

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2
3 MEETING OF THE STANDING SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

4
5 October 8, 2025

6
7 **STANDING SSC VOTING MEMBERS**

- 8 Trevor Moncrief.....
- 9 Jason Adriance.....
- 10 Luiz Barbieri.....
- 11 Harry Blanchet.....
- 12 Dave Chagaris.....
- 13 Tom Frazer.....
- 14 David Griffith.....
- 15 Tiffany Hopper.....
- 16 Jack Isaacs.....
- 17 John Mareska.....
- 18 Paul Mickle.....
- 19 Jim Nance.....
- 20 Will Patterson.....
- 21 Daniel Petrolia.....
- 22 Sean Powers.....
- 23 Andrew Ropicki.....
- 24 Steven Saul.....
- 25 Steven Scyphers.....
- 26 Ralph Townsend.....

27
28 **STAFF**

- 29 Matt Freeman.....Economist Analyst
- 30 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 31 Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- 32 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 33 Jessica Matos.....Administrative and Accounting Technician
- 34 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 35 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
- 36 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- 37 Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

38
39 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

- 40 Mike Allen.....GMFMC
- 41 Dierdre Boelke.....
- 42 Willy Goldsmith.....
- 43 Julie Neer.....SEDAR
- 44 Jim Tolan.....

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46 - - -

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1 The Meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Standing
2 Scientific and Statistical Committee convened via webinar on Wednesday,
3 October 8, 2025, and was called to order by Dr. Jim Nance.

4
5 **INTRODUCTIONS**
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

7 **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND SUMMARY FROM THE MAY 2025 SSC**
8 **MEETING**
9

10 **DR. JIM NANCE:** Gulf Council staff in attendance include Carrie
11 Simmons, John Froeschke, Ryan Rindone, Lisa Hollensead, Matt
12 Freeman, Verena Wang, Sarah Gardiner, Emily Muehlstein, and
13 Jessica Matos.

14
15 Notice of this meeting was provided to the Federal Register, sent
16 by email to subscribers of the Gulf Council's press release email
17 list, and was posted on the council's website. Topics to be
18 covered today will include Election of Chair and Vice Chair;
19 Preliminary Results of Regional Management Council Regulatory
20 Process Review; Review of Gulf SSC Projection Considerations;
21 Review of Science Consideration Subcommittee Materials; Review of
22 Gulf Gag Grouper; Operational Assessment Terms of Reference;
23 Discussion of Joint Gulf and South Atlantic SSC Working Group;
24 Review of Essential Fish Habitat Mapping for Shrimp, Reef Fish,
25 CMP, Spiny Lobster, and Red Drum FMPs.

26
27 This webinar is open to the public and is being streamed live and
28 recorded. A summary of the meeting and verbatim minutes will be
29 produced and made available to the public by our website. For the
30 purpose of voice identification, and to ensure you're able to mute
31 and unmute your line, please identify yourself by stating your
32 name when Jess calls your name for attendance. Once you have
33 identified yourself, please re-mute your line.

34
35 Today. we'll be using the raise-hand feature to help the chair
36 recognize you to speak. Jess will type names in the pad, so that
37 the chair can identify those that want to speak. We'll go ahead
38 and do our attendance now, Jess. Thank you.

39
40 **MS. JESSICA MATOS:** Jason Adriance.

41
42 **MR. JASON ADRIANCE:** Jason Adriance.

43
44 **MS. MATOS:** Luiz Barbieri.

45
46 **DR. LUIZ BARBIERI:** Luiz Barbieri.

47
48 **MS. MATOS:** Harry Blanchet.

1
2 **MR. HARRY BLANCHET:** Harry Blanchet, and I seem to have an echo.
3
4 **MS. MATOS:** I have an echo?
5
6 **MR. BLANCHET:** The first two speakers also had it. The first two
7 speakers had an echo, and I also have an echo.
8
9 **MS. MATOS:** I do not hear the echo on our end. It might be your
10 end.
11
12 **MR. BLANCHET:** I can hear you clearly.
13
14 **MS. MATOS:** Okay. Dave Chagaris.
15
16 **DR. DAVID CHAGARIS:** Dave Chagaris, and I also hear an echo from
17 Harry and Luiz.
18
19 **MS. MATOS:** Okay. Tom Frazer.
20
21 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Tom Frazer.
22
23 **MS. MATOS:** David Griffith.
24
25 **DR. DAVID GRIFFITH:** David Griffith.
26
27 **MS. MATOS:** Tiffany Hopper.
28
29 **DR. TIFFANY HOPPER:** Tiffany Hopper.
30
31 **MS. MATOS:** Jack Isaacs.
32
33 **DR. JACK ISAACS:** Jack Isaacs is here.
34
35 **MS. MATOS:** John Mareska.
36
37 **MR. JOHN MARESKA:** John Mareska.
38
39 **MS. MATOS:** Paul Mickle.
40
41 **DR. PAUL MICKLE:** Paul Mickle.
42
43 **MS. MATOS:** Paul Mickle.
44
45 **MS. MATOS:** Trevor Moncrief.
46
47 **MR. TREVOR MONCRIEF:** Trevor Moncrief.
48

1 **MS. MATOS:** Jim Nance.
2
3 **DR. NANCE:** Jim Nance.
4
5 **MS. MATOS:** Will Patterson. Dan Petrolia.
6
7 **DR. DAN PETROLIA:** Dan Petrolia.
8
9 **MS. MATOS:** Sean Powers. Andrew Ropicki.
10
11 **DR. ANDREW ROPICKI:** Andrew Ropicki.
12
13 **MS. MATOS:** Sean Powers. You'll have to unmute yourself.
14
15 **DR. SEAN POWERS:** Sorry. Sean Powers.
16
17 **MS. MATOS:** Steven Saul.
18
19 **DR. STEVEN SAUL:** Steven Saul.
20
21 **MS. MATOS:** Steven Scyphers.
22
23 **DR. STEVEN SCYPHERS:** Steven Scyphers.
24
25 **MS. MATOS:** Ralph Townsend.
26
27 **DR. RALPH TOWNSEND:** Ralph Townsend.
28
29 **MS. MATOS:** Mike Allen.
30
31 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Mike Allen.
32
33 **DR. NANCE:** Thank you, Jessica. I'm going to go over the adoption
34 of the agenda, and then also the minutes, and I'm going to turn
35 the time over to Ryan.
36
37 We've had a couple of changes since our last meeting. Dr. Mike
38 Allen is now a member of the Gulf Council. We appreciate him being
39 on the SSC for a while, and acting as the chair, and we've added
40 Dr. Tom Frazer to the committee, and I certainly look forward to
41 working with Tom. He was a great council member, and he always
42 had a lot to say on our SSC meetings.
43
44 We've had a chance, each of us, to look over the agenda. Are there
45 any corrections or additions we need to make to that agenda?
46 Hearing none, is there any opposition to the adoption of the
47 agenda? Seeing or hearing none, the agenda as written is adopted.
48

1 We've each had an opportunity to look over and approve the minutes
2 from our May 2025 SSC meeting. Any changes or issues with the
3 minutes as written? Hearing and seeing no hands, is there any
4 opposition to approval of the minutes as written? Hearing and
5 seeing none, the minutes are approved as written. Ryan, we'll go
6 ahead and turn the time over to you for the selection of our chair
7 and vice chair.

8
9 **ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**

10
11 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, Jim. Jess has put together a way
12 for us to be able to vote using a Google Doc, and so, after we
13 receive nominations for each, if there's more than one nominee for
14 chair or vice chair, then this Google Doc will be sent around, and
15 you guys can cast your votes that way, and it will make it quick
16 for us to be able to tabulate on this end, and announce who won,
17 and so I'll open the floor for nominations for chair for the SSC.
18 Sorry, and I just thought people would say, you know -- People can
19 just go ahead and speak. Luiz, go ahead.

20
21 **DR. BARBIERI:** Thank you, Ryan. I would like to nominate Trevor
22 Moncrief for chair.

23
24 **MR. RINDONE:** Trevor, do you accept?

25
26 **MR. MONCRIEF:** I will accept.

27
28 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay. Are there any other nominations? Okay.
29 Seeing no other nominations, congrats, Trevor. All right. Now
30 for vice chair. I'll open the floor for nominations for vice
31 chair. Luiz again.

32
33 **DR. BARBIERI:** Thank you, Ryan. I would like to nominate Tom
34 Frazer.

35
36 **MR. RINDONE:** Tom Frazer. Dr. Frazer, do you accept?

37
38 **DR. FRAZER:** I do.

39
40 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay. Any other nominations? Not seeing any, all
41 right. Tom, congrats as vice chair. That was easy. Okay. Trevor,
42 you're in charge now. Good luck. The next item on our agenda is
43 Item Number V, and, Trevor, I'll go ahead and read the scope of
44 work on that one.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Sounds great.

47
48 **PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

1 **PROCESS REVIEW**

2
3 **MR. RINDONE:** Dr. Willy Goldsmith and Ms. Dierdre Boelke are here
4 to present preliminary outcomes of work that's been contracted by
5 the council to conduct a regulatory process review of the other
6 regional fishery management councils, and the council funded this
7 work as part of its ongoing climate readiness and regulatory
8 streamlining efforts, with the aim of identifying approaches used
9 in other regions to improve the timeliness and throughput of how
10 we incorporate scientific information into the management process
11 and to otherwise increase efficiency.

12
13 The contractors will present their results to the council at its
14 November meeting, which is the first full week of November in
15 Biloxi, and so you guys are being asked to evaluate the information
16 presented, consider the applicability of the approaches and data
17 sources identified in the other regions for consideration for Gulf
18 fisheries management and make any recommendations to the
19 contractors and council staff, as appropriate, and so we have Willy
20 and Dierdre on, right. All right.

21
22 **DR. WILLIAM GOLDSMITH:** We are here and ready to go.

23
24 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. Go for it.

25
26 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Awesome. Thanks, Ryan. Good morning, everybody.
27 Willy Goldsmith here. I'm really glad to be with you all here
28 this morning to talk through some of our preliminary findings to-
29 date. We kind of just saw this project get teed-up a bit, and
30 it's really thinking about an eye toward increasing the timeliness
31 and responsiveness of the Gulf's regulatory processes, and, to do
32 so, we've conducted a comprehensive overview of regulatory
33 processes across councils, trying to get a sense of where there
34 might be opportunities for the Gulf Council to think about
35 increasing efficiency and throughput.

36
37 I do want to note this is kind of a preliminary snapshot into where
38 we are in our synthesis to-date, but we're eager to share with you
39 all a sense of what we've learned so far and get some feedback
40 from you all.

41
42 All right, and so just some quick background here on kind of the
43 impetus for this project. The federal regulatory process is
44 certainly comprehensive, but often can lack the agility, or the
45 nimbleness, needed to more rapidly incorporate new information and
46 respond in a timely manner to changes on the water.

47
48 As a result, the Gulf Council has been seeking a thorough review

1 of processes employed by other councils, again thinking about
2 improving the responsiveness and resilience of fisheries here in
3 the Gulf under changing conditions, and the intended impact,
4 ultimately, is to provide a detailed evaluation and summary of
5 these best practices that will inform a future project to help the
6 Gulf Council identify kind of which of these approaches or which
7 potential methodologies could be most helpful for increasing
8 responsiveness.

9

10 Just quickly, since we can't be in the room here today with you
11 all, I just wanted to give a brief introduction to each of us. My
12 name is Willy Goldsmith. I'm a consultant with Pelagic Strategies.
13 I've done a fair amount of work with councils in the past,
14 including on the Gulf Council's recreational initiative, last year
15 and earlier this year, and so I'm glad to be back here with you
16 all and talking through this effort, and, Deirdre, I'll pass it
17 over to you.

18

19 **MS. DEIRDRE BOELKE:** Thanks, Willy. Good morning, everyone. My
20 name is Deirdre Boelke. I really appreciate this opportunity to
21 run through some of our preliminary work here with the Gulf SSC
22 this morning.

23

24 My background is in fisheries management and policy. I did just
25 recently start an independent consulting firm called Fisheries
26 Insight Network, and I'm really enjoying that so far. Most of my
27 work is in kind of supporting council-related projects like this,
28 as well as doing some work in the fisheries and offshore wind
29 space.

30

31 Most relevant for this project, I used to be on the New England
32 Fishery Management Council staff, for a little over twenty years,
33 working on various projects, mostly the sea scallop plan, the
34 Atlantic herring plan, and I also was the staff for the SSC,
35 supporting their work, at some points, and so it's great to be
36 here, and I'll turn it back to Willy for a few more slides, and
37 then I'll join back in again. Thanks.

38

39 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Great. Thanks, Deirdre. All right, and so I just
40 wanted to provide, before we kind of get into some of our results
41 on here, your feedback, I just wanted to give a brief overview of
42 what our approach has been for this project. As you can see, we're
43 operating under a pretty compressed timeline, a pretty quick
44 turnaround, and trying to find some, some efforts that could be of
45 resonance to the Gulf Council.

46

47 We really divided this work into three discrete phases. The first
48 one was really looking at the Gulf Council itself and understanding

1 some of the key challenges and priorities for increasing efficiency
2 and throughput. This occurred largely over the summer, through
3 conversations with council staff, as well as past meeting materials
4 and documents that have been produced, and the deliverable coming
5 out of this work was an outline of some of these challenges and
6 priorities.

7
8 Our second phase was, again, moving from kind of inward council,
9 Gulf Council, out to the broader regional council framework across
10 the nation, and really trying to conduct a systematic review of
11 processes that occurred across the regional councils.

12
13 This was conducted with a couple of different approaches. We
14 developed and distributed an online questionnaire, as well as
15 completed a series of semi-structured interviews with NOAA
16 Fisheries and council staff, which we'll run through the
17 methodology of that in a little bit, and so that work was largely
18 complete by the end of September, and we are now in the midst of
19 bringing all of what we've learned together.

20
21 We're in the process of developing our first draft of a report,
22 which we'll be presenting to the full council at its November
23 meeting in Biloxi, and then working through the month of November
24 to finalize this report.

25
26 Here's just a brief visual outlining kind of where we are in the
27 process with each of these three phases, and so, as you can see,
28 we're kind of right in the middle of that Task 3a, working to
29 complete this first this first draft of the report, and so we're
30 certainly eager to hear your feedback, and hopefully being able to
31 incorporate some of that into our first draft here.

32
33 I just want to note as well that we have been checking in with
34 Gulf Council staff regularly, every couple of weeks, just to kind
35 of provide updates and ensure that we're staying on task here.

36
37 I'm going to walk through kind of the setup here, before getting
38 into some of the key results, and I first want to talk about our
39 first phase of this project, which is really reviewing some of the
40 key challenges and priority areas for the Gulf Council in
41 particular.

42
43 Some of the key challenges we identified were, first off, trying
44 to reduce the lag times between what's happening on the water as
45 well as -- Then management actions are really trying to find ways
46 to shorten that gap, where it's possible, and related to that was
47 the exploration of potential opportunities to automate potential
48 certain management actions that might be more routine, or non-

1 controversial, given resource limitations. Then, lastly, I'm
2 thinking about National Environmental Policy Act vehicles, or
3 other innovative approaches, that we could potentially use to
4 increase throughput here.

5
6 When it comes to identifying priority stocks, these are not
7 necessarily, quote, unquote, the most important stocks. These are
8 the ones for which there's often new and evolving information and
9 which have been noted as needing a more rapid and responsive
10 updates.

11
12 Examples could include, you know, recruitment pulses of gag and
13 red grouper and those sorts of things, and so these were identified
14 by the Gulf Council in the past as some priority stocks, and so we
15 have red snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, greater amberjack, and
16 gray snapper. In terms of some of the key measures that we were
17 tasked with exploring, these included annual catch limits,
18 seasons, bag limits, and size limits, and so some of those
19 specifications and measures there.

20
21 When it comes to certain approaches that the Gulf has considered
22 in the past, and in some cases implemented, there were sort of two
23 major buckets of approaches that we identified.

24
25 The first were these interim analyses that I think many of you are
26 familiar with. These use typically fishery-independent indices to
27 track abundance between assessments, and they can be used for a
28 couple of different reasons. They can be used to inform catch
29 advice or simply as health checks, sort of engaging with
30 stakeholders and comparing the findings of the interim analysis
31 with what folks are seeing on the water. I do want to note that
32 this process is separate and independent from the SEDAR process as
33 well.

34
35 While there have been multiple examples of this being applied,
36 there are some key challenges associated with it. One is reliance
37 on previous assessments. We've heard typically some reluctance,
38 or resistance, to using interim analyses if there hasn't been an
39 assessment within say the last five years or so.

40
41 Data processing times can also be a challenge. In particular, we
42 heard video surveys, for example, can take some time to process
43 that data, and then, even after catch advice is developed, the
44 implementation of that can still take a long time, and so that's
45 kind of on the analytical side.

46
47 On the regulatory side, we learned about kind of two types of
48 frameworks that have been used, as opposed to full amendments.

1 One is the open framework process, which has been in use, and this
2 can bypass the full amendment and NEPA process, basically going
3 from review straight to public hearing and then council action.

4
5 We have also learned of interest in exploring what the Gulf Council
6 has been calling this closed framework approach, and the idea here
7 is that, if there are potential catch limits within a certain
8 range, for example, 25 to 30 percent, is it possible to automate
9 those efforts, or those changes, in a way that, again, increases
10 efficiency, perhaps going straight from council action to a letter
11 to the Regional Administrator to begin the rulemaking there, and
12 so those are some of the options that the Gulf Council has
13 implemented and been considering in the past.

14
15 Moving on to kind of how we look outward at different councils, we
16 used a couple of different approaches here. We had this online
17 questionnaire that I think many of you actually received. This
18 was distributed by a Google form over the summer, to around 160
19 individuals, and this was largely intended to get a sense of what
20 folks perceived as challenges, innovative approaches, and
21 tradeoffs, going again, to a broad range of council staff and SSC
22 members, as well as folks at NOAA Fisheries and interstate
23 commissions.

24
25 We received about fifty responses to this, with some really helpful
26 feedback, and a good jumping off point for us. We didn't receive
27 a huge number of SSC responses, and so we're certainly eager to
28 hear from you all here today.

29
30 Building on that questionnaire, we conducted a series of semi-
31 structured interviews, via Zoom, with a combination of council and
32 NMFS staff, as well as some SSC members. We conducted a total of
33 twenty-two of these interviews across all regions. These were a
34 subset of individuals whom had been sent the online questionnaire
35 and those who had provided their name and answered the
36 questionnaire.

37
38 This provided a real great opportunity to dig a bit deeper, get a
39 sense of some of the resources that might be available for us to
40 review and understand how different councils and regions are
41 looking at increasing efficiency and throughput.

42
43 To complement both of these efforts, we, of course, can go to our
44 own in-depth research of council requirements, of processes,
45 looking through the literature and meeting materials that were
46 relevant across the eight councils.

47
48 In doing this, we really identified three primary kind of buckets

1 of constraints to efficiency and responsiveness. These included
2 legal restraints, those more around scientific timing and
3 uncertainty, and then resource limitations.

4
5 I'm not going to run through all these, in the interest of time,
6 in terms of the details of each law, but just to highlight some of
7 the key examples of legal requirements that we heard of as
8 potential obstacles to efficiency, and certainly the Magnuson-
9 Stevens Act, MSA. Some constraints included strict rebuilding
10 timelines and council process requirements, for example. The
11 Administrative Procedures Act, which generally governs agency
12 rulemaking and comment period requirements, and, again, that can
13 introduce significant time lags.

14
15 NEPA, and just a little typo, and that should be National
16 Environmental Policy Act. Again, this is sort of the process of
17 analyzing environmental effects and ensuring public input into
18 that process. This, again, can take a lot of time, and a lot of
19 council resources as well, and there are some other -- Certainly
20 some other applicable laws here that maybe were a little bit lower
21 priority, given the emphasis of this project.

22
23 Just to note here that, while we did hear the general view of these
24 kind of challenges around responsiveness to these legal
25 requirements, there was some inconsistency across regions, in
26 particular at the NOAA Fisheries level, in terms of risk tolerance,
27 for example risk of litigation and how folks wanted to handle, for
28 example, what NEPA vehicle might be most appropriate. We did hear
29 some different attitudes about that around the nation.

30
31 These are kind of the other two main buckets of constraints on the
32 scientific timing and uncertainty side. Again, we've alluded to
33 these time lags in data collection and its use in management, for
34 example between the terminal year of assessments and the ultimate
35 uptake of that information.

36
37 Of course, we're working kind of in a dynamic and changing
38 environment, and so uncertainties around how species will respond
39 to changes, inconsistencies and uncertainties about on-the-water
40 information, and how to bring that into the conversation, and then
41 just these MSA requirements around kind of the SSC's role, and
42 BSIA, and how those can also just add additional time to the
43 process.

44
45 Then, lastly, kind of an umbrella over these first two really is
46 this this issue of resource limitation, both staff and time, and
47 so thinking about how those can reduce efficiency at both the
48 council and NMFS levels, and it's not just numbers of folks. It's

1 also turnover, and that can kind of risk loss of institutional
2 knowledge, and there is some concern that these issues could, could
3 get worse in the near future.
4

5 That was sort of a, you know, view into kind of where we've been,
6 and how we've looked at some of these issues, and I'm going to
7 turn it over to Deirdre to talk through some of the potential
8 approaches that we've heard about through this review.
9

10 **MS. BOEHLE:** Thank you, Willy, and so the next few slides, again
11 -- As Willy mentioned, this is very much a work in progress. We
12 are in the thick of just synthesizing all of this information, and
13 combing through our notes, and trying to organize everything, but,
14 after doing that for a little while, we definitely have seen a way
15 to summarize most of what we learned into two categories.
16

17 The first is pretty obvious. These would be your Magnuson Act
18 regulatory processes, and the different NEPA vehicles, and the
19 different tools that different councils have used, and kind of the
20 real meat and operationalizing how they're going to approach these
21 different ways to be more efficient, and so I'm going to summarize
22 those into that category.
23

24 Then definitely, along the way, as we were speaking with people,
25 particularly in the interviews, we have another bin of best
26 practices that a lot of council staff and NOAA staff shared with
27 us, that we are calling the three C's.
28

29 You know, it comes down to setting up real protocols for how to
30 collaborate, how to work together efficiently, how to coordinate
31 timing, and different timelines, and how everyone kind of works
32 together and communicates that, both throughout a team as well as
33 to the public and to the council, and so we try, and I assume
34 throughout the report, we will be summarizing them into these two
35 different categories, but not to overlook the importance of many
36 of the comments that we heard that, really, to get the job done in
37 the end efficiently, it really -- It takes a lot of these best
38 practices, in terms of what we're calling more of the soft results,
39 and the things that people do to work together.
40

41 Then we also found, because so many councils are -- You know, I
42 don't want to say struggling, but this is a topic that is not
43 unique to the Gulf.
44

45 Everyone is trying to think about ways to work more efficiently
46 with less resources, with limited science and so forth, that
47 everyone seems to be, in some form or another, working on this
48 topic, and so there's a lot of ongoing work that, unfortunately,

1 we don't have results from those other regions to share exactly in
2 this report, but we know they're happening, and we're going to try
3 to identify those as kind of on-the-horizon efforts that hopefully,
4 within the next six months to a year, a lot of that work will be
5 coming together, and will hopefully continue to feed and be shared
6 across different regions. I do just have a few slides to go
7 through, to give you a feel for some of what we learned.

8
9 A lot of this stuff can be a little dry, and I apologize. It's
10 early in the morning. Hopefully you have some coffee. Regulatory
11 processes are not super exciting, but they are important, and it
12 is what we need to work under through the council process.

13
14 This first slide is just making sure everyone is on the same page,
15 in terms of, you know, the typical Magnuson-Stevens Act regulatory
16 pathways, and they vary. They have different functions, but, in
17 general, this is the list of all of the different ways that
18 councils operate, through amendments, which would be your major
19 changes to fishery management plans, and, you know, these often
20 take several years, in some cases, depending on the level of
21 controversy and how much is looking to be adjusted.

22
23 Frameworks, as Willy mentioned, are used in many regions, including
24 the Gulf, and these are typically a bit faster, and there are
25 things that are already considered in the larger fishery management
26 plan.

27
28 We did notice different regions call them different things. You
29 know, there are the open and closed frameworks. There's more
30 standard or abbreviated ones, but, in general, many regions seem
31 to have two different kinds, or they just use one, but, in general,
32 having some that are the standard things, that might get updated
33 sometimes on an annual basis, and then sometimes there will be
34 some, some kind of newer issue that they're trying to work through
35 that is not quite an amendment level, but it might take a bit
36 longer.

37
38 Specifications are not used in every region consistently, but they
39 are definitely a tool that many councils use, where they try to
40 really limit the amount of details, or types of actions, that can
41 be changed, and they're really pretty specific to setting catch
42 limits, and sometimes a handful of other measures, and they're
43 very linked to how much catch is coming out of the water annually,
44 and so, again, some regions are using those much more regularly.

45
46 The next few bullets really are not things you want to get in the
47 habit of relying on. They can be more efficient, in terms of
48 emergency actions, or interim actions, or secretarial actions, and

1 these are really more driven by the agency.
2
3 They're more temporary in nature. There's very specific rules
4 about how they can be used, and when they can be used, and so they
5 definitely are used, and they're used in all regions, when those
6 are needed, but, in terms of planning for a council to -- You know,
7 let's identify the most efficient vehicles to use in moving
8 forward, those are not really the ones to depend on, and so you're
9 really left with kind of frameworks and specifications as really
10 the primary ways that most regions try to implement things in an
11 efficient, effective way.
12
13 Again, in terms of NEPA, I know everyone here is probably familiar
14 with NEPA, and the different vehicles that are used, but there's
15 really three different ways that actions are developed.
16
17 All federal actions need to review the environmental impacts, and
18 making sure that there's a robust public process. Starting with
19 the environmental impact statements, you know, those are usually
20 your Magnuson Act amendments, things that are required for major
21 actions.
22
23 The figure on the right, and I'm not going to go through that,
24 but, you know, that would be the path that's lowest, on the bottom,
25 just indicating that there are these required steps, with public
26 comment periods required, and different council actions along the
27 way, and so these, obviously, take the longest. They require the
28 most level of analyses, and they definitely are the most lengthy.
29
30 The environmental assessment is that middle track, and these are
31 really used for actions that you're not sure if there's a going to
32 be any kind of significant impact as you start out, and so you're
33 assuming that there's not going to be, but there might be, and so
34 there are these kind of additional steps along the way, and
35 required analysis, but, typically, it shouldn't be taking as long
36 as an environmental impact statement.
37
38 Then, at the end of the process, there would be this finding of no
39 significant impact, and, you know, that's the important difference
40 between an EA and an EIS.
41
42 The one on the bottom I just want to raise a little more awareness
43 to, and this is a vehicle that's not used really much in the Gulf
44 region at all, categorical exclusions, but is in increasing use in
45 other regions, and these are really for actions that, when you
46 start out, you know already that they're not going to have
47 significant impacts, and so the process can be much faster.
48

1 The level of required analyses is much lower, and they typically
2 are pretty streamlined, in terms of the things they can be used
3 for, like technical corrections, more administrative things,
4 really minimal changes, that are expected to have very minimal
5 environmental impacts, but you do get to kind of bypass a lot of
6 steps, and they certainly are much more efficient, and they require
7 less resources on the staff and council time and so forth.

8
9 I just want to also note there is a little definitely uncertainty
10 going on right now with NEPA, as folks probably know, and NOAA is
11 reviewing it, and determining new guidance, that will be shared
12 with the councils eventually, and the Gulf staff is very in touch
13 with that, and there's a working group that's been established for
14 all the councils in all the regions.

15
16 In particular, the categorical exclusion topic, it does seem there
17 may be some, some new use in that region, in terms of expanding
18 the list of measures that could count as a categorical exclusion.

19
20 I'm just highlighting that because, if that is expanded, and that
21 ultimately does become part of the updated guidance, that is a way
22 it could relieve some of the time needed, and the need to have
23 environmental assessments used as often, and, you know, from our
24 conversations, this was definitely identified as a real potential
25 savings, if in fact it goes, but we don't know what the guidance
26 will be. The council staff is very in touch with that, and, you
27 know, you'll hear more about that in the coming months. I'm sure.

28
29 We tried to, you know, listen to all these conversations, and, you
30 know, we, obviously, didn't hit every topic with every person that
31 we spoke with for every region, but, in general, we tried to take
32 what we heard from all the different conversations and, in one
33 slide here, we're trying to summarize the various tools.

34
35 Again, these are regulatory tools that regions are using in
36 different ways, and some have been considered in the Gulf, and
37 some haven't, and we're still kind of working through which ones
38 would maybe be priority recommendations to have more serious
39 consideration in the Gulf.

40
41 Just to run through each of these a little bit, and to give you a
42 sense of the flavor and the variety that's out there, programmatic
43 EISs -- This is kind of a council sees that they're going to put
44 something in place, and they know, kind of starting out, that it's
45 going to need to be adjusted periodically, and so they almost set
46 up a system where they do one large action, a large EIS, that
47 covers a broad range of potential measures.

48

1 That usually takes a bit of time to set that all up, and do all of
2 that analysis, but the hope is, you know, you do all that upfront
3 work, and then you can always build off of that moving forward,
4 you know, maybe for the next ten, twelve, twenty years, as that
5 program unfolds and is in operation, and so that can be a time
6 savings in the end, but certainly it takes more upfront work to
7 get it going.

8
9 We did hear from some regions that, you know, that it can be worth
10 it in the end, so that they can kind of always tier off of that,
11 that main programmatic EIS.

12
13 Omnibus amendments are an interesting approach, in terms of a
14 streamlining tool. This is when there's maybe a new policy, a new
15 standard that comes from NOAA for example, and a council wants to
16 make a similar change across all of their plans at once, or some
17 large fraction of all of their plans at once, and there are some
18 -- In terms of this idea of efficiency, that some regions are
19 looking at to kind of enable, across all of their plans, maybe
20 different tools that are not allowed in some actions, and are in
21 some, in others, and so just kind of upfront trying to do it
22 across-the-board in all of your actions, and I'll explain one
23 example of that in a future slide.

24
25 Moving to ecosystem component species, you know, this is kind of
26 newer, since the National Standard 1 Guidelines were updated in
27 2009, and this -- We're highlighting this as a streamlining tool,
28 in that, you know, there are some species, in certain regions,
29 that really don't reach the level of warranting an entire fishery
30 management plan.

31
32 You know, they're caught at very low levels, and they may be more
33 important in terms of a predator for other species within a fishery
34 management plan, and so the idea here, in terms of a streamlining,
35 would be they don't really require the full gamut of conservation
36 and management, including annual catch limits or accountability
37 measures, but they're still an important ecosystem component
38 species to identify.

39
40 This is a way that some councils have approached some of these
41 predator species, so that they're on the list, they're on the
42 radar, but they don't require, you know, the full level of
43 management that comes along with that.

44
45 Moving down to tiering, or nesting, NEPA actions, and really just
46 wanting to highlight this. It is related to the programmatic EIS
47 that I described already, in that, you know, future actions can
48 then rely on earlier analyses, but, in particular, the supplemental

1 information report is what I would like to highlight here.

2
3 Again, it's not a tool that is used a lot in the Gulf, but other
4 regions are using it more and more. It's almost a tool that
5 confirms that, as an action is going along several years, you know,
6 annually, you can look at the catch, you can look at the fishery,
7 and almost confirm, through a much shorter, efficient memo that
8 becomes part of the record, that, yes, in fact, you know, this was
9 reviewed, and everything seems to be in order.

10
11 No new, you know, analyses are required, and it kind of just allows
12 those catch limits to stay in place for another year, for example,
13 and so these supplemental information reports are being used
14 certainly to support more efficiency, and less resources, in some
15 regions pretty successfully.

16
17 Exempted fishing permits, and so these are tools that the Magnuson
18 Act allows, where NOAA can actually issue a permit to a certain
19 segment of a fishery, or whoever is involved in the actual
20 application, to do something that would otherwise be prohibited
21 from the regular fishery management plan rules.

22
23 You know, they're intended, you know, originally, probably to
24 really promote innovation, and, you know, let's test out a gear
25 type in this, you know, small pilot way, so that, before the
26 council goes through the long process of approving a gear, we can
27 kind of test it out and see if it works, before going through the
28 whole action, which could then later follow in a more efficient
29 way. They can be used in this efficiency idea, in terms of --

30
31 **MS. MATOS:** Deirdre, we can't hear you.

32
33 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** It's Willy. Can you hear me?

34
35 **MS. MATOS:** Yes, we can. I see she just got offline, and so I
36 think something might have happened on her end.

37
38 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Okay. I can kind of pick up here for a second,
39 and then, when she pops in, she can keep going here, but so what
40 Deirdre was saying basically is EFPs can just be a really helpful
41 way to think about some of these new approaches, and can be just
42 a more efficient way to think through exploring efficiencies.

43
44 This last example that Deirdre has, or that we have on the slide
45 here, is this idea of interim final rules. This is where APA again
46 comes in, which is basically this idea that a rule can become
47 effective as soon as it's published, as opposed to after that, and
48 again, this is kind of this good -- If there's good cause, and so

1 kind of for some of these more routine management actions, this
2 can be an option.

3
4 Let's see, and I wanted to check and make sure she isn't back yet.
5 Okay, and so, in terms of some of these example streamlining tools,
6 Deirdre had spoken to the omnibus management flexibility
7 amendment, and this is something that the New England Council just
8 recently approved, at its September meeting, and this is, again,
9 related to that categorical exclusion that she had mentioned
10 earlier.

11
12 This, again, is across multiple FMPs, thinking about increasing
13 the flexibility and consistency across multiple FMPs, and some of
14 the specific measures that this could potentially allow for are
15 spelled out here.

16
17 These are not all things that have to happen. It just is an idea
18 of some of the things that could happen. For example, it can
19 increase specification frequency for potentially up to five years.
20 There are a lot of reasons why there might not be a desire for
21 that to happen, but it kind of allows for the flexibility there.

22
23 It also adds the specifications setting process for two FMPs, and
24 it allows in-season adjustment authority for all the FMPs, and it
25 removes the annual report requirements, and so really just, again,
26 focusing on streamlining, and it expands -- Again, we had talked
27 about frameworks, and how those might be able to be used, as
28 opposed to amendments, and it expands the list of items that can
29 be considered by framework, and this was initiated in June, and,
30 as alluded to, it was just -- Final action was taken I believe
31 last week, at the New England Council meeting.

32
33 **MS. BOEHLE:** I am back. Can you hear me?

34
35 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Yes.

36
37 **MS. BOEHLE:** Very sorry. I'm not sure what happened, or where you
38 lost me, but I was just talking alone in my office.

39
40 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** No worries. We have you back. We just -- We just
41 walked through kind of the omnibus management, and I was talking
42 about how some of the measures there are not necessarily things
43 that the New England Council will do, but kind of provide this
44 additional flexibility, in terms of different framework-able items
45 and specifications durations.

46
47 **MS. BOEHLE:** Thanks so much, Willy. Apologies, everyone. Thanks
48 for keeping that going, and I think we just wanted to spotlight

1 this one in particular because sometimes, you know, doing these
2 larger actions, you assume it will be this big undertaking for a
3 council, and it will take a lot of time, but this is interesting
4 that, because it's administrative, and it's really just setting
5 the stage for future use, it does appear that, through discussions
6 with NOAA, they are going to use a categorical exclusion as that
7 NEPA vehicle that I was describing earlier, which really will make
8 this quite efficient, and, as Willy explained in the timeline,
9 it's really just a matter of months, and just a little bit of work
10 the staff will need to do this fall to kind of package it together,
11 but really, start to finish, it could be a very efficient vehicle.

12
13 That was something promising that we definitely wanted to share
14 with the Gulf region, just to be proactive in a way, and so it's
15 not a definite that these things will be done.

16
17 Then, moving over to the right, we did mention what the ecosystem
18 component species are. I'm sure you're familiar with them here on
19 the SSC, but just spotlighting here an action from the South
20 Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

21
22 Again, in this similar approach of wanting to recognize the
23 ecological role of two forage species in particular, two mackerel
24 species in this case, in terms of doing that, the importance of
25 that being responsive to ecosystem-based management interests,
26 but, in terms of efficiency, just wanting to highlight that
27 definitely, you know, adding a species to an FMP brings a lot of
28 --

29
30 I'll just call it baggage, but it is important things, but
31 sometimes, for some species, maybe not completely warranted, and
32 the savings overall, of not having to set an ACL and complex
33 accountability measures when something is reached in a particular
34 year for a species that isn't really harvested in a very directed
35 way, can be a lot of time.

36
37 Because the council, in this case, wanted to highlight the
38 ecological importance of these species, and it can improve data
39 collection overall, and there are new data reporting requirements
40 that came in, and it will hopefully, you know, be a proactive way
41 that, in the event that the council wants to, you know, further
42 manage those species more directly in the future, it's kind of on
43 track, in the event that things turn that way.

44
45 This did take a longer amount of time, based on what we saw from
46 the timelines on the internet, but still a way to save time
47 overall, in that they won't have to do an ACL every year and so
48 forth.

1
2 Now just moving to the actual measures themselves, and, you know,
3 these -- We're still definitely in the thick of synthesizing this
4 across all of the different regions, and we'll be sharing examples
5 of how these have worked well, and maybe not as great, in different
6 examples, but, again, trying to, in one slide, share with you the
7 range of different specific ways that councils are trying to be
8 more responsive and efficient.

9
10 Certainly the top of the list would be setting specifications for
11 multiple years at a time, and not just doing it one year at a time.
12 This is definitely -- Especially with more practice, and councils
13 and SSCs being more comfortable with it and so forth, those
14 efficiencies continue to add up.

15
16 Using some more creative NEPA vehicles, as I was mentioning, now
17 there are some councils that, you know, have an environmental
18 assessment, let's just say year-one, and then they set it for a
19 couple of years, and then, in between, they can use these
20 supplemental information reports as those check-ins, and it's
21 becoming a pretty oiled machine, in terms of how it works and gets
22 through, and so that's certainly a possible vehicle there.

23
24 In-season measures are very attractive. They would be very
25 responsive, of course, but they do require more in-season
26 information, and so, you know, not always relevant for many
27 fisheries, but certainly, listening to other regions, there are
28 great examples of these, you know, proactive ways that systems are
29 set up so that more automatic things happen.

30
31 You know, if there is new information, they've set it up in the
32 plan already so that things are triggered, and that has a response,
33 and there's a varying level of comfort, in terms of how much
34 authority councils are willing to give to the Regional
35 Administrator through these types of actions.

36
37 Some of them are very strict, and say exactly what NMFS will do,
38 and exactly how much things -- You know, exactly what will happen,
39 and then some discretion is left, in other cases, to have a little
40 bit of flexibility, because you can't always predict exactly what
41 will make the most sense, and so it is interesting to kind of dig
42 in there and see some of the varying levels of discretion that are
43 included in some of these packages.

44
45 Automatic rollovers is another approach that would enable the
46 ability to carry forward specifications from a previous year. You
47 know, these are used in cases where sometimes there's delays, and
48 so you want to have, you know, something in there ready to go.

1
2 They're similar to default measures, and these are just slightly
3 different, in that they're not the same exact thing rolling over.
4 They're preset, kind of knowing that a fishing year might start
5 January 1, and, if everything is not in place in time, that there
6 would be some sort of backstop, and some reduced amount of
7 allocation for example, that would be available until something
8 replaces it.

9
10 The next bullet is talking about framework actions, and it's
11 definitely, from our conversations, you know, worth the time to go
12 through these lists carefully and make sure that, you know, the
13 list of framework-able items is robust to include, and give
14 flexibility to the council moving forward, to change things by
15 framework, rather than amendment, so that things could be more
16 efficient, hopefully.

17
18 Anytime that things are updated, just having that opportunity to
19 relook at the list, make sure that it's comprehensive, and it
20 includes everything, is important.

21
22 Then, finally, kind of removing, or adjusting, and, again, most
23 plans have some sort of annual requirement. The Magnuson Act does
24 require that, you know, you're kind of reviewing those at those
25 annual catch limits every year, but, in many cases, sometimes
26 leftover from ten years ago kind of things, plans tend to have
27 more additional reporting requirements, and so just kind of
28 streamlining that and making sure that those aren't just busy work
29 and, you know, requiring reports that really aren't being used and
30 are just taking a lot of time.

31
32 This is an example, when I was rejoining, that Willy was explaining
33 that the New England Council has found itself in, where they have
34 a lot of these requirements on the books, and this action that
35 they are working on now will just kind of clean the house a little
36 bit, and just leave the ones that are most valuable.

37
38 We'll just drill into a few examples to spotlight, you know, how
39 these are really being operationalized, and starting with the Mid-
40 Atlantic slide here. You know, this council has a lot of
41 experience with these multiyear specifications. They've been
42 doing them for a long time.

43
44 As I mentioned, it's become very routine. The calendars are set
45 up well in advance, and it's really kind of just churning through,
46 and quite efficient at this point.

47
48 The summer flounder, scup, black sea bass plan has been doing, you

1 know, multiyear specifications for many years. They do have that
2 overall environmental assessment, which is completed, and more
3 robust, in terms of the kinds of information that it has. It will
4 set the fishery rules for three years, and then they do have an
5 annual monitoring committee though, and that is required to kind
6 of reaffirm those annual catch limits, and, as I mentioned, that's
7 done through this supplemental information report.

8
9 They do it at one meeting. It's extensive, but it's not overboard.
10 You know, it's roughly a twenty-page report, and, you know, it's
11 reviewed, and it moves along the process, and so, on the right-
12 hand side, in the yellow box, this is kind of all of those steps,
13 and everything is laid out, in terms of the meetings and what has
14 to happen before the next meeting, and so there's risk, in that,
15 you know, if you miss one of these, we did hear, from the staff,
16 that it's pretty difficult, because then the dominoes all fall
17 down below, but, in general, this is how it works, and, you know,
18 when everything is in line, this can be very efficient.

19
20 They do get fishery performance reports from the fishing industry,
21 which are used and discussed, and all of these become part of the
22 best scientific available information that all comes together.

23
24 The council reviews it, and they do have the added hurdle, I'll
25 just call it, where they need to do this jointly with the Atlantic
26 States Commission for some of the species, and so they meet jointly
27 to try to do that more efficiently, rather than two separate
28 meetings, and then, finally, it's handed over to NMFS, and it does
29 go through the full proposed rule, and final rule, but, you know,
30 between July and December is really quite efficient, and so I will
31 stop there. Apologies for the connection issue, and I believe,
32 the next slide, Willy is going to pick back up.

33
34 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Yes. Thanks, Deidre. This is just an example.
35 This is kind of zooming-in on this multiyear specifications idea,
36 and kind of showing an if-then process that the Mid-Atlantic
37 Council has implemented on the past couple of years.

38
39 Some of you might be familiar with this recreational harvest
40 control rule framework addenda that was approved back in 2022, and
41 this is, again, just for the recreational sector, and just for
42 these four species on the bottom here, the summer flounder, scup,
43 black sea bass, and bluefish.

44
45 This process sets bag and size limits for two years at a time, and
46 it really -- It basically prescribes the required change in
47 harvest, based on two elements. First off is recreational harvest
48 projections, and how they compare with catch limits, and then the

1 biomass versus the target level. Sorry for the typo there. That
2 shouldn't be "trend", and it's just the SSB over SSB MSY, and so
3 trying to understand what the stock status is.

4
5 This was implemented by an EA, and so this has just been a way of
6 trying to better, more efficiently decide what -- How catch limits
7 need to need to change every two years for these species, and the
8 two-year limits, and I guess we can just move to the data needs
9 here.

10
11 One thing that is important to note is, while this effort has been
12 used, there are some pretty robust data provisions for these
13 species. One is an estimate of the upcoming year's harvest. This
14 is based on a combination of a recreational demand model that's
15 been developed for these species, coupled with MRIP data catch
16 estimates, as well as, again, this biennial stock status.

17
18 Each of these species are assessed every two years, and the two-
19 year specifications is lined up with that assessment cycle, and so
20 I just wanted to highlight that here's an example of kind of this
21 more focused if-then approach, but it does have with it a pretty
22 robust set of data needs as well.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Real quick, and so, this next little section,
25 we're moving into the other fundamental part, and does anyone have
26 any pressing items, given the amount of information we just heard?
27 Any Questions on that, that first section, or do you want to just
28 wait until the end? Seeing that we don't have any raised hands,
29 we'll go ahead and keep on rolling.

30
31 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Thanks, and we're nearing the end here. This is
32 just a couple of slides around these three Cs, and then cueing-up
33 some questions for you all to consider.

34
35 When it comes to the three Cs, again, this is the other element,
36 as you alluded to, and so this is the collaboration, coordination,
37 and communication. Again, through these interviews, in particular
38 with council staff and NMFS staff, we were able to compile a
39 preliminary list of over twenty of these best practices that we
40 heard for potentially promoting efficiency and responsiveness, and
41 there are kind of two subcategories here. One was around NMFS and
42 council coordination, and one was around engaging the stakeholder
43 and fishery community.

44
45 Just a couple examples here around NMFS and council coordination,
46 and one are these regional operating agreements that are
47 established between NOAA Fisheries and the councils, that really
48 helped to clarify their council and NMFS respective roles and

1 responsibilities through the regulatory and rulemaking process.

2
3 Coupled part and parcel with this, some regions have implemented
4 these regular coordination, or action planning meetings, and those
5 might be associated with a particular action, or they might just
6 occur at a more regular kind of cadence, as well, as in some cases,
7 annual staff-to-staff meetings, sort of checking in and
8 understanding how operations are going and room for improvement.

9
10 We had mentioned some inconsistencies around kind of legal
11 interpretations and risk tolerance in different regions, and some
12 have incorporated having General Counsel in the conversation
13 pretty early in the regulatory process, thinking about things like
14 NEPA vehicles and ways to approach some of those regulations.

15
16 The next two are really around data, and access to data, and so we
17 heard, in some regions, council staff are able to directly access
18 and run some analyses on data provided through NMFS databases, as
19 well as, in some cases, automated and standardized data updates
20 provided to the councils in off-assessment years for certain key
21 species, again, to provide a snapshot into what's happening there.

22
23 We also heard about regional planning, and so trying to bring
24 multiple councils, the Regional Office, the Science Center,
25 interstate commissions, all of those groups together to kind of
26 coordinate multiyear planning assessment cycles, things of that
27 nature.

28
29 Co-developing document templates, again, between NMFS and the
30 councils, just to kind of make sure that everything is aligned
31 there, and then this idea of incorporating external reports, and
32 incorporating by reference, for example, summaries of species
33 biology, or other elements that might not vary a whole lot between
34 individual documents, and thereby kind of reducing overall
35 document length and increasing the readability and efficiency
36 there.

37
38 Now here's just the other side of it, which, again, is thinking
39 about these on-the-water observations, recognizing that there can
40 be some lags in terms of the other data sources available. These
41 are just a couple of examples.

42
43 Deirdre had mentioned these annual fishery performance reports at
44 the Mid-Atlantic Council, that are prepared and considered each
45 summer, and this is a way of really getting that information from
46 the APs in a formalized fashion to the council for their
47 consideration.

48

1 We heard about both existing online platforms for stakeholder
2 input, to get on-the-water observations, and, of course, the
3 Fisherman Feedback tool down in the Gulf Council was one example,
4 and some other examples that are kind of on the horizon as well,
5 and, again, just a powerful tool for getting that feedback.

6
7 Deirdre had alluded to EFPs. Along the same lines, kind of
8 cooperative research, thinking about ways to, you know, explore
9 new approaches, as well as to get a better sense of what fishermen
10 are seeing on the water.

11
12 The next handful are really -- These next four I think can be
13 really discussed together, which is this idea of trying to bring
14 kind of the fishery stakeholders and APs together with council
15 folks. That could be having an AP member, or chair, participate
16 at the Full Council and SSC meeting. It could be having concurrent
17 AP and council meetings, or co-locating those meetings, and one
18 other example, in the Caribbean Council, was these liaison
19 officers, who give these industry reports for each island at their
20 council meetings.

21
22 I think I'm going to pass it back to Deirdre, just to kind of tee-
23 up some potential ideas that might be a particular interest to the
24 SSC, and hopefully kick off our conversation, and so, Deirdre.

25
26 **MS. BOEHLE:** Thanks, and I will try to keep this brief. Apologies
27 that it's a lot of regulatory-process-heavy stuff, but this slide
28 is trying to -- Kind of now honing-in for the SSC in particular.
29 You know, the primary role of the SSC is to recommend ABCs, you
30 know, for the council consideration, and so we didn't, you know,
31 talk about that necessarily on every interview that we had with
32 folks, but, in terms of, you know, this audience, you know, are
33 there ways to streamline and be more efficient in that regard, and
34 so, you know, we did kind of find some examples related to dynamic
35 reference points, and councils being interested in being more
36 responsive to new information, if there's ways to kind of think
37 about ABCs over multiple years, or just some flexibilities there.

38
39 This sense of efficiency is a little more broad, perhaps, in that
40 some councils are thinking about efficiency in terms of catch, and
41 being -- Not having any kind of unused catch, and being efficient
42 in that regard, and so some examples of dynamic reference points
43 that some regions are exploring is a phased-in ABC control rule,
44 you know, having more gradual implementation, if there's a large
45 change coming in an ABC up or downward, carryover of ABC, in terms
46 of transferring some underage from one year, maybe to the next
47 year, and allowing for that flexibility.

1 The Pacific Council, in particular, is looking at this green-light
2 approach. This is still being explored. It's not on the books
3 yet, but this would basically, during a multiyear approach, in the
4 middle of that, if there's some sort of new information that would,
5 quote, give green lights to increase catch, to be more efficient,
6 in terms of underutilized catch, they would be allowed to adjust
7 catch upward, if there's some new information to support that.

8
9 Finally, off-top accounting, and this is really to save time during
10 the allocation discussions, and maybe there's ways to proactively
11 look at some sort of deductions of ABC for different set-asides
12 before you get into the allocations between, you know, recreational
13 and commercial, for example, and so just throwing those out there.

14
15 These do require sometimes more responsive information, and data
16 that might not work for every species in the Gulf, but just letting
17 you know some of the reference-point-related things that we heard
18 about.

19
20 Then, related to revisions to status determination criteria, this
21 came up related to efficiency in the idea primarily of having
22 annual triggers, annual versus using multiyear averages, or
23 something that doesn't necessarily trigger a response if a stock,
24 you know, changes status immediately.

25
26 It would be kind of a more averaging of years, more of a temporal
27 smoothing, as a way to kind of help avoid some of the back and
28 forth, or reacting to noise situation, and so that was just
29 highlighted as a way that some regions are looking at that. Again,
30 it might not be a perfect fit for all stocks in the Gulf, that
31 might use proxies and things like that, but these were some
32 examples that some regions are looking at.

33
34 Moving over, just like Willy just described, and I don't need to
35 go through these, but we also definitely heard best practices, in
36 terms of SSCs and utilizing all the expertise of the SSC, and
37 different regions, you know, use their SSCs differently, and these
38 were just some samples of some of the things that we heard of ways
39 to -- Maybe, rather than bringing things to the full SSC all the
40 time, you can kind of do things more efficiently, with different
41 subgroups on different topics, or having a lead SSC per plan, so
42 that they kind of track that over a certain number of years, just
43 to kind of have that continuity.

44
45 A lot of councils are trying to get their SSCs more connected with
46 their fishing advisory panels, and having each other attend certain
47 meetings, and this was seen as, you know, a good way for, you know,
48 just increased collaboration and understanding of a plan and so

1 forth.

2

3 Some councils are having very specific periods of time, during
4 meetings or reports, that include that on-the-water -- I'll just
5 call it on-the-water observations and input, and so I know some of
6 these are used in the Gulf, from what we heard, but just kind of
7 putting them all together here for you on this slide.

8

9 The next one we've really covered, and, Jess, if you just go to
10 the next slide, this is our next steps. Again, just taking a
11 couple of weeks to pull this report together, and joining everyone
12 at the Gulf Council meeting in November, and then the next slide
13 is really -- We're just leaving this for some time for questions
14 and discussion, really thinking about if there's any feedback on
15 any of these approaches, initial pros and cons from the SSC's
16 perspective, if there's any gaps in some of the challenges that
17 Willy was describing in the beginning, from a Gulf perspective,
18 and maybe there's examples.

19

20 Again, we haven't run through everything, of course, here in these
21 slides, but ones that you're aware of, that you've maybe worked
22 on, or have colleagues in different regions that are particularly
23 innovative, or promising, that you think would be important for us
24 to dive into or review in this report, and we would really love to
25 hear that. Really just any experiences that you've had, or that
26 you're aware of, that we should include would be really helpful.
27 With that, we'll end, and sorry that went long, and I had these
28 connection issues. Thank you.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** It's all good. Willy and Diedre, thank you
31 for that presentation. This is a good one to have on the desktop,
32 I think, for us to go back to every time we have a little bit of
33 frustration, or question about the process, and it's a good one to
34 look at. I've got a few questions for you, but we'll open it up
35 for the rest of the SSC. If you've got a question, just hit the
36 raise-hand, and we'll try to get to you. First up, we've got Mr.
37 David Griffith.

38

39 **DR. GRIFFITH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can I go now?

40

41 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely.

42

43 **DR. GRIFFITH:** Okay, and so thanks a lot for that presentation. I
44 found it very interesting. I was wondering, and you did mention
45 the ecosystem kind of management, and the role of certain species
46 in ecosystems, but I was wondering if you ran into any practices
47 where they expanded that to the ecosystem, to the humans that
48 participate in the ecosystem, in that, when I was, when I was on

1 these recent stock assessment SEDAR things for shrimp, triggerfish
2 and hogfish, the issue that came up in all of those, one issue
3 that came up in all of those, was labor.

4
5 They said that getting labor crew members to go out fishing had
6 really constrained the fishery, all three commercial fisheries in
7 those fisheries, and so I was wondering, and do they pay attention
8 to social issues?

9
10 In this case, you know, it's the issue that labor puts a constraint
11 on the fishery, on the effort, and so I was wondering if any of
12 the councils look at those social issues and try and figure out
13 how they fit into the conditions of the stocks, you know, on a
14 multiyear basis, you know, because, in some cases, you know, if
15 you see an expansion of construction, for example, a lot of the
16 crew members will go into the construction sector, rather than
17 fish for those years, and it's difficult then for vessels to get
18 crew to compete with, you know, construction wages, and stuff like
19 that, to get crew, and so I was just wondering if you -- If you
20 ran into any of the councils considering those kinds of social
21 issues. Thank you.

22
23 **MS. BOEHLE:** Yes, and I can try to take a stab at that first. It
24 certainly wasn't our focus of questions for them. It was -- It's
25 a really important topic, and certainly not unique to the Gulf.
26 I'm definitely aware of hearing that from other regions, and
27 definitely in New England as well, where I had worked the longest.

28
29 Ecosystem component species, by definition, I'm not aware of
30 including those social, the kind of the human environment, and I
31 think it's a great question. I'm kind of really curious to go
32 back and reread it again and see if there's any flexibility, or
33 door open, there at all, but no I would say is the direct answer.

34
35 I didn't hear -- We didn't speak to anyone about that. It is an
36 issue, labor, and that might not be the best way to bring it up
37 through the process, in terms of a constraint, but it certainly,
38 I'm sure, is affecting the overall efficiency of these businesses,
39 and it should be highlighted as a topic.

40
41 In terms of just resources, I think social impact, social economic
42 issues, always seem to get the short end of the stick in some of
43 these things, and, with some of the reductions with NOAA and
44 everything, I'm sure a lot of this will be exacerbated, and we
45 certainly heard about concerns in different regions, in the South
46 Atlantic in particular, with just the small number of economists
47 available to support all of this work, and that being a constraint
48 in overall timing and being able to produce the work that the

1 council needs, and so I'm not sure if that really helps.

2
3 I think it's a really interesting idea. I am not aware of it
4 coming up related to the kind of broader ecosystem -- The human
5 dimension in the ecosystem component species topic.

6
7 **DR. GRIFFITH:** Thank you. I appreciate it.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Thank you, David. Next up, we've
10 got Ralph. Go ahead, Ralph.

11
12 **DR. TOWNSEND:** Thank you. I have both a high-level comment and a
13 specific question. I guess my high-level comment is I guess I'm
14 surprised that there isn't some time spent discussing harvest
15 strategies and management procedures, which are obviously becoming
16 important worldwide in fisheries management, and how the process
17 makes it difficult to implement harvest strategies and management
18 procedures and why that's not something that needs to be considered
19 as everyone is looking at this plan. I guess I'm -- Perhaps you
20 would like to comment on sort of that higher-level framing of the
21 question.

22
23 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** I can take a stab at that, and I definitely
24 appreciate the comment. I think it's a great point, and, Dierdre,
25 feel free to jump in as well. We didn't hear a lot of specific
26 examples around kind of harvest control rules and management
27 procedures.

28
29 I think the closest example that we heard, at least through this
30 initial discussion, was what was going on in the Mid-Atlantic with
31 their percent change approach framework for recreational species,
32 again kind of that prescribed combination of stock status and
33 harvest projection to basically require a certain increase or
34 reduction in catch, but it's a great point. I think I'll --
35 Dierdre, I don't know if you have anything else to add to that
36 comment.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Feel free if you want to add. If not, we can
39 move on to -- If you've got another question, Ralph, and did you
40 said you had a two-parter?

41
42 **DR. TOWNSEND:** Yes, and I would just follow-up with that and say,
43 you know, Magnuson-Stevens requires best science, and it seems, to
44 me, that harvest strategies and management procedures are rapidly
45 becoming best science around the world, and so it -- The fact that
46 we're not mentioning it at all in the process just raises a
47 question to me about what we mean by best science, but let me leave
48 it there.

1
2 My second question is around this whole issue of legal risk, what's
3 going on with the categorical exclusion, and I know that --
4 Obviously, this current administration is willing to take
5 considerably more legal risk around environmental issues than
6 previous administrations.

7
8 Project 2025 for NMFS actually identifies exempting the Magnuson-
9 Stevens Act from NEPA. I guess the question is are we likely to
10 see -- Is there, in the background here, further changes going on
11 in this administration's approach to NEPA and MSA that seems likely
12 to change in the next three years, and may accelerate what we're
13 seeing, for example, in the categorical exclusion in New England?
14 Thank you.

15
16 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Thanks for the question. I might -- I'm not sure
17 if Carrie is there. I know there are these ongoing discussions at
18 the Council Coordination Committee, and this is kind of a moving
19 target here. It's a great question. I know certainly NEPA
20 guidance is evolving, and so we're certainly thinking about a
21 moving target here.

22
23 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, I'm here.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Go ahead.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. So I guess just -- I don't
28 know if I can answer your question directly, Dr. Townsend,
29 regarding the administration and what's next, but I can just kind
30 of explain where the national CCC working group is with this new
31 NEPA guidance.

32
33 We provided a letter, and it was a marked-up letter, on the
34 guidance for categorical exclusions, and all regional councils had
35 a staff member that was involved in that working group, and we can
36 certainly provide that letter to the SSC, if you haven't seen it
37 yet.

38
39 We are also working through, at a national and regional level,
40 this new guidance, and not just the categorical exclusion, this
41 new NEPA procedural guidance, what they're calling like a crosswalk
42 between Magnuson and that new guidance, to see what those
43 requirements -- Where those requirements line up now, and where
44 efficiencies can be considered, and how those would be applied in
45 each region, and work on that has been halted due to the shutdown,
46 but that's kind of our next big task at this time.

47
48 To me, once we have that, then hopefully that can help us identify

1 these other efficiencies, you know, and where these laws match or
2 don't match. Hopefully that makes sense at a higher level.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Thank you, Carrie. All right. I hope that
5 covered your question. If not, feel free to raise your hand again
6 at the end. Tom, go ahead.

7
8 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Trevor, and so I think this question is
9 actually for Dierdre, and it had to do with the list of items that
10 are considered for a framework, and so, I mean, my experience is
11 that that list is pretty small, but, when you were talking across
12 the councils, can you, perhaps at some point, provide a comparison
13 of what's on the list for frameworks, things that could be
14 considered?

15
16 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Just a note here, and this is Willy, and apparently
17 Dierdre's mic has been disabled. I'm not sure if you all could
18 unmute her on your end.

19
20 **MS. MATOS:** Does that work?

21
22 **MS. BOEHLE:** Thank you so much. I had to rejoin on my phone, and
23 it was grayed out. I'm really sorry for all this technical
24 difficulty. Do you mind just repeating the question, because I
25 was typing when I was --

26
27 **DR. FRAZER:** No problem.

28
29 **MS. BOEHLE:** Thank you.

30
31 **DR. FRAZER:** The question has to do with, you know, there was a
32 bullet point with regard to frameworks, and the list of things
33 that could be considered, and, you know, what I was saying is my
34 experience is that that list is pretty small, at least for the
35 Gulf Council, but when you were, you know, surveying, or
36 interviewing, folks across the councils, for comparative purposes,
37 are there some councils that have a list of items that are
38 considerably larger than what is considered in the Gulf?

39
40 **MS. BOEHLE:** I would say yes, but a lot of that also depends on
41 the complexity of the plan, and so, usually, ideally, if the list
42 of framework-able items can almost include every single thing in
43 that plan, the better, and, you know, you almost -- You do have to
44 analyze them at one point, and, if that original environmental
45 impact statement can do that, and plan ahead and be broad to kind
46 of cover that, then, you know, you're able to have a much more
47 longer and robust list of framework-able items.

1 That's something we can try to do in the report in a more detailed
2 way, to kind of show examples. There definitely are regions that
3 have pretty lengthy lists of framework-able items, but, again, you
4 know, you can't just put them in there. You do have to have, at
5 one point, the actual document that analyzes that range that
6 enables you to kind of have it on the list.

7
8 The one thing that hasn't come up yet, to kind of clarify for the
9 group too, you know, we're -- This statement of work, you know,
10 for this phase, is to kind of primarily focus on other regions,
11 and bring that information back to the Gulf, and then, as I
12 understand it, there will be kind of a Phase 2 of this work, where
13 then, you know, more internally, the Gulf staff will then, you
14 know, with the council, talk about what to do next, in terms of,
15 you know, what makes the most sense for the Gulf. A lot of those
16 kinds of details too could be really dove into in that phase too,
17 in terms of what would come next.

18
19 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you. Again, I just think that list, if you can
20 provide it, gives people an idea of what's possible.

21
22 **MS. BOEHLE:** We will. Thank you. Great suggestion.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Good deal, Tom. All right. Next
25 up is Harry, and then I'll ask a couple.

26
27 **MR. BLANCHET:** Thank you, sir. This is kind of tagging off of
28 what Tom just brought up, but talking about a different aspect.
29 The supplemental information reports, the one example that you
30 provided showed some review of those reports by APs and SSCs. Was
31 that consistent across those areas where those reports are used,
32 or is there a range of how those reports get reviewed and
33 implemented?

34
35 **MS. BOEHLE:** That's a very good question, and we can try to dig
36 into that further. Some of this information, as you can imagine,
37 how things are really done day to day, is a little difficult to
38 find, unless you're able to kind of call back to the staff and go
39 through that, but that -- That can be a question we follow-up with
40 them.

41
42 The example we shared is -- It's really laid out, and it's really
43 specific, on their webpage. It's easy to see exactly how they
44 operationalize that process. Some of the other regions are not as
45 obvious, but I do suspect that those -- That there is some
46 similarity, in terms of making sure you're bringing it to the SSC
47 and the council, but I think that's an important flag that we can
48 try to tease out, if there's different ways that the regions are

1 using those supplemental information reports.

2
3 I don't know the answer offhand. I'm sure there's a little bit of
4 a variety, but, at least in New England and the Mid-Atlantic, they
5 are bringing that in front of their SSC. You know, the full
6 council does see it, if that's helpful.

7
8 **MR. BLANCHET:** Thank you. Yes. I think that getting -- Since
9 that seems to be one of the big takeaways from this project, the
10 more background and suggestions, in terms of how much is the
11 appropriate review by at least the public meetings of the SSCs and
12 the APs, as well as the council, is important. Thank you.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Thank you, Harry, and so I've got
15 a couple. We're still decent on time on the subject, if anybody
16 else pops up something, but I wanted to start out, just real quick,
17 and I'll go back to my notes.

18
19 Kind of building off of Ralph's first question, which was it seemed
20 like a lot of the -- You know, the biggest challenge that was put
21 up there was legal constraints, and I feel like, you know, to a
22 degree, there's a lot of complexity in the process, and a lot of
23 this work that was, you know, basically us walking through all
24 these different ways to try to find efficiencies, when the main
25 efficiency that can be gained is at a higher level. Did you all
26 give any thought to, you know, some changes at the legislative
27 level that might increase efficiency, or were you constrained in
28 your thought process to essentially the council side of things?

29
30 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** I can take a first stab, and then, Dierdre, feel
31 free to add. I think, Trevor, on -- We were largely focused on
32 kind of operations as they currently are. I think, you know, we
33 recognized, again, that, you know, there might be some areas where
34 legal guidance might be inconsistent, or, you know, there might be
35 some different risk tolerances across different regions, or
36 councils, you know, recognizing there might be different changes
37 in the administration that could influence kind of current legal
38 requirements and constraints.

39
40 I would say that our review is largely based on things as they
41 currently are, and trying to understand how folks are operating
42 within the current legal environment to navigate efficiencies,
43 but, Dierdre, if you have anything to add, please.

44
45 **MS. BOEHLE:** Yes, and I'll just add, Trevor, quickly, that the
46 council staff did share with us, you know, past letters that the
47 council has written on, you know, different times the Magnuson Act
48 has been up for reauthorization, and, you know, we did include

1 some of our time looking at what the council, the CCC, all of the
2 eight councils have said to that degree, and the report will cover
3 that as well.

4
5 We didn't spend a lot of time on it, honestly, because it's
6 something that I think everyone crosses their fingers and hopes
7 that some of these changes could be made, but it was a little bit
8 outside of the scope of this, but we definitely recognize that
9 making some changes to the Magnuson Act, and, you know, recognizing
10 that NEPA is under review, those larger higher up will be
11 discussed, but it wasn't really the focus of our research,
12 necessarily, but a very important point.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Fair enough. I mean, that's what I kind of
15 figured, based on it, and then -- Let's see. We had one in there
16 about categorical exclusions, on that subject, and I was making
17 sure I had a good understanding of it, because it does seem like
18 that's directly applicable to kind of what's going on in our realm,
19 but, essentially, you just kind of preset that these are the
20 changes that are going to be made, or potentially be made, within
21 a plan, and so that basically falls within that multiyear exempted
22 process, or basically allows for efficiency, so that you don't
23 have to go through as much review, and is that correct?

24
25 **MS. BOEHLE:** Yes, and they're just -- You know, you know, before
26 you start it, that the impacts will be minimal, and so it's not
27 necessarily that there's a preset rule of things, you know, a limit
28 in what you can do with them, but you know upfront that there's
29 not going to be environmental impacts, and they're primarily things
30 that have already been analyzed earlier in the plan.

31
32 I will say we heard a lot, from different staff, that the comfort
33 level of different regions definitely vary in this exact topic,
34 and so I think, really, probably a lot of the future success of
35 using it is going to take a lot of upfront communication with
36 National Marine Fisheries Service, to kind of almost pre-identify
37 that, okay, you know, these are the kinds of things we really want
38 to, as a region and a council, try this.

39
40 Using categorical exclusions, we really want to try to identify
41 upfront which things might fall into these categories, and getting
42 that upfront kind of awareness and interest, because everyone needs
43 to feel comfortable that, okay, all the analyses are up to what
44 they need to be, and, you know, let's try it, that kind of thing,
45 and so it will -- You know, if that ends up being something that
46 the region wants to try, it certainly would -- You kind of can't
47 just do it on your own type of thing.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Gotcha. All right, last two, and then we'll
2 take a little break for everybody, but, the EC species, the
3 ecosystem component species, I think there's a fair amount of those
4 that are currently within our complex.

5
6 It's just my thought, like given our winchman discussion that we
7 had in the past, that could allow for some level of efficiency,
8 and so I was glad to see that, and, a lot of times, we're reliant
9 on, you know, potential catch streams for these, you know, not
10 really observed species very often to come up with these management
11 rules, and so I think that was a good one to kind of think about.

12
13 Then the last one I was going to talk about, at least for the group
14 to consider, and the staff consider, is the idea of having an AP
15 member sit in on an SSC meeting. I would hate to have someone sit
16 there for the entire time without, you know, ever being called on,
17 or have input, but there have been times, I think, where we've
18 gone through subjects and discussed fisheries.

19
20 I'm thinking through black grouper and some of the other ones,
21 where the fishery isn't as well known, where it would be very
22 beneficial to have someone there to bounce questions off of, and
23 understand the operation of the fishery, and things like that, and
24 so, when I saw that one, it kind of, you know, piqued my interest
25 a little bit, but, other than that, thank you for the presentation.
26 Unless anybody else has anything, that's all we got. Dr. Allen,
27 go ahead.

28
29 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Diedre and Willy, I really
30 thought this presentation was really useful. It just -- It strikes
31 me that the SSC has -- We've talked a lot about how to streamline
32 the SEDAR process, and some of those discussions are ongoing, and
33 I think it would be helpful, in your summary, just to highlight
34 any tips that you learn from other regions that we might be able
35 to adapt into that process, for streamlining that whole process,
36 and so just something for you to consider.

37
38 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** Great. Thank you for the feedback.

39
40 **MS. BOEHLE:** Thank you, and I'll just quickly add that I really
41 appreciate that. Obviously, our slides were already too long, and
42 there was a lot we didn't cover, but, that one in particular, Dr.
43 Allen, just to let you know, we did hear from several folks that
44 are aware of various regions, and they also flagged that some of
45 the -- In the Northeast, they have something they call the NRCC,
46 which is very similar, but it's a coordinating committee that
47 focuses on assessment scheduling and things like that, and we do
48 hope, in the final report, to highlight some of those practices

1 that are being used, and they have a different one on the West
2 coast as well.

3

4 **DR. ALLEN:** Excellent. That would be really helpful. Thank you,
5 Diedre.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Perfect. Thank you for that
8 presentation, and so we've got a little scheduled break. Let's
9 call it everybody back at 9:20 Central and 10:20 Eastern. Great
10 presentation.

11

12 (Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

13

14 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. We have reached the mark. Time to
15 go to the next item, that I would imagine Mr. Rindone will
16 introduce.

17

18 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, sir.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Time for the next item.

21

22 **REVIEW: GULF SSC PROJECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

23

24 **MR. RINDONE:** All right, and so next up is the SSC projections
25 considerations, and so I'm going to review some considerations for
26 you guys when you're reviewing projections for stock assessments,
27 and this is in response to some discussions that we've had about
28 patterning for the decision-making over the last several years.

29

30 These considerations that you guys are going to talk about all
31 have a direct effect on the outcome of the stock assessment and
32 catch limits that are ultimately recommended to the council, and
33 this is meant to be a guidance document, and so it's going to speak
34 sort of in generalities, and, you know, obviously there can be
35 exceptions to anything, depending on the circumstances, but we're
36 looking for you guys to evaluate this and make recommendations to
37 council staff, as appropriate.

38

39 The version that was on the website, and this is probably my
40 mistake, was an older version, and so I've put a new version up
41 there, that Jess is going to pull up, and the only difference is
42 that it includes this status determination criteria section.

43

44 Again, this is meant to be a guidance document, and not, you know,
45 etched in stone or anything like that, and what we're looking to
46 do here is to improve our consistency in decision-making and
47 specify best practices for when we're recommending things that are
48 going to affect status determination criteria and our catch limits.

1
2 Because the status of termination criteria part is probably new
3 for some of you, because of what I mentioned before, I'll start on
4 that, and so you guys' recommendations on how spawning stock
5 biomass and recruitment are presented can affect whether a stock
6 is estimated to be overfished or undergoing overfishing.

7
8 Like, in the past, things like spawning stock biomass have been
9 calculated as both physical biomass and millions of eggs, and
10 recruitment, that's used to inform stock status, can be represented
11 as either a long-term average or an average based on like a
12 specific reference period, or, like what was done recently with
13 mutton and yellowtail, a shorter near-term average, and that's
14 talked about a little bit more in that recruitment section, but
15 all of these modifications can influence stock status, and so we
16 need to be thinking about that when, you know, we're thinking about
17 things like consistency and what these effects might be.

18
19 This is where it just gets important for the SSC to carefully
20 document its rationale for recommending these different settings,
21 and so a good example of this was for, again, yellowtail and
22 mutton, when you guys were looking at those assessments.

23
24 Both assessments came back healthy. For mutton, it was -- It came
25 back the healthiest that it has ever been since management started,
26 and so you guys were trying to be considerate of evidence of range
27 expansion and the health of the stock, and that was one of the
28 reasons for favoring a more near-term look at recruitment, as
29 opposed to just using the long-term average.

30
31 You guys were very specific to say that you didn't think that there
32 was a regime shift, or anything like that going on, which might be
33 inferred if you were using a nearer-term average recruitment, as
34 opposed to a longer-term, if you're thinking that, you know, that
35 something is fundamentally different about the stock.

36
37 Then you guys were specific that you didn't think that was
38 happening, that that selection was for a different reason, and so
39 just an example of making sure that, you know, that documentation
40 is thorough there.

41
42 Some other things that -- Jess, if you can scroll down. Some other
43 things that are mentioned in here is whether or not we're going to
44 use the model-estimated MSY or its proxy, and you guys have had a
45 lot of discussions about appropriate proxies to use, depending on
46 life history characteristics, and whether it's appropriate to use
47 model-estimated MSY, based on things like likelihood profiling for
48 steepness, and how SSB is estimated, and recruitment, et cetera.

1
2 We'll talk about this a little bit more, as far as the MSY versus
3 proxy, when we're talking about that workgroup that you guys
4 request to be formed also, and so any questions so far, before I
5 just keep cruising? Okay.

6
7 For recruitment we talked a little bit about this under the stock
8 status determination criteria, but whether a short average recent
9 or longer-term time period for recruitment is chosen can obviously
10 have changes, or it can influence where the stock ends up landing
11 for a stock status determination, but we also need to be mindful
12 of it inferring things like a regime shift, or a change in stock
13 productivity, and so making sure that those decisions are well
14 documented is key there.

15
16 If you guys do suspect a regime shift, positive or negative, then,
17 obviously, that should be well documented, also. Generally
18 speaking, for ABC, you guys use the average recent recruitment.

19
20 For selectivity, typically we use average fleet-specific
21 selectivity settings for the past three years, if there hasn't
22 been a change in regulation, and this is the same for retention,
23 but, if those regulations have changed, then it might be best to
24 use the years beginning when that new management went into place,
25 and so kind of capturing that new management paradigm.

26
27 Sector allocations have generally used whatever the current sector
28 allocation is for short-term projections. In the model itself,
29 whatever the fraction of the landings are that's attributable to
30 each sector, that's -- It kind of is what it is. The models
31 themselves don't use allocations input as any sort of hard
32 parameter, and so the allocations, as we specify them, really only
33 affect the projections, and so you guys may be asked to consider
34 projections for proposed or recently changed allocations.

35
36 For preliminary landings, the council has discouraged the use of
37 preliminary landings data in the projections, and instead favored
38 finalized landings, and the reason for this is because the QA/QC
39 process that can come through, especially on the recreational side,
40 can result in some sizable changes in magnitude, and what those
41 landings estimates might have been, and so, having been burned by
42 that in the past, the council has really favored just sticking
43 with the finalized landings, and so that's the preferred default
44 there for that setting.

45
46 For the timelines, you guys have generally projected model results
47 up to five years from the beginning of the projection period, and,
48 as a kind of a nod to Willy and Diedre's work, you know, different

1 councils do different things.

2

3 The South Atlantic Council will only go up to five years out from
4 the terminal year of the model, and, either way, you know,
5 something that we do need to think about is that, you know, some
6 of these species are assessed more frequently than others, and so
7 it could be sometime before there is another assessment, and so
8 this is just something for you guys to consider, if this was
9 something that you wanted to revisit, either to -- You know, if
10 you like where you are, great. If you want to adopt something
11 perhaps more akin to what the South Atlantic does, also fine, but
12 that might be a discussion point for you.

13

14 Sometimes you guys have given OFL and ABC advice for three years,
15 instead of five, depending on the number of interim years in the
16 projections, and depending on your confidence in the model results,
17 and so the table down there just shows an example of how some of
18 the settings are provided for doing projections for a stock, just
19 so you have some recall there for what those look like. Mr. Chair,
20 I'll take any questions, feedback, et cetera.

21

22 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. You all heard the man. If you've
23 got questions, throw up there. It looks like we've got Luiz.

24

25 **DR. BARBIERI:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, Ryan, I don't really
26 have a question. I just was thinking about putting this to the -
27 - I think -- You know, personally, I think this is very helpful.
28 You know, if it's not being used as something absolutely
29 prescriptive, but providing some guidelines, general guidelines,
30 so we actually can have, in a single document, a lot of this
31 criteria clearly identified, and we can think about what we've
32 done in the past, depending on the situation, and I just think
33 it's super helpful.

34

35 I want to thank you for that, and then, you know, suggest that
36 perhaps, or for other SSC members points to the discussion, whether
37 it would be helpful to develop something like this, or provide
38 this same document to the analytical teams, right, that are
39 handling development of assessments, including projections,
40 because then they have a heads-up on this criteria, and they can
41 bring something before the SSC, that basically already follows
42 those same criteria.

43

44 **MR. RINDONE:** We can absolutely do that. I have Dr. Froeschke in
45 the room, Mr. Chair.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Go ahead, Dr. Froeschke.

48

1 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** All right. I'll try not to make this a long
2 one, but I have a lot of thoughts about this, in particular about
3 how we've used this. I guess, with regard to Table 1, just a
4 comment. I think one thing that would be helpful for the SSC is,
5 for each of these, what we have is parameters, to either add
6 additional comment, or additional things, and with some background
7 information about how these estimates were derived.

8
9 For example, relative F, that's model-derived, through a
10 quantitative process in the stock assessment, and that's good.
11 Something like the allocation is really more of a council policy
12 decision, but it also is influential. That's a thing.

13
14 Where I get to -- Where my head gets, you know, pressured here is
15 the recruitment, and so the recruitment manifests itself in so
16 many ways, and so a couple of the different examples. It's highly
17 influential, in at least two ways that I'll mention, but it can be
18 model estimated, and it can be more of a subjective expert
19 guidance, and it could be a blend of those, but we often don't --
20 We're not forward-facing about what we -- What sources of
21 information leads to this.

22
23 The reason why this is difficult for me is a couple of things.
24 One, and I'll kind of circle back, but we're trying to get to more
25 of these interim analyses, and that really weighs into this, but,
26 for the example when you have these long-term and short-term,
27 whether -- How you set those up is -- If it's not model-informed,
28 and often it's not, and, to the extent that it is, it's more of a
29 residual analysis in the model, and it's not something that was
30 measured in the field, and you have egg production, or something
31 like that, and it's the things that aren't explained by the model
32 of, well, that must be solved by recruitment.

33
34 That's -- But, if you base them, for example -- If you say, well,
35 this is my feeling about long-term recruitment, what you're saying
36 is you're actually making a subjective statement about the long-
37 term productivity, which corresponds to the stock status in a
38 counterintuitive way, and so, if you say, well, I feel very
39 strongly about the average long-term recruitment of the potential
40 of this stock, that is going to weigh on the stock status, because
41 it's going to make your -- Where you are now relative lower, in a
42 relative sense, every time, because you're saying, no matter where
43 I am now, the long-term prospects for this is high. Unless you're
44 an extraordinarily high level of biomass relative to that, then
45 that's going to weigh on that.

46
47 Likewise, if you say, well, you know, I'm very pessimistic about
48 the long-term recruitment prospects of this, which is not a good

1 thing from a biological -- It's going to make your stock status
2 look better, and so it -- If it's not a strongly quantitatively-
3 informed quantity, you can say, well -- You can almost assume
4 yourself, pessimistically, into a healthy stock condition,
5 regardless of the stock size, which is sort of a wonky deal, and
6 so that's one thing to think about.

7
8 The other thing to think about is we're more interested in interim
9 analyses, and these kinds of things, and so I'll start with a
10 condition where you have an overfished stock, something like that,
11 and, typically, what we might do in these is you base your
12 recruitment on these long-term averages, and then you have say -
13 - Often, we have recent recruitment periods that we think are low,
14 and so your near-term yield levels, as a combination of stock
15 condition and expected or predicted recruitment, is low, and so
16 you end up with this very large gap, and so two things about that.

17
18 One, just as a fisheries management body, we would seem most
19 concerned about overfishing stocks and rebuilding plans. Well,
20 you have these big gaps, and it's almost impossible, for good or
21 bad, and we've seen that, with triggerfish or something, where you
22 have 700,000-pound gaps on a million-pound fishery, between the
23 ABC and OFL, and so that's whatever.

24
25 Then say, for example, you might have a stock, and we'll just say
26 mutton snapper, and I don't know if this is exactly the situation,
27 but you're -- We think recruitment is good, and we think the
28 biomass level is healthy, and maybe even above.

29
30 This is a situation where, if you were to experience overfishing
31 as a -- From management, you might not be particularly concerned
32 about that in the short-term, but, because of the way that would
33 work on the recruitment, you're probably going to have a very small
34 buffer between the OFL and ABC, which means two things.

35
36 One, you're more likely to -- You don't have much of a gap there,
37 if you were to experience it. The other thing though is if you -
38 - Those might be the stocks you might be most interested in
39 addressing through interim analyses, and being a little more
40 aggressive, but you have very little to work with, whereas
41 something as an overfished stock, where you might not want to be
42 as aggressive, that's where you have the room, and so, to me,
43 trying to figure out -- Making sure everyone is aware of what the
44 likely outcomes of recruitment are, when you make those
45 assumptions, would help.

46
47 Maybe we could develop a little guidance of, well, you know, here's
48 what it -- At some level in reality, and, if you guess too high,

1 these are some of the things you might be exposing yourself, and,
2 if you guess too low, these are some of the other consequences,
3 and I don't even know what all those are, but we run into this
4 every single time, in some way.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. So, given your feelings on it,
7 real quick, is there any direct suggestions you have for changes
8 to the document, like including those things within the various
9 sections, or it's just something for us to think about?

10
11 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I guess what would help me, and, even in the stock
12 assessments, it's often not clear how that recruitment quantity
13 was derived in the assessment, whether it was a measured quantity
14 or if it was something that was model fitted, based on the
15 residuals, and, to me, that would be informative to know that, and
16 then -- I guess that would be the main takeaway, just such that if
17 you're saying, well, we're assuming that recruitment in the next
18 five years is going to be low, what is that based on? Is it based
19 on some quantitative information, or is it not?

20
21 I mean, in general, I guess -- I mean, it's just a personal
22 preference, I guess, that we even -- We base the OFL on long-term,
23 but, even in the most long-term projections, our projections are
24 still short-term, and so, to the extent that you have highly
25 different recruitment estimates for the OFL and ABC, it seems, in
26 my experience, that that's problematic.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Well, maybe that's something we
29 consider asking specifically of the group when the projections
30 come, something they can include within their presentations.

31
32 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and I guess, just as a follow-up, just to
33 make sure that maybe we could be, you know, painfully aware of
34 what information is or is not included with respect to the
35 recruitment estimates, because, even when you sit through these
36 hundred-plus-slide PowerPoints, and it's not -- I mean, I'm sure
37 it's clear to the analyst, but it's not always clear to me, sitting
38 in the back of the room.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Yes, and I would agree with you. I think
41 that's a great point. All right. Next up, we've got Jim Nance.

42
43 **DR. BARBIERI:** Mr. Chairman, may I just -- To that point?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** To that point, Luiz. Go ahead.

46
47 **DR. BARBIERI:** Just because -- Since this is fresh in our minds,
48 right, to John's point, John, I agree, you know, with you in regard

1 to the relevance of the issues you brought up, but, in my view, I
2 think what you're suggesting, you know, could be addressed by us
3 forming another little, you know, subset of the SSC, working with
4 the council and the Science Center as kind of a working group that
5 would try and identify all those possible scenarios for how you
6 are handling recruitment, because, like you said, yes, it has been
7 highly variable, and it's not completely clear when the assessment
8 sometimes report is put together.

9

10 I think that, for this document here, this is really about
11 projections, and so it's going to tie into the assessment
12 framework, and how that model was configured, but it's really
13 looking into the projections. I don't know if this would be
14 inclusive of interim assessments, because usually we don't develop
15 projections for those.

16

17 I think -- I take your points, and I think we could improve this
18 document with more detail, but, one way or the other, I just find
19 this helpful, because it provides a framework for us to follow,
20 because we can think about the things that you brought up, which
21 of course are very important.

22

23 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, just a quick follow-up, and the reason -- I
24 thought about this a couple of years ago, we went through this
25 amberjack assessment, and we saw some draft iterations of the
26 projections and things, and there were some discrepancies in how
27 the recruitment -- But, essentially, if you were sufficiently
28 pessimistic in the recruitment, the stock would be healthy, and
29 which would completely affect both your projections and yield
30 stream and all that, and the potential for IA, and so I do think
31 that was linked.

32

33 Once it was sort of revisited, we said, well, that's probably not
34 correct, and there's -- You know, the OFL maybe needs to be based
35 on something like the higher levels of estimated recruitment, and,
36 well, then you're back into an overfished condition, and all these
37 other things, and so it -- That's how I see it being linked.

38

39 To the extent if the SSC says, well, we want to make projections
40 here, but we also may want to revisit them through an interim
41 analysis, the extent of how this is handled here sort of hamstrings
42 your ability, or not, on how you could do that, and that's what I
43 was just thinking that the SSC might think, is, yes, we want to
44 look at this again in two years, and we really haven't left
45 ourselves any wiggle room, one way or the other, and just so that
46 everyone is clear about that going forward.

47

48 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Helpful discussion. Luiz, if

1 you've got anything back to that point, you're welcome to add it.
2 We got about fifteen more minutes on this topic, and I've got a
3 list of folks. Jim Nance is the next one. Go ahead, Jim.

4
5 **DR. NANCE:** Thank you, Chair. You know, I really enjoyed the --
6 I appreciate this document. I think it gives us good -- A good
7 way to look at the different topics and things, but I do think the
8 most important thing that's been discussed is that, during our
9 discussions, we provide a good rationale for why we're making the
10 decisions that we make, so that, as we look at the different
11 parameters, and we look at recruitment, and we look at the length
12 of different things, that, as we discuss those, and I think we
13 have good discussions as an SSC, that we're being able to look at
14 those things, and then provide that rationale of why we're making
15 that decision. I do think this document provides a good template
16 for us, but our discussions are the most important, and I will
17 just leave it with that. Thanks.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Yes, and I agree. I agree. This one helps us
20 be a little bit more pragmatic. All right. Next up, we've got
21 John. Go ahead.

22
23 **MR. MARESKA:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have some
24 suggestions, and so, when I read this, it kind of struck me that
25 it only applied to maybe Tier 1 assessments, and the suggestion is
26 that this be expanded to include situations where we're looking at
27 projections under an interim assessment, whether it be a data-poor
28 stock or we're just looking at landings, like under Tier 3.

29
30 You know, sometimes we've had lengthy discussions about the
31 fishery-independent indices that's being used in that interim
32 assessment, and so I'll keep it short, and that's my suggestion.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Thank you, John. Luiz, have you
35 got anything else to add on your point?

36
37 **DR. BARBIERI:** No, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. John Froeschke
38 provided the clarification that I was looking for. Thank you.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Good deal. All right. Tom, go ahead.

41
42 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Trevor, and I just also wanted to kind of
43 address John's comments, and I think it's really a good idea to -
44 - You know, that we get a good flavor of how those recruitment
45 estimates are derived, right? I mean, whether they're, you know,
46 measured values, or they're model-derived, there's always a ton of
47 uncertainty, but the bigger issue, you know, from my perspective,
48 is that there's always been a focus on the average values, and,

1 from like a biological perspective, depending on the life history
2 of the fish, you know, recruitment is often episodic, and we don't
3 really -- It doesn't help us much, right, and so just considering
4 that fact, or that potential, or probability, possibility, when
5 you're by each species, would help you, or help the group, I think,
6 you know, provide some rationale for the decisions that they make.
7 That's it.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Excellent point. We've got Mr.
10 Chagaris. Go ahead.

11
12 **DR. CHAGARIS:** I mean, just to, you know, kind of reiterate what
13 others have said a little bit, you know, I appreciate John bringing
14 up those points about recruitment. That is probably the biggest
15 sticking point in that table. I do think that the way that we're
16 doing it is antiquated, and it allows a lot of room for
17 subjectivity.

18
19 There are examples of other assessments using, you know, time
20 series forecasting tools to sort of predict recruitment, and those
21 time series models do pretty well, if you have a decent time
22 series, at least over, you know, a three to five-year projection.

23
24 I think that we do need to be consistent, and at least establish
25 some consistency in what we've done in the past, and moving
26 forward, but we also need to be thinking maybe about a way out of
27 this, analytically, and maybe working with the assessment teams,
28 and leads, to try some different approaches that might, you know,
29 sort of get us out of this choosing recruitment levels in the
30 projections, you know, the way we've been doing it. Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Yes, and so your thought is to narrow these
33 choices into more of a closer-knit best practices kind of deal.
34 All right. Ralph, go ahead.

35
36 **DR. TOWNSEND:** Listening to John Froeschke's comments, it seems,
37 to me, there's kind of a deeper issue, which is that there's a
38 complex interaction between the models that are used and regulatory
39 rules, like OFL rules, and it's very hard, to someone who's not
40 sort of deep in the weeds, to understand those interactions.

41
42 When someone asks you, oh, how are you going to deal with
43 recruitment, you know, the answer depends on how you use it, and
44 I'm wondering if, to David's comment, that, you know, we need to
45 find a way out of this, that if one way forward is to say, you
46 know, when we do MSE work for fisheries, looking ahead, maybe part
47 of that analysis should be understanding the relationship between
48 how various assumptions in the model are going to impact the

1 probability of OFL findings and so forth.

2
3 I mean, as someone who has done modeling, not of this particular
4 aspect of fisheries, but of many other kinds of Monte Carlo
5 modeling, again, unless you're someone who does it, it's really,
6 really hard to understand what the model is sensitive to, and what
7 the model is not sensitive to, and I think getting that information
8 back to the SSC, and to the people who have to use the information,
9 is important. Thank you.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Good point, Ralph. So, Ryan, I think we've
12 got some good, detailed discussion on that one. Is there anything
13 else you're looking from us, or you think we've covered this
14 discussion pretty well?

15
16 **MR. RINDONE:** I think this is covered pretty well at this point,
17 and, you know, again, this is a guidance document. It's not meant
18 to be etched in stone, and thou shall follow, or anything like
19 that, and so it's just meant to say, you know, what you guys have
20 generally done in the past, and what you've kind of established as
21 your pattern, but I've got all this reflected in the notes, and so
22 thank you for the good discussion.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely. All right. We've got -- The next
25 one coming up is Science Coordination Subcommittee Materials. Go
26 ahead, Ryan.

27
28 **REVIEW: SCIENCE COORDINATION SUBCOMMITTEE MATERIALS**

29
30 **MR. RINDONE:** All right, and so I'm going to walk you guys through
31 a brief presentation summarizing the 8th Scientific Coordination
32 Subcommittee meeting in Boston, which was held last year. This is
33 otherwise known as the National SSC Meeting.

34
35 Myself, a former council staff member, Dr. Max Birdsong, Dr. Jim
36 Nance, and Dr. David Griffith all attended this, and I'm also going
37 to review the proposed theme for the -- That should say the 9th
38 Science Coordination Subcommittee meeting.

39
40 The proposed theme was accepted by the Council Coordinating
41 Committee, and this meeting will be hosted by the Gulf Council in
42 2027, and so you guys should evaluate the information presented,
43 and ask me any questions, and I'll defer all of those questions to
44 Dr. Nance and Dr. Griffith, and make any recommendations you might
45 have, and so we'll pull up that first presentation.

46
47 All right, and so this was a summary report that was given to the
48 Council Coordinating Committee by the New England Council staff.

1 The 8th workshop was focused on applying ABC control rules in a
2 changing environment, and it was hosted by the New England Council
3 in Boston, and the goal is to provide actionable guidance on how
4 to best support the councils, specifically with the application of
5 ABC control rules for managing fisheries in a changing environment.
6

7 The SSCs have had this challenge with their ABC control rules
8 across regions for quite some time, and it kind of stands -- These
9 challenges can stand in the way of achieving some of these
10 management goals. Also, given the degree of ecosystem change and
11 scientific uncertainty that a particular council might be
12 experiencing.
13

14 There were three different sub-themes. The first one talked about
15 advances in ecosystem science and assessment to inform these ABC
16 control rules, and so, on the left-hand side, you have the data
17 limitations, and then the meetings recommendations for each of
18 those, and so data limitations is a recurring challenge, as you
19 guys will see, and are all intimately familiar with.
20

21 Funding and planning to be able to do even basic research should
22 definitely be prioritized here, was that recommendation, but also
23 that those data be consistently available within and across
24 regions. There are a lot of these regions, like us in the South
25 Atlantic, the South Atlantic and the Mid-Atlantic, and the New
26 England Council that have species that traverse their
27 jurisdictions, and so cooperation is really important there, and
28 so having data that are consistently collected, and able to be
29 used across those regions, is definitely something that would be
30 an advancement.
31

32 There are a lot of advances that have happened on the stock
33 assessment side of things, and, recently, we've had, in different
34 regions, some new abilities to integrate climate impacts, and also
35 in terms of how reference points are defined. In other regions,
36 while those advances have occurred, the data to satisfy the stock
37 assessments needs to be able to quantify those impacts, you know,
38 might be lagging, and so that goes back to the data limitations.
39

40 For capacity limitations, expanding those collaborations, where
41 possible, and trying to take advantage of the resources that are
42 presently available, and, to the degree possible, expand data
43 collection, and integrate that local ecological knowledge, where
44 possible.
45

46 Before the shutdown, we were to get a stakeholder engagement
47 presentation from the center on some work they've done, which kind
48 of touches on this collection of local ecological knowledge, and

1 so we'll have to talk about that perhaps when we have our next
2 meeting.

3
4 Also, the ad hoc uptake of data and analyses can sometimes be a
5 strain on the system, when, you know, something new pops up, and
6 so having better strategic guidance in place for each of the
7 regions, and between regions, would certainly help for on-ramping
8 any of that ecosystem information into the decision-making
9 process.

10
11 The next theme was talking about social science for achieving
12 management goals under these dynamic conditions, and, again, data
13 limitations. We have to identify and fill those gaps and address
14 -- This was a big thing that was talked about, was addressing the
15 constraint of data confidentiality issues.

16
17 For the regional differences, engaging and formalizing how social
18 science is used, and how public testimony is fostered, and what
19 kind of responses are given, was talked about a lot. You know,
20 something that was of interest is there's a whole lot more public
21 engagement, it seems, especially in the Southeast, across-the-
22 board, you know, from the SSC meetings having an opportunity for
23 public comment, and AP meetings public comment, and the stock
24 assessment process has opportunities for public comment, and the
25 council's Fishermen Feedback tool is a great opportunity, and then
26 the council meetings themselves.

27
28 It's just, in the Southeast, there's repeated opportunities for
29 the public to get engaged, and that also helps foster that
30 cooperative research and industry input opportunity.

31
32 More coordination, obviously, will help with the capacity
33 limitations, just like in the first sub-theme, again focusing on
34 the resources that are available and how the SSCs can work
35 together, and, as far as the ad hoc update, again, that strategic
36 guidance, for especially across regions, for how social science
37 can be integrated into management, and considering the scale of
38 the data that are being collected.

39
40 Sometimes, you know, we're focused on very specific communities,
41 and the effects of those communities by what might be happening
42 from an ecological and biological perspective, and just
43 recognizing that, you know, what happens in one very specific
44 community may not be representative of a region, and having better
45 ability to adapt the decision-making process to incorporate social
46 science. So, specifically, Dr. Griffith, did you have anything
47 you wanted to add on this?

48

1 **DR. GRIFFITH:** No, Ryan. I don't think so. I think you did well.
2 We did talk a lot about the variability of social science across
3 the different regions, and I think you're right. I do like this
4 new tool that they've developed in the Southeast, you know, the
5 fishery feedback stuff, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

6
7 I gave a presentation, while I was there, on social science and
8 how it's used in the Gulf, and, you know, of course, I continue to
9 harp on this issue, but it's understandable that the bulk of the
10 information that's used for stock assessments is biological, but,
11 for community impacts, of course, it's -- You know, the social
12 science information is invaluable, and so that's all I want to
13 add. Thanks.

14
15 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, and, also, thank you to Dr. Griffith for putting
16 together working papers for both hogfish and gray triggerfish,
17 where he interviewed a bunch of fishermen with respect to both of
18 those, and presented the findings of those discussions, and, from
19 a social science perspective, to those data workshops, and so that
20 was extra homework, and that was very informative, and so thank
21 you for doing that. Dr. Townsend.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Go ahead, Ralph.

24
25 **DR. TOWNSEND:** There was on the agenda, prior to the government
26 shutdown an item on discussing the role of social science in the
27 SSC process. I assume we're going to bring that back, Ryan,
28 because I think part of what's being discussed here really, or is
29 being suggested here, really touches on that broader issue.

30
31 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, and there were some data that were needed to
32 better frame out that discussion that we needed coordination with
33 the Southeast Regional Office on, and so we'll bring that
34 discussion back at a later date.

35
36 All right. We'll move on to the third sub-theme, and so this was
37 about adapting reference points, control rules, and rebuilding
38 plans in a changing environment, and, again, data limitations, and
39 trying to solve that through just having those data be consistently
40 available, and planning our funding needs in advance, and try and
41 lock those down, so that we have a good time series of information
42 to lean on.

43
44 You know, we discussed a little bit about how some of this might
45 affect things for the previous agenda item, talking about our
46 projections considerations, and so the inertia in the science and
47 management process and analytical advances can sometimes outpace
48 our data that we have available to inform the model about those

1 things, but integrating climate impacts into assessments and
2 biological reference points was talked about across regions.

3
4 Not so much, you know, a definitive climate impact, but an
5 environmental variable that the Gulf got to tout, thanks to Dr.
6 Chagaris, was the incorporation of red tide episodic mortality for
7 gag and red grouper, which is something that was unique to the
8 Gulf region, as far as something that's been incorporated into
9 stock assessments and projections, and so hat tipped back to Dr.
10 Chagaris and his team for working on that through the RESTORE
11 grants.

12
13 Also discussed was adapting risk tables and policies to incorporate
14 climate risk. Different regions are experiencing this in different
15 ways. Interestingly, in the Gulf, when we're looking at what's
16 happening with species in the Gulf, we actually see some species
17 that might actually be climate winners, you know, through the range
18 expansion that we're observing for species like black grouper,
19 mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, just as some examples.

20
21 That's something else that's at least partly unique to the
22 southeastern U.S. The South Atlantic is seeing some of that too,
23 with respect to some of their snapper species, but, you know, other
24 regions further north of us, especially New England and the North
25 Pacific, are seeing the inverse of that more strongly.

26
27 As far as ABC control rule performance is concerned, evaluating
28 how these control rules actually perform was seen as key, and
29 simulation testing of robustness, with changing environmental
30 factors, and using things like management strategy evaluation and
31 retrospective analyses to test how robust those tools are.

32
33 This is a key thing that's being factored into the Gulf Council's
34 rebuilding of its ABC control rule with the Southeast Fisheries
35 Science Center, and that process is ongoing.

36
37 Then system rigidity, and so just the ability to adapt reference
38 points and control rules and rebuilding plans was seen as a big
39 challenge, and so the group thought that we should be proactive in
40 trying to address these challenges and barriers to adaptation and
41 look to identify where regulatory actions are required to allow
42 future flexibility, such as using carry carryover and phase-in,
43 and build as much flexibility as possible into our FMPs.

44
45 This also nods towards the work that Willy and Diedre went through
46 with all the different councils, and looking at regulatory
47 streamlining, and, you know, not just being more efficient, but
48 also being more flexible.

1
2 A far as how the different regions are working on a lot of these
3 factors, those are characterized through the next slides. I'll
4 just focus on the South Atlantic and Gulf though, and so the South
5 Atlantic Council is exploring the use of dynamic reference points
6 in their control rules and revising the SEDAR process to increase
7 assessment timeliness and throughput, which also affects the Gulf.

8
9 Their SSC has a Social and Economic Panel, and they're discussing
10 how to improve data in their risk ratings index for determining
11 their OFL and ABC. Collectively, we're working jointly to identify
12 consistent approaches for uncertainty and MSY estimates, of
13 course, when to use the proxies for reference points, and also
14 talking about recruitment timeframes for projections, and we, as
15 I mentioned, are working with the Southeast Fisheries Science
16 Center on an MSE for our Tier 1 of our ABC control rule, and we'll
17 be exploring carryover and phase-in approaches to be incorporated
18 therein. Any questions? The rest of the regions implementation
19 so far is listed in subsequent slides, but I'll let you guys read
20 that on your own.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right, and so we've definitely got some
23 common themes, that we've already talked about this morning,
24 popping up. Anybody got any questions? Go ahead and feel free to
25 raise your hand. I'll give it five seconds. All right.

26
27 **MR. RINDONE:** All right.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I do have one question, real quick. Was there
30 any discussion, I mean, given the main subject of what's going on,
31 was there any discussion on the recreational landing side of things
32 that all these regions are dealing with? I would imagine that is
33 a fairly large problem for us, but probably scaled back, given the
34 other presentations I've seen from PacFIN and everybody else, and
35 was there any discussion on that side of things?

36
37 **MR. RINDONE:** There was, but there was only so much, you know,
38 that was meant there -- That could be solved if you will, or
39 postulated to be solved, at the meeting, and, like you mentioned,
40 the degree to which the recreational landings data issues were an
41 issue, or are an issue, for a region is directly proportional to
42 the amount of recreational effort in that region, and so it's a
43 huge problem for the Southeast, but less so depending on where
44 else you go.

45
46 At this point like in the year, the pilot study was going on, and
47 so, largely, folks were of the minds -- Folks that are affected by
48 MRIP anyway were of the mind of, you know, we're in kind of a wait-

1 and-see situation. Not everybody has the advantage that the Gulf
2 has of having other state-specific data collection systems in
3 place, and so the Gulf is unique in that regard, for having, at
4 least for some species, you know, an alternative to look to besides
5 just MRIP, and so it wasn't a key discussion point, because of
6 that.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. I figured I would just at least
9 ask. All right. It looks like Mr. Griffith has an idea pop into
10 his head. Go ahead, David.

11
12 **DR. GRIFFITH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, and I just wanted to
13 add to what Ryan said. It was, again, highly variable across the
14 regions, whether or not they were considering the recreational
15 sector a big issue for them. You know, in the Southeast, of
16 course, it's a major issue, and in the Gulf of course, but Alaska,
17 the Pacific, the Northeast, it just wasn't that big of a deal, and
18 so I just wanted to respond to your question, Trevor. Thank you.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely. Good deal. It's good to hear
21 some of the Gulf SSC members' names pop up in there. I'm glad
22 we've got a little bit of a presence. Ryan, I mean, I think we've
23 got time to go ahead and move into Item 8 before we need a break
24 for lunch. Does that sound good to you?

25
26 **MR. RINDONE:** Let's do it.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Gag Operational Assessment Terms
29 of Reference. Take it away.

30
31 **REVIEW: GAG GROUPER OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

32
33 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay, and so we developed these terms of reference
34 in coordination with the Science Center, and so we're going to
35 review them here with you guys for the upcoming stock assessment
36 of gag.

37
38 The last assessment, SEDAR 72, estimated gag to be under overfished
39 and undergoing overfishing as of the terminal data year, which is
40 2019, and we implemented a rebuilding plan for the stock. It's
41 Reef Fish Amendment 56, and that was implemented in June of 2024.

42
43 Overfishing is not estimated to have occurred since 2022, and the
44 council and Science Center are currently anticipating that we'll
45 need topical working groups for two items, for updating life
46 history information, particularly on natural mortality, and to
47 discuss episodic mortality from red tide, Dave Chagaris.

48

1 We're asking that you guys evaluate these terms of reference, and
2 make any edits, as appropriate, and then we'll also ask for
3 volunteers to participate in this, in the topical working group,
4 which will be convened via webinar in 2026.

5
6 **UNIDENTIFIED:** The comment is not audible on the recording.)

7
8 **MR. RINDONE:** The draft theme. That's absolutely right. I did
9 skip past that. All right, and so we'll do this, and then we'll
10 talk about the draft theme, since I already went through this, and
11 so let's bring up those terms of reference, and then we'll talk
12 about the draft theme for the next national SSC meeting. I got
13 too excited.

14
15 In large part, these terms of reference are pretty standard, and
16 so we're going to be updating the 2022 alternative SEDAR 72 base
17 model, and this is the one that use the State of Florida's State
18 Reef Fish Survey for private angling landings and discards for
19 gag, and we're going to be updating it through 2024.

20
21 One of the key things is evaluation of the use of the G-FISHER
22 video index. The last time, at that point, when we were going
23 through SEDAR 72, G-FISHER wasn't completely coalesced and
24 finalized, and so we were still looking at the individual video
25 surveys for their applicability for use, and so this would be the
26 first opportunity to really apply G-FISHER and see if it's good
27 for use for gag. Let's see.

28
29 Evaluate the availability, and the other one that is a little bit
30 new is evaluate the availability of data on the severity, in terms
31 of like intensity and extent of the 2021 red tide episodic
32 mortality event, and determine if the previous estimate used in
33 the projections from the last assessment, which was that medium
34 severity, should be updated. Then evaluate additional red tide
35 episodic mortality, as applicable, you know, and if data are
36 available, and time permits.

37
38 In hindsight, I don't think that there -- Dave, I don't think that
39 there's much to talk about for 2022 through 2024, but, you know,
40 perhaps revisiting that 2021 estimate, you know, and we expect
41 that that could be done just via a quick webinar. How do you feel
42 about that?

43
44 **DR. CHAGARIS:** I mean, I intend to participate in the topical
45 working group, and provide this information with our updated
46 models. As far as the most recent years, there was a small red
47 tide that occurred earlier this year. It was short lived, and so
48 not a whole lot to report there, but, you know, we'll see how the

1 rest of the year plays out. As you know, the real issue is like
2 if we have a red tide during one of these interim years from the
3 terminal year to the projections, and that's when it becomes pretty
4 critical.

5
6 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay. Great. Thanks. The rest of it, for Item 3
7 there, is largely standard kit for our status determination
8 criteria, and what's reported out, using the updated FMSY proxy of
9 40 percent SPR, and so any concerns about any of this? I guess
10 we'll change that "Amendment 56 in development" to -- We'll take
11 off that "in development" part there, since Amendment 56 is
12 implemented now.

13
14 At this point, we're just looking at having a topical working
15 group, that will meet virtually, that will discuss -- One webinar
16 will be life history updates, particularly as they pertain to
17 natural mortality, and then, in another one, red tide mortality.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** It looks like Carrie has got a comment.

20
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I was
22 just thinking about the best practices document you all just went
23 through, and the discussion we had on recruitment, and I was
24 wondering if we just would want to put a note, potentially, and
25 maybe we could go up under the status determination criteria
26 section, and one of those bullet points could just say something
27 like explain, or define, derivations for recruitment, or something
28 like that. I don't know, and you guys can wordsmith what the
29 proper terms are, but do we want to put something there, just
30 noting that we're asking the analysts to explain that?

31
32 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I think that would be a good idea. I think
33 Mr. Froeschke might be well suited to add in that sentiment, since
34 we all agreed on it.

35
36 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Provide a description of the process to estimate
37 recent and long-term recruitment, i.e., model-derived versus
38 measured quantity or something.

39
40 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. I got it. I'll update that.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Sorry to put you on the spot there, Dr.
43 Froeschke. I figured you would be the best one for the job. All
44 right. We've got a couple of hands popping up. We've got Harry.

45
46 **MR. BLANCHET:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With talking about the
47 derivation of the recruitment, in a lot of our recent assessments,
48 that estimate, as you said, can be highly influenced. I think

1 it's important, if we're going to talk about the -- How do you say
2 it? The origin of that value, and what are the influential
3 factors?
4

5 It's one thing if you have it is highly influenced by your SEAMAP
6 trawl index, or by your G-FISHER index, and it's another thing to
7 say that, you know, that it's highly influenced by commercial or
8 recreational landing ages, and so, you know, that might be
9 different for the most recent year and for the estimates that are
10 five years old, and so I don't know how much detail you want to
11 get into in the specification, but I agree that it does seem like
12 it's worth addressing, but it's a hole that could be as deep as we
13 want to dig it. Thank you.
14

15 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** That's an apt description of the problem there,
16 Harry. John, go ahead.
17

18 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just as a follow-up to that point, I guess that's
19 one of the things I've long been interested to understand, is for
20 -- To me, the example of how the recruitment might be -- Might
21 show up is if there's a mismatch in the trends between a fishery-
22 independent index and the landings, and so the way that I would
23 intuitively see that is that, if the landings are declining, and
24 the index is flat, then it would come -- The model would have to,
25 in the accounting of that, would have to manipulate the recruitment
26 index, if it's not.
27

28 In cases where we have reduced the landings by means of management,
29 and we don't have a way to account for that, I'm concerned, for
30 example with amberjack, where we've serially reduced the landings.
31 If the indices are flat, the model may just simply be collapsing
32 the recruitment, in order to balance it out, and that may or may
33 not be reflective of what's happening on the water, and it would
34 seem counterintuitive.
35

36 Then that low recruitment would then affect your status
37 determination criteria, all of those things that we discussed, and
38 so that's what I'm trying to understand in a better way than we
39 have in the past.
40

41 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely. That's a good framing of it. Mr.
42 Mareska.
43

44 **MR. MARESKA:** When Dave was mentioning red tide events that were
45 occurring in 2025, it got me wondering if there was any cold kill
46 effects in January of 2025 that may affect the recruitment of gag
47 in the northern part, in the Panhandle of Florida. I guess we
48 would need somebody from Florida to respond to that, if there has

1 been any documentation of that cold kill, or a cold kill.
2
3 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Feel free to respond directly back.
4
5 **DR. BARBIERI:** Mr. Chairman, I can address this.
6
7 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Sounds great, Luiz. Go ahead.
8
9 **DR. BARBIERI:** John, good question. The short answer is I don't
10 know. I don't think there has been any major fish kills
11 identified, but I'm going to check with the staff in the fish house
12 group that receives those reports, and usually responds to those
13 reports from the public and otherwise, and check with the survey
14 people, the fishery-independent monitoring survey people, to see
15 whether they have identified anything.
16
17 There hasn't been anything, and I think Dave Chagaris, you know,
18 brought this up, that was large enough to cause a massive fish
19 kill, but there might have been some localized impacts that I'm
20 not aware of, but that's a good point, and I'm making a note to
21 look into it, John.
22
23 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Thanks for that, Luiz and John.
24 All right. Next up, we've got Tom. Go ahead.
25
26 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Trevor, and so I guess the question is for
27 Ryan, with regard to the topical working group under life history,
28 and it's -- The focus looks to be at natural mortality, but it's
29 probably broader than that. Are you going to -- Is that group
30 going to consider advances like in discard mortality?
31
32 **MR. RINDONE:** If there are new data specific to gag, they can, but
33 we'll need some discovery for that. I mean, right now, the
34 expectation was to use the discard mortality estimates from SEDAR
35 72, unless there's new data to share on that. I know Will was
36 working on some stuff.
37
38 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes, and I think Challan is too, and so I'll circle
39 back with him, and then I'll talk to you again.
40
41 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay.
42
43 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Luiz, have you got a separate point
44 to make? Luiz.
45
46 **DR. BARBIERI:** Sorry. I was talking here with my microphone turned
47 off. Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A quick comment about what
48 John Froeschke was saying, which I agree completely that those are

1 very important points for us to think about.

2

3 Then Harry's points on top of that, and I agree with those as well,
4 but I just think that, you know, in a way, it's hard to put those
5 things here, in the terms of reference, without being prescriptive,
6 right, and so the fact that, you know, Carrie brought that up, and
7 John has added some language to this, for recruitment to be looked
8 at, how that is being, you know, estimated within the assessment
9 I think is a good one, and then those details, John, I think we
10 could discuss through the assessment process, workshop process, be
11 that in-person or webinars, right, because then we can get into
12 the weeds, with the analyst there, right, and to discuss those
13 issues. It's kind of hard to predict, you know, to Harry's point,
14 ahead of time the situations that are going to have to be
15 addressed, but having that line that you added there to the terms
16 of reference will open the door there for us to look into that.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Good point, Luiz, and it looks like we've got
19 Julie here to speak directly to that. Go ahead, Julie.

20

21 **DR. JULIE NEER:** Hi. Thanks. This is Julie, and so, Luiz, just
22 to be clear, there is no assessment panel, or assessment team.
23 The way this assessment was negotiated was there is going to be
24 these topical work in groups to address those specific topics of
25 life history and red tide.

26

27 If you guys want to dig into those other topics, about the
28 projections and such, there's two options. You could suggest a
29 topical working group to focus on those topics, or you could
30 suggest a technical team, which is part of this new process, which
31 will allow the center to contact select individuals to have those
32 discussions, and then bring those discussions to the SSC as part
33 of an SSC check-in.

34

35 Either of those components -- Certainly an additional topical
36 working group will likely extend the timeline, but I can't
37 guarantee that. Unfortunately, Katie is not online, obviously, to
38 speak to that.

39

40 The technical team approach may or may not require additional time
41 to look at that additional piece of the puzzle. I think the center
42 is aware of your concerns with regard to those issues, with regard
43 to the production methodology, and it's been discussed by the SSC
44 before, but, again, without Katie here, I can't comment on whether
45 it would delay the timeline and whether that is important to the
46 SSC and/or the council with regard to getting this done in a timely
47 fashion, and so just bringing that up, but there's currently no
48 scheduled time for an SSC panel or -- A panel for the assessment

1 process under this new framework that we're using for assessments.
2 Thanks.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Thank you for that, Julie. Dr. Froeschke,
5 have got something to that point?

6
7 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes. Just in regard to the recruitment, I guess
8 it was my intent, or understanding, is that -- Not suggesting that
9 it'd be done differently, per se, but just that, whatever is done,
10 that it's documented explicitly, and so the SSC and everyone else
11 can understand what that is and consider that as part of their
12 deliberative process in making a catch advice and projections and
13 things.

14
15 **MR. RINDONE:** I have that added in under Item Number 3, is document
16 the process for estimating recent and long-term recruitment (i.e.,
17 model-derived versus measured).

18
19 **DR. BARBIERI:** To that point, Mr. Chairman, and may I?

20
21 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely. Go ahead, Luiz.

22
23 **DR. BARBIERI:** John, thanks for the clarification, because this
24 thing can get really convoluted and complicated. I think the way
25 that you explained it, irrespective of what decisions are made, is
26 just to be very well documented, so we can review later and be
27 aware of all the different decisions that were made, and so that
28 makes sense, and, Julie, thank you for that reminder.

29
30 I'm sure thinking about this assessment process in the old-
31 fashioned way, where -- Pun intended by the way, but of having,
32 you know, assessment workshops and panels put together to discuss
33 those things, and now we're moving towards a more efficiency-
34 oriented system that, you know, that's not integrated into the
35 process anymore, and so thank you for that.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Thank you, Luiz. It looks like
38 we've got Mr. Adriance. Go ahead.

39
40 **MR. ADRIANCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just following along with
41 this to the ultimate end, I guess, when this gets back before us,
42 this assessment, if we could devote some of that presentation and
43 discussion to this topic, whether it's a couple of slides in the
44 assessment presentation, given how this assessment is structured,
45 and that will give us a little time to bite at that apple at that
46 point as well. Thanks.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Yes, I think that's a good thing to devote a

1 little bit of time to, given our discussion. We certainly want to
2 -- We don't want to decrease the efficiency of the process. All
3 right. Any more comments on this topic? Hearing none, what's up?
4 We've got Number 9 is a request for volunteers. Ryan, do you think
5 we could knock that out before lunch?

6
7 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, and then I guess, when we get back from lunch,
8 we can go back and talk about the theme for the next national SSC
9 meeting, but does anybody want to volunteer for the topical working
10 group, besides Dave Chagaris? It will be like one group of people
11 that will work on all of these topics, and, right now, I have life
12 history and red tide.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** We've got some hands raised. I saw Luiz pop
15 up.

16
17 **DR. BARBIERI:** Mr. Chairman, I'll defer to Julie, because she might
18 set it straight, you know, with another clarification.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Go ahead, Julie. Set us straight.

21
22 **DR. NEER:** It's not to set you straight. It's just to let you
23 know that the tentative schedule, timing-wise, if this impacts
24 people's willingness to volunteer, is starting in late February or
25 early March with a topical working group, and working on that, at
26 least the data pieces of it, through May, and then a couple
27 additional months, looking at it for the assessment phase, when we
28 sometimes have to go back and look at how red tide analysis might
29 be incorporated into the assessment, whether that piece happens or
30 not.

31
32 Again, not sure, but those are four webinars currently scheduled,
33 total, for the entire period, and so it's not like you guys are
34 going to be working, you know, seventeen --

35
36 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Set the dog straight now. All
37 right. Luiz, have you got a comment after that?

38
39 **DR. BARBIERI:** Well, just to say that I will volunteer for the
40 life history topical working group.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Sounds great. Tom, same thing?

43
44 **DR. FRAZER:** Exactly. Thanks, Trevor.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Perfect. Ryan, do we need any
47 more?

48

1 **MR. RINDONE:** No, and that's fine. So I have Dave, Luiz, and Tom.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Ryan, do you want to push this
4 thing one more step on the Gulf and South Atlantic SSC working
5 group?
6

7 **REVIEW: SCIENCE COORDINATION SUBCOMMITTEE MATERIALS (CONTINUED)**
8

9 **MR. RINDONE:** I was going to say let's go back and talk about the
10 proposed theme, and then we can break for lunch. On the Science
11 Coordination Subcommittee Materials, all right, and so this is our
12 theme proposal that was put together with a working group.
13

14 The council executive directors agreed to postpone the 9th National
15 SSC Meeting, due to budget uncertainties, until 2027. The Gulf
16 Council still intends to host. Regarding the theme development,
17 the SCS, the national SSC meeting, traditionally has had a heavy
18 biological focus and regional data availability and resources very
19 strongly, regardless of which discipline we're talking about.
20

21 Our steering committee focused on contemporary issues that they
22 thought affected all councils and SSCs, and we garnered a lot of
23 feedback from the regional SSCs and their supporting staff.
24

25 The theme centers on strategies for robust and efficient fishery
26 science and management, examining specifically, you know, the
27 uncertainty in the federal scientific and management landscape,
28 and how it affects the councils and their SSCs, and noting that
29 the council still must meet the requirements of the Magnuson Act,
30 despite whatever situations they may be dealing with regionally,
31 and we continue to have a need to maintain functionality as federal
32 priorities, region specific needs, and science capacity can
33 change, and the SSCs need to respond to these challenges,
34 consistent with the best scientific information available and
35 variable available resources.
36

37 Some potential sub themes here are prioritizing high-value
38 analyses and advice provided efficiently, and potentially with
39 limited resources, and, you know, again, because those resources
40 could vary between regions and depending on, you know, what federal
41 priorities might be.
42

43 Also, another sub-theme is bridging the gap between fisheries
44 science and the realities of fishing, specifically looking at
45 supplementing traditional data with social surveys, citizen
46 science, and cooperative research programs, and also talking about
47 how to best collect and consider social and economic data to
48 effectively support council decision-making.

1
2 I think we here in the Gulf, through this social and economic
3 discussion about how quota changes -- Or how catchment changes can
4 affect things like the IFQ programs, and, you know, that's a start
5 in that direction.

6
7 These are some of the folks that were responsible for banging their
8 heads on the table to come up with some of this, and so along with
9 support from the SSC members, and so any questions about our
10 proposed theme?

11
12 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Anybody have any questions? Raise your hand.
13 I will say it's just trying to tackle the biggest thing out there,
14 and it seems great. All right. Jim, go ahead.

15
16 **DR. NANCE:** Ryan, I think these are very good, and I think Alaska
17 may have some trouble dealing with these, but I think these are
18 very important questions for the Southeast, the Gulf, those types
19 of things, and so I appreciate you guys putting your heads together
20 and coming up with these. I think these will be a great benefit
21 to our areas.

22
23 **MR. RINDONE:** Thanks Jim.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Great. All right. Anybody else got any
26 comments on this item? Seeing none, Ryan, I think we earned
27 ourselves a lunch break.

28
29 **MR. RINDONE:** Sounds like lunch, and so what did we have for lunch?
30 We gave an hour for lunch. All right, and so back at 12:30 Eastern,
31 11:30 Central.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Sounds great.

34
35 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. See you all in a bit.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right.

38
39 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on October 8, 2025.)

40
41 - - -

42
43 October 8, 2025

44
45 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

46
47 - - -

1 The Meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2 Standing Scientific and Statistical Committee reconvened via
3 webinar on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, and was called to order by
4 Chairman Trevor Moncrief.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. I hope everyone enjoyed their
7 lunch, and we'll get back to it. Mr. Rindone, are you there?

8
9 **MR. RINDONE:** All right.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** There we go. All right, and so we're on Item
12 Number 9, which is the Joint Gulf and South Atlantic SSC Working
13 Group.

14
15 **DISCUSSION: JOINT GULF AND SOUTH ATLANTIC SSCs WORKING GROUP**

16
17 **MR. RINDONE:** For MSY, and not MSE. So, at you all's February
18 2025 meeting with the Gulf and South Atlantic, the Gulf and South
19 Atlantic SSCs made a motion stating that a clear need was present
20 to collectively address the required precision to estimate
21 steepness, and thus estimate MSY, for management advice, and also
22 a discussion of SPR proxy values, given a range of life history
23 values among fish species, considering things like longevity, age,
24 maturity, growth, characteristics, vulnerability to environmental
25 perturbations, et cetera.

26
27 You guys requested a follow-up meeting to address these topics
28 with, you know, like a smaller working group, and the Gulf and
29 South Atlantic Councils agreed to this and directed us to work
30 with you guys to form this workgroup.

31
32 We're going to review some direction for this working group, and
33 interested SSC members should volunteer to participate. We expect
34 the working group to meet about three times, via webinar, and
35 recommendations will be presented to both SSCs and the respective
36 councils, and so we'll pull that up.

37
38 This is our draft workplan, and so it would, obviously, benefit
39 from some feedback. The objective is to develop a best practices
40 guidance document, with an associated decision matrix, to
41 recommend a standardized approach to developing MSY proxies, and
42 that is SPR values, for completed and upcoming stock assessments
43 for the Southeast.

44
45 You guys' consensus statement, that I read most of already, is
46 listed there. We expect the working group composition to include
47 support staff, subject matter experts, SSC members, and with a
48 composition listed there in the bullets, and so figuring on about

1 three SSC members from each council, one Science Center staff
2 member, one analyst from Florida, from the Center for Quantitative
3 Fisheries. What is it called, Tom?

4
5 **DR. FRAZER:** (Dr. Frazer's comment is not audible on the
6 recording.)

7
8 **MR. RINDONE:** That's right. I need an abbreviation dictionary
9 over here. From Tom's group of Florida fish nerds, and a Gulf
10 Council staff member, a South Atlantic Council staff member, and
11 an SSC member or subject matter expert from outside the Southeast,
12 just to provide some contrast.

13
14 We expect this workgroup to meet via two or three half-day
15 webinars, with potentially one in-person meeting, if the workgroup
16 thinks that it would benefit from it, and, when the working group
17 produces a draft guidance document, each SSC will receive that
18 draft document and be able to provide any final feedback before it
19 goes to the councils for consideration.

20
21 For the first meeting, we're going to gather feedback from you
22 guys on the types of analyses that you would like to see to inform
23 the guidance document and the decision matrix, which is kind of
24 like an if-then-else sort of setup.

25
26 The second meeting, you'll see those analyses and discuss the best
27 path forward for that guidance, and then the third meeting will be
28 to finalize that advice, and this could be a potential in-person
29 meeting, and then, after that, the results will be reported out to
30 the SSC, and then, after that, the councils. We're looking to get
31 this train underway before the end of 2025, if possible, meeting
32 about every two months, starting in 2026, and so volunteers, or,
33 well, I guess, first, Mr. Chair, questions, and then volunteers.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Anybody have any questions on it?
36 It looks like we got them stacked up. I think Will popped up
37 first. Go ahead, Dr. Patterson.

38
39 **DR. WILL PATTERSON:** I would just like to volunteer.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. One down. Dr. Griffith. David,
42 is that a signal to volunteer?

43
44 **DR. GRIFFITH:** I'm sorry. No, and I was going to ask Ryan if he
45 thought that a social scientist would be helpful on this, or if it
46 would be a waste of time for me to be on this, and please be
47 honest, Ryan.

48

1 **MR. RINDONE:** I'll be honest. I think that, for this particular
2 working group, it's going to be really biologically heavy, as far
3 as the setting of the MSY, but that doesn't mean that you, and
4 other social scientists and economists, wouldn't have more to
5 weigh-in on once we get to the final review of this, and thinking
6 about how this decision -- Kind of like how we talked about with
7 a couple of our earlier agenda items, how these decisions
8 ultimately parlay into the OFL and ABC recommendations that come
9 from the SSC, which include more than just MSY, but MSY is
10 certainly a key starting point to that.

11
12 **DR. GRIFFITH:** Well, I think I'll hang back and see if there are
13 other volunteers. Thank you.

14
15 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Next up, Luiz. Volunteer or
18 question?

19
20 **DR. BARBIERI:** I volunteer to be part of the working group, and
21 then I would like to make a recommendation for the subject matter
22 experts from outside the Southeast region, if this is the
23 appropriate time, Mr. Chairman.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I'll allow it.

26
27 **DR. BARBIERI:** Okay. I would suggest Dr. Elizabeth Brooks from
28 the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right.

31
32 **MR. RINDONE:** So noted.

33
34 **DR. BARBIERI:** Thank you.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Jim Tolan.

37
38 **DR. TOLAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I was going to throw my hat
39 in the ring for the subject matter expert outside the Southeast
40 Region, but I will certainly yield to Dr. Barbieri. Thank you.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Dr. Mickle. Go ahead, Paul.

43
44 **DR. MICKLE:** Sorry. Can you hear me?

45
46 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** We've got you.

47
48 **DR. MICKLE:** I was just going to volunteer. This seems like a

1 really interesting effort, and I would like to volunteer as a
2 member.
3
4 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Sounds good.
5
6 **MR. RINDONE:** I don't know if he's still on, but Steve Saul had
7 also sent me an email prior to, saying that he was interested in
8 participating in this group.
9
10 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right.
11
12 **MR. RINDONE:** Steve, is that still true? Okay. Well, I've got an
13 email from him saying that he's interested, and so let's stick his
14 name on the list to be considered, also. If we absolutely stick
15 with three SSC members, we'll just make Carrie pick.
16
17 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Sounds like a fantastic plan. I've got one
18 more hand raised. Jim Nance.
19
20 **DR. NANCE:** Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to second Luiz's
21 nomination for Liz Brooks. She's great, and so she worked at the
22 Southeast Fisheries Science Center for a while, and she's been in
23 the Northeast for quite a while now, but I think she would be a
24 great addition to this group.
25
26 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Good to hear. I remember our
27 meeting with them. There was a few strong-willed opinions, and so
28 I expect this meeting to be very diligent and long-lasting. All
29 right. One more hand up, and we've got Dr. Chagaris.
30
31 **DR. CHAGARIS:** I'm just curious of the charge for this workgroup,
32 and was it just for doing SPR proxies, or, I mean, MSY proxies,
33 but the consensus statement had language in there specific to
34 estimating steepness, and was that intentional, to sort of leave
35 that out of the charge for this workgroup, or is that implicitly
36 bundled together, because they're sort of --
37
38 **MR. RINDONE:** Implicitly bundled.
39
40 **DR. CHAGARIS:** Okay.
41
42 **MR. RINDONE:** Implicitly bundled, yes.
43
44 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Got it. Will Patterson's hand is back up. Go
45 ahead. Was that a ghost hand, Dr. Patterson?
46
47 **DR. PATTERSON:** It's a leftover. Sorry.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Ryan, have you got what you need
2 from us on that one?

3

4 **MR. RINDONE:** Roger, roger.

5

6 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Good deal. We're knocking them
7 out, and it looks like we're on to Number 10, Essential Fish
8 Habitat.

9

10 **REVIEW: ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT MAPPING FOR GULF SHRIMP, REEF**
11 **FISH, COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS, SPINY LOBSTER, AND RED DRUM**
12 **FMPs**

13

14 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. We'll pull up that scope of work. All
15 right, and so the council has been developing a generic amendment
16 for the 2025 essential fish habitat five-year review, as required
17 under the Magnuson Act, and a large component of this is to revise
18 the EFH text and map descriptions for managed finfish, spiny
19 lobster, and shrimp species. Ms. Gardiner is with us today to
20 provide a presentation summarizing the methods and results
21 produced for the EFH text and map descriptions, and you guys should
22 evaluate the information presented and provide recommendations to
23 her, as appropriate.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Fantastic. Go ahead and take it away.

26

27 **MS. SARAH GARDINER:** All right. Thanks for that, Mr. Rindone, and
28 so, again, I'm Sarah Gardiner. I'm a fishery biologist here with
29 council staff. I'm going to be walking through a progress update
30 for the General Amendment 5, which is the essential fish habitat
31 five-year review, but specifically looking at updating the EFH
32 text descriptions and identifications.

33

34 Before I walk through the presentation, I just have a quick outline
35 of what I'm going to be discussing today, the first being an
36 overview of what essential fish habitat, or EFH, is, the current
37 timeline for the work that's been produced, a summary of the work
38 that I have done so far on the EFH text descriptions and maps, and
39 then a section where I'm looking for some SSC feedback on some
40 specific maps and textual definitions, as well as SSC discussion.
41 I welcome anyone to, you know, raise their hand at any point
42 throughout the presentation. Just stop me if you have any
43 questions.

44

45 The EFH five-year review is a mechanism that is required under the
46 Magnuson Act to ensure NOAA Fisheries and the councils incorporate
47 the most recent and best science available into fishery management
48 for EFH.

1
2 The objective of a five-year review is to review ten components of
3 the FMPs, and I'll walk through those in just a second. I want to
4 highlight that previous EFH five-year reviews have not resulted in
5 amendment updates, but this one is, given the magnitude of
6 information that needs to be updated and the implementation of
7 that information into the FMPs, and that was documented in a letter
8 from NMFS to the council following the 2016 EFH five-year review.

9
10 Typically, EFH is used in the Gulf for our consultation process
11 with the Regional Office, and so any federal agency partner
12 projects looking to get regulatory permits for work, you know,
13 looking, for example, with the Army Corps of Engineers, or BOEM
14 wind and oil and gas development, or aquaculture development, have
15 to go through this EFH consultation process.

16
17 Through the consultation process, having the most accurate EFH
18 textual definitions and identifications for species, and, when
19 applicable, across life stages is helpful to have a better
20 characterization of habitat usage, which may benefit the stock
21 health and overall conservation of the stock.

22
23 I mentioned the five-year review has ten components of an EFH
24 review. I'm going to be talking about the first component today,
25 which is the text descriptions and the map identifications, but
26 there are nine other components that will take place for the five-
27 year review process, but I'm not going to be presenting those to
28 the SSC today. I'm only looking for SSC feedback on component
29 one, which is the heavy analytical lift of compiling those text
30 definitions and identifications.

31
32 Just a reminder of kind of the summary of the work to-date. This
33 hasn't been in front of the SSC in a while, and so, in July of
34 2024, the SSC reviewed the spatial data that was collected by Dr.
35 Bridgette Froeschke during the council contract.

36
37 That information is also in Appendix B of the draft options
38 document that's in on the agenda for folks to review, and so we've
39 already looked at the spatial data that's going to be used to
40 compile the EFH maps for each species, and so, since then, I've
41 been working on compiling those maps and pulling together the
42 textual definitions for essential fish habitat for forty different
43 species across seven different life stages, and so that's what I'm
44 going to be presenting to the SSC today.

45
46 I'll be bringing this information to the council as well in
47 November, and then, following council review of the document and
48 the text definitions and descriptions, I will be working to compile

1 the remaining components of the EFH five-year review, before it
2 gets brought back to the council for final action.

3
4 I wanted to just summarize what the purpose and need kind of for
5 this action is. Again, the purpose generally is to comply with
6 the EFH provisions that are defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Act,
7 requiring the councils to perform an EFH five-year review every
8 five years.

9
10 We are five years late on that five-year review, and so it's been
11 almost ten years since we've done that, and so I think that
12 justifies the purpose of the need for this action, and specifically
13 that the amendment, is to implement these EFH definitions and maps
14 into our FMPs currently. The FMPs haven't been modified since the
15 final EIS that was conducted in 2005, and so about twenty years
16 ago.

17
18 For all current federally-managed Gulf species, EFH is defined
19 qualitatively, using known habitat association sets derived from
20 the literature, and so, like I had mentioned on the last slide,
21 the last time these EFH textual definitions and maps were updated
22 was following the 2005 final EIS, and so this is an example broadly
23 of the current EFH definition for all reef fish and coastal
24 migratory pelagic FMPs. Broadly, it encompasses the entirety of
25 the Gulf.

26
27 Our goal, in modifying the current textual definitions, was to
28 break this out by species and by life stage, when applicable, so
29 we can create essentially an EFH definition for each species, at
30 each life stage, that could more accurately depict what the habitat
31 associations are for the species, and so that's the overarching
32 goal of component one of the 2025 review.

33
34 In order to do that for each species at each life stage, staff did
35 a thorough literature review to qualitatively define habitat,
36 specifically looking at three key components to compile habitat
37 definitions for species, and so looking at habitat type, habitat
38 zone, and ecoregion, which then comprises what essential fish
39 habitat is, and then we can create essential fish habitat for each
40 species at seven different life stages.

41
42 There are twelve habitat types that are broken out where we can
43 define what the associated habitat type are. These were defined
44 in the final EIS back in 2005. They range from submerged aquatic
45 vegetation and mangroves all the way to water column associated.

46
47 There are three different habitat zones of estuarine, nearshore,
48 and offshore zones, and there are five different ecoregions to

1 broadly look at the distribution of species throughout the Gulf,
2 the first being the Florida Keys to Tarpon Springs; the second
3 Tarpon Springs to Pensacola Bay; the third Pensacola Bay to the
4 Mississippi Delta; the fourth the Mississippi Delta to Freeport,
5 Texas; and the fifth to Freeport, Texas to the Mexican border.

6
7 This is particularly helpful when we're looking at species
8 distribution and habitat associations, because we can broadly look
9 at different regions in which species are more concentrated, or
10 have higher habitat usage, and so eastern versus western Gulf, et
11 cetera, and I think that gives a better characterization of
12 species-specific habitat associations, rather than just a broad
13 definition of the entirety of the Gulf.

14
15 Using this information, we were able to update the habitat
16 attribute tables. If you're looking at the document, there's a
17 habitat attribute table that's compiled for each of the forty
18 species in which we're creating EFH text definitions for. They
19 contain life history information, as well as information on these
20 habitat types, habitat zones, and ecoregions, and I'll walk through
21 an example of that in just a minute.

22
23 To inform the first two bullets, I already mentioned the spatial
24 data that was contracted out has been used to create the map visual
25 depictions of what EFH is, and then a qualitative literature review
26 was used to compile the habitat attribute tables, looking at life
27 history information, and/or any of these habitat types, habitat
28 zones, or ecoregions, to create the text and map identifications.

29
30 So, of the forty species that were analyzed for this review,
31 twenty-five of those were updated with literature through 2024.
32 Of those, thirteen of the twenty-five had updates to habitat type,
33 habitat zone, or ecoregion, which ultimately influences the
34 habitat text and map description, and so that's what's going to
35 define what EFH is for each species at different life stages.

36
37 The remaining twelve of the twenty-five had updates to life history
38 information, which kind of addresses other components of the EFH
39 five-year review, and so that might include things like mortality,
40 growth, prey species, and that might address some of the other
41 components of the EFH five-year review that I'll be conducting
42 following the SSC and council review of component one, and so, for
43 example, prey species, that information is included in the habitat
44 attribute tables, but it doesn't necessarily affect component one,
45 which is those EFH text and map identifications.

46
47 This is an example of the habitat attribute table for gag grouper.
48 I really want to focus on the first four columns of the table,

1 because that is what is going to be used to define the EFH textual
2 definitions, as well as create the map descriptions, and so we
3 have life stages, and we have the ecoregions in which the
4 literature has identified them to be found in, the habitat zones,
5 and the habitat types.

6
7 This is updated through 2024. Since 2016, you know, it was --
8 This table has been updated to indicate, for example, spawning
9 adults, and there's literature support that they're in nearshore
10 habitats, whereas previously they were just defined in offshore
11 habitats, and so working through these habitat attribute tables is
12 really what ultimately helps refine the EFH text descriptions and
13 identifications.

14
15 So, using this habitat attribute table in the first four columns,
16 we're able to create textual definitions for species across seven
17 different life stages, when applicable, and so I really want to
18 focus on -- You know, not broadly with all the life stages, all
19 forty species, across seven different life stages, what those text
20 definitions are, but a couple of highlighted examples that I was
21 able to walk through.

22
23 I want to look at, you know, gag grouper adult. The habitat
24 attribute table, and the literature that was used to inform them,
25 identified that, typically, gag grouper adults are associated
26 Gulf-wide in Ecoregions 1 through 5, in nearshore and offshore
27 habitats, and associated with hardbottom and reef habitat, and so
28 that is visually depicted on this static gag grouper adult map.

29
30 I want to highlight here that, just because all hardbottom and/or
31 reef habitat is not visually depicted on a map, it doesn't mean
32 that is not all encompassing of the habitat that is defined in the
33 Gulf, and so, for example, if there's a reef off the coast of
34 Florida that is not visually depicted on this map, but there is a
35 consultation for a project that wants to go out and look at
36 offshore development, and they encounter a reef, because the text
37 descriptions encompass reef habitat for adult gag grouper, that's
38 considered essential fish habitat for them, even if it's not
39 visually depicted on the map.

40
41 I created an R Shiny tool to hopefully better visualize what each
42 map can look like for each species, and so just give me one moment,
43 and I'll pull that up, hopefully.

44
45 Okay, and so I think folks can see this, and so this broadly is
46 just a way for the public, or the SSC, to visualize the type of
47 spatial data that has been compiled for each species across seven
48 different life stages for the maps, and so we'll walk through

1 taking a tour, and folks can kind of play around with this tool as
2 they wish, but I have a dropdown here for selecting the habitat
3 type, where you can select the twelve different habitat types, and
4 you'll be able to visualize that, and I'll throw some examples up
5 here once we finish our tour.

6
7 Next, you can select the different habitat zones, and so the
8 boundaries for the estuarine, nearshore, and offshore habitat
9 zones will be displayed on the map, if you're interested in
10 overlaying what those zones look like and visually depicting that
11 over different species life stage maps.

12
13 I have the forty species listed here in alphabetical order, in
14 which you can kind of then select which life stages you're
15 interested in looking at, and those will populate on this map right
16 here, and, if you're interested specifically in not having to
17 toggle between the textual definitions and, you know, the map
18 definitions -- It disconnected. Let's reload that. One moment,
19 please. Okay. Back to where I was, and so, if you're interested
20 in taking a look at the depicted -- Oh my goodness gracious.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** It kind of looks like we might need to pay a
23 little bit more on the internet bill.

24
25 **MS. GARDINER:** Well, I'm going to -- I'll finish up the
26 presentation, and I'll try to get this to run locally on my
27 computer, since the signal has been killed.

28
29 **MR. RINDONE:** Tom keeps trying to make a new username and password,
30 and it's crashing it.

31
32 **MS. GARDINER:** So, anyway, I created that tool and, unfortunately,
33 you know, I'm running into technical difficulties, but I promise
34 it works, to fiddle about with looking at the different EFH maps
35 for each species across different life stages, and it really is
36 kind of a unique tool, when you're able to toggle between different
37 life stages and see kind of what habitat is depicted, and hopefully
38 I can come back and revisit that in just a second.

39
40 Ultimately, you know, this this project was a pretty large
41 undertaking, in that, forty species, across seven different life
42 stages, 280 maps and textual definitions were produced, and so
43 this is a huge improvement over what's currently defined in the
44 FMPs, because, previously, based on the 2005 final EIS, the FMPs
45 define it just very broadly, encompassing a lot of the habitat in
46 the entirety of the Gulf, and so this update alone, and the
47 amendment process for this, is going to be much improved,
48 considering what has been in there previously.

1
2 I wanted some specific feedback on the SSC, and maybe I'll run
3 through these, and then hopefully get the tool up and running, so
4 that folks can take a look at that, but specifically looking at
5 species-specific distribution for a couple of highlighted species
6 that staff flagged, as the literature may not represent the entire
7 distribution of species across different life stages, the
8 definitions that we currently have for different habitat types.

9
10 Then I just broadly wanted to ask the SSC, you know, if there was
11 any additional literature sources that were not included in this
12 iteration of the five year review, or, if you look over it, or
13 look at the maps, and you feel as though it's not encompassing of
14 what is an accurate representation of habitat associations for the
15 species at different life stages, I welcome that feedback as well.

16
17 For the different species that staff kind of flagged some
18 distribution potential questions for whether these species are
19 distributed, or accurately displayed as the distribution, we have
20 wenchman, and so, right now, wenchman is only displayed, or shown
21 to have known habitat associations, in Ecoregions 3 through 5.

22
23 Spanish Mackerel, for adult and spawning adult, is only noted to
24 be distributed, or have habitat associations, through Ecoregions
25 2 and 3, and then, for scamp, the only life stage that is more
26 broadly distributed through the Gulf is spawning adult, and staff
27 kind of highlighted these, that we feel that maybe these
28 distributions for these specific species should be extended Gulf-
29 wide, and so I wanted specific SSC feedback on whether the known
30 habitat associations for these species should be considered Gulf-
31 wide or the current ecoregions that are displayed are an accurate
32 representation, and so that's my first question, and I can let
33 folks kind of simmer on that one, and then I can -- I'll move
34 through the next ones.

35
36 My next two big questions are dealing with different habitat types,
37 and how they're currently defined, and so, on the left, I have the
38 map displaying reef and hardbottom habitat, and I see a typo there,
39 but so, currently, we have these habitat types separated out, based
40 on the habitat type determination that was created back in 2005.

41
42 Because of the spatial data that we have available to us, the
43 current reef spatial layer is only one little purple speck down in
44 the bottom, by the Florida Keys, and I don't feel like that's an
45 accurate representation of the reef throughout the Gulf, or the
46 spatial data that's used to inform that.

47
48 I think that, when we were doing the spatial data contract work,

1 that a lot of our state spatial data, and the data that we got
2 from NOAA, considered reef habitat hardbottom habitat, and so I
3 think that we should -- I'm proposing that we either combine these
4 habitat types or we distribute hardbottom habitat, as well as reef
5 habitat, to any species that has those habitat associations, and
6 so I'll show an example of that in just a second as well.

7
8 The other, I guess, issue, or challenge, that I think poses with
9 the water-column-associated habitat type is that, due to the nature
10 of being water-column-associated, it just broadly encompasses the
11 entirety of the Gulf, and so, when you have a species, and you
12 want to visually depict the habitat associations for that species
13 at a specific life stage, and they are associated with water column
14 habitat, the visual depiction, or the map depiction, for that
15 species -- Just the water column habitat type kind of dominates
16 what you're really looking at, and so you don't really get that
17 fine-scale resolution, and recognizing, you know, I don't have a
18 proposed solution to this challenge.

19
20 I just think that is part of what that is, but I do think that,
21 when you're looking through some of the species at different life
22 stages, you do see that, especially in those egg, larval, and post-
23 larval life stages, where it really just consumes the entirety of
24 the Gulf.

25
26 Looking at the different habitat types that I wanted to highlight,
27 especially for this reef and hardbottom habitat kind of conundrum
28 that I'm looking at, and so gray triggerfish adult is displayed on
29 the map on the left, and you can see that, you know, gray
30 triggerfish adults are associated with reef habitat, but, because
31 reef habitat does not encapsulate hardbottom habitat currently in
32 our habitat type definition, I don't feel like the visual depiction
33 of the adult gray triggerfish EFH map is an accurate representation
34 of where their known habitat associations are.

35
36 My proposition to either combine hardbottom habitat -- Hardbottom
37 habitat with reef habitat or, if a species is reef-associated,
38 also make them hardbottom-associated, would create a map more
39 similar to what we're seeing on the right, which would, in my
40 opinion, have a better visual depiction of habitat associations
41 for adult gray triggerfish.

42
43 This is the same thing we're seeing for gray snapper as well, with
44 the reef and hardbottom habitat conundrum, we see it for the gray
45 snapper spawning adult, and I think that, you know, the SSC should
46 consider whether we need to combine these habitat types or we need
47 to attribute hardbottom habitat associations with those species
48 who also display reef associations.

1
2 I mentioned the water column association conundrum, in which it
3 kind of dominates the EFH map, and I think we see that specifically
4 in greater amberjack adults, where they are water column
5 associated, but we're not able to see the resolution for hardbottom
6 habitat, or reef habitat, because the water column habitat spatial
7 file kind of dominates the entirety of the map.

8
9 That's what I have for specific SSC feedback. I'm going to let
10 folks think about the questions they have, and I'm hoping to get
11 this tool up and running, to show you that as well.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right, and so it looks like we've got some
14 specific questions, and then we also had an ask for the broad side
15 of things. Is there any way, while she's getting that tool up,
16 that we can go back to the species distribution, slide 22, it looks
17 like? All right, and so let's go ahead and take the broad
18 questions, and if you've got any comment directly to this one that
19 she asked about, and so we've got Luiz's hand is up.

20
21 **DR. BARBIERI:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. May I proceed?

22
23 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I'll allow it.

24
25 **DR. BARBIERI:** Okay. Sarah, first of all, thank you for this
26 overview presentation. I mean, this issue is so complex, and
27 convoluted, right? It has so many facets to it that this
28 introduction that you provide I think is really helpful to sort of
29 situate our brains in what we need to be looking at here, and
30 understanding the concept, and so I appreciate that.

31
32 Then the other questions are, one, do you have to define those
33 species associations with habitats geographically, meaning is
34 there a requirement for you to place those habitat associations
35 like you have them here, right, geographically, because I'm
36 thinking areas that either have not been properly studied for that
37 particular species, for whatever reason, right, and you may still
38 have that species associated with existing habitats there, but we
39 just don't know about it yet, and so perhaps just defining the
40 habitats, like that table that you had, you know, that you focus
41 on the first four columns.

42
43 I thought that was excellent, because it gives us an idea of what
44 the habitat associations are, and we don't need to know
45 geographically where they are located. Can you --

46
47 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I'll give that one a go, Luiz. The first answer
48 is, in the pure sense of the word, no. We don't have to illustrate

1 them via a map. So long as it's described in the text, the text
2 is always going to be the definition. For example, if there were
3 an EFH consultation inshore somewhere, and there were a seagrass
4 bed that were to be impacted by a dock, or a bridge construction,
5 or something like that, and they found that, regardless of whether
6 that area was illustrated as seagrass in our work, just by nature
7 of the description and the linkage, it would be EFH.

8
9 The two kind of counter thoughts about that are, one, our partners,
10 and, in a general sense, the partners are other regulatory agencies
11 that are either required to consult with the National Marine
12 Fisheries Service as part of EFH or someone doing work that might
13 impact the habitat, and so, for them, the feedback that we have
14 always received is to be able to see, or interact with, a
15 geographical description of the habitat is useful.

16
17 The other things that we've experienced are that, one, having
18 something mapped, you can see things, and the linkages that are
19 perhaps incorrect, and that gives us an opportunity to fix that,
20 are very difficult to find in just a table. For example, when a
21 species that we think is Gulf-wide, and common, is not illustrated,
22 based on the table and the linkages.

23
24 The other thing that this gives us an opportunity to do, sort of
25 as to level up our science perhaps, is the way that it currently
26 is defined as EFH is essentially everywhere for something, and so
27 it doesn't permit you the ability to compare two different areas
28 and say, well this area is EFH for one species, one life stage of
29 a non-critical species I'll say, whereas a different area is EFH
30 for twenty-seven species across five life stages.

31
32 You can sort of stack them, and make more meaningful comparisons,
33 rather than just say, well they're both EFH for something, and so
34 they must be equal, and so there is that opportunity as well.

35
36 **DR. BARBIERI:** Right. Thanks, John. I mean, that makes sense,
37 right, and, I mean, there's no real right way to do this, and so
38 I get it, but working for one of those agencies that has been --
39 That regulates, and not at the institute level, but, you know,
40 within the management framework of FWC, that uses this kind of
41 information, right, to evaluate permitting for construction
42 projects like the ones that you mentioned, we have found that staff
43 in those positions are not necessarily well qualified to evaluate,
44 for the range of species that they have to evaluate things for,
45 whether something that's provided is correct or incorrect.

46
47 I can see them looking at a map like this and saying, well, okay,
48 well, wenchman doesn't occur along the West Florida Shelf, just

1 because it's not on the map, and so I know that there's no easy
2 solution for this, but I was thinking, you know, that might, I
3 don't know, prevent some of those things from happening.

4
5 My second question is about is there any criteria for us to
6 evaluate, you know, how much is enough for you to have to define
7 essential fish habitats for a species? For example, for those
8 species there, right, that we have on the screen now, there may
9 not have been enough studies, right?

10
11 I mean, for scamp, there's a paucity of information, really, about
12 all the different -- I mean, right now, we don't have good
13 information about where the recruitment comes from, in terms of
14 juvenile nursery area, right, and so it's just an unknown, and
15 perhaps having those disclaimers, where people say, okay, what we
16 have here is based on the information that we have to-date, but we
17 know for a fact that there are these gaps identified that we're
18 going to have to address.

19
20 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks, Luiz, and so, in the textual definitions
21 for those species life stages that don't have enough information
22 to provide a map, it disclaims that there's no information
23 available, and, if there is no information available, no spatial
24 data available, a blank map will show, and so, for those species
25 where we were not able to get a qualitative description of known
26 habitat type associations, or ecoregions, or habitat zones, they
27 are identified as, you know, being data deficient, and so I think
28 this review encapsulates those species for which we do have the
29 information to provide updated EFH definitions, as well as those
30 where we are data deficient, or data poor, and John has a follow-
31 up on that.

32
33 **DR. FROESCHKE:** So, just as a follow-up, and it's not in the
34 presentation, and it would be in the document, but, the way that
35 it's required to be described, there are four levels of information
36 that are used to describe EFH, and so, for example, Level 1 is if
37 the information is based on presence or absence of distribution.
38 Level 2 is relative density abundance information, and Level 3 is
39 growth, reproduction, or survival, and then Level 4 is production
40 rates.

41
42 Almost everything that we have is Level 1, and it has always been
43 that way, and so the long-term goal is to level-up the information
44 used in there, and, you know, in previous iterations, and, you
45 know, that's something we have considered for this, is you could
46 use more species distribution models, and other kinds of things,
47 to level-up, if you will, the kind of information used to identify
48 and describe EFH.

1
2 The discussions that we have had, sort of pragmatically with the
3 SSC and the Regional Office and things, one, there are too many
4 species that we have the higher level models, or things to do that
5 with, some of those, and the other part, more pragmatically, is
6 that, if you use those, you may omit areas, or you would have to
7 consciously prioritize what areas.

8
9 At least from a consultation perspective, in providing EFH
10 consultations, it may be not advantageous to have an area omitted,
11 even if it's not the most high priority, because that gives them
12 the ability to provide consultations, and habitat mitigation
13 advice and things, where otherwise they may have less ability to
14 do so, and so there's that kind of a conundrum that we've been
15 back and forth for a long time, and so, if you have feedback, we
16 would be happy to have it.

17
18 **DR. BARBIERI:** No, and that makes sense. I understand it better
19 now. Thank you, both.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Moving on. Harry.

22
23 **MR. BLANCHET:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Kind of tangent to one of
24 Luiz's points, in a lot of cases, these maps represent the
25 distribution of scientific or biological studies, rather than the
26 distribution of the species.

27
28 What brought that to mind was that gag distribution set of
29 pictures, where you've got eggs and larvae in Zones 1 and 2, and
30 you have spawning adults across the Gulf of Mexico, and I would
31 say that it's unlikely to have records of larvae or eggs in the
32 western Gulf of Mexico, considering the paucity of plankton studies
33 in that region. It would be easier to say, if you have spawning
34 adults, you're likely to have eggs and larvae in that area, rather
35 than searching for literature to say that.

36
37 The other part of that is that the identification of larvae and
38 eggs, at least in plankton studies, has been limited for a very
39 long time, and so, if you look at a lot of classic larval fish
40 information, there's a lot of stuff that's at the genus, or even
41 family level, that -- You know, looking here at Spanish mackerel,
42 not showing Spanish early life histories in the western Gulf of
43 Mexico is purely a case of -- Well, I take it back. That's a case
44 of there's records of them around, but they just didn't get -- As
45 best I could tell, it did not get incorporated.

46
47 I think that the -- Just as you were talking about earlier, you
48 know, trying to derive information from adjacent sources, the

1 characteristics of having spawning adults is probably more useful,
2 in terms of trying to identify where you might have early life
3 history stages, than trying to identify directly where you have
4 those early life history stages. Thank you.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** That's a good point, Harry, and same with you,
7 Luiz. All right. Sean, go ahead.

8
9 **DR. POWERS:** So Luiz and Harry covered a few of those, but let me
10 ask you something. To fill in an area like on wenchman, do you
11 just need a study? Do you have to have a study and a citation
12 that says it occurred here, because I'm trying to figure out --
13 You know, you also said you used habitat associations in the
14 literature, and so I guess that's my question.

15
16 I also think that wenchman divide like that is probably because
17 the SEAMAP trawling data didn't used to go over to Florida, and
18 now it does, but do you need -- Do you use any predictions, based
19 on habitat association, or do you need a documented source to
20 extend the geographic range?

21
22 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks for that. I don't necessarily need a
23 documented source, or like in published literature. I think what
24 I'm looking for now -- You know, I can incorporate what I like to
25 call, you know, that local ecological knowledge, and so on-the-
26 water knowledge, or just folks characterization of what they're
27 seeing into these maps, and so it can be more of a personal
28 communication documentation of where they're seeing these, and not
29 necessarily a formal citation for that.

30
31 **DR. POWERS:** Like Harry said, I don't think this, the wenchman, is
32 an example of a gap in studies, or knowledge, and it's just that
33 it's probably not incorporating the SEAMAP bottom trawl surveys
34 since they moved into Florida, or started covering Florida. On
35 your reef, how do you treat artificial reef? I saw it as a tab
36 separately in one of the engines. Do you include that with reef,
37 or is that a separate layer, or is that not in here?

38
39 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks for that. That's why I kind of included it
40 in a tab in my app. Currently, the council does not include
41 artificial reefs as essential fish habitat. It was something that
42 they considered back in 2013, but, ultimately, they didn't decide
43 to include it as a habitat type, and so it's just a known
44 association, potentially, with artificial reefs, and we let the
45 states kind of manage their artificial reef databases, to keep
46 that informed, but it's not something the council currently takes
47 into consideration for EFH definitions.

1 **DR. POWERS:** The same for oil and gas platforms, I assume?
2
3 **MS. GARDINER:** Yes.
4
5 **DR. POWERS:** So one more. Can you go to your amberjack? You have
6 greater amberjack, and this is adults, and this is based on that
7 they are water column associated?
8
9 **MS. GARDINER:** So, this is the full EFH map depiction for adults.
10 Because they have the water column habitat type association, that's
11 what is dominating the entirety of the EFH map description. In
12 there are also the spatial files for hardbottom and reefs and banks
13 and shoals, but those aren't visually depicted, because water
14 column kind of dominates, the spatial --
15
16 **DR. POWERS:** Who decides on that definition, because I would think
17 that greater amberjack -- I thought it was reef associated.
18
19 **MS. GARDINER:** So I do have the reef associations for greater
20 amberjack. I also have them associated with hardbottom and water
21 column, and I think the water column is what you're seeing visually
22 depicted here, and that kind of takes over, for lack of a better
23 term, the map description of EFH.
24
25 **DR. POWERS:** But aren't most fish water column associated, the
26 vast majority, or I guess that's what I'm trying to -- Is that
27 based on a definition of their life history, or just they occur in
28 the water column, because that latter can't be true, because tons
29 of other fish occur in the water column that are clearly on your
30 -- Like gag.
31
32 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks. It is, because their life history is water
33 column associated, and this is one of the challenges we're really
34 encountering, is that, you know, ultimately for most Gulf reef
35 fish species, at some stage of their life, they will be water
36 column associated, and so that is an associated habitat type for
37 them, but it kind of dominates the overarching ability for us to
38 depict it in the map at a finer-scale resolution, and I think John
39 might have something to add, and so I'll pass it to him.
40
41 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Sort of to answer your question about who decides,
42 I mean, that's kind of why we're here today, is to solicit the
43 advice of the SSC. I mean, the council would approve the document,
44 and they would lean heavily on the SSC, and so, for example, I
45 agree with you that having a map description of the water column
46 in a linkage is not particularly helpful.
47
48 I think it's hurtful almost, in some way, and so, for example, a

1 recommendation might be to remove that as part of the map
2 distribution. It hasn't been mapped in the past, but the water
3 column association is very nebulous, and so those are the kinds of
4 feedback that would help us, as well as some of the others, like
5 what you mentioned with the wenchman.

6
7 You know, we agree that that's either not representative of more
8 modern data, that shows that they are distributed off Florida, or
9 that there's simply an error in the linkage description in those
10 tables, and those are the kinds of things that we would like to
11 modify, or improve, in the document, and we're just trying to
12 gather some of the specific examples and, you know, any feedback
13 you all have about recommendations, we would be happy to have them.

14
15 **DR. POWERS:** Thanks, and the last one, I mean, obviously, I would
16 say to remove the water column association for this one, and keep
17 the reef associated, but you asked a question about the hardbottom
18 map, hardbottom -- Combining reef and hardbottom, and that's
19 obviously -- It changes.

20
21 I mean, off Alabama, we would consider most of that reef, but not
22 all the hardbottom off Florida would be considered reef, because
23 of the vertical, because it doesn't have much vertical elevation,
24 would be my guess, but my suggestion on those things is I'm pretty
25 sure there's some more up-to-date maps. I know Steve Murawski,
26 and his group, Josh Kilborn, have been trying to make more and
27 better updated maps, and so I'm not sure if that's part of this
28 exercise or not, but updating those sources of the map, and, if
29 you're interested, I would start with Steve Murawski or Josh
30 Kilborn, for sure.

31
32 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks, Sean. I appreciate that feedback. I think,
33 during the contract period that contact was made, and I'm not sure
34 if that data files were ever received for that, for the spatial
35 data contract that Dr. Froeschke completed in July of 2024, but we
36 can double-check.

37
38 **DR. POWERS:** Thanks, and I understand this is like a Herculean
39 task, and so don't consider anything a criticism. It's just
40 questions and suggestions.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I appreciate that, Sean. Yes, and the map
43 makes it look like amberjack is more of a CMP than it is a reef
44 fish, and so that was a good point, and a lot of good discussion
45 there. Tom, go ahead.

46
47 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Trevor, and so I appreciate the presentation,
48 and all the work that goes into this, and I guess I have a practical

1 question, and maybe not for you necessarily, but maybe John, but
2 either one of you. How many consultations do you entertain a year
3 with regard to EFH things?
4

5 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I don't personally do any. David Dale, and the
6 Regional Office, I think they do quite a few. I would have to
7 chase down specifically how many, but I think it's quite a bit,
8 because even dock pilings and routine kinds of things do require
9 those, and the Army Corps of Engineers and things works on that.
10 We could find out.
11

12 **DR. FRAZER:** I guess the reason I'm asking is because I would
13 imagine, based on the nature of the data, right, you know, the
14 response would be, yes, there's a known fishery, or fish habitat
15 association, you know, generally, and let's say with seagrass,
16 right, but we don't have a cited reference, you know, spatially at
17 this location, but that's the level of the response, right, and so
18 what I'm trying to do is think about efficiencies, as far as all
19 the work that you do.
20

21 I'm not sure I would spend a lot more time trying to drill down,
22 because I just don't think you'll ever really get there, and I
23 think it's -- If you know -- I mean, if the purpose of this is
24 really to identify map and inventory habitat types, right, and
25 then identify species habitat associations, I think that may be
26 the best that you can do, I mean, with the resources that you have,
27 and so that's kind of my suggestion, John.
28

29 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and no disagreement from me. I mean, the
30 thing that came to me is, you know, I've worked on this for a long
31 time, and, at least with Sarah's work, we finally got to the point
32 where you could see the linkages that are description of what --
33 In the maps, you could see there are certain things that are
34 errors.
35

36 I guess so what we're asking, from the SSC, is are you all
37 comfortable, for those ones that we see, or what we believe to be
38 erroneous, to making recommendations to the council or something,
39 to update those? For example, like wenchman, where, obviously, we
40 have information, through SEAMAP and other sources, that it does
41 occur off the West Florida Shelf, and we would like to fix that,
42 so it's correct.
43

44 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes, and I think that you would want to do that, and
45 what Sarah -- What I heard her say is that you have an option
46 essentially to gather, you know, local knowledge, right, and cite
47 it as such, and so, in that case, you can just take that and fill
48 it in appropriately.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Good discussion. The old juice is
3 worth the squeeze thing is coming out. All right. Tiffany, go
4 ahead.

5
6 **DR. HOPPER:** Thanks. I was apparently muted. Again, thank you,
7 Mr. Chair, and I also want to echo what some others have said about
8 the sort of Herculean nature of this work as well. One of the
9 things I was a bit curious about, and, again, you know, thinking
10 about the concept of whether the juice is worth the squeeze or
11 not, and this may not be, but I had wondered whether there might
12 be some way to get back to the question of some of these cases
13 where is an absence truly an absence, or is it a hole in the
14 dataset, whether there might be some way to flag that, either in
15 some of the backend of the map data, or in some of these tables as
16 well, just to indicate, for example, if something is not occurring
17 in a given ecoregion, is it because there's no data from that
18 region, or is it truly because we have data that shows that that
19 life stage is not occurring?

20
21 Then, to speak to some of the questions about, you know, use of
22 local knowledge to fill in some of those things, going back to the
23 map you guys showed of Spanish mackerel, that sort of suggested
24 there are no adults, or late juveniles, sort of over in the western
25 Gulf over off Texas, I mean, that's going to catch the eye of most
26 folks over here who do much fishing as something that would be
27 looking a little bit unusual, and so I do think that there's
28 probably a good use case for making some of those adjustments in
29 cases like that, where it's pretty obvious that something has been
30 missed.

31
32 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks for that feedback. I appreciate it, and, to
33 respond to your question about whether there's a way to indicate
34 whether an absence is truly an absence, I think, you know,
35 ultimately, this document is going to have to go through the
36 transmittal process, and that caveat can be made in text through
37 the document, and that can be indicated, you know, when people are
38 reviewing these EFH definitions, and that's something that our
39 counterparts at the Regional Office are also aware of as well when
40 they're doing the consultation process.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right, and so it seems like we're building
43 the --

44
45 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Trevor, can I just add real quick to that?

46
47 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Add it. Go ahead.

48

1 **DR. FROESCHKE:** So, just as a follow-up, I mean, the other part we
2 kind of mentioned earlier is there are those four levels of data,
3 or information that are associated, Level 1 being presence or
4 absence, which is most of everything that we have, and so we could,
5 and I think we would probably, add that to the maps, or the figure
6 legends, that these are the maps for Species X, Life Stage Y, based
7 on Information Level 1.

8
9 Then I guess, thinking ahead, what I would think would be our next
10 step is for the table, the association tables, of habitat, species,
11 life stage, region, that is -- We would go through, based on the
12 information that we've identified, and try to track down -- Make
13 sure we have the supporting evidence, and make suggested changes
14 to that table, and then bring that back to you all at some point,
15 to say these are the things that we think need to be modified.

16
17 For example, the Spanish mackerel, or the wenchman or something,
18 make those suggestions, just those specific ones, and not spend
19 too much time chasing down patches of seagrass on things for the
20 map. I think we're pretty good on that, but the linkages does
21 seem to be where we could make some progress.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Agreed. Harry, go ahead.

24
25 **MR. BLANCHET:** Back to the is the juice worth the squeeze, and
26 this might be a footnote in a late appendix, but this map on
27 amberjack just stayed up a little bit too long, and I promised I
28 wouldn't put my hand up again, and then I went ahead and did it.

29
30 There seems to be something missing in this, in that I don't think
31 of amberjack as being an inshore species in Louisiana, or even a
32 nearshore species in a lot of the states, because it's limited by
33 salinity, and so perhaps some -- I don't know if that's a layer,
34 and I don't know -- I mean, you essentially are showing amberjack
35 as potentially being up well inside the barrier islands in the
36 Mississippi Sound, and right along the beaches in western
37 Louisiana, two places that I'm pretty sure you're not going to
38 find amberjack, no matter how hard you try, and so whether a
39 species is being limited by salinity is something that should be
40 considered, at least for some of these areas.

41
42 I also noted, tangentially, that some of the hardbottom areas in
43 Florida, somewhere around Tarpon Springs, actually seemed like
44 they were on land. There might be some issue with how that layer
45 is being presented in the map, and the last point I'll make, and
46 then I'll go home, is that, somewhere in this document, and I
47 didn't see it, but I didn't look at the whole document, it needs
48 to be emphasized that this does not include state-managed species,

1 and so things like oysters, blue crabs, et cetera.

2
3 You're going to have some fish habitat that's of those species in
4 federal waters that is not depicted, and so, just because it's not
5 there, it doesn't mean that it's not important. Is that clear?

6
7 **MS. GARDINER:** Yes, that's clear. I think, to respond to that
8 specifically, the EFH five-year review process is only for Gulf
9 federally-managed species, and I think that that's clearly stated
10 in the document, but I could reiterate that, you know, as an
11 appended footnote as well, to make sure that it's clear that those
12 species that may be managed by the state, that occur in federal
13 waters, are not depicted in this five-year review process.

14
15 **MR. BLANCHET:** Thank you.

16
17 **MS. GARDINER:** Secondly, I wanted to touch on the potential use
18 of these maps to be indicative of distribution of species. That's
19 not what these maps are really looking at. You know, at the Level
20 1 habitat associations, we're truly only looking at identified
21 habitat that these species may be associated with.

22
23 In no way are these maps a visual depiction of potential
24 distribution for these species. If we were to do that, that raises
25 the question of are our maps to a Level 2 or 3, where we're looking
26 at potential, you know, associations with species based on
27 different salinities, or other environmental variables, and,
28 unfortunately, we're just not there yet.

29
30 I know it's easy to look at these maps and think they're broadly
31 looking at where these species life stages are distributed, but
32 really it's just known identified habitat that are in these areas
33 that these species are known to associate with, and that's, I
34 think, an important distinction.

35
36 **MR. BLANCHET:** Thank you.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I think, given the discussion we've had, I
39 think that the water column designation of greater amberjack could
40 very well be one of those things that, you know, gets pulled out
41 of logic. Let's see. Go ahead, John.

42
43 **MR. MARESKA:** So, looking at the wenchman distribution, you know,
44 if they're caught, and they're in that area, they're associating
45 with some kind of habitat, and so that is essential fish habitat
46 for that species, and so these maps should be -- When they
47 represent the distribution of the species, it's probably also
48 representing their habitat.

1
2 Specifically for wenchman, I gave a presentation to the SSC a
3 couple years ago, and I showed the distribution of where winchmen
4 occur, and, yes, I would be in favor of expanding it to off the
5 Peninsula of Florida. Being the large task that this is, do I
6 just send information to you that would help you with some of this
7 information to expand these things out?

8
9 **MS. GARDINER:** Yes, and that would be incredibly helpful, if you
10 want to shoot me an email with any recommendations that are species
11 specific, and I can get those incorporated.

12
13 **MR. MARESKA:** Okay, and, as a member of the SEAMAP subcommittee,
14 you know, there's a lot of trawling areas that we have excluded
15 because it's a hardbottom, it's a reef, it's a live bottom. The
16 SEAMAP group has extensive maps of that, and so that might be a
17 good place for you to come up with your hardbottom maps and stuff,
18 because, what you're showing, it really seems limited, and I will
19 be in touch. I'll be sending you some stuff Sarah, and so thank
20 you.

21
22 **MS. GARDINER:** Thank you. I appreciate that. I do -- I've got
23 the app up and running, if I could share my screen just one more
24 time, and I would like to show that to folks, so they can play
25 around with it just a little bit.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Let's go ahead and pull that up.
28 Maybe, given John's motivation here, maybe that's a little bit of
29 homework for all of us to go through this stuff and point out a
30 few things. As you get it pulled up, let's go ahead and let Tom
31 ask a question, real quick.

32
33 **DR. FRAZER:** I'm just trying to make sure that we can be as helpful
34 as possible, right, and so, if you're looking for a specific
35 recommendation, for example, to like get rid of the water column
36 associations, you know, that would be one, for example. Then
37 another one perhaps is, because you have so many deviations of
38 kind of various life history stages, I don't know if that's super
39 -- If that level of detail is really helpful either. It could be
40 just eggs, you know, larvae, juveniles, and adults, and that may
41 simplify things for you guys, but that would be a suggestion coming
42 from me, and I don't know how, you know, the whole SSC would feel
43 about that.

44
45 **MS. GARDINER:** I've got a quick response to that. I don't disagree
46 with you. I think that seven life stages may be a bit too many,
47 especially, you know, looking at the difference between adult and
48 spawning adult. My definition of an adult is that you reach

1 reproductive maturity.

2
3 These definitions for life stages were -- They predate me, and
4 were established in the final EIS. Unfortunately, David Dale is
5 not here, and I was hoping he was going to be able to kind of pull
6 that institutional knowledge for me on where those came from, and
7 the role that the SSC played in defining those, but, if it's
8 something that can be modified, and I'm not sure this iteration is
9 possible, but I think it should definitely be a suggestion for the
10 next five-year review, at minimum.

11
12 Mr. Chair, if you don't mind, I'll just walk through this cool
13 little app that I've got working now, hopefully, to show folks
14 what it can display, and kind of what it can do.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely. Do your thing.

17
18 **MS. GARDINER:** Hopefully, and it was working a moment ago. Give
19 me one moment.

20
21 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just while that's doing it, just as a follow-up on
22 the habitats, on John Maruska's comments, on the reef, so we did
23 make some visual decisions, I guess, and so there are lots of small
24 reefs that are not described on here, both for computational
25 efficiency and describing this. The map is already challenging,
26 and, also, you know, we had some discussions.

27
28 We're not the arbiters of all hardbottom habitat for distribution,
29 and that's not really the purpose of this map, and so we have made
30 some, you know, decisions, I guess, at least at this point on how
31 it's displayed, and so there are more information available, I
32 guess, that would be considered in the proper, but we're not
33 displaying it here.

34
35 **MS. GARDINER:** All right. Thanks for that, John, and so it looks
36 like this is relatively up and running. I'll kind of refresh folks
37 on where we started, and where we ended, and so you can go through,
38 and you can select your different habitat types here.

39
40 I've got ten habitat types described, and a reminder that there's
41 twelve. We don't have any spatial data for a drifting algae, and
42 that's hard to visually depict, and, for banks and shoals, we do
43 not, but, for those other ten, you can take a look at those, and
44 you can toggle them on and off your map. You can select or deselect
45 all.

46
47 I think that's pretty neat, if you want to look at different
48 habitat types, specifically overlaid with species' life-stage

1 specific maps. If you think that a life stage should be
2 characterized as having, you know, hardbottom habitat, but it
3 doesn't, you can overlay that, and you can get a good idea of
4 whether that would be an accurate visual depiction of the habitat
5 associations.

6
7 The other thing you can take a look at is the different habitat
8 zones. You can break these out by habitat zones, and I'll clear
9 this, so we're able to see the different habitat zones. These can
10 be toggled on and off. You can use these to overlay with different
11 species life stage maps as well.

12
13 One of the cool things that I added was the EFH descriptions. When
14 you select a species, you'll be able to click on the descriptions.
15 For almaco jack, for egg, larvae, and post larvae, we currently
16 don't have any spatial data available, and there's no information
17 to inform a map for this life stage.

18
19 That means we do not have information to inform habitat type
20 associations, habitat zone associations, or ecoregion
21 associations, and so those are just going to be blank maps, but I
22 do -- For the other species, you can look at the, you know,
23 different habitat type, zone, and ecoregion associations for each
24 species.

25
26 I've got a Google link here. This is the contracted work that Dr.
27 Froeschke provided for us last July. If you're interested in
28 looking at the metadata for that, and the contact log of who she
29 reached out to, and who she was able to contact and kind facilitate
30 those discussions to get that spatial data that we could use for
31 these maps, you can toggle that on and off.

32
33 I also have the artificial reef tab, which defines what artificial
34 reefs are broadly, and kind of why -- It justifies why, you know,
35 the council chose to not move forward with identifying artificial
36 reefs as a habitat type for EFH, and so this tool is really cool.
37 Hopefully, it's working on your devices, and it's a bandwidth issue
38 for me, but to toggle around with it, and, if you've got any
39 recommendations, I also welcome feedback for that, and, Mr. Chair,
40 I will -- That's all I need to share my screen for, and so, if
41 we've got any other questions, I'll take those.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Indeed that is a cool tool. If anybody has
44 any questions, raise your hand. I think, given the discussion
45 we've had, I think the SSC -- I'm not trying to speak for everybody,
46 and so, if someone disagrees, let me know, but I feel like the
47 staff has license to make the logical changes that they see fit on
48 some of these. Obviously, they already identified a few of them.

1
2 Then the life stage descriptions, to me, really looks like it might
3 be a carryover, or a patch over, from maybe like a salmon starter
4 or something, like they included that in the original description
5 and just carried it over to every single place they're trying to
6 get this off of, and so, if anybody sees anything on it, Sarah's
7 email is right there. If no one has any other questions, it looks
8 like we're on to public comment there, Ryan, unless you need
9 something else from us.

10
11 **MR. RINDONE:** I'm looking at Sarah.

12
13 **MS. GARDINER:** I've got no other comments on this. I think, if
14 the SSC feels that it's up to the staff's discretion to modify
15 those that they brought forward, we don't need to bring this back
16 to the SSC. If the SSC is comfortable with us making those changes
17 as suggested, we can go ahead and do that, and not bring this back
18 to the SSC. That's the only feedback I need.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** That sounds good to me. I think, if you have
21 any region-specific questions, you can reach out to individual SSC
22 members associated with those regions to probably get a good answer
23 out of them. All right, Ryan. Public comment.

24
25 **MR. RINDONE:** All right, and so, at this point in the meeting, if
26 there is anyone online that would like to give -- We don't have
27 anybody in the room, and so, if there's anyone online that would
28 like to give public comment, go ahead and raise your hands, and
29 Jess will unmute you, in order for a few minutes each to address
30 the SSC.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** We've got Jim Tolan.

33
34 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

35
36 **DR. JIM TOLAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the
37 chance to address the SSC as a public comment now, and so it's a
38 different role for me. I want to touch on just a couple of things
39 that Ryan addressed earlier, and it's the SCS8, the Boston meeting,
40 where they were really looking for some environmental impacts to
41 drive the stock assessments, and I went, and one of my last roles
42 was for as the review workshop leader, the chairman.

43
44 I had really high hopes going into that, because it was the shrimp
45 assessment, and the analysts went through a very, very different
46 modeling framework to try and incorporate a bunch of environmental
47 information, and I'll spoil the end of it, because it's going to
48 come around in hopefully the January meeting. That's kind of why

1 I'm on here today, but it was a complete bust.

2
3 We couldn't incorporate any environmental information, despite
4 what all the states all around the Gulf provided to the analysts
5 in terms of their new modeling assessment, and it was kind of
6 disappointing on my end, but the total assessment came out, and it
7 was really nice, and I'll address that come January, but it plays
8 into the SCS9 that the Gulf is going to host.

9
10 One of the sub-topics is going to be environmental drivers, and
11 this is something that the council as a whole, the Gulf Council as
12 a whole, has been really pushing for, at least for my ten years on
13 the SSC, and they would really like to see the incorporation of
14 environmental data, as it relates to stock assessment, as it
15 relates to all the things that go into stock assessment, and I
16 hope we get farther down that line.

17
18 I know Dr. Griffith is always pushing for the societal side of
19 things, but, the environmental side of things, I really had high
20 hopes going into the SEDAR 87, but it just didn't work out, and so
21 I'll close it at that, and congratulations to our new chair.
22 You're going to do a fine job. Thank you so much.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I appreciate that, Jim, and we hope to see you
25 in January. All right. Got any other raised hands? It doesn't
26 look like it. We do have an item under Other Business here of
27 Solicitation for Greater Amberjack Count SSC Reviewers. I imagine
28 maybe that's from Sean.

29
30 **MR. RINDONE:** No, and that's from me.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** That's from Ryan. All right.

33 34 **OTHER BUSINESS**

35 **SOLICITATION FOR GREATER AMBERJACK COUNT SSC REVIEWERS**

36
37 **MR. RINDONE:** It's for me to look for some people to give Sean a
38 headache. Just kidding. No, and so we have been requested by the
39 Southeast Fisheries Science Center to solicit some reviewers for
40 the Greater Amberjack Count, and that review will be held here in
41 the Gulf Council Office the last week of March. I think it's March
42 24 to the 27, and we are looking for two SSC members, and one SSC
43 member to serve as a chair, and so three total, but one of them
44 needs to serve as the chair. This is to serve as part of the peer
45 review for this project, which covers both the Gulf and the South
46 Atlantic, and so there will be South Atlantic SSC members there as
47 well.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Given David's question earlier,
2 are you looking for maybe some folks with quantitative fisheries
3 expertise, or kind of what's the look there?
4

5 **MR. RINDONE:** Quantitative fisheries expertise. You know, Sean
6 can talk more about the study, if he cares to, but this study is
7 looking at the abundance of greater amberjack across the region,
8 in both the Gulf and the South Atlantic, using novel sampling
9 techniques to try to quantify abundance and biomass, and so it
10 will be very biology heavy.
11

12 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** I see Sean has got his hand up. Go ahead,
13 Sean.
14

15 **DR. POWERS:** Yes, and so just adding on. It's in the spirit of
16 the Great Red Snapper Count, but we also have a lot of, you know,
17 tagging studies, to determine movement, and exploitation rates,
18 and we do have one socio-component that Stephen Scyphers led, and
19 built on some stuff Kai Lorenzen did earlier with some scoping,
20 but, like Ryan said, it's a fairly minor component.
21

22 A lot of the discussion, I'm sure, will be, you know, sampling,
23 statistical design, tagging, how we calculated exploitation rates,
24 all of those things, and, Ryan, there's going to be CIE reviewers,
25 South Atlantic, and then Gulf. We were supposed to give Katie and
26 John an update right after this meeting, but, obviously, that's
27 got to be postponed.
28

29 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Dr. Patterson.
30

31 **DR. PATTERSON:** I think Sean just answered my question. With the
32 Great Red Snapper Count, there was a CIE review. With the South
33 Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program population estimation study,
34 there's CIE review, and I hadn't heard whether there was going to
35 be a CIE review for the amberjack study, but I think Sean just
36 answered that.
37

38 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, there is.
39

40 **DR. PATTERSON:** Okay. Thanks.
41

42 **MR. RINDONE:** It will be -- The review team will be three CIE
43 members, two South Atlantic SSC members, two Gulf SSC members, and
44 then one Gulf SSC member to serve as the chair.
45

46 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Now we just need a few lucky volunteers. I'm
47 happy to put my name on there, but I know there's some better minds
48 for this stuff on our committee.

1
2 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. Sucker number one, Trevor Moncrief.
3
4 **DR. CHAGARIS:** Can we nominate people for this?
5
6 **MR. RINDONE:** No, and you guys are just volunteering. Dr. Neer,
7 a clarification?
8
9 **DR. NEER:** I was just going to say that you don't necessarily have
10 to have that specific expertise to serve as the chair, since the
11 chair is not a reviewer, and so, if someone is interested in
12 chairing that workshop, but doesn't feel they have the expertise
13 to dig into the details, maybe the chair is the perfect role for
14 you. Thanks.
15
16 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Sounds like a good fit for me if we can get
17 some better minds on this one, and there's one of them. Dr.
18 Chagaris, go ahead.
19
20 **DR. CHAGARIS:** I'll volunteer.
21
22 **MR. RINDONE:** One more folks, please.
23
24 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** It looks like we got Harry's hand up.
25
26 **MR. BLANCHET:** I really don't want to volunteer, but if there is
27 nobody else around.
28
29 **MR. RINDONE:** This has to be in-person, Harry.
30
31 **MR. BLANCHET:** That takes me out.
32
33 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. Harry is out. We need another one
34 in. It looks like we've got Dr. Barbieri.
35
36 **DR. BARBIERI:** Well, I would volunteer to chair the review panel,
37 if that's still needed, like Julie mentioned. Is that the case,
38 Trevor and Ryan?
39
40 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes.
41
42 **DR. BARBIERI:** Ryan, can you repeat the dates, please?
43
44 **MR. RINDONE:** March 24 to the 27, and the chair is obligated to
45 bring guava pastries for everyone who attends.
46
47 **DR. BARBIERI:** That goes without saying, yes, and Cuban coffee.
48

1 **MR. BLANCHET:** Maybe I could make that meeting. Just joking.
2
3 **DR. NEER:** Now I'm sad I won't be there.
4
5 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right, and so we've got two and a chair,
6 Ryan?
7
8 **MR. RINDONE:** We've got two and a chair. If anyone backs out,
9 Trevor is going to pick somebody out of a hat.
10
11 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** As long as it's my hat.
12
13 **MR. RINDONE:** Mr. Chair, that concludes our business.
14
15 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** All right. That concludes the Other Business.
16 I think it is time to adjourn. I appreciate everybody's time and
17 attention to the conversations. They've been good.
18
19 **DR. GRIFFITH:** Thank you, Trevor, for your leadership. I
20 appreciate it.
21
22 **CHAIRMAN MONCRIEF:** Absolutely. I guess some can call it that.
23 All right. Everybody enjoy the rest of the day.
24
25 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on October 8, 2025.)
26
27 - - -