

Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino Biloxi, Mississippi & Virtual
November 3-6, 2025

VOTING MEMBERS

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

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

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

STAFF

- Assane Diagne.....Economist
- Matt Freeman.....Economic Analyst
- John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
- Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
- Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- Anabelle Suitor.....Social Scientist
- Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

1 Billy Archer.....Panama City, FL
2 Tom Ard.....Orange Beach, AL
3 Greg Ball.....Galveston, TX
4 Susan Boggs.....Orange Beach, AL
5 B.J. Burkett.....Panama City Beach, FL
6 Rick Burris.....MS
7 Lt. Patrick Carron.....MS
8 Scott Dagget.....
9 Jason Delacruz.....FL
10 Joshua Ellender.....
11 Richard Fischer.....LA
12 Brad Gorst.....Clearwater, FL
13 Jim Green.....Destin, FL
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24 Kelia Paul.....Panama City, FL
25 Carole Neidig.....Mote Marine Lab, Sarasota, FL
26 Steven Rash.....Apalachicola, FL
27 Charlie Renier.....FL
28 Tom Roller.....SAFMC
29 Ashford Rosenberg.....Shareholders Alliance
30 Randy Schwab.....FL
31 Chance Seymour.....Biloxi, MS
32 Clarence Seymour.....Biloxi, MS
33 Mike Sullivan.....Panama City, FL
34 Maddox Trochesset.....Biloxi, FL
35 Mark Tryon.....Gulf Breeze, FL
36 Jason Underwood.....
37 Ted Venker.....CCA
38 Joel Wier.....
39 Johnny Williams.....Galveston, TX
40 Dale Woodruff.....AL
41 Bob Zales.....Panama City, FL
42 Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL
43
44

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4 November 2025 through August 2026 with the addition of C.J.
5 Sweetman to the Mackerel Committee. [The motion carried on page 7.](#)
6

7 [PAGE 26](#): Motion to direct staff to request the CCC draft a letter
8 in support of satellite-based internet service, such as Starlink,
9 technology being an approved USCG communication device. [The motion](#)
10 [carried on page 27.](#)

11
12 [PAGE 29](#): Motion in Action 1 to make Alternative 2 the preferred
13 alternative. [The motion carried on page 29.](#)
14

15 [PAGE 102](#): Motion to make Option 2 the preferred. [The motion](#)
16 [carried on page 102.](#)
17

18 [PAGE 103](#): Motion to approve Shrimp Amendment 19: Shrimp Permit
19 Moratorium and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce
20 for review and implementation and deem the codified text as
21 necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make
22 the necessary changes in the document. The council chair is given
23 the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary
24 and appropriate. [The motion carried on page 105.](#)
25

26 [PAGE 106](#): Motion to direct council staff, with assistance from
27 NMFS staff, to review and provide updated multidisciplinary
28 analyses for the minimum threshold numbers of federal Gulf Shrimp
29 commercial permits from Shrimp Amendment 17B. [The motion carried](#)
30 [on page 106.](#)
31

32 [PAGE 106](#): Motion to approve a workplan for evaluating and
33 providing shrimp bycatch methodology for finfish species in the
34 Gulf of America and to direct council staff to proceed with
35 implementation of the workplan prior to convening the shrimp
36 working group on protected resources. [The motion carried on page](#)
37 [107.](#)
38

39 [PAGE 109](#): To approve Abbreviated Framework Action: Continuation
40 of Management Measures to Reduce Reef Fish Release Mortality and
41 that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and
42 implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and
43 appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary
44 changes to the document. The council chair is given the authority
45 to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and
46 appropriate. [The motion carried on page 111.](#)
47

48 [PAGE 113](#): Motion to approve Draft Amendment 62: Modifications to

1 Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures for virtual public hearings.
2 [The motion carried on page 113.](#)

3
4 [PAGE 118](#): Motion to include Alternative A in Reef Fish Amendment
5 63 with the following changes: change Option a to 30 percent. [The](#)
6 [motion carried on page 119.](#)

7
8 [PAGE 120](#): Motion to direct staff to begin developing a document
9 that considers the following Purpose and Need statement: Purpose:
10 The purpose of this action is to establish a program structure
11 through which a Gulf state may establish a management program that
12 would provide flexibility in the management of the federally-
13 permitted vessel's harvest of red snapper for their anglers. Need:
14 The need is to reconsider the management of the federal charter-
15 for-hire harvest of red snapper within the context of the states
16 of the Gulf: to prevent overfishing while achieving, on a
17 continuing basis, the optimum yield from the harvest of red snapper
18 by the federal for-hire sector; take into account and allow for
19 variations among, and contingencies in the fisheries, fishery
20 resources, and catches; and provide fair and equitable access for
21 the sustained participation of the fishing communities of the Gulf
22 and to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts
23 on such communities. [The motion carried on page 133.](#)

24
25 [PAGE 134](#): Motion to include an action for sector separation with
26 an alternative for states that opt in to be required to maintain
27 sector separation. [The motion was withdrawn on page 138.](#)

28
29 [PAGE 146](#): Motion in Action 1.1 to make Alternative 2 the
30 preferred. [The motion carried on page 146.](#)

31
32 [PAGE 146](#): Motion to move Action 2 to Considered but Rejected.
33 [The motion carried on page 147.](#)

34
35 [PAGE 148](#): Motion in Action 3 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.
36 [The motion carried on page 148.](#)

37
38 [PAGE 150](#): Motion in Action 7.1 to make Alternative 3 the
39 preferred. [The motion carried on page 151.](#)

40
41 [PAGE 152](#): Motion in Action 7.2 to make Alternative 1 the
42 preferred. [The motion carried on page 152.](#)

43
44 - - -
45

1 The Full Council of the Gulf Council convened at the Golden Nugget
2 Hotel & Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Monday morning, November
3 3, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

4
5 **REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF PROPOSED COUNCIL COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS**
6 **NOVEMBER 2025 THROUGH AUGUST 2026 AND CURRENT COUNCIL COMMITTEE**
7 **ASSIGNMENTS**
8

9 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Okay, folks. We're going to get started, so
10 we can stay on schedule. Thank you. Good morning, and welcome to
11 Biloxi. I hope everyone had good travels. We're going to start
12 off this morning and go into Full Council session. We have a
13 couple of items we need to address. First off, I am going to hand
14 it over to Dr. Simmons.

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good
17 morning, everyone. I'm happy that we can be here and meet. I
18 know we're missing some of our federal partners, but we're going
19 to try to get as much done as we can this week, and so I'm glad
20 we're all here, other than those that can't be here, but, anyway,
21 it was a little dicey for a while, but I'm glad that we are here
22 and able to meet.

23
24 I want to introduce our new staff member, Dr. Anabelle, or Annie,
25 Suitor, our new social scientist, and so this is her second week.
26 We're ready to put her to work, and so please, when you get a
27 chance, talk to her, and introduce yourself, and we're happy to
28 have her. It took us a while to find her, and so welcome.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Welcome, Annie, and thank you. Next up, what we
31 have is the Review and Adoption of the Proposed Council Committee
32 Assignments for November 2025 through August 2026. We sent out
33 the proposed list, and there is a change that needs to be made. I
34 made a mistake and overlooked Dr. Sweetman's chosen selections for
35 the Mackerel Committee, and so I would like to add Dr. Sweetman to
36 the Mackerel Committee, and, from there, I would open the floor if
37 there's any discussion or questions. Mr. Schieble.

38
39 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** I would support that. I think it would be
40 valuable to have him on there with us as we go forward with king
41 mackerel.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Any other comments?
44 Not seeing any, and so what we'll need here is a motion to approve
45 the selections, and Bernie has helped us tee-up a motion, if a
46 council member would entertain it. Dr. Banks.

47
48 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** I'll make that motion, Bernie. **The motion is**

1 adopt the proposed council committee roster for November 2025
2 through August 2026, with the addition of C.J. Sweetman to the
3 Mackerel Committee.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the floor. Do we have
6 a second?

7
8 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Second.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have a second by General Spraggins. Is there
11 any discussion? Mr. Sanchez.

12
13 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Good morning. I just wanted to thank you for
14 accommodating my request to be on the committees that were
15 selected, and so, whoever all had their hand in that, thank you
16 very much.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir, Mr. Sanchez. Okay. **Is there any**
19 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**
20 One other -- General Spraggins.

21
22 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Before we go any further, can we -- Kevin is
23 the new director for the State of Alabama. If I took that away
24 from you, I'm sorry, but I just didn't want to leave it.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** No, and I was just going to do it at a later time,
27 but congratulations, Mr. Anson. Okay. While we're still in Full
28 Council, one more item I would like to add to the agenda for this
29 afternoon is a closed session for the council to discuss a vacant
30 seat on the Special Shrimp SSC, and so, this afternoon, council
31 members, we'll have a closed session for discussion, and, other
32 than that, we're going to move on down the agenda, and it's going
33 to be Mr. Marquez is going to lead us through Habitat.

34
35 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on November 3, 2025.)

36
37 - - -

38
39 November 5, 2025

40
41 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

42
43 - - -

44
45 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Golden
46 Nugget Hotel & Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday morning,
47 November 5, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

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

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Good morning, folks. Welcome back to the
4 great City of Biloxi. We're going to get started this morning
5 with Full Council, and so we'll start down the agenda, Call to
6 Order, Announcements, and Introductions, and we're going to follow
7 the list this morning with the supporting agencies reports, and we
8 should be somewhat back on schedule this morning and after lunch,
9 and so, with that, welcome to the 307th meeting of the Gulf Council.
10 My name is J.D. Dugas, chair of the Gulf Council.

11
12 Please place your cell phone or similar device on silent or
13 vibrating mode. For the benefit of all, we ask that private
14 conversations take place outside the meeting room. Additionally,
15 alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the meeting room.
16

17 The Gulf Council is one of eight regional councils established in
18 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, known as the
19 Magnuson-Stevens Act. Our purpose is to serve as a deliberative
20 body to advise the Secretary of Commerce on fishery management
21 measures in federal waters of the Gulf of America, ensuring
22 sustainable fishery resources that benefit the nation.
23

24 The council consists of seventeen voting members, eleven appointed
25 by the Secretary of Commerce from various Gulf regions with diverse
26 fisheries experience, plus the five state fishery managers from
27 each Gulf state and the regional manager from NOAA's Southeast
28 Fisheries Service. Several non-voting members also participate.
29

30 Public input is essential to our deliberative process. We welcome
31 both oral and written comments throughout the process. Virtual
32 attendees wishing to speak during public comment must register
33 online. In-person participants should sign in at the registration
34 kiosk in the back of the room. Only one registration per person
35 is allowed.
36

37 Public comment may conclude before the scheduled time if all
38 registered participants have spoken. This meeting is being
39 digitally recorded for the public record. As a courtesy, I ask
40 that all participants seated at the table introduce themselves,
41 beginning on my left.
42

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

45 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas Parks and Wildlife
46 Department.
47

48 **MS. BRENDA BALLARD:** Brenda Ballard, Texas.

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana.
3
4 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Billy Broussard, Louisiana.
5
6 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Joe Spraggins, Mississippi.
7
8 **MR. JOHNNY MARQUEZ:** Johnny Marquez, Mississippi.
9
10 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** Jason Osborne, Mississippi.
11
12 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries
13 Commission.
14
15 **MR. TOM ROLLER:** Tom Roller, South Atlantic liaison.
16
17 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Jackson Morton, U.S. Coast Guard.
18
19 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Anthony Overton, Alabama.
20
21 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama.
22
23 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.
24
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida.
26
27 **MR. ED WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.
28
29 **DR. MICHAEL ALLEN:** Mike Allen, Florida.
30
31 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida Fish and Wildlife
32 Conservation Commission.
33
34 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.
35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.
37

38 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
39

40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Next is the Adoption of the
41 Agenda. We need to add two items to the agenda. One would be the
42 Full Council Closed Session Committee Report, and the other will
43 be an update from Emily regarding public comment. Is there any
44 other edits to the agenda? Not seeing, can I have a motion to
45 adopt the agenda as amended? General Spraggins, and Dr. Banks
46 seconded it. Next up is Approval of the Minutes. Is there any
47 edits or changes to the minutes? Mr. Donaldson.
48

1 **MR. DONALDSON:** On page 203, line 31, I appreciate the upgrade,
2 but I'm still just a Mr., and not Dr. Donaldson, even though I did
3 stay in a Holiday Inn Express last night.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Noted. Any
6 other edits to the minutes? Seeing none, can I entertain a motion
7 to approve the minutes as edited? Dr. Banks. Mr. Anson seconds.
8 Okay. Next, I'm going to let General Spraggins say a few words
9 before we move into the supporting agencies, and first up would be
10 the South Atlantic, after General Spraggins.
11

12 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Well, first off, I want to thank you all for
13 coming last night. I hope you enjoyed the seafood. I want to
14 thank the people who put it on for us, and that was Mississippi
15 Wildlife and Fisheries Parks, and Marine Foundation. They provided
16 the alcohol and other drinks, and everything that you had last
17 night, and so, if you've got a hangover, it's their problem. All
18 right.
19

20 The French hermit oysters, how did you like the oysters on the
21 half shell, and the bake? You know, they supplied those for us,
22 and so we appreciate that. We also have -- You know, Mississippi
23 seafood is our big supporter of this. We use this to support
24 Mississippi seafood, and tell everybody how much we appreciate and
25 how much we love our seafood in Mississippi.
26

27 Our DMR cooking team, I could not tell you more about them. I
28 tell you what, and they did all the cooking for you last night,
29 and so if you -- I think you can say that the food was fantastic.
30 I think the only thing they probably didn't cook was maybe the
31 potato salad and the coleslaw and the dessert, but, other than
32 that, they took care of it, and so we appreciate them.
33

34 As far as the hats, I want you all to know that's a thing that
35 we're doing here in Mississippi, and we're doing a big push, and
36 that's Make it American again. Make seafood American. I'm tired
37 of these imports. I'm tired of the things that are happening out
38 there, and, everywhere we go, you know, we're getting more imports,
39 more imports, more imports. We want people to buy.
40

41 It's not meant to be anything political. That's why it's a blue
42 color, and everything else, and so I want you to understand that.
43 It's not meant to that at all. It's meant to tell people about
44 how we need to buy American seafood, and so thank you all for that,
45 and we appreciate you, and thank you a lot.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins, and your folks for
48 hosting the council. It was a great event. Next up, we'll move

1 to Mr. Roller with the South Atlantic for your report.

2
3 **SUPPORTING AGENCIES UPDATES**
4 **SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT**
5

6 **MR. ROLLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Tom Roller. I'm a
7 council member from North Carolina, serving in an at-large seat,
8 and I am the liaison for this meeting. You will find our report
9 in the briefing book, and I'm just going to go over it here. The
10 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met in North Charleston,
11 South Carolina on September 15th to 19th, 2025, and we're going to
12 go over the summary.

13
14 The first action was we went over the executive orders. The
15 council reviewed public input received on Executive Order 14276,
16 Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. The council solicited
17 online public comment from July 28th through August 15th, 2025, as
18 well as input from its advisory panels via virtual meeting held on
19 August 11th.

20
21 Directives in Executive Order 14276 include measures to reduce
22 regulatory burden and promote domestic fisheries. In response to
23 the EO, the council was focusing on activities that were already
24 underway, to ensure that they would be accommodated in the
25 workplan, and thus have a high chance of completion.

26
27 Actions already underway that were considered high priority were
28 removing or considering ecosystem component designation for
29 species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan; continuing
30 to work on Snapper Grouper Amendment 60, which aims to address
31 permit issues and improve commercial trip efficiency; supporting
32 the development of exempted fishing permit applications from the
33 four South Atlantic states to explore state management of the
34 recreational red snapper fishery.

35
36 The council's response will also describe how the council is
37 working to increase stakeholder engagement with the management and
38 science processes. Stakeholder input is a fundamental component
39 of the council process and critical to understanding how the
40 council can improve the competitiveness of fisheries in its
41 jurisdiction.

42
43 Other recommendations will be considered for the council's
44 response to Executive Order 14192 or for inclusion in the council's
45 workplan.

46
47 In addition, the council recommends that NOAA Fisheries prioritize
48 the following items in response to Executive Order 14276:

1 maintaining capacity for data collection, such as dockside
2 sampling and for conducting stock assessments in the South Atlantic
3 region; supporting the funding of citizen science and cooperative
4 research initiatives; eliminating the prohibition of shark fin
5 sales, due to its negative impacts on fishing businesses and
6 potential contribution to depredation; removing the requirement to
7 report discards in a commercial fishery or develop and fund a
8 discard reporting program that will meet the best scientific
9 information available standards; supporting funding for the
10 Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program, especially activities that
11 promote marketing and development, infrastructure, and capacity
12 building.

13
14 On to our Snapper Grouper committee. The first big item was the
15 state management of red snapper. The council held an informational
16 session on joint federal and state management. NOAA Fisheries
17 Southeast Regional Office and the Gulf Council addressed
18 regulatory procedures and the roles in implementing state-based
19 management of red snapper in the Gulf of America. The Florida FWC
20 provided a state perspective at a broader Atlantic viewpoint, as
21 presented by the ASMFC.

22
23 The council discussed issues to be addressed if joint state and
24 federal management of the recreational red snapper fishery is
25 considered in the South Atlantic and gave staff direction to begin
26 working on an amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP.

27
28 Each state will initially develop and submit exempted fishing
29 permit applications to NOAA Fisheries to begin exploring the
30 concept. Presentations on the state proposals are scheduled for
31 the December 2025 council meeting, when discussions of the next
32 steps will continue.

33
34 The commercial fisheries management, the council settled on
35 actions to include in Amendment 60, which focuses on improving
36 management of the commercial snapper grouper fishery. The council
37 will go over refined actions and alternatives in December 2025,
38 and a draft amendment in March 2026, when the council will consider
39 approving amendment for public hearings.

40
41 The council requested input on the draft amendment from the Law
42 Enforcement and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panels at their meetings
43 in winter and spring 2026, respectively. This included items like
44 revising our two-for-one permit, some framework for dynamic trip
45 limits, and multi-day trip limits for a subset of species, and
46 another one was gear storage requirements, specifically for
47 longline fisheries like golden tile and sharks, which you can't
48 fish in both fisheries in the same day.

1
2 Next was our innovation plan for the snapper grouper fishery. We
3 discussed a proposed framework, first introduced in June 2025, to
4 reset snapper grouper fisheries discussion and make progress
5 towards innovative actions that improve the overall fishery. The
6 framework is built around establishing goalposts that describe
7 overarching fisheries objectives and aims to guide individual
8 decisions in agreeing to principles and facts to avoid repetitive
9 discussions. The council intends to develop a series of short,
10 medium, and long-term actions that are achievable, given the
11 current science and regulatory challenges.

12
13 During this meeting, the council members brainstormed ideas for
14 goalposts and principles, followed by discussion and grouping of
15 activities.

16
17 At the December 2025 meeting, the council will continue to develop
18 an innovation plan by reviewing and discussing the identified
19 priorities. I'll add that we did this through a large workshop of
20 brainstorming activities, and we have a really good report in our
21 own briefing book that would be worth looking at.

22
23 Snapper grouper fisheries management unit revision, which has been
24 a big conversation lately, through the development of Amendment
25 61, the council has identified seventeen species to examine more
26 in-depth to determine whether the species should be removed from
27 the FMU or designated as ecosystem component species.

28
29 The species are misty grouper, margate, sailor's choice, tomtate,
30 white grunt, bar jack, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye
31 porgy, scup, whitebone porgy, banded rudderfish, blackfin snapper,
32 cubera snapper, queen snapper, Atlantic spadefish, and sand
33 tilefish, and we approved this amendment for scoping.

34
35 The next amendment was black sea bass. The council continued work
36 on Regulatory Amendment 37 to quickly implement measures to address
37 the continuing decline in the abundance of black sea bass in the
38 South Atlantic. Additional actions will be considered through
39 Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper FMP.

40
41 Regulatory Amendment 37 proposes to establish recreational and
42 commercial annual catch targets equal to 50 percent of the average
43 landings from 2019 through 2023. The council would reconsider the
44 ACTs and associated measures two years after implementation.
45 Additionally, the council has considered changing minimum size
46 limits, reducing the recreational bag limit, and implementing a
47 spawning season closure of at least two months for both the
48 commercial and recreational sectors. Virtual public hearings for

1 Regulatory Amendment 37 will be held prior to the council's
2 December meeting.

3
4 On yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, the council discussed
5 Joint Snapper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55, which is being
6 developed in response to recent stock assessments for both species.
7 Neither species has overfished or experiencing overfishing.

8
9 For each species, the amendment will adopt recommended catch
10 levels, establish the apportionment of the ABC between Gulf and
11 South Atlantic Councils, establish ACLs, and establish sector
12 allocations for the South Atlantic. The Gulf Council is the
13 administrative lead for this amendment.

14
15 Atlantic blueline tilefish, following the March 2025 stock
16 assessment for Atlantic blueline tilefish, SEDAR 92, the council's
17 SSC recommended an ABC level that would allow an increase in
18 harvest. The assessment addressed the stock of blueline tilefish
19 that spans the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management
20 Councils jurisdictions.

21
22 To implement new catch limits for the 2026 fishing season, the
23 council is preparing an abbreviated framework, Amendment 5, to
24 adopt the recommended ABC to establish a total annual catch limit.
25 Jurisdictional allocations and other management measures will be
26 addressed in a future amendment. A public hearing will be held at
27 the council's December 2025 meeting in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

28
29 This framework is being pursued simply because we have more fish
30 to put on the table, and our council really wanted to get that to
31 the fishermen as soon as possible.

32
33 Now on to coral and shrimp, and the council approved completing a
34 joint amendment to the Coral and Shrimp FMPs that proposes
35 establishing a shrimp fisheries access area for the rock shrimp
36 fishery along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the
37 Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

38
39 The council addressed additional information included in the
40 amendment and provided rationale for how the proposed action meets
41 the objectives of each FMP. The amendment will be considered for
42 its final approval at the council's December 2025 meeting. With
43 that, I'm happy to take any questions, but I conclude my report.
44 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Roller, for your report. Do we
47 have any questions for Mr. Roller? Captain Walker.

48

1 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Tom. I don't want to put you on the spot.
2 Do you remember the discussion on your bullet point that you sent
3 in the EO letter about removing the requirement to report discards
4 in a commercial fishery or develop and fund a discard reporting
5 program? Do you remember that discussion at all?
6

7 **MR. ROLLER:** Vaguely, and I think the point of that was, while we
8 have discard estimates, they're not really usable, and so the
9 question is how can they be usable for management purposes, and
10 that's something that fishermen have brought up.
11

12 **MR. WALKER:** Also, we also, and I don't know if you're aware of
13 it, but we also had about re-evaluate the shark finning ban in our
14 letter as well, and so I'm glad to see you guys did, too.
15

16 **MR. ROLLER:** I should also add we had a lot of discussions regarding
17 the use of Starlink for -- You know, as you did here, and our
18 council has done the same thing.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Roller?
21 Not seeing any, thank you, Mr. Roller. I'll add, in your report,
22 I'm happy to see that your states are moving towards a state
23 management program.
24

25 I think it's the right time to do so, and, also, I would like to
26 just give a shoutout to Chris, because I think he was pretty much
27 involved in helping that path forward, but it's good to see you
28 guys moving in that direction. Thank you. Next up is Lt. Carron
29 with Mississippi Law Enforcement.
30

31 **MISSISSIPPI LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

32

33 **LT. PATRICK CARRON:** Good morning. I'm Lieutenant Patrick Carron,
34 with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Thank you
35 for having me this morning. We have a brief update on our JEA
36 efforts. Our contract hours were similar to the amount last year.
37

38 With turtle excluder devices, we've been tasked with 476 at-sea
39 hours and sixty dockside patrol hours. With recreational reef
40 fish, we've been tasked with 220 at-sea patrol hours and eighty
41 dockside patrol hours.
42

43 With individual fishing quota, we've been tasked with ninety-five
44 dockside hours. With Lacey Act and IUU fishing, we've been tasked
45 with 150 hours of dockside patrols, and, for general enforcement,
46 we've been tasked with 560 hours of at-sea patrols and 150 hours
47 of dockside patrols, and that concludes our JEA tasking. Does
48 anyone have any questions?

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lieutenant Carron. We have a question
3 from Mr. Schieble.
4
5 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Good morning. Thank you for the report. Real
6 quick, so, in Louisiana, we've had some cases of illegal fishing
7 charters that our enforcement has made over the past year. Have
8 you seen any of those or an increase in those in your waters at
9 all?
10
11 **LT. CARRON:** We've had several instances of it. We've received
12 numerous complaints. I believe we've only had one or two cases
13 that have actually been sustained, that have resulted in criminal
14 charges.
15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Lieutenant
17 Carron? General Spraggins.
18
19 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and just, if you can, I know we do a great
20 job checking snapper, and what is our numbers, 95 percent, or 98
21 percent, that we are checking that are in compliance?
22
23 **LT. CARRON:** Our compliance with Tails 'n Scales?
24
25 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes.
26
27 **LT. CARRON:** Yes, sir, and I believe that's correct. We've done
28 a tremendous job, the officers have, at doing the intercepts to
29 verify the compliance.
30
31 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** We're running, what, around 10 percent to 12
32 percent that we're checking?
33
34 **LT. CARRON:** Yes, sir, and I believe it's actually slightly higher
35 than that. The last numbers I saw were somewhere around 15
36 percent.
37
38 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Which is a lot, you know, when you think of
39 the number of trips, that we're checking that many, and so we are
40 getting in compliance, and we thank you all for everything you all
41 do. We appreciate you.
42
43 **LT. CARRON:** Yes, sir. Thank you. It's a tremendous effort from
44 the officers. Thank you.
45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lieutenant Carron. Next up is Mr.
47 Donaldson with the Gulf States report.
48

1 years ago, and it's intended to traverse the permitting process
2 for finfish aquaculture and test the Aquafort technology in the
3 Gulf and in state waters. The site is two miles off the beach,
4 south of Fort Morgan in Alabama, and it will include two twenty-
5 by-twenty-foot nets that extend down fifteen feet.

6
7 It has taken about two or three years to get all the permits, but,
8 earlier this year, all the permits were received, and we are
9 actually now starting to work on building the actual structure,
10 and deploying it, and so the structure is currently at the Dauphin
11 Island Lab, along with the netting.

12
13 It was received a couple of weeks ago. They're currently
14 assembling, and I believe -- I talked with Steve yesterday, and I
15 believe that they're actually completed with the assembly, and
16 they're planning to take it offshore, where they can install the
17 nets, and get it in the water, and ready to receive the animals,
18 and the plan is to hopefully put the animals in in early December.

19
20 We'll be using red drum for the finfish, eastern oyster for the
21 oysters, and then a Gracilaria species for the seaweed. The plan
22 is to harvest just prior to the hurricane season, and then the
23 structure will be towed back to shore, and then redeployed next
24 November, and I believe, with that, I will answer any questions,
25 Mr. Chairman.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson, for your report. Do we
28 have any questions for Mr. Donaldson? Mr. Geeslin, and then Mr.
29 Sanchez.

30
31 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thanks for your report, Dave. I was kind of hoping
32 we would hear a little bit about this camera study that I believe
33 the State of Texas, and, Kevin, I'm looking for a head nod from
34 you from Alabama, between -- I think our partners are Mote Marine
35 Lab, the camera folks, and Environmental Defense Fund. In a
36 nutshell, Dave, do I have that right?

37
38 They're coordinating with us, NOAA, the Office of Science and
39 Technology, putting cameras at specific high-use Gulf passes and
40 inlets, to really help us either validate or look at and complement
41 effort estimates throughout those passes. Do I got that right?

42
43 **MR. DONALDSON:** Yes. That's correct, and that's one of the seven
44 projects that were funded under the red snapper research, and, as
45 I mentioned, we're hoping to start in January and it may be a
46 little later, but, right now, those -- They have been selected,
47 but we haven't started work on those yet. We've been waiting for
48 the government to reopen so we can begin those.

1
2 My plan is -- I believe those are -- They're a year to two-year
3 projects, and they vary by the project, but hopefully next year,
4 or the following year, have a more in-depth presentation on some
5 of the results of those.

6
7 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes, and it's probably premature on my part to bring
8 that up, and you're exactly right, Dave. I think they're hoping
9 to kick off in January. I know I've got a meeting scheduled with
10 the Mote Marine Lab folks sometime in December to get the
11 groundwork going for that, but thanks for that.

12
13 **MR. DONALDSON:** But it's exciting to look at some alternative
14 methods for getting recreational fishing effort, and that was kind
15 of the purpose of those. We did two workshops, if you recall, on
16 looking at effort estimates as well as discard.

17
18 **MR. GEESLIN:** Agreed. We're excited about that, looking at some
19 innovative technologies to put some pieces of the puzzle together.
20 Thank you.

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

23
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just had a question. Of
25 the six or seven new hires that are going to Galveston and Panama
26 City, I think, do you have any idea how many are going to where
27 yet, or is that still up in the air?

28
29 **MR. DONALDSON:** I believe they're going to be -- When I put this
30 presentation together, we weren't sure if it was going to be six
31 or seven. It's going to be six, and they'll be three in each area,
32 and the whole reason for us getting involved is, on the west coast,
33 the Pacific Commission provides a similar role for the observer
34 program, but, in the Gulf, they had the same contractor hiring and
35 deploying the observers as well as doing the QA/QC.

36
37 The OIG found that that was kind of a conflict of interest, and we
38 were approached by NOAA Fisheries if we would be interested to do
39 a similar activity in the Gulf, and so these people are already
40 well-versed in the job, and we're essentially going to hire them
41 from the contractor, so they know what's going on, and so we won't
42 miss any -- There won't be any lag in terms of gearing up or
43 anything, but, yes, it will be three, I believe.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Donaldson?
46 Dr. Simmons.

47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dave, thank

1 you for the presentation, and I just had a couple quick questions
2 on the observer program you mentioned in the presentation, and you
3 could have said this and I missed it.

4
5 As your staff and personnel are taking over this program, are you
6 also going to assist with making changes, potential improvements,
7 to those various fisheries that the observers are covering, and
8 change some of the methodology, as you alluded to, to get at some
9 of your state stock assessments, or would you just take the current
10 framework and run with what's already been done in recent times?

11
12 **MR. DONALDSON:** So, initially, we're just going to take over what
13 has currently been going on, but, talking with the Galveston Lab
14 personnel, they're very interested in ways to improve the program,
15 make the data more useful, and so he's very interested in getting
16 input from the states, and so that's -- Ultimately, hopefully we
17 can suggest some changes, and some improvements, maybe some
18 expansion. Obviously, it's all dependent on available resources
19 and whatnot, but that's ultimately the goal, is to provide some
20 improvements.

21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Great. Thank you. Just, if
23 it's appropriate, I mean, I think it might be helpful if we could
24 have a council staff member involved in that process, if they are
25 in fact looking at revamping it, because we know many of our staff
26 are attending those assessments, and the data workshops, and are
27 very familiar with those gaps, and so I think we could help, if
28 that is possible in the future, if that program is actually going
29 to make some changes.

30
31 **MR. DONALDSON:** So it would be envisioned that the GulfFIN
32 Committee would be the ones that would be providing input, and Dr.
33 Hollensead is a member of that committee, and would be able to
34 provide input and so, yes, absolutely.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. No other
37 questions? Not seeing any, okay, and we'll move on to Lt. Morton
38 with the Coast Guard.

39
40 **U.S. COAST GUARD**

41
42 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. I'm
43 Lt. Jackson Morton. I'm the Living Marine Resources Officer at
44 the Coast Guard's Heartland District.

45
46 Starting off with the Exclusive Economic Zone enforcement,
47 specifically foreign fishing vessel encroachment into our EEZ, and
48 so we wrapped up the 2025 fiscal year. We finished off with forty-

1 seven total interdictions, and we were able to recover 15,859
2 pounds of red snapper.

3
4 Since the beginning of the calendar year, we've shifted a lot of
5 priority, and made a lot of allocations to our surface assets, to
6 kind of go down over there to south Texas and kind of make this
7 mission, and hit it really hard, and then, combined with
8 prosecution under the Lacey Act, we've seen a lot of decrease in
9 the number of detection that we've seen from the lanchas. You
10 know, can't really say if there's a causal relationship there, but
11 there's certainly a correlation.

12
13 Some of the good cases that we've had so far this year, six total
14 cases have been referred for prosecution under the Lacey Act.
15 That's five from the Coast Guard and one from Customs and Border
16 Patrol Air and Marine Operations. The biggest highlight of the
17 year was we actually got three cases that night. From the Coast
18 Guard, on 13 June, Station South Padre Island and Coast Guard
19 Cutter Daniel Tarr interdicted one lancha each, eight total
20 personnel, and then recovered 1,134 pounds of red snapper. All
21 eight of those people recovered from the Coast Guard were referred
22 for prosecution.

23
24 AMO also was there and was able to get another one. Five of those
25 people were also referred, and there's actually an error on the
26 slide on the last bullet point there, but we've referred twenty-
27 four individuals for prosecution, and eleven thus far have pled
28 guilty.

29
30 Just some photos from some of the cases we've had throughout the
31 year. The top-left there is pretty standard lancha outfit, three
32 to four people, generally, and I like this picture because it kind
33 of highlights that this illegal fishery is prosecuted all times of
34 the day, and not just at night, and so you can see they're in broad
35 daylight when we were able to interdict these guys. The top-
36 right, you can see one of the hulls and some red snapper laid out
37 on the pier there at Station South Padre Island.

38
39 The bottom-left is a picture of some gear and some snappers that
40 were recovered, and then, the bottom-right, that's kind of your
41 typical lancha outfit, how they're loaded down. Luckily, we were
42 able to recover this lancha with the gear still onboard, and so
43 that gear is not floating out there anymore, which is always a
44 good thing for us, but you can kind of see these things are loaded
45 down, and that's some of the longline gear that they're using.

46
47 Switching over to our domestic fisheries enforcement, with the
48 increase in the lancha mission, we only have limited assets, and

1 so that decreased our total number of hours dedicated for domestic
2 fisheries, and, because of that, we didn't have as many boardings
3 as we had last year. It was still almost 500, and we ended up
4 with 487, and then, again, like last year, nine cases resulted in
5 significant violations.

6
7 The most common violations we saw throughout the year were mainly
8 from ESA, and so turtle excluder devices, net violations, and we
9 also saw some violations when it comes to the bycatch reduction
10 and violations.

11
12 Then, to finish out the year for our marine protected resources,
13 and that's sea turtles, mammal entanglements, things of that
14 nature, we only had the one for the year, and that happened back
15 in January. It was a cold stun from some turtles down there in
16 Texas. We're still able and willing to help out when we get the
17 call, but just one for the year 2025, and then that is the end of
18 the presentation. If there's any questions, we would love to have
19 them.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton, for your report. Do we
22 have any questions for Lt. Morton? Mr. Strelcheck.

23
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Lt. Morton and I discussed this a little bit
25 earlier this week, but if you could just give a brief update on
26 Starlink and what we discussed.

27
28 **LT. MORTON:** Thanks for the question, Mr. Strelcheck. I gave a
29 presentation, myself and some colleagues, up at Coast Guard
30 Headquarters about Starlink at the last council meeting. The Coast
31 Guard did respond back with an official letter to the council, and
32 I'm pretty sure everyone has seen that at this point.

33
34 I have it up, if it's worth reading. If not, I'll just give the
35 highlights, but, essentially, it says the Coast Guard is still
36 looking into the issue. The efforts that everyone has made to
37 kind of bring it forward, to light, we really appreciate that, and
38 sharing those on-the-water experiences are very helpful in
39 determining applicability of different systems and what have you.

40
41 At this time, Coast Guard is still not considering Starlink to be
42 suitable to meet their communication equipment carriage
43 requirements, but we're working with Starlink itself, as well as
44 the FCC, with those technical specifications, to see what we can
45 do and move forward. Other than that, I have no further update.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

1 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Do you have any idea how long it would take to get
2 involved in the technical specifications and be able to let us
3 know if Starlink is going to be a candidate? I mean, there's an
4 obvious strong interest from everybody. Thank you.

5
6 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez, and so we're kind of dealing
7 with two separate agencies at this point, right, and so the Coast
8 Guard -- We handle the carriage requirements for the safety portion
9 of it, and I think FCC is the lead agency when it comes to the
10 nitty-gritty, if you will, when it comes to the technical
11 specifications and what exactly they all need to meet from that
12 side, and I would be -- I would not be able to tell you exactly
13 how long that process is going to be, or even tell you -- That's
14 way above my head with the scientific aspects of that, but, yes,
15 I think -- You know, talking with them, it's not just a commercial
16 fishing vessel issue, and it's not just here on the Gulf. It's,
17 you know, all parts of the marine transportation system, and
18 countrywide, and so I think -- You know, like I said, we really
19 appreciate everyone's, you know, passion for this, and, you know,
20 we're working to try to find a solution, but, at this time, we do
21 not consider Starlink to meet the requirements.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton. Do we have any other
24 questions? Captain Frady.

25
26 **MR. FRADY:** Lieutenant, thank you so much for that, and thank you
27 for your continued support in trying to get Starlink in use. The
28 one thing a lot of people don't know is, if you ever get in trouble
29 offshore, and you're able to raise the Coast Guard on Channel 16,
30 or whatever that is, the first thing the Coast Guard asks you to
31 do is give them a phone call from a telephone, and so if you could
32 relay that to them, that they're the people that say, well, give
33 us a phone call when you get to a telephone, and so Starlink
34 provides telephone access, and so it would be so helpful if someone
35 higher up knew that, that that's one thing that they would ask you
36 to do, is call them. Thank you.

37
38 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Frady, and that's a great point. I
39 think, you know, we're saying that it's not able to replace the
40 existing requirements, but, of course, if you have it to use on
41 your vessel in an emergency situation, please use all available
42 resources, you know. It's a matter of life and death out there.
43 I would, you know, be throwing everything at the wall, and see
44 what sticks, but thank you.

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

47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so there

1 seems to be a lot of confusion around this still, and I don't know
2 if it's possible, but if you all could produce some type of public
3 statement, or press release, that explains, you know, that you're
4 in the process of this, but it's not an approved device.

5
6 I mean, we've had folks come to the table and asking these
7 questions, and, when they show up, and they don't have that, and
8 the observers can't go out, I think they have a period of time to
9 meet those requirements, and then, if they don't, then they can
10 get a violation for that, and so is there something like that that
11 could be done that we could push out to our constituents after you
12 guys develop it?

13
14 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I think that's certainly
15 something that we can request and try to see if we can provide for
16 you all.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have another one from Captain Walker.

19
20 **MR. WALKER:** While we're on the topic, it wasn't clear to me, in
21 the letter that we got from the Coast Guard, who we should talk to
22 next. It sounded like they were like it's not up to us, and it's
23 up to the FCC, but I haven't heard of anybody at FCC directly that
24 we can say, hey, can we poke this a little bit, and there's
25 thousands of people waiting on something, and it's not really that
26 clear to me. Is it FCC, or is it Coast Guard, or you're not sure?

27
28 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Captain Walker, and I think -- The FCC,
29 they have the -- They produce the regulations on the technical
30 aspects, and so like this unit needs to meet whatever it is that
31 they can certify that this is, you know, good for emergency
32 situations, and then at which point the Coast Guard come back and
33 say, hey, we incorporated what they put in their regulations into
34 our carriage requirements, and so I do not have a specific contact
35 within the FCC for folks to contact, but, you know, I would
36 encourage everyone who is, you know, still trying to get this thing
37 pushed across the goal line to keep digging.

38
39 I know it's difficult to get in touch with Starlink, and then who
40 knows who at the FCC is the right people to contact, and so we can
41 keep working together to try to find a solution to this issue.
42 Thank you.

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, sir.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Do we have any other questions for Lt.
47 Morton? Not seeing any, thank you, Lt. Morton. Okay. Moving on
48 down the agenda, I would like to -- I'm going to go through the

1 closed session report, and then it will be followed by the Habitat
2 Committee. Mr. Sanchez.

3
4 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Sorry to interrupt Before we leave the Starlink,
5 would it be appropriate for -- If there's, you know, some desire
6 here from, from us as the council, to, A, find out who at the FCC
7 we need to contact and write them a letter on behalf of the council
8 saying that, hey, we would like this to be expedited as quick as
9 possible, and there's a tremendous interest in this, so that we -
10 - Let's get this moving a little bit. I would like to see if
11 anybody has an appetite for that.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker, did you have your hand up?

14
15 **MR. WALKER:** I would just give my support for the concept. Sure.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other council members? Any objection
18 to writing a letter? Mr. Anson.

19
20 **MR. ANSON:** No objection. I'm just wondering, since it is an issue
21 that the South Atlantic is dealing with, is maybe a joint letter,
22 potentially.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Captain Walker.

25
26 **MR. WALKER:** So, along those same lines, it was mentioned to me
27 that perhaps we could have all the regional councils in the country
28 write in, the CCC it's called, which would represent millions of
29 people, I think, and say we all would like to see some action on
30 this, while our guys are banned from working, essentially, because
31 of a delay in technology understanding.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, you wanted to chime in? No?
34 Okay. Captain Frady.

35
36 **MR. FRADY:** I just want to remind everybody that vessels, overload
37 vessels, that are inspected by the Coast Guard that go beyond
38 twenty nautical miles offshore are required to have a single
39 sideband, and, to my knowledge, the single sideband radio is like
40 a ham radio. It's not even monitored by anyone, and so it would
41 be wise if we got away from having the requirement to have a single
42 sideband, and no one listens to it, and to upgrade the technology.
43 Thank you.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. Lt. Morton.

46
47 **LT. MORTON:** Thanks for the comment, Captain Frady. I just want
48 to point out that certain single sideband frequencies are monitored

1 by the Coast Guard, specifically like the digital selective calling
2 and things like that. Just press the SOS button, and we do get
3 the ping on it. It is true that some of the voice channels aren't
4 monitored in most of the United States. There's some places that's
5 the only available, and so there's people -- But your single
6 sideband still does work. We do get pings on those, and we do get
7 positions and things of that nature.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and so, Dr. Simmons, chime in if you want,
10 but we're going to need a motion from Mr. Sanchez to proceed.

11
12 **MR. SANCHEZ:** All right. Help me, please.

13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I was thinking perhaps two separate
15 motions. Let me just talk through it and see if that makes sense.
16 One, that we would ask -- Since the CCC did not meet this fall, we
17 could ask that the executive directors consider this and be willing
18 to talk to their chairs and sign this letter, and so we can make
19 that one motion, and then perhaps a second motion regarding the
20 FCC.

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

23
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** You help me craft them, and put them up there, and
25 let's do it.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Direct staff to request the CCC draft a letter in
28 support of Starlink technology being approved communication
29 device, and we can wordsmith it. It's just -- By the U.S. Coast
30 Guard. Mr. Sanchez, or Mr. Walker, or Captain Frady, anyone want
31 to add to or -- Feel free. Dr. Froeschke.

32
33 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Well, the only thing I remember before, when
34 we talked about that, is since the Starlink is more of a
35 technology, and it's like a Wi-Fi, and it's not a device, and so
36 I don't know, and so we might need to think about -- I would just
37 be concerned they just would write back and say it's not a device.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

40
41 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and so we would be using our phone. We're not
42 calling on the -- Via Starlink is the pipeline, but we would
43 actually been using our phone to call, most of the time, and I
44 guess you could use anything, but --

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Lt. Morton.

47
48 **LT. MORTON:** If it may help, the Coast Guard refers to the

1 technology aspect of it as satellite-based internet service, and
2 then Starlink is just the brand. I don't know if that would help
3 with writing the motion, but that's what we refer to it in our
4 official letter.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

7
8 **MR. WALKER:** So maybe we could word it as "satellite-based internet
9 service, such as Starlink", so we have both of them in there. I
10 don't know that there are other ones, and I wouldn't want to open
11 it up too big, but, if that's the terminology that they're going
12 with, we should probably include that.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and Dr. Simmons agrees that this will work.
15 Mr. Sanchez, is this your motion? Do you want to read it into the
16 record?

17
18 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, sir. **Motion to direct staff to request the CCC**
19 **draft the letter in support of satellite-based internet service,**
20 **such as Starlink technology, being an approved U.S. Coast Guard**
21 **communications service.**

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Do we have a second. Captain Walker
24 seconded. Is there any further discussion on the motion? **Is there**
25 **any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.**

26
27 Bear with us for a second to see if we need another motion. Okay,
28 and we think this is going to fly. This is okay, unless Mr.
29 Sanchez or Captain Walker think differently, and not on this
30 motion, but another motion. We're good, if you all are good.

31
32 **MR. WALKER:** I guess this just leaves it to staff. We don't
33 actually say to the FCC in that. Well, I get the motion has
34 already carried, but I think we're not really sure who we're
35 sending this to yet, right? We don't say who we're sending this
36 to, and it just says draft a letter, and so maybe we need to -- I
37 don't know who it is we're sending it to either, but we'll have to
38 figure that out, and maybe include it.

39
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, my understanding was this
41 would be to the U.S. Coast Guard, again, on behalf of all the
42 councils requesting this. That's not the intent?

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** Well, the letter that they sent to us said it's not
45 them, and it's the FCC, and so, another letter to the Coast Guard,
46 I don't see that doing any good, if they're just saying it's not
47 us, and so maybe both.

48

1 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I agree. What I heard is that it's the FCC and their
2 specification in getting this on board, and so let's go ahead and,
3 you know, identify everybody that needs to hear that we feel
4 strongly about this.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke.

7
8 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I was just looking at the letter, and, in one of
9 the parts, it says the FCC has not yet developed technical
10 specifications for satellite-based internet that meet the
11 requirements set forth in the 47 CFR Part 80, blah, blah, blah.
12 Do we want to add something in there that we request that they
13 develop those technical specifications? Did you want me to say
14 more words?

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Say it again, Dr. Froeschke.

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we
19 have a plan, and I think we can draft something, and have you guys
20 look at it, and maybe send a draft to Lt. Morton to take a look
21 at, and then we can send it on, if the other councils agree.

22
23 **FULL COUNCIL CLOSED SESSION REPORT**

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Everyone is good? Okay. We'll move on to
26 the Full Council closed session. It's Tab G. This was on November
27 3rd, and let's see. The Full Council was convened in a closed
28 session on the afternoon of November 3rd to discuss the membership
29 of the Special Shrimp Scientific and Statistical Committee. Konnor
30 Lockfield was appointed to serve on the Special Shrimp SSC, and
31 this concludes my report. Next, we'll have Mr. Marquez's report
32 for Habitat Committee.

33
34 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

35 **HABITAT PROTECTION & RESTORATION COMMITTEE REPORT**

36
37 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to give the
38 report for the Habitat Protection and Restoration Committee. The
39 committee adopted the agenda, which can be found at Tab B, Number
40 2, and the minutes, which were found at Tab B, Number 2, from the
41 November 2024 meeting, which were approved as written.

42
43 The council is developing Generic Amendment 5 for essential fish
44 habitat as part of the 2025 EFH five-year review, as required under
45 the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Act. Council staff
46 presented a summary of the revised EFH text and associated maps
47 for reef fish, coastal migratory pelagics, red drum, spiny lobster,
48 and shrimp species and the associated EFH web application.

1
2 Following council review of the EFH text and map descriptions,
3 council staff will compile the remaining components of the EFH
4 five-year review and bring it back to the council to finalize the
5 amendment. This process and resulting document will concurrently
6 meet the requirements of the EFH five-year review process.

7
8 A council member inquired on suggested habitat type for adult gag
9 grouper off the coast of Louisiana. Council staff clarified the
10 EFH maps provided are not visual depictions of distributions for
11 species by life stage, but rather display known habitat linkages
12 for each species and life stage and are consistent with Level 1
13 information, as defined in the document. The EFH textual
14 identification provides the legal definition by species life stage
15 to be used in the consultation process.

16
17 Additionally, a committee member suggested that having literature
18 citations and potential full text papers accessible for stock
19 assessment authors during the assessment process would be
20 beneficial. The committee agreed with the proposed SSC
21 recommendations to be included in the final document.

22
23 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1 to make**
24 **Alternative 2 the preferred alternative, and I would like to read**
25 **that alternative. Alternative 2 states: Updated essential fish**
26 **habitat identification and descriptions and habitat attribute**
27 **tables for the Shrimp, Reef Fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, Spiny**
28 **Lobster, and Red Drum Fishery Management Plans to include primary**
29 **research and technical literature sources through 2024. This**
30 **alternative could be used for all managed species for every life**
31 **stage, as data are available. The motion carried without**
32 **opposition.**

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marquez. We have a committee
35 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
36 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? The motion**
37 **carries.** Mr. Marquez.

38
39 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This concludes my report.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marquez. We'll move on down the
42 list to the Ecosystem Committee Report. Mr. Anson.

43
44 **ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE REPORT**

45
46 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Ecosystem Committee convened
47 on November 3rd. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab Q, Number
48 1 and the minutes, Tab Q, Number 2, from the June 2025 meeting

1 were approved as written.

2
3 Draft Fishery Ecosystem Plan, Tab Q, Numbers 4(a) through (b),
4 staff reviewed the draft Gulf fishery ecosystem plan, which is a
5 non-regulatory document to guide the use of ecosystem information
6 in Gulf fisheries management. The committee discussed the mission
7 statement of the fishery ecosystem plan and whether it should be
8 revised to state the council's goal to be responsive and proactive
9 to ecosystem concerns, in addition to the goal of maintaining long-
10 term sustainability of Gulf resources.

11
12 A committee member contributed that this mission statement's goal
13 to provide a structured process for integrating ecosystem science
14 into decision-making processes likely encompass the short-term
15 goals of responsiveness.

16
17 Committee members discussed the fishery ecosystem issue process
18 and procedures. A committee member inquired whether the council
19 could recommend a fishery ecosystem issue directly or whether
20 Ecosystem Technical Committee (ETC) approval of prospective
21 fishery ecosystem issues would be required.

22
23 Staff responded that ETC approval was intended for stakeholder-
24 recommended fishery ecosystem issues, largely to ensure that
25 recommended issues fall within the council's purview.

26
27 A committee member asked for clarification on when council
28 selection and initiation of a fishery ecosystem issue occurred
29 within the fishery ecosystem issue loop process. Staff responded
30 that council selection and initiation of a fishery ecosystem issue
31 would be required before the first step of the fishery ecosystem
32 issue loop can begin. A committee member stressed the need for
33 interagency communication for issues, such as water quality, that
34 are outside of the council's jurisdiction.

35
36 Next, the committee discussed the fishery ecosystem plan
37 communication strategy, and a committee member expressed the need
38 for these efforts to highlight previous council successes in
39 incorporating ecosystem information into Gulf fisheries
40 management, for example red tide episodic mortality in red grouper
41 stock assessments.

42
43 A committee member inquired about the ongoing red tide pilot
44 fishery ecosystem issue and asked whether other measures were
45 possible beyond incorporating red tide into stock assessments.
46 Staff responded that some potential non-regulatory outcomes of the
47 red tide fishery ecosystem issue could be improved communication
48 of the effects of incorporating red tide episodic mortality in

1 stock assessments to impacted stock stakeholders and improved
2 understanding of the biological response and resilience of red
3 grouper to red tide to inform council decision-making.

4
5 A committee member contributed that improved information on the
6 underlying causes of changes to patterns of fish distribution,
7 such as for king mackerel, could aid the council in proactive
8 informed decision-making. Other business, no other business came
9 before the committee. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Is there anything that
12 needs to be brought up for the Ecosystem Committee? Not seeing
13 anything, okay, and so, moving on to the last item that I think we
14 can tackle before lunch, it would be the added agenda item, which
15 is Emily.

16
17 I brought this up, and had a discussion with Emily and Dr. Simmons,
18 and asked Emily to give us a little more insight on -- Yesterday
19 morning, at 9:30, she sent us an email with a link, and it's for
20 comments related to the charter-for-hire red snapper discussion
21 we're having, and I noticed it was a live document, and I spoke
22 with some council members that didn't realize it was a live
23 document, and you had to keep going back and looking at it to get
24 updated comments, and so I asked Emily to give us a little more
25 information on that this morning, and so, Emily.

26
27 **UPDATE ON PUBLIC COMMENT**

28
29 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so what I'm going
30 to do right now is sort of give you a general -- Drive you generally
31 through how we handle public comments, create those public comment
32 records, and how you can access them, either as council members or
33 members of the public that are listening in today, because it's
34 really important to understand how we keep those comments, and
35 where we keep those comments, so that you can stay like completely
36 up-to-date, by the minute, in real time on receiving our public
37 comments.

38
39 The reason this came about is because, typically in our process,
40 we don't create a standalone comment form for an issue until it
41 becomes a council document. Once you guys initiate work on a
42 document, we will develop a comment form that is specific to that
43 document and create a public comment record for it.

44
45 Now, the other day, or I guess in the last week, we've gotten a
46 number of comments about the red snapper charter-for-hire state
47 management discussion, and, since this isn't a document yet,
48 typically what we do is we put all of those comments into the

1 general comment box. Now, those general comments are linked in
2 the meeting materials for each meeting. They're also online, but,
3 at this point, for this specific issue, we decided that it was
4 probably time for us to create a standalone box, since we were
5 getting quite a few.

6
7 I will show you. If you're on our website, a couple of things
8 that you need to know. The first thing is, if you look at this
9 fisheries management tab, and you navigate to amendments under
10 development, what you'll see is, if you want, you can sort by where
11 we are in the management process, or you can simply come down, and
12 you'll see a list of all of the items that the council is currently
13 working on.

14
15 Now, I think the most relevant one right now is the one I just
16 discussed, which is this red snapper charter-for-hire state
17 management discussion. Again, it's not a document yet, which is
18 why we don't have it named. but what you'll see is, when you click
19 on that, there is a link to submit comments, and, as a member of
20 the public, you can just go to this link, and it will let you
21 submit your comments, and they'll populate into the comment record.

22
23 Now, as a council member, what I would encourage you guys to do is
24 look around on this page of amendments under development, and each
25 one of the documents is going to have a read comment link. What's
26 really cool about this read comment link is, if I were to create
27 a public comment right now, and hit enter to submit it, it would
28 automatically populate on this, and so it is a real-time record of
29 the public comments.

30
31 Now, you'll see, if you look on the date here, that, as of
32 yesterday, we have almost fifty comments that have come in about
33 this specific issue, and that all happened -- Some of it was
34 previous to your committee discussion, but a lot of it happened
35 during and after your discussion, and so I just want to bring that
36 to your attention. If you're sort of looking for what the
37 contemporary feedback is that the council is getting, it should
38 exist, you know, on one of these documents on our page.

39
40 The next thing that I do want to show you is there's two other
41 ways that, you know, you all can be looking at comment. There's
42 this public comment link that's at the very top of the webpage.
43 It's on our homepage, and it's on every part of the webpage.

44
45 At the very bottom of the public comment page, you'll see a couple
46 of things. First, this is where folks can submit general fisheries
47 comments, and I do sort those and put them where they belong. If
48 they don't belong in general, and they are specific to a document,

1 I will put them in with the document periodically.

2
3 You can read those general comments that we're getting, but then,
4 if you remember, we're still in the middle of piloting this
5 anonymous voicemail comments, and so we also maintain this record
6 almost like -- It's not quite as real time, because it's a
7 voicemail, and I have a manual thing that I have to do, but these
8 anonymous voicemails are also near real time in when they are
9 populated, and so that's another place for you all to go and see
10 what we're getting. With that, I'm happy to take any questions,
11 or explain anything further, if you guys have use for that.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily. Do we have any questions? Mr.
14 Schieble.

15
16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** A real quick one, and so, the order of the comments
17 that you showed on there, the newest comments are at the bottom of
18 the spreadsheet, and the oldest ones are at the top, and is that
19 correct?

20
21 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes. That's how it works.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

24
25 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and so I was wondering, Emily, and this is a great
26 job, to get pretty much instantaneous feedback from the public on
27 the documents that are under development, but I was just wondering,
28 relative to the ordering, chronological ordering, of the comments,
29 you know, as a document moves in time, sometimes action items can
30 be amended, can be removed, additional alternatives can be added,
31 or removed, and I'm just wondering, and is it possible to, somehow
32 or another, identify the individual comments, or order them in
33 such a way so they're relevant to the current status of the
34 document as it moves through the draft scoping, public hearing,
35 final action phase?

36
37 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Honestly, Kevin, I would have to think about how
38 to do that, right, and so, at this point, before you guys take
39 final action, you're probably very familiar with me doing a public
40 comment summary. That public comment summary, in part, is a
41 summary of all of these written comments that you can access from
42 this page, and so it is important that we build the record that
43 goes along with it.

44
45 I'm going to have to really think about and look into, logically,
46 how we could do that. I wonder if there's a way, in the
47 spreadsheet, that I can kind of like put a note or something that
48 said, at this point, Alternative 2 was taken out, and we would

1 also have to decide if the juice is worth the squeeze for that,
2 because, you know, if you look at it, I mean, we've got over twenty
3 documents that are in this, and so that's a big lift, if we're
4 tracking all of those things for all of those documents, and so it
5 is something I will think about, and, if you have any ideas on how
6 I might be able to efficiently do that, I would be happy to hear
7 them.

8
9 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I realize that it would potentially be some
10 extra work, and so just curious about your initial thoughts on it.
11 The only thing I could think of, relative to that, is, somehow or
12 another, if you had a table that you would create that would --
13 You know, for each document, it would have those phases of
14 development, and a date, and then so that, when a person submitted
15 a comment on that particular date, it would go to the table, search
16 for the latest date in the table that's relevant, or, you know,
17 current, and then see if it's before or after that date, and then
18 it would then tag on an additional column, potentially, in the
19 output that you have here that we can see.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

22
23 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Emily. I hadn't gotten to the comment
24 page yet, and so thanks for moving that forward. Just by rough
25 math, I thought I would point out, while we're on here, that what
26 I see, there are forty-five comments, and there are forty-four
27 opposed to the concept of state management for the for-hire. That
28 is 98 percent of what I see on the letters here, and so, like I
29 said, again, if 98 percent of the comments thus far are opposed,
30 I don't know why we're talking about this.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Ms. Ballard.

33
34 **MS. BALLARD:** You'll also note that probably about 98 percent are
35 from Florida. I don't see any Texas on there, or a lot of other
36 states. It's like two major states, and that's it.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Ballard. Do we have anything for
39 Emily? Any other questions? Go ahead, Emily, if you have a
40 comment.

41
42 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Just sort of in response to that idea, and so
43 what I will tell you a little bit about this process is there were
44 two or three specific people that asked me if there was a comment
45 form yet for this, and I think those people took those and sent
46 them sort of to their associations, and to their groups, and so
47 one thing I do want to remind you, as council members, and these
48 are conversations that we've had sort of over and over again, is

1 that this was not a survey, right?

2
3 It's probably not a representative sample, and so, at this point,
4 the early comments that we were getting are, yes, very clearly,
5 you know, pointing in one direction. However, we have not done a
6 public push for like this exists.

7
8 I mean, we made this exist yesterday, and so I will say that, you
9 know, we would prefer to sort of get further along, and do some
10 pretty clear pushes to get comments, before you do any analysis on
11 what they are and what they mean.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily, for the clarification. Dr.
14 Banks.

15
16 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, Emily, I think, following
17 up on Kevin's idea, maybe there's a way to do it for these
18 amendments that are more controversial, and not waste your time on
19 ones we may be getting like two or three comments, that maybe
20 aren't really influencing decisions, or just are in support and
21 that's it, versus like some of these with maybe the IFQ program,
22 and this discussion, and those might be more influential in our
23 decision-making.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Do we have anything else
26 for Emily? Not seeing any, okay, and let's take our lunch break.
27 We'll come back at 1.30 on schedule for public comment.

28
29 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on November 5, 2025.)

30
31 - - -

32
33 November 5, 2025

34
35 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

36
37 - - -

38
39 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Golden
40 Nugget Hotel & Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday
41 afternoon, November 5, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman
42 J.D. Dugas.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Before we get to public
45 testimony, we have a special birthday that we would like to
46 announce. It's Dr. Simmons' birthday this week, and Emily has
47 helped us arrange some sweets in the back of the room, and we just
48 wanted to share a few words, how much we appreciate Dr. Simmons'

1 work here, and she's always supportive of me for sure, but I know
2 staff as well, and thank you, Dr. Simmons, and happy 23rd birthday.

3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you all very much.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll get into public testimony. Good
6 afternoon, everyone. Public input is a vital part of the council
7 -- Sorry, excuse me. I'm ahead of myself. I like to move quick.
8 Okay. My apologies. I move quickly. Okay. Here we go with
9 public testimony.

10
11 Good afternoon, everyone. Public input is a vital part of the
12 council's deliberative process and comments, both oral and
13 written, are accepted and considered by the council throughout the
14 process. The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all
15 statements include a brief description of the background and
16 interests of the persons in the subject of the statement.

17
18 All written information shall include a statement of the source
19 and date of such information. Oral or written communication
20 provided to the council, its members, or its staff that relate to
21 matters within the council's purview are public in nature.

22
23 Please give any written comments to staff, as all written comments
24 will be posted on the council's website for viewing by council
25 members and the public and will be maintained by the council as
26 part of the permanent record. Knowingly and willfully submitting
27 false information to the council is a violation of federal law.

28
29 We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual
30 attendees. Anyone joining us virtually that wishes to speak during
31 public comment should have already registered online. Virtual
32 participants that are registered to comment should ensure that
33 they are registered for the webinar under the same name they used
34 to register to speak. In-person attendees wishing to speak during
35 public comment should sign-in at the registration kiosk located in
36 the back of the room. We accept only one registration per person.

37
38 Each speaker is allowed three minutes for their testimony. Please
39 note the timer lights on the podium or on the webinar. They will
40 be green for the first two minutes and will blink yellow for the
41 final minute of testimony. At three minutes, a red light will
42 appear, and a buzzer will be enacted. Time allowed to dignitaries
43 providing testimony is extended at the discretion of the chair.

44
45 If you have a cell phone or similar device, we ask that you keep
46 them on silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. Also, for
47 all to be able to hear the proceedings, we ask that you have any
48 private conversations outside the meeting room. Please note public

1 comment may end before the published agenda time if all registered
2 in-person and virtual participants have completed their comments.
3 Okay, and so what we'll do is rotate between in-person and online,
4 and we're going to start in the room with Lawrence Marino.

5
6 **PUBLIC COMMENT**
7

8 **MR. LAWRENCE MARINO:** Good afternoon. My name is Larry Marino,
9 and I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill.
10 First, I would like to compliment council staff for pulling
11 together the DESCEND Act document so quickly. That was well done
12 and much appreciated.

13
14 As to the state management of red snapper for-hire, it was puzzling
15 why there was even a question regarding what the purpose and need
16 is. We all know that weather and for-hire fishing patterns are
17 different from the east side of the Gulf to the west. One size
18 doesn't fit all. Providing the flexibility to address those
19 differences is the purpose and need.

20
21 Unlike with Gulf-wide management, state management allows
22 tailoring of seasons, bag limits and size limits to the particular
23 needs and preferences of each state and their fishermen. The
24 success of state management of private angling has clearly
25 demonstrated the benefits of local control. Allowing fishing when
26 each state's fishermen want it, using better and more timely data,
27 and increasing the season length, and, in Louisiana, even the bag
28 limit.

29
30 At the same time, as the stock assessments and longer seasons
31 indicate, and as Chris demonstrated yesterday, the fishery is
32 thriving. Rumors of its demise are greatly exaggerated. The
33 states are better able to manage to their quotas with fewer and
34 smaller overruns when they occur, and so why is anyone opposed to
35 extending this to for-hire, and, further, to the recreational
36 sector and more species, including amberjack?

37
38 To the extent any reason was given yesterday, it was simply that
39 it's been rejected before. In other words, don't do it now,
40 because you didn't do it then. That is history, but it's not a
41 reason.

42
43 We also heard comments that some for-hire fishermen just don't
44 like it and will get upset that it's coming up again. Again,
45 that's not a reason. We didn't hear any reasons at the table not
46 to do it, and so I tried to think what they might be.

47
48 There may be concerns that sector separation or allocations could

1 be eliminated. By default, I would expect the state management to
2 simply push down the existing sector separations and allocations
3 to the states, because it's management that's being changed, and
4 not the thing being manage, but, if that's the sticking point,
5 simply state in the amendment that existing sector separations and
6 allocations shall continue in force, or, more broadly, expressly
7 retain council authority over sector separation and allocation.

8
9 There may also be concerns about whether a federal permit would
10 still be required to fish in a state's federal waters. Again, by
11 default, I would expect that to be so, but, regardless, state it
12 in the amendment.

13
14 A related issue that came up yesterday made clear that fishing and
15 landing are permissible anywhere in the Gulf with that permit,
16 though, of course, landing in a state would be permissible only
17 during its open season. The same goes for other concerns that may
18 come up along these lines. Just provide for them in the amendment.

19
20 East Gulf versus west Gulf fishermen obviously have some divergent
21 interests, due to better or worse fishing weather at particular
22 times in particular states. Magnuson requires fairness, and it's
23 unfair to limit fishermen in only part of the Gulf to fish during
24 what everyone knows will be bad fishing weather there, and so that
25 can't be a reason.

26
27 It's been suggested to try this out first for amberjack, to build
28 some trust. Expansion of state management to amberjack and other
29 reef fish species is also needed, but in addition to red snapper
30 for-hire, and not instead.

31
32 There was discussion of allowing states to opt out. Well, it's
33 unclear why they would. With that option, a state will not have
34 management thrust upon it if they don't want it.

35
36 It is an interesting question though who will decide whether a
37 state will opt out. The council, the state fishery commissions,
38 a majority vote of the fishermen, or something else? This too can
39 be addressed in the amendment, although public hearings, input
40 from the state managers, and questionnaires to the participants in
41 each state can help inform that decision.

42
43 Obviously, the quota is going to have to be allocated among the
44 states, and that's not necessarily going to be easy, but the state
45 managers came together on allocations for private angling quickly,
46 and really very smoothly, and there's no reason that can't happen
47 here, too.

1 I urge the council to move this document forward as quickly as
2 possible, and addressing concerns like sector separation and
3 allocations, and I also urge the council to expand state management
4 to amberjack and as many other species as possible.

5
6 Regarding Amendment 63 and the red grouper set-aside pilot project,
7 Kesley was right. This is good timing, in a relatively low-risk
8 setting, to test and tweak this concept, and there very much is a
9 need. Smaller commercial fishermen have testified repeatedly to
10 having to pay the majority of their income to shareholders in order
11 to access this public resource, and then they're blackballed if
12 they object.

13
14 It's been a bigger problem historically for red grouper than at
15 this exact moment, with low lease prices due to the recent quota
16 increases, but that's temporary. Inevitably, there will be a
17 bigger disparity again, after this current glut is absorbed, and
18 it's a much bigger problem for red snapper, though, again, the
19 point here is to do a pilot program to see what is possible.

20
21 It's been asked if the juice is worth a squeeze. This pilot
22 program won't solve the problem, but it can demonstrate whether a
23 larger implementation can work, or what's necessary to make it
24 work. It's reasonable to base distributions on increases, instead
25 of the entire quota, at least for this pilot program, because, in
26 the long run, some sort of cyclical redistribution, or something
27 to that effect, is needed to fix the inequity of the IFQ program
28 as it exists today.

29
30 Back to the pilot program, if you do base it on the increase, it
31 should be on the entire overage, and not some small percentage of
32 it. It has to be a meaningful amount to make this work. The
33 active fishing requirement is a good approach to limit
34 distributions to actual fishermen, but it must be recognized that
35 this means that the program won't actually address new entrants to
36 the fishery. Rather, it addresses new entrance to shareholding,
37 but the concern isn't just for active fishermen with no shares.

38
39 It's also for those with fewer shares than is economical. Whether
40 it's 5,000 pounds, or 10,000 or whatever, and I'm sure it varies
41 by boat size or the makeup of the individual fishermen's harvest,
42 but, again, it has to be meaningful, and so it would be
43 counterproductive to redistribute some of this quota back to the
44 same large shareholders who already control the fishery.

45
46 Small shareholders, those with only a few thousand pounds, need
47 enough to be economical, just like the fishermen with none do.
48 This could be addressed by making larger allocations to fishermen

1 with no shares and smaller ones to those with let's say 5,000
2 pounds, or some other threshold. Even so, there may not, and
3 probably won't be, enough distribution to make everyone
4 economical.

5
6 One way to address this, at least in part, would be to create a
7 government or NGO-managed share leasing website and require all
8 leasing to be done through it, anonymously, to the lessor as to
9 who the lessee might be. This would expand access between lessors
10 and lessees, so they won't be limited to personal contacts to make
11 transactions. It would still be a market value, but it would
12 better enable fishermen to supplement their distributions to reach
13 economic viability, and anonymity would eliminate the opportunity
14 to blackball individual fishermen.

15
16 Finally, distributions must be non-transferable. The point is to
17 prevent scalping and circumventing the purpose, and any
18 transferability would quickly defeat the purpose. I urge the
19 council to move forward with this program, and quickly, for the
20 benefit of the smaller fishermen, who are the lifeblood of this
21 industry. Thank you.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marino, for your comments. Do we
24 have any questions for Mr. Marino? Not seeing any, Larry, thank
25 you. Next up, we'll go online to Ms. Carole Neidig, and then
26 followed by Mr. Ken Haddad.

27
28 **MS. BERNADINE ROY:** Ms. Neidig, you'll have to unmute your line to
29 speak.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We're going to move on to Mr. Ken Haddad.

32
33 **MR. KEN HADDAD:** Mr. Chair and council members, I appreciate the
34 opportunity to speak today. My name is Ken Haddad with the
35 American Sportfishing Association, and I do want to thank
36 Mississippi for a very fine event last night, with good food, and
37 in a good historic setting for the maritime.

38
39 We support final action on the abbreviated framework implementing
40 the DESCEND Act. We thank the council for making this a priority,
41 and we commend Sarah and her team for a great product in such a
42 short amount of time. We hope you will continue to defend the
43 decisions and points made in the document and consider that this
44 is a continuation of regulations, and also warranting an
45 abbreviated review process.

46
47 We support Reef Fish Amendment 62 on red grouper as drafted. We're
48 good with Amendment 58 as it is currently drafted. For the Gulf

1 states for-hire delegation, we support exploring an amendment that
2 includes an opt-out provision based on the collective interests of
3 an individual state and their for-hire fleet.

4
5 We do think Louisiana for-hire folks should be given the
6 opportunity to pursue their interests in state management, and
7 others, if that plays out that way. We know there are many
8 complications that would need to be addressed, but that shouldn't
9 stop you from at least moving forward with discussions around the
10 table.

11
12 Finally, a reminder, as you continue discussions on amberjack,
13 that the recreational initiative contains a recommendation for
14 regional management as those discussions proceed. Thank you, Mr.
15 Chair.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Haddad. Do we have any questions?
18 I'm seeing any again, Ken, and thank you. Next, we're going to go
19 back to Ms. Carole.

20
21 **MS. CAROLE NEIDIG:** Can you hear me now?

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, ma'am.

24
25 **MS. NEIDIG:** I'm so sorry about that. I got disconnected when I
26 unmuted before, and I apologize. Good afternoon, council members.
27 Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Carol Neidig, and I'm
28 the director of the Center for Fisheries Electronic Monitoring at
29 Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, Florida.

30
31 I would first like to thank the council for its continued support
32 of our center's electronic monitoring work in partnership with the
33 commercial reef fish fleet. I would also like to take this
34 opportunity to express our gratitude to the many fishermen who
35 have continued to contribute their valuable time and effort to
36 this work for nearly a decade now.

37
38 In recent years, the NOAA Fisheries staff have encouraged our
39 center to engage our electronic monitoring participants as a study
40 fleet to help fill critical data gaps. With that in mind, I would
41 like to give you an update on a recent letter of intent submitted
42 to the Gulf Coastal Ocean Observing System, GCOOS, for a project
43 titled "Establishing a Fishing Vessel Ocean Observing Network in
44 the Gulf of America".

45
46 This proposed five-year project that's led by the Ocean Data
47 Network includes our center, SEA Vision AI, the Shareholders
48 Alliance, FSU, and a NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center

1 affiliate at the University of Miami.

2
3 The project outlines a pilot program to integrate vessel
4 participants with electronic monitoring systems with environmental
5 sensors to collect co-located catch, effort, and subsurface
6 temperature and depth data during their fishing operations. To
7 our knowledge, this would be the first coordinated effort in U.S.
8 fisheries to systematically pair EM-verified catch data with
9 environmental information collected directly from a commercial
10 fishing fleet.

11
12 This project aligns with the broader GCOOS mission to reduce
13 coastal hazards and improve the health of Gulf ecosystems and
14 living marine resources by expanding the availability of low-cost
15 subsurface and bottom temperature and depth data collected through
16 a network of partner commercial fishing vessels operating across
17 the West Florida and Texas-Louisiana shelves.

18
19 These data will contribute to hurricane and marine heatwave
20 forecasts, ecosystem-based fisheries management, and resilience
21 for coastal communities.

22
23 Of course, at a time when funding for fisheries surveys is limited,
24 this program offers an innovative, cost-effective approach for
25 fishermen involved in study fleets to contribute additional
26 scientific data during their normal fishing operations, while also
27 having immediate access to their raw data and data products for
28 informed decision-making.

29
30 By pairing this verified catch information with corresponding
31 environmental conditions, the program can also provide valuable
32 data for use in stock assessments and habitat models, and also to
33 help advance ecosystem-based fisheries management. I want to thank
34 you again for the opportunity to share this information from our
35 team to the Gulf Council, and for your continued support, and I
36 also want to put a shoutout to say happy birthday, Carrie.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any questions? Not seeing -- Mr. Sanchez.

39
40 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hi, Carole, and I just have a question. How close
41 are you, or are you already ready, to do this and start to provide
42 some kind of ecosystem-related fishing data to inform some of our
43 assessments in the Gulf?

44
45 **MS. NEIDIG:** Sorry, Mr. Sanchez, and, yes, we have submitted -- Of
46 course, with the shutdown, we were supposed to hear November 1st
47 on whether we could take the next step, but this is something that
48 ODN has been very much involved with around the world, and a lot

1 of what we're proposing will tie into existing networks that are
2 available for, of course, hurricane broadcasting and so forth, and
3 we would like to be able to integrate this into Gulf networks also,
4 once we could start collecting this data, and it is proposed for
5 over a five-year period, and so it's definitely a group effort, if
6 we are allowed to get the green light and go for it.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Ms. Carole. Not seeing any
9 other questions, next up in the room is Mr. Richard Fischer, and
10 he'll be followed by Scott Dagget on virtual.

11
12 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members
13 of the council. Richard Fischer, representing the Louisiana
14 federally-permitted charter-for-hire industry. Happy birthday,
15 Carrie, and thank you all for allowing me to speak.

16
17 I want to thank you, and I appreciate you all for your work on the
18 DESCEND Act. That's some great work there, and thank you for
19 taking that up.

20
21 On state management, the Louisiana Charterboat Association, as
22 well as multiple national recreational fishing organizations, and
23 you just heard from one of them, and thank you, Ken, and we support
24 the option for states to take on red snapper state management for
25 federally-permitted captains.

26
27 I've got four specific reasons why, and let's hope I can get to
28 all of them in three minutes. First of all, data issues. At the
29 root of the issue is MRIP. It's flawed, it's imprecise, it's
30 underfunded. In contrast, Louisiana's state-developed LA Creel is
31 more precise, near real-time data, and is recognized as the gold
32 standard.

33
34 Other Gulf states have followed suit with improved models. State
35 programs, better tools, and local knowledge can manage fishery
36 resources more effectively and sustainably. To my colleagues in
37 Florida, I would ask you to consider that state fish counting
38 system in your state spit out three-and-a-half times fewer
39 amberjack and ten times fewer gag grouper than MRIP recently.

40
41 From hearing Florida fishermen talk about it, they appear to think
42 that the state data is more close of an estimation than the federal
43 one, and so please consider that, you know, maybe the biggest
44 boogeyman in the room is not potentially losing some allocation to
45 the eastern Gulf, and it's actually the federal system that's
46 shutting down seasons. There's a National Standard regarding the
47 use of best available science, and I would argue that the status
48 quo defies that.

1
2 Reason number two, the federal situation. We all know about the
3 funding shortages, staffing constraints, budget cuts,
4 administrative hurdles. This is an opportunity to deregulate.
5 There has to be, according to an executive order, ten deregulatory
6 actions for every one regulatory action that NOAA can do.

7
8 Here's your opportunity to chip into that ten with state
9 management. We've seen the states do it. They've done it for
10 millions of private recreational anglers. They can do it for the
11 1,300 or so charter boats.

12
13 Issue number three, fairness. You're going to hear a lot about
14 how state management would be unfair, and unequitable. Well, what
15 about the status quo? Captains in other parts of the Gulf can
16 fish more days per year, because of the weather. They can take
17 two and three trips per day, because of the distances to fish
18 differences. Captains in our part of the Gulf, as it was mentioned
19 yesterday, have to watch state charter boats catch more on days
20 where they can't fish, and so the status quo isn't fair or
21 equitable. I would argue that this defies the National Standard
22 regarding regional flexibility.

23
24 Finally, point number four, the resource, the most important one.
25 The Great Red Snapper Count showed, pretty definitively, that there
26 are stronger red snapper stocks in the western Gulf than the
27 eastern Gulf. We all know there's considerably more pressure in
28 the eastern Gulf than the western Gulf.

29
30 Status quo, a one-size-fits-all approach, ignores these regional
31 differences and perpetuates the cycle of increased pressure on
32 decreasing red snapper stocks. Status quo is not the most
33 scientifically sound approach, and I would argue that that defies
34 the national standard regarding overfishing.

35
36 So, in conclusion, you're going to hear a lot of speculation and
37 assumptions today about the direct and indirect results of state
38 management. I wrote a letter that was posted last week. Many of
39 you have read that letter, and it addresses some of those concerns
40 that I've already heard.

41
42 I'm not going to have enough time to rehash those up here, but I
43 presume that many of the state management proponents here on the
44 council have no desire to implement the direct or the indirect
45 consequences of what's being said, but I still encourage you all
46 to listen to them and address these concerns, if they're real.

47
48 Keep having the conversation, because we don't want our guys to

1 get hurt from this either, and remember that we're just asking for
2 the option for state management. If a certain state wants out,
3 stay out of it. We're not looking to impose anything on any state
4 that doesn't want it, and that's all I got for you all. Thank you
5 so much for allowing me to speak, and I'm happy to take any
6 questions.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Fischer, for your
9 testimony. Do we have any questions? Captain Frady.

10
11 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer, for being here. I can
12 understand you've always been a proponent of state management, and
13 I know you all love your state, as evident by your comments for
14 the past few years on what to do. The question I've got is how
15 many federal permits in Louisiana?

16
17 **MR. FISCHER:** I think we have about ninety to 100, and about sixty
18 to seventy of those are being used by captains.

19
20 **MR. FRADY:** How many have said that, yes, they want state
21 management, and how many of them would like to have it where they
22 are?

23
24 **MR. FISCHER:** We as an association -- I mean, obviously, it's tough
25 to meet with everybody, but we, as an association, have put out a
26 survey, and that survey stated back that 85 percent of the
27 respondents to that survey were in favor of state management.

28
29 **MR. FRADY:** (Mr. Frady's comment is not audible on the recording.)

30
31 **MR. FISCHER:** Everyone that we had contact information for. The
32 vast majority of that sixty to seventy received the survey, and
33 roughly forty to fifty responded to it.

34
35 **MR. FRADY:** (Mr. Frady's comment is not audible on the recording.)

36
37 **MR. FISCHER:** I would think very little. I would think very few,
38 and that is not something that I'm standing up here and advocating
39 for, and I think those on the council that are advocating for state
40 management aren't either, but I don't want to speak for them.

41
42 **MR. FRADY:** Louisiana has been on record by talking about fairness
43 many times, but their actions prove differently, when you all set
44 the season for the state guideboats at four fish per person, and
45 there was a big disparity brought up between your state guideboats,
46 rubbing it in the faces of your federal-permitted boats, going we
47 can catch four, and you can only catch two, and so do you think,
48 if Louisiana had played and matched the federal seasons, would

1 they have been happy? Would it still be an overwhelming response
2 to what we get out of federal management?

3
4 **MR. FISCHER:** It would, yes, because that is just one of several
5 fairness concerns that I've brought up. That one, you are correct,
6 Captain Frady, is a Louisiana-created concern.

7
8 The others are created by the federal government Gulf Council
9 system, and so you are correct in that that is something that our
10 captains are passionate about, and that, you know, puts us, as
11 LCBA, in a really tough spot, because, at the state level, I'm not
12 going to go advocate against the best interests of state charter
13 boats just so that federally-permitted guys can feel better about
14 it, and there's less access for state guys, and so that's not
15 something that I've ever done.

16
17 That's not something I'd advise anyone in Louisiana to ever do.
18 The way to gain more fairness and equity is to take advantage of
19 the very system that Louisiana charter captains, that are
20 federally-permitted, rightly deemed to be unfair to them, and the
21 only way that can happen is at this body NOAA Fisheries.

22
23 **MR. FRADY:** Last question. Are you aware of how past years, when
24 state management went into effect, that your average weight of
25 your red snapper being landed continues to get smaller, and what
26 would you attribute to the average weight trending downward? What
27 would -- Would you call that successful, whenever your average
28 weight has gone from nine pounds a fish down to about five pounds
29 a fish in the past, you know, five or six years?

30
31 The reason I'm asking that is we're talking about trust. Do you
32 trust your state to continue hammering those fish and letting
33 people -- Give them what they want, and let them catch more fish?
34 I mean, I want to know, because, if this is a good thing for all
35 of us, I may be -- I want to explore every angle of this, with
36 every flashlight pointing at it from every angle, and that's what
37 I want to know. I mean, are you happy with going from a nine-
38 pound short season going to a five-pound fish and having a long
39 season?

40
41 **MR. FISCHER:** Well, there's a lot of factors that can go into that.
42 I mean, look at the reefs that we're losing at a crazy rate,
43 especially off of Louisiana. I mean, there are tons of factors
44 that could go into that, and it doesn't necessarily have to be
45 attributed to state management. Causation and correlation aren't
46 always together.

47
48 You did ask if I have faith in my state agency, and I have the

1 utmost faith in our state agency, and our biologists, powered by
2 LA Creel, powered by the best biologists in the country, in a near
3 real-time way, in ten days, to tell us what's been taken out of
4 the water.

5
6 We have repeatedly ended seasons in a responsible way, and been
7 honest about it, if there was a slight overage, and so I have the
8 -- I can only speak for Louisiana, and I have the utmost faith in
9 Louisiana.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We're going to have to wrap this
12 conversation up. This is a public comment. If you all want to
13 have this conversation out in the hall, you all are more than
14 welcome to do so.

15
16 **MR. FRADY:** Thanks, Mr. Fischer. I just want to know how you feel
17 about this. Thank you.

18
19 **MR. FISCHER:** Happy to, and, please, let's continue the
20 conversation. Thank you, Captain Frady.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Richard, can you turn the mic off, please? Thank
23 you. Next, we're going to go online to Mr. Scott Dagget.

24
25 **MR. SCOTT DAGGET:** Good afternoon. I'll make this as quick as
26 possible, because I'm offshore doing my day job. I don't know
27 what number it is, but I'm a SOFA member, a longliner out of
28 Madeira Beach, and the 50-50 split with -- This is all about the
29 reef fish with the 50-50 split, and for people to get it on their
30 landings.

31
32 This is what I think is the fairest way to go about any of this,
33 and, if people have a problem with that, they're not a fisherman,
34 and they're an investor. Like the things you guys have done so
35 far has made a difference in my crew's lives, because now I've got
36 a guy moving into a bigger house, because he's making more money.
37 The lease price has gone down, and so I think everybody that's
38 against these improvements to the IFQ system are strictly
39 investors, and not fishermen. Thanks for your time. That's all
40 I've got.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Dagget. Do we have any questions?
43 Yes, we do. Mr. Osborne.

44
45 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yeah, this isn't necessarily a question for him. I
46 just want the record to reflect that the previous speaker was
47 referring to Chris from Louisiana that he had trust in, and so I
48 just want to make sure he was aware.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for reminding us, Mr. Osborne. Do we
3 have any questions? No? Thank you. We're going to move back in
4 the room with Captain Bob Zales, and then we'll go back online to
5 Jason Underwood.

6
7 **MR. BOB ZALES, II:** Bob Zales II, Executive Director of
8 Southeastern Fisheries Association. I had a bunch of stuff to
9 talk about, but I'm going to pass on that with recent issues that
10 have come up.

11
12 First, I want to thank the council for taking up this issue on the
13 Starlink thing again. As pretty much everybody knows, SFA has
14 been at the forefront of this issue from the beginning, and we're
15 working several different angles in trying to get this done.

16
17 Today, after you all's conversation about the letter, I've sent a
18 request to Representative Patronis' staff, and also to Senator
19 Scott's staff, to try to get information on who to contact with
20 FCC. When I get that information, I'll provide that to you for
21 your letter.

22
23 On this whole issue of for-hire charters, I'm going to take you
24 back and give you a history lesson. Me and my family were part of
25 the for-hire sector for fifty-eight years. Back in the late 1990s,
26 when red snapper shut down for the first time, recreational red
27 snapper, Dr. Hogarth came in to play with stuff and suggested to
28 industry, which was me and several others, about trying to develop
29 a season for red snapper Gulf-wide.

30
31 A fellow by the name of Mike Shirippa, who was a scientist at the
32 Science Center, developed a program where you could go in, and you
33 could pick the days, and the bag limits and everything, to do that.
34 Industry sat down, and we chose a six-month season from April
35 through October with a four-fish bag limit.

36
37 Now, you all at the council, you all manage the resource for the
38 whole, for everybody in the Gulf. You all manage the fishers for
39 the whole, everybody in the Gulf. Not everybody is happy with
40 everything that you all do, but what you do is for the benefit of
41 all people.

42
43 The season that we selected, that six-month season, not everybody
44 was happy with that. The majority was, and that season worked
45 really well. On down the line, we developed a limited access
46 permit. I was chairman of the AP that created that permit.

47
48 When you look at what's happened with the for-hire industry, the

1 for-hire industry in the Gulf of Mexico has greatly benefited from
2 the current federal management of these fishers. I would suggest
3 to you that, for the benefit of this fishery, that you continue
4 that federal management for the for-hire fishery.

5
6 There's no need to go into -- Assane had a statement in this thing
7 of what is the problem, and that's what we're asking, is what is
8 the problem? Be careful of what you do, because, if you don't
9 have a problem, why fix it? What are you going to do to go in
10 here and try to fix something that's not broke, and this system is
11 not broken.

12
13 It works, and it works well, and pretty much most people across
14 the Gulf are happy with it, and so, as I've said, you can't satisfy
15 everybody, but, right now, you're satisfying the majority with
16 this program, and keep it that way.

17
18 Now, I will add to it, and I'm going to pick on my Louisiana
19 friends a little bit. I've bragged about your Louisiana Creel
20 program, but I'm going to tell you, with this for-hire thing going
21 statewide, we've recently learned, in Louisiana, they can't manage
22 a football team, and so how are you going to be able to manage a
23 for-hire fishery? Thank you very much.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Zales.

26
27 **MR. ZALES:** And happy birthday, Carrie, and Roll Tide.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** None of us manage a football team. Listen.

30
31 **MR. ZALES:** I'm talking about the state, and I understand that.
32 Any questions?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Captain Zales? Mr.
35 Schieble.

36
37 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'm not going to speak about college football, but
38 I will ask -- You did say, for the benefit of the federal for-hire
39 fishery, we should leave it the way it is. Can you specify more
40 so what that benefit is?

41
42 **MR. ZALES:** I'm sorry, and what was the last part?

43
44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Can you give examples of what the benefit would be
45 to maintain the current status of the federal for-hire fishery?

46
47 **MR. ZALES:** The current benefit?

48

1 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
2

3 **MR. ZALES:** It is the way that the industry has benefited and been
4 prosecuted over the last -- Ever since permits came into play, and
5 ever since the limited entry program came into play. The industry
6 is doing well. They have -- The season has gotten better, and
7 they were down to two or three days, but, because of where we are
8 with the federal system, and we've got their own quota, and because
9 of sector separation, which originally I opposed, but I now support
10 that wholeheartedly, because it has worked, the season has
11 expanded.
12

13 To be honest, I think it's too long. I think, right now, there's
14 way too much pressure on this resource. The resource can't handle
15 it. You cannot manage a restricted resource with unlimited access,
16 and, because of what's happening with the recreational sector being
17 completely, totally unregulated, you've got the for-hire sector
18 that is regulated, and they're able to maintain their quota, and
19 stay within their quota. Since they've had sector separation, the
20 for-hire sector has never gone over that quota, and so there's the
21 benefits.
22

23 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'll be real quick, and just as a follow-up, and so
24 I don't think there's any intention to change how all that works
25 as we go forward with this. It's to be able to just have a fair
26 and equitable allowance among different portions of the Gulf, to
27 be able to benefit from that, as well as what you just said, and
28 so we don't have any intention of removing the permits. We don't
29 have any intention of changing the sector separation.
30

31 I mean, that's some of the things we talked about, and so I
32 encourage you to just kind of work with us as we go through this
33 in a document format. If we get down the line, and it still
34 doesn't look like it's going to work, then we just stop at that
35 point, but let's entertain it, and give it a fair shot.
36

37 **MR. ZALES:** Well, you still take the risk. I mean, granted, you
38 all have all good intentions about what you intend to do and where
39 you put it with the states. The states, the governors change, and
40 the resource agencies change, and everything changes down the line,
41 that we will have no control over at all, as to what happens in
42 the future, and so everything may be great to start off, but, after
43 the next election, it could all shift, and completely be destroyed,
44 to where, if you were under the federal management, it stays the
45 same.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Zales. Any other questions?
48 Not seeing any.

1
2 **MR. ZALES:** Thank you very much.
3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next, we'll go online to Jason Underwood, and he
5 will be followed by Mr. Johnny Williams.
6

7 **MR. JASON UNDERWOOD:** Hi, and my name is Jason Underwood. I've
8 been a commercial fisherman for twenty-five years, twenty of it
9 owning my own boats. I'm in favor of the red grouper pilot program
10 and the relocation of shares to active permits with red grouper
11 landings.
12

13 We just happen to be having a problem where shareholders are taking
14 advantage of the fishermen, with outrageous lease prices, which
15 has been making it hard to make profits, with the way the share
16 prices have been, and so I think it would be a good thing to have
17 the pilot program, to be able to get new fishermen, and active
18 fishermen, into the program, and get their foot in the door to be
19 able to own shares in the future, and that's about all I've got
20 there. I hope everybody heard me.
21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jason. We heard you. Do we have any
23 questions? Not seeing any, we'll move on to Mr. Johnny Williams,
24 then followed by Mr. David Johnson.
25

26 **MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS:** Good afternoon. Johnny Williams, Williams
27 Party Boats Incorporated, a third-generation partyboat operator
28 out of Galveston.
29

30 Today, I want to make everyone aware that I am from Texas. I do
31 have two headboat permits, and I'm 100 percent against state
32 management. When the issue first arose, I went to Austin, and I
33 talked to Robin Riechers about it. I asked him what assurance
34 that I would have that we would be protected under state
35 management. He couldn't give me any sort of assurance, and so at
36 least we know what we have right now, and so I'm 100 percent
37 against state management.
38

39 If you really want to help the people in the for-hire sector, what
40 I suggest you do is change the calendar fishing year from the
41 current January 1 through December 31 until April 1 to March 31,
42 and the rationale for this is, last year, we weren't able to
43 accomplish our quota. We only caught about three-quarters of our
44 quota even, with the two seasons.
45

46 This year we haven't gotten the information yet. When we finally
47 do, we won't have time to catch our quota by the end of the year,
48 and so, if we changed it to a situation where we had April 1 to

1 March 31, when we got the data, maybe in November or December, we
2 could open up again in January or February, or even March or
3 whatever, for a certain number of times, and so it would give the
4 for-hire sector an opportunity to catch their quota.

5
6 The commercial guys, they can fish all year, and we're not afforded
7 that opportunity, but this will give us an opportunity to get our
8 share of the fish.

9
10 That being said, I think we're overfishing. I think state
11 management has failed. You can see the fish are getting smaller.
12 The quotas are not being caught in the timeframe that they were
13 calculated to be. I can tell you, from my experience, that we're
14 having to fish farther and farther offshore. Our fish are getting
15 smaller and smaller, and the fish have been on the wane probably
16 for about three years now. I think we're overfishing. We need to
17 do something about it. I think we need to reduce the quota.

18
19 When the question came up about increasing the quota a few years
20 ago, I, and most of the other people in the for-hire sector and
21 the commercial sector, were totally against it. I mean, it seems
22 counterintuitive, because, you know, that's our livelihood, but
23 we're trying to protect the resource, and so I also suggest that,
24 because of what's going on, I think we need to have a reduction in
25 quota. Thank you very much for your time, and happy birthday,
26 Carrie. We love you.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williams. We have a couple of
29 questions. Mr. Geeslin, followed by Mr. Osborne.

30
31 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Williams, and, first and foremost,
32 your operation has done a great job over the years, for a long
33 time, introducing recreational anglers to the fishery, and so I've
34 got to give credit where credit is due. Regarding those assurances
35 you mentioned, can you give me an example of exactly what you may
36 have been looking for there?

37
38 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Well, I asked Robin, and I said, you know, what
39 assurance are you going to give us that, you know, we won't be
40 kicked out the door, because, according to the information that we
41 have, Texas catches, what, 6 percent of the total number of red
42 snapper that are caught in the Gulf, or something like that, on
43 the recreational sector.

44
45 I mean, we've got one of the largest -- We've got the second-
46 largest state in the country. We've got three of the top ten major
47 cities, population-wise, in the country, and we've got an extended
48 coastline, with a number of ports and everything, and I'm just

1 afraid that, if the state got their fish, that they would put some
2 regulations on us in the for-sector that we wouldn't like, and the
3 recreational fishermen would be taken care of better than we would,
4 and that's my concern. I know what I have now. Robin wouldn't
5 give me any insurance that he would do anything at all for me.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Williams.
8

9 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Thank you very much. Have a great day.
10

11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Next up online, we have David Johnson, and
12 he will be followed by Dale Woodruff.
13

14 **MR. DAVID JOHNSON:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the
15 Gulf Council. My name is David Johnson. I am an owner-operator
16 in the Gulf of Mexico reef fishery, and I'm calling you guys from
17 offshore right now.
18

19 I'm calling today to weigh-in on the Amendment 63, the IFQ pool.
20 It's something that I support. As an owner-operator that owns no
21 IFQ, I think this is a step in the right direction to helping the
22 fishermen actually, you know, the men and women actually doing the
23 fishing, and I think this is a step in the right direction.
24

25 As far as Amendment 63 goes, I believe the threshold for the IFQ
26 pool should be at 2.79 million. On Action 1, 10 percent of the
27 quota should be set aside, and, on Action 2, I support the
28 Alternative 3, the 50-50 split, and I believe it should be doled
29 out proportionate to the landings of the vessel.
30

31 I would also like to weigh-in on the black grouper and scamp quota.
32 I believe that they should be kept together, instead of separated.
33 Basically, if you separate them -- Guys, scamps don't go down.
34 You know, if you cut the scamp quota off, I don't know a single
35 fisherman that goes out and just targets scamp, and so I don't see
36 where cutting that quota is going to help, and what you're going
37 to do is bycatch, and, when people catch them, they're going to
38 release them, and they're going to float off and die. I've never
39 seen a scamp go down, in all my years of fishing, and so, if you
40 have any questions, and I can barely hear, but I'm happy to answer.
41

42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Johnson. We have a question from
43 Mr. Sanchez.
44

45 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hello, David. Thank you for calling in with your
46 testimony. I wanted to ask you, and are you calling in using
47 Starlink?
48

1 **MR. JOHNSON:** Yes. I'm on Starlink right now. Yes, sir.
2

3 **MR. SANCHEZ:** You're coming in loud and clear. Thank you.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Johnson. We have no further
6 questions, and we will move to Mr. Dale Woodruff, followed by Mr.
7 Charlie Renier.
8

9 **MR. DALE WOODRUFF:** Good afternoon. Dale Woodruff, president of
10 the Alabama Charter Fishing Association. I hope you all received
11 my letter that I emailed to each one of you individually. If you
12 did not, I'll send it to you again.
13

14 Our association has voted to not be in favor of the state takeover
15 of the federal for-hire vessels, and, you know, we get told that
16 there's -- Oh, well, we'll give you flexibility, but what does
17 flexibility look like? You know, these are some questions.
18

19 Will the federal for-hire historical data be the state guidelines
20 to managing this? Will the federal boats be given the same exact
21 season as what the states are doing? Are you being honest with
22 your people, because I hear you, listening in, and are you being
23 honest with the people who say they want to be managed by the
24 state? Are you telling the other federal boats that they'll
25 possibly have less days than what they have now? Do they know
26 this?
27

28 Do your state guide boats know that, for the most part, they can't
29 fish outside of nine miles, because I can promise you, if I was a
30 state guide boat, and I had invested over \$400,000 or \$500,000 in
31 something, I would love to fish Gulf-wide wherever I wanted to
32 with a state license, for sure, but why are you wanting to manage
33 the for-hire sector?
34

35 Things just seem to be going good. I mean, it looks like it's an
36 overwhelming number of federally-permitted vessels that do not
37 want this, but I know you get two or three emails, and you're like,
38 oh, those are the ones I'm going to pick and choose, and talk about
39 at the Gulf Council, because somebody wants to be in favor of it.
40

41 This also -- Why are the states not trying to manage each species
42 right now? Why don't you go ahead and try to pick up on the
43 amberjack and manage it yourself? Why don't you pick up on the
44 groupers and manage it yourself? Why are we going from red
45 snapper, and now we're going after the federal boats? Why not go
46 after the fish first, and then, if it looks good, and I don't know,
47 bring something to the table other than we'll just give you
48 flexibility, because we think we can do it better.

1
2 I mean, you can make it look good. When you have an average
3 decline every year on the size of red snapper, and your seasons
4 are getting longer, and so where are we going to be? We're coming
5 down already. Are we coming down where we're going to be two or
6 three-pound fish here before too long?

7
8 Are we going to have to lower the size limit so you can have a
9 season, because we're going to catch all the sixteen and eighteen-
10 inch fish, and discard them?

11
12 Then, not to make it quick, but we talked about the Starlink, and
13 this is something that I talked to a couple of council members
14 about. Starlink should be considered an antenna, and not the
15 communication device.

16
17 With the VHF, you have to have an antenna to make it work. With
18 the single sideband, you have to have an antenna to make it work,
19 okay, and you can take the Starlink system and include it with the
20 Marine Radio Operator Safety Certificate. I would think you could
21 do that.

22
23 You would have an inspector come and inspect your systems, like we
24 have to do for the COI boats. They come, and they hook up to our
25 sidebands, and they hook up to our VHF, and they hook up to any
26 communication device that we have to have, and they write that
27 down on a Radio Safety Certificate, which is good for ten years,
28 I believe, or is it five years? I would have to -- I've lost my
29 thought.

30
31 If that's on that Radio Safety Certificate, it should be, I would
32 think, be allowed. I mean, it's a powered-up system that will let
33 you have your cellphone be able to communicate through, and so it
34 should be more of an antenna than it would be an actual
35 communication device.

36
37 I don't know how, you know, the Coast Guard would want to look at
38 that, or whatever, and, as far as the single sideband, I know --
39 I guess I've gone over, and I have a letter right here that they
40 said they have stopped monitoring the single sideband, the 4125,
41 as of February of 2022, and so, if I want to communicate, and,
42 most of our vessels, we don't extend past 100 miles.

43
44 If I will need to communicate at any time, I can get on Channel
45 16, and our Coast Guard will find me anywhere within 100 miles at
46 this time too, and so I don't think Starlink should be an issue.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Woodruff. We have a question from

1 Captain Walker.
2
3 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Captain Woodruff, and so you're the Alabama
4 Charter Boat Association, and so you're the guys --
5
6 **MR. WOODRUFF:** Yes, sir, and I know some of you all have come to
7 our social that we have. You all saw a lot of people there,
8 haven't you, and it's not just one or two, or fifty, and I think
9 we had over 100 there the last two times, but go ahead, and I'm
10 sorry.
11
12 **MR. WALKER:** I'm seeing there's a hundred-and -- The most current
13 record I have is 152 permitted boats in Alabama, and so you would
14 be the primary organization in your State of Alabama.
15
16 **MR. WOODRUFF:** Right, and we have -- Sorry. Go ahead.
17
18 **MR. WALKER:** Your organization that you represent opposes state
19 management?
20
21 **MR. WOODRUFF:** We oppose. We are not in favor of state management.
22 We are happy, and I know this is, you know, I'm from the government,
23 and we're here to help, but we are happy. We have 115 days right
24 now. We asked not to have this many days. We think it's too long,
25 and we see it. I live it every day out there.
26
27 Before snapper season, when the snapper season is closed, the size
28 of fish are declining. If you want to catch big fish, you have to
29 high-grade. I'm sorry, and that's just the only way it's going to
30 be. If you go out there and catch your first couple of fish,
31 they're going to be small, and so we're promoting -- The length of
32 the seasons that we're having right now, we're promoting high-
33 grading, because nobody wants to go out there and catch a small
34 fish, concerning the private boats. Our charter boats, we go out
35 there, and we catch the first fish, and we're done.
36
37 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Captain.
38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more question from Ms. Ballard.
40
41 **MS. BALLARD:** Just a quick question. When you all go out to a
42 spot, do you see a lot of other private recreational boats there,
43 or is it mostly your boat going to the same spot?
44
45 **MR. WOODRUFF:** Yes. There's a lot of effort off the coast of
46 Alabama.
47
48 **MS. BALLARD:** So you typically go to the similar spots?

1
2 **MR. WOODRUFF:** No, and I don't go to a spot where there's -- I
3 mean, unless it's a big spot, and we want to catch a specific --
4 Like vermilion snapper, and then we may all kind of get together
5 and fish around that spot, but, as far as going and target, like
6 trying to target red snapper, if I see a boat on a spot that I
7 would like to have fished, I will go to another spot, but there
8 are days out there where I can ride fifty miles and not have a
9 place to park.

10
11 **MS. BALLARD:** Okay. Thank you.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Woodruff. Next up online, we'll
14 have Mr. Charlie Renier.

15
16 **MR. CHARLIE RENIER:** Hello. My name is Charlie Renier. I was
17 born and raised in the Keys. I've been a fisherman and the industry
18 for my entire life. I currently live in Madeira Beach, which is
19 considered the red grouper capital of the world.

20
21 I have thirty-five to forty boats fish for me out of Madeira Beach,
22 and they're prime fish they catch. What has happened in our
23 industry is, as the older fishermen have sold off their boats and
24 permits, they have kept their quota and leased it to the fishermen.

25
26 When you all start thinking about setting aside 400,000 pounds, or
27 a certain percentage of quota, or new quota that comes out, it
28 needs to go to the current boats that are catching it, so they can
29 get some. I would say, out of forty boats, half of my boats own
30 zero quota, and, if you're going to help the people out, you need
31 to help the people out that are catching the fish. I may not be
32 the biggest grouper producer in Florida, but I think I am, and I
33 also want to hit on the shallow-water grouper.

34
35 The reason we haven't been catching all our shallow-water grouper
36 is because you've taken our gags from us, and we never got snappers
37 to catch. The majority of the shallow-water grouper and black
38 grouper live in 150 to 300 feet of water.

39
40 We currently try to stay away from that depth, because we don't
41 want to catch the gag, and we don't want to catch the snapper, and
42 so please don't take our shallow-water fish from us, because, as
43 we get gags back, as we buy more and more snapper quota, we will
44 catch those fish.

45
46 We need every single fish we can catch. We provide seafood for
47 the entire country. We feed most of the people, but we need to
48 continue to feed the people, and what you all have done so far

1 with the quota system is a good system. We need to keep it going,
2 but we need to get it to the boats that catch the fish now.
3 Whatever is going forward needs to come to them.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier. Do we have any questions?
6 Not seeing any, thank you, Charlie. Next up, in the room, we have
7 Mr. Joshua Ellender, who will be followed by Mr. Randy Schwab
8 online.

9
10 **MR. JOSHUA ELLENDER:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the
11 Gulf Council. Happy birthday, Carrie. So, to start off, I support
12 the DESCEND Act. I also support the regional management framework
13 action for the purpose of regional differences in our fishing
14 effort.

15
16 I also support the delegation to the Gulf states of the management
17 authority for the federal for-hire red snapper component. The
18 reason for this is because of the inequalities of how it stands
19 now. Every state should be able to make their own decisions on
20 how they fish their waters.

21
22 To Captain Frady's point of trusting Louisiana Department of
23 Wildlife and Fisheries, we do have the utmost trust in our Wildlife
24 and Fisheries Department.

25
26 I've heard from a few that our red snapper are getting smaller.
27 This has nothing to do with the states, but it's a federal issue.
28 This is one of the problems with the one-size-fits-all approach.
29 If Louisiana had control of our seasons, then it can make changes
30 much quicker than the Gulf Council in restricting our fishing
31 efforts to reduce landings.

32
33 The questions are why are groups against a state wanting to manage
34 its own fishery? Is it because it will rightfully allocate the
35 quota and reduce the catch of the areas who are over-harvesting?
36 Someone said it isn't a specific -- Excuse me. Someone said it
37 isn't a specific state's quota, but doesn't the fishery depend on
38 the fruits of the state adjacent to it, and that's it. Any
39 questions, feel free to ask, and I can answer.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Ellender. We have any questions?
42 Not seeing any, thank you, Josh. Next up online, we have Randy
43 Schwab, followed by Mr. Jim Zurbrick.

44
45 **MR. RANDY SCHWAB:** Good afternoon, council. Can you guys hear me?

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir.
48

1 **MR. SCHWAB:** I appreciate your guys' time and letting me speak
2 here. As Mr. Underwood said, and David Johnston, I support this
3 Amendment 63 for the quota for the red grouper. I definitely
4 believe in the people who are catching the fish are the ones who
5 should receive this new quota, and so I am for the catch history
6 and making a decision on where the quota goes.

7
8 Other than that, my other question is what's going to make you
9 qualify for the potential quota pool here? Is that something you
10 guys have already put out there, or when will we see the
11 qualifications for what will need to be a qualifier?

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schwab, we're not engaged to answer your
14 questions at this point. This is the opportunity for you to give
15 us comment.

16
17 **MR. SCHWAB:** Okay. Well, I'm for Amendment 63 and the quota pool,
18 and that's about all I have to say. Other than that, I was on
19 offshore today attending your meeting on Starlink also.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schwab. We have a question from
22 Mr. Strelcheck.

23
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Mr. Schwab, thanks for joining us today. I'm
25 just curious to hear a little about your background. How long
26 have you been fishing in the fishery? Do you have shares? Do you
27 lease a lot of quota?

28
29 **MR. SCHWAB:** I have a small fleet of three rod-and-reel commercial
30 boats. One of the permits I purchased came with a small amount of
31 quota. I own fifty-four pounds of red grouper, and that's,
32 obviously, not enough to support one boat.

33
34 I was born and raised here in Indian Rocks Beach, Florida, and I
35 have been commercial fishing in my entire life. I never got the
36 opportunity to fish for any quota. I was fishing for another
37 gentleman at that point.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schwab. Not seeing any further
40 questions, we'll move on in the room to Mr. Jim Zurbrick, and he
41 will be followed by Mr. Brad Gorst online.

42
43 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak.
44 Jim Zurbrick, from Steinhatchee, Florida. I was in that charter
45 business for a good number of years, all the way through the late
46 1980s and 1990s, and I got out of it during the 2008 economic
47 downturn, and I've been commercial fishing ever since.

1 I did have a commercial permit, and so I did get a few fish when
2 we historically broke up the IFQ and went to it, but my wife and
3 I made the decision to spend, in 2009, before the council ever
4 passed the IFQ, to spend \$150,000, that we really didn't have, but
5 we got a loan and bought it, and then that increased with more
6 fish, because we took a lot of cuts after we went to the IFQ.

7
8 Just like that one gentleman that just spoke said he didn't have
9 the opportunity, I got 231 pounds of red snapper, and now we own
10 16,000, but we bought them all since then, with some increases
11 that we've had.

12
13 I do support 63, the amendment. I do think we need to carve out.
14 I think we need a pilot program. I think the question is how do
15 we protect the people at a base level, whether it's the 2.7 we're
16 at now or it's the 4.9 we're going to go to, but we need to carve
17 out, and get those hundreds of thousands of pounds, and get them
18 in the hands of people who are actively fishing, allocation only.

19
20 Although I would say that, right now, if you're going to buy some
21 red grouper -- Three years ago, or four years ago, you could buy
22 it for five-dollars, or four-dollars. Seven-dollars, that's what
23 it's going for now, and it might even go lower.

24
25 I think, if somebody who actually wants to be in business, you've
26 got to put something into it, and I hate when somebody says, well,
27 I want to get a new truck, and me and my wife are looking at a
28 bigger house, and so I can't afford to buy quota. That's part of
29 your business plan.

30
31 If you're a landscaper, you've got to buy your mowers, your
32 trailers, your trimming equipment, insurance, and all of it. It's
33 just part of being in business, but I do support the carve-out for
34 the pilot program. Just make sure it's enough.

35
36 I'm disappointed that AJ wasn't closed in time. I'm not sure
37 what's going to happen. You guys are going to have to deal with
38 it, because all those fish that were caught this year was actually
39 over, right, and so just a couple of things there. Any questions?

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Mr. Zurbrick?

42
43 **MR. ZURBRICK:** Thank you.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Not seeing any, thanks, Jim. Next, we'll go
46 online to Mr. Brad Gorst, and he will be followed by Kelia Paul.

47
48 **MS. ROY:** Mr. Gorst, you'll have to unmute your line to speak.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll move on to Ms. Kelia Paul, and she'll
3 be followed by Mike Sullivan online.
4

5 **MS. KELIA PAUL:** Good afternoon, council. Thank you for the
6 opportunity to speak today. My name is Kelia Paul. I own two
7 dually-permitted vessels at Panama City Beach, and I'm the
8 president of the Panama City Boatmen's Association. My comments
9 today will reflect the will of my members.
10

11 I do want to quickly touch on Amendment 63. Move forward with the
12 pilot. While, yes, there's access right now for red grouper, it's
13 more about piloting the ability to deploy a quota set-aside and
14 how the stakeholders will behave. I'll also add that I believe
15 the percentage should be based on the increase and not the total
16 quota. For 62 and 58A, we support the Shareholders Alliance's
17 stance. I know they are behind me, but we support them.
18

19 Let's get into state management of the red snapper fishery for
20 charter-for-hire. We are vehemently against this. We did not
21 support state management of the recreational sector, back when it
22 was proposed, and we definitely do not want the states managing
23 our quota or our seasons.
24

25 When state management was proposed, it was supposed to have
26 safeguards, real-time catch and effort monitoring, electronic
27 reporting, and calibration between the survey systems. However,
28 these safeguards are not in place seven years later. What we
29 should be focusing on, and what this council has seemed to keep
30 kicking down the road, is SEFHIER, one of the safeguards that was
31 put in place for these situations.
32

33 Now, the same small user group who took down SEFHIER is coming
34 after the state management, despite the lion's share of charter
35 boats stating that they don't want this.
36

37 The comment was made that primarily all of those written comments
38 against us were from Florida, but, as we hold 60 percent of the
39 Gulf permits, that shouldn't be dismissed so easily.
40

41 I stood up here in San Antonio and told you all we were seeing a
42 decline in the snapper stock. This is happening. The increased
43 effort by the state management has already put our stock in
44 jeopardy, as was validated by the SEDAR assessment.
45

46 Recreational seasons have lengthened, but both length and weight
47 have declined in the species. Opening up state management is also
48 concerning, as the effort could be even further increased by

1 charters chasing non-overlapping season with a \$400 charter
2 license.

3
4 Then, on top of that, the question remains to be seen of what will
5 this do with our federal permits? Will state boats be able to
6 fish in federal waters under state management? If so, what does
7 that do to our permits, an investment we had to make in order to
8 prosecute the fishery in federal waters.

9
10 Please listen to what the stakeholders are saying and asking for.
11 The representatives at this table who are truly charter
12 representatives, reflected in their votes yesterday, and they
13 speak for us, and we do not want to take risks with our livelihood
14 over unknowns. If you truly want to know, poll the permit holders.
15 Thank you.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Paul. Do we have any questions?
18 Not seeing any, thank you, and so next we'll go online to Mike
19 Sullivan, and he be followed by Mr. Billy Archer.

20
21 **MS. ROY:** Mike Sullivan, if you would like to unmute your line so
22 you could speak.

23
24 **MR. MIKE SULLIVAN:** Am I still not unmuted?

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Now we've got you. Go ahead.

27
28 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Okay. Mike Sullivan here, Panama City, Florida,
29 owner and operator of three Coast Guard-inspected vessels, all
30 three commercial permitted, also. I am highly against state
31 management. We don't know anything. As you've heard from many of
32 the people who are truly in the industry, we don't know what will
33 happen. What will happen to our permits? What will happen to our
34 seasons?

35
36 As for now, I'm not a huge fan of the state management. Our red
37 snapper have gone -- Reduced drastically in size. The states just
38 keep opening the seasons. I believe our season is too long. I
39 don't like the fact that politics can get involved in fishing
40 regulations. Sometimes I feel things are done for votes, and not
41 for the fish, and so I am highly against the state management, and
42 that's all I have to say.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. Do we have any
45 questions? Captain Walker.

46
47 **MR. WALKER:** I just want to ask, and what state are you in, Mike?
48

1 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Florida. Panama City, Florida.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. We don't have any other
4 questions.

5
6 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Okay. Thank you.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Mr. Billy Archer, and we'll go back
9 online and try Mr. Brad Gorst next.

10
11 **MR. BILLY ARCHER:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and
12 members of the Gulf Council. My name is Billy Archer. I'm a
13 third-generation fisherman from Panama City, Florida. I'm a dual-
14 permit holder. I participate in both the commercial and charter
15 sectors of the reef fish complex. My vessel, the Seminole Wind,
16 is a fifty-five-foot Miller Marine, Hull Number 1, certified to
17 carry twenty-five passengers a hundred miles offshore between
18 Freeport, Texas and Apalachicola, Florida.

19
20 I bought this vessel in 1996. 2026 will be my fifty-second year
21 as a charter captain fishing the Gulf of America. I share all
22 this with you today so that, when I say I personally nor
23 professionally want anything to do with the state-management
24 takeover of a federal fishery, for several reasons.

25
26 As you know, our federal fisheries are governed by the Magnuson-
27 Stevens Act. It provides protection for our fisheries and the
28 different sectors that we share the resource with. I personally
29 don't want to lose that protection and risk the consequences of
30 every four years electing a new governor that might not have our
31 industry best interests in mind.

32
33 As far as FWC, it at best does the minimum to ensure we survive,
34 from being overwhelmed by the private recreational sector, who, by
35 the way, are still fishing and are allowed to fish for red snapper
36 on weekends today.

37
38 I believe this experiment, the state takeover of the charter boats,
39 for lack of a better word, would only facilitate our industry being
40 crushed, as had been mentioned in yesterday's discussion around
41 the table, and the possibility of exploring combining the sector
42 quota under one recreational umbrella. That's a bad idea.

43
44 Since implementation in 2015 of sector separation, it has proven
45 to be an indispensable tool that provides stability and protection
46 for the charter boat industry. It keeps us accountable, prevents
47 overfishing, and overcapitalization, meaning that, if you want to
48 participate in the fishery, you have to possess a federal reef

1 fish charter permit. Does anyone here have a clue of what will
2 happen to our permits should the council move forward with this
3 terrible idea? There are too many unknowns and too many
4 enforcement issues.

5
6 Other than an obvious quota grab, I don't understand why Louisiana,
7 a state with such a small percentage of federal permits, that holds
8 around eight-and-a-half percent, if that's correct, to be pushing,
9 and this is just surreal to me.

10
11 The federal system might not be perfect, but it's still by far the
12 best approach to managing our nation's fisheries. It's not broke,
13 and so why fix it, and thank you for your time. You have a blessed
14 day, and General, that was an awesome party yesterday. The oysters
15 were fantastic, and, Ms. Carrie, the happiest of birthdays. Any
16 questions?

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

19
20 **MR. ARCHER:** Thank you very much.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Next, we'll try Mr. Brad Gorst online,
23 followed by Tom Ard.

24
25 **MR. BRAD GORST:** Can you hear me?

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.

28
29 **MR. GORST:** All right. My name is Brad Gorst. I run a charter
30 boat out of Clearwater, Florida. We have two inspected charter
31 boats, and both of them are twenty-two passenger, and I have a
32 third forty-passenger charter-headboat permit. We are dual-
33 permitted as well.

34
35 I'm adamantly opposed to state management, and I'm going to be the
36 first one to go out and say this and I think that somebody needs
37 to hold NMFS' feet to the fire on letting this -- On not keeping
38 the states in check and by letting them overfish the red snapper
39 in the last -- Since this thing was enacted.

40
41 I was there when this all went down, and I said that it's going to
42 happen, and it did. You look at the stock, and everybody is saying
43 it, and you hear it in public testimony. A lot of people are
44 saying that the management is -- Or the fishery is down.

45
46 To those that say that, you know, Louisiana has bad weather, well,
47 the weather blows in Florida too. We get a lot of bad weather
48 here, and so weather is not a good reason, and the benefits to the

1 system is that it works. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
2
3 As far as the other part of it is, if Louisiana wanted all them
4 fish, they should have stuck with not suing to get rid of the
5 SEFHIER program, which I still participate in, being it's -- I
6 still have South Atlantic permits, and so the data is still there,
7 and, you know, we're still collecting it.
8
9 As far as being the dual-permitted side of it, the red grouper, I
10 don't agree with the stock assessment, no way, no how. I've been
11 doing this for about thirty-eight years, and the red grouper are
12 not what it says. I'm not buying it.
13
14 As far as the lease price, I don't see where they're saying that
15 they're not making any money, because I just saw, right on Facebook
16 this morning, twenty-cents a pound, and they're selling the fish
17 for six-dollars a pound, and so that's \$5.80 to the fishermen, and
18 I don't see how -- The math just doesn't add up to me.
19
20 As far as the IFQ program, if you want the fish, go buy them like
21 I did. I had to mortgage my house, and spend the money to go buy
22 the fish, and so I think that the state management needs to be
23 addressed for the recreational, because that's the reason why we're
24 not having any fish.
25
26 The DESCEND Act, if a guy was using a descending device, he
27 wouldn't know if that scamp survived or not. Thank you, and, Dr.
28 Simmons, happy birthday.
29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Gorst. Do we have any questions?
31 Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Tom Ard, followed by Mr. Brian
32 Lewis.
33
34 **MR. TOM ARD:** I usually speak loud enough that I don't need no
35 mic, and so, you know, but it's been a while since I've been up
36 here. I see a lot of old faces, and I see a lot of new faces.
37 That's really cool.
38
39 I'll tell you how long I've been away. The last time I was here,
40 I was fighting head-to-head with Bob Zales, and, today, I pretty
41 much agreed with everything he said. I was like, wow, that has
42 changed. I'm like, whoa, and that was crazy.
43
44 I have five federally-permitted charter boats in Orange Beach,
45 Alabama. My family has been in the charter fishing business for
46 forty-six years. Before sector separation, we were starving. I
47 had one full-time boat, my dad's boat, and we was trying to make
48 a living with it.

1
2 We fought, and I joined the CFA, and fought with them guys tooth
3 and nail for sector separation, and no state management, and
4 staying with the federal system, and probably the reason I ain't
5 been around much is we've been busy. We've been buying boats.
6 There's eleven of us that work together full-time.

7
8 I've got one friend of mine, Brett Russell, that's been with me
9 fifteen or sixteen years. He's a partner with me in two of my
10 boats, and I'm bringing him up through the business, and hopefully
11 he'll take over for me one day. That's the plan anyway. I don't
12 know if he knows about it.

13
14 Let's see here. When I said I agree with Bob, I think the seasons
15 are too long. One of the reasons I'm against state management is,
16 you know, the recreational is every day until the end of the year
17 that right now they catch red snapper, and the fish are getting
18 banged on way too hard. They're getting small, and just our
19 seasons are too long.

20
21 You know, I think the charter-for-hire season is too long. You
22 know, I would like to see somewhere around May 15th to August 15th,
23 and, boom, shut it off for the recreational and the charter-for-
24 hire. Give this fish a break, you know? I mean, there is a reason
25 that the fish are getting smaller, and then you throw more back,
26 and then, you know, more predators come, and eat them, and that's
27 not good for management at all.

28
29 Starlink, you know, there was not no Starlink last time I was here.
30 I have it on three of our boats, and it's great. I snatched it
31 off mine the other day and went camping with it. It took me about
32 ten minutes, and I had it online, and watched football. You know,
33 we didn't have any signal out in the woods, and it works out there,
34 and it works on the water too. It's great.

35
36 I think you should support an environmental fishery ecosystem plan
37 and explore red tides and dead zones and the effect on the fishery.
38 I do recreational fish a lot in Florida, and I do know that the
39 red tides can be detrimental down there, and especially on the
40 trout and stuff that I fish for, but I'm sure the grouper, too. I
41 think that needs to be really looked into in your plans.

42
43 I think that's about all I got, but just to say that I'm not for
44 state management. I like what's going on right now. We are
45 thriving. We were 19 percent up this year in business. We're
46 back to our 2022 numbers, which is great, and everything is going
47 real well, and I don't think we need to fix what's not broken, and
48 so thank you.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Ard. Do we have any questions?
3 Not seeing any, next we'll move online to Mr. Brian Lewis, and he
4 will be followed by Mr. Scott Hickman.
5
6 **MR. BRIAN LEWIS:** Good afternoon. Can everybody hear me?
7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.
9
10 **MR. LEWIS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the
11 council. Let me start out, before I forget, to wish Carrie a happy
12 birthday. This is Brian Lewis, owner of a commercial fishing
13 vessel out of Clearwater, Florida.
14
15 I'm going to touch on a bunch of subjects here. I'm going to start
16 out with Amendment 62, and so, in Action 2, I support Alternative
17 2. I support a phased quota approach, and the reason why I wanted
18 to mention that is we're sitting at two-million pounds of red
19 grouper allocation sitting in that's not even caught yet, and here
20 it is November.
21
22 This is going to go towards the 63 comments too, and so we're
23 sitting here, and we got all this red grouper quota, and I can't
24 even give it away, if I wanted to, and so I hear, loud and clear,
25 about the fishermen that may or may not have been blackballed, or
26 whatever the case may be, but now is the time to go catch them if
27 you can, but I'm not seeing them, okay?
28
29 My boat is offshore right now, and we're not -- We're simply not
30 catching a fish, and we're a vertical line tended-gear fishing
31 boat, bandit rod-and-reel, okay, and we're averaging -- Right now
32 my boat is out there, right now, and it is sitting at 600 pounds
33 of fish. Half of it is red snapper and half red grouper.
34
35 With all the changes that have occurred with this fishery, we've
36 lost our gags, and we can't even catch a gag. There's no gag to
37 catch, so that's really hurting us, and so I'm worried about future
38 increases, and the timeliness of them for next year of getting us
39 the red grouper again, and we're stuck in the same rut as we are
40 now, where we can't give them away, and we can't catch them,
41 because we're not catching them, and so I'm worried about are the
42 fish even going to be there.
43
44 All right, and on to Amendment 63. I support this amendment, but
45 it needs full evaluation on the proposed pilot program, and I'm a
46 member of the Ad Hoc Advisory IFQ panel, and I would like to see
47 if we could reconvene on this, so we can gather some input from
48 some of these stakeholders, because I'm hearing a lot of people

1 out there, and what they're saying of, you know, the other
2 fishermen don't have it, but I bought quota on my own.

3
4 I bought every pound I own, okay, and it's no secret that I have
5 17,000 pounds of red grouper shares that I purchased, and I am now
6 the proud owner of, at \$50,000, and I just bought 1,000 pounds of
7 red snapper shares, right, with no allocation, and so I have to
8 wait until January so I can start getting back some of my return
9 on my investment.

10
11 I feel sorry for a lot of these guys, but we've got to remember
12 the whole point of this IFQ program, when it was originated, was
13 -- It has met all its goals, right, and so there's problems, yes,
14 but, you know, one of the biggest problems we've got is access to
15 capital for these fishermen.

16
17 We need to work -- The IFQ loan program is not a good program. I
18 had to take my house, and use my home equity to borrow money to
19 buy quota, and I'm doing it. It's a business plan I made, and so
20 I feel sorry for some of these guys that sit here and say they
21 didn't have a chance.

22
23 Guess what, guys? I sold my fishing boat, twenty years ago, and
24 somebody else got my quota, and I bought another boat, and a
25 permit, and I had to start from ground zero. It's tough, but, you
26 know what, I support this, but we need to really evaluate the whole
27 intent of this Amendment 63. I appreciate the time to speak, and
28 I'm open to any comments or questions.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lewis. Do we have any questions?
31 Not seeing any, next up, Mr. Scott Hickman, followed by Mr. Steven
32 Rash.

33
34 **MR. SCOTT HICKMAN:** Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for having us
35 here in the great state of Mississippi, and we appreciate
36 Mississippi's amazing care they took of us last night. What a
37 great time, and food, and maybe I was a little overserved, but I
38 had a great time, and, Dr. Simmons, congratulations on another
39 birthday and at the helm of the Gulf Council. You're doing a
40 fabulous job. I know that the fishermen really appreciate that.

41
42 Once again, I'm Captain Scott Hickman, from Galveston, Texas. I
43 reside in Congressional District Number 14. That district
44 encompasses three ports. It's the largest congressional district
45 with that many ports in the United States. We're right next to
46 Houston, Texas, in the suburbs, which is almost eight-million
47 people.

48

1 What's also special is that area, and those three ports have, I
2 believe, and Andy has got the documentation, because Kesley was
3 asking about it, and like the second largest amount of charter
4 federal permits in the Gulf is in that small area.

5
6 We've got lots of people, and we've got lots of fishing effort.
7 We've got a good fishery. Yes, the fish are getting smaller, but
8 we've got a busy bunch of people out there, a lot of recreational
9 fishermen, and I'm going to start out really just talking about
10 this push from Louisiana, because I'm a little open-minded about
11 trying new things.

12
13 I'm very innovative, when it comes to fisheries, but I started
14 thinking back and reflecting on the lawsuit against VMS, and how
15 it ended up just wrecking the whole great EMER system, or the
16 electronic reporting that we had built, and it was one of the guys
17 from Louisiana that was here giving a public comment, and he was
18 the name on the law -- One of the names on the lawsuit against VMS
19 that we lost in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals hearing, and
20 Billy and I was at that hearing.

21
22 That lawsuit was handled by a handful of captains from Venice,
23 Louisiana, and it was a large law firm from New York City that was
24 funded by the Koch Brothers, and I'm thinking what in the world
25 does the Koch Brothers care about me having a VMS and reporting my
26 catch, and I thought that was strange.

27
28 The more I think about it, I'm like something don't smell right on
29 the state management deal. My folks back home don't like it. They
30 don't trust it. Even though we've got some great representatives
31 from the great State of Texas that sit on this council, I can't
32 remember ever having anybody from the largest fishing area west of
33 the Mississippi River on the Gulf Council.

34
35 I run out of the largest marina west of the Mississippi. We have
36 the largest concentration of federal charter boat permits, but we
37 can't get anybody on the Gulf Council. We've never been
38 represented, and so my folks back home, charter boat folks, I have
39 not had anybody reach out to me, and I've reached out to a lot of
40 people, and they don't want to go down that road.

41
42 One of the other things we're concerned about is king mackerel,
43 mahi, and cobia. There's an ecosystem problem in the Gulf. We've
44 got high sea surface temperatures. We've got huge dead zones.
45 We've got red tides. The FEP, that didn't get a lot of discussion
46 this week, needs to move forward, and we need to flesh that out,
47 and wrap our minds around what's going on with these other fish,
48 and what's causing these problems.

1
2 The red snapper IFQ system works well. Sector separation is
3 working well. We need to leave those things alone. We need to be
4 working on things that we have problems. Amberjacks, a big problem
5 in a lot of areas. Good where I'm at, but we got some ecosystem
6 things, and we've got to find out why we have issues with these
7 other fisheries, and, on that, I really appreciate you all's time.
8 Thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Hickman. Do we have any
11 questions? We have a couple of questions. Dr. Allen, followed by
12 Captain Frady.

13
14 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Captain Hickman, for the comments. It
15 strikes me, when we were talking yesterday in the Ecosystem
16 Committee about the need to use examples of ecosystem-based
17 fisheries management, and places where that can be used in the
18 management process, and your comments about the hypoxic zone, and
19 potential impacts on things like cobia and king mackerel and stuff
20 is a good example of that, and so I hope we can follow that through
21 with the upcoming assessment.

22
23 **MR. HICKMAN:** That would be great. There's definitely an issue
24 with recruitment, and it has got to be tied to environmental
25 problems.

26
27 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you.

28
29 **MR. HICKMAN:** Thank you.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Frady.

32
33 **MR. FRADY:** Captain Hickman, I just want to thank you so much for
34 mentioning the ecosystem problems, and for having any kind of plan
35 to work on that. It's greatly appreciated. Thank you for stepping
36 up, and even bringing that to our attention, because all of us who
37 make our living on the water, and play on the water, all are seeing
38 the effects of something going on. Thank you, sir.

39
40 **MR. HICKMAN:** Thank you.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez, followed by Mr. Strelcheck.

43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. Scott, I wanted to ask you, and I know
45 that you've demonstrated that you're innovative, and very open-
46 minded, an out-of-the box thinker even, in terms of fisheries
47 issues. That much is very clear.

48

1 Now, I think we're scheduled, sometime in the future, to have a
2 meeting in Galveston, and, much like this sector separation federal
3 for-hire state management stuff that we fought, for many years,
4 once before already, I'm assuming this is going to drag a little
5 bit before it finally comes in for a landing. We have a meeting
6 in Galveston, and will this fleet, and their lack of support for
7 this -- Will they show up for that meeting in full force?
8

9 **MR. HICKMAN:** Well, when we were doing sector separation, we did
10 set a record for the longest public comment, in Galveston, Texas,
11 and I think it was like ten or eleven o'clock at night by the time
12 it finally ended, and we're up to the challenge to break that
13 record, and so let's, you know, keep moving on this. We've got a
14 lot of people who are going to speak against it, and so, Carrie,
15 you may want to think about getting your pizza order in early for
16 the council.
17

18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
19

20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Scott, it's good to see you. Thanks for being
21 here. I'm curious just about your observations on the water. You
22 commercially fish, and I know you're involved with the for-hire
23 industry. What are you seeing, in terms of changes in fish
24 abundance, size, and effort in Texas?
25

26 **MR. HICKMAN:** In Texas this year, I did see recreational effort
27 down a little bit. I don't know why that is. We did have a real
28 rough June, but, overall, you know, we didn't see as much
29 recreational effort. Charter boats ran more, I believe. We had
30 a good, busy charter boat season.
31

32 The fish sizes are gotten very small. Inside fifty or sixty miles,
33 the fish were small, small. There's a lot of tail pinchers.
34 There's a lot of fish being discarded. Outside sixty miles, the
35 fish are in really good shape. You know, our shelf goes out to a
36 hundred miles.
37

38 As you know, I sent yourself and some other people amberjack
39 pictures, and our amberjack fishery is doing good off of Galveston.
40 I know, off of Florida, it's not as good, but we're seeing good,
41 strong, big stocks of fish everywhere, but, yes, the red snapper
42 season, I would agree with some of the others. On the charter
43 boat side, it's too long.
44

45 We're catching too many fish. We need to shorten the seasons up.
46 I know Texas just closed. I say that I think recreational effort
47 is down, and I just think we've spread it out more in Texas. It's
48 a very, very long season, but the fish have gotten a lot smaller.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more, Scott. Mr. Geeslin.
3
4 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Captain Hickman.
5 Related to the seasonal components, and I don't care which sector,
6 but you're unable to fish under your federal charter-for-hire.
7 You're unable to capitalize on those federal waters right now, and
8 that's correct?
9
10 **MR. HICKMAN:** No, and I have a federally-permitted charter boat.
11 I operate actually three boats.
12
13 **MR. GEESLIN:** So you're able to capitalize on those fish in federal
14 waters right now?
15
16 **MR. HICKMAN:** Correct.
17
18 **MR. GEESLIN:** So what are we seeing, or what are you seeing, as
19 far as those sizes of fish? Yesterday, I reported, the last couple
20 of weeks, we're seeing a 9.6-pound average in red snapper.
21
22 **MR. HICKMAN:** So, from a purely fisherman standpoint, and I've
23 been doing this as a deckhand and a captain for almost forty years,
24 and I'm going to be fifty-nine this year, and the fishery has been
25 great to me. Everybody knows, when the water starts cooling down
26 in the fall, and the days get shorter, those big fish move back
27 inshore. That's just natural. That's just what nature does.
28
29 In the summertime, the water gets hot, and it's getting really
30 hot, and the bigger fish move further offshore. The fish are
31 smaller, and that's just what nature does, and so that's part of
32 why you're seeing bigger fish later in the season, like you're
33 seeing in your surveys. The season has gone longer than it's ever
34 gone in a long time. We're seeing those bigger fish, because they
35 naturally move back inshore when the days get shorter and the water
36 cools off.
37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.
39
40 **MR. WALKER:** Just real quick, how is the king mackerel fishing in
41 Texas?
42
43 **MR. HICKMAN:** It's terrible, the worst -- I would have never
44 believed, as a young captain, that a fish that was a nuisance while
45 we were fishing for everything else would ever be something I would
46 go look for and hardly ever catch anymore.
47
48 I bet I didn't catch twenty king mackerel this summer. It's

1 terrible. The same thing with cobia. I think I caught eight
2 keepers, and I used to catch 200 to 300 a summer. It's terrible,
3 and it's got to be mostly ecosystem related. You know, these fish
4 are not recruiting. You know, the little-bitty-baby king mackerel,
5 the fry, are not able to -- The water is too hot, and they're not
6 recruiting, and so it's not good.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Hickman. One more. I hear
9 your concerns about charter-for-hire red snapper state management.
10 My question is would you be in support of amberjack charter-for-
11 hire state management?

12
13 **MR. HICKMAN:** Well, we're already together, and I would have to
14 really petition our folks at home and see if they would be willing
15 to try that, since that fishery is already being managed at one.
16 The proof is in the pudding, right? You know, if you want to try
17 one, that would be a good one to try.

18
19 You know, as far as the battles we fought for red snapper, I don't
20 think we're willing to get back in bed with the recreational side
21 in state management. Amberjack, maybe that's something we could
22 try, and do a pilot program with charter and recreational, and set
23 the seasons how you want, state-by-state. Yes, and I think that
24 would be something worth looking into.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you.

27
28 **MR. HICKMAN:** Thank you.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more from Ms. Ballard.

31
32 **MS. BALLARD:** Hi, Scott. We had a great time this week with you,
33 and I was just curious. On your boat, your guests, are they having
34 a good time?

35
36 **MR. HICKMAN:** They do.

37
38 **MS. BALLARD:** So like a recreationally good time?

39
40 **MR. HICKMAN:** I think they do, you know, as long as they don't
41 drink too much.

42
43 **MS. BALLARD:** Just checking. All right. Thank you.

44
45 **MR. HICKMAN:** You bet.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. No other questions, and thank
48 you, Captain Hickman. Next up is Mr. Steven Rash, and he will be

1 followed by Mr. Mark Tryon.

2
3 **MR. STEVEN RASH:** Hello. I'm Steven Rash. I own Water Street
4 Seafood in Apalachicola, Florida, and I've been in the commercial
5 fishing business for about forty-two years. Recently, over the
6 past few years, I've seen management of our reef fish, particularly
7 snapper and grouper, become detrimental to the fishery itself.
8 The management is actually counterproductive.

9
10 When the federal government turned over management to each state,
11 that was the beginning of the end, and I've listened to fisherman
12 after fisherman, recreational fishermen, for-hire fishermen,
13 charter fishermen, testify, over and over and over again, today
14 and at many other council meetings, that the catch is going down.

15
16 Catch per unit effort is going down. Size is going down. The
17 seasons are too long. Discards are going up, but I see an
18 unwillingness of the council to make serious efforts towards
19 addressing these issues.

20
21 These are the main issues affecting our grouper snapper fishery.
22 What I see instead is the council wrestling around with some kind
23 of quota, wanting to change the IFQ quotas. The IFQ quota system
24 in the commercial fishery has been working for a long time. I
25 agree that I would like to see new entrants into the fishery. I
26 would like to see a way for people to gain quota, but, the quota
27 that I have, I bought. I paid for it. I took loans out, and I
28 worked for it. To take my quota from me to give, it to somebody
29 else for free, is not fair.

30
31 There's a loan program in place, and as one of the other
32 individuals testified, the loan program doesn't work, because I
33 was going to take a loan out, but they wouldn't take the quota for
34 collateral. If they would take the quota for collateral, and this
35 is quota the government controls, and they won't take their own
36 quota for collateral, but, if they would take the quota for
37 collateral, many more people could take a loan out, buy quota, go
38 fishing, and make their payments, but they don't -- That's not the
39 way it's set up. You have to put up your own collateral, i.e.,
40 your house, your mortgage, and so that's really not working.

41
42 As somebody else testified, in the red grouper fishery, when you
43 reissue more red grouper -- There's so much red grouper out there
44 now that you can't lease it. The last price I got for leasing red
45 grouper was ten-cents, but, the last time I put red grouper out to
46 my boats, it was zero.

47
48 At Water Street Seafood, I bought quota, and I lease quota, to in

1 turn put it on the boats that fish for us, and I don't make any
2 money on it.

3
4 I don't do it to make money as an investment. I do it so the
5 fishermen can fish, because they can't get their own quota, and so
6 making restrictions that, if you don't fish your quota, you lose
7 part of it, is unfair to me, A because I paid for it and B because
8 I just use it to put it on other fishermen's boats, so that they
9 can catch fish.

10
11 If we can increase our quotas by reducing recreational discard
12 mortality, which is by far the biggest factor that's harming our
13 fishery -- If you do something about that, we can increase quotas,
14 and we can give more quota to people that don't have quota, instead
15 of trying to take quota from people now, and so I hope you look at
16 that and come up with a better plan. Thank you.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rash. We have a question from Mr.
19 Sanchez.

20
21 **MR. RASH:** Yes, sir.

22
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hi there, and thank you. I wanted to ask you, and,
24 as this is getting kicked around the table, you know, how do we
25 get these shares circulating into the hands of new entrants and
26 what have you, some of the things discussed were possibly taking
27 increases in quotas, such as we just had in red grouper, and taking
28 that amount above the increase, so that you're not necessarily
29 taking anything from someone currently, and then making those
30 somehow -- Some, you know, mechanism, that's still being kicked
31 around, available to new entrants, as well as existing
32 participating fishermen. How do you feel about something like
33 that, conceptually?

34
35 **MR. RASH:** I would say I halfway agree with it. When I bought
36 quota, and I bought shares, I didn't buy pounds, and I bought a
37 percentage of the quota. Whether that quota goes up or down, I
38 paid for a percentage of that quota, and so, if the percentage of
39 the quota that I paid for gets less, then, yes, you're taking from
40 me, but I understand the other side of it.

41
42 You know, another alternative is for the government, A, to let
43 people borrow money, and put their quota up that they're buying as
44 collateral, and that would give people the ability to buy quota,
45 which, again, like people with testimony, you're getting into
46 business, and, a lot of times, you know, there are startup costs
47 to get into business. There are startup costs to getting into
48 commercial fishing.

1
2 You know, that's part of the -- You know, that's part of it, and
3 get over it, but the federal government can buy quota. If somebody
4 wants to sell quota, why can't the federal government buy it, and,
5 if they want to reissue it to somebody else, then reissue it to
6 somebody else.

7
8 I bought the quota, and I paid for it, and I've spent a lot, lot
9 of time and effort and work to pay for that quota, and so, if the
10 federal government wants to take the quota from me to give it to
11 somebody else, of course, I'm against that, and I'll fight that as
12 hard as I can.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I agree with everything you said. Thank you for
15 your comments.

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

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rash. Not seeing any other
20 questions, next up will be Mr. Mark Tryon, followed by Ms. Susan
21 Boggs.

22
23 **MR. MARK TRYON:** Gulf Breeze, Florida. I'm a commercial fisherman,
24 rod-and-reel fisherman, and I run day trips, twelve to fourteen-
25 hour trips. I've testified quite a few times on the reduction of
26 my landings over time since the implementation of state management.

27
28 I think something that should be done is that the audit should be
29 commissioned to audit the state management of red snapper to
30 determine the degree of accountability and accuracy that's out
31 there right now, and then recommend any improvements, because
32 there's a lot of room for improvement, and some states are more
33 accurate and accountable than others.

34
35 For example, I'm familiar with Florida, and I'm not so familiar
36 with the other states, and apparently Louisiana's system is pretty
37 good, but Florida, for instance, the survey gets sent out at random
38 to anglers, and I've received this survey. The problem with that,
39 one of the problems, is it's sent out like a month after you were
40 actually going fishing, and so, in other words, I don't know that
41 a survey is coming.

42
43 The survey comes maybe three or four weeks after I went fishing,
44 and I don't remember, and did I go fishing, and what did I catch?
45 You know, heck, if I was getting a survey, if I knew I was getting
46 a survey, I would have wrote some notes down and been able to
47 accurately fill it out, and my recollection -- When you get the
48 survey, it asks like what species were caught, and that's about

1 it, no weights or discards or any of that.

2
3 Then the other problem with it is it's voluntary, and so, if
4 somebody is, busy and they get it, or, you know, it just sits in
5 a pile on their desk, and then they don't respond to it, and so
6 there's a lot of room for improvement there, I know in Florida,
7 and I assume there is a similar room for improvement with some of
8 the other states.

9
10 What I would like to see is some improvements made now to the
11 current system, the way it's been done, and as a kind of a bridge
12 to a better system, which would be like an iPhone-based system
13 with hail-out and hail-in and number of fish, let's say for
14 snapper, and how many are onboard.

15
16 I think that could be done, and, you know, I think that would be
17 much more accountable and accurate in the future, if we could work
18 on implementing something like that, and maybe in conjunction with
19 a federal permit for recreational reef fishing, and that would
20 also bring in a little bit of funds too, which would help monitor
21 the whole system, enforcement and so on and so forth, and that's
22 about -- That's all I have to say today.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Tryon. Do we have any questions?
25 Not seeing any, next up online is Ms. Susan Boggs, a former council
26 member. Welcome, Susan.

27
28 **MS. ROY:** Susan, you'll have to unmute your line to speak. Susan,
29 I see that you've unmuted, but we can't hear you.

30
31 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Susan, go ahead and start.

32
33 **MS. BOGGS:** All right. Thank you, Emily. Good afternoon, Mr.
34 Chair and members of the Gulf Council, and thank you for the
35 opportunity to make comments. My name is Susan Boggs. My husband,
36 Randy, and I are the owners of Reel Surprise Charters and Marina
37 located in Orange Beach, Alabama.

38
39 In addition to the marina, we own a headboat and a six-passenger
40 boat. Each vessel we own holds both a Gulf charter-headboat permit
41 for reef fish and a Gulf charter-headboat permit for coastal
42 migratory pelagic fish.

43
44 We would like to clarify that we are not members of the Alabama
45 Charter Fishing Association. Our comments today are presented
46 solely in our capacity as owners and operators of charter vessels.
47 We are here to share our perspective based on our direct
48 involvement in the charter industry.

1
2 Our remarks in response to the council's discussion yesterday
3 regarding the potential delegation of federal for-hire vessel
4 management for red snapper to the Gulf states. During that
5 conversation, two state directors expressed that the system is not
6 broken. If the current system is effective, what is the reasoning
7 behind some council members advocating for a change in management
8 approach?

9
10 As owners, we do not support state management of red snapper for
11 federal for-hire vessels. We appreciate the protections provided
12 under federal management and have an established working
13 relationship with SERO. Our experience has shown that the current
14 federal management system provides important protections for both
15 the resource and our business. Under federal management, the
16 federal for-hire sector has not overfished red snapper in recent
17 years.

18
19 Additionally, we have observed that the red snapper season has
20 continued to lengthen, providing greater access. We believe it is
21 premature for the council to consider changes to the management
22 structure while SEFHIER 2.0 has not yet made progress. Without
23 meaningful advancement on SEFHIER 2.0, further discussion about
24 transitioning to state management seems unwarranted at this time.

25
26 Historically, federal for-hire charter boats and federal for-hire
27 headboats have proactively presented solutions to the Gulf
28 Council. One notable example is Amendment 42, which was tabled.

29
30 This amendment was developed after a two-year headboat
31 collaborative pilot program. This pilot program proved to be
32 highly successful addressing the management of red snapper and gag
33 grouper. It demonstrated a reduction of more than 50 percent
34 discards and allowed headboats and their customers, the non-boat-
35 owning public, year-round access to these species. Most notably,
36 this was a program that was developed by the fishermen on the
37 water. Thank you again for the opportunity to address the council
38 today, and happy birthday, Dr. Simmons.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Do we have any questions?
41 Not seeing any, Susan, thank you again for calling in. Next up is
42 Mr. Randy Lauser, and he will be followed by Mr. B.J. Burkett.

43
44 **MR. RANDY LAUSER:** Good afternoon, council. Randy Louser, Southern
45 Offshore Fishing Association. I just want to start with the IFQ
46 program. We probably wouldn't be having this discussion today if
47 it never went public.

1 The first five years I was in, I was, you know, qualified and
2 everything. I had fish and all that, and it was reasonable. You
3 could buy, and you could lease for a decent price. Then, after
4 the five years was up, it went public. That ruined it right there.
5 It should have stayed within the fishermen.

6
7 I heard the other, what, yesterday, that there are 600 IFQ
8 accounts, and a lot of those were non -- They had nothing to do
9 with the fishing business, nothing at all, okay, and so that's why
10 we're having this discussion today, because it went public, and I
11 want to thank the council for giving us fish back, because we've
12 been struggling ever since Amendment 53, and then our gag groupers,
13 and 88 percent of our gag groupers in Amendment 53.

14
15 We got kicked really hard. You know, we couldn't catch gags. I
16 was catching 2,000 pounds of gags a trip. That was a big cut right
17 there, along with the lease price. The lease price went through
18 the roof. Now, in the last couple of months -- My boat just had
19 his best trip the last trip. He had 7,700 for eight days, and we
20 had a cheap lease price, and we finally made some money.

21
22 The morale around the dock was great. Everybody is happy, because
23 they just got a big raise, and it's just -- So I'm all for the
24 pilot program to go forward with any increases in the quota to go
25 to the people who are catching the fish, because, you know, I heard
26 somebody just seven-dollars a pound you can buy it for. Okay, and
27 you could have got that back in the day.

28
29 Then, after that five-year period, everything shot through the
30 roof, the lease price every year, or the quota price to buy, and
31 nobody could afford to buy in it. Who is going to go spend a
32 million bucks, you know, when the future of the fishery was so
33 uncertain, and so I'm all for the pilot program for helping out
34 the fishermen. That's what we need.

35
36 On the blacks and the scamp, I think it should be kept together,
37 because we haven't been out there -- You know, ever since we lost
38 88 percent of our gags, we're not fishing those waters, because
39 we're tired of throwing gag groupers back, and then, when you catch
40 the scamps, they're all dead, and so it's just going to make a big
41 discard for the scamp, and so thank you very much.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lauser. Do we have any questions?
44 Not seeing any, next up online will be Mr. B.J. Burkett, followed
45 by Mr. Ted Venker.

46
47 **MR. B. J. BURKETT:** Can you hear me?
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, we can.
2

3 **MR. BURKETT:** My name is B.J. Burkett, Panama City Beach, Florida.
4 I have three charter vessels, one of which is also a commercial
5 fishing vessel. Half of the year, I am an IFQ holder. The main
6 reason I'm calling today is about the state management for the
7 federal for-hire industry.
8

9 I am totally against it. I haven't talked to anybody in this area
10 that is for it, and my main issue with the council right now is I
11 don't even know why this is being entertained, when less than 10
12 percent of the permit holders in this fishery of about 1,250 --
13 Less than 10 percent is pushing this.
14

15 I mean, it shouldn't even be on the table at that point. Put it
16 to a vote if you've got to, but I'm not seeing anybody but a small
17 section of our fishery that is wanting this to go into effect, and
18 all you're going to do is create disaster. They're going to cook
19 the books, and they're going to let them catch four fish a day,
20 and it's just going to be a disaster down the road, and, if you
21 all can't see that, it's very embarrassing.
22

23 The other thing, red snapper, over the last few years, we have all
24 stood up there, in public testimony, and told you that the fish
25 are getting smaller, and they're not as plentiful, and we're not
26 seeing you all do nothing about it, and why is that? Why won't
27 you all do something, when we're the stakeholders, and we want to
28 see this fishery thrive? Please do something.
29

30 We need to lower the season. A shorter season. It needs to be
31 lower for the recreational, also. I mean, I'm an avid recreational
32 fisherman, also. Charter fish, just trying to make a living, but,
33 I mean, all these fishermen, commercial, rec, everybody is telling
34 you that, hey, man, the fish just aren't there, and they're not
35 big anymore. I mean, we need your help to do something here.
36

37 The gag grouper, you all cut it back so bad on that, and my boat
38 caught my quota and another boat's quota, which used to be 20,000
39 pounds, which is down to about 3,500 now. It took two-and-a-half
40 days to catch them, if that tells you how plentiful they are. You
41 all need to get the quota back up on grouper.
42

43 If you all remember, years back, I stood up there in front of you
44 all, and I said, hey, we're starting to see an issue with grouper.
45 You all didn't do nothing about it, and then, when you finally
46 did, it was a drastic cut. Why can't we do some small cuts in the
47 beginning, instead of all drastic at the end? I mean, just start
48 listening to the fishermen. It would go a lot quicker, and a lot

1 smoother. That's all I got.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burkett. Do we have any questions?
4 Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Ted Venker, followed by Mr. Greg
5 Ball online.

6

7 **MR. TED VENKER:** Hi, and thank you. My name is Ted Venker. I'm
8 with the Coastal Conservation Association. Thank you for the
9 opportunity to speak today, and thank you, General Spraggins, for
10 hosting the social last night. Great venue and great food. I
11 know everybody that goes to these meetings appreciates your effort,
12 and so thank you for that.

13

14 I will say, right up front, that I cannot speak for charter-for-
15 hire businesses. There are plenty of the usual crowd here today
16 to do that. There are many, many more out there who,
17 unfortunately, you don't hear from who can do that, but I do think
18 it's important to remember that the people on the back of those
19 boats are regular anglers, and, on their behalf, I would advocate
20 for a system that provides the most flexibility to access the
21 resource, whether that is tailoring seasons, due to weather or
22 holidays or whatever, to enhance their experience.

23

24 Those variables, as we all know, differ hugely from Key West to
25 Brownsville, which is why we've been supporters of state management
26 from the beginning, and so, with that in mind, I would encourage
27 this council to explore the proposal to delegate management of the
28 federal for-hire sector to the states thoroughly. It may not be
29 workable for all states, but it may be workable for some, and, by
30 working through the document, you at least know more than you know
31 now.

32

33 You don't often hear from charter customers, but I remember, a few
34 years ago, and I think some of you were here then, and I think we
35 were in Alabama, when some snowbirds, and I think they were from
36 Minnesota -- Somebody either brought them in, or they just stumbled
37 into a Gulf Council meeting on their own, but they came to testify
38 before the council, and they were saying how wonderful it would be
39 if their charter captain could own catch shares, so they could be
40 flexible and fish when they came to town in the wintertime.

41

42 Well, state management could do that. It could provide a winter
43 season for snowbirds, as an example. It could provide a lot more
44 versatility for both the private anglers in the back of those boats
45 and the operators, more so than they have now, and so that's just
46 something to think about, and so, at the very least, I encourage
47 the council to explore those options. Some states could opt-in,
48 and some states could opt-out, and that in itself provides

1 flexibility.

2

3 As Chris said yesterday, you know, most obstacles can be worked
4 out. The only really unworkable obstacle that I've seen is a one-
5 size-fits-all regime for an industry that operates from one end of
6 the Gulf to the other. That's all I have. Thank you. Happy
7 birthday, Carrie.

8

9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Venker. Do we have any questions?
10 Not seeing any, Ted, thank you. Next up online is Mr. Greg Ball,
11 and he will be followed by Ms. Ashford Rosenberg.

12

13 **MR. GREG BALL:** Good afternoon. This is Greg Ball, from Galveston,
14 Texas, charter-for-hire, two federally-permitted boats and two
15 state-water boats. I'm just here, and I'm totally against the
16 state management of our federally-permitted boats.

17

18 I haven't seen anything good come out of the state management, and
19 I don't see anything good that's going to come out of state
20 management, and so I'm totally against it. That's all I have.

21

22 You know, I'm in Texas, and we have snapper in state water year-
23 round, which is, you know, never a good thing either, but they
24 continue to let that stay that way, and so I don't want to see my
25 permits, that I make money off of, make a living for my family, go
26 to the state to manage. They're being managed just fine where
27 they're at. Thank you.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Ball. Do we have any questions?
30 Not seeing any, next up, Ms. Ashford Rosenberg, followed by Mr.
31 Clarence Seymour.

32

33 **MS. ASHFORD ROSENBERG:** Good afternoon, council members, and thank
34 you for the chance to speak. I'm Ashford Rosenberg. I'm the
35 Director of Regional Policy and Special Projects for the Gulf of
36 America Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance.

37

38 First, congratulations, Kevin, on your recent appointment to the
39 director at DNR. We look forward to continuing to work with you
40 in that role. Rick, big thanks to you and your team last night.
41 That's one of my favorite spots in the entire Gulf, and so thank
42 you for that, and happy birthday, Carrie.

43

44 Before I get into the Shareholders Alliance's specific comments
45 and recommendations on amendments, I would like us to take a step
46 back and think about what life looks like for commercial fishermen
47 and seafood businesses right now.

48

1 We hear a lot about business planning, and then that all relies on
2 stability, right? You know, if you're going to make a business
3 plan, you need to have some stability in front of you, so you can
4 make that plan, and that doesn't exist right now for commercial
5 fishermen.
6

7 If you look from 2025 to 2027, that two-year period, there are six
8 major regulatory changes coming for commercial reef fish fishermen
9 in that time. We had the emergency rule for red grouper this year.
10 January 1 of next year, the fishermen will lose half of their
11 shallow-water and deepwater quota. Sometime next year, we'll have
12 that mid-year increase of red grouper, Amendment 62, and then, in
13 2027, if the council keeps to its current timeline, we will see
14 the new black and scamp share complexes, the implementation of the
15 pilot red grouper quota pool, and possibly the consideration of
16 new permit requirements to purchase and maintain shares.
17

18 That's a lot to take in a very short amount of time, and so I'm
19 just urging the council -- We acknowledge that fisheries are
20 inherently dynamic, and management has to be able to respond
21 quickly, but, as you're debating these amendments in front of you,
22 please try to keep in mind that these are not standalone things.
23 They all intermingle, and they all work together, and they all can
24 either hinder or enhance the fishermen's ability to grow and adapt
25 their livelihoods.
26

27 Specifically on Amendment 62 for red grouper, we do support moving
28 this amendment forward as quickly as possible with the phase-in
29 quota approach. As we said before, mid-year increases in quota
30 can be disruptive, and, with fifty-five days of fishing left in
31 this year, we've only caught half the quota, and that's the lowest
32 quota utilization since 2018. The phase-in approach is also, you
33 know, appropriately precautionary to give fishermen some time to,
34 over time, adapt to that large quota increase.
35

36 For the red grouper quota pool on Amendment 63, we appreciate the
37 Gulf Council exploring new ideas to support the next generation of
38 commercial fishermen and those who may be capital limited and
39 unable to purchase shares.
40

41 If quota pools are executed and designed effectively, they could
42 be an effective tool to meet the needs of fishermen and management.
43 At a high level, we have the following recommendations. Identify
44 clear metrics that ensure the quota pool is meeting its goals,
45 separate from the inherent changes that are going to happen from
46 this large quota increase.
47

48 Ensure the pilot set-aside doesn't unfairly penalize fishermen who

1 have invested their hard-earned money into purchasing shares and
2 now won't realize the gains of that purchase. Clear eligibility
3 requirements and participation requirements, and we also urge you
4 to convene the Ad Hoc IFQ AP to provide their expertise.

5
6 At a finer scale, we would like you to consider including the red
7 grouper shares held by NMFS from 36A into this quota pool. We
8 recommend adding an alternative to Action 1 that adds some other
9 thresholds, just other than today versus next year on when the
10 quota pool exists. Add options that do consider a portion of the
11 increase for the quota pool, as opposed to the whole quota, and
12 exploring the ideas of a research set-aside, similar to New
13 England, so we can really benefit both the fishermen and the
14 science.

15
16 I don't know how three minutes went so fast, and I have a red
17 light, but I'm happy to take questions, and I have some input on
18 58A, if you would like to hear it.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Rosenberg. We have a question
21 from Dr. Sweetman.

22
23 **DR. SWEETMAN:** What are your thoughts on shallow-water grouper?

24
25 **MS. ROSENBERG:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We support the removal
26 of 1.2 from the amendment. It's a very complicated amendment
27 already, that has real life impacts, and so the IFQ programs, by
28 design, are supposed to be flexible and responsive to industry,
29 and, you know, by just distributing these new shares proportionally
30 with current shareholdings, it will give the industry the ability
31 to adapt and move allocation within themselves moving forward.

32
33 We also urge you to -- You know, it sounds like the MRIP pilot
34 study is not that far off from completion, and so we urge you to
35 uphold your motion to not reallocate based on MRIP-FES until that
36 study is completed and reviewed by the SSC, and it sounds like
37 we're finally near that point.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Ms. Rosenberg? Not seeing
40 any, thank you, Ashford.

41
42 **MS. ROSENBERG:** Thank you.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Mr. Clarence Seymour, followed by Jason
45 Delacruz.

46
47 **MR. CLARENCE SEYMOUR:** Good afternoon, council. Captain Clarence
48 Seymour, Charter Boat SYL, Biloxi, Mississippi, federally

1 permitted for twenty-eight years, and, yes, as you've heard from
2 a lot of captains here today, we've been through the whole thing.
3 Go back to 2005, and Katrina hit us. Three years down on historical
4 catch out of the state of Mississippi, which we are -- Then come
5 back through the oil spill, and we get through sector separation,
6 and we fight regional management tooth and nail in the State of
7 Mississippi, with the federal fleet that was a little bit bigger
8 back then.

9
10 Now the fleet is -- The paperwork that came out in the document
11 the other day said we have twenty-three federally-permitted
12 charter boats in Mississippi, which shows 2.3 percent of the
13 federal permits, which we actually only have thirteen on the pier.
14 That's several behind us, and some down by McElroy's, and there's
15 two in Pascagoula, and one in Pass Christian, and so there's really
16 only four places, in a seventy-five-mile coastline, that hold all
17 thirteen federally-permitted charter boats.

18
19 The other ten are addressed in Alabama, the ones in Orange Beach,
20 and the other ones are part of the fleet in Venice, which these
21 guys are residents in Ocean Springs, but they work out of Venice.

22
23 That guideline there, if we have a breakdown on regional
24 management, and Mississippi gets a really short cut, and we're
25 already getting a short cut on the private anglers, and the
26 uncertainty of regional management for us is, right now, we're
27 federally managed, and it's working fantastic.

28
29 I've come from a plateau of about to lose everything in 2009, after
30 Katrina, to now a striving, full force business for the summertime,
31 and it's just very important that we listen to the fleet about
32 what really our needs are, and our purposes of that document that's
33 getting started.

34
35 One of the things about purpose is about closure. It was in there,
36 that I've seen, and that's what I see, that our neighboring states
37 and such as, can't regional manage for closure.

38
39 Closure is so important for this fishery that I've seen in my
40 twenty-eight years of federal fishing, and that makes it strive
41 for the following season, and everybody, the public and the private
42 anglers, we all get to really use the resource at its full
43 potential, other than weekends and such as, which I know we have
44 to, you know, keep everybody in mind on each state and all that,
45 but we've just got to remember that we're small and we've -- I got
46 -- You all fixing to hear testimony from some young stakeholders,
47 and I'm very proud of them for showing up today and representing
48 their fleet. I think you all are going to be pretty pleased with

1 what these young men are saying about their future.

2
3 Reef building, the future is one of the things that we're really
4 lacking on in the EEZ, which a lot of people don't realize that,
5 that it's such a struggle in certain states to get good reef
6 development made, when they pull all rigs up in your area that you
7 depend on, that all of our private anglers and our federal fleet
8 and our federal passengers are able to use that area, and that we
9 have to share with the shrimp boat fleet, and we share with each
10 other, the commercial fleet, et cetera, and so there's a lot to
11 it.

12
13 Regional management, I'm definitely not for any type of regional
14 management. Let's leave it like it is. It's fantastic, and it's
15 just working good for me, and that's all I've got to say.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Seymour. We have a question from
18 Mr. Osborne.

19
20 **MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Captain. I just want to make it clear,
21 and so your objection isn't necessarily to the state managing it,
22 but it's more of a concern about what our shares would be, or total
23 number we would be able to get in Mississippi.

24
25 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Yes, and, well, I didn't quite get to it. The thing
26 that I have is, when they draw this line from -- If we do a line
27 draw, which I heard that going down too, and so I really -- It's
28 the uncertainty is not my -- Just say we got 80,000 pounds.

29
30 With the thirteen boats that's on the pier, that pretty well gives
31 us a year-round fishery. We don't need a year-round fishery. We
32 need closure. Then, when everybody's opportunity comes back --
33 That's my feelings about what our cut may be, but, if it's 2.3
34 percent of the federal permits, but you're right that they had
35 this document cut up before in Amendment 50, when it was trying to
36 get us in regional management.

37
38 It was astronomical on what we was going to get, but we had
39 uncertainty, because Dr. Lutz and I had to talk about it in
40 Galveston, but she's no longer with the agency anymore. General
41 Spraggins, he's probably going to stay around a little bit longer,
42 but who's our next guy? Who's our next governor? That's my
43 problem with uncertainty on our cut of Mississippi's allocation.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Seymour. We have two questions.
46 Mr. Geeslin, followed by Captain Walker.

47
48 **MR. GEESLIN:** Captain Seymour, not necessarily a question, and I

1 just wanted to appreciate you for bringing up the critical
2 important habitat of artificial reefs. I don't care what sticker
3 you've got on your boat, whether it's charter-for-hire, rec,
4 commercial, and I think we've all been able to realize the value
5 in the enhanced habitat capacity of those artificial reefs. We're
6 certainly realizing them off the coast of Texas, and I know Alabama
7 is too, and so I appreciate you highlighting that today.

8
9 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Thank you. The government shut down, and the Corps
10 of Engineers is holding a permit for us. We have a yard full of
11 -- I'm part of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Fishery Board, one of
12 the board of directors, and we've been praying, for the last three
13 years, to get this permit. It's adding to two sites that -- We're
14 almost full in all the three sites or so we have, and the one
15 that's way offshore, and so thanks for bringing that up.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

18
19 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Sebo, and I appreciate your concerns here.
20 The system, the for-hire system, works good for your people here
21 in Mississippi as-is, correct? That's what you said, right, and
22 I think -- I think your concern is legitimate.

23
24 We're not offering any guarantees that you're not going to get
25 less, and, from what I can see, these, your smaller states up here,
26 Alabama and Mississippi, don't always get the best deal when it
27 comes to splitting things up between the states, and so, as it
28 stands right now, we're all sharing this pot, and, the vast
29 majority of what I'm hearing in the charter business, we're all
30 happy sharing this pot that we have right now. It's working out
31 good for everybody, and so I agree with what your point is, and I
32 appreciate you coming up here.

33
34 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Yes, and can I add to that, Ed? So we're under a
35 Tails 'n Scales app right now, and so we hail-in and hail-out, and
36 we tell Mississippi what we catch per passenger, and discards, but
37 the thing about it is that I can go back on that, our state's,
38 Mississippi's, website, Tails 'n Scales, and I actually fished
39 fifty-six red snapper trips in 115 days.

40
41 That's not smashing 115 days, but my business strived well enough,
42 because the passengers that we have in the summertime, that's --
43 Everybody thinks, oh, well, you're going to get more in October.
44 We may, and, when them tailgates drop, fishing stops here in
45 Mississippi. We're SEC, and they love football. The phone does
46 not ring, but thank you anyway.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Seymour, one question. You mentioned you

1 were fishing fifty out of 100 days, correct, or fifty trips?

2
3 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Fifty-six snapper trips. That was actually logged
4 red snapper trips, which is approximately about -- It's somewhere
5 around 550, or 560, red snapper from June 1 through September 15.
6 It's 115 days.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So my question to you is do you run two trips a
9 day, or you can only run around one trip a day?

10
11 **MR. SEYMOUR:** I used to smash them all the time, but, right now,
12 I'm a little old for all that, and so the body won't allow the
13 double sixes as much as I used to. I let these young guys handle
14 that, and so I try to do like a full day, mostly, from six to two
15 or somewhere like that. It's a lot easier on a fellow's body, and
16 the heat.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you.

19
20 **MR. SEYMOUR:** You're welcome.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, we have Mr. Jason Delacruz calling in
23 online, and he'll followed by Chance Seymour.

24
25 **MR. JASON DELACRUZ:** All right. Thank you, everybody. I know it
26 seems weird that I'm calling you online, when you saw me there all
27 week, but I just had to catch an airplane, and so, real quick, I
28 guess the focus of my comments has been my conversations with Andy
29 on the pilot program, 63, for red grouper.

30
31 Very, very cautiously, I'm willing to try this idea, from this
32 concept, to see if we can stabilize our system, but I'll say it
33 once, and I'll say it again, and I think the phrase that's the
34 most important in this conversation is it's harvest.

35
36 I don't think there should be a separate pool for somebody who
37 owns quota and doesn't own quota. I know there's, ironically,
38 people that have sold quota that are going to be in the non-harvest
39 pool, and people that own quota will be in the quota pool that own
40 quota, and, if you understand how I'm confusing this, my point is
41 why is there a difference if I own quota? Why should I be penalized
42 if I bought quota?

43
44 Now, the ironic thing is the takeaway, and I'm not trying to tell
45 tales on Andy, is that I would fall in the non-quota-owning pool,
46 which seems like it would dilute the argument, and so, if this is
47 the case, why don't we just do one pool? If you harvest, this is
48 what you get. This is what the set-aside is, regardless of what

1 you own. I shouldn't be penalized for owning quota and making
2 those decisions for my business.

3
4 If you chose to, you know, not buy quota, which many of these
5 people are, mostly because of these conversations, then fine, but
6 let's get to a point where we try a system like this, see how it
7 works, and stabilize this system, so they know, hey, this is all
8 I'm going to get, and then they can go out and invest in their
9 business.

10
11 You know, like you've heard from so many other people that's been
12 before me, you know, they bought quota, and they invested money.
13 You know, make the conversation about harvest, and not about
14 anything else, because that's what we really are talking about
15 here, the people that harvest.

16
17 We want to protect the people that harvest the fish. They provide
18 food for us. It's part of our food security conversation that we
19 have we have right now, and so let's really focus on that, in my
20 opinion.

21
22 Also, on the shallow-water grouper thing, to me, it's just that I
23 know we considered but rejected that first part of that
24 conversation yesterday, and I'll be honest that I was blown away
25 by that. That just scared the living crap out of me, as a guy
26 that's been in this fishery a long time.

27
28 If we're ever going to get to a stable fishery, where everybody is
29 going to get to make decisions, we have to stop doing things like
30 this. We have to get in a position where we're just moving forward,
31 and the people can invest in their business.

32
33 It shouldn't be fair that we decide that we're going to build a
34 system that penalizes people for the wrong reasons, because I think
35 the one good thing that will come out of this potential program
36 with red grouper is that people are going to understand that it's
37 not as good as you think when you get to fish for your fish, and
38 you have to fish for your fish, because they're going to have a
39 breakdown timeframe, and they're not going to get those fish the
40 following year, and so they're going to understand what ownership
41 means.

42
43 From that idea, I'm willing to move cautiously towards this
44 program, just so that we can show you that, hey, it's not as easy
45 as you think. Right now, the burden is on the fish house, and
46 it's good, but it will change in this conversation, and I think
47 that's something to think about and to evaluate. I hit exactly
48 three minutes. I'm doing good. Go ahead. I'm done.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Delacruz. Do we have any
3 questions? Not seeing any, Jason, thank you for calling in. Next
4 up is Mr. Chance Seymour, followed by Captain Jim Green.

5
6 **MR. CHANCE SEYMOUR:** Hello. I'm Captain Chance Seymour, locally
7 right here in Biloxi, Mississippi, owner and operator of
8 Mississippi Gulf Coast Fishing Charters. I've been in business
9 since 2017. I bought my federal permit when I was twenty-one years
10 old.

11
12 I do not support state management. The system right now is working
13 incredibly good. I get to fish just about as many days as I need
14 to fish to make an honest living, and I just don't see why we're
15 going to try to fix something that's not broken, but, other than
16 that, that's about all I have.

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

20
21 **MR. WALKER:** Just real quick, how is the king fishing in
22 Mississippi this year?

23
24 **MR. CHANCE SEYMOUR:** I don't think I caught one this year.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Seymour?
27 Not seeing any --

28
29 **MR. CHANCE SEYMOUR:** Thank you all for your time.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for coming, Chance. Next up is Captain
32 Jim Green, followed by Captain Mike Jennings.

33
34 **MR. JIM GREEN:** Thank you, Council. Captain Jim Green, president
35 of the Destin Charter Boat Association and the Charter Fishermen's.
36 Thank you, Mississippi, and General, and all of you. That social
37 was great. The food was wonderful. Happy birthday, Carrie.

38
39 I'm speaking on behalf of both organizations today. On Thursday,
40 we emailed out a joint letter to all members speaking against the
41 idea of Gulf states managing our federal for-hire fleet for red
42 snapper.

43
44 First, the premise of a single federal permit being managed by
45 different administrative agencies, with different agendas,
46 different data systems, different budgets, while umbrellaed by the
47 agency that has done the job of keeping us keeping our subsector
48 within setting harvest limits, seems a bit much. That makes my

1 uncertainty meter and alarms go off, and that doesn't sound like
2 a regulation that will create less government bureaucracy, but
3 more of it.

4
5 During the constant positioning for fish before the passage of
6 Amendment 40, there was a brutal reality that came to fruition,
7 and that was our industry was being used as pawns and collateral
8 damage in a political demonstration against the agency with
9 noncompliant state red snapper seasons, so much that we fought to
10 split away.

11
12 There was a desire in our industry to create our own data
13 collection program, and apply that to bring accountability and
14 stability to our industry, and not be brought back in the state
15 politics and the whim of change that, with different
16 administrations, agendas and priorities would come with.

17
18 There's nowhere in any of the Gulf states constitutions that
19 protects my industry's way of life and requires me to have the
20 seat at the table like the MSA does. The intent of this federal
21 permit was to provide limited amount of access to the Gulf federal
22 fisheries. We did that.

23
24 We limited to a finite number amount of effort that can be applied.
25 Then we took a haircut from our red snapper historical catch, from
26 62 to 43 percent, to get us a piece of the pie to work within.
27 Now, after all that, we do take reservation in fleshing out being
28 controlled by the entities that haven't shown us that we are
29 necessarily protected when the going gets tough.

30
31 I've been told, a few times, that this was about season dates,
32 season start dates, and bag limits. I can understand wanting to
33 have that discussion that fleshes that out, but, far more than
34 that -- This reaches far more than that. This is trying to pull
35 the heart out of the federal permit holder and fracture the Gulf-
36 wide authority this permit has, bringing those fish and permits
37 that are -- Bringing the fish that those permits represent into
38 the fold and having complete control.

39
40 Then we're right back smack where we get where we had to fight our
41 way out of a decade ago. This is why we don't want it. Becoming
42 the responsibility of multiple administrations, variables, and
43 budgets and priorities, one election way from a drastic change, no
44 thank you.

45
46 The opt-in and opt-out is the camel's nose under the tent. I think
47 it -- We think it sets a bad precedent and will create a level of
48 uncertainty for the rest of the fleet. Our system is not

1 functioning outside of the limits or intentions of how it was set
2 up.

3
4 If you want to discuss start season dates, let's do that, but there
5 is a very -- This is a very complex possible solution to a problem
6 that really truly hasn't been defined yet, and, if season start
7 dates and bag limits is what we want to talk about, there's other
8 less arduous methods to take a look at those things, and so thank
9 you for the opportunity to speak.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. Do we have any
12 questions? Mr. Sanchez.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Jim, if you could elaborate a little bit, and you
15 were mentioning that there was value, and I guess, and I don't
16 know, security in having a limited access component to the federal
17 program. Now, what do you perceive happens if you get kind of
18 roped into some state management?

19
20 **MR. GREEN:** Well, I understand -- So, to me, I think that the --
21 I think short-term people would like it, until there's not any
22 fish, and then there's no protections that are set up like there
23 is with Magnuson. Magnuson acknowledges us as a user group, and,
24 as we experienced in the noncompliant state season, we were
25 acknowledged, but we were just not considered that much, and I
26 want everybody to know here that I'm not necessarily worried about
27 Chris and Louisiana right now, but I've got thirty more years of
28 this, and eventually Chris is going to retire, and eventually
29 Louisiana, Florida, every single state, is going to have a
30 different governor.

31
32 I'm concerned about that, because I went through the first part of
33 trying to get this, and it's not -- It's not that Magnuson is this
34 glorious thing that has no flaws, and it definitely does, and it
35 has room for improvement, but it doesn't have the veritable sense
36 and the nimbleness that state governments have, and I find that to
37 be, long-term, a very big problem. I hope that answers what you
38 were getting at, Mr. Sanchez. Thank you for the opportunity to
39 elaborate. Thank you.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. Next up is Captain
42 Mike Jennings, followed by Maddux.

43
44 **MR. MIKE JENNINGS:** Good afternoon. I'm Captain Mike Jennings
45 from Freeport, Texas. I'm also from that same congressional
46 district as Captain Hickman spoke with you all about earlier, and
47 I wish I had more than three minutes, because I think I could offer
48 some historical perspective of why some of you all are sitting

1 around this table looking at all these charter boat captains coming
2 up to you and saying they don't want what you're offering.

3
4 I can go all the way back, on my historical perspective, to an
5 organization we called Save Our Sector, SOS, and there's probably
6 less than a half-a-dozen faces looking at me right now that even
7 remember that. We disbanded that organization and became the
8 Charter Fishermen's Association. My name, my signature, is on the
9 original incorporation for that organization. I'm past president
10 of that.

11
12 Now, I'm not speaking for that organization, neither one of them,
13 today, and I'm speaking for myself, but, Amendment 40, when we
14 fought that thing for over a decade, was because our industry was
15 being crushed, basically through regulatory differences. Those
16 regulatory differences still exist, and it also comes down to a
17 lot of trust.

18
19 Throughout that entire fight, and there's one person on the council
20 right now that's going to looking to be kind of funny, because he
21 did help, and he did step up and give us a hand at the end, but,
22 for the most part, our biggest fight was with the state directors.

23
24 My state alone told me, multiple times, that it didn't matter what
25 we wanted, and they were never going to vote for us. They were
26 never going to support us in it, and, although I have the utmost
27 respect for the council members we have from Texas now, and that's
28 not pandering, and that's honesty, they're always going to be here,
29 and, as he said before, governors change, and things change.

30
31 Under the current system that we have, we are able to collectively
32 come to this council and gather information on what we want as a
33 group, kind of like changing the season a few weeks because
34 Mississippi wanted to start a week earlier, and great. Was it the
35 best thing for me in Texas? No, and it's not going to help me at
36 all, but it's something they wanted, and, collectively as a group,
37 it helped us.

38
39 We have that ability now under sector separation. If you split it
40 by state, or if you split it where I heard last night and say at
41 the Mississippi-Alabama state line, now I'm going to have to work
42 strictly with individuals in Louisiana and Alabama, where I've
43 been told -- Even one last night said we've got to look out for
44 our own.

45
46 Well, I'm not their own. Now I'm at the mercy of two states that
47 have no obligation to represent me whatsoever as a charter boat
48 captain from Texas, and there's so many pitfalls that haven't been

1 thought through here, and so many opportunities to make this
2 mistake, and we listened to how great state management is.

3
4 Well, I would -- I could argue that it hasn't been a success.
5 We're watching these fish get smaller and smaller every year, and
6 that is by far the number one indicator of a fishery that's in a
7 decline. We can stand up there like those three monkeys that see
8 no evil, do no evil, and hear no evil, but we have to face facts
9 here, and is the state management that great?

10
11 We don't think it is, and we enjoy the success we've had since
12 Amendment 40 has been passed. We've lost -- We've fought lawsuits
13 all the way to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and a lot of
14 these arguments that are being given to you all today about the
15 advantages of it didn't even fly in the Fifth Circuit, when they
16 tried to crush the amendment altogether, and so I'm out of time,
17 and so I will stop there. I wish I had hours.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Jennings. Do we have a
20 question? Mr. Sanchez.

21
22 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Mike, you were mentioning that there's some perceived
23 advantages, at least that you have, to being able to come to this
24 transparent, very public process and, you know, come as a group,
25 or as an individual, and voice your concerns, and hopefully, you
26 know, we listen, and we take some action at some point. Do you
27 feel you have that same in your state management? I'm not familiar
28 with the state public process.

29
30 **MR. JENNINGS:** Currently, with -- I've made multiple trips to
31 Austin as well. I haven't in quite some time, because it was
32 futile on some issues or fisheries.

33
34 A lot of the disparities that we currently have, and still have,
35 within the private recreational access, and the state access, and
36 there's -- We've tried to talk about our concerns with that, and
37 I gave up on that a decade ago, and it was because we were basically
38 told that we were just going to do what we want to do, and if it
39 -- However it affects you, we're the State of Texas, and we have
40 the right to decide what's going on in our state waters, et cetera.

41
42 There's -- I could go on and on about that, too, but I feel like,
43 right now, as a group, and others -- We talk, and, as an industry,
44 we're a lot better organized than some people may imagine, and we
45 speak daily throughout the Gulf of Mexico, and we can come to this
46 council, and we've already run -- We've already flushed all the
47 problems and pitfalls out amongst ourselves, and we can come in
48 here as a group, and all we've got to say is here's what we think

1 works best for the industry, and this is what we would like you to
2 do for the change, and I'm just using that change because it's
3 most recent with the season, the discussion for Mississippi.

4
5 There was no argument going forward. We had already had the
6 arguments behind closed doors, and it was simple, because there's
7 -- It doesn't hurt -- It doesn't give an advantage to any one
8 state's agenda, and it didn't hurt any one state, and it was a
9 pretty simple decision by the council to move forward on.

10
11 The ability to do that going forward with the states, given our
12 past history with the state directors and so forth, when we were
13 trying to do something we thought was best for the industry, and
14 there's nothing to show us that's going to be any different than
15 it was prior to Amendment 40.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Jennings. I have one more
18 from Mr. Geeslin.

19
20 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thanks, Captain Jennings. I always appreciate your
21 input, and I value our dialogue and relationship, and I know we've
22 got a lot of common denominators, one being the strength of the
23 Texas economy, the eighth largest economy in the world. You play
24 a role in that, and so I want to state that.

25
26 **MR. JENNINGS:** I live right next to what I think is the third-
27 largest city in the nation. I've got a clientele built into my
28 back pocket. I mean, it's all these -- You know, all these ports
29 are different. Some are tourism and so forth.

30
31 **MR. GEESLIN:** Sure, and this is -- I've got an observation, and
32 I've got a question. I've heard a lot, and I'm somewhat
33 conflicted, because I hear, you know, the industry is doing well.
34 The seasons have gotten better. It's not broke, don't fix it, but
35 then, also here, the fish are getting smaller, which is, you know,
36 not solely pointed at any one sector, and the fishery is crashing,
37 and localized depletion, and so I'm trying to -- In my head, I'm
38 trying to, you know, figure that out and what's what.

39
40 I agree that you all are incredibly well organized, and that helps
41 us, you know, coming from a couple of mouthpieces that would you
42 say represent that sector rather well, and I know, you know, Scott
43 mentioned the congressional district up there, and we've got the
44 high population center, but I'm also -- You know, this is
45 representing the State of Texas, and we've also got that fishery
46 down in the south.

47
48 **MR. JENNINGS:** Right.

1
2 **MR. GEESLIN:** Down in the southern coast, and, Mike, what's your
3 thought, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but, if you
4 know what those folks are thinking about, because we're getting
5 calls from across the coast as well, and I'm hearing from you, but
6 what's your feel for that fishery down there in the charter-for-
7 hire sector that fish primarily below Rockport and Aransas?

8
9 **MR. JENNINGS:** I'm trying to choose my words correctly. I know
10 three or four of them down there, or a half-a-dozen maybe, and a
11 couple that are now out of the business. I know one, that was a
12 big supporter of Amendment 40, that the Port Aransas Boatmen's
13 Association refused to sell fuel to and drummed out of town because
14 he just wouldn't go along with what he was told to believe. I can
15 name him, and he's probably listening to me talk right now.

16
17 They deserve what's best for them. On the same token, I believe
18 that everybody deserves what's best for them, and, within this
19 country, when you're a large minority of whatever that entity may
20 be, then I think they should work within what the vast majority
21 thinks is best. We live in that society every day. I'm not trying
22 to take anything away from that port, but it is a minority within
23 the industry, and I don't know how to put it any more frankly.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Jennings. Any other questions?
26 Ms. Ballard?

27
28 **MS. BALLARD:** Mike Jennings, and I know you mentioned that you
29 don't reach out to some sort of resource when it comes to Texas
30 Parks and Wildlife --

31
32 **MR. JENNINGS:** Can you start that over, please? I was --

33
34 **MS. BALLARD:** I know you mentioned that you don't reach out to
35 Texas Parks and Wildlife much. Feel free to, and there's a Coastal
36 Resource Advisory Council, and we would love to hear your input on
37 anything that has to do with charter-for-hire. Thank you.

38
39 **MR. JENNINGS:** Thank you.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Captain Jennings?

42
43 **MR. JENNINGS:** All right. Thank you.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mike. Next up is Maddux Trochesset,
46 followed by Sean Heverin.

47
48 **MR. MADDUX TROCHESSET:** All right. Thank you, guys, for having me

1 here today. My name is Captain Maddux Trochesset. I'm a fourth-
2 generation charter boat captain here. My great-grandfather
3 started it down here in Biloxi after World War II, and we have the
4 Silver Dollar, which is right back there. I think a few of you
5 guys went on it last night. Thank you for not making a mess.

6
7 We are -- I'm speaking for me and for my grandfather. He's been
8 doing it for fifty-two years. We are very much against state
9 management, and, over the last -- The last two years are some of
10 the best years we've had. If it's not broken, don't fix it.

11
12 I think that we're so focused on snapper, but there's a lot bigger
13 issues out here in the Gulf. The king mackerel fishery does just
14 not exist anymore. When I was -- Ten or fifteen years ago, when
15 I was deck-handing, we would catch four or five trip, and it was
16 expected.

17
18 This year, out of 161 trips, we caught one. They're not there.
19 The state management does not need to happen. We need to stop
20 worrying about that, and we need to focus on actual important
21 things, like the king mackerel fishery. Thank you.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Maddux. Do we have any questions?
24 Not seeing any, thank you for coming. Okay. Last on our list is
25 Mr. Sean Heverin online.

26
27 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** All right, Sean. Go ahead.

28
29 **MR. SEAN HEVERIN:** Hi, and my name is Sean Heverin, out of Maderia
30 Beach, Florida. I own three longline vessels, and I also am a
31 fish dealer. We buy fish from eighty or ninety vessels in the
32 Gulf of Mexico between Florida, Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama.

33
34 I would like to preface what I'm about to say is that, you know,
35 I wasn't given anything in this quota system. I invested, in the
36 hundreds of thousands of dollars, and, also, you know, I would
37 like to say that we would like to get -- Nobody really wants to
38 get their money taken away that they've invested into the quota
39 program, but I do feel that it's important to give quota to some
40 of the guys that are having landings, specifically with this red
41 grouper proposal and allocating some of the fish to people with
42 landings based on catch history.

43
44 I think it's important to get some of the quota into the hands of
45 the guys that are catching the fish, instead of some of the
46 fishermen leasing quota from people who are using this as a multi-
47 generational wealth goal to pass on to their kids, who don't fish,
48 and their grandkids, who don't fish.

1
2 Any idea that the council comes up with that can put fish into the
3 hands of guys that are catching fish is important. I listened to
4 David Johnson and Randy Schwab and Charlie Renier earlier, and I
5 think that they had really good ideas, and I agree with them.

6
7 As far as the shallow-water grouper topics that were discussed
8 yesterday, I really liked the presentation that was put on, and I
9 think that the 50-50 option, where they would give 50 percent of
10 the quota to fishermen with landings and the other 50 percent to
11 people that have existing shares, I think that was a really good
12 idea, and I would support that.

13
14 You know, with all the money that I've invested into the quota
15 program, I think the \$300,000 or \$400,000 I've invested into
16 shares, that I still have, and I feel like, if I wasn't doing my
17 part in landing those fish, or had landing history, then I don't
18 really deserve that, and, even though I've put my personal money
19 into that, you know, then it could be taken away, and I understand
20 that risk.

21
22 I just wanted to make sure that was said, because, whenever I
23 discuss this with people, they always say that, oh, I put all my
24 money into the quota, and they're just going to take it from me,
25 and, well, guess what? I have too, and it's hard-earned money. I
26 mean, all this money was generated from fishing, and selling fish,
27 and, you know, it just wasn't handed to me by any means, and so,
28 anyway, that's just what I wanted to say, and thank you for your
29 time.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Sean. Do we have any questions? Not
32 seeing any, thank you. Okay, and that's going to conclude our
33 public comment today. I recommend we take a break. Let's come
34 back at 4:35. What I would like to do is knock out one more report
35 today, and stay ahead of schedule, and maybe we can adjourn early
36 tomorrow, and who knows?

37
38 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. If we can quiet down in the back,
41 we're going to get started again. Okay. What I would like to do
42 this afternoon, and I'll look for the appetite around the table,
43 and remind everyone that we had somewhat of a break this morning,
44 being ahead of schedule, and so I would ask that you would consider
45 maybe working a few minutes late today, and if we can knock out
46 Sustainable Fisheries and the Shrimp Committee reports, and that
47 would leave us with Reef Fish tomorrow, and possibly a short day
48 tomorrow, and that's my goal, and so I'm looking around the table

1 to see if everyone is okay with that. Thank you. I appreciate
2 it, and so, with that being said, we're going to turn it over to
3 Dr. Banks, and we'll go through Sustainable Fisheries first.

4
5 **COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)**
6 **SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE REPORT**
7

8 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right. The committee
9 adopted the agenda, Tab E, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab E, Number
10 2, from the August 2024 meeting were approved as written.

11
12 Regulatory Streamlining Report, Tab E, Number 4(a) through (c),
13 Ms. Boelke, from the Fisheries Insight Network, and Dr. Goldsmith,
14 from Pelagic Strategies, presented a draft report for work
15 contracted by the council to conduct a regulatory process review
16 of the other regional fishery management councils.

17
18 The council funded this work as part of its ongoing climate
19 readiness and regulatory streamlining efforts, with the aim of
20 identifying efficient processes used in other regions that could
21 potentially be applied in the Gulf. The contractors provided an
22 overview of the draft recommendations from the report, including
23 procedural mechanisms, innovative regulatory approaches, and best
24 practices for collaboration, coordination, and communication.

25
26 The committee discussed the potential use of categorical
27 exclusions (CE) as a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
28 vehicle to quickly implement routine non-controversial measures.

29
30 The committee discussed the challenges of navigating CEs in the
31 Gulf, where routine changes like catch limits are often accompanied
32 by more complex issues, such as allocation and data unit
33 conversion.

34
35 Committee members asked whether there were guidance on types of
36 actions considered to have minimal impact and requested that staff
37 keep the council informed of actions and development that could
38 qualify for a CE as a means for efficiency.

39
40 The contractors responded that NOAA was in the process of updating
41 its procedures for NEPA implementation, which included expanding
42 the use of CEs. Council staff contributed that the Council
43 Coordination Committee has a working group focused on these NEPA
44 updates, and the working group was awaiting guidance on how to
45 apply the new NEPA procedures within bounds of the Magnuson-Stevens
46 Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

47
48 The committee expressed interest in automating routine management

1 activities through a closed framework process, but noted that
2 challenges with recreational data availability and calibration in
3 the Gulf may hinder automation. A committee member suggested that
4 automation could be possible for simple actions with fewer data
5 issues and highlighted efficiencies that could be gained by
6 limiting the need for council discussion and SSC review.

7
8 Council staff responded that such automation could be feasible,
9 but would require comprehensive pre-analysis to inform framework
10 development. The contractors added that the process can be
11 flexible, and some management measures may be automated, while
12 other more complex management measures follow a traditional path
13 through the council process.

14
15 A committee member reported ecosystem component species (ECS)
16 designation for species that are not encountered in quantities
17 that warrant federal conservation and management. The committee
18 member mentioned that other regions streamline their decisions on
19 conservation and management need by using polls, rather than
20 council discussion.

21
22 Council staff added that ECS designation for some reef species
23 align with the council's response to the Executive Order Restoring
24 American Seafood Competitiveness, which includes a recommendation
25 to remove low-priority species from fishery management plans.

26
27 The committee discussed the draft recommendations for improving
28 the uptake of scientific information and stakeholder knowledge in
29 the council process. A committee member asked for clarification
30 on the use of exempted fishing permits (EFP) in other regions,
31 since the council already participates in the EFP approval process,
32 but currently views EFPs as a largely NOAA-driven effort.

33
34 The contractors responded that other regions use EFPs in a
35 proactive manner, linking EFPs with their council's research and
36 monitoring priorities. A council member contributed that EFPs
37 have been developed in the South Atlantic to test management
38 strategies for reducing red snapper discards.

39
40 A committee member expressed interest in the use of fishery
41 performance reports to inform decision making and inquired whether
42 an advisory panel (AP) development product would be representative
43 of various fishing sectors. The contractors clarified that, in
44 other regions, staff typically prepared the report with
45 standardized information acquired from the APs and highlighted
46 that the fishery performance reports can reveal information about
47 fisheries trends that are not captured by traditional data sources,
48 for example weather or fuel prices.

1
2 A committee member inquired whether the contractors researched the
3 timing of scientific advice in other regions and offered that many
4 regions coordinate the flow of scientific data with the timing of
5 the council process. The councils responded that other regions
6 aligned the timing of their stock assessment review process with
7 council timelines.

8
9 A committee member discussed an ongoing effort to internally review
10 and streamline interdisciplinary plan team processes in the Gulf,
11 including improving the flow of data to council staff. The
12 contractors added that, in some regions, council staff have
13 highlighted direct access to federal databases as a key efficiency.

14
15 The committee member also suggested that development of
16 streamlining tools and approaches should be coordinated between
17 the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, because the regions are
18 similar, and coordinated efforts could reduce the burden on the
19 Southeast Regional Office, which oversees both regions. There
20 were no other business that came before the committee. Mr. Chair,
21 this concludes my report.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Banks, for your report.
24 Dr. Simmons.

25
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think
27 staff's plan for this -- Originally, when we were talking about it
28 in committee, we were thinking we might get some more guidance
29 from you all, but I think what we would like to do, if you agree,
30 is get a look at the final report on this from the contractors,
31 get the Regional Office open, so we can talk to them about some of
32 the NEPA vehicles, go through our FMPs, and look at the different
33 frameworks we currently have on the books, and then try to come
34 back with a workplan for you all to look at. Does that sound
35 reasonable to you?

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

38
39 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that sounds like a good plan. I
40 know council staff is already kind of working on, you know, some
41 of the recommendations that are on there, whether they're
42 regulatory approaches, procedural mechanisms, and I think some of
43 the administrative stuff, that kind of was highlighted, just to
44 kind of maybe talk about that just for half a second here, and so
45 expanded, I think, AP interactions with the SSC, and that was on
46 there. I think you guys are kind of already working on doing some
47 of those things.

48

1 SSC subgroups, I think some of that process is already kind of
2 initiated, but the fishery performance reports, and, I mean, I
3 think that's a -- I would like to maybe see how that's tested out.
4 I'm not necessarily saying that we should be doing this across-
5 the-board.

6
7 I don't know how much time it will take for staff to do this, or,
8 quite frankly, how useful it will be, but maybe we can test that
9 out for a species here coming up with a upcoming stock assessment
10 or something, to align with that timing, and we'll see where it
11 goes, and, if the council is finding use, and value, in that, we
12 can proceed with future species, or we can just do away with it,
13 but, anyway, that's just my two cents.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Froeschke.

16
17 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I think, if we were going to go down that road,
18 which I think might be interesting, it would be useful to pair
19 that with the consideration of getting access to the databases
20 more in a streamlined way. That way, we can actually do it, and
21 it doesn't just require another laborious data request and waiting
22 for it and compiling the information.

23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and we can
25 certainly work on that.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Dr. Simmons has enough information. Thank
28 you, Dr. Sweetman. We're going to move on to the Shrimp Committee
29 report. Mr. Schieble.

30
31 **SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT**

32
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, sir, Mr. Chair. Thank you. The committee
34 adopted the agenda, Tab D, Number 1, and the committee then
35 approved the August 2025 meeting minutes, Tab D, Number 2, with
36 the modification of the word "softfish" on line 23 of page 16 to
37 "sawfish".

38
39 Final action, Shrimp Amendment 19, Shrimp Permit Moratorium, Tab
40 D, Numbers 4(a) through (c), council staff reviewed the summary of
41 written and virtual public comments, noting that a virtual public
42 hearing webinar was held on October 21, 2025. Council staff then
43 reviewed the options in Shrimp Amendment 19.

44
45 A committee member stated that, upon further review of the
46 amendment, he would like to discuss the 1,072 minimum threshold
47 number of valid or renewable permits for federal Gulf commercial
48 shrimp permits.

1
2 Another committee member added that the number of active permits
3 in 2024 was 691 and that it would be beneficial for the Southeast
4 Fisheries Science Center to review the minimum threshold number of
5 permits, given new scientific information and in light of effort
6 thresholds for juvenile red snapper and take of protected
7 resources.

8
9 A committee member added that Option 2 as the preferred would
10 maintain status quo, versus implement a new regulatory change,
11 given current executive orders.

12
13 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to make Option 2 the**
14 **preferred. Option 2 reads to extend the moratorium on issuance of**
15 **federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits. The moratorium**
16 **would be extended for ten years.** That motion carried unanimously.
17 Mr. Chair, we have a committee motion.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We do have a committee
20 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion?
21 **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
22 **the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

23
24 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** A committee member added that Preferred Option 2
25 reflects the Shrimp AP's motion at its April 2025 meeting. **The**
26 **committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council**
27 **approved Shrimp Amendment 19: Shrimp Permit Moratorium and that it**
28 **be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and**
29 **implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and**
30 **appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary**
31 **changes in the document. The council chair is given the authority**
32 **to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and**
33 **appropriate.** That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair, we have
34 a committee motion.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee
37 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? No
38 discussion. Okay. We're going to have a roll call vote. It's
39 final action. Dr. Simmons.

40
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Overton.

42
43 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.

44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.

46
47 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Walker.
2
3 MR. WALKER: Yes.
4
5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Osborne.
6
7 MR. OSBORNE: Yes.
8
9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Burris.
10
11 MR. BURRIS: Yes.
12
13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Allen.
14
15 DR. ALLEN: Yes.
16
17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Sanchez.
18
19 MR. SANCHEZ: Yes.
20
21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Frady.
22
23 MR. FRADY: Yes.
24
25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.
26
27 DR. SWEETMAN: Yes.
28
29 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.
30
31 MR. MARQUEZ: Yes.
32
33 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.
34
35 DR. BANKS: Yes.
36
37 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Strelcheck.
38
39 MR. STRELCHECK: Yes.
40
41 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.
42
43 MR. ANSON: Yes.
44
45 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Schieble.
46
47 MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes.
48

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Ballard.
 2
 3 **MS. BALLARD:** Yes.
 4
 5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
 6
 7 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
 8
 9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
 10
 11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.
 12

Names	Vote		
Dr. Overton	yes		
Mr. Broussard	yes		
Capt. Walker	yes		
Mr. Osborne	yes		
Mr. Burris	yes		
Dr. Allen	yes		
Mr. Sanchez	yes		
Capt. Frady	yes		
Dr. Sweetman	yes		
Mr. Marquez	yes		
Dr. Banks	yes		
Mr. Strelcheck	yes		
Mr. Anson	yes		
Mr. Schieble	yes		
Ms. Ballard	yes		
Mr. Geeslin	yes		
Mr. Dugas	yes		
		Row Labels	Count of Vote
		yes	17
		Grand Total	17

13
 14
 15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carries unanimously, Mr.
 16 **Chair.**

17
 18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Mr. Schieble.

19
 20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** A committee member noted that further analyses are
 21 needed, given new information on the shrimp fishery, for the
 22 minimum threshold number of permits. He added that the shrimp
 23 industry's economic environment is also changing. Another
 24 committee member commented that biologic and economic conditions
 25 drive shrimp effort, and he would encourage market information to
 26 be considered. Council staff stated that, contingent on how
 27 quickly the analyses are completed, this information could be
 28 presented to the Shrimp AP at its March 2026 meeting.
 29

1 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct council staff,**
2 **with assistance from National Marine Fisheries Service staff, to**
3 **review and provide updated multidisciplinary analyses for the**
4 **minimum threshold number of federal Gulf shrimp commercial permits**
5 **from Shrimp Amendment 17B. The motion carried unanimously, Mr.**
6 **Chair.**

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a motion on the
9 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Seeing none, is**
10 **there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**
11 **carries.** Mr. Schieble.

12
13 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Working Group Update on Shrimp Bycatch
14 Methodologies, Tab D, Number 5, council staff presented a draft
15 workplan for evaluating and providing feedback on shrimp bycatch
16 methodology for finfish species in the Gulf of America.

17
18 She noted the council's motion at its August 2025 meeting to
19 populate and convene a working group to identify workable solutions
20 that aim to reduce interactions with smalltooth sawfish and giant
21 manta ray in the Gulf federal shrimp trawl fishery. She added
22 that the output from the working group on finfish bycatch could be
23 used as an input for the working group on protected resources
24 bycatch.

25
26 She stated the bycatch methodologies for red snapper and a draft
27 approach for gray triggerfish were presented to the SSC virtually
28 in May of 2025, but the SSC asked that the presentation be
29 revisited in-person, with more time on the agenda, at a future SSC
30 meeting.

31
32 A committee member added that he was on the SSC during those
33 presentations and agreed the SSC did not have adequate time to
34 review, and so he concurred with the need for this working group
35 on shrimp bycatch methodology for finfish species.

36
37 Another committee member requested that specific names of National
38 Marine Fisheries Service personnel be replaced with "should be
39 determined" until after the government shutdown, when specific
40 personnel can be identified.

41
42 He then inquired when the working group on protected resources
43 might convene. Council staff responded that it was critical the
44 working group on finfish bycatch convene first, prior to the start
45 of the next red snapper assessment in spring 2026.

46
47 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to approve the workplan**
48 **for evaluating and providing feedback on shrimp bycatch**

1 methodology for finfish species in the Gulf of America and to
2 direct council staff to proceed with implementation of the workplan
3 prior to convening the shrimp working group on protected resources.
4 That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair, we have a committee
5 motion.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee
8 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? I'm
9 not seeing any. **Is there any opposition to the motion?** I'm seeing
10 none. **The motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

11
12 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Other Business, Mr. Donaldson reminded the committee
13 that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission will no longer be
14 able to process the secure digital cards from federally-permitted
15 Gulf commercial shrimp vessels after December 31, 2025, and I
16 wanted to ask a question about that before we conclude the report,
17 and so maybe we can have a quick discussion.

18
19 I wish Dr. Walter was here, but I know he's not, because of the
20 closure, but do we know where we're going to be getting effort
21 information going forward for the next year or so, until this
22 amendment with the electronic reporting is in place, and the
23 timeline?

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

26
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Chris, for the question, and so I had a
28 chance to talk to Dave Donaldson while he was here, and I've also
29 talked to LGL. I assume it's usable, ready to be integrated, but
30 we have, I think, 125 vessels that already have the VMS devices as
31 part of the pilot program, and there's another hundred or so that
32 are waiting to have those devices loaded.

33
34 Clay, obviously, and John are furloughed, or are just working
35 intermittently, and so I have reached out to them and asked that
36 we talk about this after the shutdown ends. There may be
37 opportunity to provide funding to Gulf States, or through another
38 means to support SD cards, you know, going to a contractor or
39 someone that can collect and upload that data, but I don't know
40 for certain what that would look like at this point.

41
42 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I know, later at the end of the meeting, we're going
43 to talk about the schedule of amendments, and where they are in
44 the process and all that, and I think maybe that would be more
45 appropriate at that point, and talk about where that amendment is
46 in the timeline of the process for final approval, right?

47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think

1 that's fine. It's a good conversation to have, but I mean, I don't
2 -- NMFS still has got to implement that program, and I don't know
3 where the agency is with funding that program, no matter how
4 quickly we can transmit it.

5
6 I know Dr. Putman was here, but it might be nice to get an update,
7 at least internally, with Science Center staff and our staff, on
8 where they are with Early Adopter. Can they get the data real
9 time? Can we begin to like use this? What is the sample frame
10 looking like?

11
12 You know, maybe we can actually have that discussion as we are
13 going through the working group process. It seems like, if that
14 data is real time, can we start looking at it and seeing what is
15 it saying compared to the disks?

16
17 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I think that works. I think it's a good idea, at
18 least to go forward here, and maybe at the next Shrimp Committee,
19 and so, Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Schieble, and so two
22 minutes short of five o'clock. No overtime. All right. That's
23 all we're going to do today. That's all we can do. We'll start
24 off in the morning with Reef Fish, and we'll see you at 8:30 in
25 the morning.

26
27 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on November 5, 2025.)

28
29 - - -

30
31 November 6, 2025

32
33 THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

34
35 - - -

36
37 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Golden
38 Nugget Hotel & Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Thursday morning,
39 November 6, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Good morning, everyone. Welcome back to
42 the last short day of our council meeting. We have to go through
43 Reef Fish, and then we have one other agenda item today. Dr.
44 Simmons will give us an update on some priorities, council planning
45 and activities, but we're going to start with Reef Fish this
46 morning, and Dr. Sweetman is going to lead us through that. Dr.
47 Sweetman.

48

1 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**

2
3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. Reef Fish Committee
4 report. All right. The committee adopted the agenda as modified,
5 Tab B, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab B, Number 2, from the August
6 2025 meeting were approved as written.

7
8 Final action: Abbreviated Framework Action: Continuation of
9 Management Measures to Reduce Reef Fish Release mortality, Tab B,
10 Number 4, the council is developing this abbreviated framework
11 action to extend the requirement for commercial and recreational
12 fishermen to possess a venting tool or descending device that is
13 rigged and ready for use when fishing for reef fish in federal
14 waters of the Gulf.

15
16 This requirement was previously detailed under the Direct
17 Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel
18 Devices, (DESCEND) Act, which expires on January 1, 2026.

19
20 Staff reviewed public comment and the abbreviated framework action
21 document. A committee member inquired about the use of data from
22 the Southeast Region Headboat Survey through October 2025, as the
23 Southeast Region Headboat Survey was set to conclude operation.

24
25 Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff clarified that the
26 Southeast Region Headboat Survey is still currently ongoing, but
27 port sampling concluded. SERO staff noted that, should this
28 administration consider this a regulatory action, there may be
29 additional considerations taken to offset the regulatory burden.

30
31 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to approve the Abbreviated**
32 **Framework Action: Continuation of Management Measures to Reduce**
33 **Reef Fish Release Mortality and that it be forwarded to the**
34 **Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the**
35 **codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial**
36 **license to make necessary changes to the document. The council**
37 **chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified**
38 **text as necessary and appropriate. The motion carried without**
39 **opposition, Mr. Chair.**

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
42 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Not
43 seeing any discussion, this is a final action. There will be a
44 roll call vote, and Dr. Simmons will lead us through that.

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Broussard.

47
48 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
3
4 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.
9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.
11
12 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes.
13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Marquez.
15
16 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Yes.
17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
19
20 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Allen.
23
24 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes.
25
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Ballard.
27
28 **MS. BALLARD:** Yes.
29
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
31
32 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.
35
36 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
37
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
39
40 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
43
44 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.
45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
47
48 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.

1
 2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
 3
 4 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
 5
 6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.
 7
 8 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
 9
 10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
 11
 12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.
 13

Names	Vote	Row Labels	Count of Vote
Gen. Spraggins	absent		
Mr. Broussard	yes	absent	1
Dr. Banks	yes	yes	16
Mr. Strelcheck	yes	Grand Total	17
Mr. Osborne	yes		
Mr. Marquez	yes		
Mr. Sanchez	yes		
Dr. Allen	yes		
Ms. Ballard	yes		
Mr. Schieble	yes		
Capt. Walker	yes		
Capt. Frady	yes		
Dr. Sweetman	yes		
Mr. Anson	yes		
Mr. Geeslin	yes		
Dr. Overton	yes		
Mr. Dugas	yes		

14
 15
 16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I think the General might have stepped
 17 out. **It passed unanimously with one absent, Mr. Chair.**
 18
 19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay. **The motion passes.**
 20 Dr. Sweetman.
 21
 22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. Moving on, Draft
 23 options, Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44,
 24 Modifications to Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management
 25 Measures, Tab B, Number 9, Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper
 26 Amendment 44 is a joint amendment to consider modifications to
 27 Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper management
 28 between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.
 29

1 New stock assessments for Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper, SEDAR
2 79, and yellowtail snapper, SEDAR 96, estimated these respective
3 species to be healthy, i.e., not overfished or undergoing
4 overfishing, as of 2023, with northward range expansion evident in
5 both stocks in the Gulf.

6
7 This amendment considers modification of the respective stock
8 catch limits, jurisdictional apportionment of the respective stock
9 acceptable biological catch (ABC), and setting the regional annual
10 catch limits (ACL) and South Atlantic sector allocations for both
11 species within the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction.

12
13 The South Atlantic Council will further develop alternatives for
14 Actions 3 and 4, which consider South Atlantic sector allocations,
15 at its December 2025 meeting in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The
16 Gulf Council does not use sector allocations for these species,
17 and, as such, the sector allocation actions in practice apply only
18 to the South Atlantic Council. Council staff reviewed the actions
19 and alternatives in the document with the committee, which had no
20 edits.

21
22 A committee member agreed that both stocks are expanding northward
23 on both the Gulf and South Atlantic coastlines. Another committee
24 member wanted to avoid a situation of having a region having a
25 quota closure, especially with both stocks be in such a healthy
26 condition.

27
28 Public Hearing Draft, Reef Fish Amendment 64: Modifications to
29 Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures, Tab B, Number 5, council
30 staff presented a public hearing draft of Reef Fish Amendment 62,
31 which considers management modifications for red grouper based on
32 the results of the most recent stock assessment, SEDAR 88.

33
34 The stock assessment found red grouper to be healthy, and, as a
35 result, the SSC recommended modifications to catch limits and stock
36 status determination criteria. The document proposes actions that
37 consider modifying status determination criteria, catch limits,
38 and sector allocations. It also considers removing the twenty-
39 fathom recreational seasonal closure for shallow-water grouper.

40
41 Council staff reviewed the updated language of the purpose and
42 need statements following the council's request at its August 2025
43 meeting to incorporate references to the State of Florida's State
44 Reef Fish Survey, or SRFS.

45
46 A committee member inquired as to the rationale for the time series
47 of 1986 to 2005 for sector allocation in the Preferred Alternative
48 2 in Action 2. Council staff responded that it is the same time

1 series used for sector allocation of red grouper in Reef Fish
2 Amendment 53, but updated to incorporate SRFS landings, and it
3 followed the same time series used for sector allocation of red
4 grouper in Reef Fish Amendment 30B, where 2005 was the most recent
5 year of landings.

6
7 Council staff added that more recent years of landings are
8 considered in Alternatives 3 and 4 and noted that sector
9 allocations differ, at most, 1.2 percent across Alternatives 2
10 through 4. **The committee recommends, and I so move, to approve**
11 **Draft Amendment 62: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper Management**
12 **Measures for virtual public hearings.** The motion carried without
13 opposition, Mr. Chair.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
16 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
17 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
18 **the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

19
20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A committee member inquired
21 how quickly Reef Fish Amendment 62 could be implemented if final
22 action is taken at the January 2026 council meeting. SERO
23 responded that the commercial quota could be increased mid-year
24 2026, and that the recreational season could be extended for 2026.

25
26 SERO stated that a priority reevaluation of council amendments
27 would occur following the end of the U.S. federal government
28 shutdown. Council staff added that notice of public hearings in
29 the Federal Register cannot occur until the government shutdown
30 has ended.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

33
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just two things, and a little nuanced, but keep
35 in mind the red grouper -- Essentially, the season is January 1 to
36 the end of the year. We would project the catch limit is caught,
37 right, and so we're not necessarily extending the season. We're
38 just not closing the season based on this increase, and so I just
39 wanted to note that.

40
41 The other thing I told Carrie is, in the event that the government
42 shutdown lingered on for a long time, and you couldn't do public
43 hearings, you could consider the January meeting as your final
44 public hearing, as long as we can publish the agenda to take the
45 final action.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck, for that. Dr.
48 Sweetman.

1
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for that, Andy.
3 Okay. I think we're going to have some discussion here on this
4 item, and so Presentation of Reef Fish Amendment 63: Modifications
5 to Gulf Red Grouper IFQ Program, Tab B, Number 6.

6
7 Council staff presented Reef Fish Amendment 63, which would
8 establish a three-year pilot commercial red grouper IFQ share pool
9 and distribute the resulting annual allocation to eligible
10 participants.

11
12 The presentation included options for quota amounts held in the
13 pool, eligibility criteria, and methods for distributing quota
14 pool annual allocations. Committee members asked whether a quota
15 pool is needed, because red grouper annual allocation is currently
16 available at very low prices. A committee member noted that the
17 amount of quota distributed could make a significant difference
18 for several participants.

19
20 The committee inquired about the number of IFQ accounts with red
21 grouper landings. Dr. Jessica Stephen, from SERO, indicated that,
22 in 2024, there were 283 IFQ accounts with red grouper landings.

23
24 The committee discussed alternative methods for determining the
25 amount of quota held in the quota pool. A committee member
26 suggested that the quota pool could hold a fixed amount of quota
27 during the three-year pilot program. SERO added that it was
28 important to ensure that the amount of allocation available to the
29 quota pool was sufficient to make the program viable and useful
30 for fishermen.

31
32 A committee member noted that the amount in the quota pool could
33 be expressed as a percentage of quota increases above a preset
34 baseline. The examples below provide alternatives based on quota
35 increases and fixed quota pool amounts. Commercial quota pool --
36 If we could scroll up on those examples. Sorry. The other way.

37
38 Okay. Commercial quota pool for Gulf red grouper, and I think
39 this is kind of where we're probably going to want some discussion
40 points here. All right.

41
42 Alternative A would establish a commercial quota pool for Gulf red
43 grouper beginning in 2027. If the commercial quota (ACT) is below
44 2.79 million pounds gutted weight, the quota pool is set at zero
45 percent of the commercial quota, zero pounds. If the commercial
46 quota is at or above 2.79 million pounds gutted weight, the quota
47 pool would hold -- Then we would have several options there, and
48 you can see the options, how they would play out. listed on a

1 table. I don't think I need to read all of that information there.
2 There are various percentages.

3
4 If we want to move on to Alternative B, Bernie, this would
5 establish a commercial quota pool for Gulf red grouper beginning
6 in 2027. If the commercial quota ACT is below 2.79 million pounds
7 gutted weight, the quota pool is set at zero percent of the
8 commercial quota, zero pounds. If the commercial quota is at or
9 above 2.79 million pounds, the quota pool would hold -- Then we
10 have three options on the table of 400,000, 500,000, 600,000
11 pounds. Let me just kind of finish off with this section here,
12 and then we can maybe have a discussion.

13
14 Committee members asked about when quota withheld for appeals would
15 be released. SERO replied that any withheld quota would likely be
16 released by the end of February annually, once the appeals process
17 was completed. Another committee member noted that the quota pool
18 would not be a mechanism for new entrants, but targets fishermen
19 already participating in the red grouper fishery with landings
20 history. I think I want to take a pause here for a second, and I
21 see a hand, Mr. Chair.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Strelcheck.

24
25 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I wanted to clarify that the appeals process is
26 likely going to go into sometime later in the year. What we were
27 saying is that we would release the quota no later than the end of
28 February, with the exception of the amount that's being held for
29 appeals, and then the appeals amount will be released sometime
30 thereafter, once the appeals process resolves, and so I just want
31 to clarify that in the minutes.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Strelcheck. Is there any other
34 discussion on red grouper? Captain Walker.

35
36 **MR. WALKER:** I mentioned it in committee, and I also heard it two
37 or three times in public comment, the possibility of growing this
38 quota pool from the overage above a certain number, rather than
39 taking it from the entire quota. That would make it not a takeaway
40 from somebody, and a give to somebody else, while still leaving us
41 an opportunity to examine -- To test this and see if it works.

42
43 If there was support for that idea, maybe we could work up a third
44 alternative saying that, and, as I mentioned before, I would also
45 support possibly using higher percentages, since that's going to
46 be a lower number. I don't know what that number would be yet,
47 but you could do a high -- You could do 50 percent of that if you
48 wanted to, if the number is not high enough to make it viable, and

1 so I would like to hear what other people have to say about pulling
2 this pool off of an overage above either 2.7 or 4.7 million, and
3 just splitting up that overage, and then it wouldn't take away
4 from anybody already in the fishery.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Captain Walker. I have Dr.
7 Sweetman, and, Assane, did you need to respond, too?

8
9 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Yes.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Go ahead.

12
13 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, Captain Walker, that
14 example -- Essentially, that is what it's trying to provide, the
15 one here for Alternative A, because, if I were to read one of the
16 options, 10 percent of the commercial red grouper quota increase
17 above 2.79. It's based on your suggestion, and Mr. Anson's
18 suggestion, that we add these two alternatives to the document.

19
20 The first one deals with the quota increase, as suggested, and,
21 for your consideration, we added 25 percent, and, if you wanted to
22 consider higher percentages, that would be a request, and then we
23 would just adjust the table.

24
25 The second one, Alternative B, and, Bernie, if you could scroll
26 down just a little bit, is based on the other suggestion that was
27 made during the meeting, meaning picking a fixed amount of quota,
28 and, for your consideration, we just put numbers between 400,000
29 and 600,000 pounds, but, should you decide to proceed, and want
30 one of these approaches, then I guess, during your discussion, you
31 would let us know which methods you would consider, and we would
32 include that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

33
34 **MR. WALKER:** Great. Thank you, Assane. I hadn't caught that,
35 actually. The way I read it originally, I had kind of missed it.
36 It was coming off the whole pool, and they just did the opposite
37 here, and so I don't think we've had any discussion on this option
38 yet, and so I would love to hear what anybody else has to say about
39 it.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Next up is Dr. Sweetman.

42
43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I mean, I think we heard, in
44 public comment, that there's interest in exploring kind of what
45 this might look like here, and it's a three-year pilot program.
46 Some of the concerns I've heard from folks is that this would be
47 precedent setting for some of these other IFQ fisheries.

48

1 I just don't see that, just because they're, for the most part,
2 fully utilized. Like I think it's an interesting approach to
3 trying to evaluate what you do in this kind of unique situation
4 that we have for red grouper here, and so, I mean, my thought here
5 would be probably leaning more towards Alternative A, and looking
6 at a certain percentage along those lines, but I certainly would,
7 you know, look at my colleagues around the table here, to see what
8 their perspectives are.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.

11
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I said it in committee, and you can do
13 the math any number of different ways and arrive at very similar
14 outcomes, right, and so I think probably the most important is,
15 you know, is there a minimum and/or maximum range that we want to
16 consider for the quota pool, because we want staff to be able to
17 capture that.

18
19 The options that Assane presented, during his presentation, I think
20 were more in line with 400,000 or 500,000 at the bottom end of the
21 range, and a million pounds on the top end of the range, whereas
22 these alternatives, obviously, are more toward that 400,000 or
23 500,000, or even less than that, and so I think it would be worth
24 giving some direction with regard to how wide of a range do you
25 want to consider for this.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson, and then Captain Walker.

28
29 **MR. ANSON:** I appreciate Assane including the Alternative B here,
30 based on my comments, and I think, after looking at it like this,
31 and then seeing this new alternative relative to the other
32 alternatives that are in the document, I think Alternative A, and
33 those others, I think speak more to the issue of fairness, I guess,
34 and equity, in as much as potentially setting a floor whereby those
35 that have acquired shares -- They can still reap some of the
36 benefits of the increase.

37
38 Based on Andy's comments, it might be that we're trying to see if
39 we want to include Alternative A in the document going forward, as
40 well as Alternative B, because Alternative A is a little bit more
41 clear, I guess, and transparent, to some degree, as to how the
42 number is derived, and then plus it gives some deference to
43 establishing that baseline number of pounds that are protection,
44 if you will, to the shareholders. I would not recommend including
45 Alternative B, but that's just my comment. Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Mr. Walker, followed by
48 Mr. Sanchez.

1
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I agree with Kevin. I would like to see
3 Alternative A make its way into the document.
4
5 **MR. WALKER:** I'll agree with that. We can kick it around a little
6 bit more, and so, Andy, you don't have any thoughts on what range
7 would make it even worthwhile to go and do all this? I mean, if
8 it got too small, it's not going to make a difference to anybody.
9 Do you have any thoughts there?
10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
12
13 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Based on just some preliminary discussions that
14 Jessica Stephen and I had before the council meeting, the 10
15 percent that we were presenting in Assane's presentation, which
16 was, I don't know, 400,000 or 500,000, seemed to be kind of the
17 minimum you would want to seed the pool with, right, and so,
18 anything you drop below that, you're really not providing much
19 quota to benefit those that would be participating in the quota
20 pool, and so that would be my recommendation.
21
22 I think the 10 and 15 percent are on the low end, but, obviously,
23 could be reasonable, in terms of consideration to review that, and
24 to analyze it and determine whether we want to keep those in or
25 not. The 25 percent certainly captures what we feel would be
26 within the range.
27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.
29
30 **MR. WALKER:** So we're just moving this forward now, and we don't
31 necessarily have to pick one today right? I'm certainly in favor
32 of moving it forward, and I think -- I don't think I would be
33 opposed to having it be 25 percent of the increase, just to make
34 it a worthwhile number.
35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I'm looking around the table. If there's
37 an appetite to remove anything, Dr. Simmons requests a motion, if
38 that's what we choose. We'll need a motion.
39
40 **MR. WALKER:** **Motion to include Alternative A and B in the document.**
41 **I'll make that motion. I'll make a motion to include Alternative**
42 **A and B in the document for further discussion consideration.**
43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I thought we -- Dr. Banks.
45
46 **DR. BANKS:** I thought -- Based on that discussion, I think it's
47 just A.
48

1 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I'm all A. I didn't want to exclude anybody
2 else, but, yes, it can just be A, if the group votes in favor of
3 that.
4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Sweetman seconds. Okay. Is
6 there any more discussion on the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.
7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So, based on my comments about the pool being
9 large enough to make it viable, my recommendation would be to drop
10 the 10 percent and add 30 percent, for consideration, and would
11 the people making the motion be amenable to that?
12
13 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and that would be fine. Maybe we can -- I don't
14 know if we can change that chart on the fly, but the alternative
15 we could -- It doesn't really have the range on the -- On the
16 option, and so we could eliminate Option a, or change it, I guess,
17 and how would -- What's the best way to do that? Is it like to
18 add an Option e with like 30 percent?
19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.
21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we could
23 just say to include Alternative A in Reef Fish Amendment 63 with
24 the following changes: remove Option a, 10 percent, and the
25 addition of an option of 30 percent, or something like that.
26
27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Let's give Bernie a second to get it up. Captain
29 Walker, is this good with you?
30
31 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, sir.
32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman?
34
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, sir.
36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We have a motion on the board. Is
38 there any further discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
39 **there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**
40 **carries.** Dr. Sweetman.
41
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. Moving along, the next item is Presentation
43 on Delegation of Management of Federal For-Hire Vessels to the
44 Gulf States for Red Snapper, Tab B, Number 7, staff presented the
45 delegation of management of the red snapper federal for-hire
46 component to the Gulf states.
47
48 Topics discussed included identifying Gulf states intending to

1 assume management of their portion of the red snapper federal for-
2 hire component, data collection programs, and allocating the red
3 snapper federal for-hire ACL among the states.
4

5 A committee member recalled that similar issues were addressed
6 during the development of amendments addressing red snapper state
7 management for private anglers. Another committee member
8 suggested that emphasis should be placed on improving data
9 collection programs, rather than pursuing delegation.
10

11 The committee discussed the purpose and need. A committee member
12 thought it premature to proceed with developing alternatives and
13 indicated that more feedback from the public would be needed,
14 especially given the many letters the council has received thus
15 far in opposition to the proposed action.
16

17 Another committee member thought that, despite those letters of
18 objection, that it was important to explore these issues and that
19 the process of doing so would highlight the challenges to be
20 overcome.
21

22 The committee member noted that for-hire state management -- That
23 for-hire management should be state-specific and not one-size-
24 fits-all. Another committee member noted that delegation would be
25 a form of adaptive management that could respond to state
26 specificities.
27

28 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to begin**
29 **developing a document that considers the following purpose and**
30 **need statement: Purpose: The purpose of this action is to establish**
31 **a program structure through which a Gulf state may establish a**
32 **management program that would provide flexibility in the**
33 **management of the federally-permitted vessels' harvest of red**
34 **snapper for their anglers. Need: The need is to consider the**
35 **management of the federal charter-for-hire harvest of red snapper**
36 **within the context of the states of the Gulf to prevent**
37 **overfishing, while achieving, on a continued basis, the optimum**
38 **yield from the harvest of red snapper by the federal for-hire**
39 **sector; take into account and allow for variations among and**
40 **contingencies in the fisheries; fisheries resources and catches;**
41 **and provide fair and equitable access for the sustained**
42 **participation of fishing communities of the Gulf and, to the extent**
43 **practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such**
44 **communities. The motion carried nine to four with three**
45 **abstentions and one absent. Mr. Chair.**
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
48 motion on the board. Any discussion? Mr. Schieble, followed by

1 Mr. Sanchez.
2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, after we get through this motion, and vote on
4 it, I would like to sort of discuss a few things based on how
5 public comment went yesterday.
6
7 I think, you know, we heard some concerns, of course, and I would
8 like to propose some potential guardrails to include in the
9 document, to make sure what Assane comes back to us with would
10 have those types of things in there.
11
12 I can put up some motions after we get through this, if that's
13 needed, or just have a discussion, whatever is the preference, but
14 at least I'll put something up for discussion, and then I can
15 withdraw them, if needed at that point, but just to give us
16 something to discuss.
17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Schieble, and I think we can tackle
19 this motion and then come back to you. Mr. Sanchez.
20
21 **MR. SANCHEZ:** To me, this is kind of chicken-and-egg, because, as
22 you probably know, I'm opposed to turning over federal for-hire to
23 state management, but the fact that we're developing a purpose and
24 need statement would suggest that we are moving forward with a
25 document.
26
27 Not sure, chicken-and-egg, how we make it very apparent to the
28 council that the overwhelming part of the federal for-hire fleet
29 does not want this, other than maybe to have hearings and this and
30 that, but I'm going to say that, just based on the portal that was
31 created, and the comments to-date, there's overwhelming opposition
32 to this, and we're just getting started.
33
34 Before this is done, we're going to go to several states that are
35 in support of this, and probably have a meeting there, and I'm
36 referring to, you know, Galveston, down the road, and I think
37 they're going to come out of the woodwork in opposition to this,
38 and so, having seen this evolve before, and the fact that it is
39 working as intended, I don't know why we're going to try to do
40 this, and basically force this down an entire sector that does not
41 want it, and I think you'll find that out.
42
43 Now, I do see that some of the reasons for wanting this by certain
44 states is that they have a fantastic data gathering program. LA
45 Creel, to be specific, is a very strong, robust program, capable
46 of doing things, and I'm not for it being used to inform federal
47 management, but I have to draw the line at turning federal for-
48 hire over to state management.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez, for your comments.
3 Captain Walker.
4

5 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had a couple questions about
6 this, and I would like to direct them to Mr. Geeslin, if I could.
7 I am going to ask you a question, Dakus. You guys, Texas, has
8 been a big supporter of reestablishing the SEFHIER program to count
9 the federally for-hire fish, if I'm not mistaken.

10
11 Are we -- If we were to go forward with this program, are we still
12 going to -- Assuming the SEFHIER gets back up and running, are we
13 still -- Under this idea, are we still going to use that to count
14 the federal for-hire fish, because one of my biggest concerns on
15 all this is the varying state data collection methods.

16
17 You know, it just makes me a little uneasy, and I wondered, and,
18 if we're still -- Assuming SEFHIER gets back up, are we still
19 assuming that all five state for-hire fisheries are going to log-
20 in their catch on SEFHIER, or we are not going to use that, and
21 use each state's fishing counting method?

22
23 **MR. GEESLIN:** I appreciate the question, but I don't think I'm the
24 one to make that call. I think we would still monitor -- We would
25 still intercept those for-hire boats during our creel surveys, but
26 how that's used, and who that's reported to, whether that's a
27 SEFHIER tool or our existing tool, is probably not my decision.

28
29 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I just wanted to point that out. That's a
30 big concern of mine, is I think we should all use the same counting
31 system, if we're all going to still be part of the -- Call it a
32 sector separation program.

33
34 Well, that's my biggest hurdle, and I have some other concerns,
35 but, you know, that one gave me some pause, that, if we're going
36 to use a different data collection systems, I think it could get
37 a little off-track.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. I'll turn it over to Mr.
40 Schieble, but, to my knowledge, there's no funding for the SEFHIER
41 program in the future that we know of.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** Right, and I'm just looking down the road, if we did
44 put SEFHIER back up, which, as you know, we've been trying to do
45 for a while here, and how that would all shake out.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.
48

1 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** My understanding would be that it would be handled
2 exactly how it was handled when we had SEFHIER, the first version,
3 right, and so simultaneously. Those two surveys were running at
4 the same time dockside, for example, and we still continue to
5 intercept charter-for-hire dockside with LA Creel. while separate
6 SEFHIER intercepts were going on at the same marinas, potentially.

7
8 The idea was, when they set up the scheduling, they tried to not
9 have overlap on those assignments at the same time. On the backend
10 of all that would be the effort portion of it, right? The states,
11 or at least LA Creel, would continue to call the charter-for-hires
12 as part of the effort survey, and then I'm assuming that SEFHIER
13 would do a similar thing, but, speaking for Louisiana, during the
14 snapper season, our effort survey is 100 percent of the charter-
15 for-hire, and then the biologists handle that.

16
17 The offices do the charter calls, and not the call service that
18 does the private angler calls, and so it's a little bit different,
19 but it's better saturation, and a complete sample size, and so I
20 don't see a difference whether SEFHIER would get up and running
21 budget-wise or not, and it would still be covered, and you would
22 have those data units. Keep in mind that, by the time this would
23 come through the council process, we would have three states on
24 the same system in the Gulf.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Sanchez, and then the General.

27
28 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Getting back to the chicken-and-egg part of this,
29 before we create a document, because, you know, I understand LA
30 Creel, and I think it is a great program, and I sincerely mean
31 that, but are we going to use LA Creel? Are you going to take on
32 all the Gulf states to manage this with this better program? I
33 mean, is there money to do that? Is it legal? We don't even have
34 legal counsel to give us some informed guidance on that, number
35 one.

36
37 Number two, backing up even before that, getting back to does the
38 fleet want this, the entire federal for-hire fleet, and can we do
39 some kind of referendum, or some formal query of the fleet, and
40 ask them, as a whole, do you all want to consider looking at state
41 management, and let's get the pulse on this thing before we go
42 creating a document, perhaps needlessly.

43
44 While some states may want it, I think you will find out the
45 overwhelming sentiment of the fleet is not to go in this direction,
46 and so maybe a referendum, or some means that staff might be able
47 to suggest for a query or something in advance of this.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Chris, to that point.

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I agree with you that this feels like cart
4 before the horse, or chicken-and-egg, or 6-7, whatever you want to
5 call it, but I think you've got to keep in mind here the opt-out
6 portion of this, right?

7
8 If there's an overwhelming majority in a particular state, then
9 those state council representatives would probably make a motion
10 that -- You know, that would be a state that opts out of this
11 entirely, stays remaining in its current system, and that's that,
12 and, if there's a state that chooses to opt-in, that state would
13 function under the state management system to opt-in for portions
14 of these.

15
16 I'm going to get into a few more nuts-and-bolts details there in
17 a minute, once we go through this, for Assane to make sure he
18 includes in whatever draft document we receive, whenever that
19 happens to happen.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I was going to say the same thing, John. What's
22 not in this motion on the board right now is the opt-out, and so
23 I don't want folks to forget about that, and so, if the majority
24 of the fleet in Florida wants out, they have that option, and so
25 I would just remind folks of that. General Spraggins, then Captain
26 Frady, and then Captain Walker.

27
28 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** First off, I'm not saying, by any means, that
29 I think we should do this, as far as a long-term thing, but, as we
30 talked about in the last couple of days, I think that looking at
31 it -- One of the things I'm going to do is I promised all of my
32 fishermen that what I would do is we'll have meetings, and we'll
33 talk about it, and we'll sit down and talk about what comes out,
34 but, until I get some kind of framework to show me what we're
35 talking about, I don't really know what I want to even consider it
36 or not consider it, and I can't take it to them until I have the
37 framework, until I have some form of framework to take to them to
38 say, hey, this is what they're looking at, and this is what it
39 would affect Mississippi, and this is what it would affect overall.

40
41 Until I get that, I don't know, and so that's the reason I'm in
42 support of this motion to move forward, and let's just look at it,
43 and let's see where we're at, and I think we're a year down the
44 road of even getting close to anything in this, and so, you know,
45 I think it's a long time that it's going to take to do it, and so
46 I don't think it's something -- I believe each and every one of
47 the state directors, and each one of the representatives for the
48 state, have an opportunity to go back and really talk to your

1 constituents in your area, and find out what you want, and be able
2 to bring that maybe to the January -- When we come to January, we
3 can talk more about it, and be able to talk about what we can do.
4

5 You know, you may have some completely different ideas come up in
6 January, compared to what Chris is going to bring up here in a few
7 minutes, and it will be something that we can carry forward, and
8 so I'm going to support the motion, if it goes forward, but, you
9 know, only because I want to see what they're talking about, and
10 I want to see what's there, and get some kind of idea of where
11 we're at.
12

13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Mr. Sanchez, to
14 that point?
15

16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes. To that point, yes, and I think, in addition
17 to maybe some referendum, to feel the pulse or something, but,
18 getting more specifically to what you were saying, each state
19 having something to show their people, absolutely, and, again,
20 we're back to carts and horses and chickens and eggs, but each
21 state, in my opinion, would need to know, all right, if you go
22 this direction, here's how many days your charter-for-hire,
23 respectively speaking, is going to end up with, and then that might
24 tell them whether they want this or not. I mean, just very, very
25 visibly.
26

27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Chris.
28

29 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, to that point, John, that's the first thing I'm
30 going to address here, as soon as we get through this.
31

32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Frady, followed by Captain Walker.
33

34 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, Mr. Sanchez is
35 talking about getting the cart before the horse, and I think he's
36 right. Looking at this right here, I mean, I understand the
37 purpose and the need. I do get it. I totally understand how some
38 user groups want to have more flexibility, other than having to go
39 through the agency to get a season set.
40

41 I get it, but we worked hard, in sector separation, to get
42 Amendment 40 going, and there's yet to be a review of Amendment
43 40, to see if it's been successful or not, or the economic impacts
44 it has had, and the other thing is our council staff, and they're
45 here to do what we ask them to do --
46

47 In talking to some of the staff, I do understand that we do have
48 an updated red snapper assessment coming up here in the near

1 future, within six months, and, from what we're seeing on the
2 water, versus what we can supposedly see out of the science, is
3 our fishery, the red snapper fishery across the Gulf, is, from
4 what we call it, negative trending.

5
6 As a precaution, I would like to just pump the brakes on this for
7 a second, at least until after we have some analysis come in from
8 the stock assessment, and the other thing is just I want to see an
9 analysis of Amendment 40, to see is it failing, or is it working,
10 before we just give up and throw our hands in the air and just
11 say, well, the states can give you the flexibility.

12
13 Overwhelmingly, we spent ten years getting sector separation, and
14 it did work. It gave us everything we desired. The only thing it
15 doesn't give you is the flexibility to have, you know, bag limits
16 and size limits and seasons, but, so far, everybody I know is happy
17 with it. Thank you, sir.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. I have Captain Walker,
20 and Dr. Sweetman.

21
22 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I don't disagree with the
23 General. We don't know what we're telling our guys they're facing
24 here. I don't understand, and we heard, from every single for-
25 hire individual that came up here yesterday, from four of the five
26 Gulf states, that spoke in opposition.

27
28 Every single one, none in favor, and we're sitting here saying
29 let's try it, and I just don't understand, you know, voting against
30 what -- I'm a charter fisherman myself, and so I get it, and I
31 don't understand pushing something through that, with the
32 exception of Louisiana, and I understand their individual
33 problems, that everybody said don't do this, and we're saying, you
34 know, let's go ahead and do this.

35
36 I don't really get that, but I think what it's going to come down
37 to is how we split this allocation. That's what we're talking
38 about, the impending allocation battle, and I don't know if that's
39 what Mr. Schieble is getting ready to pull out here next, and
40 that's what is going to make or break it for everybody.

41
42 If they're going to say Louisiana, or Mississippi, is going to get
43 a sixty-day cut in their opportunity, I don't imagine you would
44 support that. I know you would always be a good representative of
45 your people in Mississippi, whether I agree with it or not, but I
46 still don't really understand why we're even still talking about
47 this, after what we heard in public testimony, but could anybody
48 fill me in, and maybe Mr. Schieble, on how we're going to attempt

1 this allocation split between the for-hire guys state-to-state?

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Well, it's one of the actions that we requested for
4 some to come back to us with some options, right, that would be in
5 there. I'm not going to, you know, be pre-decisional here on how
6 we're going to do that. I would like to see what he comes back
7 with, when eventually we get this document, but it would probably
8 be based on a historical time series of landings, and depending on
9 those dates.

10
11 He had that table, in the original presentation, that went back
12 showing the number of permits to 2016. I would like to see the
13 difference on the number of permits going further back in the time
14 series, because there's been a major shift in where those permits
15 go in the Gulf, as you're well aware, but, also, that dictates the
16 landings time series as well.

17
18 Going back further in time is going to show you the change in the
19 Gulf from landings regionally, and that, to me, would be part of
20 what we have to discuss around here, as to what those allocations
21 would become, but I don't think that that's a major obstacle. It
22 will be what probably takes the longest.

23
24 **MR. WALKER:** If I could, real quick, I did ask Assane for the
25 landings estimates, and he told me that, due to the shutdown, he's
26 not able to access those yesterday, right, the charter-for-hire?

27
28 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and I was not able to get updated numbers to
29 provide all of that, but, should you decide to move forward, that's
30 going to be in it.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So I have a list running, and I think a lot of
33 this discussion is going to come out from Mr. Schieble, probably
34 after this motion, and just reminding folks that he's going to
35 give some more explanation on these guardrails and the questions
36 that are being asked now. Next, I have Dr. Sweetman and Mr.
37 Sanchez.

38
39 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Speaking to emotion on the table here, I heard loud
40 and clear, from public comment last night, and that didn't really
41 surprise me, and just a point of clarification, Ed. I mean, if
42 ultimately -- I mean, this is kind of where I stand right here.
43 Like, if ultimately this moves forward, this doesn't mean that
44 we're doing this.

45
46 It's just a document will be generated that we could explore a
47 little bit here, and, philosophically, I'm fine with that. I don't
48 know where Florida stands, at the end of the day, on, you know,

1 how -- The devil is going to be in the detail, right, on how this
2 ultimately plays out, and that's all I think is being asked here,
3 is to just look at this at the end of the day.
4
5 It might be a total disaster, and I kind of agree. Like the
6 allocation discussion is going to be a significant challenge, but,
7 you know, I mean, without having options on the table, and having
8 those discussions, you know, it's -- I understand the discussion
9 of the cart ahead of the horse here, but it's just putting together
10 a document that I'm okay with exploring.
11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I have Mr. Sanchez,
13 then Dr. Allen, and then the General.
14
15 **MR. SANCHEZ:** We were discussing opt-in and opt-out. Well, how is
16 that going to work, in terms of -- Can an individual charter-for-
17 hire person, who does not want to be a part of this, opt-out, or
18 does it have to be that entire state's charter federal for-hire
19 has to opt out?
20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** To my knowledge, it's the state, Mr. Sanchez.
22 Mr. Strelcheck, to that point?
23
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, let me just jump in on that, and so, with
25 the delegation of authority, and it depends, I guess, on what
26 approach we take under Magnuson, recall that any sort of delegation
27 requires a three-quarter majority vote of this council, right, and
28 so, if Louisiana decides to opt-out, the whole council still has
29 to agree with the opt-out, right, or not the whole council, but
30 three-quarters of the council has to agree. I just want to
31 emphasize that, that, to delegate authority, there is Magnuson
32 requirements for that delegation.
33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, to that point, Mr. Strelcheck, like we did in
35 Amendment 50, you had to have -- Each state had its own amendment,
36 and every council member had to vote yes or no for each state,
37 correct?
38
39 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Right. With any amendment action that's taken
40 and recommended to the Fisheries Service, you vote it up or down,
41 right, and then the threshold though is a majority, with certain
42 requirements for super majorities, and delegation of authority is
43 one of those.
44
45 How we structure this, we don't -- We've talked about it, and we're
46 not sure if we need five separate amendments for the states, or we
47 could do it in one omnibus amendment. We would have to figure
48 that out.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen, and then General Spraggins.
3

4 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of comments. You
5 know, I definitely see the argument that, you know, there's no
6 harm in us having a conversation about this. I get that, but I
7 just wanted to make the point that there is a real cost for this
8 council to talk about something, because, you know, the Science
9 Center has reduced capacity for -- You know, it's going to be some
10 council staff time for us to put numbers together to look at this.

11
12 When I think about that, and then I think about the overwhelming
13 comments that we heard yesterday, it would just seem to me that,
14 to go forward with this, we would want to have some sense that
15 there's a substantial amount of support out there, and I didn't
16 hear that, and so I would vote no against this one, and so thank
17 you.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Dr. Allen. General Spraggins.
20

21 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Captain Walker, I heard my fishermen yesterday,
22 even though I wasn't here for a lot of it, but I still heard it,
23 and I know where they stand, and I understand that.

24
25 One thing I do look at though is, when somebody brings something
26 up, and asks me to look at it, and to see what it is, we're going
27 to have an opportunity, at the end of the day here, to rack and
28 stack where we want things anyway, and I'm not sure where this is
29 going to fit in that rack and stack.

30
31 You know, it may not be at the top, by any means, and so it's
32 probably going to have a lot to do with what Carrie and the staff
33 say they can do, and when they can do something, but I think that
34 just to leave it on the table, and to be able to -- Let's talk
35 with our people, and get forward between now and January, and it
36 might get taken off the table in January.

37
38 You know, it might be a situation that is totally out, and there's
39 not anything that's going to happen anytime soon, but I heard them,
40 and I understand them, but I also believe that we ought to give
41 every opportunity a chance.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Mr. Marquez.
44

45 **MR. MARQUEZ:** I just wanted to add to that. In talking with some
46 of the fishermen after the comment period yesterday, I think what
47 I heard back from them was that they recognize that that discussion
48 document was so preliminary, and we were just at the beginning,

1 and they even posed a lot of questions that we need to think about,
2 and that there were not suggested answers or anything in there.

3
4 The way to get to that discussion, even though some of them may
5 have a lot of trepidation about proceeding, was to start with some
6 sort of a document. That's how you get that discussion going.
7 That's how you're going to flesh that out. We haven't really done
8 that yet, where we are in this process, and so, you know, we heard
9 a lot of comments initially saying no, but I think there's a
10 recognition that this is kind of how the process works. You have
11 to have this discussion.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marquez. I would like to comment
14 on some of the comments I've heard from Captain Walker and Dr.
15 Allen regarding public comment yesterday. Public comment, to me,
16 was tremendously against this motion, agreed, but I will say that
17 there were two folks here from Louisiana, and they do represent -
18 - I believe he said there was sixty-something folks they polled
19 that were interested from the State of Louisiana, and so we can't
20 count that out. I understand that the vast majority of the folks
21 in the room are against it, but there are some folks that are
22 interested in seeing the conversation proceed. Mr. Osborne.

23
24 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes, and I understand everything you guys are saying,
25 and it does make me leery, based on some of the comments yesterday.
26 Folks are worried that their -- The quota that they have now is
27 going to be impacted, right?

28
29 I'm looking at it, and I heard some of you all's comments
30 yesterday, and folks in the audience about their state, and who
31 knows politically who is going to be governors, and the same thing
32 applies on the federal level, and who is going to be president,
33 and that's every four years.

34
35 I personally believe that folks have a bigger impact locally on
36 their state politicians than they do on the federal side. One
37 thing I'm concerned about, honestly, is the direction of this
38 administration currently, and what they're doing with every
39 agency, and how that could impact us moving forward, particularly
40 as it relates to fisheries, and I just think that we should at
41 least take a look at it, and, in the end, you know, to what the
42 general said, is we may not like it.

43
44 We may find whatever they come back with is crap, but, if we don't
45 at least take a look at it, considering everything that's happening
46 in D.C. and everything that's happening at NOAA, and the fisheries,
47 like at least we've done our job to try and be prepared, in case
48 the worst thing happens.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Osborne. Mr. Strelcheck, and then
3 we'll try to wrap this up.
4

5 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'll leave with I don't think it hurts
6 to, obviously, continue to evaluate this, and, obviously, get more
7 public input through future meetings. I will say though, based on
8 Jason's comments, I heard kind of the exact opposite, from some of
9 the charter captains, with regard to they don't feel like they
10 will have as much access to their state commission.

11
12 They won't -- They don't trust their state commission as much maybe
13 as the process here, and I definitely heard a lot of captains
14 question how successful state management has been, from a
15 biological standpoint.
16

17 I'm not going to argue that it's state management that's affecting
18 the stock, and the reduction in size of fish, and everything that
19 we talked about the other day, because that's one component of a
20 much larger fishery that includes the commercial and charter
21 sectors, but I think there's a lot of questions that all of them
22 have, that I heard, and trust as being one of those, and access
23 being one of those, and just the health and status of this
24 population, that I think all of that has to get wrapped into a
25 broader conversation about how we're going to manage this fishery
26 going into the future.
27

28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Osborne.
29

30 **MR. OSBORNE:** Andy, all I was saying on that is that I personally
31 believe that, because they're -- The community is closer to their
32 state representatives, that they should be able to have better
33 access to them than trying to go up to D.C. and influence, you
34 know, in a big building, right?
35

36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Osborne. Not seeing any
37 other hands -- I don't have any other hands, and let's bring this
38 to a vote and move forward. Mr. Sanchez has asked for a roll call
39 vote. We can do that as soon as Dr. Simmons is ready.
40

41 **I'm going to read the motion for the record. To direct staff to**
42 **begin developing a document that considers the following purpose**
43 **and needs statement. Dr. Simmons.**
44

45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Osborne.
46

47 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes.
48

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Broussard.
2
3 MR. BROUSSARD: Yes.
4
5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.
6
7 DR. SWEETMAN: Yes.
8
9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.
10
11 MR. MARQUEZ: Yes.
12
13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Ms. Ballard.
14
15 MS. BALLARD: Yes.
16
17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Walker.
18
19 MR. WALKER: No.
20
21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Geeslin.
22
23 MR. GEESLIN: Yes.
24
25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Sanchez.
26
27 MR. SANCHEZ: No.
28
29 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.
30
31 DR. BANKS: Yes.
32
33 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Allen.
34
35 DR. ALLEN: No.
36
37 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: General Spraggins.
38
39 GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes.
40
41 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.
42
43 MR. ANSON: Yes.
44
45 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Overton.
46
47 DR. OVERTON: No.
48

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
 2
 3 **MR. FRADY:** No.
 4
 5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
 6
 7 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
 8
 9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
 10
 11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Abstain.
 12

Names	Vote		
Mr. Osborne	yes		
Mr. Broussard	yes	abstain	2
Dr. Sweetman	yes	no	5
Mr. Marquez	yes	yes	10
Ms. Ballard	yes	Grand Total	17
Capt. Walker	no		
Mr. Geeslin	yes		
Mr. Sanchez	no		
Dr. Banks	yes		
Dr. Allen	no		
Gen. Spraggins	yes		
Mr. Anson	yes		
Dr. Overton	no		
Capt. Frady	no		
Mr. Schieble	yes		
Mr. Strelcheck	abstain		
Mr. Dugas	abstain		

13
 14
 15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Abstain. Okay, and did you want to
 16 vote? You don't need to. **The motion passed ten to five with two**
 17 **abstentions.**

18
 19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay. Dr. Sweetman, or,
 20 Chris, you want to -- Okay. We'll let Mr. Schieble go now.

21
 22 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Before we move further into the committee report
 23 regarding this, I wanted to pose a couple of items for us to just
 24 look at and consider here. I think a motion would be a good start.
 25 If we don't need a motion for this, I'll retract them, and I sent
 26 the first one to Bernie.

27
 28 This, I think, is what I talked about with guardrails. After a
 29 lot of the comment I heard, especially from Captain Frady across

1 the table, one item is sector separation. There seems to be a lot
2 of concern that the states would do something against sector
3 separation, and so I'm submitting this in here as one action that
4 we can include in the document. Assane, if we can have this as
5 one of the things that you would come back with in the document.
6

7 **The motion is to include an action for sector separation with an**
8 **alternative for states that opt-in, which would mean to participate**
9 **in the alternative program, to be required to maintain sector**
10 **separation.**

11
12 If a state opts-into this, that state would be required to maintain
13 that sector separation for allocation purposes, and so the federal
14 for-hire fleet's allocation would not be intruded upon elsewhere,
15 right, and this is just one alternative that would be within that
16 action that we can all sit and choose to vote on. I'm not sure if
17 we need this as a motion, but I will offer it up as one, for
18 discussion.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Diagne.

21
22 **DR. DIAGNE:** Just to understand, so states that opt-in for
23 delegation, right? That's what you mean? Okay, and so maybe if
24 you would consider --
25

26 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** We can modify the language in this, as appropriate.
27 If you feel it needs to be modified, I'm open to it.
28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.
30

31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think this is staff direction, but keep in mind,
32 right now, you don't have the option to opt-out or opt-in to sector
33 separation, right? It is sector separation, until we change it,
34 right, and so that would be happening in the amendment, to just
35 further emphasize that we're maintaining sector separation.
36

37 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so what I heard yesterday is that there's
38 a fear that, if a state gets control of the allocation from the
39 federal for-hire fleet, that there may not be maintaining sector
40 separation with that allocation. It could just get turned into
41 general recreational allocation, is what a lot of people said, and
42 so I'm trying to craft language to reassure the federal for-hire
43 captains that that wouldn't happen. I agree with you, yes, that
44 sector separation is Amendment 40, regardless, and we have to do
45 that, but however we need to put that language into this document
46 is what I'm requesting.
47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Diagne.

1
2 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and so just to include, I guess, in broad term
3 text, or an action, because it may be that, because that's the law
4 of the land, that reinforcing that in the text, to say that
5 delegation would not allow a particular state to essentially undo
6 sector separation, something like that, just text. If it requires
7 an action, that would be, but, if not, we'll just write in the
8 text.

9
10 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'm fine with that, if everyone else is fine with
11 that as well, and I can withdraw this motion, but I wanted to put
12 it up for conversation.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So we have a second for the motion? Mr. Broussard
15 seconded the motion. Okay, and now I'm going to the list of
16 Captain Walker, and then Jason.

17
18 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Chris. I appreciate what you're trying to do
19 here to try and clarify some things. Maintaining sector separation
20 is kind of a lot of -- Like I think -- I'm pretty sure that sector
21 separation sets a bag limit for the for-hire sector, and does it
22 not? No? Just the allocation? Okay.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Osborne.

25
26 **MR. OSBORNE:** What I would recommend is just amending the motion
27 to -- Instead of saying "to include an action for sector
28 separation", for the staff to be -- "To examine the issue of sector
29 separation with an alternative for states within their document".

30
31 **DR. DIAGNE:** But I guess -- I mean, "examination" would consider
32 both sides, but, if I hear Mr. Schieble here, the text would have
33 to make it clear that sector separation is not going to be undone
34 by this document.

35
36 **MR. OSBORNE:** I mean, I think it's understood that staff is going
37 to look at all these different facets of it, but I think, to
38 Chris's point, we want to make sure, to the industry, that we at
39 least put an emphasis on this, and how it affects, pro and con,
40 right, but so, instead of saying to include an action, you just
41 say to ensure that there's significant discussion within that
42 document that we'll be seeing from staff on this issue.

43
44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I'm fine with that friendly amendment, if
45 we want to do that, and so the basis for where I derived this
46 motion in the first place was the slide that we saw that talks
47 about sector separation or not in there, and I felt that that's
48 what got everybody all worked up about whether we're going to have

1 that or not, and that was not my intention from the start, when we
2 asked for that presentation.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and, in the presentation slide 9 is the page
5 he's referring to, this block on the right. I don't have any other
6 hands? Dr. Sweetman.

7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** This motion still confuses me here. I mean, I get
9 the intent, but like it still doesn't make sense, kind of as
10 written right here. I mean, maybe a better approach to this,
11 Chris, is like this is something that's already in place, and so
12 it's like an alternative for something that's in place already,
13 and so it's a bit confusing.

14
15 I get what you're saying, but I feel like this is more direction
16 to staff in developing this document, to please include and
17 consider these components there, but I don't know -- I mean, were
18 you planning to go like step by -- Motion by motion by motion of
19 stuff to include there? Because I feel like maybe just a more
20 timely -- Just direction to staff of here's stuff that should be
21 included within these amendments, and I'm not sure a motion is
22 needed for everything here.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Chris.

25
26 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, to that point, I don't disagree with you. I'm
27 trying to make sure there's understanding, and, to me, that slide
28 9, or whatever it was, it was confusing. That's what led to this,
29 and I've got another motion to talk about another guardrail after
30 this one, but we may not need motions.

31
32 We need this discussion, to make sure Assane knows what to bring
33 back to us, and that's all I'm trying to do, is give us talking
34 points, and I can retract these as official motions in the end, if
35 we don't want them, but it's to prompt discussion.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I've got a list of hands. Dr. Froeschke,
38 to that point, and then I've got General Spraggins and Mr. Anson.

39
40 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just for my staff perspective, it would be better
41 to not do it this way, if you don't -- Because, from an IPT --
42 When we get this -- When we get a motion from the council to
43 develop an action, and our first response is we're not going to be
44 able to develop this as an action, because there isn't -- There is
45 no alternatives to be considered, as far as this. I mean, there
46 isn't an option to opt-out, and so I don't know what we would do,
47 and so we would spend a ton of time figuring out how to respond to
48 this.

1
2 If you would just have a motion to say, you know, as direction to
3 the staff on this, please consider that it's the council's intent
4 to remain within the confines of sector separation at this time,
5 and that would be more helpful, to me, and then we could include
6 that in the background, explain sector separation, explain that
7 that would still be maintained in this document going forward, but
8 we wouldn't have to include an action that I don't even know what
9 would occur.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Chris.

12
13 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so, to that point, I totally agree with
14 you, and, if Assane is comfortable with just knowing that we need
15 to make sure we have status quo of sector separation included
16 within the alternatives we get, then I'm totally fine with
17 withdrawing this motion.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have several hands. General Spraggins is next,
20 and then Mr. Anson.

21
22 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** You answered my point there, because I still
23 hadn't figured opt-in and opt-out, and we haven't put anything in
24 it about what's going on, and so, you know, it's got me confused
25 as all get out. Trevor, you better get ready, because we're going
26 to have to figure this one out, but the -- So I agree, you know,
27 and I think if we just pull the motion.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson, and then Mr. Sanchez.

30
31 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I was not in favor of this motion as written.
32 They had the kind of the substitute that was temporarily on the
33 board, and, you know, Mr. Schieble has said that he would withdraw
34 it, and I think it could be accomplished either through the
35 background portion of the document, as well as probably in the
36 allocation action, and it will probably be mentioned in there as
37 well, the statutory requirement that the allocation remain with
38 the federal for-hire sector, in whatever state that decides to
39 opt-in.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

42
43 **MR. SANCHEZ:** So, Chris, I guess just throw out your guardrails,
44 you know, rather than motion by motion. Just put them out there,
45 and let's talk about it.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Okay, and so, to be
48 clear, Mr. Schieble, you have withdrawn your motion?

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I am withdrawing this motion. I sent Bernie another
3 one for us to talk about, but it doesn't need to be an official
4 motion, but let's pull it up and have a discussion. If you liked
5 this one, you'll love the next one.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and let's give Bernie a chance to get that
8 up.
9

10 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So one of the other things we heard about is that,
11 you know, states having longer and longer season structure, right,
12 but part of the point of this whole thing is for the states, that
13 are different parts of the Gulf, with different fisheries, to be
14 able to structure their seasons differently, and so what I brought
15 up here is to maintain the total number of days.
16

17 There was some concern yesterday, that we heard from public
18 comment, that, you know, the federal season will be X amount of
19 days, whatever it's going to be, and other states would exceed
20 that, which would cause problems, right, and so this would be a
21 guardrail to make sure that whatever states would opt-in to the
22 state management version of the federal for-hire season will be
23 limited to the total maximum number of days that the federal
24 fishery is.
25

26 However, the start and end dates could be moved, and so you could
27 have a modified season structure within a state that opts-into
28 this, with an earlier start, but still the same total number of
29 days, and it would stop, perhaps, before the end of a federal
30 season in another state.
31

32 I'm putting guardrails in place that the total number can't be
33 exceeded, and it doesn't change it from that perspective, but it
34 would allow a state to modify how it fishes, and that's part of
35 the fair and equitable portion of what I saw in the need statement
36 that we just voted on earlier, and so this is open for discussion
37 as well.
38

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

41 **MR. ANSON:** Chris, I appreciate you coming up with these talking
42 points at this stage, to kind of help alleviate some of the concern
43 now that the motion to go forward with the document has been
44 passed, and these will help to address some of those questions,
45 and it might spur some additional questions, internally as well as
46 externally.
47

48 I'm just a little -- I'm having a hard time trying to understand

1 what you're trying to accomplish here with setting a fixed season
2 in the document, because, you know, each of the states will still
3 be monitoring their allocation on a weekly basis, monthly basis,
4 what have you, and they'll need to take action based on whatever
5 is going on in that particular fishing season, and so, if a fishing
6 season is going good, and people are catching fish and such, I
7 don't know if you can have a maximum, you know, a guaranteed
8 maximum, number of days and still try to, you know, meet your
9 allocation goals.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Chris, to that point, and then General.

12
13 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** To that point, thank you, Kevin, and so maybe I
14 wasn't clear on this. It's not to dictate that you're going to
15 get the maximum number of days. It's to put guardrails on the
16 total, right, and so the total number of days fishable within a
17 state that would opt-in would be equal to whatever the total number
18 of fishing days is for the rest of the Gulf at that point, but you
19 could start it earlier, end it earlier, and so let's say Louisiana
20 opted-into state management, and we had 115 days.

21
22 We started May 1, to match up with what our recreational season
23 is, and so everybody is starting at the same time, and we monitor
24 through LA Creel units, and the landings are coming in to where,
25 whatever that determined allocation is for Louisiana, is getting
26 to be where we would exceed it, and we would shut it off. We
27 wouldn't achieve a maximum total number of days, because perhaps
28 we started earlier, and the fishery was allowed to be prosecuted
29 more efficiently than what it is right now.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. General Spraggins, and Mr.
32 Marquez.

33
34 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Chris, I do appreciate you doing these things,
35 and looking at it, but I think, where we're at right now, we have
36 a motion for staff to look at something. Why can't we just send
37 our things to the staff and say, hey, these are the things I want
38 you to include to look at, you know, and could you look at that?
39 Do we have to have a motion for everyone that we ask the staff to
40 look at? If I'm wrong, then I understand that.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

43
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, in response to that, no, we don't
45 have to have a motion to provide direction to the staff, but we do
46 need to have a public discussion, right, and so we can't just all
47 be sending emails and ideas to staff independently of one another.
48 That's why we're meeting as a council to discuss all this.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Marquez.

3
4 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Well, that was more or less my same comment, as a
5 new person on here, is how do you get guidance for the staff to do
6 this, and now I appreciate what Chris is trying to do here. To
7 me, it limits the discussion. It's an issue where, you know, we
8 want to talk about it, and we want to flesh it out in the document.
9 That was kind of the point of the earlier comments of, you know,
10 having a discussion document.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Walker.

13
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** My suggestion, because I think there's camps here,
15 in terms of supporting or opposing this right now, and we're
16 struggling kind of how to proceed, is maybe we set this aside.
17 We've already made the decision to move the document forward. We
18 come back at another meeting and focus on what would be the kind
19 of contents of the actual amendment itself, to really think about
20 the direction to staff, and, collectively, it gives all of us some
21 time, between now and whenever that meeting is, to kind of put our
22 heads together and bring that to the table.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

25
26 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** To that point, to I guess assure everyone in here,
27 this is the last I have to offer for this, but I wanted to get it
28 on the public record, for those that are listening, that gave
29 public comment yesterday, that I'm trying to put in guardrails to
30 make sure some of their concerns are addressed, and that was the
31 whole purpose of this, but I also want to make sure that Assane
32 knew the things that I felt were critical that need to be included
33 when we do get this back, but this is it. That's the end of my
34 list.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

37
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, Chris, I'm really appreciative of your
39 thought going into this. I think there's some things that I'm
40 thinking through that are kind of unintended consequences, and
41 like putting the guardrails in terms of the maximum number of days
42 is great, but that means you're foregoing potentially harvest,
43 because you're not catching your catch limit, right?

44
45 Is that something the state ultimately is going to want to support,
46 especially if that grows over time, and there's less and less quota
47 being caught, right, and so that's where I feel like we're maybe,
48 like John said, a little bit cart ahead of the horse, but we've

1 had this discussion. It's good that it's on the record, and the
2 staff has heard it. We can bring back some additional ideas, as
3 well as some of the things that have been thrown out today.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** To that point?

6
7 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and this is to that point, and my last comment,
8 and so that's why I asked for having an alternative in there to
9 talk about this, where there would be an alternative, perhaps with
10 options, where we limit it, you know, to the total number of days
11 that matches whatever the federal season is, and other options
12 that don't, and then, at that point, we all, as a council, decide
13 upon that, but I want to make sure certain alternatives were
14 included, or certain language, and that's what this is for.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. I have Captain Walker and Mr.
17 Sanchez.

18
19 **MR. WALKER:** I appreciate that, Chris, and I like what you've done
20 here. It kind of alleviates some of the concerns that I have, and
21 some of the industry has, and so, if I'm following what this says,
22 this says that, states that opt-out, the season wouldn't be longer
23 than the federal season? Okay. Well, that's -- I mean, a lot of
24 people have that concern, as you probably know, and so all this is
25 great. I like the clarification, and I appreciate it.

26
27 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so my thought is that, if there's 115 days,
28 whatever you want to say it is going forward, that the state that
29 would opt-into the state management version of it would follow the
30 same total number of days, but it could be broken up. They could
31 close, and then reopen over a holiday week, or something like that,
32 but there's still the total number of days wouldn't exceed whatever
33 the federal for-hire season date is for the entire Gulf, whatever
34 that total number is, and that would be one alternative.

35
36 There could be other options within that alternative to change
37 that, if we want to look at that going down the road, but I'm
38 trying to put in guardrails for people's concerns that we heard
39 yesterday, and you all, especially the same thing, that states
40 would not just have this wide open season that totally exceeds
41 what other portions of the Gulf were capable of fishing, total
42 number of days.

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** That's great. That makes a big difference, I think,
45 and that's very helpful.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. I have Mr. Sanchez,
48 and then I'll give Captain Frady the opportunity, and we'll try to

1 wrap this up.

2

3 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've also heard, for years
4 now, from the very federal for-hire, and some of them have even
5 come to the podium and said we want shorter seasons, and we're
6 beating this stock down, and, yes, you might say, well, that was
7 from this state, that state, another state, but the fact remains
8 that common sense would say that we're beating this stock down,
9 and here we're trying to restructure, and I get it, to optimize
10 the days each state can pick, because it might be a different start
11 date that benefits one state, weather or what have you, versus
12 overall here are the days, and go, and good luck.

13

14 I get all that, but, at some point, I don't think we can lose sight
15 that this stock -- As we create more efficiency in harvest, it's
16 kind of heading in the wrong direction, and I think we're going to
17 find that out when it's too late, and then we're having to rebuild
18 something again.

19

20 No, the science hasn't caught up with that yet, but there has been
21 four years of people approaching that podium saying, man, I'm
22 having to go further, and they're getting smaller, and then you
23 hear, well, some folks are saying, well, these fish are bigger,
24 but how much high-grading is going on to get to that? I mean,
25 there's something going on here, and I think we're all aware of
26 that, and I don't think just promoting more efficiency to harvest
27 -- I think we're heading in the wrong direction.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** To that point, Chris?

30

31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, Thank you, John, and I don't disagree with
32 you. I agree that, you know, there may be different fisheries
33 among the different regions of the Gulf, the way things are
34 behaving, and this creates that flexibility to be able to modify
35 the fishery within different regions of the Gulf, based on what
36 you're talking about. That's the whole idea.

37

38 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I respect what you're trying to do. I may not agree
39 with you, but I 100 percent respect what you're trying to do and
40 where you're coming from.

41

42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Captain Frady.

43

44 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I've always kind of
45 looked at things that are kind of outside the box. You know, we're
46 talking about delegating the federal for-hire, charter-for-hire,
47 allocation to the states, and let the states best decide.

48

1 You know, in the essence of the current administration, and the
2 getting rid of regulations, would it be possible to entertain the
3 fact that we just delegate the authority to set seasons and bag
4 limits with the Regional Administrator, based upon the state's
5 request, without even having to do a delegation, but still keep
6 the federal charter-for-hire in contact and let the
7 administrator's office set our seasons and bag limits.

8
9 That way we still have a direct contact with the fish, and the
10 permit to the fish goes right to the government. I mean, I would
11 be entertained the idea of letting Andy be the flexible one, which
12 each state submits to him what they want to do, and he says, sure,
13 as long as you don't miss your ACL, and the Magnuson Act is not
14 violated, and we're still rebuilding a fishery, and I'm okay with
15 that, but I'm a minimalist, when it comes to having to go through
16 this whole document, and have somebody else look at it, and we've
17 already got the guy.

18
19 All we've got to do is give him the permission to do it, but the
20 other thing is one of the things that I'm missing here, and, if
21 the states did take control, I want to make sure that the states
22 understand that it's in a condition with we have our own SEFHIER
23 program, and that the SEFHIER program is what we ride with, because
24 we trust it.

25
26 It just needs to be funded, and I don't want to depend upon how
27 great -- I mean, I understand the states, the LA Creel, and Alabama
28 and Mississippi are just wonderful, but, for the charter-for-hire,
29 we're familiar with SEFHIER, and we want to see it continue. We
30 want to maintain our allocation, and we want to make sure the
31 fishery gets better, but would it be possible to avoid all of this
32 and make sure that SEFHIER is funded and let our Regional
33 Administrator just say, okay, guys, what's the state's wishes, and
34 you do it, and set your bag limits and your seasons according to
35 -- But we've got the man right there, the agency, that can just do
36 it, but he has to be given permission. It's just a thought. Thank
37 you.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. I don't think we have
40 any control over the funding of the SEFHIER portion here at this
41 table, and, to your other questions, it would be up to Mr.
42 Strelcheck, you know, to answer those, and that can be a discussion
43 to be had the next time this comes before the council. It's
44 something that Mr. Strelcheck can flesh out with his team. Okay,
45 and we're going to finish with Dr. Allen.

46
47 **DR. ALLEN:** I just wanted to add, and I brought this up when we
48 talked about it on Monday, or Tuesday, that, if this moves forward

1 to looking at options, I think there should also be an assessment
2 of what it means for data streams for the stock assessment, because
3 that's going to be a key issue. This is one of the most complicated
4 stock assessments in America, and those data streams, and things
5 that make it more complicated, could be a problem.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Allen. Okay, and so we're
8 going to turn it back over to Dr. Sweetman to continue down the
9 committee report. Thank you for all the input.
10

11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay, and so I think we're after that committee
12 motion there, right? Yes, and, regarding data calibration, the
13 committee noted that Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama would all
14 be under their respective creel programs and monitoring in a
15 similar way. Florida and Texas would require program modifications
16 to their surveys to also monitor federal for-hire red snapper catch
17 and effort.
18

19 A committee member highlighted differences on how the state surveys
20 operate, which could create disparities in comparing landings.
21 The committee indicated that determining allocation between the
22 states would be a key discussion point in the future.
23

24 A committee member noted that states with a small number of vessels
25 may not fare well in allocation results. A committee member noted
26 that allocation would consider several factors, including
27 landings. A committee member indicated that the consideration for
28 delegating for-hire management to the Gulf states is timely, given
29 ongoing discussions between state governors' offices and NOAA
30 Fisheries regarding recreational fisheries management and the ways
31 in which states may contribute to addressing management
32 challenges.
33

34 Council staff recalled the structure of Reef Fish Amendments 50A
35 to F, which included an umbrella amendment and then separate state-
36 specific amendments for delegation of authority for managing the
37 private angling component for red snapper. Council staff
38 recommended, and the committee agreed, to begin with an umbrella
39 document in this instance as well. Mr. Chair, I think now, before
40 we move into the next topic, might be a good time for a break.
41

42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Let's take
43 a fifteen-minute break, and we'll come back at 10:10.
44

45 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, folks. We're going to get started
48 again, and Dr. Sweetman is going to lead us through the rest of

1 the Reef Fish Committee report.

2
3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we have a couple of
4 decision points here for that for folks, and so, as we work through
5 this towards the end, let's just be aware of that. All right.
6 Public Hearing Draft: Reef Fish Amendment 58A: Shallow-Water
7 Grouper Complex Management Considerations, Tab B, Number 8,
8 council staff provided a presentation focused on two actions in
9 this document.

10
11 The first, Action 1.2, considers how IFQ shares of other shallow-
12 water grouper would be redistributed in the proposed scamp and
13 black grouper complexes. IFQ shares could be distributed either
14 using the existing percentage of shares only, landings history
15 only, or a combination of the two.

16
17 Dr. Jessica Stephen, from SERO, presented several scenarios
18 informed by IFQ data to demonstrate how the various alternatives
19 would affect shareholders who currently hold other shallow-water
20 grouper shares.

21
22 The second part of the presentation focused on Action 3, which
23 considers recreational accountability measures (AMs) for the black
24 grouper complex. An initial exploration of using a three-year
25 average to trigger the accountability measure did not definitively
26 produce an outcome that differed substantially from the last year's
27 estimate for predict recreational landings in the following year.

28
29 A simulation analysis indicated that recreational black grouper
30 complex landings have historically been lower than the
31 recreational black grouper complex ACL being considered in Action
32 2.

33
34 Therefore, exceeding the recreational ACL and complex ACL was
35 unlikely, even when applying high percentage standard error to
36 harvest estimates. The committee reviewed the purpose and need as
37 well as each action in the document. The committee agreed that
38 splitting the existing other shallow-water grouper complex was
39 warranted, given the assessment results for scamp and yellowmouth
40 grouper in SEDAR 68.

41
42 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1.1 to make**
43 **Alternative 2 the preferred. Alternative 2 would dissolve the**
44 **existing other shallow-water grouper complex and form two new**
45 **complexes, a scamp and yellowmouth grouper complex (scamp complex)**
46 **and a black grouper and yellowfin grouper complex (black grouper**
47 **complex). Create two new IFQ share categories, one for scamp**
48 **complex and one for black grouper complex. The motion carried**

1 with no opposition. Mr. Chair.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
4 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
5 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
6 **the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee discussed the
9 IFQ redistribution alternatives in Action 1.2. A committee member
10 stated that moving IFQ shares to participants who may have never
11 harvested that species was counter to the broader goals the council
12 has expressed for the program.

13
14 A committee member contended a main objective when reviewing the
15 IFQ program was to put shares in the hands of those who land the
16 fish. Several committee members acknowledged that sentiment, but
17 questioned whether Amendment 58A was the appropriate document to
18 achieve the larger IFQ program goals. They stated that mechanisms
19 in the program would still allow for shares to be made available
20 to permitted fishermen, especially for the black grouper complex.

21
22 The committee understood that allocation price for scamp complex
23 shares would see an increase, due to the reduction in catch limits
24 coming from the stock assessment, and stated that has happened for
25 several other IFQ species.

26
27 The committee ultimately reached consensus that removing the
28 action would be the most pragmatic approach and would result in a
29 proportional distribution of scamp complex and black grouper
30 complex share categories, based on existing other shallow-water
31 grouper share percentages.

32
33 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to move Action 1.2 to**
34 **Considered but Rejected. Action 1.2 deals with the distribution**
35 **of IFQ program shares to newly-established scamp and black grouper**
36 **complex share categories, and you can see the alternatives and**
37 **options that are on the screen.** Mr. Chair. The motion carried
38 with no opposition.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, and so we have a
41 committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the
42 motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

43
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and so I will say I have still
45 reservations about moving this to Considered but Rejected.
46 Certainly, with public testimony, I think there was not a lot of
47 support for this. We did hear at least one or two fishermen talk
48 about the 50-50 approach as a possible option.

1
2 My concern, obviously, is we are doing this substantial shift in
3 the shareholdings or, excuse me, in the landings, and the catch
4 limits, and that it's going to take a lot of shuffling around in
5 the market in order to get this into the hands of the people that
6 are actually landing the fish, and so my preference is, obviously,
7 to keep this in and continue, obviously, considering it, and I
8 recognize that that was not what the committee had voted.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Captain Walker.

11
12 **MR. WALKER:** So I believe this was my motion. I was a little bit
13 surprised to hear some of the commercial guys, who I know to be
14 significant shareholders, actually in favor of maybe exploring a
15 50-50.

16
17 I'm not going to change it, or withdraw it, but, you know, if there
18 was further discussion on it, I'm happy to entertain it, and it
19 was really a couple of the big shareholder guys that said that
20 they were in favor of it, and it would have actually moved some
21 stuff away from them, and so I'm open to changing it. I don't
22 want to take it out, but, if anybody wanted to discuss it, I'm
23 fine with that, too.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

26
27 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Leave it as Considered but Rejected.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and do we have any other comments or
30 discussion on the motion on the board? **Is there any opposition to**
31 **the motion on the board? Seeing none, motion carries.** Dr.
32 Sweetman.

33
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Council staff indicated that
35 language in the alternative to break up the other shallow-water
36 grouper complex into two new complexes would need to be updated to
37 specify the IFQ share cap. The intention is to use the existing
38 share cap of 7.266147 percent for the other shallow-water grouper
39 for the new complexes, and this updated language will be integrated
40 into the next version of the document.

41
42 In Action 3, the committee discussed the various analyses used to
43 inform the action discussion. While average recreational harvest
44 of black grouper complex has been historically lower than the
45 recreational ACL selected as preferred in Action 2, there is still
46 a possibility of an overage, and it is possible that the black
47 grouper complex catch levels may be revisited in the future.

1 The committee ultimately decided that establishing a post-season
2 recreational AM would benefit the complex and help constrain
3 harvest to sustainable levels.
4

5 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 3 to make**
6 **Alternative 2 the preferred. Alternative 2 is a post-season**
7 **recreational accountability measure would be implemented for the**
8 **black grouper complex if the recreational ACL and the black grouper**
9 **complex ACL are exceeded. If, in the following year of an overage,**
10 **NOAA Fisheries would close the recreational black grouper complex**
11 **to harvest when the recreational ACL is met, or projected to be**
12 **met, unless NOAA Fisheries determines, based upon the best of**
13 **scientific information available, that closure of recreational**
14 **fishing season is unnecessary. That motion carried without**
15 **opposition. Mr. Chair.**
16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
18 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
19 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
20 **the motion carries. Dr. Sweetman.**
21

22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee
23 decided to retain its preferred alternatives in Actions 2, 4, 5,
24 and 6. When considering the scamp complex recreational closed
25 season and payback provisions, Action 7.1 and 7.2, the committee
26 decided to wait until Full Council to make any decisions about
27 selecting a preferred alternative for those actions.
28

29 Council staff requested the committee provide direction on how
30 they would like public hearings to be conducted for Amendment 58A
31 from the Full Council, or at Full Council, and so, Mr. Chair, it
32 seems like we perhaps need a small discussion on Actions 7.1 and
33 7.2, and, if the council is ready to select preferred alternatives,
34 I think that would be helpful.
35

36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Osborne.
37

38 **MR. OSBORNE:** Sorry, and this is on the previous one that we
39 discussed. I thought we had had a discussion about taking out the
40 black complex ACL. Did that -- Did I miss that, or we kept it in?
41

42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No, and we kept it in during committee, Mr. Osborne,
43 and we did have discussions about that, but it ultimately got kept
44 in there.
45

46 **MR. OSBORNE:** All right.
47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

1
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right, and I'll kick it off here, and it might
3 be helpful, Bernie, maybe if we can just look at the options that
4 are in 7.1.

5
6 I think there's only a couple there relative to the recreational
7 season structure for the shallow-water grouper complex, and, just
8 to filibuster, I think, you know, the options were to kind of keep
9 it, you know, status quo, and we have a potential opening on June
10 1 or a potential opening on July 1, and that would theoretically
11 go to the end of December, but the analysis indicated that we
12 probably wouldn't get that far, regardless of the option that we
13 choose.

14
15 The July 1 start date is consistent with the 2025 framework that
16 was put in place recently, and so I'll just throw that out there
17 for potential options, and I know, when we were kind of discussing
18 that, some of those -- That July 1 start date was important for
19 Louisiana, for some of our colleagues across the Gulf there, and
20 I think, for Florida, that seemed to be okay for some folks, but
21 I just kind of wanted to put that out there for discussion, to see
22 if we wanted to select a preferred.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Broussard.

25
26 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Do you remember how many days with the July 1
27 opener?

28
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I think I might look to Dr. Hollensead for that.

30
31 **DR. LISA HOLLENSHAD:** So, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling
32 down to the second table that's there, because we'll look at the
33 one that considers the two-year average, because that also, you
34 know, tries to focus in on recent management changes to gag
35 grouper, and so these align a little bit, so those seasons overlap.

36
37 That gives you an idea of how many days you're looking at,
38 depending on what you select, and so the June 1 option is sort of
39 that top half of the table there, of the blue highlighted, and
40 then the July 1 is sort of that second portion, and so it's kind
41 of complicated, because it depends on what was selected in Actions
42 5 and Action 6, but preferreds have been selected on that, and so,
43 if you just want to focus on that row, it will give you an idea of
44 what the season duration would be.

45
46 In June 1, that top, you've got the Preferred Option 2b in Action
47 5, and then the preferred in Action 6, and that's, you know, ninety
48 days, and then ninety-four days in July, and so there's not much

1 difference, because, as you might imagine, in the summer, that's
2 the highest effort, and so that's when these would be open, and
3 so, yes, they're comparable.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Hollensead. Captain Walker.
6

7 **MR. WALKER:** So I talked with Mr. Broussard over there, and they
8 said that it's better for them, on that side, to have later in the
9 season. I'm just wondering, and we have -- If it's not that big
10 of a difference, June is opening of red snapper for us, right?
11

12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, go ahead.
13

14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Private rec opens a little earlier than that this
15 last year, but, you know, another consideration here was, if you
16 push it longer in July, you're going to get more overlap with the
17 gag season, and so that's a consideration there as well, Captain
18 Walker.
19

20 **MR. WALKER:** Right, and I forgot about that. I think that's going
21 to be a bigger thing, because you're fishing the exact same spot
22 for gag and scamp, and so the overlap there would be a bigger
23 issue, and so I'm good with the preferred.
24

25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.
26

27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right. **Good discussion, and I think we can**
28 **probably go ahead, and maybe I'll move, in Action 7.1, to make**
29 **Alternative 3 the preferred.**
30

31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion by Dr. Sweetman. We have
32 a second by Dr. Banks. We'll give Bernie a few moments to pull
33 that up. Dr. Sweetman, you good?
34

35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, sir.
36

37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussion on the motion? Go
38 ahead, C.J.
39

40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just to kind of build the rationale a little bit
41 more, this would be consistent with the framework that we have,
42 and so we would be kind of looking at similar data streams and
43 whatnot, from a year-to-year basis, which is nice, when you're
44 developing a new season structure, to understand what the effort
45 and actual true landings are. We've got overlap with the potential
46 gag grouper season, and so I think there's some conservation
47 benefits here for two species that are co-caught together.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any other discussion?
2 Captain Walker.
3
4 **MR. WALKER:** I'm sorry, and maybe I'm behind the ball on this, but
5 when did it end if we were to open it in June, and when was the
6 season end projected to be? Can we go back a moment?
7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So, those options that Dr. Hollensead was going
9 through, it looked like it was ninety days or ninety-four days
10 were basically the difference between the two.
11
12 **MR. WALKER:** But what was the month? What was it? Do you remember
13 what month it was? Was it October, and so we would miss gag season
14 if we include it?
15
16 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, and so it would be -- It would be August 30
17 or October 3. If you started in June, right, it would be ninety
18 days open, and so that would get you to August 3, If you open
19 July 1, you would have ninety-four days, and that would get you
20 to October 3.
21
22 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and that's what I thought. I just -- August,
23 that's no part of it, and I just see the discards on both sides of
24 the gag and the gag grouper with red snapper open, or, well, I
25 guess red snapper is a longer season, and so I just hate to have
26 people throw a scamp back in June, when red snapper opens, but I
27 do think it's more important for gag, and so I just wanted to
28 double-check and make sure there wasn't an opportunity to cover
29 both, but I guess there isn't.
30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussions on the motion? **Is**
32 **there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**
33 **carries.** Dr. Sweetman.
34
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and so then the last kind of option that we
36 have here is Action 7.2, which refers to the payback, and that was
37 one that we didn't really select a preferred on there, but, Bernie,
38 if you could perhaps scroll to that part of the document, and I
39 think it was either do it or don't do it, and I believe the
40 discussion at the table was that this was not a requirement for us
41 to implement this, and so --
42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** It's 7.2. Sorry, Dr. Sweetman. Go ahead, C.J.
44
45 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and so this is basically -- I mean, it's either
46 we do it or we don't do it, and, if we recall, we did have a bit
47 of discussion around the table during committee about this, and,
48 ultimately, we decided not to select a preferred here, because a

1 payback provision was not necessarily a requirement for this
2 fishery, but we figured it was to get people to think about it a
3 little bit more, you know, during the committee, in between
4 committee and here, and maybe we want to have some more discussion
5 on this.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

8

9 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had originally suggested, or
10 made a motion, that we make alternative to prefer, but Mr.
11 Strelcheck made me aware, and I didn't realize, that that was not
12 a requirement that we do that, and that there would be other ways
13 to handle an overage without a payback provision, and so I don't
14 know if you want to expand on that any, Andy, on what the options
15 are, but I withdrew that motion.

16

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

18

19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so what we would do, on an annual basis,
20 is project the length of the season. We would -- If there was an
21 overage, for example, in the prior year, and we had too long of a
22 season, for example, the season would be adjusted accordingly, to
23 be shortened to ensure that we have a higher likelihood of
24 maintaining within the catch limit, and so we do that with a number
25 of fisheries, and I think that could work the same way for scamp,
26 without having to pay back.

27

28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

29

30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and so there would already be some AMs
31 associated here, right, and just this would not be requiring a
32 payback provision, and so I think that there is some guardrails,
33 if you will, relative to this, relative to how Andy will structure
34 the season, and how he projects it later on, and so, from my
35 perspective, I mean, I'm happy to move this forward, just to kind
36 of continue on with the discussion, and so I would -- **Bernie, I**
37 **would move, for Action 7.2, to make Alternative 2 the preferred.**

38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we have a motion by Dr. Sweetman. Is
40 there a second?

41

42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** **Alternative 1.** My bad. My apologies.

43

44 **DR. BANKS:** I will second that correct motion there, C.J.

45

46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Now we're good. Okay. Dr. Banks seconded
47 the motion. Any further discussion on the motion? **Is there any**
48 **opposition to the motion? Seeing none, motion carries.** Dr.

1 Sweetman.

2

3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I guess just the last
4 little bit here is it looks like council staff was looking for
5 some direction on public hearings for this, to ultimately move
6 this forward, and I guess my recommendation, at least from the
7 Florida side, is I might prioritize like an area like Madeira
8 Beach, and maybe even Fort Myers. I would probably prioritize
9 Madeira Beach over Fort Myers, and certainly a virtual public
10 hearing too I think would be useful, because it's quite a large
11 state, and so I think that will be helpful, but I also might want
12 to look over to our Louisiana counterparts. I know shallow-water
13 grouper can play an important role in your state too, and I don't
14 know what your perspective is on that.

15

16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

17

18 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and Dr. Simmons and I talked briefly about
19 potentially our Lafayette office as an option. We could offer a
20 conference room there. It wouldn't be a charge of the council
21 then, and that's kind of central location, as far as folks being
22 able to do that.

23

24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks. Mr. Geeslin.

25

26 **MR. GEESLIN:** Sure, and we're happy to accommodate there in
27 Galveston, at the Dickinson Marine Lab. Either way, we're happy
28 to participate and attend.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. Mr. Anson, do you have
31 an appetite for this? Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.

32

33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so a couple
34 other things we could also do, I think maybe, is we could send out
35 some letters to commercial federal permit holders, and maybe for-
36 hire, if we needed to, and we could possibly do that, right, on
37 this, and can we do letters, or a notice that this is happening?
38 The other thing we could do, for the private anglers, is put a
39 push out on the Fish Rules. Sorry that I interrupted.

40

41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

42

43 **MR. ANSON:** If you have staff time and resources to hold an in-
44 person meeting, I would suggest Mobile, just to kind of spread it
45 out, and give it better access for folks on both sides of the bay,
46 but I don't know if we'll get much participation, and so that's
47 why I'm saying, if you actually have the resources, then go ahead
48 and have it in-person, but a virtual may suffice.

1
2 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I don't really think we need one. I mean,
3 obviously, we can chime-in to even a virtual one in Alabama if we
4 need to, but I don't think we need one.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Okay. Dr. Simmons.

7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

11
12 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right. The homestretch. Review of State
13 Program Landings for Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack, Tab B,
14 Number 10, the reef fish and IFQ program landings were not
15 available, due to the government shutdown.

16
17 Council members representing the five Gulf states reviewed their
18 private recreational red snapper fishing season statistics with
19 the committee, including data on average length, weight, and trip
20 level fishing effort data. These council members also presented
21 similar data for greater amberjack, as available. States generally
22 reported fewer intercepts for greater amberjack compared to red
23 snapper, rendering less certainty in those data as reported.

24
25 Generally, landings for greater amberjack across states were
26 estimated to decline over the last several years, commensurate
27 with regulatory modifications to retention limits and fishing
28 season duration. Mr. Chair.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, I mean, I would like to make a
31 comment on this last piece here, that, for greater amberjack, the
32 decline in the landings over the last several years, I just wanted
33 to point out, in Chris's presentation, the Louisiana landings have
34 declined, but that's just the season structure changed, and I just
35 wanted to bring that up. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman.

36
37 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Okay. Other Business,
38 Mississippi and Alabama Creel use for 2026. A committee member
39 from Mississippi summarized implementation progress for creel
40 programs, for creel survey programs, in that state.

41
42 Another representative from Mississippi noted that the state
43 expects to submit its documentation and data for certification by
44 NMFS by the end of September of 2026, but added that the timeline
45 from that point for receiving certification was unknown.

46
47 The representative from Mississippi noted that the federal for-
48 hire component was included in Mississippi's implementation of

1 Creel and that it could be easily separated from other recreational
2 modes.

3
4 A committee member from Alabama summarized implementation progress
5 for the creel survey program in that state. Alabama's
6 implementation process is not as far along as Mississippi, with
7 the expectation of submitting its documentation and data for
8 certification by NOAA Fisheries by the end of December of 2026.
9 Alabama intends to continue operating its Snapper Check survey in
10 the interim. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, for leading us through
13 the Reef Fish Committee report. If there is nothing else to come
14 before Reef Fish, we'll move back to the agenda, and we have one
15 last item, and that will be Dr. Simmons, and we'll have a
16 discussion of council planning and primary activities. Dr.
17 Simmons.

18
19 **DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES AND UPDATE**
20 **ON DOCUMENTS TRANSMITTED FOR RULEMAKING**

21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I want
23 to preface this by saying this is very tentative. We have a lot
24 of unknowns right now, right, with the shutdown, and we had some
25 bottlenecks worth finalizing documents, and getting them
26 transmitted, well before the shutdown, and so, Bernie, could you
27 please put up Tab R, Number 6?

28
29 Right now, this is tentatively our plan, and also to note that,
30 you know, we were planning to have a fall education Outreach and
31 Education Technical Committee meeting. If the government doesn't
32 reopen, we can't file a Federal Register notice, and we can't have
33 that meeting, and the same thing with trying to reconvene the ETC,
34 and so, again, a lot of unknowns.

35
36 Our plan right now, for the January council meeting, is to have a
37 final action draft of Reef Fish Amendment 62, which is the
38 modification of red grouper management measures, have a final
39 action draft of Reef Fish Amendment 58A, which is modification of
40 shallow-water grouper management measures, have a draft of Reef
41 Fish Amendment 63, which is the program to establish a set aside
42 of red grouper commercial quota, have a draft of Amendment
43 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 to modify yellowtail and mutton
44 snapper management measures, bring back a presentation to continue
45 to discuss regional management of greater amberjack, and possibly
46 bring the council the current drafts of Amendments 58A through B
47 and 60 with the Ad Hoc IFQ AP recommendations that we received,
48 and I think it was during their March/April meeting, because you

1 have not seen those yet. I could pause there, if you would like,
2 or I could keep going through.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions? Mr. Schieble.

5

6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I know this isn't an amendment, or an action that's
7 currently going through, but I think back -- I think it was at the
8 April council meeting that I made a motion about getting an update
9 on the amberjack count to come at the January meeting. Is that
10 still potentially able to happen?

11

12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

13

14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, in
15 discussions with our staff and the steering committee on that
16 effort, as well as the PI's plan, currently, right now, it is to
17 host, in the Gulf Council office, and the amberjack count review
18 is going to be the week of March 23 through 27 of 2026.

19

20 I think the concept there is, until that's been reviewed, and
21 they've had a chance -- The PI's have had a chance to incorporate
22 any considerations or changes they need to make, and it also will
23 include our SSC members, the South Atlantic SSC members, and CIE
24 reviewers, and so it's going to be a pretty large review, and they
25 would need time to incorporate that, and then, at a later point,
26 we would schedule a report-out to the council, is our plan right
27 now.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

30

31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So do you think potentially, and you don't have to
32 answer this, but, at the April meeting, we could get an update
33 then, and that would be reasonable, or is that still sort of too
34 close to the March review?

35

36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** We could try. I think it depends on
37 what kind of changes they're asked, and if the PI's are available
38 and comfortable doing all that, you know, what kind of detail you
39 want, and it also will have to go, you know, probably to the SSC,
40 the larger SSC, at some point, I assume, either after the
41 assessment process or before, and I'm not sure exactly how we're
42 going to do that right now.

43

44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Chris, I wouldn't probably expect -- It could be
45 June. Mr. Strelcheck.

46

47 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, I mean, obviously, a lot of unknowns
48 right now, but, given Sean Powers is the lead PI, at least Alabama

1 would be convenient for April, if we're able to make that happen.
2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** That would be nice, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Allen.
4
5 **DR. ALLEN:** I was just going to speak in support of the process
6 that Dr. Simmons outlined. I think that completing a thorough
7 review of any study like this, but that study, and giving the
8 investigators a chance to respond to that review, is really a good
9 first step, that ultimately will save time.
10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Mr. Sanchez.
12
13 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Is there any chance of adding a brief update on where
14 we're at with SEFHIER? There seems to be a lot of interest in
15 talking about that, considering everything we discussed here
16 today. Is that something that we could do, and nothing, you know,
17 too laborious, but --
18
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. We can put that on here
20 and see if we have time on the agenda.
21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Dr. Simmons? Dr.
23 Sweetman.
24
25 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Not a question, but I'm just thoroughly impressed
26 with staff and moving so quickly on that DESCEND Act document, and
27 so really, really, really, really good job. We'll try to not make
28 that the precedent for you guys. I know we put you in an awkward
29 situation, but I appreciate that.
30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Marquez.
32
33 **MR. MARQUEZ:** I couldn't recall from the last meeting, and when
34 were we going to get an update on the pilot project on FES?
35
36 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I would need to check, obviously, with the
37 team, and so they just went through the calibration workshop right
38 before the shutdown, and so I'm guessing we could probably have
39 something in January, but I would want to confirm that.
40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Rindone.
42
43 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have it on the SSC agenda
44 for the SSC's February meeting to get an update, and so we had to
45 move that from the October meeting agenda, which had to become a
46 webinar, due to the shutdown, and so there's a couple of FES-
47 related things that are on the February SSC agenda, and that's one
48 of them.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rendon. Dr. Sweetman.

3
4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm trying not to be repetitive here, but do we
5 have any updates on kind of the standing requests that we have
6 relative to some interim analyses? I mean, I feel like we've been
7 waiting for years on gag right now, and I know we asked for kind
8 of a recurring one for red grouper, and we just went through an
9 assessment, but --

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

12
13 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You guys will have -- Or the
14 SSC will be reviewing an interim analysis for red grouper, which
15 will be done as a health check, since we just had catch limits
16 updated, and we haven't even implemented those yet.

17
18 Then we'll have an interim analysis for lane snapper, gag, and
19 greater amberjack, all of which will consider the use of the G-
20 FISHER video index, and so the SSC will have a busy February, but
21 Mr. Moncrief will keep them on track.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Simmons.

24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, if
26 there's nothing else on this, I didn't know if you wanted me to go
27 down to the next section, the documents. Just so everyone is aware
28 that we have yet to finalize and transmit, and that wouldn't
29 necessarily come back to the council, but we have tried to meet
30 with Mr. Strelcheck and put these in priority order, based on when
31 we think, you know, timing-wise, there's a deadline, as far as
32 implementation, and we're under a tighter timeline, essentially.

33
34 This just lists the sections that still need to be done, and the
35 review that has to happen for them by the Science Center, and so
36 I don't know if there's any questions on that, and then, finally,
37 for the documents in rulemaking, just for everyone's awareness,
38 and I don't know if Mr. Strelcheck has any updates, but we did
39 transmit the other shallow-water grouper management measures, the
40 lane snapper management measures, and, of course, the
41 comprehensive amendment for electronic reporting for charter
42 vessels some time ago, and all of those are, you know, still
43 waiting in the wings to be implemented.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, for the update. Do we
46 have any questions for Dr. Simmons in the transmit list priority
47 order, or any questions for Mr. Strelcheck in rulemaking? Mr.
48 Strelcheck.

1
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** First, I want just thank Carrie, John, J.D., and
3 Kesley for meeting earlier this week and going through the
4 priorities. As I indicated to them, once the government reopens,
5 and I have a chance to sit down with my team, we may still need to
6 do a little bit of juggling here, in terms of priorities, but we've
7 tried to prioritize, obviously, based on things that have very
8 specific deadlines and timing requirements.

9
10 In terms of the documents in rulemaking, you know, I heard C.J.'s
11 reaction about the comprehensive reporting amendment just now, and
12 so, yes, you submitted that some time ago. There is a lengthy
13 Paperwork Reduction Act process that's also tied up with our permit
14 system changes, and so we are, obviously, working to implement
15 that.

16
17 I talked to Frank about lane snapper, and that's ready to go to
18 rulemaking. I need to check in on other shallow-water grouper,
19 but, obviously, that has an important timing component as well,
20 and I think that's pretty far along, in terms of moving into
21 rulemaking, and so I think we're set there.

22
23 It's really a matter of now getting to some of these other actions
24 that you've either taken final action on, or just took final action
25 on, and being able to move those amendments through the Fisheries
26 Service, so we can process them for rulemaking.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that update, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we
29 have any other comments or questions? Not seeing any, okay, and
30 that's going to move us to Other Business, and there was no other
31 business, and so we'll conclude the meeting, but, before we do, I
32 would like to thank a few folks, General Spraggins and the State
33 of Mississippi for the social on Tuesday evening. The food was
34 excellent. Thank you.

35
36 The presenters that presented on Tuesday, and I think it was
37 Tuesday, and the staff, for sure. Thank you all for working hard
38 and expediting some of these documents for us. Today is actually
39 Dr. Simmons' 23rd birthday, and so happy birthday, Dr. Simmons,
40 and, with that, we will see you in New Orleans in January. Thank
41 you. Safe travels.

42
43 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on November 5, 2025.)

44
45 - - -
46