

SHRIMP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Hilton Palacio Riverwalk

San Antonio, Texas

August 27, 2025

VOTING MEMBERS

- 10 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 11 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 12 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 13 Rick Burris (designee for Joe Spraggins).....Mississippi
- 14 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 15 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 16 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 17 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 18 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

- 21 Michael Allen.....Florida
- 22 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 23 Brenda Ballard.....Texas
- 24 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- 25 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 26 John Marquez.....Mississippi
- 27 LT Jason Morton.....USCG
- 28 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
- 29 Ed Walker.....Florida

STAFF

- 32 Assane Diagne.....Economist
- 33 Matt Freeman.....Economist
- 34 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 35 Sarah Gardiner.....
- 36 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
- 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 38 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 39 Jessica Matos.....
- 40 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 41 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- 42 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 43 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

- 46 Frank Helies.....NOAA
- 47 Jimmy Hull.....SAFMC
- 48 Jennifer Lee.....NOAA

1 Jessica Stephen.....NOAA
2 John Walter.....SEFSC
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PAGE 7: Motion to modify the language of Option 3 as follows:
Option 3: Create a federal limited access permit for commercial shrimp vessels in the Gulf. To be eligible for a commercial shrimp vessel permit under the limited access system, vessels must have a valid or renewable federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permit on October 26, 2026. Federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits would need to be renewed every year, and all previous renewal, transfer, and reporting requirements would still be in effect. Reviews of the limited access permit will occur ten years after implementation of this amendment or as otherwise deemed necessary by the council. The motion carried on page 9.

PAGE 9: Motion to make Option 3 the preferred option. The motion carried on page 10.

- - -

1 The Shrimp Management Committee of the Gulf Council convened at
2 The Hilton Palacio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Wednesday
3 morning, August 27, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Chris
4 Schieble.

5
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
7 **APPROVAL OF APRIL 2025 MINUTES**
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
9

10 **CHAIRMAN CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** I would like, at this time, to call the
11 Shrimp m=Management Committee to order. The members of the
12 committee are myself as the chair, and Dr. Overton is the vice
13 chair. Dr. Banks, Mr. Broussard, Mr. Donaldson, Mr. Osborne, who
14 is absent, Mr. Geeslin, Mr. Sanchez, Mr. Burris and Mr. Strelcheck.

15
16 The first item on the agenda is Adoption of the Agenda , Tab D,
17 Number 1. Does anyone have any additions, or modifications, to
18 the agenda, like other business? Seeing none, can I get a motion
19 to adopt the agenda? Mr. Sanchez. Second by Mr. Broussard.
20 Moving on, the next item is the Approval of the April 2025 Meeting
21 Minutes, Tab D, Number 2. Any additions, deletions, corrections,
22 or edits to the minutes from that meeting? Mr. Sanchez.

23
24 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Yes, and it's fine. We can go ahead and make
25 a motion to adopt.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. I didn't see any issues either as well,
28 and so I have a motion to adopt from Mr. Sanchez, and a second
29 from Mr. Donaldson. Moving on on the agenda is Tab D, Number 3,
30 and we're going to let Dr. Freeman introduce an agenda item going
31 through the action guide, please.

32
33 **DRAFT SHRIMP AMENDMENT 19: SHRIMP PERMIT MORATORIUM**
34

35 **DR. MATT FREEMAN:** So, for Agenda Item Number IV, the committee
36 will be presented with a draft amendment to address the expiration
37 of the federal Gulf commercial permit moratorium, which will occur
38 on October 26, 2026.

39
40 The committee should ask questions and may consider selecting the
41 preferred alternative. If a preferred alternative is selected,
42 staff will hold one to two virtual public hearings following the
43 August 2025 council meeting, and the council may take final action
44 at the November 2025 council meeting.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Freeman. With that,
47 can you pull up Tab D, Number 4, which is the Draft Shrimp Amendment
48 19: Shrimp Moratorium Permit document. Can you lead us through

1 that?

2

3 **DR. FREEMAN:** Okay, and so, Bernie, could you go to the purpose
4 and need? Nothing has changed to the purpose and need statements,
5 but, given that we do have some new council members, I thought it
6 would be appropriate to review those, and so, for this document,
7 the purpose of this action is to determine if limiting access to
8 federal permits is necessary on a temporary or permanent basis to
9 maintain the biological, social, and economic benefits to the
10 shrimp fishery achieved under the moratorium.

11

12 The need is to protect federally-managed Gulf shrimp stocks while
13 promoting catch efficiency, economic efficiency, and stability,
14 and obtain the best available information with which to manage the
15 fishery. Now, Bernie, if we could go ahead and go to the action
16 in the document.

17

18 There are three options for consideration. The first is our no
19 action. The moratorium on the issuance of new federal Gulf
20 commercial shrimp vessel permits would expire October 26, 2026.
21 With expiration of the federal Gulf commercial shrimp permit
22 moratorium, the commercial shrimp vessel permits will become open
23 access permits, as they were prior to the moratorium, and,
24 therefore, will be available to any eligible applicants.

25

26 With Option 2, that would be to extend the moratorium on the
27 issuance of federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits. The
28 moratorium would be extended for ten years, and, with Option 3, it
29 would be to create a federal limited access permit for commercial
30 shrimp vessels in the Gulf.

31

32 To be eligible for a commercial shrimp vessel permit under the
33 limited access system, vessels must have a valid or renewable
34 federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permit on October 26, 2026.
35 Federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits would need to be
36 renewed every year, and all previous renewal, transfer, and
37 reporting requirements would still be in effect.

38

39 I'll note that last sentence for Option 3, and that applies under
40 Option 2 already. It's just stated, since it would be transferring
41 from potentially a moratorium to a limited access permit, just to
42 make clear that those apply under Option 3 as well.

43

44 Some additional information to provide to the committee, and so,
45 if the committee were to select either Option 2 or Option 3 as the
46 preferred, it is still within the council's purview, should the
47 council ever want to take action with Option 2, to consider
48 removing that moratorium prior to ten years, if any conditions

1 were to change.

2
3 Likewise, with Option 3, it would also be within the council's
4 purview, should conditions change with the shrimp industry, to
5 consider removing, or somehow modifying, that limited access
6 permit program. Another piece of information here I think that
7 would be helpful, and I think we mentioned it at the last council
8 meeting, or the one in April, I believe and so, in another
9 amendment, and we're nearing this, in terms of the number of
10 permits that are available.

11
12 Currently, when the minimum number of valid or renewable Gulf
13 shrimp permits reaches 1,175, the committee will be forming a
14 review panel to review the details of a permit pool or other
15 options. As currently, right now, there is a 1,072 minimum
16 threshold number of Gulf shrimp permit vessels to maintain.

17
18 Another piece of relevant information for Option 2 and Option 3,
19 even with a moratorium or a limited access program, these permits
20 are transferable, and I believe, from what I recall, and Dr.
21 Stephen can correct me, but I believe, in the previous three years,
22 there have been roughly twenty permits that were bought and sold,
23 and so there is some activity there, even though the overall number
24 of permits has been decreasing, and so I'll pause there and see if
25 there's any questions or discussion.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Dr. Freeman. That's a good recap.
28 I guess a comment in general. I would like to state that I like
29 the way this document was laid out, with the economic section in
30 the beginning. It was very helpful to be able to read through
31 that before getting to the action item, to help you understand why
32 we got to this, and what the need is, and one other tidbit of
33 information, and this is essentially similarly laid out to the way
34 17B was handled with the moratorium document ten years ago.

35
36 Option 2, the language is pretty much the same, as well as Option
37 3, but I would like to make a motion to modify Option 3 a little
38 bit, actually just to add a sentence into Option 3, to make it a
39 little clearer for everybody, and I sent that motion over to
40 Bernie, if she could pull up the language, and we could just paste
41 it in there, and then discuss.

42
43 **Essentially, while she's pulling that up, it's to add a sentence**
44 **to the end of Option 3 that says reviews of the limited access**
45 **permit will occur ten years after implementation of this amendment,**
46 **and as otherwise deemed necessary by the council, and so it pretty**
47 **much sort of just puts a sunset on Option 3, to where it comes**
48 **back for review, if we were to select that as the preferred, and**

1 it doesn't mean it's just a permanent non-reviewable option, or
2 alternative. The highlighted sentence is the addition. All the
3 language in Option 3 is the same other than that. Mr. Sanchez.

4
5 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Did you need a second for --

6
7 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** I do. Yes, sir.

8
9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Okay. I will second that.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** So my rationale, again, is really to just be
12 able to have this come back before the council. It's not an
13 indefinite timeline then, if we were to select that option, but it
14 doesn't necessarily preclude Option 2 by adding that in there. It
15 just makes a little bit more clear. Any questions, or comments,
16 about adding that language to -- Dr. Freeman.

17
18 **DR. FREEMAN:** Sure, and I'll just add that I think that would also
19 address some industry concerns that with a LAPP program, that
20 whether or not the council would still be keeping an eye on the
21 conditions of the industry, and so I think a motion like that would
22 hopefully address some of those concerns, knowing that, at a
23 minimum, the council would review in ten years. It would be well
24 within the purview to review it earlier, or additionally, besides
25 that ten years.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Dr. Freeman, and remind us of the
28 timeline on this document. On the action guide itself, what's our
29 next step for a draft version of this?

30
31 **DR. FREEMAN:** Certainly, and so, as it stands right now, if the
32 council, or the committee and then the council, were to select a
33 preferred, we would do public hearing webinars, and then the
34 council could take final action as soon as November. I think the
35 key thing would be that the January meeting really would be the
36 latest we would want to consider final action, to ensure, for
37 rulemaking purposes, that it's in place prior to October.
38 Otherwise, the permits would switch. Basically, the industry would
39 switch to open access, and then have to switch either back to a
40 moratorium or to a LAPP program.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Understandable. Thank you for the
43 recap, and so this is kind of on the fast track a little bit.
44 Fortunately, there's only one action in here that we have to review
45 and go through today. If there's no other further discussion on
46 this, or comments, or questions, on this motion. Mr. Anson.

47
48 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. **I'm not on your committee,**

1 but just wondering if you might consider replacing "and as
2 otherwise" to "or as otherwise".
3

4 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Sure. I'll take a friendly amendment. Thank
5 you. Secunder, are you good with that? Okay. Any other comments,
6 or questions, regarding the motion? **Is anyone opposed to the**
7 **motion that drafted on the board for the Option 3 language change?**
8 **Seeing none, the motion passes.**
9

10 I guess, since Dr. Freeman said we really need to move on this a
11 little bit, I would like to put a motion up to make Option 3 the
12 preferred. Mr. Sanchez seconds. Any discussion on that as a
13 preferred alternative, or option, I guess is what's being called
14 here. Mr. Strelcheck.
15

16 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** You're moving quick this morning, Chair.
17 One of the things I wanted to raise, and I think it's important,
18 given the seafood competitiveness executive order, is that we're
19 going to be, I think, have to really thoughtful and consider the
20 rationale for this decision, right, and so I've been looking
21 through, you know, our past amendments.
22

23 You know, we have an essentially target level of valid and
24 renewable Gulf vessel permits at 1,072. We've been kind of
25 incrementally reducing the number of permits, through attrition
26 and lapses.
27

28 In 17A, it also talked about the basis for that 1,072 was
29 predicated on the number of active permitted vessels, and so one
30 of the things we're not clear about, I think, and we need to
31 investigate, is it 1,072 active vessels or is it 1,072 vessels, of
32 which some subset is active, right, because, if it's the latter,
33 we're already well below 1,072, just based on the economic
34 conditions of this industry.
35

36 Then, for maybe the newer council members, or those less familiar,
37 we also have this process for, once the permits drop below 1,175,
38 we have this review panel, and a pool, but I say all this because
39 I think it's important for the record, in terms of the rationale
40 and decision making as to why we're continuing a moratorium or
41 imposing limited access.
42

43 The last thing I'll mention is that all of those numbers that I
44 just mentioned were also predicated on prior shrimp assessments,
45 aggregate optimum yield, things that have changed greatly over the
46 last decade or so, and so I think it's going to be important to
47 talk to the Science Center and have a hard look just regarding the
48 prior basis for these decisions, whether those are still valid, or

1 whether any new scientific advice and information would form the
2 basis for further decision making.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Those are very valid points, and I
5 appreciate you bringing that up, and I think, you know, that was
6 sort of my logic as to having the otherwise deemed necessary part
7 of that sentence added in there, so that the council could review,
8 you know, exactly what you described there, anytime we needed,
9 right, to be able to bring this back up in front of us, if it was
10 time to modify or remove it. Dr. Freeman, I don't have it at the
11 top of my head, but do you know the number of permits that were -
12 - That exchanged hands, I guess, in the past year, roughly?

13
14 **DR. FREEMAN:** I'm going to look to Dr. Stephen. She may be able
15 to pull that information up. I'm not sure how quickly. If not,
16 she may need a moment, while she looks at it, and she can
17 potentially come back to us with that answer.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. That would be helpful, I think, as we
20 go through the discussion, and that could be something we discuss
21 in Full Council as well, once we have this up for Thursday. I
22 guess we have a motion on the board to make Option 3 the preferred.
23 Any other further discussion about making that preferred before we
24 go into Full Council on Thursday? **Seeing none, do we have any**
25 **opposition to that as the preferred at this time?** Mr. Sanchez
26 seconded it. You seconded that as the preferred, correct?

27
28 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm going to abstain.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** **We have one abstention, and so the motion**
33 **passes to make Option 3, or Alternative 3, the preferred.** Okay.
34 Moving on in the action guide, we have Item V, Protected Resources
35 Bycatch in Shrimp Trawls: A Summary review of Data for Reinitiation
36 of Section 7 Consultation, which is Tab D, Number 5(a), and that's
37 Ms. Lee to give us that presentation and background information,
38 correct?

39
40 **PROTECTED RESOURCES BYCATCH IN SHRIMP TRAWLS: A SUMMARY REVIEW**
41 **OF DATA FOR REINITIATION OF SECTION 7 CONSULTATION**

42
43 **DR. FREEMAN:** Yes, sir, and would you like for me to go through
44 the action guide?

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Yes.

47
48 **DR. FREEMAN:** Okay, and so, as Ms. Lee is coming up, for the action

1 guide, in June of 2023, NOAA's Sustainable Fisheries Division
2 requested the NOAA Protected Resource Division to restart a formal
3 review of southeastern shrimp fisheries.
4

5 This review, required by the Endangered Species Act, is necessary
6 because new information has shown that shrimp fishing might be
7 affecting smalltooth sawfish and giant manta rays more than
8 predicted in the previous 2021 shrimp opinion, i.e., the product
9 of the last consultation.

10
11 SERO staff will review the key summary data on smalltooth sawfish
12 and giant manta ray assembled for the reinitiation of section 7
13 consultation compiled over the past two years. SERO staff will
14 also present paths forward for collaboration and advancing the
15 consultation, consistent with the October 2024 ESA/Magnuson-
16 Stevens Act policy directive.

17
18 The committee should explore development of potential alternatives
19 to minimize small-tooth sawfish and giant manta ray bycatch in the
20 Gulf shrimp fishery based on the information presented. The
21 committee should ask questions and make recommendations and
22 motions.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Freeman. Can we pull up
25 the presentation, Bernie, Tab D-5(a)? Yes, and that's it there.
26 Do we have Ms. Lee?

27
28 **MS. JENNIFER LEE:** Good morning, and welcome to our three new
29 council members. My name is Jennifer Lee. As stated, I work in
30 the Southeast Regional Office Protected Resources Division, and I
31 serve as the fishery management liaison for our division, and so
32 the purpose of that role is just to give you a starting point, if
33 you ever have protected resources concerns or need information,
34 and it's for me to help on any protected resources bycatch issues
35 in our fisheries.

36
37 Councils get a lot of supplementary information in presentations,
38 many that I actually give, but the focus here is on information
39 you need to know, and not the nice to know. The purpose of the
40 presentation is to facilitate a meaningful discussion, and then a
41 path forward for continuing that discussion, on the effects of the
42 shrimp fisheries on smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray.

43
44 To meet that goal, I'm going to review some Section 7 requirements.
45 I like to make sure everyone is on the same playing field with the
46 information, and then talk about the package, what we have for new
47 information that we've been collecting and kind of peppering you
48 with over the last couple years, and then share some ways the

1 council can engage.

2

3 This slide just contains an outline of the information I'll present
4 to meet those objectives, and it serves as a reference slide, since
5 the presentation does contain a lot of information, that I know
6 you already had in your briefing book, but, for now, we can just
7 skip to the next slide.

8

9 Four years ago, we completed a comprehensive consultation and
10 biological opinion on the southeast shrimp fisheries and their
11 management in the Gulf and the South Atlantic, and then also on
12 our TED regulations, to evaluate their effects on listed species.
13 You'll note I have a hyperlink there for the old BiOp that you can
14 look at, and I have other hyperlinks to try to help. I really
15 tried to use this presentation as a reference for you, and so
16 there's a lot of information that you can look back, but, four
17 years ago, we completed that consultation.

18

19 Two years ago, the Sustainable Fisheries Division requested
20 Protected Resources reinitiate, because we had unanticipated
21 observed lethal take of giant manta rays. The BiOp hadn't expected
22 any, and then new information revealing effects of these fisheries
23 on smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray that wasn't considered
24 in the shrimp biological opinion. The reinitiation, you'll see,
25 again, I have a hyperlink there, and shows you when we are required
26 to reinitiate.

27

28 Even though it says they requested it, it's because it's required
29 under the ESA to reinitiate consultation in this situation, and
30 then, since then, we've been -- Since identifying that need to
31 reinitiate, we've been collaborating with our Science Center and
32 working to develop the information we need to formally reinitiate,
33 and so, just because you say you're going to reinitiate
34 consultation, it doesn't mean you just dive right in formally. We
35 have to get the information that we need to work on that
36 consultation, and, again, there's a hyperlink there that, if you
37 want to see what is actually required, but we've been working hard,
38 over the last couple of years, to collect information that we told
39 you we needed, like our bycatch estimates and PVAs and things like
40 that, and so that's kind of where we are today.

41

42 I said I wanted to just make sure everyone understood, because I'm
43 mentioning our biological opinion and reinitiation and
44 consultation, and make sure everyone is on the same level with
45 what those are, and so, really, the Section 7 consultation is a
46 documented exchange about the effects of an action on listed
47 species.

48

1 A biological opinion is basically our record for how we meet the
2 statutory process and all the requirements of that Section 7
3 process that's outlaid in regulations, and the biological opinion
4 lays it out and summarizes the effects of a federal action,
5 identifies whether or not the action is likely to jeopardize the
6 continued existence of a listed species, or result in the
7 destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

8
9 That's a lot of words, by the way, and that's the only time I think
10 I talk about critical habitat. There may be one other time, but,
11 since we're focused on the species impacts here, I'm not going to
12 waste your time talking about critical habitat, really.

13
14 It represents those technical, legal, and policy issues. It is an
15 opinion, and it's the product of that formal consultation process,
16 and the last important thing to know is, as far as the action,
17 what we refer to as the action, and I know you do lots of FMP
18 amendments, but the scope of biological opinions is on the whole
19 fishery management regime, and so it's the authorization of the
20 fishery through the FMP, and the regulations, and all the
21 amendments to date, and anything new that you're going to do. It's
22 just good to know that it's the scope, as opposed to say just one
23 amendment that we're looking at.

24
25 So why do we do one? There's several parts of Section 7, actually.
26 Section 7(a)(1) is the Affirmative Conservation Mandate, and so
27 that essentially says we have all these authorities, and we need
28 to use them to protect endangered and threatened species.
29 Sometimes this almost seems -- There's so much focus on the duty
30 to avoid jeopardy that people don't realize that that's a
31 requirement, but we are required to use our authorities to carry
32 out these programs.

33
34 Section 7(a)(2) is the duty to avoid jeopardy. That's the one
35 people are most familiar with, if you are familiar, which is that
36 we must ensure any action authorized, funded, or carried out, and
37 we already talked about what our action is, is not likely to
38 jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or destroy or
39 adversely modify critical habitat.

40
41 Then, at the conclusion of a formal consultation in this process,
42 there's a written statement, and hopefully you know that's the
43 biological opinion we just mentioned.

44
45 Then you understand that there's a duty to avoid jeopardy. Well,
46 how do we do that, and how does that work through this biological
47 opinion, and so we need to go over what "to jeopardize" means.
48 The ESA defines that as jeopardize the continued existence as an

1 action that would be expected, directly or indirectly, to reduce
2 appreciably the likelihood of both survival and recovery of listed
3 species in the wild by reducing the reproduction numbers or
4 distribution of that species.

5
6 That is, again, a lot of words, but they're important words,
7 because how we do this jeopardy analysis is we essentially break
8 that down, and so we're first looking at the listed -- We're first
9 looking at the reductions in those reproduction numbers and
10 distribution, and we're looking at the individuals and impacts,
11 and then we're elevating it. We're looking at how it looks for
12 the population at the population level.

13
14 We have to add the effects of a federal action on top of the
15 effects of other human activities, the natural phenomenon, on the
16 species status and trends in a particular action area, and the
17 species global status and trend, and so you're kind of layering it
18 on, these opinions. You're looking at, okay, this is the action,
19 and these are all those players, and these are the species, and
20 here's everything else going on in that action area, and here's
21 how your impacts are, and then you're kind of putting it all
22 together in this jeopardy analysis.

23
24 Then the big question, of course, is, well, what happens if your
25 action is likely to jeopardize? Actions can't move forward if
26 they are likely to jeopardize. You can't take the action, and so
27 it basically means that if we, the consulting side of the house,
28 and I'll pause right there, just to be clear, and we have dual
29 roles under the Endangered Species Act.

30
31 We have the action agency side, Sustainable Fisheries, working on
32 the regs, and then we have the Protected Resources Division that
33 writes the consultations, and so when, on the Protected Resources
34 side, we write that biological opinion, if it's likely to
35 jeopardize, then we have to come up with reasonable and prudent
36 alternatives, things that are different from the action as
37 outlined, so that we avoid jeopardy.

38
39 We work together with, you know, Sustainable Fisheries, and you,
40 and we try to avoid jeopardy conclusions, so that we don't ever
41 have to get there, first of all, because, if we can foresee that
42 things aren't looking good, then we can try to take some actions
43 and avoid having a jeopardy opinion.

44
45 The other thing is that all opinions -- So let's say it was a
46 jeopardy opinion, and we had a reasonable and prudent alternative,
47 and the council said -- Everyone said it looks great, and we
48 implement it, and we still always then authorize incidental take,

1 and every incidental take statement specifies the amount of take,
2 the extent of take, and then it has what sometimes people confuse
3 with the reasonable and prudent alternatives, which is reasonable
4 and prudent measures. Even if it's not jeopardy, we still have to
5 minimize the impacts of the take that we have said are not likely
6 to jeopardize, and, again, hot links there if you need more.

7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just because this is a long presentation, I want
9 to give maybe Jenny a break. There's a lot, obviously, to this.
10 You really haven't dealt with, I think, a major ESA issue in about
11 fifteen years, but what I wanted to emphasize, and what Jenny has
12 already emphasized, right, is this is for the continued
13 authorization of the fishery, right?

14
15 We're not here trying to be punitive with the shrimp industry, or
16 anyone else that we're trying to do a biological opinion on. We're
17 focused on continuing to authorize a fishery, or a federal action,
18 to move forward, and we have to, obviously, do these biological
19 opinions related to the Endangered Species Act, in order to make
20 that happen.

21
22 Our focus is, obviously, on minimizing take and the recovery,
23 obviously, for those endangered species, while also balancing that
24 with the needs of the industry and fishermen, and so I don't know
25 if anyone has any questions about the first part here, before Jenny
26 kind of dives into smalltooth sawfish and manta rays. I'm not
27 seeing any.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** All right. Go ahead.

30
31 **MS. LEE:** I love that. Thank you so much, Andy. Okay, and so we
32 have reviewed the Section 7 requirements, and now I'm going to
33 just give you a quick synopsis of what data we have on which we're
34 working to make that, looking at the impacts and trying to evaluate
35 jeopardy.

36
37 Really quick, smalltooth sawfish, they were listed as endangered
38 in 2003. The primary threats were bycatch, shrimp trawls, bottom
39 longlines, recreational hook-and-line gear, and all were noted,
40 but primary bycatch, secondary loss of habitat, and then we do
41 want to also note the threat of the south Florida spinning fish
42 events that you're familiar with now.

43
44 As far as the life history, it's a small population, slow-growing,
45 late-maturing, few young born, and so essentially a vulnerable
46 population, and so here you have the recovery plan objectives.

47
48 We are currently updating the smalltooth sawfish recovery plan,

1 but, essentially, the big picture is staying the same, and so we
2 want to minimize human interactions, protect and restore habitats,
3 ensure smalltooth sawfish abundance and distribution increase, and
4 so basically working on those threats that we just talked about.

5
6 We've had a lot of new data since the 2021 opinion. That's, as I
7 said, part of why we have this trigger, and you can see we actually
8 have six research publications. We've come here before and talked
9 about some of these, but, essentially, it started where we have
10 Smith et al. 2021, which replicated some earlier genetic work and
11 showed that there's only a small number of adult females
12 contributing to the population, and also in the fidelity to
13 specific nurseries.

14
15 Then we had Graham come out, who just kind of looked at the overlap
16 of fisheries and sawfish habitat and basically said, yes, there's
17 -- Smalltooth sawfish are at a high risk from shrimp trawls, and
18 then it noted how some female -- How the female population, or
19 females, are going into deeper waters, and so maybe there is a
20 potential for more impacts on females.

21
22 John Carlson, Dr. John Carlson, from our Science Center, updated
23 the first PVA done on soft fish, and then we -- We then have a
24 second update, in which we tried to incorporate the new bycatch
25 estimates that we've done, and then also looking at the impact of
26 the mortality event, and then we have a couple other papers here
27 that are just focused on, again, better information, and so we've
28 just learned a lot over this period of time, and particularly
29 Kroetz et al. 2025 really refined our life history information.

30
31 You know, we had kind of long, or wide, ranges of parameters in
32 what we knew, and it really centered it down, and so we have a
33 much better understanding.

34
35 Then, lastly, Farmer et al. is in press, and so not out yet,
36 documents a significant declining trend in the relative abundance
37 of small juveniles, which I guess I'll just leave it at that, and
38 so just a lot of information coming out.

39
40 I'm going to have to flip-flop a little here, because we,
41 obviously, have two species, and so now we're going to backtrack
42 to giant manta ray status, which was not listed until 2018. Their
43 threats are bycatch, domestic and foreign, and directed fishing
44 for gill plates and meat, foreign only, of course, and you can see
45 some of the other threats on the slide. Again, late maturing, and
46 they may have a pup, one, every two, three years, twelve to
47 thirteen gestation, and the bottom line here is, you know, again,
48 a very vulnerable population.

1
2 Here, I wanted to just say in, terms of, you know, for sawfish, we
3 had all those publications. We don't have quite as many
4 publications, but what we did do, that's really important here, is
5 we had a severe lack of information, because giant manta ray
6 weren't being identified to species.

7
8 In 2019, the Fishery Observer Program began identifying and
9 recording bycatch for giant manta rays, providing a much better
10 understanding of the data that we do have, and, you know, doing
11 observer training, and so I just -- You can see here, that we --
12 You know, it shows how to measure them, how they look different
13 from devil rays, things like that, and so a really big improvement.

14
15 That led to instead of having just that initial one year on the
16 last BiOp, we now have five more years of improved bycatch data.
17 In addition, there were a couple of publications, and Pate et al.
18 2024 was looking at on the east coast of Florida, at reproductive
19 and feeding habitats. Farmer et al. 2022 integrated decades of
20 sighting and survey data into a distribution model, and we were
21 able to predict highest occurrences occurring around the
22 Mississippi River delta between April and June and October and
23 November, and so we looked at that relative to our take, and it
24 all kind of falls in line.

25
26 Then our -- We also have a new draft recovery plan, which provides
27 -- Again, it's summarizing a lot of this new information that's
28 coming out and is focused on how you can minimize the threats.

29
30 Now we're going to move on. You got a little bit of the background,
31 and so what about the actual shrimp trawl effects, and so injury
32 and stress and mortality resulting from capture, breakage and
33 damage to the rostrum, and, basically, these are really big
34 animals, right, and so if you can imagine hanging -- I don't like
35 to hang from the monkey bars anymore, at my age, but like this is
36 a giant animal hanging, and so that really does damage to internal
37 organs.

38
39 It's got, you know, the big rostrum, with the teeth, and so it's
40 getting caught in things, and I looked through the observer notes,
41 and we have some video, and you can see in the picture, and that's
42 an observer, but the -- You know, the animal is looking pink,
43 really pink, because it's, you know, been really banged up, and we
44 have lots of cases where rostrums are -- You know, where rostrums
45 are getting broken, and, obviously, it's just -- Again, it's
46 difficult. There was, you know, one case where someone was knocked
47 down, and so these are hard for fishermen to handle.

48

1 Then, for giant manta ray, again, a really large animal. What's
2 different about giant manta rays is they're obligate ram-
3 ventilation feeders. Anyway, they have to move constantly to get
4 pass water over their gills, and so, when they're compacted, and
5 they can't move, they asphyxiate, and so that capture in trawls
6 severely restricts that movement and respiration, resulting in
7 asphyxiation. Then, also, again, compacted against the netting,
8 and the weight of the animal, you know, and so we have concerns
9 about survival post-release.

10
11 Observer data, and here's what we can share with you, in terms of
12 just trying to get a picture of the animals. You know, this isn't
13 by catch estimates, and this is just these are the observed
14 interactions, and what do we know from them, and, of course, we
15 have to start off by acknowledging our observer coverage is less
16 than 2 percent, and keep in mind that, for these species, we're
17 looking at particular areas, and so observer coverage can be very
18 low, you know, lower than 1 percent.

19
20 Observed takes since 2008, we have twenty-six, sixteen alive, three
21 mortalities, and seven unknown, twenty-one in the Gulf of Mexico
22 and five in the South Atlantic.

23
24 I do want to point out, since it doesn't seem like many
25 mortalities, and it does seem like quite a lot of unknowns, that,
26 again, when you look at this information, a lot of the unknowns
27 look pretty bad, and so, in terms of the likelihood that they're
28 surviving, or even that they're really alive at that time, and
29 like they don't know, but say, you know, it will describe how the
30 animal just, you know, sunk, and so that's why, when we think about
31 mortality estimates for 2021, that last BiOp, we assumed a 50
32 percent mortality overall.

33
34 We have -- If you just do the math, we have 38 percent at-release
35 mortality, based on observed mortalities and assigned unknowns,
36 based on observer descriptions, and then I would like to point
37 that post-release mortality for small rays ranges from 9 to 60
38 percent.

39
40 I didn't put a link in for that, but there's a Dapp et al. 2015
41 that looks at a variety of species, for example like smooth skate
42 with 60 percent, and so just what we know about this, in general,
43 is that, again, it's difficult to release, and so we think that
44 overall mortality is actually probably higher than 50 percent. We
45 don't know, you know, but it just doesn't look like these animals
46 are doing well, from these interactions.

47
48 Some characteristics, and so the majority of the takes is off

1 southwest Florida. The location of the trawl varies, but most of
2 it -- Most of them are sort of at or in the TEDs. Actually, I
3 thought that was interesting. I thought maybe they would get hung
4 up sooner, but I guess, with the water flow, they're pretty much
5 near the TEDs. Again, the rostrum breakage.

6
7 These are large juveniles and adults, and so that's very important.
8 Again, the juveniles stay closer to the shore. The adults go
9 further offshore, and so they're the more vulnerable to offshore
10 shrimp fisheries, and then I would just point out that we only
11 have 35 percent of records with sex IDs, and so let's see.

12
13 Okay. Again, we have to flip-flop to giant manta ray, and the
14 same low observer coverage. In this case, we have forty-six
15 animals that we've observed taken since 2019, and so thirty-one
16 alive, six mortalities, nine unknowns. We do have eight in the
17 Atlantic and thirty-eight in the Gulf, and I keep referencing that
18 just because this consultation isn't just for the Gulf. Again, it
19 is for the fishery as a whole.

20
21 We have -- The big thing, of course, is the last opinion, and we
22 only -- At that point, we had one year of data, and we hadn't seen
23 any mortalities, and we hadn't really, I guess, thought through
24 all the factors, and so it just said, you know, we think they're
25 all going to be alive, and so clearly that's not the case.

26
27 We have a 33 percent at-release mortality rate, if you look at the
28 observed mortalities and unknowns, and then, again, when we factor
29 in the mean total discard -- Let's see, what is this? My apologies.
30 The discard mortality -- So not looking specific to giant manta
31 rays, but just the mean total discard mortality for obligate ram-
32 ventilating species, and so those ones that have to keep moving,
33 is actually as high as 84.2, and that's that paper I referenced
34 before, and so those are just interesting things if you're trying
35 to figure out like what do we know.

36
37 Most interactions are occurring offshore of Louisiana, followed by
38 Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi. Most interactions are in spring
39 and fall. An important, or interesting, part is that 33 percent
40 of all trips, and so we have eight out of twenty-four trips have
41 multiple interactions, and so, for giant manta ray, we are seeing
42 multiple interactions, where, you know, I guess, if you catch one
43 on one day, you may catch a different one on the next day, and
44 then trips with multiple interactions accounted for thirty to
45 forty-six takes. That's probably all I want to say about that.
46 Moving on to the next slide.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Hold up. We have a question from Dr. Simmons?

1
2 **MS. LEE:** Sure.
3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Sorry, and thank you. Just a quick
5 question here, Jenny, and so does this include state water
6 fisheries for shrimp?
7
8 **MS. LEE:** That's a good question, and I'm going to answer that on
9 the very next slide.
10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Sorry.
12
13 **MS. LEE:** No, and it's fine. I think we have another question.
14
15 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Banks.
16
17 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** I have a quick question, a clarifying question,
18 and so you said there's 38 percent mortality with unknowns, and so
19 observed and unknowns, and you calculate that at 38 percent for
20 sawfish?
21
22 **MS. LEE:** Yes, and that's for at the vessel, and then you have to
23 factor in what might die after you release it.
24
25 **DR. BANKS:** Right, and so, with that, when we do post-release
26 mortality studies, and go through the review process, the unknowns
27 are not necessarily calculated as part of the mortality, because
28 there's a chance that they could survive, and so is that a
29 different process for the biological opinions, versus like a
30 publication? I'm just trying to, in my brain, compare.
31
32 **MS. LEE:** Sure, and, no, absolutely. Well, I think, for us, what
33 I had noted was that, to dig in a little, we looked at the notes
34 on those observed reports, and so it is a little different. We
35 didn't just -- We did assume some mortalities, and like when we
36 looked closer at the notes, and saw like the descriptions, and,
37 you know, like the rostrum was broke, and the animal was -- You
38 know, like that kind of thing, like not moving, and so we went a
39 little further there.
40
41 **DR. BANKS:** So the unknowns are what the observer said, but then
42 you classified based on those?
43
44 **MS. LEE:** Yes. All right. Next slide, please. Okay, and so here
45 we have the map of all the take information we have, and so, to
46 answer Dr. Simmons' question, we have a few takes in state waters,
47 but the bulk are in federal, and so all of our observed takes are
48 from federal observer programs, and so our observer program, and

1 they're all from federally-permitted shrimp vessels, but everyone
2 knows sometimes, you know, when they're observing a trip, they
3 will move into state waters.

4
5 In the Gulf, and we're looking at -- I think, the way we did this,
6 we just looked sort of where the tow ended up, and so keep in mind,
7 of course, that these are moving vessels, and so if they're -- You
8 know, they might start in one place, and end in the other, but, in
9 the Gulf, there were six mantas in Gulf state waters.

10
11 The rest were all in federal waters, and then there were two
12 sawfish within the Dry Tortugas National Park boundaries, and so
13 hopefully that's just not right. Then, in the South Atlantic,
14 there were three mantas and one sawfish in state waters, but,
15 again, these are all federally-permitted vessels that are fishing.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** I have a question real quick, Ms. Lee. So,
18 looking at this map, and I know the resolution isn't designed to
19 be zooming-in here very much, but, looking at the green dots off
20 of Louisiana for the 2024 interactions with giant manta rays, I
21 suspect almost every one of those is within state waters, but, for
22 clarity's sake, we have what's called the inside-outside line for
23 shrimping in Louisiana. That's not the state water boundary.
24 That's closer to shore, within one mile, but that designates the
25 offshore shrimping zone is outside the inside-outside line.

26
27 **MS. LEE:** Right.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** But I still think that the majority of these
30 landings are within state waters.

31
32 **MS. LEE:** So I can just tell you, because I knew this would come
33 up, that we looked at them. We mapped the -- I'm sorry that you
34 don't see the state-federal line on the map, and some of that is
35 actually confidentiality issues, but, just to be clear that, you
36 know, we did look at which ones were in state and which were in
37 federal.

38
39 I did misspeak that points were based on the start point of the
40 tow, which was more consistently reported than the end point of
41 the tow, or the release location, which, you know, often was not
42 noted on there, and then, really, the key here is that these are
43 long tows, and they may cross state and federal boundaries, but,
44 again, these are federally-permitted shrimp fishermen, and, you
45 know, the majority of them were in federal waters, and so I would
46 be happy to follow-up and share a little bit more one-on-one on
47 kind of the specifics of those points.

1 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** All right. Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Anson.

2
3 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you. Again, I'm not on your committee. Jenny,
4 in the previous slide, you said that there were three observations,
5 interactions or observations, in Alabama, or off Alabama, and one
6 from Mississippi, but I'm only seeing -- This is for mantas, and
7 I'm only seen two, unless there's an overlap there. I only see
8 two observations, at least what I determine to be off Mississippi.

9
10 **MS. LEE:** There is likely an overlap. It's not the best map. I
11 mean, we want to just roughly, you know, show folks where we're
12 seeing the interactions. I mean, really, what you get out of that
13 map is that there's a cluster, you know, off of south Florida,
14 around, you know, the outside of the Dry Tortugas, and then there's
15 a cluster, you know, off of Louisiana, and then there are some
16 still in the South Atlantic, where shrimping occurs. That's really
17 what I'm trying to share there, but, again, I'll be happy -- I
18 have spreadsheets, and I can dig into the particulars and do some
19 one-on-one with people on that.

20
21 Okay, and so, moving on to the next slide, this is just to
22 acknowledge that we have updated our total bycatch estimates and
23 that the SSC received a whole presentation on this, and so I'm not
24 getting in the weeds at all on this, but just to acknowledge we
25 have new bycatch estimates for smalltooth sawfish. They range
26 from thirty animals in 2013 to 123 in 2020. They range from
27 twenty-two animals in 2013 to fifty-eight animals in 2016 in the
28 South Atlantic.

29
30 The mean model-based bycatch estimates for giant manta ray range
31 from 385 animals in 2021 to 863 animals in 2023. They range from
32 477 animals in 2022 to 1,245 animals in 2019 in the South Atlantic.

33
34 The important thing really is just the credible intervals from the
35 models are narrower than those estimated last time, based on the
36 bootstrap ratio estimator, but the intervals do overlap for
37 overlapping years, and so the bottom line here is we did a lot --
38 Our Science Center did a lot of work trying to find the best model
39 and estimates for updating the bycatch estimates, and we now have
40 those as one piece of the puzzle.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** A technical question, real quick, on that
43 slide, and so, two slides prior, you showed the number of manta
44 ray interactions consistently right around about eight, if you
45 don't include the unknown, over the past three years, but, on this
46 current slide, it shows an increasing amount of bycatch estimates
47 over the past same time series, and we've seen presentations given
48 to us regarding the shrimp effort in the Gulf declining up to an

1 83 percent reduction in effort, and so how can the number of manta
2 ray interactions be going up?

3
4 **MS. LEE:** Well, again, the publication saw a general increase in
5 giant manta ray bycatch, but, again, we've been observing giant
6 manta ray bycatch since 2019, and so it's really -- One you're not
7 even looking at all the old records. We're just looking at the
8 more recent years, and so, I mean, it could be a factor of observer
9 coverage, but it's just what we've what we've seen, and observed,
10 and I think Andy is going to help me out.

11
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, maybe not help, but I think -- I guess the
13 other point is an overall declining trend in effort, but, in terms
14 of the kind of discrete areas in which this bycatch is occurring,
15 if effort is not trending the same as kind of the overall effort,
16 then you could, obviously, get different estimates with regard to
17 interactions, and so we've seen some decline, for example, in
18 southwest Florida in recent years, because of hurricane Ian, but
19 it was still kind of trending over kind of some long-term average,
20 at kind of similar effort levels. I don't recall, obviously, in
21 the middle Gulf that that's also the case or not.

22
23 **MS. LEE:** Thank you. I really -- Go ahead.

24
25 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** I think one of the other things we have to think
26 about this is the populations of these animals may be going up, or
27 going down, during that same time period, and so some of what we
28 might be seeing here is reflecting their population dynamics, and
29 I think we'll get to that more when we look at trends that may be
30 indicative of either positive or negative signs, and like the
31 decline in smalltooth sawfish in the time series may be a decline
32 in the population, and I think that's one of the concerns that we
33 need to bring here to the council. Thanks.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** I appreciate that. That's helpful. I was
36 just speaking to the manta ray numbers, and so, looking between
37 2022 and 2023, it almost doubled, and, looking at the table two
38 slides prior, you have nine interactions, and two are unknown,
39 and, basically, it's the same, the nine, for 2023, with one
40 unknown, and so those numbers are the same, but they're almost
41 doubling here in the effort, and so I guess it has to refer to the
42 population size, which we haven't seen yet, of manta rays, would
43 be the only explanation that I can see. Thank you.

44
45 **MS. LEE:** Yes, and just remember there's also loads of overlap in
46 the confidence intervals, you know, and so we weren't really so
47 much presenting the bycatch trends for giant manta rays, because,
48 again, it's -- You know, it's the data we have over the last period

1 of time, and so, you know, really, the focus here is on the
2 magnitude, more than the actual trend.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Froeschke, and then Dr. Sweetman.

5
6 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Just an observation on the manta rays, and
7 they're close inshore off Louisiana, and I'm just curious if the
8 economics of the shrimp fishery has led to more inshore, or
9 nearshore, shrimping, rather than more of the historical offshore
10 shrimping, and that's prompting some of the changes in the
11 interaction, because, otherwise, if you look at it, and you say,
12 well, there's more interaction with manta rays, I would interpret
13 that as a positive sign for the manta ray population, as it would
14 seem to be going up if the interactions are going up.

15
16 **MS. LEE:** Yes, and, again, I really still go with, in 2019, we had
17 a single year of data, and now we have five, with limited observer
18 coverage, and so, you know, the model accounts for depth and area
19 fished, and factors in where the observer coverage was located,
20 and so, you know, there's a little more going into it than -- You
21 know, we would have to really get in the weeds here, and, in fact,
22 I have -- At the end, and don't look now, but we do have a couple
23 slides at the back that were intended for questions on effort
24 information, and so, again, this is quite a long presentation, and
25 so, if it's okay with you guys, I'll move forward.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** We have two more questions, real quick, and so
28 Dr. Sweetman, and then Mr. Burris.

29
30 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Sorry, and hopefully I'm not going to get into
31 the weeds here, but I'm just wondering, and so, obviously, these
32 are model-based estimates, but can you, Jenny, perhaps explain, at
33 least a bit, how these were extrapolated to give us these numbers
34 here, because -- The only reason why I'm asking is because, you
35 know, it's a couple, two or three, each year, with, obviously,
36 less than 2 percent observer coverage, and so I'm just wondering
37 how these numbers are overall extrapolated to get us what we have
38 here.

39
40 **DR. WALTER:** I'll field that, if you want to phone a friend. In
41 the background documents, there's a paper on the bycatch estimation
42 method, that was reviewed by the SSC, that goes into the model-
43 based estimates, and why we use a model is because there are holes
44 that have to get filled, in terms of depth and stat zone, and so
45 the effort is partitioned to the areas of overlap, and so, in this
46 case, you see that square for giant mantas. It was not using the
47 effort for the entire Gulf.

1 Then stat and depth zone, because those are factors that seem to
2 affect the encounter rate for giant mantas, are part of the model,
3 and so what the model then does is say, well, if you only have
4 limited observer coverage here, but you have effort in this area,
5 you're likely to have had an interaction, and so it fills in those
6 gaps where you would otherwise not have had any observer coverage,
7 but it would be reasonable to assume that, because you have effort
8 there, that you might have bycatch, and that's the basics of the
9 framework for why a model-based estimate is useful when you have
10 such limited observer coverage.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Thank you. We have a follow-up on Mr. Rindone.

13
14 **MR. RINDONE:** Just for the committee and the council to note on
15 this, the SSC didn't make formal recommendations regarding this,
16 and so I don't want to say that this was reviewed by the SSC, as
17 if that's some sort of indicator of the SSC's tacit approval of
18 it. They are asking to review it again in October, and so just
19 FYI.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Simmons.

22
23 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. To that point,
24 I think it was a virtual meeting, and I think this information was
25 a bit rushed. I also think there was quite a bit of confusion
26 about what the actual methodology was being used regarding bycatch,
27 not only for finfish species, but also for protected resources,
28 and so this does need to come back to the SSC in October, with a
29 lot more information, and I would just point out the desk reviews
30 of this were not really reviewing the methodology.

31
32 They reviewed more of the issues with management, and I think there
33 was a lot of confusion about the consultants that were doing those
34 reviews, how the fishery is prosecuted, and the analysts weren't
35 able to be contacted to resolve those discussions, and so there's
36 been a lot of emphasis on those desk reviews with the CIE, and I
37 think also that needs to be potentially revisited, with maybe a
38 larger review body in that expertise.

39
40 **DR. WALTER:** I'm confused by that statement that they were reviewed
41 for management, because that was not in the terms of reference for
42 the CIE review at all. Usually they only review the science, and
43 so I think, if there's concerns from this council as to the
44 adequacy of the review, then I think that's fair to say you would
45 like some -- There's further questions, and I think the SSC had a
46 few questions that we're going to follow-up with, but the review
47 certainly did review the methodology, the modeling, and the data
48 for adequacy, but not how it would be used for management, from my

1 read of the terms of reference.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Simmons.

4

5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I apologize if I misspoke. I think
6 the recommendations were not on the methodology at-hand. The
7 recommendations were on how we can improve and change the
8 management to make that methodology better, instead of providing
9 feedback on the data we had and what we could do with it.

10

11 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Burris.

12

13 **MR. RICK BURRIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Touching on what Dr.
14 Froeschke was talking about, or asking about, trends and
15 interactions, and forgive me if you mentioned this earlier, but,
16 understanding that the manta rays weren't listed in 2018, were
17 there not any data prior to that showing those interactions, or
18 catches, in bycatch?

19

20 **MS. LEE:** The species was listed range-wide, population-wide, and
21 so there's a lot of great information that went into the listing
22 of the species, that I don't want to take the time right now to
23 elaborate on. I can point to references, and share the
24 information, but I think, for this purpose, you know, the
25 information that we're trying to move forward with, we have better
26 giant manta ray information on bycatch, and here's what we have.

27

28 I want to circle back, just to say that, in terms of the bycatch
29 estimates, you know, the agency worked really hard on coming up
30 with sea turtle bycatch estimates, and better methods, and so the
31 Bayesian modeling approach that was used here largely mimics the
32 approach that was used there, but I don't want us to get so bogged
33 down in the data here, because I think the point is -- You can,
34 and we can continue to do that, but, right now, for this
35 presentation, I think the key information is just that the old
36 BiOp only had one year of data, and now we have five years of data,
37 and we're working to refine those estimates.

38

39 They have -- You know, we're working on reducing those confidence
40 intervals, and this was the result, and it's one piece of
41 information when we're looking at everything else in the context
42 of the impacts of this fishery.

43

44 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Allen.

45

46 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just going to
47 summarize the SSC comments this, and the motion we made, but I
48 think maybe I should wait, Jennifer, because we also had some

1 comments on the PVA analysis, which you haven't gotten to yet, and
2 so --

3
4 **MS. LEE:** Sure, and I think -- Yes, and I'm going to keep it at a
5 relatively high level, and then, after, that sounds good.

6
7 **DR. ALLEN:** Okay.

8
9 **MS. LEE:** If we can move to the next slide, I just wanted to
10 reference that this is the Gulf Council, and we've been focused on
11 a lot of the Gulf information, and so, if you're wondering, you
12 know, well, what about the shrimp effort impacts in the South
13 Atlantic region, and that's, again, where we were talking about
14 just looking sort of at what's happening in the Gulf with effort
15 in our conversation.

16
17 The picture here is just -- Again, it's very limited by low
18 observer coverage. We have less observer coverage overall in the
19 South Atlantic than the Gulf. The effort of the Florida east coast
20 for fishing is really focused in Zones 28 and 30, and so we have
21 great overlap with giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish, because
22 the shrimp fishery is just naturally occurring more north, and
23 then our effort data, is, again, more uncertain in the South
24 Atlantic, and so we just really need to improve data in these areas
25 of high overlap, to avoid conservative assumptions, and so I just
26 wanted to throw in one slide about the South Atlantic.

27
28 We would be wrong to not bring up the sawfish mortality event, and
29 think about how that factors into this process, and so we had a
30 major mortality event in 2024. We had fifty-six confirmed
31 mortalities, and total mortality is likely higher. These were all
32 fairly large juveniles, or adults, and big animals, and most of
33 this came from the Keys between January and June.

34
35 There may have been another Keys mortality event in 2021, but we
36 didn't get reports of thrashing and spinning. We did get five to
37 ten reports of large dead sawfish, but this was really in 2024,
38 was the first major mortality event, as described, and then there
39 was a smaller mortality event in 2025, and so we had sixty affected
40 smalltooth sawfish reports, with nine mortalities, and then the
41 reports were more geographically isolated.

42
43 The bottom line is the cause is still under investigation, but
44 it's likely to have been a benthic harmful algae bloom, and then,
45 in thinking about considerations, we have uncertainty regarding
46 the frequency and the scale of future mortality events, but, again,
47 we have a smaller one this year, and so we know it's not likely to
48 be -- Or it's not going to be a one-time thing, but it was, you

1 know, extraordinary, in a bad way, in 2024.
2
3 We've been focused -- These last few slides were all focused at
4 the individual level, and, as I noted, when we're thinking about
5 jeopardy, we need to figure out the impacts on the population, and
6 so one tool we use is a population viability analysis. It doesn't
7 work for all species, but particularly, when species are smaller,
8 it can be a good tool.
9
10 It's basically a model that estimates the future size and risk of
11 extinction of populations in light of life history
12 characteristics, threats facing the species, and management
13 actions, and then you can predict the probability of the population
14 persisting into the future, and you can explore consequences of
15 management actions in light of the uncertain data. Again, there's
16 a wide range of model approaches that are used in PVAs, based on
17 the abundance trends to complex individual-based habitat models.
18
19 For smalltooth sawfish, we've actually had really a sequence of
20 PVAs over time, as parameter input has revised, as we've learned
21 more about the parameters that go into the model, and so the first
22 one was back with Carlson and Simpfendorfer in 2014, and it's an
23 age-structured Leslie matrix model. It's using data in the form
24 of post-breeding census with inputs of fecundity and survivorship.
25
26 Then so you put in -- Well, I'm going to actually stop myself,
27 because I don't want to get into the weeds, but the bottom line is
28 there was one in 2014, and Carlson 2023 updated the model with new
29 data, and then Carlson and Farmer in 2025 updated it again, and so
30 we now -- In the model we have so far, it's updated shrimp bycatch
31 estimates from the Bayesian modeling that we just talked about.
32
33 The population size going in, there's a new genetic close-kin mark-
34 recapture study that's suggesting, again, the population size is
35 small, and so it's putting in all those new papers, and we're
36 factoring things in, and then the mortality event in 2024, and
37 that 2023 PVA didn't look at all that mortality of adults and large
38 juveniles, and so it's adding that in.
39
40 Again, I really just want you to know that these papers are
41 available, and that we're working through the information that we
42 have, and we have additional PVA work to be completed, and so we
43 do have a giant manta ray PVA, with outputs of probability of
44 extinction similar to those, like for sawfish, and we need to
45 complete that, and we want to look at what things look like with
46 no future shrimp bycatch, and then with the future shrimp bycatch
47 does not exceed the 2023 shrimp bycatch, and that's something we
48 ask for, and so we're just basically plugging in and trying to get

1 a feel for the impacts.

2
3 Then, for sawfish, the same thing, and incorporating also the 2025
4 mortality events. The last time, you know, again, it was kind of
5 like just 2024, and now we're recognizing that we're probably going
6 to have some level of mortality event in future years, and so we're
7 still working on that, and we're also working to incorporate the
8 Gulf Council SSC feedback, and so I don't know if now -- Did you
9 want to share?

10
11 **DR. ALLEN:** Sure. Yes, and I'm happy to, and so, at the last SSC
12 meeting, we were able to spend a fair amount of time on this, and
13 we saw this same presentation, and we made some specific
14 recommendations based on that.

15
16 First of all, we recognized that this is a really important issue,
17 and one that we need to continue looking at. There's clearly a
18 need for targeted data collection, more targeted data collection,
19 in areas of high bycatch. We felt like the cooperative research
20 was the best way to do that. There's a need for increased observer
21 coverage, particularly in the areas of higher bycatch records, and
22 as well as evaluation of uncertainty around those bycatch
23 estimates.

24
25 The SSC had some good discussion about there's good evidence for
26 range expansion, particularly for smalltooth sawfish moving up the
27 coast, and with some unknown implications of that, but that has
28 been a good thing, that smalltooth sawfish are expanding their
29 range northward, and so we noted that.

30
31 The observer data were 2 percent. It was really low observer
32 data, and so there's a need for improved observer data, and then
33 continued refinement of the effective population size estimates
34 resulting from that population viability. We felt like cooperation
35 with the industry was going to be critical here, and so, basically,
36 we felt like the general approach used here is a good approach for
37 these types of questions, but we need more data, and we need more
38 observations, and we need refinement in those estimates, and so
39 that's where we left it.

40
41 **MS. LEE:** Thank you. I appreciate that, and, yes, just for
42 clarification, the SSC, as the scientific body, received a full
43 presentation on the PVA, the updated PVA, and they previously saw
44 the 2023 one, and then also the bycatch estimates was a whole
45 presentation, and so I'm trying really just to kind of catch the
46 council up on overall, you know, where we are, where we're headed,
47 where we want to go type of information.

48

1 So, obviously, all this stuff you could have a whole presentation
2 on, as we have in the past, and so it was kind of challenging to
3 figure out, you know, what best to share here, but I think I have
4 captured what you really need to know about our situation, and
5 then I also did want to point out, as far as the observer coverage,
6 I mean, again, when you look at the actual like the stat zone level
7 observer coverage, you know, one thing that I had thought was
8 particularly interesting, for example, is that, in 2022, where we
9 had --

10
11 It was actually six sawfish that were in that one year, and that
12 was the year that observed coverage in those areas was actually
13 more like 2 to 4.8 percent coverage, and so that was pretty
14 interesting to me, that, with just a little more coverage, we got,
15 you know, substantially more take, and so we do recognize that,
16 you know, our observed data is limiting for sure.

17
18 Okay, and so let's go on to the next slide, which is our overarching
19 preliminary conclusions, and it's just, you know, again, kind of
20 taking what we've -- All the new information and analyses, as far
21 as smalltooth sawfish population abundance data and trends, and so
22 we have growing evidence that the population is small, and some of
23 the genetic abundance population estimate stuff that's going on
24 right now, and everything is really coming down, and kind of coming
25 to agreeance, that the population is on the smaller end of what
26 say we were initially looking at in those early PVAs.

27
28 The evidence of a declining abundance trend in juvenile smalltooth
29 sawfish, that's another thing that, you know, is a major finding.
30 It's over ten years now that we have a declining abundance trend
31 in juvenile smalltooth sawfish in Charlotte Harbor, and that paper
32 will be coming out soon, and then, again, the mortality event, and
33 just a major impact on the population, in particular, again, the
34 adults.

35
36 As far as the shrimp trawl bycatch, it is the largest ongoing long-
37 term source of mortality for large juvenile and adult mortality,
38 and so, you know, the 2024 and 2025 smalltooth mortality event,
39 you know, had major impact in terms of, you know, across time
40 moving forward. Shrimp trawl bycatch is still a major source of
41 mortality.

42
43 Then, for giant manta ray bycatch, for me, the take-homes are it's
44 observed annually off of Louisiana, you know, nine or ten say a
45 year, with that less than 2 percent observer coverage, and the
46 increasing in the Gulf -- To be honest, I thought I had switched
47 that. That is what the paper says, but, again, the focus here is
48 just that we're seeing a lot of animals, you know, with the

1 observed coverage that we have in that area.

2
3 More actions may be needed to minimize shrimp impacts, in light of
4 the above conclusions, and, again, like I -- Having the context of
5 the Section 7 consultation, there's the jeopardy analysis, and
6 then there's just minimizing also, no matter -- Like, even if it's
7 not jeopardy, it's still minimizing impacts.

8
9 I almost feel like this is a commercial break, because we've been
10 on giant manta ray and sawfish now for the whole way, but, when I
11 first came to the council, I had said that the consultation would
12 be limited to smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray, because we
13 hadn't met any of the other triggers.

14
15 I had also noted that we did -- Per our 2021 BiOp, we have to
16 monitor take, and we were working to produce updated sea turtle
17 bycatch estimates, per that requirement to monitor take, and so
18 all this slide is is that we now have completed updated sea turtle
19 bycatch estimates, and vessel mortality estimates, and, for green,
20 loggerhead, Kemp's, and hawksbill, bycatch estimates are below our
21 ITS levels. For leatherbacks, the method was revised, and so it
22 resulted in higher estimates than in the BiOp, and I say but no
23 increasing trend, because I didn't want to alarm people.

24
25 This is just new analysts, a better -- You know, a better way of
26 analyzing the data differently, and so that we do need to -- Now
27 we have met a trigger, because we have exceeded our incidental
28 take, but what that means, basically, is that we have to go back
29 and revise the methods, and show this is how we do it now, and
30 then revise our incidental take statement, and so do not be alarmed
31 by this. I do not -- This is why all the rest of the presentation
32 is on giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish, and you get a single
33 slide, but I did want to acknowledge that there will be more than
34 just the BiOp, and we'll have to also address this.

35
36 Okay, and then this is just -- I thought it might be good to
37 acknowledge, well, where is our starting point, or where are we
38 with respect to the old biological opinion, because, you know,
39 right now, we're still under that opinion, and so the ITS, the
40 incidental take statement, and the reasonable and prudent
41 measures, and so those things to minimize, minimize the take that
42 we authorized, had monitoring, and so fishery effort and observed
43 data must be collected to produce take estimates every five years,
44 and so, like I said, we just did that, and we're doing that.

45
46 Sampling, collecting and tagging activities of ESA species, you
47 know, again, establish profiles, getting more information, and
48 there was actually, or there is, a reasonable measure, specific to

1 ecological studies, that says we must review and analyze available
2 temporal and spatial data for hotspots, and so there was just a
3 recognition, last time, that we didn't have -- Particularly with
4 giant manta ray, we didn't have enough data, but, as we get more
5 data, we should be conducting these analyses, per our BiOp
6 requirements, and then focused on handling, and so, for example,
7 we have distributed information on our resuscitation guidelines,
8 and on our handling guidelines, how to properly release and
9 minimize mortality, and so those are things that we have out there
10 now.

11
12 Then so what else could we do for smalltooth sawfish and giant
13 manta ray, and how can we address these current data limitations,
14 and we're talking about how can we improve bycatch monitoring in
15 primary bycatch areas, and, you know, how can we reduce mortality,
16 how can we improve and raise awareness of compliance with safe
17 handling and release guidance, and so we're just kind of throwing
18 out there like what can we do to minimize mortality.

19
20 Then so, when you're thinking about this, we just thought it would
21 be good to point out, you know, well, what do we do in other
22 situations, in other fisheries, for example, and so these are just
23 some strategies we use in other fisheries, whether capping overall
24 effort or take, and, I mean, I think people are familiar with
25 Hawaii longline fishery, where they have take caps, and fishing in
26 areas in a manner resulting in a lower sea turtle catch per unit
27 effort, or reducing mortality and mortality rates, and then sort
28 of getting into, okay, well, what does that mean exactly, and what
29 are some examples, and so I mentioned Hawaii seasonal area closures
30 and hotspot areas.

31
32 We have -- There's some for -- For example, Mid-Atlantic large
33 mesh gillnet has rolling closures, and there's some other fisheries
34 that have other time and area closures, and we have our bottom
35 longline, for example, closure, our time-area closure, and gear
36 modifications. You know, a prime example is TEDs, and we have
37 shrimp and flounder fisheries that, you know, use TEDs that are 97
38 percent effective.

39
40 Improved handling, release, and technique, and require training,
41 and overnight soak prohibitions. That was thrown in there as an
42 example of what they're doing to reduce sturgeon mortality, and so
43 GARFO is actually working on -- Working on a lot with Atlantic
44 sturgeon right now, and coming up with their own amendment to
45 address Atlantic sturgeon, and so I just put these, you know,
46 examples out here to share that, you know, when we're thinking
47 about this, there are places to look.

48

1 Then that takes us to the council engagement in the Section 7
2 process, and so I hope most of you are familiar, but the ESA MSA
3 Integration Policy Directive, and so, nationwide, you know, or
4 across all the fishery management councils, there was a big effort,
5 and particularly the Pacific Islands Council was working hard to
6 figure out how to have the councils engage in Section 7
7 consultations.

8
9 You know, councils are not technically an applicant. If you're an
10 applicant for say a permit, you have special rights related to
11 that, but the agency recognizes that, you know, councils are
12 unique, and you're our partners, and so there was a big effort to
13 figure out how we can try to integrate and get councils engaged in
14 the Section 7 process. There's a hyperlink to that document. Sam
15 has come and talked to you about it before, but it outlines how
16 councils can participate in the process, early collaboration.

17
18 You know, the whole focus is how can we work together, prior to
19 initiation, for reducing the likelihood that we're going to end up
20 in jeopardy consultations, and so, essentially, you know, that's
21 what I'm doing here, right, and then ways that councils can be
22 involved in Section 7 consultations, and so you can work with our
23 Sustainable Fisheries, and basically describing the proposed
24 action for the purpose of initiating consultation, working on
25 feasible alternatives to the status quo.

26
27 You know, everything you're doing now, as far as looking into the
28 best scientific information, and particularly really on fishery
29 management practices, right, and like that's where we really need
30 good cooperation and input, as the fishery manager experts, and so
31 you can get engaged in helping us with our draft biological
32 assessments and evaluations. All of that is on the action agency
33 side and, you know, the initiation document.

34
35 Then, for kind of the mechanism, and so I said, you know, how do
36 we do that, and so one way is obvious. You can have a liaison,
37 like me, who comes to council meetings and engages in your advisory
38 panels and, you know, the Protected Resources side of the house
39 brings you information that is important for you to know.

40
41 PRD can engage in reviewing your documents. You know, we have our
42 IPT process, right, and so we can evaluate the actions you're
43 taking, and then we can form IPTs for considering ESA actions,
44 such as like we did for the Gulf Reef Fish Amendment 31, and that's
45 been a while. I know not everyone was around for that, but some
46 folks were, and that was -- At the time, loggerheads were not doing
47 well, actually, and so we came together and tried to figure out,
48 you know, what it is we could do.

1
2 Then the policy directive also mentions ad hoc committees or
3 working groups to review ESA data, explore alternatives for changes
4 to the FMP to address ESA-related concerns, and I mentioned the
5 groundfish ESA working group on the slide. That's something the
6 west coast does to engage in the Section 7 process. Next slide,
7 and we're almost done, and thank you so much.

8
9 Where do we go from here? Timing of formal consultations, most
10 folks know, okay, it's, you know, 135 days for a formal
11 consultation, but, obviously, there's a lot of things that go into
12 it, and that can change that timeline, and so what the proposed
13 action is -- If we're doing it just on a status quo, and we have
14 that information, then, okay, we power on, but, if we're
15 considering a new management measure, that -- Again, we have to
16 make sure that we really fully understand and have that action
17 well defined before we move forward with consultation.

18
19 Then, depending on the engagement process, that can take time.
20 For example, if you -- You know, if you ultimately see a draft
21 biological opinion, that takes time, and then internal and external
22 factors too, of course, and so, once reinitiated, the default time
23 is 135 days, but that time really can be, and is, frequently
24 extended, through mutual agreement, and so it just kind of depends
25 on where we go from here.

26
27 Then the last slide is just somewhere where I get more information,
28 but I am sticking around. I'm not taking off today, and so, you
29 know, I hope to continue the dialogue with you on these issues,
30 and I think that essentially completes my presentation, and so,
31 really, I appreciate all your time. I know it was a lot of
32 information, and, in some areas, it seems like not enough
33 information, but the bottom line is, you know, we want to engage
34 you. We want to share with you what we know, what we don't know,
35 and where we're going with this, and we want your help as we try
36 to work through this situation.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Lee. Very comprehensive
39 presentation. I appreciate you getting us through all that, and
40 also handling some very tough questions from all of us around the
41 table. I think Mr. Sanchez has a question for you as well.

42
43 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Not so much a question. It's just -- You know, it's
44 a lot to take in. Obviously, we need some kind of action to do
45 something about this, and address this, and I'm thinking, rather
46 than having, you know, presentations without the correct group
47 populating the room to really have something meaningful happen --
48 I would like to see, and, if I need to make a motion, I will, that

1 we convene a working group that's going to be populated by shrimp
2 industry representatives, and I would defer to staff.

3
4 Carrie knows who they are, who they should be, and that we have
5 Protected Resources folks there, and some NMFS gear folks as well,
6 and let's get together, and roll up our sleeves, and see if we
7 can't do something, you know, about this, in a less impactful
8 manner, and accomplish the concerns at-hand.

9
10 **MS. LEE:** I know that was a motion, but I just wanted to, I guess,
11 explain what we were mumbling over here, just so you didn't think
12 that was rude. We were just trying to think in terms of the
13 mechanics, and making sure how to meet that motion, and so the
14 council can have an advisory panel, right, and you can call it an
15 advisory panel, I guess, but the bottom line is, so long as the
16 council establishes the group, then it's FACA exempt, and we can
17 engage. I don't know if, Mara, you want to say anything more on
18 that.

19
20 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Not really. I mean, you can -- If you want, I
21 mean, you call it a workgroup. It's an advisory panel. You create
22 it, and you can populate it. You may also want to consider like
23 an IPT-type group to be internal, right, and so you could have
24 both processes going at the same time as well.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** So, Mr. Sanchez, are you thinking like along
27 the lines of what will be formed for the IFQ, that ad hoc advisory
28 panel that we put together for that, or different?

29
30 **MR. SANCHEZ:** You know, I don't want to get so bogged down with
31 formalities. What I would really like to see, to be simple, is
32 the resources, the Protected Resources, folks, industry people,
33 and then NMFS gear people, and let's come up with a solution,
34 something livable, practical. I mean, it's not that difficult,
35 what I think I'm suggesting.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. I don't I disagree with your suggestion,
38 or your motion, whichever you want to make it to be. I guess one
39 thing, a bit of housekeeping going forward here, and so all of
40 this is going to come before the SSC again at their October
41 meeting, and is that correct? It will be on their agenda to review
42 the actual effort estimations and --

43
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. and so, right
45 now, we have scheduled to receive the assessments for pink, white,
46 and brown shrimp, and then we're going to look at the bycatch
47 estimation again for finfish, but I think -- Then get a better
48 understanding of the observer program, but then perhaps also

1 consider maybe getting a better understanding of the methodology
2 for the bycatch as well, because I think there were some individual
3 effort estimates produced for pink, brown, and white shrimp, but
4 I don't know that that was very transparent, and openly discussed,
5 and maybe that will be part of the assessment review process, but
6 I think that would be helpful to understand, you know, particularly
7 for the pink shrimp fishery in south Florida, how those estimates
8 were extrapolated in that area, to make sure we have the effort
9 estimate correct, and then to take that further with the bycatch
10 methodology, not only for finfish but also for protected resources,
11 because that impacts many, many of our stock assessments for
12 finfish.

13
14 I think we have a little bit of work to do there. I don't think
15 we're slated to receive any updates on the population on the PVA,
16 the population viability analysis, and so I don't know when -- If
17 Ms. Lee can provide updates on when that would come back to the
18 SSC, when you might be able to provide that.

19
20 I think there was also some questions about, you know, some other
21 datasets and stuff getting into the weeds, and I think we just,
22 internally, need to figure that out before it comes back to the
23 SSC again.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I would like to get a better handle
26 on the bycatch. You know, the very last slide in the presentation,
27 that we did not look at, it talks about the trawl effort, for
28 primarily giant manta ray, in the bycatch area where those are
29 being observed, but then, you know, are the numbers of nine manta
30 rays that are interacted with being extrapolated to the Gulf-wide
31 shrimping effort, or are they specifically to that regional effort,
32 because, when you look at -- Way back at slide 19, it's talking
33 about the overall number that it extrapolates to, which is Gulf-
34 wide, but this slide talks about effort in that area, and I don't
35 want to go into the weeds here. I think we're coming up against
36 a break anyway, but, Mr. Strelcheck.

37
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** A couple of suggestions here. I think there's a
39 need for an internal interdisciplinary planning team, and I think
40 that would be helpful then with all the questions and information
41 gathering, with regard to the data, so that, when you're then
42 presenting, or interacting, with this workgroup that Mr. Sanchez
43 is proposing, right, that we have a lot of that information, or
44 questions, answered, or at least teed-up, obviously, to get
45 resolved and answered.

46
47 In terms of the working group, I like the concept, John. I am
48 supportive of it. I would also recommend maybe we come back during

1 Full Council, because we want to see how these workgroups have
2 been comprised elsewhere.

3
4 You know, my thought is a broad group that involves everyone from
5 shrimp industry members to academics to sawfish recovery, to, you
6 know, my team, you know, and trying to get the whole suite of
7 people that are involved in both the industry and their expertise
8 on sawfish and manta rays to the table, so they can work
9 collaboratively together, because that's really the goal here. We
10 want to work collaboratively with the industry on this one.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Sanchez.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I'm fine with that. We can wait until Full
15 Council, and maybe we'll get some public comment in between, too.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so you're comfortable making a
18 motion then? Dr. Walter.

19
20 **DR. WALTER:** I do support John's proposal there, and I thin, from
21 the Science Center perspective, providing expertise on the gear,
22 and probably on the effort, and on observer coverage, because there
23 probably is going to need to be some support from that, in terms
24 of like the where, when, how the interactions are occurring, and
25 is there a way to mitigate them.

26
27 I think there is also a number of groups who might be helpful to
28 the process too who the council could consider adding to this that
29 are outside the federal or state footprint, who have been working
30 on bycatch issues for a number of years, and so I think we might
31 hear from them in public comment, if they're interested in this,
32 but that's how we've often solved these bycatch issues, is through
33 working together with both the industry as well as outside groups,
34 academics and other scientists, who have been able to bridge the
35 gaps that need to happen to make this work.

36
37 On the specific science questions that might need to go back before
38 the SSC, what it would be valuable to do is to work offline, in
39 terms of identifying what are the things that need to go back to
40 the SSC, when they need to go back to the SSC, and ensuring that
41 we at the Science Center can provide those on that timeline, and
42 so I think that's going to be helpful here, in just laying out
43 that timeline for my staff, in terms of what we would need to
44 provide, and what the SSC would need to review, so that there would
45 be actionable science before the council, because I think what
46 we've seen is that there's going to probably need to be some
47 actions.

1 The council is going to need to have confidence that the science
2 is strong enough to act, and I think that's where we want to try
3 to get to relatively soon, so that we are able to be confident
4 that anything that does go into place is backed by good science,
5 and so I'll work with council staff to draft out what needs to be
6 done there. Thanks.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Walter. Dr.
9 Simmons.

10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and just thank you for that, Dr.
12 Walter. I guess, just back to the timing, and the timeline, Ms.
13 Lee, you kind of covered that a little bit, but it was slightly
14 confusing to me, and so, I mean, maybe we need to have a special
15 meeting, that doesn't happen in October, to get everything done
16 with SSC in advance, and so do we have some time to do that after
17 the October meeting, or, you know, is this just something that has
18 to happen right this second, because I do think we're going to
19 need to coordinate a little bit better on this before it comes
20 back again to the SSC.

21
22 **MS. LEE:** Yes, and, I mean, we still have -- As I noted, we still
23 are working through those PVAs, and so we -- Like I would say --
24 We're not saying we have a complete initiation package right now
25 to move forward with the consultation. There's still uncertainty
26 in whether it's a status quo consultation or whether we're going
27 to be looking at something different, and so, you know, I think we
28 have a little time, and that I'm trying to figure out, in terms of
29 the PVA timing, and not to put poor John Walter back on here, but
30 I think you wanted to sort of acknowledge the timing with the PVAs
31 and what you thought there that the Science Center might be able
32 to do.

33
34 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think we probably -- There's a number of
35 additional requests from the Regional Office for the PVAs for some
36 other runs that evaluate a number of other scenarios. That's in
37 the letter. We have not done all those runs.

38
39 We had some staffing shortages, that I alluded to, that slowed our
40 ability to meet all of those under the original timeframe. I think
41 we can probably get them done by the end of this year, those
42 additional runs, and then I would also say, if there are other
43 things the SSC needs, and I think Mike outlined a number of those,
44 and some of them are longer-term, and those require like higher
45 observer coverage, and that's not going to happen in the short-
46 term, but, in terms of there's other things in the PVA that we
47 hope for the SSC to see, and I think maybe getting a little more
48 time with the documents, and with the methodology, will help.

1
2 Mike, maybe you and I can talk offline, and, if there's other runs
3 that might be useful to get that, you know, vet it through the
4 science process and say, yes, this is meeting what we need right
5 now, let's talk about that. Thanks.

6
7 **DR. ALLEN:** I'm happy to, John.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Any other comments, or questions,
10 regarding the presentation from Ms. Lee? Seeing none, thank you
11 again, Ms. Lee. I know that was a marathon. You did a great job.
12 That was very informative for all of us. Mr. Chair, I believe we
13 do not have any other business for the Shrimp Committee at this
14 time, and so that concludes the Shrimp Management Committee.

15
16 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 27, 2025.)

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