

GULF COUNCIL

ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE

Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino & Virtual Biloxi, Mississippi

November 3, 2025

VOTING MEMBERS

- Kevin Anson.....Alabama
- Kesley Banks.....Texas
- Mike Allen.....Florida
- Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- Johnny Marquez.....Mississippi
- Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- John Sanchez.....Florida
- Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

- Brenda Ballard.....Texas
- Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- Troy Frady.....Alabama
- Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG
- Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
- Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- Ed Walker.....Florida

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

- Trevor Moncrief.....SSC
- Tom Roller.....SAFMC

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1 The Ecosystem Committee of the Gulf Council convened at The Golden
2 Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Monday morning,
3 November 3, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

4
5 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
6 **APPROVAL OF JUNE 2025 MINUTES**
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
8

9 **CHAIRMAN KEVIN ANSON:** Before we get into the agenda, and approval
10 of agenda, I just want to go through the membership for the
11 Ecosystem Committee. That includes Dr. Allen as vice chair, Dr.
12 Banks, Mr. Broussard, Mr. Marquez, Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Dr.
13 Overton, Mr. Geeslin, Mr. Sanchez, and Mr. Strelcheck.

14
15 Now we will go ahead and approve the agenda. Are there any
16 additions or changes or modifications to the agenda? Not seeing
17 any, can I have a motion to approve the agenda? I can't see who.
18 Is that C.J.? Was that you?

19
20 **DR. C. J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. approves the agenda, and I have second by
21 Mr. Sanchez. Is there any opposition to approving the agenda as
22 written? Seeing none, the agenda is adopted.

23
24 The next item on the agenda is Item Number II, Approval of the
25 June 2025 Minutes. Is there any comments or any changes needed to
26 the minutes? Seeing none, can I have a motion to adopt the minutes?
27 C.J. has a motion, and that's seconded by Dr. Allen. Is there any
28 opposition to accepting the minutes as written? Not seeing any,
29 the motion carries. That will take us to Item Number III, Action
30 Guide and Next Steps. Dr. Wang.

31
32 **DR. VERENA WANG:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we have one item on
33 the agenda for the committee to discuss today, and that is the
34 Draft Fishery Ecosystem Plan, and so staff will provide an overview
35 of the draft Gulf fishery ecosystem plan, which is a non-regulatory
36 document that's meant to guide the use of ecosystem information in
37 Gulf fisheries management.

38
39 The draft fishery ecosystem plan outlines a structured process for
40 investigating fishery ecosystem issues of concern and identifying
41 potential approaches for addressing these issues, and so the order
42 that things are happening is a little bit atypical.

43
44 Normally, the Ecosystem Technical Committee, the ETC, would have
45 had a chance to meet and review the draft fishery ecosystem plan
46 and provide recommendations for the committee, and we did have an

1 ETC webinar scheduled for October 21, but, unfortunately, we had
2 to cancel that webinar, because of the ongoing government shutdown.
3 There are a number of ETC members who are NMFS staff, and that
4 includes the chair of the ETC.

5
6 The draft that the committee is seeing today has not yet been
7 reviewed by the ETC, but we do intend to also seek their input,
8 and their feedback, as soon as it's possible for us to do so, and
9 so, today, the committee should discuss the draft and provide
10 feedback for both staff and for the ETC to consider, and, after
11 both the committee and the ETC have had a chance to review the
12 draft, we are going to begin the next phase for operationalizing
13 the fishery ecosystem plan.

14
15 I think that's the main reason why we didn't want to delay putting
16 this draft before the committee, is that there are a number of
17 moving parts with our ongoing Inflation Reduction Act projects
18 related to the fishery ecosystem plan that we need to keep moving
19 forward.

20
21 Specifically, the council is currently in the process of selecting
22 a contractor to develop and conduct stakeholder engagements for
23 the fishery ecosystem plan, and this is going to include
24 identifying stakeholder-driven fishery ecosystem issues of
25 concern, helping us to determine how to prioritize those fishery
26 ecosystem issues, and then eventually evaluating the social and
27 economic impacts of these fishery ecosystem issues on Gulf
28 stakeholders, and these stakeholder engagements are slated to
29 start early next year, and that's it for the action guide, Mr.
30 Chair.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you, Dr. Wang. Are there any questions for
33 Dr. Wang? I'm not seeing any, and so that will take us to Item
34 Number IV, Draft Fishery Ecosystem Plan Review. Dr. Wang.

35
36 **DRAFT FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN**

37
38 **DR. WANG:** Bernie, can you pull up 4(a), please? Thanks, and you
39 can just leave it on that first page for a minute. I'm just going
40 to start off with a little bit of background for the new members
41 of the committee.

42
43 In 2021, the council contracted LGL Ecological Research Associates
44 to develop a fishery ecosystem plan for the Gulf, and they
45 submitted that draft fishery ecosystem plan in 2022, and this
46 fishery ecosystem plan that LGL developed was done in consultation

1 with the council, and with the ETC, and was really designed to be
2 actionable at the council's request.

3
4 They designed a fishery ecosystem plan that was centered around
5 the concept of the fishery ecosystem issue, and investigating
6 individual fishery ecosystem issues of concern, and this was really
7 meant to be a tangible, and sort of right-sized approach, to
8 ecosystem planning to fit the needs specifically of this region.

9
10 In 2022, the council approved the draft LGL fishery ecosystem plan
11 as a concept, and as a baseline, for continued development of the
12 fishery ecosystem plan, and so, since then, the ETC has met quite
13 a few times to continue to discuss the fishery ecosystem plan, to
14 discuss the processes and procedures, and how to develop those for
15 the fishery ecosystem plan, and to discuss how to begin to
16 operationalize the fishery ecosystem plan.

17
18 The draft that the committee is seeing today is the first new
19 version of the fishery ecosystem plan that's been developed since
20 the 2022 LGL contracted version, and I can pause here and see if
21 there are any general questions, or discussion. Otherwise, I can
22 step through the document a little bit and ask for some specific
23 feedback.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** It looks like we have a question from Dr.
26 Sweetman.

27
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a real quick question
29 for you, Dr. Wang, and so let's say the council has a new
30 recommendation for a research topic that they want included within
31 this plan here. My question is, process-wise, like, how would
32 that work? Like it seems like, right now, the Ecosystem Technical
33 Committee can reject a council recommendation there, and I'm just
34 wondering how that works.

35
36 **DR. WANG:** That's a good question, and I think that the way that
37 it is written now -- Maybe it looks like it's that way, but I don't
38 think it was intended to read that way, and so I think -- We'll
39 get to this later on, as I go through the document, but we intended
40 the Ecosystem Technical Committee to be sort of the clearinghouse
41 for new fishery ecosystem issues that come up through stakeholders
42 or through the APs.

43
44 They could evaluate them, and see mostly whether they're even
45 within the council's purview, and then things that aren't can sort
46 of be, you know, moved off to the side, and so, if it's something

1 that the council has no chance of doing anything about, then it
2 doesn't make sense to include it to the list, but that was not
3 intended to be written that the council can propose something that
4 the ETC will give a big thumbs-down to.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other questions at this time? All right.
7 Dr. Wang, if you want to go through the document.

8
9 **DR. WANG:** Great. Bernie, can you go to Section 1.3, please?
10 Thank you. Okay, and so Chapter 1 starts with just an introduction
11 to national-level ecosystem guidance, and then it provides some
12 background about the ecosystem efforts in the Gulf so far, and how
13 we got to where we are today with the current fishery ecosystem
14 plan, but I wanted to start here on the goals of the fishery
15 ecosystem plan and get some feedback from the committee about the
16 mission statement.

17
18 The mission statement that's in italics there, and I'll read it in
19 a minute, is something that was proposed by the ETC in 2020. That's
20 really before the development of the fishery ecosystem plan really
21 kicked off, but it's something that's been maintained to this day,
22 and so I thought that now would be a good time to check in with
23 the committee, and make sure that this still represents the spirit
24 of the fishery ecosystem plan, and see whether there are any
25 updates that are necessary.

26
27 There have been a couple of minor language tweaks since 2020, just
28 to keep things updated, but it does stand essentially as it was
29 written by the ETC back then, and so I'll read it.

30
31 The mission statement for the fishery ecosystem plan is to provide
32 a structured process for integrating ecosystem science into the
33 Gulf Fishery Management Council's decision-making for long-term
34 ecological, social, and economic sustainability of Gulf of America
35 resources. I'll stop here and see if there are any comments from
36 the committee about the mission statement.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any comments? Mr. Strelcheck.

39
40 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I would be interested in other committee
41 members' perspectives, and so I agree with this statement. I think
42 what I feel like maybe is missing is the short-term responsiveness,
43 right, and so a lot of the ecosystem events, like red tide events,
44 we want to be proactive, and not reactive to, right, and so I think
45 that's really the focus here, is like the long-term sustainability,
46 but in also addressing these short-term events, to make sure that

1 we have them readily available for consideration in management.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other comments? Andy, do you have a -- Do
4 you have any -- C.J., and then followed by Mr. Dugas.

5
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I guess, to that point, Andy, fair. I
7 mean, I don't think we want to create an ecosystem plan that just
8 ends up being kind of a paperweight, right, that we don't really
9 do anything with here.

10
11 Maybe, Andy, what you're looking at is the structured process for
12 integrating into ecosystem science, and maybe -- Are you looking
13 for more clarification about what that structured process actually
14 is for how we would integrate this? I guess a question back to
15 you.

16
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** This is a broad mission statement, and so I was
18 just kind of thinking out loud with regard to the focus is,
19 obviously, on the long-term ecological, social, and economic
20 sustainability, right, but, in order to achieve that, you also
21 have to have a process that's responsive, even under shorter-term
22 windows, and so that's all I guess I was pointing out. As long
23 as, I think, the ecosystem plan develops, and that's encapsulated
24 in it, in terms of the structure of the process, then the mission
25 statement will be fine as it stands.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Sweetman.

28
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No, and I totally agree with Andy there. I mean,
30 if -- I think it's all about that phrase "structured process", and
31 like if we're able to act in a timely manner to actually do
32 something with this, and I think that's the entire point, and I
33 agree with Andy.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Simmons.

36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so
38 I think, maybe when we were talking about this a while ago, perhaps
39 the more newer operational pieces that we would try to integrate
40 would be the fishery ecosystem issues piece, and maybe it would be
41 helpful for Verena to kind of go through that, go through the
42 document, and then perhaps we could come back to our mission
43 statement and see if we need maybe to add some objectives, or
44 refine this from that, and just an idea.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other thoughts? All right. Not seeing any,

1 Dr. Wang.

2

3 **DR. WANG:** Great. Bernie, can you go to Section 3.1, please? If
4 you could just scroll up a tiny bit, so we can see the chapter
5 title. Thanks.

6

7 I'm skipping over Chapter 2 a little bit. Chapter 2 really just
8 kind of provides an overview of the principles of fishery ecosystem
9 planning, and defines the concept of the fishery ecosystem issue,
10 and sort of how we came to arrive at using the fishery ecosystem
11 issue as sort of a functional unit for this active, actionable
12 fishery ecosystem plan.

13

14 Again, a fishery ecosystem issue is an ecosystem issue of concern
15 that arises in the Gulf that affects numerous Gulf stakeholders
16 and that rises beyond single species management, and perhaps needs
17 additional consideration, and so those definitions are provided in
18 Chapter 2, but Chapter 3 is where we really get into the meat of
19 the fishery ecosystem plan, and where we start to define some of
20 the processes and procedures for actually doing some of this work
21 and for identifying fishery ecosystem issues and for how we
22 investigate individual fishery ecosystem issues in a structured
23 way.

24

25 For this first section here in 3.1, identifying fishery ecosystem
26 issues, this is something that C.J. touched on a little bit
27 already, and so fishery ecosystem issues are going to sort of
28 bubble up to the council process in a natural way through -- As
29 stakeholders are making observations on the water, when their
30 ecosystem changes, and those are going to come up through public
31 comment, through the advisory panels, and make their way to the
32 council through those means, as well as other means of council
33 communication.

34

35 In order to kick off this fishery ecosystem plan, we also are
36 planning to populate an initial list of fishery ecosystem issues,
37 and we're doing that with the help of a social science contractor,
38 and so this is something that I mentioned previously as one of our
39 Inflation Reduction Act projects.

40

41 We are going to bring on a social science contractor, and they are
42 going to use a structured process that they develop to identify
43 stakeholder-driven fishery ecosystem issues in an equitable way
44 that represents the many different stakeholders in the Gulf, and
45 is also representative of the five different Gulf states.

46

1 They're going to do this and develop an initial list of fishery
2 ecosystem issues for the council to consider, and this list is
3 going to live in the appendix of this document, and so the appendix
4 is really going to be sort of the living part of this document.

5
6 So, of course, this contracted process is only going to happen
7 once, and, as conditions change, as time passes, of course, there
8 are going to be new fishery ecosystem issues that arise, and this
9 is where we get to what C.J. was mentioning before, is that new
10 fishery ecosystem issues can be recommended by stakeholders, by
11 the advisory panels, by the different technical committees, and we
12 are envisioning that the ETC is going to be the clearinghouse for
13 these fishery ecosystem issues, to give them a once-over, determine
14 whether they fit within the council's purview, whether -- Things
15 of that nature, and then those will then be added to the appendix
16 with this list of fishery ecosystem issues. Again, of course, the
17 council can directly recommend something to be added to that list
18 of fishery ecosystem issues.

19
20 If you could scroll down a little bit, to that box that's just
21 underneath, and so, within the appendix with the fishery ecosystem
22 issue list, there's also going to be a fishery ecosystem issue
23 description, and so the description is going to accompany each
24 fishery ecosystem issue, and it's going to have each of the
25 components that are listed here in this little box, so that there
26 can be a quick reference for what each of the fishery ecosystem
27 issues is about.

28
29 Bernie, if you could scroll to Section 3.2, please, just
30 underneath. All right, and so that was the process for identifying
31 fishery ecosystem issues and getting them added to that list of
32 prospective things for the council to consider, and so that, aside
33 from direct council recommendations, is going to be at the
34 discretion of the ETC.

35
36 The council is ultimately going to be responsible for determining
37 what fishery ecosystem issues to begin work on, which fishery
38 ecosystem issues to initiate, and that can depend on a lot of
39 different factors, and that could include the urgency and the
40 priority of the issue, the breadth of the issue, how many
41 stakeholders it is impacting, and it could also include
42 considerations for resource availability, things like staff time
43 to actually work on these ecosystem issues, considerations for
44 maybe what else is currently on the action schedule, and also
45 considerations for the data availability and whether there is --
46 Whether meaningful progress can be made toward this fishery

1 ecosystem issue, given the information that is currently
2 available.

3
4 As I mentioned before, the appendix, with this list of fishery
5 ecosystem issues, is going to be the living part of this document,
6 and we are envisioning that that is going to be reviewed by the
7 council annually.

8
9 At that point, any new fishery ecosystem issues that have been
10 added to the list can be presented and discussed. The council can
11 decide whether or not to initiate work on a fishery ecosystem
12 issue, or they can choose to deprioritize or remove a fishery
13 ecosystem issue from the list, and, at that point, it would be put
14 in an archive of some sort.

15
16 Again, that reassessing of the list of fishery ecosystem issues
17 would happen annually, and then the actual main body of this
18 fishery ecosystem plan document is a little bit more static. It
19 just outlines the processes and procedures, and we are envisioning
20 that that would happen on a five-year basis, where we would revisit
21 the fishery ecosystem plan itself and see whether there are any
22 updates or revisions that are needed to happen, and, of course,
23 fishery ecosystem issues that actually have work that is ongoing
24 will receive more regular progress updates, on an ad hoc basis, as
25 work is continuing.

26
27 Are there are any comments or questions right now about these kind
28 of general processes and the timing for reviewing fishery ecosystem
29 issues?

30
31 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any questions? Dr. Allen.

32
33 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you, Dr. Wang. I like this format of having
34 these ecosystem issues at the back of the document, this kind of
35 a live document, and I think that, you know, we have some successes
36 in this category, like, for example, the use of satellite imagery
37 for red tide and modifying natural mortality for red grouper. That
38 was a fairly recent study that showed success, and I wonder if, in
39 those ecosystem plans at the end, those examples could be
40 highlighted.

41
42 So red tide I'm sure will be one of the categories, but it might
43 be good to add some text in there about, you know, how this has
44 been done in the past and kind of showed success in that area,
45 because -- I was thinking, Andy, about your comment versus --
46 Reactive versus proactive.

1
2 In one sense, it's reactive to build an assessment to do that in
3 response to a past red tide event, but it's also proactive, because
4 it lays out a framework of how this was done, right, and so it can
5 be used for the future.

6
7 **DR. WANG:** Yes, and that's a really good point, and I would also
8 like to point out, because this happened before you came on the
9 council, is that red tide was recommended as the pilot fishery
10 ecosystem issue to consider, and it's something that the ETC has
11 begun work on, and that we are continuing to work with the ETC
12 chair on, to identify other avenues to address red tide that are
13 outside of just adjusting for episodic mortality in the stock
14 assessment, to identify ways that could directly benefit
15 stakeholders, and to do other things in terms of red tide that
16 could help in sort of the fisheries management realm, but it is a
17 good idea to highlight these, and I'll talk about it a little more
18 in the communication section.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other questions or comments on the document
21 thus far? All right, Dr. Wang.

22
23 **DR. WANG:** All right. Bernie, you could scroll down just a little
24 bit to the figure that's under 3.3. Thanks, and so this figure is
25 the fishery ecosystem issue loop, and I know that you can't really
26 see it on the screen here, but this is a figure that the committee
27 has seen many different iterations of before, and the fishery
28 ecosystem issue loop really outlines the structured process by
29 which a fishery ecosystem issue that the council chooses to
30 initiate is going to proceed.

31
32 It kind of gives us some structure for how we're going to
33 investigate each of these individual fishery ecosystem issues, and
34 so the fishery ecosystem issue loop begins with a scoping process,
35 to kind of identify where we are now, and that includes stakeholder
36 involvement, identifying the key questions and goals that can and
37 cannot be addressed in this process, identifying the dimensions of
38 the problem and the data availability, and, of course, whether the
39 council has the authority to manage the issue.

40
41 The loop proceeds through development of a workplan and defining
42 objectives and timelines and data and research needs, and
43 eventually can end in analyses that are being conducted either
44 directly by council staff or by NMFS partners, or, if there are
45 more involved analyses that are necessary, there can be research
46 recommendations that come out of this loop.

1
2 Eventually, the idea is to move far enough along in the process,
3 and gather enough information, that we can eventually provide
4 recommendations either for management considerations or for
5 communications or other things that would help to address the issue
6 of concern.

7
8 This is the figure itself, and underneath this figure is sort of
9 a detailing of what each of these individual steps in the fishery
10 ecosystem issue loop entails, and so this iteration of the fishery
11 ecosystem issue loop -- Like I said, it has changed many times,
12 but I do think that this is the same version that the committee
13 saw in June of this year, and so I'll pause here and see if there
14 are any comments on the loop itself.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Sweetman.

17
18 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, kind of getting to
19 Andy's question, and what Mike's point was, we're working on the
20 red tide, right, as kind of the first go-round here, and so just
21 -- I'm not trying to speculate as to what comes out from this kind
22 of analysis here, but like let's say they identify, the ETC
23 identifies -- I know gag grouper was incorporated within the
24 assessment, as far as impacts from red tide and natural mortality.

25
26 What other mechanism would the council have to actually do
27 something on that, and so I guess I'm wondering -- Kind of like
28 let's say you find that red tide has a significant impact on a
29 variety of fisheries here and like, beyond like incorporating it
30 into an assessment, and this might be tricky here, because I'm
31 trying to get you to kind of speculate as to maybe what the ETC
32 might recommend for specific issues here, but like -- I'm just
33 trying to understand like how would the council actually act upon
34 something along those lines, and using red tide as an example.

35
36 **DR. WANG:** That is tricky, and I'm going to try to be careful here,
37 and not sort of put words in the ETC's mouth, but there are some
38 things that the ETC discussed, specifically that incorporating red
39 tide into stock assessments is not a particularly satisfying thing
40 for stakeholders who are being impacted by red tide, and a lot of
41 times too, stakeholders, hearing that episodic mortality, more
42 mortality, from this event, that they have no control over, is
43 being introduced into a stock assessment.

44
45 To them, it often seems like this can only reduce their catch, and
46 it's only ever going to result in bad things for them, and so one

1 of the potential outcomes that the ETC discussed is potentially
2 improving our communications around the issue of red tide and
3 helping folks to understand what these kinds of adjustments within
4 a stock assessment can do. It doesn't always end in resulting in
5 catch.

6
7 I think, in the previous red grouper assessment, it actually ended
8 up in increasing the level of catch, because the red tide was not
9 as severe as previously predicted, and so there was more -- There
10 was less uncertainty around red tide episodic mortality.

11
12 There are other things that the ETC has discussed as potential
13 goals for things that could be addressed through -- For red tide
14 through this fishery ecosystem issue process, but I think I don't
15 -- I don't want to go too far down that path right now.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. I have Dr. Froeschke.

18
19 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** I guess, without getting too far in that
20 specific example, but one potential scenario I could see with which
21 this process would be helpful is that it's -- To-date, it seems
22 that what we've learned is that the biological response may have
23 not been what we have anticipated, and the stock may -- For
24 example, it might be much more resilient to that.

25
26 In the past, what we've done is said, okay, we have a red tide
27 that has immediate social and economic impacts on this, which are
28 negative, and the initial reaction is, well, because the biological
29 response has also been negative, that the -- These are going to be
30 prolonged effects that you might expect, and, well, there's going
31 to be necessarily reductions in allowable harvest, which was going
32 to exacerbate social and economic effects, and what we -- If that
33 were not accurate, and say, okay, the stock is more resilient than
34 we thought, because recruitment tends to be better, and this is a
35 mechanistic thing that we can -- That we feel confident about, and
36 I'm not suggesting that's true, but, if that were to -- That
37 necessarily extending, or exacerbating, social and economic
38 impacts, or reductions necessary in the future, may not be even
39 the right response.

40
41 I think there is some work around in that space for this, and that,
42 you know, as we learn more, and understand how this works, I think
43 we could improve the management to go along with it.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Simmons.

46

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so my
2 comment was just going to be more like high-level, as we start
3 selecting the FEIs to develop. I mean, there may not be, you know,
4 a direct correlation with those regulatory changes, but it could
5 provide -- As we flesh those out, you know, and as more studies
6 perhaps come available on that particular issue, it could inform
7 your decision making, and we could cite that module, that FEI,
8 when you're making those decisions, be it seasonality, mortality,
9 and so they may or may not change the council's mind, but it could
10 reinforce what the public is seeing, explain why they're perhaps
11 seeing that, and maybe inform your decision differently, and so
12 that's how I see some of these potentially also working as we go
13 through this process, or that's my hope.

14

15 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Strelcheck.

16

17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, just kind of thinking through just
18 examples, you know, shifting away from red tide, like a species
19 like king mackerel, that we've been talking about in recent years,
20 right, where we've seen these fundamental shifts and changes in
21 distribution and abundance, right, and now I'm hearing some
22 promising signs that maybe they're showing back up again.

23

24 Well, trying to, once again, be reactive, in terms of understanding
25 what caused that, and then, based on that information, use that to
26 be proactive, in terms of how we manage those resources going
27 forward, I think that's really key to how we can better manage
28 these fisheries, and, like we talked about earlier this morning,
29 how do we have a more responsive process that then adapts to that,
30 once we know kind of, or understand better, what's going on in the
31 ecosystem.

32

33 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other comments? All right, Dr. Wang.

34

35 **DR. WANG:** Thank you. That's all really good feedback. Bernie,
36 can you go to Chapter 4, please? Thank you. Chapter 4 is the
37 last chapter of the fishery ecosystem plan outside of the appendix
38 with the list of fishery ecosystem issues, but Chapter 4 outlines
39 our communications plan, and this is something that we have been
40 thinking a lot about, because a fishery ecosystem plan is pretty
41 different than what we are typically used to communicating when it
42 comes to our more regulatory documents.

43

44 We are trying to develop ways to communicate the fishery ecosystem
45 plan on a high level that kind of accurately communicates the goals
46 and expectations of a fishery ecosystem plan, and also sort of

1 outlines what we can and cannot accomplish through this process.

2
3 It is not going to be the saving grace for everything, and so we
4 want to make sure to temper expectations and to communicate really
5 clearly what a fishery ecosystem plan, in this context, is aiming
6 to do.

7
8 Our main avenue of planned communication for the fishery ecosystem
9 plan itself is the council's website, and so there is an ecosystem
10 landing page currently on the council's website, and that really
11 just contains links to some older NMFS documents around ecosystem
12 in the Gulf, regional EBFM plans, things like that, but we are
13 planning to redesign the ecosystem landing page to focus on the
14 fishery ecosystem plan, to communicate broadly these goals, and to
15 explain the fishery ecosystem plan in a way that is sort of
16 palatable.

17
18 We are also planning to -- If you can scroll down a little bit to
19 4.2, Bernie, and we are also planning to use websites as our main
20 communication for individual fishery ecosystem issues that are
21 selected to be worked on.

22
23 Each fishery ecosystem issue is going to have its own specific web
24 landing page, and that is where we are going to provide background
25 information about the fishery ecosystem issue and its impacts on
26 stakeholders, hopefully in something like a storyboard format, and
27 that is also where we are going to provide updates and information
28 about how progress is going through the loop and new information
29 that is arising as work is proceeding through the process, and so
30 that is it for the communication plan and for this document, if
31 there any other questions.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any further questions about the document? I think
34 this iteration is a little clearer, I think, than the previous
35 one, and is, I think, what has been in line with the previous ETC
36 meetings that I have been a part of, and it kind of holds true to
37 that.

38
39 I just have one question, Dr. Wang, about the graphic in 3.3.1. I
40 am just wondering if there needs to be any -- To me, it seems
41 unclear as to when the actual FEI investigation will occur. I
42 assume it is at the development of the workplan, but there is
43 nothing in there that just specifically states, okay, all this
44 information has been gathered, and then the council makes a
45 decision, and I am just wondering if that might need to be looked
46 at to make it a little more clear.

1
2 **DR. WANG:** Bernie, can you go to Figure 3.3.1, please? So, to
3 answer your question, the work is beginning at Step 1, and so the
4 scoping is part of the work, and so, once the council initiates
5 and selects a fishery ecosystem issue to begin, that is when the
6 scoping process will start.

7
8 That is when we will really do a full inventory of what the needs
9 are, what information is available, and where we could potentially
10 go from there, and it is always possible, after the scoping
11 process, that we determine that there are really large data needs,
12 or really big research recommendations, that could cause the loop
13 to sit for a minute while other things are happening, but it really
14 does begin with this scoping process. This fully fleshed-out
15 scoping process isn't going to start until the council chooses a
16 fishery ecosystem issue to begin, and that is something that we
17 can try to make more clear in the document.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. All right. Any other comments or --
20 Dr. Allen?

21
22 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am kind of making the same
23 comment here, Dr. Wang, of I think, when it comes to the
24 communication plan, it would be good to highlight examples of how
25 we have had success, or how this kind of information has been
26 incorporated into fishery management, because I think it is hard
27 for people -- It is hard for me sometimes to even get my head
28 around what do we mean when we talk about ecosystem effects.
29 Showing examples I think is -- It will drive it home, as to how
30 this can be used.

31
32 **DR. WANG:** Yes, and that is a great comment, and I think that a
33 good place to do that would be on the general fishery ecosystem
34 plan webpage, outside of the individual fishery ecosystem issues,
35 where we can highlight some of the efforts that have been ongoing
36 and how we are trying to build from those efforts to build sort of
37 a more strategic effort to incorporate these ecosystem concerns
38 into management here in this region.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Any other comments, last comments, or
41 questions? Not seeing any. Mr. Sanchez.

42
43 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you. I am in support of, you know, doing
44 the things that we are discussing here, and identifying ways to
45 address the things we are encountering, ecosystem-related, but I
46 do want to share just a frustration, in that -- It has nothing to

1 do with this document, but it's just the reality that here we are
2 creating something, which is all well and good, and I am in support
3 of, but it seems to be reactionary, and then us, because we have
4 our hands tied -- It seems like, a lot of the things that we are
5 documenting how we respond to, we are not doing anything on an
6 interagency basis to really control.

7
8 You know, we were talking about red tide. We know we have
9 aggravating land-based factors that just fuel these things, and
10 blow them up, yet we don't do anything about it, and water quality,
11 to me, in the Keys and everywhere, it's the head of the snake, and
12 unless we get past, you know, operating in our little box, in this
13 case reactionary, and really forcing our partners in these things
14 to do something about it, we are just counting the fallout, you
15 know, the problem, and we are kind of spinning our wheels here. I
16 just wanted to throw that out there.

17
18 **DR. WANG:** Yes, and that is a very fair comment, and I will point
19 out that, in this fishery ecosystem issue loop process, one of the
20 outcomes can be to recommend interagency communication, or
21 cooperation, and, to some degree, there is only so much you can
22 do. You can't really tell another agency what to do, but we do
23 want to keep them informed about how their actions are potentially
24 impacting Gulf fisheries.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. It doesn't look like there's any other
27 comments, or questions, and we had no other business brought up
28 when we approved the agenda. I'm not seeing any other hands to
29 that, and so, Mr. Chair, that concludes Ecosystem Committee.

30
31 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on November 3, 2025.)

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