

GULF COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE

Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino & Virtual Biloxi, Mississippi

November 3, 2025

**VOTING MEMBERS**

- Kesley Banks.....Texas
- Mike Allen.....Florida
- Kevin Anson.....Alabama
- Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- Troy Frady.....Alabama
- Johnny Marquez.....Mississippi
- John Sanchez.....Florida
- Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

- Brenda Ballard.....Texas
- Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
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- Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG
- Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
- Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- Ed Walker.....Florida

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- Willie Goldsmith.....Pelagic Strategies

1 Trevor Moncrief.....SSC  
2 Tom Roller.....SAFMC  
3  
4 - - -  
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1 The Sustainable Fisheries Committee of the Gulf Council convened  
2 at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on  
3 Monday morning, November 3, 2025, and was called to order by  
4 Chairman Kesley Banks.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN KESLEY BANKS:** This is calling to order Sustainable  
11 Fisheries. Members of the committee include myself, Kevin Anson,  
12 Mike Allen, Billy Broussard, Troy Frady, Johnny Marquez, C.J.  
13 Sweetman, Chris Schieble, John Sanchez, General Spraggins, and  
14 Andy Strelcheck. I will entertain a motion to adopt the agenda,  
15 if there are no further additions in Other Business. C.J.

16  
17 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** So moved, Madam Chair.

18  
19 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Second.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** It's seconded by Mr. Sanchez. We'll move on to  
22 the Approval of the August 2025 Minutes. Any discussion?  
23 Otherwise, we'll entertain a motion. C.J. We need a second.  
24 Kevin, thank you. All right. On to the Action Guide and Next  
25 Steps.

26  
27 **REGULATORY STREAMLINING REPORT**  
28

29 **DR. VERENA WANG:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and so we have one item  
30 on the agenda for the committee to discuss today, and that is the  
31 Regulatory Streamlining Report, and so have Ms. Deirdre Boelke of  
32 Fisheries Insight Network and Dr. Willie Goldsmith of Pelagic  
33 Strategies with us, at the end of the table on that side over  
34 there, and they will introduce themselves when they start their  
35 presentation.

36  
37 They are going to be presenting a draft report for work contracted  
38 by the council to conduct a regulatory review process of the other  
39 regional fishery management councils, and so this is part of the  
40 council's Inflation Reduction Act funding projects, and the  
41 council funded this work as part of its ongoing climate readiness  
42 and regulatory streamlining efforts, with the aim of identifying  
43 approaches used in other regions to improve the timeliness and  
44 throughput of incorporating updated scientific information into  
45 the management process and otherwise increase efficiency, and so  
46 we're looking to learn from what other councils have been doing.

1  
2 This work is going to be the first phase of the council's  
3 regulatory streamlining efforts, and, in the second phase, the  
4 council is going to solicit a contractor to work with staff to  
5 operationalize the prioritized findings from this regulatory  
6 process review, including things like analysis and document  
7 development.

8  
9 Today, the committee should evaluate the information that's  
10 presented, consider the applicability of the approaches identified  
11 in other regions for consideration in Gulf fisheries management,  
12 and make any recommendations to the contractors prior to their  
13 submission of their final report at the beginning of December.  
14 The committee should also provide recommendations for streamlining  
15 approaches that they would like to operationalize in the second  
16 phase of the streamlining process. Madam Chair.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** All right. Are you guys ready to jump into it?  
19 We'll turn it over to you.

20  
21 **DR. WILLIE GOLDSMITH:** All right thank you, Verena and Madam Chair.  
22 It's great to be here and see everybody again. My name is Willie  
23 Goldsmith, and I'm with Pelagic Strategies, here with my colleague,  
24 Deirdre Boelke from Fisheries Insight Network.

25  
26 In the past, we both worked with councils on both regulatory  
27 development and implementation. It's great to see you all again,  
28 having worked on the recreational initiative last year, and Deirdre  
29 brings over two decades of experience as a staff member for the  
30 New England Fishery Management Council, and so we're glad to be  
31 here and share some insights that we've developed over the past  
32 few months as we've conducted a pretty comprehensive review of the  
33 regulatory process across councils.

34  
35 We've been looking across all eight regional councils, including  
36 the Gulf Council, with an eye toward looking to increase the  
37 timeliness and responsiveness of the Gulf's regulatory process as  
38 new information becomes available.

39  
40 As you all might have seen, a draft report was uploaded last week  
41 for your review. There's a lot of information in there, a lot of  
42 findings, as we've done our scoping around different councils,  
43 which we've distilled into a handful of fifteen recommendations  
44 which we think might be particularly applicable to the Gulf  
45 Council, and so we're looking forward to discussing all those with  
46 you.

1  
2 All right, and so just a little bit of background to set the stage  
3 on kind of what motivated this project, the recognition that, as  
4 you all know, while the federal regulatory process is  
5 comprehensive, that can often come at the expense of agility and  
6 timeliness of action.

7  
8 As a result, this project really sought to get a sense of landscape  
9 across regional councils and ways in which they're looking to  
10 improve responsiveness, with a particular eye, again, toward what  
11 lessons, or approaches, might be most applicable to the unique  
12 aspects of Gulf fisheries. As Verena mentioned, this work is  
13 intended to inform a phase two, a future project, to identify and  
14 operationalize some of these specific efficiency approaches.

15  
16 This project had a pretty aggressive timeline. This work has  
17 largely taken place over the past four or so months, and we're  
18 anticipating to wrap it up in the next month or so, and it can  
19 really be broken into three overlapping phases.

20  
21 The first one largely occurred between us and Gulf Council staff,  
22 trying to best understand some of the key challenges and priority  
23 management actions that the council sought to address through this  
24 project.

25  
26 The second phase is really the meat of this regulatory review,  
27 looking out to other councils, and we had three different elements  
28 of that process, and I'll walk through a bit more in a few slides  
29 here, including a literature review, an online questionnaire that  
30 we distributed, and a series of semi-structured interviews with a  
31 subset of those questionnaire invitees.

32  
33 Then the third phase, which we're sort of in the middle of right  
34 now, is really trying to bring this all together, understand all  
35 that information that we were able to gather, and distill it and  
36 synthesize it into a handful of key findings and recommendations  
37 that might be particularly useful for you all to consider.

38  
39 We've completed a first draft of the report, as you all saw. I  
40 had the chance to share and review that with the SSC a little less  
41 than a month ago, and, of course, we're here presenting to you  
42 all, and then we're looking to finalize the report in the next  
43 month or so.

44  
45 Okay, and so, since we don't have a ton of time, we wanted to spend  
46 most of today focusing on really our Phase 3, our findings and

1 recommendations, but did want to give a quick overview of what  
2 those first couple of phases look like for you all to review, and  
3 so, first off, when it comes to the Gulf's unique challenges and  
4 priorities, we were really able to identify three particular kind  
5 of areas to focus on.

6  
7 The first was on reducing these lag times between on-the-water  
8 changes and management action. The second was potential  
9 exploration of automation approaches for more routine or non-  
10 controversial actions, again trying to minimize some of those lag  
11 times in that way, and be more resilient against any current or  
12 potential future resource limitations, and the third, which  
13 Deirdre will get into a bit more as we talk about our findings,  
14 was thinking about some more efficient NEPA vehicles, as opposed  
15 to kind of your more comprehensive environmental impact statements  
16 or environmental assessments or other approaches, that might be  
17 helpful for kind of increasing the amount of information that's  
18 making its way through the council process, and ultimately to  
19 rulemaking.

20  
21 There were five key priority species that had previously been  
22 identified by the council, kind of for this idea of greater  
23 efficiency and timeliness. Some of these are, obviously, quite  
24 high-profile, but a lot of this is not just about the kind of  
25 relative importance of these species, but also how often new  
26 information can become available, and as a result necessitate more  
27 rapid responses.

28  
29 We heard, for example, about gag and red grouper often having these  
30 recruitment pulses, and it would be great to pick those up and  
31 operationalize the management context more quickly there. Then,  
32 lastly, thinking about key measures, these are largely around kind  
33 of your annual fishery specifications, things like catch limits,  
34 seasons, bag loads, size limits.

35  
36 Then our Phase 2, as I mentioned it really consisted of these three  
37 elements, starting on the left there. We distributed an online  
38 questionnaire, using Google Forms, to about 160 individuals in the  
39 late summer. This went to a combination of council staff and SSC  
40 members, as well as NMFS and commission staff.

41  
42 This was an anonymous questionnaire, but we did provide folks the  
43 option to provide their name for future follow-up, and it was a  
44 series of mostly open-ended questions, really trying to get a sense  
45 of what different folks from around the around the nation viewed  
46 as key challenges to efficiency and responsiveness, as well as any

1 potential innovative approaches that they've tried to explore in  
2 those regions, and any trade-offs between, for example, efficiency  
3 and transparency that they've had to confront through that process.  
4

5 We gathered around fifty responses, representing all regions, and  
6 about two-thirds of those responses came from council staff, with  
7 the remaining third from a combination of NMFS staff, commission,  
8 and SSC members.  
9

10 A subset of the folks to whom we sent the questionnaire were also  
11 invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with us, and  
12 so we had a series of twenty-two semi-structured about forty-five-  
13 minute interviews. These had a total of twenty-four individuals,  
14 again representing all regions, and these are really intended to  
15 dig in a bit more, trying to understand, again, some of these key  
16 challenges and get a bit more information on some of these  
17 approaches.  
18

19 Then, lastly, we did a pretty in-depth review of the documentation  
20 associated with each council, thinking about, for example, the  
21 SOPPs, the statements of organization, practices, and procedures,  
22 as well as regional operating agreements with relevant NMFS  
23 offices.  
24

25 We identified sort of three major buckets of constraints to  
26 efficiency and responsiveness. I'm just going to breeze through  
27 these here, but they're spelled out in much more detail in the  
28 report. Generally speaking, legal constraints, these are kind of  
29 the biggest three laws that are relevant, the MSA, NEPA, and the  
30 Administrative Procedures Act, although there are a handful of  
31 other relevant laws as well.  
32

33 Together, these all have pretty stringent procedural requirements,  
34 public input and transparency requirements, and scientific  
35 restraints as well, in terms of the data that can be used in these  
36 discussions.  
37

38 Issues again with scientific timing and uncertainty, and so data  
39 lags, uncertainties about what future environmental conditions  
40 might look like, and how to respond to those, and then, lastly,  
41 concerns around limited staff and time resources to conduct these  
42 conduct these activities.  
43

44 Okay, and so, moving on to our findings, as I mentioned in the  
45 report, we really detailed a lot of kind of the higher-level  
46 findings that we were able to derive across councils, and these

1 can really be summarized in three major buckets.

2  
3 The first is MSA regulatory pathways and their associated NEPA  
4 vehicles, specific, you know, amendments, frameworks,  
5 specifications, that sort of thing. The second is more around  
6 specific streamlining tools or efficiency measures that individual  
7 councils have brought to bear on the process and found some time  
8 or resource savings.

9  
10 The third is sort of these softer, but really important,  
11 collaboration, communication and coordination processes. Some of  
12 these are more institutionalized than others across councils, but  
13 have been really important for finding ways to kind of help the  
14 process move along smoothly and reduce bottlenecks.

15  
16 Together, these findings were used to inform the development of  
17 fifteen draft recommendations for you all to consider. Again, I  
18 want to emphasize these are these are just draft recommendations.  
19 If you go to the next slide, you'll see them all spelled out here.

20  
21 Sorry for the small text and busy slide, but the goal here is just  
22 to give you a sense of kind of the universe of recommendations  
23 that we've come up with here. This is on page 62 of the report,  
24 and they fall into three general categories.

25  
26 Procedural mechanisms and innovative regulatory approaches are  
27 going to be covered by Deirdre here in a second, and then, again,  
28 looking at some of these collaboration, coordination and  
29 communication best practices. These are not in any sort of  
30 priority order here. These are really just a snapshot of some of  
31 the key ideas that we were able to come up with.

32  
33 If you go to the next slide, this is just showing a handful of  
34 those recommendations that we're going to highlight here today, to  
35 kind of show some key case studies of what types of opportunities  
36 might exist through some of these approaches, and so, with the  
37 next slide, I think I'll pass it over to my colleague Deirdre, who  
38 is going to walk through our first sets of recommendations.

39  
40 **MS. DEIDRE BOELKE:** Thank you, Willie. Good morning, everyone.  
41 It's great to be here back in Biloxi. I had the opportunity to be  
42 here last year at the same time, and so it's nice to see you again,  
43 talking about a different project.

44  
45 Willie did a great job giving a kind of high-level overview of the  
46 big-picture stuff, and kind of why we're here, and what the needs

1 are for the Gulf, and now we're going to kind of dig into the weeds  
2 a little bit, and we thought we might do that through examples  
3 that we came across in other regions, and we'll try to spotlight  
4 a few of them.

5  
6 We don't have time to go through all fifteen recommendations, and  
7 so we're really just trying to highlight a few of them, to give  
8 you a feel for what's in the larger report, but we definitely would  
9 encourage the Gulf Council to consider, you know, all of the  
10 different strategies and ideas and see what might fit the best.

11  
12 In terms of the different management actions under the Magnuson  
13 Act, this council is very familiar with all of them. This is the  
14 top-half of a larger table that's in the document, on page 29,  
15 and, really, for all of the different vehicles that are available  
16 to the councils to make adjustments to plans, the ones that is  
17 really intended to be most streamlined is the framework adjustment.

18  
19 You know, this is frameworking. Councils call them different  
20 things, and that can get a little confusing, in terms of whether  
21 it's an open framework or a closed framework, an abbreviated  
22 framework, and everyone kind of uses a different term,  
23 unfortunately, but, in general, the idea is there. You know,  
24 everyone recognized that there were going to be needs to adjust  
25 these actions in a fairly, you know, quick way, in some cases, but  
26 the thing that really saves time is the actual NEPA accompanying  
27 vehicle that's used to implement those frameworks.

28  
29 Here in the Gulf Council, my understanding is you you've definitely  
30 tried, and explored, a few of those different NEPA vehicles,  
31 sometimes with success and sometimes with a little resistance, and  
32 so really kind of pushing the envelope a little bit, in terms of  
33 those NEPA vehicles, could really hopefully open some doors for  
34 efficiency, and so we're going to spend a little time on something  
35 called a categorical exclusion, and if you could just jump to the  
36 next slide, please.

37  
38 This is the first recommendation we'll highlight today,  
39 Recommendation 1.1, and this would be to kind of take a step back  
40 and look at all of the different frameworks in particular that the  
41 Gulf Council has adopted maybe in the last five or ten years, and  
42 kind of look through that and see that, okay, this was a framework.  
43 It was implemented through an environmental assessment, and did it  
44 really have to? Could we maybe have looked at a categorical  
45 exclusion, and I'll just explain that, for folks that are not  
46 familiar.

1  
2 You know, these are things that are kind of predefined. They're  
3 relatively routine. They've already been somewhat analyzed, in  
4 terms of a range of different alternatives that the council could  
5 take, and so you're really just building off of, you know, a pre-  
6 arranged idea, and they're relatively routine. The key about them  
7 is that they cannot have a significant impact, and so the figure  
8 on the right -- I know you can't read it, but it is in the document,  
9 on page 35.

10  
11 The intent really of putting it in here is to show you there's  
12 much fewer steps. The left column is a categorical exclusion, and  
13 you'll see there's really just a few steps involved from going  
14 from an idea, or a management need, down to implementation.

15  
16 The middle row there is intended to reflect an environmental  
17 assessment. It does have a few more required steps, in terms of  
18 analysis and review, and, finally, on the right-hand column is  
19 your environmental impact statement, and that has the most required  
20 steps, and so, you know, just getting a sense of that, if you know  
21 upfront, when you're starting something, that it's going to qualify  
22 as low impact, and it's relatively routine, administrative in  
23 nature, it's really possible to do that quite quickly.

24  
25 We do have a few examples that are described in much more detail  
26 in in the document. The North Pacific and the Pacific Councils,  
27 in particular, use categorical exclusions very routinely. They  
28 use them extensively.

29  
30 They'll kind of have, in some cases, a programmatic, which is a  
31 large environmental impact statement, setting up a big system,  
32 but, really, at least if it's an environmental assessment every  
33 five years or so, that you can build on, and, if you've routinely  
34 gone through a process here of qualifying for no significant impact  
35 year after year, that's a very good candidate almost of a flag of  
36 saying, okay, let's take a minute and see if this could actually  
37 qualify under a categorical exclusion.

38  
39 The benefit is, from a staff perspective, the documents are very  
40 minor. It's really just a memo. It's not, you know, a large  
41 framework document that includes all kinds of extensive analysis.  
42 It's basically a letter to the record showing that there's, you  
43 know, non-significant impacts expected.

44  
45 The agency is, as you know through work that the councils do all  
46 together, going through a big review of their NEPA procedures and

1 policies, and we're highlighting this one in particular because,  
2 right now, the agency has proposed really expanding the list of  
3 measures that would qualify under a categorical exclusion, and so,  
4 if that maintains, and stays, it's really quite broad, and, all of  
5 a sudden, many of the measures you do here, like changing  
6 possession limits, setting catch limits, all of those things, may  
7 qualify for categorical exclusion moving forward.

8  
9 We just want to, you know, highlight this, and emphasize as a  
10 possible vehicle to really save a really, you know, big amount of  
11 time on the staff perspective, and also on the agency's side.  
12 There are many less review steps, as you see in those different  
13 boxes, that would be required to -- That they would have to go  
14 through as well to get to the same end, essentially.

15  
16 That's definitely the first one we wanted to highlight, and if you  
17 jump to the next slide, please, this is a table that essentially,  
18 through all of our discussions with folks and so forth, we came  
19 across really lots of different possible streamlining tools.

20  
21 These are the ones that -- It's not exhaustive, and there's others,  
22 but they kind of bubbled to the top, in terms of things that this  
23 council might want to think about, and, again, we don't have time  
24 to go through all of them, but, really, you know, I hope that you  
25 do it at some point, and so, today, we're just going to highlight  
26 three of them, and do that by spotlighting a few examples from  
27 other regions, to hopefully, you know, give you a sense of how  
28 these things work.

29  
30 In general, the idea is that these are different ways to either  
31 hopefully be more responsive, be more consistent, and kind of  
32 creatively get at measures in a more expeditious way, and so, if  
33 you go to the next slide, we'll start with ecosystem component  
34 species, I believe. Thank you.

35  
36 Again, this is something the Gulf Council has discussed, and, you  
37 know, talked about, but, to-date, you know, not really a lot of  
38 action in this in this topic, and so we have two kind of spotlight  
39 examples here.

40  
41 On the left, starting with the Western Pacific Regional Fishery  
42 Management Council, in general, ecosystem component species is,  
43 you know, a newer term. After the National Standard One Guidelines  
44 were updated, every fishery that's in, you know, a fisheries  
45 management plan is a stock in a fishery.

46

1 Now, as you know, it's required to have these very detailed status  
2 stock determinations, and accountability measures, catch limits  
3 every single year, and I think this became pretty cumbersome.  
4 People realized over time, especially for species that have less  
5 information known about them for example, and it was really quite  
6 cumbersome, and there was also a push to think about ecosystem  
7 management, rather than necessarily one species at a time.

8  
9 In the Western Pacific, they really embraced ecosystem management  
10 as an idea, and, essentially, all of their plans over time  
11 following those updates became these ecosystem plans, and so they  
12 have five of them in their region, but, again, after needing to  
13 set catch limits every single year for so many dozens and dozens  
14 of species, where they don't really have enough information to  
15 really do that, as well as many of the species are in state waters,  
16 and not necessarily under the full control of the federal FMP,  
17 this became very problematic.

18  
19 For the Western Pacific Council, they went through the process of  
20 considering ecosystem component species, and, in doing that, you  
21 basically, for a variety of different reasons -- You're still  
22 recognizing the species importance, either as its ecological role  
23 for forage, or maybe that it's just important for some other reason  
24 to the ecosystem, and so it's part of the plan, but it doesn't  
25 need an annual catch limit, and it doesn't have to have  
26 accountability measures and so forth, and so you end up kind of  
27 saving all of that administrative burdens related to that.

28  
29 We're just sharing with you a very kind of comprehensive approach  
30 for ecosystems that the Western Pacific has used, and then an  
31 example a little closer to home is the South Atlantic Fishery  
32 Management Council -- It did kind of once one or two species at a  
33 time, through Amendment 12, and they did also designate two  
34 mackerel species as ecosystem component species, a few years ago,  
35 to the dolphin wahoo plan.

36  
37 Those mackerel species are very important as forage, particularly  
38 for wahoo, and they were able to do this in a relatively, you know,  
39 quick way, through that NEPA vehicle I was describing before, the  
40 categorical exclusion, and really, when you speak to the staff,  
41 and kind of others involved, the benefits really come down to being  
42 -- Not having to go through that process of setting those catch  
43 limits, sometimes in many cases with -- You know, you don't really  
44 have the information to do it.

45  
46 These are, again, just another tool, and approach, that that we

1 would kind of highlight, that's highlighted in the report, to  
2 consider. It doesn't always, you know, work out, and there's  
3 reasons not to go down this path, but certainly it could be to be  
4 something to look into. If you'll just go to the next slide, I'll  
5 highlight another pathway, potentially. Thanks.

6  
7 This has to do with an omnibus amendment, and, again, this council  
8 has used this vehicle before. If there's something that you want  
9 to do in a broad way across more than one plan at a time, it can  
10 be an efficient vehicle to consider, and especially now, if the  
11 Gulf Council is, you know, potentially getting serious about  
12 improving responsiveness and streamlining.

13  
14 This is going on in the New England Council staff right now, and  
15 so I wanted to share this as a spotlight example. Like all of the  
16 regions, folks are facing the idea of reduced staffing capacity,  
17 the need to be more responsive to changes in the environment, and  
18 the New England Council wanted, in a proactive way, to basically  
19 update all of their plans at once, to have more kind of responsive  
20 measures on the books.

21  
22 It doesn't go through all of the exact details for every single  
23 plan, but, as you see on the right-hand side, those are all of the  
24 different fishery management plans in New England, and they're  
25 inconsistent, in terms of how responsive the plans are, and so  
26 this action is intended to kind of bring everyone on to the same  
27 level.

28  
29 In terms of specifics, that would be for their specification  
30 setting process, whether they're allowed to do in-season  
31 adjustments. In this case, there's really only one or two plans  
32 that that have that allowance, and so this would kind of put it on  
33 the books for everything, and there's also an idea to remove  
34 duplicative requirements for reporting, and things that are just  
35 not used, and they're trying to kind of, in one fell swoop across  
36 all of their plans, look at look at these things at once.

37  
38 This, again, is being done through a categorical exclusion, because  
39 it's primarily administrative, and so just pointing that out again,  
40 and they were able to do it over several months really, which is,  
41 from being on the staff for many years, is pretty amazing. I never  
42 worked on things that quickly, and so sharing that as another  
43 approach to just think of, if you if you're doing something for  
44 one plan, you might want to think about it for more than one plan,  
45 just to be proactive to have it on the books.

1 The last example I'll walk through here, on the next slide please,  
2 is exempted fishing permits, and, again, these are used in all  
3 regions, but to different degrees, and, thinking about  
4 responsiveness, and trying to kind of get more information from  
5 on-the-water into management more quickly, this is a way that some  
6 regions are using this maybe more effectively than others.

7  
8 Exempted fishing permits essentially is an exemption that NMFS is  
9 allowed to do, and to basically let someone do something that they  
10 otherwise would be prohibited to do, and, really, many councils  
11 are just on the receiving end of this. The council meeting is  
12 used as a place to have a public comment and review before the  
13 agency considers approving an exempted fishing permit, but there  
14 are some regions where it's a much more proactive role, and I'll  
15 just share this example here.

16  
17 The Caribbean Fishery Management Council recently reviewed an EFP  
18 application that had two purposes, and one is it was related to  
19 red hind grouper, and it would be allowing a limited amount of  
20 harvest within a spawning closure, and it had to two roles, really  
21 to collect basic life history data, which was very important for  
22 their assessment, and it was a data gap that was identified through  
23 the assessment process, and so, you know, that seemed like a pretty  
24 obvious thing that the council would support.

25  
26 Then the second one was actually to evaluate the effectiveness of  
27 those seasonal area closures, and so, again, something the council  
28 was very vested in, and curious and interested to see the findings,  
29 and so, if more kind of proactive EFPs could be developed for  
30 research projects that, you know, the council is most interested  
31 in, it is a way to effectively pilot an idea before requiring it  
32 through an action.

33  
34 Just highlighting this also, and, through our work, we heard a lot  
35 about cooperative research, and, the more that cooperative  
36 research is kind of promoted around the council table, it can also  
37 be a way to kind of effectively bring more information, and have  
38 management be more responsive, and so this is another kind of  
39 creative way that -- An efficient pathway to get that kind of  
40 information in front of the council.

41  
42 Finally, before I turn it back to Willie for the last topic of  
43 recommendations, the next slide is an overview of kind of the  
44 specific measures, again, in talking with folks, and doing our own  
45 research, of efficiency measures in general.

46

1 I'm not going to spotlight any of these, in the interest of time  
2 necessarily, but, again, all of these are geared at more  
3 efficiency, and are there ways to set up specifications for  
4 multiple years, and in-season measures are, obviously, very  
5 responsive.

6  
7 Also, moving to the next row down below, having more automatic  
8 purpose control rules, where, you know, if something happens, or  
9 if there's a certain change in the stock, then there's a reaction.

10  
11 These kinds of measures do take time to develop upfront, and  
12 analyze the impacts ahead of time, but they can have great  
13 efficiencies later, but, really, you need to have the right  
14 information, and the data streams to support them, and, really,  
15 what we learned a lot, in talking to folks over the phone, is you  
16 also need a willingness at the council table to actually follow  
17 through and let those policies happen when they're triggered.

18  
19 That can sometimes be the hardest part, where you lose that  
20 flexibility at the council's ability to say, okay, well, we said  
21 this was going to happen, and now we're going to stick by this  
22 policy, and actually let it be triggered, that sometimes falls  
23 apart if the council is, you know, not willing to cede some of  
24 that authority to the agency to have those triggers be set.

25  
26 I think it is a commitment to, you know, go through that work, and  
27 all of that effort upfront, and then also a commitment on the back-  
28 end that, if they're triggered, you know, the council stays by  
29 those decisions, and doesn't revisit that work, and so, you know,  
30 sometimes they're not always used, for that reason. With that, I  
31 might turn it back to Willie to get us through the last section of  
32 recommendations.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Just a second.

35  
36 **MS. BOELKE:** Sure.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** We're going to stop our questions, if that's okay.  
39 We have a couple hands.

40  
41 **MS. BOELKE:** Sure.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** We'll start with C.J.

44  
45 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, and sorry. I didn't know what the  
46 appropriate time was to kind of ask some questions here, but

1 there's a lot in here, and so I appreciate you all getting through  
2 this.

3  
4 **MS. BOELKE:** There's a lot.

5  
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So, just kind of my two-cents on what I've heard so  
7 far, I mean, I think categorical exclusions are a good avenue for  
8 us to explore. Some of the concerns I have relative to some of  
9 these things is how we navigate, you know, when we're specifying  
10 catch limits or anything like that.

11  
12 Like allocations are some of the more challenging things that we  
13 have to discuss here, and so how does that process get kind of  
14 incorporated into sort of this categorical exclusion thought  
15 process?

16  
17 Ecosystem component, I'm fully supportive of that, too. I think  
18 we're kind of slowly starting to navigate that in some of the  
19 discussions that we've had at past council meetings. I think one  
20 of the -- So one way that the South Atlantic Council has been  
21 navigating this is so we have to answer those ten questions, right,  
22 as to whether they're in need of management.

23  
24 The South Atlantic Council, rather than have the council itself  
25 debate around the table, they actually kind of provided a poll,  
26 basically, to answer those questions before a meeting, and so,  
27 basically, if all that stuff was answered before we get here, and  
28 we don't have to go around the table, and is this an important  
29 part of the ecosystem, because some of that, obviously, is  
30 subjective, right, to however you perceive it. I think that can  
31 be a way to kind of further streamline some of that, but I'm very  
32 supportive of that.

33  
34 Then just a comment I had about the relative omnibus amendment,  
35 and so I like the concept. I just see differences in the different  
36 councils, right, and the New England Council only manages a handful  
37 of fisheries, and we're managing dozens down here, and so something  
38 that's applicable to every single FMP might be a little bit more  
39 challenging down here, and so just kind of throwing some of those  
40 concepts out there, and just my general thoughts so far.

41  
42 Then, the EFP process, I feel like we already do this, to a degree.  
43 I feel like we kind of approved -- Well, it's NOAA that ultimately  
44 ends up approving them. We just kind of recommend if the council  
45 wants changes to something.

46

1 I think one of the ones we recently gave the thumbs-up for was  
2 harvesting of undersized reef fish, you know, on some commercial  
3 vessels, and so I view that as kind of a unique way to explore,  
4 but I would like some more feedback, I guess, from you all, kind  
5 of perhaps, about what you're thinking about how the council can  
6 play a more adaptive role in the EFP process, because we're not  
7 the ones that really approve it, or like come up with, hey, we  
8 want an idea for an EFP about this, and like is that what you guys  
9 are asking for there, is it as they come to us, because we do  
10 review them as they come to NOAA Fisheries and the council, and so  
11 sorry, and I'll stop talking now.

12  
13 **MS. BOELKE:** Sure, and I'm happy to respond to the last one first,  
14 if that makes sense, and so, with EFPs, and I do understand, and  
15 the staff explained to us that your council has responded and  
16 participated in giving comments about whether to approve or  
17 disapprove or modify an EFP application.

18  
19 That is typically how many councils use the EFP process. Some  
20 regions do it in a more proactive way, and I wasn't very specific  
21 before, but, in terms of actually linking it with their research  
22 priorities setting that they do every year, that's reviewed, or  
23 every five years, they have certain research priorities.

24  
25 The more specific the council can be, in terms of identifying  
26 potential research that they want to see happen, that they want to  
27 prioritize, and specifically in a way that it can feed back into  
28 the research community, and then just being a conduit, or a place,  
29 to have researchers connect with fishermen and have that  
30 cooperative research happen, you know, either at council meetings,  
31 or through the SSC, or through the assessment process, and some  
32 councils play a very active role in also using it to evaluate their  
33 management, you know, structures.

34  
35 I'm thinking of a few examples I worked on in New England, where  
36 there was a need for a certain gear modification, and, before the  
37 council required it, they actually kind of tried to work from this  
38 behind the scenes to get some EFPs in place to do the research, so  
39 they had the science that they needed to actually implement a new  
40 a new measure, you know, through an FMP, and so it's more just  
41 proactive engagement and connecting your priorities as a council  
42 with the science community.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. We have a couple more hands. Kevin, and  
45 then Andy.

46

1 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you. My question relates to the  
2 categorical exclusions on slide 10, but you had mentioned that  
3 NOAA has some guidance. I think you mentioned that NOAA has some  
4 guidance currently on categorical exclusions, and what could apply  
5 in those situations, and that they're also reviewing that, and  
6 undergoing some further clarification, or guidance, on use of  
7 categorical exclusion.

8  
9 You may not have the full answer, but, as it pertains to the  
10 examples that you provided, as far as setting ACLs and catch limits  
11 and such, you talked about minimal impact, and so is there anything  
12 currently in the categorical exclusion recommendations, or  
13 guidance, that pertains to excessive, because some minimal -- Some  
14 of these things that we're trying to deal with, as it pertains to  
15 data and such, we are going through that process.

16  
17 We're going through a document process, but I'm just curious if  
18 that has already been addressed, or those, if you're aware  
19 of, are going to be addressed in this new iteration.

20  
21 **MS. BOELKE:** Sure, and I'm happy to give half an answer, and then  
22 look over to my NMFS colleagues, or staff, too. My kind of sitting  
23 on the outside, doing a little bit of a review of the recent  
24 actions that this council has put through, I would argue and make  
25 a case that some of those could have been a CE.

26  
27 I wasn't, you know, here and aware of the kind of legal and risk  
28 tolerances that the region has, but, because they were, quote, you  
29 know, more routine, or things you've done before, that qualified  
30 as not having a significant impact, it could have been argued that  
31 they maybe could have been considered that way, and maybe they  
32 were, and I'm not sure, but the really important part about moving  
33 forward is that the proposed list that the agency has out, you  
34 know, for comment, which Carrie and other staff are very involved  
35 in through the Council Coordinating Committee that they've been  
36 reviewing, it's drastically more flexible.

37  
38 The list is much longer, in terms of the things that would, you  
39 know, right away be considered a CE, whereas now it's shorter.  
40 It's a shorter list, and there's just not as much maybe experience,  
41 or emphasis, on trying to be, you know, using CEs more routinely,  
42 and it does feel like, from the proposed list and work that the  
43 agency has put out so far, that, you know, there is a more serious  
44 interest in in expanding that use as a vehicle.

45  
46 However, that's all under review, and, you know, there was supposed

1 to be a CCC meeting a few weeks ago to really dig into that, and  
2 make some progress, which, you know, was canceled, but I'm sure it  
3 will be picked up again in the coming months, and hopefully -- If  
4 anybody wants to add anything. I'm not, you know, participating  
5 in those, but that's my understanding.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** All right. Andy.

8  
9 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks for the presentation. This is a lot  
10 of great information. A couple of comments, and some questions,  
11 and so, with regard to the EFP you mentioned for the Caribbean, I  
12 think that's a good example. I think a much better example would  
13 be the South Atlantic red snapper exempted fishing permits.

14  
15 That was something where the council was bogged down in trying to  
16 address a specific problem. They worked with the agency to come  
17 up with a request for proposals that ultimately led to exempted  
18 fishing projects being created by the states to address that  
19 particular problem for red snapper discards, and so I just want to  
20 mention that first.

21  
22 I guess two questions. One relates to the streamlining, with  
23 regard to like annual specifications, and do any other regions  
24 face the same challenges that the Southeast is facing with the new  
25 data streams, the recreational and commercial allocations, the  
26 calibration, because I feel like that is one of the things that's  
27 substantially hindering us from using some of these streamlining  
28 methods.

29  
30 **MS. BOELKE:** It's hard to compare them. I don't have as much, you  
31 know, firsthand experience with the challenges here, but I do  
32 understand that they may be greater, and more challenging, in those  
33 categories. Maybe we didn't find an exact example in another  
34 region where they've figured it out with the same set of  
35 challenges, but, in general, having the data behind the engine to  
36 make it work is important, but there could be ways to -- You know,  
37 through some of the discussions that are starting to happen with  
38 the agency here, it does seem that there could be some compromises,  
39 and, you know, a this is good enough kind of approach, where it  
40 could work.

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I agree with that. I think we are going  
43 to move into a much more flexible environment with regard to NEPA  
44 going forward.

45  
46 Then my second question is a little bit of a loaded question, but

1 you're providing a lot of great examples of how each of the  
2 councils does things well with these various efficiencies. Is  
3 there one council, or a council, that stood out that you said,  
4 wow, they're really doing things well, and like there's a whole  
5 kind of collective package of efficiencies that should be a good  
6 model for other councils to look at?  
7

8 **MS. BOELKE:** I think we did try, through our planned interviews  
9 and research -- We wanted to look at them all, and I think, in our  
10 report, we maybe don't always pick the best example to highlight,  
11 because we are trying to give a variety, and a flavor, and the  
12 staff here also explained that please don't just focus on  
13 recommendations that we can't follow, because we don't have, you  
14 know, the data that the North Pacific has real time, you know,  
15 but, every day, twenty-four hours, they have, you know, perfect  
16 information, and so please don't just give us stuff that we can't  
17 use.  
18

19 Sure, the regions that have, you know, more robust data can  
20 probably support some of these more sophisticated in-season  
21 adaptive management plans, like the North Pacific or the Mid-  
22 Atlantic, but, really, I would say all of them have -- With, you  
23 know, the conditions that they each have, you know, have little  
24 nuggets of creative ideas and things, and so I don't think there's  
25 one region that's perfectly figured it out for everything,  
26 especially when you think about it trying to be relative to what  
27 the conditions are here. Do you want to add?  
28

29 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Dr. Simmons, did you want to jump in?  
30

31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Yes, and thank you, Madam  
32 Chair. I just had a couple of things to contribute regarding the  
33 working group that we have at the national level with the Council  
34 Coordinating Committee, and so, in June, there was a change in the  
35 NEPA policy and procedures directive that came out, and so we got  
36 a group that worked together and provided comments from all the  
37 regions, and there was a letter sent.  
38

39 I think we sent that to the council, and we can send that again,  
40 if that's helpful, and so we haven't gotten a response back yet  
41 from the agency on those comments, but one of the big challenges  
42 is defining significance, right? Who does that, and how is it  
43 done in each region, and then the other issue is, you know, many  
44 of the councils have those frameworks for different FMPs set up,  
45 and we did ours a while ago.  
46

1 So, at some point, it has to be analyzed in some form or fashion,  
2 whether that's in a big document, whether that's by separate FMPs,  
3 and so, if it's non-significant, and you have it in the framework,  
4 and it's been analyzed, and you can automate that, but you have to  
5 have the data available to do that, and so those are kind of all  
6 the pieces that have to line up, and so we're waiting for a response  
7 back on that.

8  
9 The other big change I think that's going to help us a lot is this  
10 group is going to work with Headquarters staff to do a crosswalk  
11 between the requirements of Magnuson and the new NEPA procedure  
12 guidelines.

13  
14 That's going to kind of show us where things line up, hopefully,  
15 and where we can get some efficiencies with our vehicle, our NEPA  
16 vehicle, our documents that give us what we need to -- Where we  
17 need to go, and so hopefully that makes sense, but I think one of  
18 the SSC recommendations, which I guess you guys are going to get  
19 to later with Mr. Moncrief, was to go through and take another  
20 look at what we have in our frameworks, and see where we can update  
21 that, and what we can do, but those are kind of some big things in  
22 the back of your mind to think about when we're talking about this.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Andy, did we cover all yours? We kind of jumped  
25 in there. Okay. C.J.

26  
27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and I totally agree, Carrie.  
28 Looking at those frameworks is going to be important, and so just  
29 kind of one last little comment from me. I mean, I think Andy  
30 brought up some additional good points about some of the challenges  
31 we have with some categorical exclusions potentially, as it relates  
32 to simple things like changing catch limits.

33  
34 I brought up allocation discussions. Andy brought up currency  
35 changes, and things along those lines, and those are all issues  
36 nearly associated with everything that we're going for, but  
37 certainly there are examples that we're navigating through where  
38 maybe it is a little more straightforward, and there's not a lot  
39 of changes going on, and there's not a data currency change or  
40 anything along those lines, and so, I mean, maybe a nice way to  
41 streamline this is, if the quota is going up by X percentage, then  
42 it can just be automated like that, and the council doesn't need  
43 to see it at four consecutive meetings, you know, going back and  
44 forth between the SSC.

45  
46 That seems like a pretty streamlined approach, where, if it's not

1 like a significant bump, or a reduction or whatever, it's just  
2 automated, and, if there's no other components associated with  
3 that that would be relatively controversial, then -- Again, there  
4 is some components of that that are subjective, but, anyhow, that's  
5 my two-cents.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Thank you. Any other questions before we  
8 jump back into this presentation? Ed.

9  
10 **MR. ED WALKER:** Just a quick one for Dr. Simmons. Would the staff  
11 -- Can I assume that the staff would kind of automatically inform  
12 us that maybe something qualifies for these categorical exclusions  
13 or not, because I think it would be helpful if it was pointed out  
14 that, by the way, this action that you're talking about may qualify  
15 for categorical exclusions.

16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and thank you for that, and so  
18 we've been doing that kind of behind the scenes, and trying not to  
19 have it so front and center, but, yes, we've been trying to  
20 operationalize that, and I think you'll see that -- We're doing  
21 that with the DESCEND, the continuation of the DESCENT document,  
22 during the Reef Fish Committee. That's called a categorical. That  
23 would be a categorical exclusion, and that's the NEPA vehicle  
24 that's going to get us there. It's primarily administrative.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Any other questions? Seeing none, back to  
27 you guys.

28  
29 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** All right. Thanks very much. If you could head  
30 to the next slide, please. All right, and so Deirdre walked  
31 through kind of some of those specific, you know, potential  
32 regulatory pathways and efficiencies that could be found, and I'm  
33 just going to spend a little bit of time, to bring us home here,  
34 just talking about some of these three Cs approaches that we heard  
35 about, these communication, coordination, collaboration approaches  
36 that different councils are using.

37  
38 These really kind of fell into three broad categories. The first  
39 one, that you can see here, is improving coordination between  
40 councils and NMFS. The second is more around scientific efficiency  
41 and throughput, whereas the third is thinking about, again,  
42 bringing stakeholders into the conversations and on-the-water  
43 perspectives into the management discussion.

44  
45 Just first off here, here are some of the key findings from our  
46 analysis across councils of some of the key approaches in which

1 coordination has been improved between councils and NMFS.

2  
3 I'm not going to walk through each of these in turn, but they  
4 really have to do with just finding more standardized ways to  
5 continue the process of information exchange, and also just kind  
6 of regular communication, trying to get ahead of any issues and  
7 reduce bottlenecks during both the data collection and regulatory  
8 process, and I'm going to focus on that third one there, if you  
9 could go to the next slide.

10  
11 Great, and so this brings us to our Recommendation 3.1, and this  
12 one is about updating the Gulf Council's regional operating  
13 agreement with NMFS to better serve as an action planning tool.

14  
15 Each council has these regional operating agreements. I believe  
16 the Gulf Council's was last updated in 2016, and there might be  
17 some opportunities here, looking across what other councils have  
18 done, to really use this agreement as an opportunity to be a bit  
19 more specific about what that relationship between the council and  
20 NMFS looks like during the regulatory process, and so, you know,  
21 which staff are responsible for various aspects of the process,  
22 kind of a more detailed and iterative approach to action planning  
23 and really mapping out the entire regulatory process, both during  
24 council action as well as post-council action during final  
25 rulemaking there.

26  
27 One great example of this is occurring in the North Pacific, where  
28 they really have spelled out this detailed action planning process  
29 throughout the lifetime of a regulation's development. They also  
30 have developed an analytical template for development of NEPA  
31 analyses, and this has really brought to bear a number of  
32 efficiencies, again reducing some of these bottlenecks, where  
33 everybody is aware of kind of what individual roles are, minimizing  
34 unwelcome surprises, and legal surprises is one that came up again  
35 and again, around, you know, having done the analysis and then  
36 being told there might be additional analyses needed, and this  
37 seems like an approach that's been really effective off of the  
38 North Pacific.

39  
40 This next category is, again, increasing scientific efficiency and  
41 throughput, and so we talked earlier about some of these challenges  
42 in data lags, and the amount of time it can take for new information  
43 to make its way to the council table for decision-making, and so  
44 there were a number of different approaches that councils were  
45 using to try to address this lag, and really, you know, have the  
46 SSC making decisions on the most recently available information.

1  
2 One tool, and, again, this is just one of these approaches that we  
3 found in this category, was really looking to expand the use of  
4 SSC subgroups. We know that the Gulf Council does make some use  
5 of SSC subgroups, but this has really been a pretty significant  
6 source of time savings for a couple of different councils, in terms  
7 of streamlining the process of SSC review and recommendation before  
8 information makes its way to the council.

9  
10 This information, or whatever the work of these subgroups does,  
11 does still have to go through the full SSC. It has to be  
12 recommended first, but we did hear examples of this approach  
13 leveraging specific expertise of SSC members, as well as kind of  
14 maintaining conversations and momentum between the full SSC  
15 meetings, and one example that we heard of recently was in the  
16 Western Pacific, with their multi-species bottom fish complex.

17  
18 This is somewhere between -- I think American Samoa is around  
19 eleven species, and many of these are data-poor, and there have  
20 been ongoing conversations around developing and updating the  
21 regional assessment framework, as well as potential modeling  
22 approaches for both assessments and catch limits, given, again,  
23 data availability requirements and the complexities of a  
24 multispecies fishery.

25  
26 This work has kind of happened in between full SSC meetings, and  
27 was recently brought to the full SSC, and so just an example here  
28 of the kinds of conversations that could be happening in the  
29 interim between those full gatherings of the SSC.

30  
31 Then the third and final bucket, if you will, of the three Cs is  
32 the idea of, again, better engaging stakeholders and bringing on-  
33 the-water perspectives into the conversation. We're aware of the  
34 Fisherman Feedback Tool, and how successful that's been here in  
35 the Gulf, and actually, you know, heard other councils talking  
36 about how useful the Fisherman Feedback Tool has been, but we also  
37 heard of some other pretty discrete and interesting approaches  
38 that other councils have been using to bring those on-the-water  
39 perspectives into the conversation, help them potentially meet  
40 BSIA criteria, and that sort of thing.

41  
42 If you go to the next slide, I'll just walk through a couple of  
43 quick examples. The first one has to do with really trying to  
44 find ways to standardize some of the information about what's going  
45 on on the water, and so our Recommendation 3.5 is about developing  
46 fishery performance reports.

1  
2 These have been used by both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic  
3 Councils. These are basically standardized reports that are  
4 developed over the course of AP meetings, and they provide a  
5 variety of perspectives on things like species availability and  
6 size, fishing effort, market conditions, environmental variables,  
7 weather, those sorts of things.

8  
9 This information can be really important for filling gaps between  
10 assessments, and also provide an early-on-the-water indicator of  
11 changing conditions that might not have found its way into  
12 available fishery-dependent or independent indices.

13  
14 These are provided to the SSC and to the council in a standardized  
15 format, both within a given year across species as well as across  
16 years, and so it's really helpful for understanding potential  
17 trends or changes in the fishery over time. We had mentioned those  
18 five priority species earlier in the presentation, and so this  
19 could potentially, you know, be piloted with those initial five  
20 species.

21  
22 On the right here is just an example for Illex squid that the Mid-  
23 Atlantic has done, and just showing some of the feedback from their  
24 Shortfin Squid AP and some of the types of information that come  
25 out of those conversations and make it to the council.

26  
27 Along the same lines, you know, we talked about those fishery  
28 performance reports, but we also heard about, in terms of the  
29 interactions between the advisory panels and both the council and  
30 the SSC, there might be some opportunities to increase efficiency  
31 there.

32  
33 There were a couple of different approaches that we heard. One  
34 was around kind of bringing the meetings together in space and  
35 time, and so is it possible to co-locate at least some AP meetings  
36 with a given council meeting, especially if there are particular  
37 items of relevance to that AP, and we did hear a couple of real-  
38 time examples of where management action was informed by the AP  
39 being available.

40  
41 This was on the right side here, and you can see the Pacific  
42 Council, in 2023, there was a finding of overfished for pullback  
43 rockfish just before the council meeting, and an expected closure,  
44 but the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, which is the AP analog in  
45 that fishery, was meeting concurrently with the full council  
46 meeting, and actually had some discussions, and were able to find

1 a way to allow for a fishery using a gear type that had previously  
2 been tested, but not yet implemented, with an EFP, and so that was  
3 one example.

4  
5 Another one was around trying to prescribe a bit more SSC  
6 interaction with the APs, and so the Mid-Atlantic, for example,  
7 has a designated biological and socioeconomic lead that they assign  
8 to each of the species throughout the Mid.

9  
10 Those folks then attend AP meetings, and are able to bring that  
11 information back to the SSC directly, and also be able to ask any  
12 questions that might be particularly relevant for any scientific  
13 or management questions on the table, and so just another example  
14 of how some interaction there in real time might be a time savings  
15 and a way to get that on-the-water information and the conversation  
16 on it sooner.

17  
18 With that, I think I'm going to pass it back over to Deirdre, who  
19 is going to talk through a slew of kind of on-the-horizon topics  
20 that we're eagerly awaiting.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** We have a question. Ed.

23  
24 **MR. WALKER:** I just had a question about standardized fishery  
25 performance reports. You're saying that would come from the AP,  
26 and the AP members would fill in the blanks in the standardized  
27 form, and do you think that's a sample size to show a trend in the  
28 overall fishery, because our APs are ten to eighteen members from  
29 different sides of the table, ideally. I just wondered if you  
30 think that's a large enough sample size to provide useful  
31 information as trends in the fishery.

32  
33 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** That's a great question. I think it would largely,  
34 to some extent, depend on the context of the fishery, and so, if  
35 you have, you know, a large, diffuse recreational fishery, it might  
36 be, you know, less representative than a smaller, more concentrated  
37 commercial fishery, and so, depending on the specifics, or the  
38 specific issues that are being addressed, or concerns at that time,  
39 I could see it being more or less applicable, but that's a great  
40 point.

41  
42 Regarding kind of the information, and how that occurs, and so  
43 typically the AP meets, and then the responsible staff member  
44 prepares the summary and reviews it with the AP before finalizing  
45 it, and it's typically -- The way that it's standardized, they're  
46 kind of a template of standard questions that are asked at each

1 meeting, and so, the responses, those are what to use to develop  
2 a report.

3  
4 **MS. BOELKE:** Just to add a little bit, the flavor of them I think  
5 is what people really appreciate about them, is that they tend to  
6 focus on things that, you know, the council members, and SSC  
7 members, don't get from other sources, you know, really digging  
8 into the behavior behind maybe some of the trends, or, you know,  
9 why people are catching, or why catch has changed, the location,  
10 you know, really trying to get at the behavior and things that  
11 aren't tracked as closely in normal pathways, you know, about fuel  
12 and, you know, just weather, things like that, that are not  
13 normally captured, I think is really their real benefit.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Any other questions? Seeing none, back to  
16 you.

17  
18 **MS. BOELKE:** Great, and so we're almost done here. Thanks for  
19 your patience. If you go to the next slide, please, on the horizon  
20 topics, we did kind of set out a separate chapter, you know,  
21 subchapter, on this, because there is so much effort going on right  
22 now.

23  
24 As you're aware through the IRA funds, you know, really focused on  
25 this exact topic, all the councils are, in some form or another,  
26 working on projects like this, and so it's important to learn from,  
27 you know, all of that work that's going on around the country.

28  
29 We have noted and summarized a few that we think are a little more  
30 pertinent to this topic in the report. In particular, you know,  
31 the South Atlantic being a neighbor, they definitely are working  
32 on a program review that's going to include kind of how their  
33 council operates, but then also how they kind of work with the  
34 agency and the Science Center and the Regional Office, and so,  
35 obviously, being that you share many of those same partners, that  
36 would be an important thing to track.

37  
38 The South Atlantic, and we have a few other bullets on here also,  
39 in a great way of focusing on the communication and the actual  
40 decision tools. You know, if management becomes more efficient,  
41 and there's less opportunities for these, you know, big, open  
42 meetings, you don't want to lose too much transparency and trust,  
43 and so a lot of focus of some of these IRA projects is also thinking  
44 about the communication tools that would be needed to accompany  
45 these kinds of more efficient actions, to make sure that you're  
46 bringing the public along, and people are not going to be

1 surprised, at the end, if there's fewer meetings and availability  
2 and opportunities for them to kind of see what's coming, and so  
3 definitely having some of those as part of this overall story is  
4 also important.

5  
6 We've already mentioned the second bullet here, but it's definitely  
7 worth reemphasizing, this NOAA NEPA guidance, and, you know,  
8 specifically the proposed categorical exclusion and the expanded  
9 list is -- You know, your staff is already very involved in working  
10 on that, but it's an important one to highlight here. I'm sure,  
11 at some point in 2026, this will get more finalized.

12  
13 The executive orders, we have that at the bullet at the bottom.  
14 Again, your council, and your staff, have already responded to  
15 some of these things, but, again, efficiency, and reducing burden  
16 on the industry, are all themes of some of these efforts, and so  
17 they do kind of relate, and so we're just highlighting some of  
18 these things as things to continue to track.

19  
20 Then, finally, just next steps, and this was mentioned on the next  
21 slide already, but, just in terms of what Verena was explaining,  
22 if you could just advance it one slide, and I'm sorry. Thank you.

23  
24 We're going to, you know, listen to the questions and comments  
25 made here today, as well as the Full Council meeting in a few days,  
26 incorporate that, and there are some staff members reviewing the  
27 report more closely. We'll take all of that feedback and finalize  
28 the report in the coming weeks, and, as Verena mentioned, there  
29 will be a Phase 2 to this effort. That will be, you know, further  
30 defined in the coming weeks, in terms of what things this council  
31 wants to pursue in more detail under a separate project, and so,  
32 you know, more on this as kind of the Phase 2 begins after this  
33 project.

34  
35 The last slide that we have here, and maybe there's one or two  
36 more, is we -- The staff did ask us to try to look, as we were  
37 talking to other regions, for different ways that councils may be  
38 evaluating the performance of these efficiency approaches, and we  
39 did try -- We asked this question, and, you know, I would say we  
40 found basically that none of the councils have a very formal way  
41 to, you know, assess and compare different metrics related to  
42 efficiency, but, in speaking with them, you definitely hear that  
43 there are these benefits that they're experiencing at a staff  
44 level, and a council level, in terms of having more responsive  
45 management to help prevent overfishing, spending less time on  
46 document preparation, fewer reviews, documents being shorter, and

1 things like that.

2

3 While there's nothing formal that we came across, we do offer, in  
4 the report, a potential way to maybe compare, in a qualitative  
5 sense, some of the key metrics that the council would want to think  
6 about in terms of next steps, and which might help inform you which  
7 ideas might bubble to the top.

8

9 We've highlighted a few, but please don't take that as, you know,  
10 the ones you should look at. Hopefully you really look at all of  
11 the different ideas, and evaluate them, and these are just some  
12 candidate ways that you could maybe do that, in terms of ranking  
13 and fitting it with the system here, in terms of the data needs  
14 that you have and what your priorities are as a council.

15

16 This section is in the report, and is offered as a potential tool  
17 for you to think about as you hopefully prioritize some of these  
18 items moving forward, and then, finally, I think our last slide is  
19 just to encourage discussion, which thank you, and we've kind of  
20 had a little bit already, but we're definitely -- This is a draft  
21 report. We're looking for suggestions.

22

23 If you have experience, or awareness, of other regions that maybe  
24 didn't come up in our report, we would love to hear about them,  
25 and further improve the report, and include those examples, and  
26 like Andy mentioned one, although I was warned never to talk about  
27 red snapper in this area, and so that's maybe why we avoided that,  
28 but we can add more examples that would better illustrate some of  
29 these things.

30

31 We would really appreciate the advice to do that, and so these are  
32 just some trigger questions to get some discussion going for things  
33 for you to think about, and we did mention we brought this to the  
34 SSC, and so we have tried to incorporate some of the feedback we  
35 got from the SSC meeting a few weeks ago as well, and so thank you  
36 for your attention.

37

38 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. That was a lot of good information.  
39 Any questions, or comments? C.J.

40

41 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you both for presenting this. I think this  
42 was super helpful. Hopefully, throughout this conversation, you  
43 guys have kind of gotten two-cents from the council on kind of  
44 things that we think could move forward, or things that could need  
45 to be explored maybe a little bit more, just as it relates to the  
46 Gulf Council in particular.

1  
2 Thanks, Carrie, for bringing up the framework aspect of it too,  
3 because I think that's an important part of this whole process  
4 too, and so, I mean, I'm fully supportive of what you guys have  
5 addressed so far.

6  
7 I mean, I think you've heard my concerns about some of the  
8 particular ones that might be a little bit more tricky for us to  
9 navigate there, but, I mean, I think one of the lowest hanging  
10 fruit there is relative to catch limits, or anything along those  
11 lines, where maybe it's just a simple like if-then statement, as  
12 it relates to that, and like I was highlighting that like, if the  
13 quote is bumped up by X percentage, then it automatically moves  
14 forward, if the council not having to discuss allocations or  
15 anything along those lines.

16  
17 Very simple things that can help automate this framework, so we  
18 don't have to bring things that seemingly are simple, yet they  
19 require us, just from an administrative perspective, to go through  
20 multiple meetings, and so I think that could help streamline a lot  
21 of this. Thank you.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Andy.

24  
25 **MS. BOELKE:** If you don't mind, if I could just add, because it  
26 didn't come up, and, also, it's important to think about some of  
27 these if-then ideas, because they really can be very flexible, and  
28 they don't have to go all the way. You know, they don't have to  
29 do everything, and do it perfectly.

30  
31 As you mentioned, you can kind of step back and just almost tweak  
32 it a little bit, because everyone would then be comfortable, and  
33 some of the examples we found when they -- So they could be semi-  
34 automatic too, where you have something automatic, that people are  
35 comfortable with, and the rest of the council will always be okay  
36 with, and then you can have another layer, where it's more semi-  
37 automatic, where, if it needs more adjustment, you can go through  
38 a more regular process, where you have the SSC weigh-in, and you  
39 have a different approach, but having that kind of floor of an  
40 automatic in place, where it's pretty much okay, and let's just  
41 get through another year, and let's do this efficiently, as kind  
42 of a backup.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Andy.

45  
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks again for the presentation. There's really

1 a lot of great information to chew on. A couple of comments, one  
2 of which you noted was essentially what other regions are doing,  
3 and, in particular, I want to focus on the South Atlantic Council,  
4 right, because the work that this council does, and the species  
5 you manage, and the issues you face, are so similar across the  
6 South Atlantic and Gulf that it, to me, is going to be really  
7 important, moving forward, that we try to come up with the same  
8 tools and approaches as much as possible, because the same Regional  
9 Office is essentially working with both of those councils.

10  
11 The Caribbean is a little bit different, but, to the extent that  
12 we can work toward that, that would be a huge benefit, from the  
13 vantage point of my Regional Office.

14  
15 You know, one thing I didn't hear so much about was kind of timing  
16 of scientific advice. Maybe you touched upon that, but I think  
17 that's been another challenge for us, and so we've talked a lot  
18 about use of like interim analyses.

19  
20 I know, if Clay was here, you know, our goal is to have more of  
21 that real-time data coming off of the white ships and the research  
22 surveys, but, if we get a stock assessment in January, and we get  
23 the next one in August, and we get the next one in November, it  
24 creates this haphazard management approach, where everything is  
25 kind of coming in inconsistently, and then the timing of things  
26 really can be disruptive to when we can implement, or respond to,  
27 that science for management.

28  
29 I know certain regions kind of time their scientific advice so  
30 that it feeds into the management process, and so I think a greater  
31 emphasis on that is really important.

32  
33 Then just a couple of comments, and a question, and so the process  
34 you spotlighted, a slide or two ago with the Regional Office, and  
35 so we're calling it a lean process. It's essentially a formal  
36 review of kind of how efficient, or inefficient, things are  
37 operating with our planning teams when we're working on amendments  
38 and other actions with the councils.

39  
40 We see some opportunities that really align well with these  
41 recommendations. For example, there's data bottlenecks we know  
42 that are impeding some of the work of the council, and so how do  
43 we allow that data to flow to the council staff and make your work  
44 easier to do, and so we're going to continue to focus on that at  
45 the Regional Office.

1 The same is true about just how IPT meetings are run, the  
2 efficiency of them, how many members need to be on a planning team,  
3 because we have staffing limitations, and so I just wanted to let  
4 people know that there's this parallel effort that we're continuing  
5 to engage the council staff on to help with efficiency.

6  
7 Then my last question, maybe to Carrie, is, for the ecosystem  
8 component species, or the species in need of management, C.J.  
9 mentioned what the South Atlantic has done for their snapper  
10 grouper complex. I think it's been a really good model, and I  
11 can't remember, and is reef fish on the workplan for looking at  
12 species in need of conservation or management, because, if not, I  
13 think that would be something we would want to discuss further.  
14 Thanks.

15  
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and so I  
17 believe it was in our workplan from the executive order, and that  
18 we have a draft of that, and I guess all that will have to be  
19 reconsidered here, but I think you could -- When you're thinking  
20 about, you know, those species need to stay in our fishery  
21 management plan or not, you could also consider the ecosystem  
22 component species at that time. I think that makes sense.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Willie.

25  
26 **DR. GOLDSMITH:** I just had a quick response to Andy, if that's all  
27 right. Sorry, and just going back to your -- Thank you for the  
28 comments, you know, and that's super helpful to understand that  
29 some of that scientific information, and kind of how to get that  
30 into the conversation would be helpful, and certainly some councils  
31 have kind of regimented their process, such that the data is  
32 available kind of to inform their specifications.

33  
34 We didn't discuss it today, but we did have a couple of  
35 recommendations. Some are around -- Well, one is more of a  
36 finding, and it's more of around the assessment planning process  
37 that, you know, the NRCC in the Northeast conducts, and the STAR  
38 process on the west coast, which are less around conducting the  
39 assessments, as SEDAR does, and more around like the review  
40 process, and trying to streamline that peer review.

41  
42 I think the STAR process, in particular on the west coast, has  
43 been a good example of trying to align peer review with completion  
44 of a draft assessment, to try to get that information into the  
45 discussion as quickly as possible.

1 Then, when it comes to data kind of in the interim between those  
2 full assessments, we did hear some conversations around data  
3 access, as well as data reports, and this is back to kind of the  
4 NMFS-council collaboration, and some regions -- Basically, there's  
5 council access to like the CAMS database, for example, in the  
6 Northeast, which has allowed --

7  
8 While not, you know, a full assessment, it does provide kind of an  
9 early insight into that data availability, and it gives folks a  
10 chance to see what's going on, and then, also, the provision of  
11 kind of a standardized, or in some cases automated, annual data  
12 updates on not just catches, but things like observers, discards,  
13 those kinds of things as well, and so there's some other data  
14 examples that might be helpful.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. At this time, I would like to bring up Mr.  
17 Moncrief. Is there anything from the SSC discussion to highlight?

18  
19 **MR. TREVOR MONCRIEF:** All right, and so a lot of the SSC discussion  
20 centered around a lot of the points that were already brought up,  
21 specifically by Dr. Sweetman and Mr. Anson. We kind of went down  
22 that whole route. We definitely saw the CEs as, you know, a  
23 potential vehicle to gain some level of efficiency. We thought  
24 that was a good one.

25  
26 We had talked about the ecosystem component species, that there  
27 were a lot that kind of exist on the edge of that definition for  
28 us that could, you know, teeter either way. Oftentimes, I feel  
29 like, you all as a group -- More species get brought to add on  
30 than to get taken away, but I think there are certainly some  
31 candidates there that we've seen over the last couple of years  
32 that could be removed. Let's see.

33  
34 Going back through my notes, we had a member that brought up, you  
35 know, the consideration of HCRs, or varying MPs, as it related to  
36 the conversation, and, since they're becoming more and more in  
37 use, potentially that's a vehicle for efficiency.

38  
39 Then we definitely, you know, speak on the comment of the fishery  
40 performance reports. It's actually come up multiple times in past  
41 SSC meetings, and it wasn't as much geared towards something coming  
42 out of the AP as much as it was kind of a synthesis of a species  
43 altogether, as far as how the fishery has been performing and  
44 things of note, like how many times has this reached its ACL in  
45 the last ten years, what percentage of the harvest is coming from  
46 where, that kind of stuff.

1  
2 It's very beneficial, and it ties into the last one that we had,  
3 which was AP member inclusion to the SSC meetings. There's a lot  
4 of times where -- I'm thinking specifically back to the black  
5 grouper conversation that we had.

6  
7 The SSC members as a whole typically don't know how those fisheries  
8 operate in detail, and so, when you're trying to go through and  
9 analyze landings or whatever, as far as information you have on a  
10 species, you're making a lot of assumptions about a species that  
11 you really don't know what's going on with, or how the fishery  
12 operates, and so sometimes having that voice in the room to help  
13 guide that discussion -- I think it's very beneficial in the  
14 recommendation-making process that the SSC undergoes.

15  
16 Then the last one, and so we had brought up, you know, just a  
17 general question, and I think it's, you know, at least pertinent  
18 to the conversation. Obviously, the number-one issue that was  
19 identified through what was sent out was legal constraints, simply  
20 tying to MSA, NEPA, and Administrative Procedures.

21  
22 Obviously, the NEPA stuff is getting corrected a little bit, but  
23 we did have at least a question of was there any consideration of,  
24 you know, larger-scale, or that next level recommendation changes,  
25 that could potentially, you know, change this five-thousand-piece  
26 puzzle that you go through every time you try to go through a rule  
27 change, or any other process, down to a thousand pieces.

28  
29 It wasn't considered by Willie and his group. Obviously, they did  
30 their fair amount of diligence on everything they had available to  
31 them, and everything else going on, but that was one of the  
32 conversations we had in that room.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Any questions for Trevor?

35  
36 **MS. BOELKE:** Sorry, and not just a question, just to let you know,  
37 Trevor -- Thank you for the meeting. We did try to take a lot of  
38 your feedback, and we did include a new subsection about the status  
39 determination criteria, and using more automatic harvest control  
40 rules. That didn't come up in our conversations as a very  
41 efficient thing, I think, because it takes usually so long to  
42 develop, and a real investment of resources and staff capacity to  
43 develop those things.

44  
45 However, you know, from the conversation with the SSC, we did go  
46 back, and it is a new part of the report that I'll just highlight

1 for you to check out. There's a couple new pages about some  
2 examples of councils using those more automatic and semi-automatic  
3 control rules that we did include. Thank you.  
4

5 **MR. MONCRIEF:** Yes, and I think the group understood that, you  
6 know, every efficiency gained on that side is also confounded by  
7 the overarching process that you have to go through in order to  
8 get to those, even implementing or having the idea of implementing  
9 something like that, and so it's definitely a consideration, but  
10 yes, the overall complexity of the process I think kind of inhibits  
11 that from being truly efficient.  
12

13 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Any other -- C.J.  
14

15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No questions, but just thanks for your comments,  
16 Trevor, and congratulations on election as chair.  
17

18 **MR. MONCRIEF:** Thank you, sir.  
19

20 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Any other questions or comments? We have  
21 time to go through the document, if anybody has any questions or  
22 points of discussion in the document. Seeing none, okay, and there  
23 was no other business brought before this committee. Last chance.  
24 Seeing none, Mr. Chair, I'll turn it back over to you.  
25

26 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks.  
27

28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just, maybe  
29 at Full Council, we could get together with some of the committee  
30 members and try to come up with a plan to operationalize some of  
31 these, because I think we got a lot of other information that  
32 maybe, administratively, we might want to change things, or do  
33 things differently, and so maybe if you can give us some feedback  
34 on that, in addition to the streamlining recommendations, that  
35 could be helpful, by Full Council, so that we have some direction  
36 for our next steps of our phase of this project.  
37

38 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. It sounds like the committee has homework  
39 to be thinking about this for Full Council, unless anybody has an  
40 idea that they want to jump in right now. It doesn't look like  
41 it. Okay. You have homework for Full Council.  
42

43 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on November 3, 2025.)  
44  
45

- - -