

GULF COUNCIL

308TH MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Hyatt Centric

New Orleans, Louisiana and Virtual

January 28, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

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

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG

STAFF

Assane Diagne.....Economist
Matt Freeman.....Economic Analyst
John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
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

1
2 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**
3 Billy Archer.....Panama City, FL
4 Major Dean Aucoin.....LA
5 Jason Barrow.....Panama City, FL
6 Susan Boggs.....Orange Beach, AL
7 Gregg Bray.....GSMFC
8 Catherine Bruger.....Ocean Conservancy, FL
9 B.J. Burkett.....Panama City, FL
10 Mike Colby.....Clearwater, FL
11 Anthony Colletti.....FL
12 Scott Daggett.....Madeira Beach, FL
13 Jason Delacruz.....FL
14 Joshua Ellender.....LA
15 Richard Fischer.....LA
16 Jamie Gaspard.....LA
17 Jim Green.....Destin, FL
18 Marshall Gross.....Leeville, LA
19 Buddy Guindon.....Galveston, TX
20 Ken Haddad.....ASA, FL
21 Frank Helies.....NOAA
22 Sean Heverin.....Madeira Beach, FL
23 Scott Hickman.....Galveston, TX
24 Rachel Hisler.....Double Bayou, TX
25 Dylan Hubbard.....FL
26 Zack Istre.....Crystal River, FL
27 Gary Jarvis.....Destin, FL
28 Mark Kelly.....Panama City, FL
29 Randy Lauser.....Madeira Beach, FL
30 Larry Lemieux.....Panama City, FL
31 Brian Lewis.....Clearwater, FL
32 Alyssa Lopez.....
33 Stewart Miller.....Panama City, FL
34 Jeff Ready.....Panama City Beach, FL
35 Tom Roller.....SAFMC
36 Ashford Rosenberg.....Shareholders Alliance
37 Jeff Sharnowski.....Madeira Beach, FL
38 Randy Sobieraj.....Leeville, LA
39 Mike Sullivan.....Panama City, FL
40 Bill Tucker.....Dunedin, FL
41 Matt Walia.....NOAA OLE
42 John Walter.....SEFSC
43 Johnny Williams.....Galveston, TX
44 Dale Woodruff.....AL
45 Bob Zales.....Panama City, FL
46 Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL

47
48 - - -

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1
2
3 Table of Motions..... 4
4
5 Call to Order, Announcements, and Introductions..... 6
6
7 Adoption of Agenda and Approval of Minutes..... 9
8
9 Presentation: Update on Gulf Commission Programmatic Activities 9
10
11 Public Comment..... 18
12
13 Supporting Agencies Updates..... 71
14 South Atlantic Council Liaison..... 71
15 Louisiana Law Enforcement Efforts..... 74
16 NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) Report..... 76
17 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission..... 80
18 U.S. Coast Guard..... 80
19
20 Committee Reports..... 82
21 Administrative/Budget Committee Report..... 82
22 Law Enforcement Committee Report..... 84
23 Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report..... 89
24 Data Collection Committee Report..... 92
25 Outreach and Education Committee Report..... 103
26 Reef Fish Committee Report..... 106
27
28 Update on Documents Transmitted for Rulemaking..... 133
29
30 Discussion of Council Planning and Primary Activities..... 136
31
32 Other Business..... 136
33
34 Adjournment..... 138
35
36

- - -

TABLE OF MOTIONS

1
2
3 [PAGE 88](#): Motion to remove the closed session of the LETC to
4 discuss the Officer/Team of the Year nomination. [The motion](#)
5 [carried on page 89](#).

6
7 [PAGE 90](#): Motion to request an extension of the comment period on
8 the implementation of the proposed HMS rule of commercial and
9 recreational shark management measures to give the Gulf Council
10 ample time to comment. Additionally, the Gulf Council requests a
11 presentation from HMS at the April 2026 council meeting. [The](#)
12 [motion carried on page 91](#).

13
14 [PAGE 104](#): Motion to direct council staff to send a letter to NOAA
15 Fisheries encouraging NOAA Fisheries to develop a system for
16 providing appropriate marine regulatory areas and boundaries to
17 companies producing marine charts and mapping units. [The motion](#)
18 [carried on page 104](#).

19
20 [PAGE 107](#): Motion to direct staff to begin a document to designate
21 authority to the Regional Administrator to modify the federal for-
22 hire fishing regulations for red snapper on an annual basis, given
23 predetermined constraints on bag limits, minimum size limits,
24 fishing season start and end dates, and reopening the fishing
25 season prior to the end of the fishing year. [The motion carried](#)
26 [on page 112](#).

27
28 [PAGE 112](#): Motion to approve Reef Fish Amendment 62: Modifications
29 to Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures and that it be forwarded
30 to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and
31 deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff
32 editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document.
33 The council chair is given the authority to deem any changes to
34 the codified text as necessary and appropriate. [The motion carried](#)
35 [on page 114](#).

36
37 [PAGE 115](#): Motion to bring Reef Fish Amendment 58A: Shallow-water
38 Grouper Complex Management Considerations back to the council
39 after receiving the SSC review of the MRIP-FES pilot study results.
40 [The motion carried on page 122](#).

41
42 [PAGE 131](#): Motion to direct staff to begin a document to explore
43 options for enhanced flexibility for private red snapper
44 recreational management. Develop an action to consider carryover
45 of uncaught quota from the previous year within a state. Also
46 consider an action to allow transfer of some uncaught quota between
47 states within a current fishing year similar to 50 CFR
48 622.384(c)(2), which allows efficient in-season transfer of

1 Atlantic Spanish mackerel commercial quota between states in the
2 South Atlantic. [The motion carried on page 132.](#)

3

4 [PAGE 132](#): Motion to direct staff to begin a document to update
5 the catch limits for lane snapper based on the SSC's
6 recommendations. [The motion carried on page 133.](#)

7

8

- - -

9

1 The Full Council of the Gulf Council convened at the Hyatt Centric
2 in New Orleans, Louisiana on Wednesday morning, January 28, 2026,
3 and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

4
5 **CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS**
6

7 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you. I think
8 we all know our agenda is a little different today. We'll do the
9 best we can with what we have to work straight down the agenda.
10 Before we get started, I want to remind everyone about the working
11 lunch today. Council members, we'll have a thirty-minute break,
12 and have a working lunch here in the room. Okay, and we'll get
13 started.

14
15 Welcome to the 308th meeting of the Gulf Council. My name is J.D.
16 Dugas, chair of the Gulf Council. Please place your cell phone or
17 similar device on silent or vibrating mode. For the benefit of
18 all, we ask that private conversations take place outside the
19 meeting room. Additionally, alcoholic beverages are not permitted
20 in the meeting room.

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

28
29 The council consists of seventeen voting members, eleven appointed
30 by the Secretary of Commerce from various Gulf regions with diverse
31 fisheries experience, plus five state fishery managers from each
32 Gulf state and the Regional Administrator from NOAA's Southeast
33 Fisheries Service. Several non-voting members also participate.

34
35 Public input is essential to our deliberative process. We welcome
36 both oral and written comments throughout the process. Virtual
37 attendees wishing to speak during public comment must register
38 online. In-person participants should sign in at the registration
39 kiosk at the back of the room. Only one registration per person
40 is allowed. Public comment may conclude before the scheduled time
41 if all registered participants have spoken.

42
43 This meeting is being digitally recorded for the record. As a
44 courtesy, I ask that all participants seated at the table introduce
45 themselves beginning on my left.

46
47 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Kesley Banks, Texas.
48

1 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas Parks and Wildlife
2 Department.
3
4 **MS. BRENDA BALLARD:** Brenda Ballard, Texas.
5
6 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida Fish and Wildlife
7 Conservation Commission.
8
9 **DR. MICHAEL ALLEN:** Mike Allen, Florida.
10
11 **MR. ED WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.
12
13 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida.
14
15 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.
16
17 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama.
18
19 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Anthony Overton, Alabama.
20
21 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Lt. Jackson Morton, United States Coast Guard.
22
23 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.
24
25 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional
26 Office.
27
28 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.
29
30 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries
31 Commission.
32
33 **MR. JOHN MARQUEZ:** Johnny Marquez, Mississippi.
34
35 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Joe Spraggins, Mississippi.
36
37 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Billy Broussard, Louisiana.
38
39 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana.
40
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.
42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you all. Okay, and so, before we move to
44 the next agenda item, I'm going to turn the mic over to Dr. Simmons
45 to say a few words for us.
46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This morning,
48 I would like to recognize two very important, special people that

1 have passed on to a better place, and I'm going to start with Dr.
2 Benny Gallaway. Dr. Benny Gallaway was a respected fisheries
3 scientist, trusted partner, and longtime advocate for sustainable
4 fisheries in the Gulf of America.

5
6 As president of LGL Ecological Research Associates, Dr. Gallaway
7 devoted his career to relevant research that significantly shaped
8 management needs for better science, and it greatly improved our
9 understanding of numerous fisheries interactions with marine
10 resources in the Gulf.

11
12 He challenged the scientific community to bridge the gap between
13 contributions to research and management needs. Dr. Gallaway was
14 most well-known for his research supporting the Gulf shrimp
15 fishery. He identified a gap for many managers, and filled them
16 in a robust way, reducing our interactions with the Gulf shrimp
17 fishery and red snapper, other finfish species, and protected
18 resources.

19
20 Dr. Gallaway served on the council's Scientific and Statistical
21 Committee for many years, and his research and guidance deeply
22 influenced fisheries policy in the Gulf. Dr. Gallaway was known
23 for his integrity, generosity, and mentorship, and he set a lasting
24 standard for cooperative research across the Gulf.

25
26 We extend our sincere condolences to his family, his colleagues at
27 LGL Ecological Research Associates, and all who had the privilege
28 of working with him. Dr. Gallaway's contributions to fisheries
29 science and his enduring impact on our community will not be
30 forgotten.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons.

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** All right.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.

37
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next person
39 we would like to recognize is Captain Randy Boggs. Captain Randy
40 Boggs was a larger-than-life individual, a steadfast advocate for
41 the for-hire fishing industry, and a cherished member of our
42 council community. Captain Randy served on numerous council
43 advisory panels and was an active participant in the council
44 process, for as long as anyone can remember. Through his
45 thoughtful engagement and tireless dedication, he successfully
46 advocated for his industry, while earning the respect of fellow
47 fishermen, council members, and staff alike.

48

1 Randy was a man of many talents. He never met a stranger, and he
2 was always ready to help someone in need. He was committed to
3 creating more outdoorsmen and women in today's world, and he
4 delighted in passing along his knowledge and stories.

5
6 Randy is survived by his wife, Susan, his business partner and a
7 former council member, and their daughter, Elizabeth, who grew up
8 with the council and now runs a boat of her own, and sits on our
9 Ad Hoc For-Hire Data Collection AP.

10
11 Randy was a friend to all of us, and his legacy of service,
12 generosity, and dedication will live on through Susan and Elizabeth
13 and other family members in the countless lives he touched. We
14 are grateful for his lasting contributions and will remember him
15 with deep respect and sincere appreciation.

16
17 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, for those kind words.
20 With that, if no one has anything they would like to say, we'll
21 move on to Item II. All right. Adoption of the Agenda, and are
22 there any modifications to the agenda? Can I get a motion to adopt
23 the agenda? Dr. Sweetman.

24
25 **DR. BANKS:** Second.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Seconded by Dr. Banks. Thank you. Next is the
28 Approval of the Minutes. Are there any edits to the minutes? Any
29 changes? Not seeing any, can I have a motion to approve the
30 minutes as written? Captain Walker, and Dr. Banks seconds. Thank
31 you. Okay. Next, we'll move on to Item Number III. Mr. Bray
32 will give us a presentation, an update on Gulf Commission activity.

33
34 **PRESENTATION: UPDATE ON GULF COMMISSION PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVITIES**

35
36 **MR. GREGG BRAY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, council
37 members. My name is Gregg Bray. I'm the Assistant Director of
38 the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and I just wanted to
39 give you an update as to the programmatic activities at the Gulf
40 Commission.

41
42 We've had a couple of new activities that we've added, and I just
43 wanted to remind you of the role the commission plays in helping
44 you all make informed decisions here, many of which are very
45 difficult decisions, and so we thank you for the work that you do
46 here, and we appreciate your interest in the work that we do.

47
48 Just some brief history. The commission was established by an act

1 of Congress in 1949. It's a compact among the five Gulf states,
2 and our mission is to promote the better utilization of marine
3 resources in the Gulf of America, and we primarily do that through
4 data collection programs.

5
6 I think, as I go through these programs here, the thing I want you
7 to keep in mind, that permeates through all of these programs, is
8 I think our greatest role is the commission sits at this
9 intersection between state and federal data collection efforts,
10 and we work to help facilitate opportunities to discuss data
11 methodologies, data gaps, obstacles, and try to work towards
12 addressing these things, addressing regional needs and priorities
13 in a collaborative manner. That's our primary focus here, and
14 what we work really hard at, and so, with that in mind, next slide,
15 please.

16
17 The first program I'll highlight is the Southeast Area Monitoring
18 Assessment Program, or SEAMAP. That is our fishery-independent
19 arm of the commission. It's a federal-state-university
20 cooperative for the collection, management, dissemination of
21 fishery-independent data.

22
23 SEAMAP operates a suite of fishery-independent field surveys that
24 are focused on assessing the abundance and distribution of fauna
25 in the shelf and slope waters of the Gulf of America. They collect
26 data on size, sex, maturity, life history, and SEAMAP data are
27 used in stock assessments for thirty-five species or species
28 complexes.

29
30 On each of these slides, I'm going to give you a name at the
31 bottom. That's the program coordinator. If you have more specific
32 or detailed questions, that would be the person you would want to
33 reach out to.

34
35 We have a fishery-independent arm. The fishery-dependent arm is
36 the GulfFIN program that you've probably heard a lot about. There
37 are FIN programs all throughout the country, Atlantic, Gulf,
38 Pacific, Western Pacific, Alaska, all focused on the same general
39 goal of collecting, storage, disseminating marine fishery-
40 dependent data.

41
42 In our region, that's primarily focused in three major areas,
43 recreational effort and landings, commercial landings, biological
44 data, and I apologize, and I should have taken off SEFHIER from
45 the recreational bullet. SEFHIER 1.0 is no longer a thing, but,
46 besides the things I've listed here, GulfFIN also supports numerous
47 other things.

1 We're helping with the shrimp Early Adopter Program, IRA
2 recreational research projects, Southeast headboat survey data,
3 when there is funding available to support that. Anything fishery-
4 dependent in nature, GulfFIN tries to help with in the Gulf region,
5 and, just like SEAMAP, we provide all of our data to SEDAR, and to
6 the states, to help support stock assessment efforts.

7
8 The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program is one of the oldest
9 cooperative state federal programs. It originated from the
10 Commercial Fisheries Research and Development Act of 1965 and the
11 Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986.

12
13 The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act funding supports state
14 monitoring and assessment programs to gauge the health of
15 commercially and recreational important fish stocks. It supports
16 the development of commission management profiles and fishery
17 management plans, which assists the states in maintaining
18 sustainable fish stocks, and it currently supports data collection
19 for the Gulf menhaden commercial fishery in the Gulf.

20
21 In recent years, the IJF program has had additional funding that,
22 in addition to those three major bullets I just spoke of, has also
23 provided additional funding through state research funding
24 programs to help address unfunded data collection priorities at
25 the state level.

26
27 In 2016, the commission was approached by NOAA's Office of
28 Aquaculture to develop and manage a small grants program that would
29 assist with technical or regulatory opportunities with aquaculture
30 efforts in the Gulf region, and so we've had four major projects
31 under that program. The last two are still in progress, the
32 Regional Oyster Consortium and the Integrated Multitrophic
33 Aquaculture Program, and those are ongoing projects.

34
35 To date, the program has received almost \$12 million that the
36 commission has obligated for research and development of
37 aquaculture in the Gulf of America.

38
39 This one of the new programs, the Multi-Jurisdictional Finfish
40 Research Project, and so, in 2023, Congress directed NMFS to
41 partner with the Gulf Commission to provide grants to conduct
42 fishery-independent research on multi-jurisdictional fish species
43 in the Gulf that are data deficient, and they identified cobia,
44 tripletail, tarpon, and great triggerfish.

45
46 In 2025, last year, we were actually awarded \$5 million to
47 instigate that program, and commission staff developed an RFP to
48 gather critical data to support the management of both cobia and

1 tripletail, and the hope is that we will get additional funding in
2 year-two to expand it to address tarpon and great triggerfish.

3
4 The commission received three project proposals, and utilized a
5 review team of both external and internal science matter experts,
6 and, in mid-December, awarded funding to the University of South
7 Alabama to execute their project proposal, and that project work
8 should start early this year.

9
10 Our Sport Fish Restoration Program focuses primarily on issues
11 dealing with artificial reef and aquatic nuisance species. Our
12 program manager is the coordinator of the Artificial Reef
13 Subcommittee in the Gulf, that sits under our commission Technical
14 Coordinating Committee, and they deal with issues on coordination
15 of artificial reef research, monitoring, and management across the
16 five Gulf states, but they also interact with regional artificial
17 reef groups outside of our region on issues of national importance.

18
19 We've also implemented a pilot study, our Gulf Artificial Reef
20 Monitoring and Assessment Program, that is evaluating seasonal
21 conditions on low dissolved oxygen around artificial reefs, with
22 the goal of developing standardized baseline data for artificial
23 reefs across the Gulf, and he also serves in a coordination role
24 focused on aquatic nuisance species, with information sharing and
25 establishing continuity with the National Aquatic Nuisance Species
26 Taskforce, along with the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel
27 on Aquatic Invasive Species.

28
29 The Gulf is no stranger to fisheries disasters. The current
30 project that we have in place with regards to our fisheries
31 disaster program is the Return 'Em Program. I'm guessing most
32 people in the room are familiar with this program at this point.

33
34 Return 'Em Right was developed in response to the Deepwater Horizon
35 disaster, to help restore damaged reef fish populations from that
36 oil disaster, and Return 'Em Right collects data and monitors the
37 use of descending devices and other release practices to try to
38 improve survivability of reef fish post-release, and they do this
39 through a multitude of components.

40
41 They've utilized human dimension surveys to assess and monitor
42 changes in angler behaviors with regards to release practices and
43 use of descending devices. They've done fishery-independent
44 research looking at post-release survival and depredation of these
45 priority reef fish species that are impacted by barotrauma.

46
47 They do fishery-dependent monitoring, ongoing monitoring, to look
48 at changes in release practices, use of descending device,

1 conditions of released fish, and then a significant component of
2 this research has also been the education module.

3
4 They developed an online education model that both private and
5 for-hire anglers could go through, and, at the end of that, they
6 were provided gear, free descending devices and other release
7 tools, and, to this point, nearly 50,000 Gulf reef fish anglers
8 have gone through the training module developed by Return 'Em
9 Right.

10
11 This is the last program I'll highlight for you today, and so, in
12 2025, we were contacted by Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff
13 and asked if the commission would entertain the idea of providing
14 support staff to assist the Southeast Fishery Observer Program.

15
16 We had extensive internal conversations, and external
17 conversations, because this is a similar business model that's
18 used on the Pacific Coast, working with the Pacific States Marine
19 Fisheries Commission, and we have entered into a contract with
20 NOAA Fisheries to provide support staff.

21
22 We've hired nine new employees, that are located in the Galveston
23 and the Panama City Labs for NOAA Fisheries, and these folks are
24 primarily providing support through training observers, providing
25 safety training, quality controlling of observer data, and data
26 entry.

27
28 These support staff are overseeing observers that operate in the
29 shrimp trawl observer program, the shark coastal gillnet observer
30 program, the shark bottom longline observer program, the Gulf reef
31 fish observers, and platform removal observers.

32
33 Ultimately, we're very new to this. We're still learning a lot
34 about this program, and we're learning quickly, but, ultimately,
35 when Dave and I discussed this, and we discussed it with staff,
36 one of our hopes here is that -- So, in recent years, there's been
37 an interest from our state partners to learn a little bit more
38 about the data collected through these programs.

39
40 Primarily, at this point, the shrimp trawl data, and how that data
41 could be used to maybe inform state stock assessment efforts,
42 because there's a lot of state-water species that are collected
43 through some of those programs, and so we're hoping this provides
44 an opportunity for the commission and state partners to understand
45 the capabilities of the observer program and work towards accessing
46 data, which I said is what we do, and maybe be able to make that
47 available to the benefit of not just federal assessments, but state
48 assessments as well.

1
2 That is it for our update on commission programmatic activity,
3 and, Mr. Chairman, if there are any questions, I'll do my best to
4 answer.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Bray, for your presentation. Do
7 we have any questions? Mr. Geeslin.

8
9 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thanks, Gregg. I suspect we'll see something very
10 similar when we visit our nation's capital later in February. One
11 of the topics you all do a great job of sharing with our elected
12 officials is the funding challenges. Do you care to share any of
13 your, you know, projected funding challenges, any programmatic
14 changes, any sustainability, based on funding trends, where states
15 may need to prepare accordingly?

16
17 You guys do a wonderful job of, as soon as you get funds, you
18 notice us, and we start preparing, and it doesn't matter if it's
19 a SEAMAP, GulfFIN, any of the programs that we partner on, but I
20 just wanted to give you a minute to maybe forecast funding and the
21 sustainability of any of those programs into the future.

22
23 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and this last year was a challenge, with the new
24 administration and the thoroughness which they wanted to review
25 new obligations and new requests. We definitely struggled to get
26 money. The forecast going forward, we're still waiting to hear
27 from our federal partners as to what a 2026 funding allocation
28 looks like for many of our programs.

29
30 For instance, SEAMAP needs a new cooperative agreement in place.
31 They just completed a five-year cooperative agreement, and so
32 that's a little bit more of a burdensome task, and we fight a
33 little bit the process, because, a lot of times, we're told we
34 can't -- We can't instigate a new cooperative agreement without a
35 funding value associated with that.

36
37 We can't get a funding value associated with that until budgets
38 are approved, and NOAA Fisheries tells us what's available, and so
39 the process of getting money, and that's one of the things we're
40 going to talk about when we go up there. The process of getting
41 agreements in place, and getting money, seems to get more
42 cumbersome, as opposed to more easy, and so that's one of the
43 things we're fighting.

44
45 With regards to funding amounts, it's hard to say. You know,
46 leading up to this point, we heard the rumors of significant cuts
47 to NOAA Fisheries, which would mean pass-through to the commission
48 would be impacted, but maybe it's not as bad, but we just don't

1 know at this point what 2026 looks like, and beyond, but I will
2 say the process of navigating that seems to be getting harder,
3 and, the harder it gets, the more it butts up to when we run out
4 of funding, and need new money, and we enter this gray area.

5
6 How do we continue to work? How much pressure does that put on
7 our state partners, and our independent contractors and things, to
8 operate in a period of uncertainty funding-wise, and I worry that,
9 at some point, the rubber is going to meet the road, and there's
10 going to be gaps in data collection, because we don't have money
11 to keep programs in place during periods of uncertainty.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

14
15 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so Dakus touched upon several things I
16 was going to ask, but, first, I just want to thank you and Dave
17 and the commission. You guys do an outstanding job. Anytime I
18 need to pick up the phone and call you guys, you're always
19 available.

20
21 You know, one of the things that kind of resonated with me with
22 your presentation is I feel like kind of the scope and scale of
23 your core mission at the commission is growing, right, and
24 changing, and so, similar to Dakus, you know, I was interested in
25 kind of asking, you know, how do you see the mission changing, and
26 evolving, and then, as you've touched upon already, kind of the
27 erosion of some of those core programs that the commission
28 initially was stood up to accomplish, right, and so where do you
29 have the areas of greatest concern at this stage?

30
31 **MR. BRAY:** I think, you know, I can speak to the one that's closest
32 to me, as being part of the FIN program since day-one. We've
33 already lost some things that I would say are critical. We haven't
34 had any money to help support biological data collection, age and
35 growth structures for the state level, to supplement the states
36 and what they do, for a couple years now.

37
38 You know, the idea of age-based stock assessments, and the ability
39 to have robust enough data to support that, that's a concern, and
40 that's been eroding for a little while now. I think what I'm
41 fearful of is we're about to enter into a conversation of, with
42 reducing federal funding support for some of these data collection
43 programs, what can we do as a collaborative group, state and
44 federal, to try to pick up some of those gaps.

45
46 We've already had discussions about, well, we've lost funding for
47 port sampling for the Southeast Headboat Survey. Well, maybe can
48 the states come in and pick that up, and I think it's going to be

1 a difficult conversation, because, as we've talked about, I don't
2 think state budgets are increasing, in the face of rapidly
3 decreasing federal funding availability, and so I think, you know,
4 as we've been preparing for a national state directors meeting,
5 Andy, and that's going to be held in the Gulf this year, and so,
6 obviously, we're helping lead the charge there, and I think one of
7 the important issues that we as a group need to sit and talk about
8 are what are our core priorities?

9
10 What are the things that we have to maintain, and what are some of
11 the other things that might get sacrificed during this period of
12 funding uncertainty that we're going to have to adapt to with how
13 we do science and management, and I think some of these things,
14 that we've robustly funded and supported in the past, are going to
15 -- We're going to either lose programs, or, for things like maybe
16 dockside sampling, recreational effort, SEAMAP surveys, whatever
17 the programmatic topic is, we're going to be looking at less
18 precision, because we can't do as much sampling, which presents
19 greater uncertainty for you all around the table when you look at
20 those results and have to make management decisions around data
21 that's even less certain than it was before.

22
23 I think we have to identify what are the greatest priorities, and
24 direct the available funding we have to support those, recognizing
25 we're going to lose some things along the way, I think.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

28
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, just briefly, just a comment, just to
30 follow-up, and so not finalized, because we don't have the
31 allocations, but the budget passed does provide the councils and
32 fishery commissions with \$45 million dollars, which is a \$700,000
33 increase, and so it's not going to keep up with inflation, right,
34 and so it's pointing toward, obviously, some of the challenges
35 that you're facing, but it's a lot better than I think what we
36 were expecting, and so that's at least encouraging.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin.

39
40 **MR. GEESLIN:** Just to Andy's point, and I'm glad we're -- I'm glad
41 we're in sync here. Gregg, in a rapidly-changing environment, new
42 technology, and not necessarily new concerns, but a very what I
43 would say is somewhat of an aggressive approach that we've taken,
44 collectively, to look into -- I'm speaking to some of the emerging
45 studies that we have going on, some of the camera work, and the
46 effort estimates, and that's encouraging.

47
48 You know, this is a tough discussion. I would encourage us,

1 collectively again, as state directors, as Gulf states, with Andy's
2 team, with Dr. Porch and Dr. Walter, to really think about, you
3 know, our prioritized list, and what we have to have, and what
4 it's kind of nice to have, right, moving forward, because I would
5 hate to back up on some of these new, emerging, you know,
6 technologies that may provide us a data stream that we haven't had
7 that -- You know, to your point, age and growth.

8
9 That is that is critical to understanding life history of our
10 fishes, but, at some point, do we look back on that catalog and
11 say, well, okay, that was that was -- We can scale that down, to
12 some respect.

13
14 I don't know where this occurs, Andy, but I would embrace that
15 that discussion, just as we're having these conversations. Even
16 at the state level, we can think about filling gaps, messaging to
17 our elected officials, both in the House and the Senate, as to
18 where these critical needs continue to support these science-based
19 management decisions.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. Do we have
22 any other questions for Mr. Bray? Not seeing any, thank you.

23
24 **MR. BRAY:** Thank you.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Next on the agenda is going to be public
27 comment, and it's scheduled in about five minutes. I would say we
28 -- Let's take a four or five-minute break. I would ask you not to
29 venture off and have a party in the hall, and let's get started on
30 time.

31
32 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. If we could quiet down in the back, we'll
35 get started with public comment. Thank you. Good afternoon,
36 everyone. Sorry, and good morning.

37
38 Public input is a vital part of the council's deliberative process,
39 and comments, both oral and written, are accepted and considered
40 by the council throughout the process. The Sustainable Fisheries
41 Act requires that all statements include a brief description of
42 the background and interest of the persons in the subject of the
43 statement. All written information shall include a statement of
44 the source and date of such information.

45
46 Oral and written communications provided to the council, its
47 members, or staff that relate to matters within the council's
48 purview or public in nature. Please give any written comments to

1 the staff, as all written comments will be posted on the council's
2 website for viewing by council members and the public and will be
3 maintained by the council as part of a permanent record. Knowingly
4 and willfully submitting false information to council is a
5 violation of federal law.

6
7 We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual
8 attendees. Anyone joining us virtually that wishes to speak during
9 public comment should have already registered online. Virtual
10 participants that are registered to comment should ensure that
11 they are registered for the webinar under the same name they used
12 to register to speak.

13
14 In-person attendees wishing to speak during public comment should
15 sign in at the registration kiosk located in the back of the room.
16 We accept only one registration per person.

17
18 Each speaker is allowed three minutes for their testimony. Please
19 note the timer lights on the podium are on the webinar. They will
20 be green for the first two minutes and will blink yellow for the
21 final minute of testimony. At three minutes, the red light will
22 appear, and a buzzer may be enacted. Time allowed to dignitaries
23 providing testimony is extended at the discretion of the chair.

24
25 If you have a cell phone or similar device, we ask that you keep
26 them on silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. Also, for
27 all to be able to hear the proceedings, we ask that you have any
28 private conversations outside the meeting room. Please note public
29 comment may end before the published agenda time if all registered
30 in-person and virtual participants have completed their comment.

31
32 We'll do as we usually do and rotate between online and in-person
33 in the room, and we're going to start with Captain Dylan Hubbard
34 in the room, and then we'll go online.

35
36 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

37
38 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to
39 speak. Captain Hubbard, central west Florida. As far as SEFHIER
40 goes, I was a little disappointed in committee that there wasn't
41 any movement. I'm hoping today at Full Council we'll move forward.
42 We need this document moved forward and finalized as soon as
43 possible to get that recreational data collection back on the
44 water.

45
46 We've heard a lot at this meeting, in committee, when talking about
47 amberjacks. We just heard a presentation about the challenges
48 with recreational data collection. We're asking to give this

1 data to you. We wanted to do it before, and we had the opportunity,
2 and, unfortunately, it got taken away from us. We would love the
3 opportunity to do it again and supply you with more recreational
4 data.

5
6 Also, the red snapper federal for-hire season, the potential of it
7 starting June 1 instead of May 22, like was finalized last year in
8 August, is really frustrating, and I would ask the table here to
9 do whatever you guys can to prioritize that, moving forward, and
10 make sure we do have that May 22 season. So often, we can see
11 closures happen really fast. We've seen emergency rules in past
12 cases. I feel like there's a lot of precedent set here, and
13 opportunities that we can make this happen.

14
15 As far as the red snapper season extension last year, there was
16 some discussion in committee about it was last minute. I've heard
17 people say, oh, it's too late in the year. I want to thank SERO,
18 and the Regional Administrator, for doing that. I don't care how
19 late in the year it is. If there's quota left on the table, give
20 us the opportunity to go catch it, please, and I don't care what
21 kind of notice I have. If we open it, we can sell some trips, and
22 I appreciate the opportunity.

23
24 Thank you for moving forward on the lane snapper catch limit
25 increase. I would ask the council to prioritize moving this
26 forward as fast as possible.

27
28 Also, mutton snapper, we saw, in the landings, that we're
29 potentially starting to face the same issue with mutton snapper
30 that we saw with lanes. We're seeing it on the water every day.
31 We went from catching one or two mutton snapper a year to catching
32 ten to twelve a trip.

33
34 It is ridiculous, the growth in the mutton snapper population, and
35 their expansion further and further north, and so I'm concerned
36 that we're going to start to see the mutton snapper issue become
37 much like we've faced with the lane snapper, and so, whatever we
38 can do as a council to avoid, that would be awesome.

39
40 Also, thank you for moving forward on Amendment 62 and leaving the
41 preferred in Action 3 alone. I would love to see that continue
42 moving forward at final council. Thank you.

43
44 Also, shallow-water grouper, we would love to see that season,
45 that recreational season, for scamp be as long as possible, and
46 stay where it is, that July 1 through the end of the year. I think
47 that's our biggest possible access, and the best of this bad
48 situation.

1
2 State management, I would love to see SEFHIER set up, and on the
3 water and working, before we explore state management. I think
4 having conversations around this table, and exploring things, is
5 what's great about this process, but I think there's some things
6 that we need to do before we have that conversation, informed
7 conversation, and, as Dakus mentioned earlier, science-based
8 management.

9
10 We have to have some science before we move forward in this tough
11 conversation and so let's get SEFHIER back up on the water. Let's
12 get the Great Amberjack Count data in. Let's get the MRIP-FES
13 pilot study in. Let's have some data to talk about this science-
14 based management, please, and that's all I've got. Thank you.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Hubbard. Do we have any
17 questions? Not seeing any, Dylan, thank you. Next, we're going
18 to go online to Mr. Joshua Ellender.

19
20 **MR. JOSHUA ELLENDER:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the
21 Gulf Council. My name is Joshua Ellender. I am located in south
22 Louisiana, and I'm a charter captain, and I also represent -- I'm
23 the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Louisiana Charter
24 Boat Association.

25
26 This morning, I'm just going to make it kind of short and sweet,
27 just going to the old state management push, and so I'm a firm
28 believer in it. I think we should keep it going as much as possible
29 and make it fair and equitable for everybody involved.

30
31 Being fair doesn't mean everybody is going to like it, but it's
32 still fair all around the table. What I would like to see is that,
33 as far as sector separation goes, is that we give the states the
34 opportunity to make that decision for each individual area.

35
36 It's not fair for everybody to be, you know, pooled in one bowl,
37 if you will, or put in one pool together. We all operate
38 differently. We have different seasons. Our opportunities to go
39 catch is different, and so let's just keep that separate. Let's
40 let the states decide that, and so that's about it. That's all
41 I've got today. If you have any questions, I'm open for answers.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Josh. Any comments? Do we have any
44 questions? We have a question from Mr. Sanchez.

45
46 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Good morning, Josh. I just wanted to ask you, and
47 do you have a state or a federal permit?
48

1 **MR. ELLENDER:** I have neither. I used to manage a federal permit
2 for Coco Charters, which had -- I think they had ten federal
3 permits.

4
5 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, Josh, thank
8 you. Next, we'll move on in the room to Mr. Mike Colby. Next
9 online will be Jim Zurbrick.

10
11 **MR. MIKE COLBY:** Thanks, council. I'm a charter operator out of
12 Clearwater. I'm still the president of our Clearwater Marine
13 Association, headboat charter operator, and I normally do not like
14 making a comment on something that I haven't read yet, and that's
15 referring to the state management for federally-permitted charter
16 boats.

17
18 I know it's probably going to be a contentious issue, but,
19 personally, and our guys in our association are not very familiar
20 with it at this moment, but I can tell you that, for me, I don't
21 have to get the flu to know I don't want it, and I think I will
22 let that just sort of sit right there, but what -- In our
23 association, what we are discussing is putting SEFHIER right there
24 on the launching pad.

25
26 I worked, for a lot of years, on the voluntary ELB project that
27 was the precursor to SEFHIER, and we had funding through National
28 Fish and Wildlife Federation. I had 180 federally-permitted
29 charter boats in that voluntary project, and, in that first year
30 of data, I presented that data to SEDAR 60.

31
32 Our graph line showed that the reporting frequency at the end of
33 that first year was almost 90 percent, and so SEFHIER can be
34 successful. These folks at SEDAR, they had never been presented
35 in the recreational charter fishery with a transition from paper
36 to electronic.

37
38 They had never been presented, in the charter industry, a data
39 collection device that was real-time, on-the-water, trip-level
40 reporting. They wanted more of it, and so there was a great need
41 for SEFHIER to just get started, and I understand there are
42 challenges with funding, but our guys really want to see this move
43 ahead.

44
45 As far as equipment for this, I still have a VMS on my boat. I
46 mean, it's decommissioned, but, many of the guys that were in the
47 first level of SEFHIER, they still have some of that equipment,
48 and so that's something that you might be mindful about as we look

1 at alternatives for funding. Thank you.
2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mike. Do we have any questions? I'm
4 not seeing any. Okay. Next, we'll move online to Mr. Jim Zurbrick.
5
6 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Hello. Can you hear me?
7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. We have you.
9
10 **MR. ZURBRICK:** Well, thank you very much. Thank you so much for
11 allowing me to speak here. Jim Zurbrick, from Steinhatchee. I
12 was very frustrated when I listened about the slow-boat SEFHIER
13 progression. We have got to move. Just like Mike said, we have
14 got to move this forward. This is so important, to have two data
15 streams, charter and commercial, providing the data streams, and
16 so we need to really fast track this.
17
18 Also, I'm against the state control of the federal charter boats.
19 It works. We're going to get SEFHIER initiated. It's going to be
20 great, and so I think we need to talk about it, but that's not the
21 direction I think we ought to go.
22
23 I've got a -- Quickly, I wanted to say I do support the decrease
24 of shallow-water grouper. My problem is the allocation, and I
25 think you're going to hear a lot of that today, and so that's my
26 opinion on that.
27
28 I want to clarify something about the dealer permits. There were
29 some questions that dealers might just be speculators. Patty and
30 I, the Zurbricks, have a shareholder account in our name, and we
31 keep it in our name, so we don't have the liability. When my
32 fishing vessel, Jolly Rogers II, goes fishing, I can separate the
33 liability.
34
35 On top of that, we are federal dealers, and I take my quota,
36 because a dealer can't own shares, a dealer permit can't, and so
37 what we do is we transfer out of the Jim and Patty account and
38 feed the Jolly Rogers II fishing vessel we own, and then all the
39 five guys that fish for me in Steinhatchee.
40
41 Now, I can prove all my landings. I mean, we just unloaded a boat
42 Monday, and so we're actively putting quota on boats that actively
43 fish for me, and, as we explore what we're going to do, we have to
44 keep in mind that the Shareholders Alliance is one of those
45 organizations that probably needs a carve-out. It's a nonprofit.
46 The work they do, the help they give fishermen who can't locate
47 quota, at a discounted price, is just great.
48

1 Let's see here. Getting back to the shallow-water closure, we
2 need to go forward with removing that shallow-water closure for
3 the rec sector. The charter guys need it. It's probably the best
4 way to go, and I thank you very much.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. We have a question from
7 Captain Walker.

8
9 **MR. ZURBRICK:** Go ahead.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Jim. I'm curious to hear if you had any
12 thoughts on, if we were to proceed with the leaving dealer permits
13 in, how could we manage legit dealers like yourself, versus people
14 trying to, you know, just use it as cover to maintain a leasing
15 business.

16
17 **MR. ZURBRICK:** Well, Ed, now, since my wife, Patty, handles all
18 the trip tickets, once we get the electronic -- Right now, the
19 state trip ticket system is speaking with the federal system, okay,
20 and so you know who has landings, and you know how this quota is
21 being issued. All you do is go into my shareholder account, and
22 you see that, all the people I've fed with quota, I bought their
23 fish, and so you can track this.

24
25 **MR. WALKER:** That's very interesting. Thanks for that insight.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Zurbrick?
28 Not seeing any, thanks, Jim. Next up will be Captain Bob Zales,
29 followed by Zack Istre online.

30
31 **MR. BOB ZALES:** Bob Zales II, Southeastern Fisheries Association.
32 First, I want to thank you all for recognizing Randy and Benny. I
33 knew both of those people for a long time, worked with both of
34 them, and they're great friends, and great people, and they're
35 going to be greatly missed.

36
37 Amendment 62, we, on Action 1, Preferred 3. On 2, Preferred 2,
38 and, on 3, Preferred 2, and we would encourage the Fisheries
39 Service, and I know Andy has done everything he can, with the
40 backlogs in D.C., to get this thing moved forward as fast as
41 possible. All these amendments that have been approved to be
42 implemented need to be moved forward.

43
44 On 58A, because of the fact that, a couple of years ago, you all
45 passed a motion that said you wouldn't play with allocation based
46 on FES until it got straightened out, right now, with 58A you're
47 playing with allocation, and, as far as I know, FES still isn't
48 straightened out. We don't have the presentation, and we don't

1 have the information, and so we would encourage you to delay that
2 amendment until such time as the data gets straightened out.

3
4 You all heard comments yesterday about the lack of effort in areas
5 where scamp historically have been caught, and so a lot of
6 reduction, I suspect, in the numbers of scamp landed is because
7 the effort is just not there to bring them in, and so the data
8 needs to be straightened out before this is moved forward, and, at
9 the same time, because of the backlog, if you move this thing
10 forward, it may be a year or two before the thing gets done anyway,
11 and so you're not looking at a lot of lag time, I don't believe.

12
13 On the for-hire fishery, moving to state management, we are
14 completely opposed to that, and we don't think that that's a good
15 idea. The for-hire fishery has done well since the limited-entry
16 permits were first required. They're still doing pretty good.
17 The permits have value. Everything is working, and we think that
18 the industry overall, the majority, and you heard the comments at
19 the last meeting, and the overwhelming majority was opposed to it.

20
21 SEFHIER, all the electronic data programs that are there,
22 especially SEFHIER, you've got the platform. There's no reason to
23 reinvent that wheel, and we would encourage the Fisheries Service
24 to move forward as fast as possible.

25
26 Now, a lot of this is going to be incumbent on us, as industry
27 people, to work with Congress and other people about funding,
28 because we know money is a problem, and so, on lot of these issues,
29 it's incumbent upon us to go to Congress to get the money, try to
30 get the money anyway, to get this stuff done. Once it gets to the
31 agencies, then work with the agency to be sure that funding is
32 spent where we need to have it spent, and so, other than that, if
33 you have any questions, I'll try to answer them.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Zales. Do we have any
36 questions? Not seeing any, Bob, thank you. Next online is Zach
37 Istre.

38
39 **MR. ZACK ISTRE:** Can you guys hear me?

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.

42
43 **MR. ISTRE:** This is Zack. Is it possible to move me to the end?
44 I'm in and out of traffic, with bad service right now, and can you
45 put me at the end, and I'll get everything ready for then, if
46 possible?

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Zack. We'll move you to the bottom of the

1 list.

2

3 **MR. ISTRE:** Thank you, sir.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up in the room will be Mr. Mark Kelly.

6

7 **MR. MARK KELLY:** Before I get started, there is several from Panama
8 City that's trying to get on virtually, and are having difficulty,
9 and so, if something has crashed, or whatever on that end, and I'm
10 sure you're probably aware of that by now.

11

12 I'm Mark Kelly. I'm from Panama City. I've got two charter boats,
13 federal charter boats. I have dual permits, and I'm fully invested
14 in an IFQ system, and so my main concern today is the state
15 management for the federal for-hire boats. I'm dead set against
16 that.

17

18 I think that opens up -- We've done everything. I've been in the
19 process before we even had permits, and so we've done everything
20 you all have asked us to do. We've capped the effort, and I feel
21 like you're putting us in a pool of unknowns for us, because NMFS
22 does a fabulous job of protecting the species, and the states are
23 all about the money, and that's a big concern of mine.

24

25 Also, I'm ready to see the logbook program, electronic logbook
26 program, for the charter for-hire to be expedited. We need it,
27 and we're asking for it, and we'll do whatever. I would recommend,
28 if we're doing it, to start out as small as you can with it, and
29 then graduate the fishermen into it. That way, they're not
30 overwhelmed with it, and every year add a little piece, if you
31 need to or whatever.

32

33 Also, this May the 22nd opening that happened last year, and so
34 we're going to be a year into it, and it's not -- We don't even
35 know if it's going to open May the 22nd, and that's horrible
36 management, because some of us have already told our charters and
37 all, and so we don't know if it's June the 1st, or June the 22nd,
38 and, well, don't they know, and that's what they ask about you
39 all, is don't you all know?

40

41 Well, you know, nobody understands how things are done, but I would
42 like to see it open May 22nd. If you could expedite that, or do
43 whatever it takes, that would be great. We've still got a massive
44 dolphin and shark problem, and we sure would like to have some
45 help on that. That winds me up.

46

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

1
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks for being here, and I appreciate your
3 comments about the season, and I certainly sharing in the
4 frustration of how long rulemaking is taking. A question for you,
5 and I've asked this to several captains. We should have a good
6 sense, I think, by March as to whether or not we're going to be
7 able to open the season by May 22nd or not, right, and so how far
8 in advance are you booking trips? When would be a kind of ideal
9 time period to really inform the fleet about the start date of the
10 season and the end date of the season if we can't get May 22nd in
11 place?

12
13 **MR. KELLY:** So what are my feelings on May 22nd? I mean, as far
14 as the start date, and so evidently there was a post on the Facebook
15 of Mexico about -- I thought it was already a done deal, and so I
16 have booked several trips in that timeframe, but I have went back
17 and -- Because these are people that's gone with me for twenty or
18 thirty years, and, you know, you're only as good as your word, and
19 so we've had to move those trips already.

20
21 I would love as much time as I can get on May 22nd. I would take
22 it all the way to the 1st of May. I wouldn't want it there to get
23 it open, but, unlike the December opening, that's not enough time
24 to do a whole lot. I mean, we don't have no -- What Christmas
25 business we have, it didn't benefit me on the opening in December.
26 Anyway, that answers your question.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Kelly. Any other questions? Not
29 seeing any. Thank you. Next, we'll move online to Mr. Dale
30 Woodruff, and he'll be followed by Mr. B.J. Burkett. Dale, are
31 you with us?

32
33 **MS. BERNADINE ROY:** Mr. Woodruff, you'll have to unmute your line
34 to speak.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We're going to move on. We're having
37 problems connecting with Dale, and so let's go back in the room to
38 Mr. Burkett.

39
40 **MR. B.J. BURKETT:** My name is B.J. Burkett. I'm here representing
41 myself and my three charter boats/commercial fishing boats out of
42 Panama City, Florida. I'm also here representing our Panama City
43 Beach Charter Association. We have about close to a hundred
44 federal permits in our area that are involved with our association.

45
46 The main thing I'm here to talk about, and it's not even on the
47 agenda for this meeting, but it's state management. We're really
48 struggling with the concept of it, because of what has happened in

1 the last several years with the council. There has been, I would
2 say, a semi-consistent platform that we were able to fish off of
3 that NMFS has created, and so we have stability. We have our days.

4
5 That's kind of set out, and it's been growing every year, but the
6 issue I have with state management is, as soon as the states took
7 over the recreational side a few years ago, we have been seeing a
8 drastic decline all over the Gulf. We talked to people in Texas,
9 talked to people in south Florida, Alabama, Louisiana.

10
11 The fish are getting smaller, and there's not as many of them.
12 Now, there are some areas, like my area, and they're in really bad
13 shape. The snapper are just not there anymore. We have a fairly
14 strong artificial reef program going on right now. There's reefs
15 going in the water, but just no fish to get on the reefs. Natural
16 bottom, they're just not there. Are we still catching fish? Some.
17 No limits, and it's getting kind of sad, and all this has happened
18 with state management.

19
20 If you put our federal industry in the state management, we cannot
21 see any benefit to the fishery. This council is supposed to be
22 here for the fishermen, but mainly for the fishery, to keep the
23 fish around, and, if you put us in the state management, that is
24 going to open the doors to where the fishery is going to keep
25 declining. We need to -- I would prefer you all to take state
26 management back, if you want to see this fishery get better. Take
27 it out of the recreational's hands. That's what needs to be done,
28 in our opinion.

29
30 You all, as a council, pass everything in here as a majority vote.
31 When you -- If you take the permits that are in the Gulf, the 1,200
32 permits, and there's only about maybe a hundred people that are
33 wanting this state management, and that's less than 10 percent.
34 Can you all pass something with a 10 percent vote? You can't, and
35 you shouldn't, and so just keep that in mind, that the majority of
36 the stakeholders do not want this, and that's what you all should
37 go on.

38
39 The logbooks, we support the logbooks. We need logbooks. It's
40 something that will help consistency, and last, but not least, the
41 dolphins and sharks are still a major problem. I don't see you
42 all pushing for anything to help that.

43
44 We would really appreciate it if you all would get behind us, and
45 try to help find out the problem with that, and solve it through
46 the uppers. We can't do it, but I feel like some of you all have
47 got enough pull where you all can help us, and that's all I got.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burkett. Do we have any questions?
2 Not seeing any, thank you. We'll move online to Mr. Mike Sullivan.
3
4 **MR. MIKE SULLIVAN:** All right. Are you all there?
5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We've got you.
7
8 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Okay, I jumped up the list pretty quickly. Okay,
9 yes, and thank you all very much for allowing us to speak. I am
10 Mike Sullivan, owner-operator. I have several certified charter
11 boats, federally-permitted, also dual permitted with commercial
12 permits. I've been in the industry thirty-one years.
13
14 I am against state management. My opinion on this is, the National
15 Marine Fisheries Service, this is what you all do for a living.
16 You've done a great job rebuilding the snapper stock, you know,
17 over the last ten years. You know, up to ten years ago, the stock
18 was in great shape, and, as we've transferred to state management,
19 to where, in my opinion, it becomes more of a political thing,
20 where the governors just come in and go, hey, I'm going to give
21 you 200 days of snapper, without any true science behind this, as
22 you all would have, and our fishery is in a serious decline of
23 snapper.
24
25 I mean, I've been to these meetings, and talked and listened, and
26 I haven't heard one person say, in the last couple of years, that
27 the fishery is doing better, rebounding. Like it's becoming a
28 little bit of chaos, and I would love you all to continue to manage
29 our fisheries, and I wish you managed all of it.
30
31 I am for us getting electronic logbooks for the federal for-hire.
32 We definitely need to be held accountable. We want to know if
33 we're staying in our lane or not. You know, again, I've been in
34 this my whole life, and I still have many years to come. I want
35 to keep a continuous, steady livelihood.
36
37 I heard you ask Mark Kelly about the knowing when we could open
38 the seasons and stuff like that. Yes, I'm like him. It's been
39 posted places -- You know, customers have called me about the May
40 22nd, and I also understand some of it is out of your hands, but,
41 at the same time, like I also don't understand why it's not
42 opening, you know, guaranteed that day, and it's hard for these
43 people to line trips up.
44
45 It as yourself when you go on vacation. You can't, you know, in
46 one week, or two weeks, gather up the friends and set something
47 up. A lot of this has to be done months in advance, where people
48 request time off to come down to go fishing, and so it makes it a

1 lot tougher on us in the business-wise to be able to pre-plan these
2 things.
3
4 Then one other thing I want to touch on is, obviously, yes, we
5 have a shark problem. I would love to see the shark quota
6 commercially, you know, free up, to where there could become a
7 shark industry again, to try to help some of this predation that
8 we go through every day, where they're eating one out of every
9 three or four fish. You know, I mean, that's terrible on the
10 stock, also. I feel like the pendulum has tilted with the sharks.
11 You know, we've let them get a little too abundant, and that's
12 pretty much it for me.
13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. Do we have any
15 questions? We do. Dr. Overton.
16
17 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Yes.
18
19 **DR. OVERTON:** Mike, where do you fish out of? I didn't catch where
20 you're from.
21
22 **MR. SULLIVAN:** I'm at a Panama City, Florida, at Captain Anderson's
23 Marina.
24
25 **DR. OVERTON:** Okay, Thank you.
26
27 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Yes, sir.
28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Mr. Sullivan? Not seeing
30 any, thank you, Mike.
31
32 **MR. SULLIVAN:** Thank you for your time. You all have a great day.
33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up in the room, we have Mr. Larry Lemieux.
35
36 **MR. LARRY LEMIEUX:** Good afternoon, Gulf Council. My name is Larry
37 Lemieux. I'm a charter boat at Captain Anderson's Marina. I am
38 federally-permitted. I also have a commercial king mackerel permit
39 as well.
40
41 I'm going to touch -- I guess you got all the Panama City guys
42 kind of first. I'm not for the state management. We've seen a
43 steady decline in snapper fishing in the last years. I've stood
44 at this same podium in this same building, I think three years
45 ago, and all these gentlemen in this room, this charter for-hire,
46 and told you all snapper was in trouble.
47
48 Well, maybe you'll finally see it in black and white, when you get

1 your stock assessment out, and I believe it's coming in a couple
2 months. You know, the longer snapper season, we really appreciate
3 that little bit we got last Christmas. Yes, it helped some of us.
4 For the most part, not so much.

5
6 I am a little disappointed we're not getting to the Friday before
7 May, Memorial Day when we -- You know, like some of the other
8 gentlemen touched on before myself. You're booking -- These people
9 are booking trips well in advance to come down on Memorial Day,
10 which is going to sell out on our beach, hopefully, knock on wood.

11
12 You know, you have to call them back. I had a gentleman call, and
13 I had already booked him for a couple trips, and I had to call
14 back, and I had to completely go sideways and say, well, now I
15 don't know. It's definitely going to be June 1, but I don't know,
16 you know, and it doesn't leave us much leeway in our booking
17 calendar when sometimes you book up six, eight months in advance.
18 With that being said, it's just -- I was hoping for, you know, the
19 Memorial Day opening this year, but who knows if we'll get it.

20
21 I would rather see snapper open a little earlier and go through
22 the end of August. I think most of the guys in the room would be,
23 you know, in agreeance. Another thing for the logbooks for the
24 SEFHIER program, I'm definitely for it in the for-hire sector. I
25 think the information is more accurate, and more available, for
26 you guys. I think it should be reinstated to help everybody that
27 does this in this fishery.

28
29 I think you guys definitely need to keep this in your ballpark,
30 and not give it to the state again. When we have a governor
31 change, he could go sideways, and who knows what might happen, and
32 so I want to see you federal -- Us federal guys stay with you
33 federal folks. You all done -- You know, you've kept us in business
34 this long, and let's hope you keep us in business a little bit
35 longer.

36
37 Then, of course, the last, you know, dolphins and sharks,
38 obviously, are a problem. With the Marine Mammal Act, dolphins
39 are probably always going to be a problem. With sharks, I would
40 definitely like to see something to make them where they're
41 valuable in a market, where we could have maybe a reduction in
42 their stock, because, like Captain Sullivan said, it's out of hand.

43
44 Somebody is going to get hurt. It's this only time before somebody
45 really gets hurt charter fishing by a shark, whether it be a hand
46 or finger. It's just we can prevent this, moving forward, and I
47 know it's a very hard issue for you guys, but, other than that, I
48 appreciate you guys' time, and I'm sure I'll see you again. Thank

1 you.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Larry. Do we have any questions? Not
4 seeing any, thank you. Next, we'll move online to Mr. Dale
5 Woodruff.

6
7 **MR. DALE WOODRUFF:** Hi. Can you hear me now?

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead, Dale.

10
11 **MR. WOODRUFF:** Awesome. Dale Woodruff, President of the Alabama
12 Charter Fishing Association. I also have a multi-passenger and a
13 six-pack boat, federally-permitted. I guess, before the public
14 comment, what's important and what's not important, if we have to
15 do some cutback with you all, is the states trying to take over
16 the federal management of the for-hire industry.

17
18 It seems like we've had a state go over, and it's like we need to
19 make some kind of rule that, if a state goes over, instead of a
20 small payback of what they went over, maybe it needs a double, or
21 triple, such as, if a state goes over 85,000 pounds, the following
22 year, they have to pay back 170,000 pounds, or even 255,000 pounds,
23 to keep them from going over, since we do have a lot of people
24 that are trying to comply.

25
26 What would it look like as far as the greater amberjack being
27 managed as a pelagic? I listened to Powers the other day talking
28 about some of our fish that were tagged along the northern Gulf
29 that were caught in the Caribbean, and so, if our fish are coming
30 and going, year after year, depending on the ebbs and flows of the
31 currents, and bait, management definitely needs to be changed,
32 because we just can't keep calling the amberjack a reef fish when
33 they decide they just want to leave whenever.

34
35 Scamp, I don't think we need to take such a drastic measure. If
36 we have to do some sort of management, let's maybe reduce the bag
37 limit, so we don't have to worry about the mortality on these fish.
38 We catch them from 700 feet of water to fifty feet of water, and
39 you know nothing will live that good out in 700, even with the
40 device sometimes.

41
42 Then keep working on the SEFHIER. Maybe even go to one fish per
43 person on the scamp, and I don't know if I said that. Keep working
44 on SEFHIER, and let's get it rolling. We need this information.

45
46 As far as the red snapper season with the charter federally-
47 permitted boats, if we can get the May 22nd date, that'd be great,
48 but if we have a full -- If we have a long season, how about let's

1 try to maybe split the season, and so a hard stop date around
2 August 15th, and then have another date of October 1st to start,
3 through -- Through possibly December 31st, or when the quota is
4 met.

5
6 Then, of course, I'm not at the meeting physically, but, from what
7 it looks like, from what I can see, there's very few people for
8 state management of the for-hire industry, and then may God bless
9 the Boggs family.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dale, for your comments. Do we have
12 any questions? Not seeing any, thanks again, Dale. Next, we'll
13 move on in the room to Mr. Jason Barrow. Next, online, will be
14 Mr. Jeff Sharnowski.

15
16 **MR. JASON BARROW:** Good morning. I'm Jason Barrow from Panama
17 City Dive Center over in Panama City Beach, Florida. I'm an owner
18 and operator of one of the largest recreational dive fleets along
19 the Gulf Coast. I have one federal boat and two state boats that
20 we operate year-round.

21
22 I personally would not like the state to take over the federal
23 side of the management. Just in the last couple of years, the
24 longer seasons, depending on the weather, we've really seen a
25 drastic decline of snapper populations, especially around our
26 inshore wrecks, inside the state boundaries, and I just don't think
27 they have their grasp on the data and the research that the federal
28 side has.

29
30 I would really like to see the federal continue, and not have the
31 state take it over, but that's basically what I wanted to voice my
32 concerns over. Thank you for what you guys are doing, and keep up
33 the good work. Thank you, guys.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jason. Do we have any questions? Not
36 seeing any, next, online, is Mr. Jeff Sharnowski.

37
38 **MR. JEFF SHARNOWSKI:** Yes, and can you hear me?

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead, Jeff.

41
42 **MR. SHARNOWSKI:** Good morning. My name is Jeff Sharnowski. I
43 fished out of Madeira Beach, Florida for red grouper. I bought my
44 first commercial rod-and-reel boat in 2000. It was a thirty-foot
45 Island Hopper.

46
47 I fished those IFQ qualifying years. I bought my second boat in
48 2006, and sold it in 2010 to add the shares to my first boat, but

1 it still wasn't enough to fish all year long, and so I went to the
2 open market to get another 5,000 pounds, and that was only enough
3 to fish ten months out of the year.

4
5 I did approximately ten trips per year between 2010 and 2014, and
6 my average yearly total catch was just over 31,000 pounds, with
7 only one year less than 30,000 pounds. I sold my boat with this
8 permit in 2015. It was the only way I could sell it. I had the
9 hopes of getting a larger, more comfortable boat.

10
11 Then, in 2015, life happened, and I decided to take some time off
12 from fishing. In 2017, I heard fish were hard to catch, and so I
13 made a business decision to wait to see where this was going before
14 buying another boat, and I'm glad I did, because, when you set the
15 quota at three million pounds, I couldn't justify with that small
16 allocation. It was just too big of a business gamble.

17
18 When this IFQ system was started, it was said we could use it when
19 it was best for us to go fishing, because of weather, boat safety,
20 market conditions, et cetera. Now I feel you're forcing me to
21 make a business decision before I feel I'm ready, or I'll lose my
22 shares. I don't believe the red grouper stock has recovered.

23
24 To explore my options, I put all my shares on the IFQ marketplace.
25 If I do sell, I would like to sell it in a package deal, so they
26 can have some bycatch shares. I advocated for the IFQ loan program
27 just for this purpose.

28
29 I would really like to sell to a small up-and-coming person in the
30 industry. One person who has contacted me was only in the industry
31 for two years, and didn't qualify for the loan program. Most of
32 my offers have been mainly for everything but the red grouper, and
33 someone offered to buy my gag for seventy-dollars a pound, but, at
34 this point, I'm not willing to separate, just in case I do get a
35 boat and a permit again, or, if I find a new entrant, they will
36 need my bycatch shares.

37
38 On the red grouper commercial quota pool, with the number of pounds
39 you're talking about, it doesn't sound like you're trying to help
40 any commercial fisherman I've ever known. It sounds like you're
41 giving them to a recreational boat with a permit. Have them get
42 some skin in the game and buy me out.

43
44 With this increase in quota, this feels like 2016 all over again,
45 when you increased the quota in October 2016, and then, two years
46 later, you slashed it by more than half. If we don't learn from
47 our mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them. Thank you for your
48 time.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jeff. Do we have any questions? I'm
3 not seeing any. Thank you, Jeff. Next, we'll go to Mr. Gary
4 Jarvis, and next, online, is Mr. Bill Tucker.

5
6 **MR. GARY JARVIS:** Captain Gary Jarvis. Good morning, everyone.
7 I'm the Vice President of Destin Charter Boat Association, which
8 represents federally-chartered fishermen.

9
10 I've been fishing professionally since 1978. For those that don't
11 want to do any math, that's forty-five years as an active charter-
12 for-hire and commercial fisherman. My boats are dual-permitted.
13 I'm going to try to finally retire this year, and wean myself off
14 of the fishing career that I've had.

15
16 I'm adamantly against state management of the federal for-hire
17 charter industry. In 2008, in this very city, I introduced sector
18 separation to this council. In 2015, it was signed into law, and
19 what that did is it, by law, gave us -- It recognized sector by
20 name. It gave us an allocation of the historical participation in
21 recreational fisheries for our non-boat-owning public that fish
22 upon our boats, and part of that plan was a self-reported near-
23 real-time data collection system, where we were on the cusp of
24 that.

25
26 We gave it a good shot, and lost it in the courts on a couple of
27 issues but the new SEFHIER program has addressed that lawsuit, and
28 it will pass a judicial review, and that was also one of the
29 cornerstones, because we understood that, with that allocation,
30 and with that identity, and the protection under federal law to
31 exist came responsibility.

32
33 That's why the self-reported data collection system was one of the
34 cornerstones of the SOS plan, and so I just really encourage you
35 to remember that, and it's not that -- There's been some comments
36 about our red snapper fishery is in decline, and I agree
37 wholeheartedly with those men that are on the water, but, more
38 importantly, every four years, there's a new administration in the
39 states, and they might be really friendly to the federal charter-
40 for-hire industry, or they may not.

41
42 States went noncompliant in 2006 and 2007, which led to sector
43 separation. We were forced, because the states weren't our
44 friends, and, throughout the time, especially after 2018, when the
45 Lott amendment prevented fair access, a lot of the governors have
46 appointed people that are from the recreational lobby, and really
47 haven't supported the charter-for-hire or the commercial
48 industries, and so it's not that maybe our state chairs today are

1 hostile to our industry, or the commercial industry, but the long-
2 term track record is they have not exactly been our friends either,
3 and so state management scares the bejesus out of me.

4
5 As I sit here telling you I'm about to retire, I still care about
6 the next generation of fishermen that are actively sitting on
7 \$400,000 and \$500,000 boat payments, and need that stability that
8 sector separation has given us throughout the time.

9
10 Also, because of the problem with the May 22 start, I highly
11 recommend that we just do a June 1 to October 31 opening, to give
12 us a chance, not only to have that stability and the opportunity
13 to keep our businesses up and running, but just to compensate for
14 this apparently lack of priority that the council saw back in
15 August of last year when you made final action on that May 22
16 state.

17
18 Basically, Andy, I'm asking you to throw us a bone, to make a
19 compromise. We'll probably get closer to our ACL, and our catch,
20 and, also, that November and December doesn't work, for especially
21 the northern Gulf. Everybody has already transitioned to college
22 football and hunting, and so I don't think there was a dozen red
23 snapper trips run on that second opening, out of 120 federally-
24 permitted charter boats in our fleet. Thank you very much.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Jarvis. Do we have any
27 questions? Not seeing any, thank you. Next, online, will be Mr.
28 Bill Tucker.

29
30 **MR. BILL TUCKER:** Hey. How are you? How is my audio?

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Bill.

33
34 **MR. TUCKER:** Okay. Bill Tucker, commercial fisherman from Dunedin,
35 since 1985. My comments address Amendment 59A and B. From the
36 very start, commercial fishermen never wanted catch shares to be
37 owned outside the fishery. It was the Gulf Council, just prior to
38 final implementation of the IFQ, who dug in and refused to move
39 forward unless our IFQs were made available to the general public.

40
41 Commercial fishermen strongly disagreed, but, in the end, we
42 relented. We did manage to get a five-year exclusive period before
43 it completely opened up to public investment, and it gave us time
44 to consolidate.

45
46 Now, in 2026, well over a decade later, the council seems
47 determined to reverse course and require a commercial reef fish
48 permit to participate in the system. This is a flip-flop that

1 everyone sees, and it creates a very unstable business environment.
2 It's no wonder new entrants are skeptical to invest their capital
3 in the grouper fishery. The council keeps moving the goalposts.

4
5 Young people see the council's ambivalence towards historical
6 fishermen and the substantial financial investments in the fishery
7 that they made. Potential new entrants see the council's
8 willingness to kick out the very people the council itself insisted
9 on including in the IFQ.

10
11 Young people are understandably cautious about risking their
12 resources and their futures to a council seemingly intent on
13 disrupting the business plans of the existing participants.
14 Changing the rules of the game midstream does not promote stability
15 in business or in commercial fisheries.

16
17 We don't fish for sport and pleasure. This is our work. It's
18 dangerous. We have consciously sacrificed our time, labor, and
19 capital for it. We do it to earn a living. We desire and work
20 for accountable fisheries, for the benefit of the fishery and for
21 the fishermen.

22
23 The only real barrier to entry in our IFQ fisheries is access to
24 capital and the willingness to take reasonable and calculated
25 risks. A stable regulatory environment is where the council can
26 help. We need stability to succeed in business. Potential new
27 entrants will not invest their time or their money where the
28 goalposts are constantly shifting.

29
30 Young, as well as old, fishermen require a stable environment,
31 where they can recoup their investments and generate a profit.
32 They need to know that, when they borrow money from the Fisheries
33 Finance Program, that there will be a stable and accountable
34 fishery to support them as they pay off a loan.

35
36 New entrants will not invest in a fishery. They will not
37 collateralize their homes for a fishery loan in an environment as
38 unstable as the council creates through amendments like 59A and B.
39 Thanks for considering my perspectives as you move forward.

40
41 Our futures are in your hands. Please remember that it's IFQ
42 fishermen who put grouper and red snapper on the plates of millions
43 of Americans who don't catch fish for themselves. Please work
44 with us to continue this heritage. Thank you, and, if you have
45 any questions, I'm happy to answer them.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Tucker. Do we have any questions?
48 I'm not seeing any, Bill. Thank you. Next up, in the room, is

1 Mr. Sean Heverin, and he will be followed by Ms. Catherine Bruger.
2 Go ahead, Sean.

3
4 **MR. SEAN HEVERIN:** Hello. My name is Sean Heverin from Madeira
5 Beach. I own three commercial longline vessels and one bandit
6 vessel. I also run a fish house and manage about eighty or ninety
7 boats across the Gulf.

8
9 I wanted to speak first off about the shallow-water grouper. My
10 opinion on this is that we're using recreational estimates that
11 have a high margin of error to determine that scamp are overfished,
12 which I disagree.

13
14 I think that the best indicator of the fishery are the commercial
15 landings, to get the true health of the fishery. I think that
16 it's unfair to the commercial sector to have proposals of taking
17 away percentages from the commercial sector to give to the
18 recreational sector, because these recreational estimates are
19 being said that the recreational is catching a lot more, and so
20 the scamo are overfished, and so, to make it fair, we're going to
21 take it from commercial to give to recreational. I disagree with
22 that.

23
24 I think the management council should look at commercial landings,
25 and give more weight to them, determining landings and estimates
26 and the health of the fishery, versus using estimated data that
27 has a high degree of error to make management decisions.

28
29 I would like to see better data collected, and maybe push the
30 decision on the shallow-water back later, until we can get some
31 better data collected on that. If a decision has to be made, then
32 I would like to see the commercial -- I would like to see the
33 current percentages stay the same, where commercial is at 80.1
34 percent and recreational is at 19.9 percent.

35
36 Then, going forward after that, I would like to talk about the red
37 grouper pilot program. I think that's a great idea, and I fully
38 support that. I have three longline boats that catch, combined,
39 over 100,000 red grouper a year. I own about 11,000 red grouper
40 shares that I've bought in, and so I think it's a great idea.

41
42 I've heard the Fisheries Finance Program brought up in previous
43 testimony. I've applied for that. I'm going through that process
44 right now. One disagreement I have with the program, which is
45 hurting my ability to get a loan, is, first off, I've never got a
46 loan to buy IFQ shares. I've had to purchase all the shares that
47 I own outright with money I've saved from fishing, and so I was
48 trying to get a reimbursement for the shares and permits and boats

1 that I've already owned.

2
3 I was told, by the loan officer, they will only give you credit
4 for the original value of your assets that you own, and not the
5 current market value, and so, for instance, I bought a South
6 Atlantic fishing permit back in 2010, when I fished in the South
7 Atlantic. They would only give me credit for the original purchase
8 price, which was \$30,000, when they're valued around \$100,000 now.

9
10 Then I bought a longline endorsement, a few years ago, for
11 \$200,000, but, right now, the value has dropped to \$150,000
12 estimated value. They would only give me credit for \$150,000, and
13 so it's kind of like hypocritical that they would give me the lower
14 of the two values, and so I would just like to see the Fisheries
15 Finance Program modified to give you current market value and
16 assessed value on the assets that you own for getting a loan
17 through there.

18
19 Then, finally, I would like to add that I think that there should
20 be some mandatory catch reporting for the private rec sector to
21 get better data collection, to make management decisions on how
22 it's going to affect all three sectors. That's all I got.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Heverin. We have a question from
25 Mr. Osborne.

26
27 **MR. OSBORNE:** I'm just curious on that loan. Was it the same loan
28 officer for both times?

29
30 **MR. HEVERIN:** Yes.

31
32 **MR. OSBORNE:** What was the explanation?

33
34 **MR. HEVERIN:** They didn't really have an explanation, and the other
35 point I made is that -- I'm not in this situation, but I said that,
36 you know, if I got quota at the initial outset of the program by
37 the government, what value would you give on that, if I'm trying
38 to get a cash-out loan on that, and they said they don't know.

39
40 I just thought it was strange that they couldn't put a value on
41 the asset that you own to get, you know, a cash-out loan there,
42 and so, anyway, I'm just doing this to share my experience with
43 that to, you know, future quota purchases for people that are
44 trying to go through the loan process.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Sean. All right. Next up, online, we
47 have Ms. Catherine Bruger.

48

1 **MS. CATHERINE BRUGER:** Chair, can you hear me?

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, ma'am. Go ahead, Ms. Bruger.

4
5 **MS. BRUGER:** Great. Thank you. Good morning, and thank you all
6 for the opportunity to provide comment. My name is Catherine
7 Bruger, and I'm a second-generation fishery biologist from St.
8 Petersburg, Florida. I've worked in fisheries for about twenty
9 years, first with FWC, nearly a decade with NOAA at SERO, and now
10 as a manager of fish conservation for Ocean Conservancy. My focus
11 is on ensuring sustainable fisheries, recreational management, and
12 data modernization.

13
14 My comments to the council today focus on data collection issues.
15 Fundamentally, when considering transitioning methodologies, new
16 programs should improve data quality compared to legacy methods.
17 Metrics to evaluate improvements include things like improving the
18 accuracy, and/or precision of catch and effort estimates,
19 timeliness of data, and achieving higher sampling rates at a
20 reduced cost to taxpayers and license holders.

21
22 Both the SEFHIER program and commercial electronic reporting
23 propose improvements to data quality. SEFHIER proposes census-
24 based reporting, and, with validation, will improve accuracy and
25 timeliness of data compared to surveys, and there's a lot of
26 support from the industry.

27
28 Additionally, shifting commercial logbooks from paper-based to
29 electronic reporting increases accuracy and will result in
30 improved management responsiveness through greater efficiency and
31 interoperable systems. Ocean Conservancy supports implementation
32 of both SEFHIER and commercial e-logs.

33
34 Regarding expansion of state-delegated management, we have serious
35 concerns. First, positive conservation outcomes have not been
36 proven yet for red snapper. Recent landings updates demonstrate
37 declining size trends throughout most of the Gulf, and we continue
38 to hear reports of localized depletions.

39
40 While increasing season lengths is positive for angler
41 satisfaction, this comes at the cost of declining catch rates,
42 another troubling sign.

43
44 Greater amberjack has been overfished for over twenty-five years.
45 There isn't a lot of wiggle room for management error. It's too
46 risky for both the health of fish stocks and the stability for
47 fishermen.

1 In addition, it's unclear if state-delegated management has
2 improved data quality. The state data collection enterprise
3 remains fractured, and data is not transparent, obscuring regional
4 effort trends and increasing uncertainty. There are nationwide
5 data standards for recreational fishing surveys and data
6 collection, which include elements like developing calibrations,
7 producing annual reports, undergoing peer review, and making the
8 data available to the public.

9
10 These data standards underwent review by the National Academies,
11 and the final report was released yesterday. Largely, the panel
12 concluded that the data standards are appropriate and recommended
13 minor adjustments to strengthen them. While it's encouraging that
14 commitments have been made by the states, and a shared database is
15 in progress, achievement of these data standards remains
16 ambitious.

17
18 We reiterate adherence to these data standards is both the antidote
19 to the current dysfunction for red snapper data collection and a
20 prerequisite before considering expansion. Without evidence that
21 stock health is trending positively, data standards are met, and
22 data quality is measurably improved, Ocean Conservancy does not
23 support consideration of expanded state-delegated management. We
24 offer additional recommendations in our letter, and thank you for
25 your time.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Bruger. Do we have any questions?
28 Not seeing any, thank you, Catherine. Next up, in the room, is
29 Mr. Ken Haddad, followed by Mr. Richard Stiglitz online.

30
31 **MR. KEN HADDAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and council members. My
32 name is Ken Haddad, American Sportfishing Association. I'll
33 comment on several things.

34
35 Red grouper, we support the changes in red grouper management
36 measures based on the conversion from FES to the State of Florida
37 survey. We would like to note that this results in a reduction in
38 the percentage of allocation to the rec sector. We have
39 consistently advocated that a conversion in landings like this is
40 not an actual change, but a recalibration, and so that's why we
41 are supporting an actual change.

42
43 On 58A, as with most folks, we're disappointed in the lack of
44 sufficient and timely data, and that we don't have the results of
45 the FES study baked in. With that said, we support 58A in its
46 current form, and that the preferred alternatives provide a
47 balanced distribution of the new catch allowance, based on sector
48 catch histories.

1
2 I would also like to point out that the commercial sector had an
3 IFQ quota that never constrained their catch, and the rec sector
4 did not have an ACL at all, and so both sectors have been fishing
5 somewhat unconstrained. 58A thus sets allocations, and it does
6 not really change them.

7
8 We are open to the idea of phasing-in the changes, or delaying
9 implementation, but, based on discussions yesterday and last
10 evening, it seems like the long-term results would very likely
11 result in more severe cuts than implementing those cuts now, and
12 so we think that passing this amendment now is probably the best
13 of some bad choices.

14
15 On the deepwater grouper rec mandatory reporting, we recognize the
16 near impossibility at the moment of actually improving the
17 statistics through mandatory reporting. I want to be very clear
18 that we have supported smartphone technology and self-reporting
19 for years and years. The fishermen are not the issue.
20 Implementation and the science are the issues.

21
22 Just a note that we believe that maybe a solution to all of this
23 is independent surveys and recruitment indices as a long-term
24 management strategy, and then, finally, thank you for keeping the
25 rec initiative recommendations on the forefront, and I want to
26 point out that one of those recommendations is to dig deeper into
27 self-reporting by the recreational communities. Thank you.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Haddad. Do we have any questions?
30 Not seeing any, Ken, thank you. Next, online, we'll go to Mr.
31 Jeff Ready.

32
33 **MR. JEFF REDDY:** Good morning, and thank you. I'm Jeff Reddy.
34 I'm a charter captain out of Panama City Beach, also representing
35 a couple other captains here in our marina.

36
37 We are, first off, definitely opposed to the federal for-hire
38 moving to state control. It's been working fine at the federal
39 level and should continue to be there. As others have said, moving
40 that to state, they haven't -- Not that they haven't done a good
41 job lately, but, in the long-term, changing up -- Changing of
42 governors, and administrations, really does open that up to become
43 a disaster in the future, and so we're definitely opposed to moving
44 that to state control.

45
46 As Mark Kelly had said earlier on another point here, in regarding
47 to seasons and dates, announcing and making decisions on season
48 openings earlier rather than later is always more beneficial when

1 we are booking trips well in advance for these seasons, especially
2 with returning clients, and it's really hard for these people that
3 are booking months in advance, and make plans for their vacations,
4 when we do have to call them and say that, you know, the date has
5 been changed, or, you know, we're still not sure of what the date
6 is. We would like to see those decisions, you know, being made
7 earlier, so that we can let our clients know.

8
9 On another topic, I know there's not a lot anybody can really do
10 about dolphins. Shark management, however, we would love to see
11 shark management -- You know, the council do something about that.
12 Predation is definitely out of hand in the northern Gulf, and it
13 is affecting the fishery quite a bit, and that's all I've got, and
14 so thank you for your time.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Ready. Do we have any questions?
17 Not seeing any, thanks, Jeff. Next up will be, in the room, Mr.
18 Billy Archer.

19
20 **MR. BILLY ARCHER:** Good morning. My name is Captain Billy Archer.
21 I'm from Panama City, Florida. I'm a third-generation fisherman.
22 I am a dual permit holder, and I participate both the charter-for-
23 hire and commercial sectors. Thank you for letting me speak to
24 you this morning.

25
26 2015 was a David and Goliath moment for my industry. Sector
27 separation, Amendment 40, was approved by this council, and it has
28 provided the tools and means for a stable, robust, and accountable
29 fishery management plan. Under Amendment 40, the charter-for-hire
30 industry has been provided federal protection, through the MSA,
31 that gives the federal permit holders the right to exist, the right
32 to fish our own red snapper quota, and protection for the nation's
33 red snapper fishery for our customers.

34
35 More importantly, to keep us from being swallowed up by the
36 thousands of state-licensed guideboats that legally must stay
37 inside state waters to stay compliant, and so why would any federal
38 permit holder want to join your takeover of state fisheries, or
39 federal fisheries?

40
41 I, for one, do not support delegating management authority to the
42 Gulf states. Louisiana and Texas are prime examples of how not to
43 do it. How can they turn a blind eye to enforcement problems,
44 inconsistent opening dates, and bag limits? In my opinion, it is
45 gravely unfair to the federally-permitted small fishing businesses
46 in their states. It is for this reason I do not want federal
47 permits managed by separate governing bodies. Five states are
48 five potential problems.

1
2 I do, however, support federal for-hire data being collected by
3 one source, to maintain low uncertainty, and ask the council to
4 move forward with public hearings on the current version of
5 modifications to the Gulf for-hire data collection program, the
6 new version of SEFHIER. Thank you for your time.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Archer. Do we have any
9 questions?

10
11 **MR. ARCHER:** Also, whoever moved this meeting, the public
12 testimony, up to the mornings, good job.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Archer. Next, online, will be Mr.
15 Brian Lewis.

16
17 **MR. BRIAN LEWIS:** Good morning. Can everybody hear me?

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes. Go ahead, Brian.

20
21 **MR. LEWIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Brian Lewis, Clearwater,
22 Florida. I own a fishing vessel that fishes for Frenchy's Seafood,
23 which has like nine restaurants.

24
25 I want to talk about a bunch of things, one of which is our boat,
26 which is a bandit hook-and-line rod and reel boat. We are highly
27 dependent on the red grouper fishery. 80 percent, to 90 percent,
28 of our catch is just that. I feel like, okay, we didn't catch all
29 the red grouper last year, which should be probably somewhat of an
30 indicator, really, of the true health of our red grouper fishery.

31
32 My boat, last trip, for an eleven-day trip, had 800 pounds of red
33 grouper. We worked hard at it, trying to catch them, okay, and
34 drove all over, and burned 300 gallons of fuel. I mean, we've got
35 a great bottom machine, and so I don't know what to tell you there.
36 I would like to see where all these red grouper are, because I
37 surely -- We could go catch them.

38
39 I think since -- From a long time ago, red grouper has had a
40 bullseye on it, okay, because of the effort shifting that's
41 occurring with all the fisheries. The recreational fishermen,
42 look at all the hogfish that they're targeting. They broke the
43 code on catching them, okay, and I've never seen -- I never even
44 knew hardly any recreational fishermen who were truly targeting
45 them.

46
47 Mutton snapper, I see all kinds of social media posts about all
48 the mutton snapper being landed, okay, and there's effort shifting

1 occurring all the way across the Gulf of Mexico. I can't do effort
2 shifting, okay? I can't afford to go out there with a little hook-
3 and-line trying to catch hogfish to make a living, okay?

4
5 I have a full-time captain. He's got a new baby, and a girlfriend,
6 and they need to be dependent on this, and I'm really concerned
7 about trying to increase our quota.

8
9 You want to talk about a success story? Okay, and let me tell you
10 something, all right? I bought in 100 percent of my money into
11 this fishery, okay, and I was against the IFQ program in the
12 beginning, but I have got fishing quota that I have acquired on my
13 own, okay?

14
15 Talk about the IFQ loan program? Forget about it, okay, and I
16 borrowed against my house, okay, and, you know, maybe this pilot
17 program -- I wish these guys good luck, because I don't see how
18 you're going to give them enough to even make a spot, but let them
19 find out what it's really all about to have maintenance and upkeep
20 of a vessel, okay, because then the reality check will come into
21 play.

22
23 The other thing that I want to talk about is I'm really
24 disappointed that we're not trying to get the SEFHIER program going
25 forward for the charter industry. I think that's such an important
26 mechanism for these guys to report their landings, okay, and show
27 the true data streams.

28
29 We talk about -- I hear a lot of talk about there's never no money
30 to implement this and that with the recreational fishery, private
31 rec, right? Okay, and I get charged a three-and-a-half percent
32 cost recovery fee off of each one of my fishing trips, okay, and
33 so I can't see why we can't come up with something, in this world
34 we live in, to come up with better data streams for the private
35 rec, to really know what we're all landing.

36
37 I appreciate your time, and taking the time to do what you guys do
38 best, but please remember one thing, to manage the fisheries in a
39 sustainable way. Thank you for your time.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lewis. Do we have any questions?
42 Not seeing any, thanks again, Brian. Next up, in the room, is Mr.
43 Anthony Colletti, followed by Ms. Susan Boggs, online.

44
45 **MR. ANTHONY COLLETTI:** Good morning, council. Anthony Colletti,
46 owner, operator, commercial fisherman. I started my career on the
47 east coast of Florida, working on the back of my dad's boat at the
48 age of thirteen. I'm thirty-seven now. I made it from the east

1 coast of Florida, with trip limits, different fisheries, chased
2 the king mackerel very hard, and ended up where I am today, fully
3 invested in the IFQ program.

4
5 I've spent tremendous amount of money investing in myself and my
6 business over time. It did not come easy. I'm still working hard
7 at it. I'm in fear for some of the changes that may be coming
8 down the line that I hear.

9
10 When you say you're going to take and put the fish back into the
11 fishermen's hands, I would like to know how you plan to do that,
12 because, like everybody else is saying, the Fisheries Funding
13 Program is impossible to navigate through. You would have to
14 eliminate probably 80 percent of the requirements, and so I'm
15 asking, when and if you make any changes, to look at the unforeseen
16 consequences that may affect young fishermen.

17
18 I'm in the middle of several owner finance deals with fishermen
19 that have been wanting to exit the fishery, and, if you make a
20 catch requirement to where they have to catch some of their fish,
21 that's going to eliminate any chances for young fishermen to be
22 able to buy them out, and so, with that all being said, I really
23 hope you take that into consideration.

24
25 As far as the amberjacks go, I would love to see some of them come
26 back to the commercial side. We're seeing a lot of them. We've
27 had a pretty good year with king mackerel. I'm connected down in
28 the Keys, and I'm connected on the east Coast. The fish are
29 everywhere and so I appreciate your time today.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Anthony. Do we have any questions?
32 Dr. Sweetman.

33
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you for coming, Anthony. Can you elaborate
35 a little bit, and I'm trying to reconcile your comment about having
36 a landings permit, and how that would impact young fishermen from
37 participating in the IFQ fishery, and can you elaborate a little
38 bit on that, please?

39
40 **MR. COLLETTI:** Yes, I can. From what I'm hearing, the permit
41 requirement for shareholders to hold shares, and in the future
42 there may be a landings requirement. Well, I've built my business,
43 over fourteen years of fishing in the IFQ program, building
44 connections and communicating with certain shareholders that want
45 to retire.

46
47 With time, I've built stability in my business, and I depend on
48 those people every year when it's time to lease fish and continue

1 my business buying in as I go, and so, if you take those fish from
2 these shareholders, that I've dealt business with for the past
3 fourteen years, and you put them in someone else's hands, they may
4 not want to lease to me.

5
6 I don't have the money to purchase what I need to operate every
7 year, but I'm working my way through it, and so, again, with the
8 Fisheries Finance Program, it is impossible for an owner-operator
9 to navigate through that.

10
11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Anthony, thank you. I have a question for you,
14 and so I know you spread across the Gulf, from the east to even
15 Louisiana, and we talked about it. I know your boat is in Dulac.
16 You made a comment that amberjack are plentiful.

17
18 **MR. COLLETTI:** Yes.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I don't want to know where you're fishing, but
21 east or west?

22
23 **MR. COLLETTI:** West. West of the river.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** That's all I needed. Thank you.

26
27 **MR. COLLETTI:** Any other questions? Thank you. Have a good day.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, online, is Ms. Susan Boggs.

30
31 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Good morning, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the
32 opportunity to give comment today. My name is Susan Boggs. I'm
33 now the owner of Reel Surprise Charters and Marina in Orange Beach,
34 Alabama.

35
36 I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank the Gulf Council
37 staff and the Gulf Council members for your support during this
38 time with my family. I am proud to say that my daughter is out
39 today on the Reel Surprise fishing.

40
41 I haven't had an opportunity to listen to much of the council
42 meeting this week, but I would like to say that, based on the
43 comments that I've heard today, we do need to try to give some
44 stability to the fishermen with an opening date for the red snapper
45 season. I know several of the fishermen here, that I spoke with
46 when they heard word of that last year late, they were already
47 booking trips, and so that is something that's going to be very
48 crucial to the folks.

1
2 SEFHIER, Bob Zales said it perfectly. If you all will move forward
3 with SEFHIER 2.0, or whatever everyone wants to call it, the
4 fishermen will find the funding. We've done it before. We'll do
5 it again, but, again, I just want to thank you all for your support,
6 and I look forward to seeing you all in March.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions? No questions, Susan.
9 Thanks for tuning in. It's good to hear your voice. Next up is
10 Mr. Randy Sobieraj.

11
12 **MR. RANDY SOBIERAJ:** Randy Sobieraj, from Leeville, Louisiana,
13 commercial longline owner-operator. As far as the shallow-water
14 grouper, I feel like you guys are taking too big of a step,
15 reallocating and doing a reduction, without having the proper
16 accountability or the science, especially since the stock
17 assessment is coming up so soon, and so I feel like you guys are
18 making too big of a stride. You know, maybe take baby steps.
19 We're trying to run before we can even crawl.

20
21 As far as jacks go, I would love to see more. My last trip out,
22 we were throwing jacks back. In longline, we're not targeting
23 them. It's more of a bycatch, but, when you're catching them in
24 the mud on pieces of bait, cut bait at that, I can only imagine
25 what I could do on a bandit when I'm actually targeting them.

26
27 As far as the IFQ program, we're doing exit plans, but nothing for
28 entry ideas, because how are you going to force somebody out when
29 no one has the funds to get in, especially new guys? Like Anthony
30 said, owner-operator, and I don't have millions of dollars just to
31 splurge on IFQ. I've been purchasing a few quota, but, with the
32 instability, I had to pump the brakes on it, and how do you plan
33 a business when there's such instability in the program?

34
35 Like Anthony, I rely on a lot of leaseholders, and, if you start
36 making requirements without having some sort of program to have
37 new guys come in and purchase the IFQ program, I feel like you
38 guys are kind of shooting for failure, especially if you're trying
39 to get the fishermen to have the IFQ, you know, and put it back in
40 the fishermen's hands.

41
42 As far as like the quota bank, I feel like you guys should have
43 exceptions for them. You know, they're trying to help new
44 fishermen, and, to put stipulations on them that are actually
45 trying to help the fishery, I feel like you guys are kind of
46 overshooting what you all's end goal is, but I appreciate it.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Randy. Do we have any questions? Mr.

1 Osborne.
2
3 **MR. OSBORNE:** I'm curious what you think about state management.
4
5 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** In what regards?
6
7 **MR. OSBORNE:** Well, for the transition from federal to state.
8
9 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** I know, but to what regards? Regarding like for
10 the recreational sector towards IFQ or towards -- You know, I guess
11 it's a very open question, and so it's hard to pinpoint exactly
12 what you're trying to get towards.
13
14 **MR. OSBORNE:** Well, I'm just -- Like the Florida folks we know
15 don't like any of the Florida state management, the charter guys,
16 and I know that, you know, the Louisiana guys aren't any better,
17 or at least Schieble isn't.
18
19 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** I guess the biggest thing is -- If you're talking
20 about the recreational sector, the biggest thing is you've got to
21 take accountability of what you're taking out of the ocean, and
22 you can't just keep throwing mud at the wall and hoping something
23 sticks, because, you know, once you get to a point of no return,
24 it's like, how do you come back from that?
25
26 You know, if you start looking at the amount of fishermen today,
27 compared to ten years ago, or twenty years ago, you know, how many
28 Freeman do you see on the side of the road? Back in the day, it's
29 like, if you've seen somebody with a forty-six Post, it's like, oh
30 man, he's loaded, but there was only a few people fishing, but now
31 it's --
32
33 The population has exploded, and so I guess the biggest thing
34 you've got to look at is who can take accountability on that
35 sector, you know, because, obviously, the commercial side, you
36 have all the landings, you know exactly to the pound of what we're
37 landing. What about the recreational sector, and so I guess it
38 just depends on who is going to be able to take that ball and run
39 with it to take accountability.
40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Randy. I have a question for you.
42 You mentioned you're in Leeville, Louisiana.
43
44 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** Yes, sir.
45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** What is your opinion on amberjack? You touched
47 on amberjack, and what are you seeing?
48

1 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** If you want to load the wagon, let's go with it.
2 I'll take you right now.
3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have to assume you're talking about west of the
5 river.
6
7 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** Yes, sir, but I do fish out to the east, and not as
8 much, but primarily to the west, and, if you wanted to target them,
9 I think you can load the wagon and do it fairly easy. Like I said,
10 longlining, we're using cut bait, and that's not primarily a way
11 to target amberjack, and, like I said, I had fifty in a day, and
12 we're fishing in the mud.
13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you.
15
16 **MR. SOBIERAJ:** Yes, sir.
17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, we'll move online to Stewart Miller.
19
20 **MR. STEWART MILLER:** Can you hear me?
21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Now we got you, Stuart. Go ahead.
23
24 **MR. MILLER:** Thank you. My name is Stewart Miller. I'm out of
25 Panama City, Florida. I own and operate the Charterboat Great
26 Escape. It's dual-permitted, federally-permitted. I also have a
27 couple of commercial boats.
28
29 I am not for state management. I'm third-generation in this, done
30 it my whole life, and I -- I would -- I mean, I had to go out and
31 get a VMS permit, I mean a VMS, for the for-hire for my federal
32 permit, because my old VMS was no longer any good, and so I'm
33 definitely, I mean, invested in this, and I would not like to see
34 the state run it.
35
36 I'm also -- The red snapper dates, I've already booked trips in
37 May for this, and was told it was pretty much a done deal, and
38 going to open, and now it's not, and so I have to call them all
39 back and let them know that, hey, I basically told you all wrong
40 information, and lied to you, and we're going to see if we can
41 move you around, and hopefully they can move to another date.
42
43 I would like to see you all give us a heads-up on when dates are
44 opened and dates are closed. Knowing things weeks, months, in
45 advance is really not beneficial to us. This fall snapper, when
46 we had it around Christmas and all, everybody has already got
47 Christmas stuff planned, and, if we could have known about it
48 earlier, sure, we could have run.

1
2 I actually ran two trips during that, but I had those trips booked
3 in January and said, hey, you want to catch red snapper? Move
4 over to this day, and we'll at least be able to catch snapper.
5
6 Technology is definitely hurting us, and CMOR Mapping, the trolling
7 motors. You're talking about the scamp. Well, all those edges
8 that the scamp sit on off there in that deeper water now is -- For
9 800 bucks, you can have it all. What took me a lifetime to learn,
10 you can have it for 800 bucks, and trolling motors will hold you
11 right there until the batteries go dead.
12
13 We definitely have a shark and dolphin problem out of Panama City
14 for sure, 100 percent. I would like to see something addressed to
15 that, if we could, and that is it.
16
17 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Stewart. I'm not seeing any questions in
18 the room.
19
20 **MR. MILLER:** No problem.
21
22 **DR. BANKS:** All right, and so we're going to bring it into the
23 room for Marshall Gross.
24
25 **MR. GROSS:** Hello. My name is Marshall Gross. I'm a co-owner and
26 captain of the Seaquest, and we fish out of Leeville. Twenty five
27 years on the same boat, and I've been buying my way in the fishery,
28 and it's hard, and stressful, but it's possible, but, if they keep
29 changing stuff, it makes it harder, and more stressful, and it's
30 tough. The snapper, buying snapper, I have everything, dollar, to
31 my name invested in a little bit of quota, and I'm glad to have
32 it, and I earned it.
33
34 Now, the amberjacks, I'm sick of seeing them float off. I fish
35 300 foot of water. They die. They float off. The gags, at the
36 end of the year, yes, they got quota, but nobody will let you have
37 none of it, and so, the gags, they float off.
38
39 Now, you all want to go with the shallow-water grouper, and what's
40 next? The scamps? They're going to float off. They're going to
41 die for no reason. There won't be no -- It helps in a way, but it
42 don't help, and then, like to give our fish -- You all say it's
43 overfished, and then give it to the recreational. It's the same
44 amount of fish being caught. How does it help? I don't understand
45 like how it helps when you're giving it to them or us. It ain't
46 helping. It ain't changing nothing. That's all I got.
47
48 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Gross. Do we have any questions? Not

1 seeing any, thank you. Is Zack online, Zack Istre? Zack, are you
2 there?
3
4 **MS. ROY:** Zack, you'll have to unmute your line.
5
6 **MR. ISTRE:** Can you hear me?
7
8 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
9
10 **MR, ISTRE:** You got me now? All right. Good. Zack Istre, ten
11 years commercial diving, twenty-five years diving the Gulf.
12 Crystal River, Florida.
13
14 We've got a harvest permit. We're also a wholesale dealer. I
15 dive from like Tampa to Apalachicola, in forty to 250 feet. My
16 boat does between 1,900 to 2,200 dives a year. We see what's
17 really going on.
18
19 First off, I want to make it priority mandatory reporting for all.
20 Move it to the very top of the list. We have been asking, and
21 talking about it, for eight to ten years. The only way to have
22 accurate data of fisheries is to know what is actually coming out
23 of the Gulf. The guessing does not work, and it leaves way too
24 much variable and flawed data.
25
26 Here's a plan for it. Everybody says it's too hard. Adopt
27 Mississippi's Tails 'n Scales app, and add the species. It's
28 already working. It's over 95 percent compliant. Make fines
29 severe, and then remove a license for non-reporting. It is, in my
30 opinion, the most important first priority for health of the
31 fishery and accurate data. Put it into emergency action as soon
32 as possible.
33
34 I'm got to switch you over, real quick. All right, and then I was
35 going to say we're seeing more gags and AJs than we have seen in
36 the last twenty-five years of diving the Gulf.
37
38 The interim study with the G-FISHER camera data is not accurate on
39 gags unless they are on big structure, cracks, caves, et cetera.
40 Gags have to have a home to tuck in at night, and it also explains
41 why the G-FISHER cams work well on the lane data. We see big
42 schools of them in live bottom and sand.
43
44 The date, water temp, and where bait is during data collection has
45 an extreme result on the numbers and the data. It's typically
46 done in summer, when weather is nice. Gags and jacks are typically
47 very deep and spread out this time of year. Deepwater fishermen
48 this year were catching jacks and gags in 500 to 800 foot of water

1 in the summer.

2
3 Here's the last thing. Dealer and fishermen involved in IFQ, we're
4 a small, one-boat, family-owned business. We were forced to get
5 our dealer's license. This way, we could sell direct to
6 restaurants to make enough on our fish to stay profitable. Have
7 I reached time or something?

8
9 I think, if you're not actually fishing with a current permit,
10 your quota should be reallocated back to the guys taking most all
11 the risk offshore. We are away from our families offshore to make
12 a very small percentage of the profit of the IFQ fish.

13
14 It's highway robbery for us, the guys fishing, for ourselves and
15 having to fish for big dealers and fish houses that lease up and
16 own, or hold, most of the shares and allocation for IFQ fish. Plan
17 a government buyback for dealers that transfer to the fishermen.
18 Under them, we're a time gradual transfer.

19
20 The only reason big dealers and fish houses have massive amounts
21 of quota is to control buying, selling, and making money on all
22 ends, the shares and allocation monopoly business plan.

23
24 Shareholder logged allocation transfer history, buyback for the
25 shareholder moved to who has been fishing the actual fish. Please
26 listen to us. We are the ones out. More than anyone, we see
27 what's going on, and we want the fishery the best it can be.
28 Hopefully one day our kids can fish, too. That's all I got.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Zack. Do we have any questions? Not
31 seeing any, thanks again, Zack. Next up, in the room, is Ms.
32 Rachel Hisler.

33
34 **MS. RACHEL HISLER:** Good morning. Rachel Hisler, Double Bayou,
35 Texas, representing my multi-generational family fishing business.
36 Most of the points that I'm going to make today have already, you
37 know, been made, and so I'm just going to echo those.

38
39 I'm asking you to hold on your motion to make allocation decisions
40 based on MREP-FES when we haven't received that pilot study yet,
41 and so, on that one, you know, we've seen that, currently, the
42 timeline on implementing these actions is taking longer than I
43 think any of us would like, and so I feel like we can pause there,
44 and let the framework action go ahead and do what it's going to
45 do, and see how that's going to affect the fishery, in order to
46 prevent overfishing on scamp.

47
48 Then, also, I want to kind of echo what Anthony was talking about,

1 as far as being in an owner-finance situation, and then possibly
2 compromising that, for businesses like myself, where we are in the
3 process of buying out an exiting captain, who is gracious enough,
4 and able, to owner finance that, because of the arrangement that
5 we have made, but then, if you require him to go and have a permit,
6 and then also to make landings, that's taking fish out, or off, of
7 our boat, and then also pitting --

8
9 Well, if he has to go get a permit, and a boat, and land fish,
10 then why wouldn't he just keep doing it all for himself, and, you
11 know, allowing us to have an avenue into this fishery to replace
12 an outgoing fisherman, and so that's a concern for me.

13
14 These people have worked their entire lives, and they deserve to
15 exit the fishery with dignity, and people like me want to earn the
16 respect of, you know, the hard work that it takes to prosecute
17 this fishery. Thank you.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Rachel. Do we have any questions?
20 Not seeing any, thank you again. Next up is Ms. Ashford Rosenberg.

21
22 **MS. ASHFORD ROSENBERG:** Good morning, council, and thank you for
23 the opportunity to speak. Thank you, Carrie and J.D., for the
24 recognition of Dr. Gallaway and Randy. Those are both amazing
25 individuals that I feel very lucky to have had shape my personal
26 and professional life.

27
28 I'm Ashford Rosenberg. I'm the Director of Regional Policy and
29 Special Projects at the Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders
30 Alliance.

31
32 First, on Amendment 62, thank you for continuing to move this
33 document forward. We encourage you to keep doing so, and to make
34 it a priority. Considering the reductions in gag, shallow-water,
35 and amberjack, this increase could help fishermen, but we also
36 want to say that we really do support the phase-in increase
37 concept. It's precautionary.

38
39 It's warranted, and we really implore the council and the SSC to
40 look at, you know, avenues and pathways to do this for other
41 fisheries, and other stocks, whether those catch limit
42 recommendations are increasing or decreasing.

43
44 On 58A, we do request that you postpone final action on this
45 document. I acknowledge the incredible work done by the Southeast
46 Fisheries Science Center partners and the SSC on that assessment.

47
48 We were excited that the electronic monitoring data, that many of

1 our member boats participate in, was used as part of that
2 assessment, and that's really exciting, but, considering a lot of
3 the uncertainty around recreational data, and, you know, a lot of
4 the concerns that you've heard from fishermen, we do believe that
5 there's precedent, and justification, to postpone this until we
6 have a little bit more information and clarity around the FES pilot
7 study, and also some analysis on if the 54 percent reduction
8 through the framework action is enough to start addressing or
9 preventing overfishing in scamp.

10
11 Regarding Amendment 59A, we appreciate your continued discussion
12 around this, especially around quota banks and fishery trusts. We
13 strongly believe that those are tools that can really help fishing
14 communities, not just in the Gulf, but there are examples of this
15 in areas outside the Gulf, and we work with many of those
16 organizations.

17
18 We've seen them really do a lot of good for fishing communities
19 and help continue bringing in next-generation fishermen or
20 addressing other fishery challenges.

21
22 We do acknowledge that we are the only functioning quota bank in
23 the Gulf right now, but, you know, we want to see a future where
24 that may not be the case. We want to see whatever language that
25 goes in that document set a precedent for other organizations to
26 do this, if they think it's an appropriate tool for their
27 community.

28
29 Lastly, on Amendment 63, as you continue considering a quota pool
30 for red grouper, we still would like to see more information about
31 what metrics you're going to look at to see if that's successful,
32 and how you're going to measure that level of success, and also
33 some assessment of the up and downstream impacts of what a quota
34 pool could do to other roles in the fishery, and that's all I've
35 got.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Rosenberg. Do we have any
38 questions? Not seeing any, thanks, Ashford. Next up is Mr. Jamie
39 Gaspard.

40
41 **MR. JAMIE GASPARD:** Hello, council. I've got a few things. I'm
42 against state management, because, as was stated before, we don't
43 even have a framework to see what it would look like past the
44 federal system.

45
46 I know the federal system has flaws, and I've advocated for that,
47 but, if we get a new governor, and he's more friendly to one side
48 than the other, do they cut us? I've been a captain for thirty

1 years, a commercial fisherman for the last eight. I see holes in
2 both systems. The federal system has to do better, and, when I
3 say that, they can't even give us a definite date that they're
4 going to open the season, and let's think about that for a minute.

5
6 We've been pushing for something for almost two years now and can't
7 get it done. It's 2026. You know, just think about that for a
8 minute. Think about if you had to build a business around that.
9 You've got people calling you, and, well, when is the season going
10 to open? Well, we don't know. We've got an idea, but we can close
11 the system, we can close the season, in three days, but we can't
12 tell people that it's going to open in months.

13
14 You know, just think about that for a minute. If you ran a business
15 like that -- If these people that are making these decisions was
16 your employee, would you keep them around? I think you all know
17 the answer to that question.

18
19 Now, shark population, everybody is raising all the hell in the
20 world about that. Anything been done? No. Amberjacks, there's
21 more amberjack. There's never been a problem with amberjack, from
22 river to river. We catch them in ninety feet of water, with no
23 structure. You know, we've never really caught an amberjack
24 without a vertical structure. We're catching them on pipeline
25 crosses. A commercial trip, we're catching three and four a drop.
26 You know, that's unbelievable.

27
28 Now, I would like to see the Gulf separated into different zones,
29 because I don't want to be punished for what one other state does.
30 We have different needs in Louisiana. We don't have white sandy
31 beaches. We got mud. Think about that for a minute. People come
32 here to fish. They don't come on vacation. They don't go to the
33 beach. You know, we don't have all these fancy restaurants down
34 south. People come to fish.

35
36 We have different needs, and that's why I would like to see, you
37 know, different structures for different states, and listen to the
38 people a little bit more. The people come, and they talk, and is
39 anything really ever heard or moved or made? I've been coming
40 here for almost thirty years now, and I don't know if one thing
41 I've ever said in this room has transpired to anything. I bet you
42 they got a lot of people behind me who can say that.

43
44 Now, I thought of this big old speech before I came here today,
45 but I just winged it. I didn't write nothing down this time, and
46 so we have to -- Well, you all have to do, or the people working
47 for you all have to do, a better job, because, if it continues, it
48 will lose credibility, and more people are going to go for stuff

1 like the state management, because they want it to go to the state
2 so they can talk to somebody.

3
4 They feel that, if twenty people get together, at least they can
5 go sit with the governor and make a move. Whether it's good or
6 bad, they want to move. You know, I reached out to a lot of
7 charter boat captains in this state, and they feel -- They say,
8 oh, well, you all are going to be gutted if you do this. Well,
9 they've been gutted pretty bad.

10
11 We can't catch triggerfish, and we can't catch amberjack, and
12 they're going to take grouper away, and so what have we got left?
13 That's basically what we catch. Two lemonfish, you know, and so
14 you all just think about that on the back side.

15
16 We have different needs. We need those fish together. We catch
17 those fish together. If I can go out and catch my two snapper, an
18 amberjack, and a couple of triggerfish, people are happy.

19
20 Now I've got to fight against twenty-five so-called state-water
21 fishermen that's fishing right next to me in federal waters,
22 charging a third of the money and catching twice the fish. Think
23 about trying to build a business around that.

24
25 I just say, yes, it's a good thing we fish for tuna fish, because
26 the red snapper thing, with the federal-permitted boats, are taking
27 a real beating over this, and anybody that can say that don't know
28 what the hell they're talking about. You've got to talk to the
29 federal government, and that's how you stand on that. Thank you
30 for your time.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Gaspard. Do we have any questions?
33 Not seeing any, Jamie, thank you for being here. Next up is
34 Melissa Lopez.

35
36 **MS. MELISSA LOPEZ:** Hello. I'm Melissa Lopez. My husband and I
37 are new entrants. This is like my third council meeting, and I'm
38 hoping I don't ramble or say something stupid up here.

39
40 We started out as charter fishermen. My husband has been a captain
41 for twenty years. It has kind of morphed into entering the IFQ
42 program, buying our own fish house, vessel, all of it. This is
43 our second year of operation, and it's definitely been very hard
44 to enter, mainly the quota. You know, the pricing is ridiculous.
45 Now it's going for upwards of five-dollars a pound.

46
47 I can't afford the capital, after all that I've put in to enter,
48 to even buy enough that would make a dent in our yearly gross, and

1 so, with that being said, requiring a permit isn't going to put
2 the fish back in the hands of the fishermen.

3
4 There are roughly 700 unused permits. They're going for \$25,000
5 to \$30,000. Somebody can easily buy that. Forcing a shareholder,
6 who is trying to retire after years of donating their bodies to
7 the industry, onto a vessel will not fix the problem either.

8
9 With that being said, I wouldn't have the ability to be here
10 without the ability to lease quota, and so owners and entrants,
11 fishermen, must retain this ability. I would say that 90 percent
12 of the active vessels couldn't get approved for an FPP loan, or an
13 FFP loan.

14
15 The rules need to be adjusted, so that it's in the reach of the
16 fishermen. The lack of access to funding is creating a problem
17 for retired fishermen, who want the quota to go to the fishermen,
18 but also want to retire, and the fishermen can't put up the capital
19 to buy them out.

20
21 The amberjack limits, it doesn't seem like we have good data, from
22 what I've heard from you guys. My guys can't get past the
23 amberjacks west of the river, and they're reporting they're taking
24 over the habitat, like I've heard other people talk about also. I
25 mean, increase the TAC. Require mandated reporting for the
26 recreational sector. We don't target the jacks, but they're landed
27 while they eat the undersized snapper off the down, and then we
28 throw them back, to either let them float away or continue to chomp
29 on the baby snappers, and so poor baby snappers.

30
31 Electronic logbooks, we have IFQs managed online, state reporting,
32 vessel accounts all online. Like that's -- I don't understand how
33 we're in the year 2026 and that's not a thing.

34
35 Again, recreational reporting, SEFHIER funding, and what about a
36 recreational fishing quota? Managing one sector that doesn't
37 harvest half of the TAC, in some cases, while not implementing
38 mandated reporting on the larger majority doesn't matter.

39
40 The majority of the federal recreational anglers and charter boats
41 have Starlink. Some states have stepped up, and it's far past
42 time that we have mandated reporting for the other half of the
43 sector that we're distributing the TAC to.

44
45 Why experiment with the delicate commercial IFQ when there's half
46 of the TAC open for experiments, and it would not take something
47 from someone who's already paid in? I've heard, from these
48 meetings, that it seems like you're giving fish that's overfished

1 to a sector that has no oversight.

2
3 Sterilize the dolphin pods maybe is an idea. I don't want to see
4 flippers die, but sterilization perhaps, and so, 59, definitely
5 postponed the amendment. It doesn't seem like we have enough data.
6 The timeline is uncertain.

7
8 Then I thought that we had the motion to not make allocation
9 decisions based on the FES until we know the results of the pilot
10 study, and, I mean, it sounds like we're making decisions on the
11 FES, and so I would request to postpone the amendment, and that's
12 all I have. Thank you so much for having me.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Lopez. Do we have any questions?
15 Mr. Strelcheck.

16
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** First, thank you for being here, and you did a
18 great job. You talked a lot about what the council has before us
19 not working, not fixing the problems, not the solving issues. From
20 the standpoint of a new entrant, someone that's struggling to get
21 access to quota, what would be one thing, a couple of things, that
22 we could do that would make a huge difference for you personally?

23
24 **MS. LOPEZ:** For me personally, I've tried the FFP. Maria Starr,
25 she's tried her best to help us out, but she just can't make it
26 work with the parameters that she's under right now, and so we
27 need federal funding.

28
29 Many countries subsidize their fisheries. Like we're out here,
30 and our boats are broken, and we can't buy quota access. We can't
31 afford to make a living, much less pay your crew a living wage.
32 I've seen Congress waste trillions and billions of dollars. Like
33 just give us a little billion, maybe, less than, and we'll be okay.
34 We need money. That's what it is.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Lopez.

37
38 **MS. LOPEZ:** Thank you.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, next up is
41 Captain Scott Hickman.

42
43 **MR. SCOTT HICKMAN:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the
44 Gulf Council. Captain Scott Hickman, from Galveston, Texas, owner
45 and operator of Circle H Outdoors and Charters, thirty-five-year-
46 plus, dual-permitted, commercial shareholder of red snapper. I
47 love coming to these meetings. It's always New Orleans the day
48 after waterfowl season ends, and so it's good. It's like a mini-

1 vacation, seeing all of you all, and eating really good food, and
2 having some good adult beverages.

3
4 First off, I would like to -- It was good to hear Susan Boggs'
5 voice earlier. You know, the Boggs family has been such a vital
6 part of this council process. Randy Boggs, who we lost this month,
7 was one of the first founding members of the Charter Fishermen's
8 Association, when we started that way, way back when, you know,
9 going over 20 years.

10
11 One of the things I can remember about Randy was he was adamant
12 that the Charter Fishermen's Association was for federally-
13 permitted operators only, and he wrote that into our bylaws when
14 we started the organization, and it wasn't just folks in the state-
15 water guide associations, et cetera. I said, well, Randy, we want
16 to be the biggest association we can be, and he says, no, we want
17 to be the best and biggest federal charter boat association.

18
19 That being said, Gary Jarvis was the president, way back then, me,
20 Mike Jennings, all these folks. We're all a little bit long in
21 the tooth now, and it has kind of gone to the next generation,
22 with Jim Green and Dylan Hubbard at the reins, and they're doing
23 a fabulous job, but I think, you know, Randy was really proud of
24 how CFA turned out.

25
26 All the work that he did with the charter boat -- The headboat
27 cooperative that they tested, and it worked really good, and I
28 think they reduced discards by 80 percent in that program. He
29 worked real close with Andy on that, and I think Andy got the
30 industry innovation award that year for the agency, and Randy was
31 a vital part of getting charter boats really started in the Gulf,
32 and he was really active in getting our data collection system
33 moving forward.

34
35 Thinking back on it, I was working with Greg Stunz on iSnapper,
36 and we came to present it at a council meeting in Florida. My
37 kids had come to the meeting with my wife, and they went to go see
38 Mickey Mouse, and we were promoting this new app to track charter
39 boat landings.

40
41 Today, we're still working on implementing that electronic data
42 collection system. My kids are both done with their undergrad,
43 and one of them got engaged last week. She's a practicing
44 registered nurse in oncology, and the other one is getting ready
45 to start PA school. We're still working on finalizing our data
46 collection system. That's crazy. The technology is here. Let's
47 do it.

48

1 Thanks to the Gulf Council staff on getting these working groups
2 together for the ecosystem-based management stuff, the FEP work.
3 It's really important. That's a lot of our problems, and I'm
4 against the state management takeover. We're doing a great job
5 with sector separation. Let's get the data collection system
6 going, and I appreciate you all's time.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Hickman. Any questions? Not
9 seeing any, Scott. Thank you, Scott. Next up is Mr. Buddy Guindon.

10
11 **MR. BUDDY GUINDON:** Good morning. Buddy Guindon, commercial
12 fisherman from Galveston, Texas. I own a fully-integrated fishing
13 business. I recreational fish, I charter fish, and I commercial
14 fish, mostly.

15
16 We had a great opportunity today to meet about a half-a-dozen new
17 entrants in the fishery, new entrants that are using the IFQ system
18 the way it was designed to be used. You come in, you work, you
19 make relationships, you find someone you want to buy out, and you
20 make an agreement and buy them off.

21
22 Those are the people this council should be representing, people
23 that are working hard to build a business and supply a living to
24 their family, not the people that come up to this microphone and
25 whine and cry about how they can't, how they aren't able to, how
26 they're blackballed, and all the things that take place.

27
28 This is a business that doesn't include everyone. You can't be a
29 commercial fisherman just because you want to be one. You have to
30 go through a lot of steps of learning how to do it, and then how
31 do you get the money to do it, and you just met a half-a-dozen
32 people that are struggling and working very hard to do what they're
33 supposed to do.

34
35 As you look towards changing the system, it changes their ability
36 to be successful, and that should be a big consideration as you
37 move forward with these management plans that you're thinking
38 about.

39
40 The shallow-water grouper complex is kind of a mess. We're trying
41 to manage with data that's being reviewed, and maybe we should
42 wait until we get that, so we don't have to do it twice. It's not
43 many years off. Just take a precautionary step towards lowering
44 a quota. You know, do a little. Don't hurt the fishery. Don't
45 take away the ability from these guys to go fish.

46
47 As far as the charter boat and state management, Andy, I thought,
48 a long time ago, we told the group of fishermen here that state

1 management in the private angler sector would come with
2 accountability. It would come with the ability to have common
3 currency, and that was supposed to happen right away, and it isn't
4 happening, and it's not happening because of the resistance of the
5 states.

6
7 When a state says we're not going to collect recreational data,
8 because it's too hard, that breaks my heart, because with that
9 data could come a much better successful fishery. If we can gather
10 that portion of the data, and it's only 25 percent of the fishery
11 that exists right now, but they account for 90-plus percent of the
12 dead discards.

13
14 That's a tragedy. You have to figure out some other way to manage
15 these people, and figure out how to manage them means figure out
16 who is fishing and what they're catching. It's got to happen, and
17 we have to push the states, and I don't know if the federal
18 government can do that. Can they push down on the states and make
19 them do their job?

20
21 You said you were going to when you implemented the state
22 management, and it hasn't happened, and I don't think anybody has
23 ever come here and said anything about it, but, if we look back in
24 the minutes, we'll see that there was an agreement that they were
25 going to get this done, and it hasn't been done yet today. Sorry
26 I took too long.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Guindon. Do we have any questions?
29 We do. Captain Walker.

30
31 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Buddy. All right, and so you say that not
32 changing the system is going to help lower-level fishermen make a
33 living, and make things easier for them and stuff, is kind of what
34 I'm gathering, but --

35
36 **MR. GUINDON:** No.

37
38 **MR. WALKER:** All right. Am I getting that wrong?

39
40 **MR. GUINDON:** Well, what I'm saying is it will hurt these people,
41 these particular people that have taken the initiative to do the
42 work it takes to build relationships with people and then buy them
43 up. You know, you build those relationships by maybe working for
44 them, or just associating with them, or being a casual friend. I
45 don't know how they did it, but they did it.

46
47 There's a half-a-dozen of them in here that came up and told you
48 that what you're doing, or what you intend on doing, is going to

1 interfere with the plans that they have built. When you're a young
2 man, like they are, and you have a plan, and you're working your
3 plan, and you finally get that first nut you bust, where you've
4 got some quota, that you can start getting repaid for what you've
5 done, and your business plan starts to grow, and multiply, and
6 become successful, it encourages you to keep going.

7
8 Then you come to a meeting where they say, okay, we're just going
9 to take the increases now and redistribute them to these people
10 that are pissing and moaning up here about not having any fish,
11 and that's what I was talking about.

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** All right, and so, my goal at least here, in my view,
14 if we can find a way to lower allocation prices, that also helps
15 small fishermen, and maybe not these six guys, who seem to have
16 built their relationship with someone outside the fishery that
17 doesn't fish, and, you know, that's fine, but, if we're trying to
18 help the majority of the fishery that's struggling, to me, it seems
19 like trying to find a way to lower allocation prices helps more of
20 the fishermen than keeping it the way it is currently.

21
22 **MR. GUINDON:** There's only one way to lower --

23
24 **MR. WALKER:** The low allocation prices thing is what I'm trying to
25 do with some of these ideas that we're attempting right now, and,
26 to me, that is a benefit to a lot of up-and-coming commercial
27 fishermen, when they can make more money on a trip.

28
29 **MR. GUINDON:** Let me give you a shortcut to get there. A full
30 retention fishery, okay, and it will eliminate all the
31 overcapitalization. The only reason we have five-dollar red
32 snapper prices is what? We're overcapitalized. There's too many
33 lumberjacks trying to cut down the last tree, and so they're paying
34 whatever they have to do to get it.

35
36 Overcapitalization is still the problem in this fishery, in the
37 red snapper fishery. I don't believe it's overcapitalization in
38 the red grouper fishery, but, in the red snapper fishery, there's
39 too many people trying to catch the amount of fish we have
40 available. There's only one way to cure that. People have to go
41 away.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** Well, I mean, some might argue consolidation is also
44 an issue.

45
46 **MR. GUINDON:** Well, some might argue that, but it's a necessary
47 evil in this fishery, With diminishing quotas, and we've had
48 diminishing quotas in all species except for red snapper and

1 tilefish, and I'll make you a little wager on the next couple of
2 years, if you would like to, on one of those fish. We're going to
3 have quota reductions. You can't bring in a bunch of new fishermen
4 while the quotas are diving.

5

6 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Buddy. We'll continue this later.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Guindon. Next up is Mr. Scott
9 Daggett.

10

11 **MR. SCOTT DAGGETT:** Good morning. I'm an owner-operator on Madeira
12 Beach, going into my thirty-ninth year of doing this, and I would
13 like to touch on the scamps for a moment, because, in my area
14 alone, and like I used to live in thirty and forty fathoms, and
15 catch scamps and blacks, and, since the black reduction, in our
16 area anyways, and I'm sure, if you had the 2025 numbers on scamps
17 for commercial, you would see a sharp decline, because most of our
18 effort is now thirty fathoms to twenty fathoms, you know, throwing
19 away the blacks and the scamps.

20

21 I can count on my hands and I've been -- Like I said, I'm going
22 into my thirty-ninth year of doing this, how many scamps I've seen
23 swim back to the bottom. That is the weakest grouper in the bunch.
24 If you ever rod-and-reeled, it's one tug, and you reel them up,
25 and that's it. I've rarely ever seen a scamp swim back down.

26

27 I would like to touch on the quota pool. I'm all for that, but
28 the reason we're in this mess is because you guys always leave
29 loopholes in the system.

30

31 Like I've seen those baselines the other day, and 2,400 should
32 have been the floor. In my opinion, it should be 10,000 or 12,000
33 should be the floor. If you're a full-time commercial fisherman
34 -- Any rod-and-reel in our area, an average trip is 1,500 to 3,000
35 pounds.

36

37 You know, I'm all in on this stuff. I've taken my retirement to
38 buy IFQs, and bought them at the height, twenty-dollars a share,
39 and now, you know, the common practice is lease them back to your
40 boat, and so now the quota is down to fifty-cents.

41

42 That's what I'm leasing for now, and I appreciate that, because -
43 - I'm trying not to get mixed up here, but now, at the twenty-
44 dollars a share I bought for it, I was leasing it back to my boat
45 for two, but, now that the shares have dropped, now I'm leasing it
46 back to my boat for fifty-cents, but that's okay, because I'm all
47 in. I'm going to be here when you guys take the fish back and the
48 price goes back up.

1
2 For instance, last year, beginning of the year, I leased 20,000
3 pounds for -- I'm getting mixed up here. Sorry. For \$35,000.
4 Just in this meeting, and the other day, now I've leased 35,000
5 pounds for \$18,500. That's the difference this is making in
6 Amendment 62. Just on this last trip alone, and we had a pretty
7 good trip. We were just shy of 9,000. 7,300 of it was red grouper.
8 That was an extra right around \$8,000 or \$9,000 back to the captain
9 and crew, and it makes a difference in our lives. Thank you very
10 much.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Scott. Do we have any questions? Not
13 seeing any, next up is Mr. Randy Lauser.

14
15 **MR. RANDY LAUSER:** Morning, council. Randy Lauser, Southern
16 Offshore Fishing Association, out of Madera Beach, Florida. The
17 main thing I want to comment is on the quota pool there. I think
18 you guys need a lot of work to go into that, because that is not
19 for a full-time fisherman. That's for the part-time fishermen,
20 and everybody here, in my matter, is a full-time fisherman.

21
22 New entries, and I feel sorry for these young kids back here. I've
23 got a young captain on my boat running it now, okay, and, just a
24 while back, we told you what was going to happen whenever Amendment
25 53 -- You took a lot of red groupers, and then the gag groupers,
26 88 percent of those, and now scamp and yellowedge. You just took
27 half of those.

28
29 You know how much revenue that you all just took alone, and it's
30 -- Losing that much revenue, and I was still running my boat when
31 all that happened. Now I've got my captain on there, and you ought
32 to see the difference in the paychecks. If we still had all that
33 fish that we could catch, they would probably be able to afford to
34 make a payment on some quota, but you guys keep taking and taking
35 and taking.

36
37 What's next? I think the only thing I've got left you all can
38 take is tilefish. You all took half of everything else, and so,
39 like I said, I feel sorry for the new entries. If I was a new
40 entry trying to get in this, I would run, because there's no way.
41 Nobody can afford it, with how much revenue we lost on all that
42 fish.

43
44 Then, on the scamps, I think you all need to kick this can down
45 the road, because the data is not right. If you can see the
46 commercial data, you see how far it went down whenever you took
47 our gag groupers. As everybody knows, who wants to fish out there,
48 because we're tired of watching gag groupers float on back behind

1 the boat. It makes you sick to your stomach. It really does.
2 Thank you very much.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Randy. Any questions? I'm not seeing
5 any. Next up is Mr. Johnny Williams.

6
7 **MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS:** Good afternoon, or good morning. Johnny
8 Williams, Williams Party Boats Incorporated, third-generation
9 partyboat operator out of Galveston.

10
11 I am totally against you all separating the shallow-water grouper
12 at this time. I think we need to look and see what the stock
13 assessments are for all the different species in that complex
14 before we start pulling things out.

15
16 Also, I think you all need to take into consideration too, if
17 you're looking at fishery-dependent data, all the closure areas
18 that we've had, different reefs that have been protected out there,
19 and boats are no longer allowed to longline over those areas.
20 Also, you can't go in there and anchor, and stuff like that, and
21 so I think that probably has an effect on the catch rates, and so
22 I think we probably need to take those things into consideration.
23 We also need to leave everything alone until we get all the
24 information.

25
26 As far as red snapper goes, once again, the red snapper for-hire
27 sector did not catch the quota this year. As I suggested at other
28 meetings, we could change the fishing year from January 1 through
29 December 31 to April 1 through March 31, and, when it's determined
30 that we didn't get our quota, as we haven't the last couple of
31 years, we would still have access to those fish, because we were
32 given such a short period of time to let you know that, you know,
33 the season was reopening this year.

34
35 Our boat started out on a thirty-six-hour trip. Later on, we found
36 out that the season opened that morning, at twelve o'clock, but
37 the boat left at 6:30, and we had no idea at that time, because it
38 wasn't made available to the public yet.

39
40 The fish are not in that good of shape. I asked Andy yesterday,
41 after the meeting, about the red snapper harvest and stuff like
42 that. I think that we're overfishing the resource, and Andy said
43 that, at the time, it's kind of hard to determine, because we're
44 in new territory. We haven't fished this long, but, back in 2022,
45 we caught more fish in seventy-nine days than we did this year,
46 and we had many more days to fish.

47
48 The fish are in bad shape, and you all need to do something about

1 it. What I suggest you do is leave us where we're at in the for-
2 hire sector, what we caught this year, and reduce all the other
3 sectors by 75 percent, or by 25 percent, and only let them harvest
4 75 percent, because I've been dealing with this council since the
5 late 1980s, and we were trying to have a rebuilding plan, and I
6 guarantee you -- I don't think there's anybody in this audience
7 here that thinks that the fishing is as good as it was a few years
8 ago, and I don't know if you all have been addressing people, that
9 are your constituents, and see what their opinion is, but I
10 guarantee you that you'll find out that most of the people are
11 going to tell you, if not all, that the fishery is in bad shape,
12 or it's getting worse anyway. Thank you very much for your time.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williams. Do we have any
15 questions? General Spraggins.
16

17 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** So did I hear you correct that you're telling
18 me that you want us to cut the commercial fishery quota for red
19 snapper?
20

21 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Yes. Cut the commercial, cut the recreational, and
22 leave the for-hire sector, which we're harvesting -- Which is only
23 a couple of million pounds. We're supposed to be able to harvest
24 a little over three-million pounds, and we're harvesting about
25 two-million pounds, and let me make this statement, too.
26

27 I inherited some IFQ quota this year, and so I have some IFQ quota
28 as well. I'm asking you to cut my IFQ quota, because I think --
29 I want this fishery to be there for my children, and my grandsons,
30 and we're going to be back fishing year-round with a seven-fish
31 bag limit, and a thirteen-inch size limit, like we were in 1990,
32 at the rate we're going, to try to cut our quota, because we're
33 overfishing these fish. There's no doubt in my mind about that.
34

35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, thank you,
36 Johnny.
37

38 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Thank you very much.
39

40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Captain Jim Green.
41

42 **MR. JIM GREEN:** Hello, council members. Captain Jim Green,
43 President of DCBA and CFA. Carrie, that was a wonderful, heartfelt
44 tribute to Randy and Benny, two great men. They'll be missed.
45 They shared a passion that everybody in this room has, and that's
46 to make our fisheries better, and they did a lot of work in their
47 time to do that, and so we're appreciative of them, and our hearts
48 and prayers go to their family.

1
2 I want to thank the council on the discussion to be more nimble
3 at the federal level. The idea of giving the Regional
4 Administrator more authority to make nonconsequential adjustments
5 is a great idea, and based in common sense.

6
7 Andy, thank you and your team for always being as transparent as
8 possible. I understand how frustrating it can be at leadership
9 when people want answers, and you don't have them, and so thank
10 you always for your efforts, and, on a side note, the for-hire
11 season could run through October, as long as possible, and our
12 industry could plan and market for that, and that would be a lot
13 better than a pop-up season at the end of the year.

14
15 The DCBA and CFA supports and defers to Captain Hubbard on all
16 testimony on grouper today. Concerning the SEFHIER document, it's
17 time. We started this most recent process in April of 2023. We
18 developed a document, created an AP, populated it with a truly
19 diverse group of individuals from our industry.

20
21 In those two meetings, over three days, our industry found
22 consensus and solutions and provided recommendations to the
23 council, all of which that passed unanimously. This council picked
24 preferred alternatives, and, with VMS out, the main source of
25 contention was dissolved. Please move forward with this document,
26 and the process, and allow our industry to again have the
27 opportunity to provide data and stewardship.

28
29 When it comes to state management, the federal for-hire sector, we
30 take great concern in the fracturing of our industry. Different
31 management, different data programs, and different philosophies
32 and priorities is a recipe for disaster in the long-term. It would
33 be a death by a thousand cuts to Amendment 40. The most effective
34 management tool our industry has ever had would be laden with
35 inequity and uncertainty.

36
37 We pushed for sector separation, and our own data collection
38 program, to escape state politics, to escape from having to battle
39 our neighbors about access. In the past, our industry has been
40 collateral damage to the nimbleness of the states, and so the
41 proposition of stepping back into all of that is not appealing
42 without protections in place to keep our industry secure.

43
44 It's why we want sector separation for the five major reef fish
45 species and our own data system. Honestly, it's not some lavish
46 ask to secure historical access and create a data system so our
47 industry can be effective partners in the stewardship of the
48 nation's fishery.

1
2 I will say state management might be something to look at once we
3 have sector allocations and our own functioning data program,
4 depending on what species we're talking about.

5
6 Part of our discussion around the Gulf was getting a data system
7 so we could explore moving the start date for the western Gulf,
8 because of the weather in the early summer, but we must maintain
9 continuity, just like these fisheries do not belong to any
10 individual state, nor do our permits, and I'm not saying that
11 everyone would jump onboard, but I know I would feel our industry
12 could explore it at that point, with those protections in place,
13 maintaining the validity and continuity of a Gulf-wide permit no
14 matter where it's fishing. Thank you for the opportunity today.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. Any questions?

17
18 **MR. GREEN:** Thank you.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thanks, Jim. Next up is Richard Fischer.

21
22 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** Good morning, council. Richard Fischer, CEO
23 of the Louisiana Charter Boat Association. Welcome to New
24 Orleans. I hope everyone had a great time last night. I'll keep
25 my comments pretty brief.

26
27 I've, you know, been beating the drum for quite some time about
28 state management. I definitely want to thank the council for
29 continuing to discuss it, and, you know, bringing amberjack into
30 the fold yesterday as well, and so I appreciate you all for that.

31
32 I have great respect for the captains that have come up to this
33 podium and have opposed state management so far. I would just say
34 that I've heard a lot of speculation, and I would say let's keep
35 working through the process, let's keep talking. I feel confident
36 that, as the process continues, a lot of the issues that have been
37 brought up will be ironed out. Commonsense will prevail, and this
38 is not going to be the death blow that it's being portrayed as to
39 a lot of the businesses so far.

40
41 I appreciate the council for having the courage to bring up this
42 topic and move forward with it. I think it's going to be very
43 good for the Gulf, especially in our portion of the Gulf, in many
44 ways.

45
46 In three minutes, I just don't have the time to address all the
47 various ways that I think it could be, and it will be ironed out
48 over the coming months, but I certainly appreciate the willingness

1 of this body to do so, and, with that, I'll leave you all. Thank
2 you.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Do we have any questions?
5 Mr. Geeslin.

6
7 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer. I appreciate you hosting
8 the event last night. Just for the record, my clarification, where
9 is your group on SEFHIER?

10
11 **MR. FISCHER:** So it has been very -- Another thing that I've been
12 beating the drum at this podium for quite some time, is that our
13 captains have been staunchly against SEFHIER, but that was a
14 completely different SEFHIER, that looks completely different than
15 what we're talking about right now.

16
17 We're not talking about tracking. We're not talking about a device
18 that's affixed to the vessel that captains, in many cases, in most
19 cases, had to pay for. We're not talking about mandatory economic
20 reporting. That has been brought back considerably, and so, you
21 know, without having had the full conversation with enough of them
22 to feel like I've garnered a consensus, I would really like to
23 think that they wouldn't put up a ruckus about an app on your
24 phone. You know, in the spirit of collaboration with getting
25 better data to support better management, I think it's something
26 that our guys would, maybe reluctantly, but be okay with.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Richard. Any other questions? Not
29 seeing any, thank you, Richard, and I thank the Louisiana
30 Charterboat Association for the social last night.

31
32 **MR. FISCHER:** Thank you all for coming.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Jason Delacruz.

35
36 **MR. JASON DELACRUZ:** Good morning. That's a change. Real quick,
37 I'll start on shallow-water. I don't understand why we're on fire
38 to get this amendment done. We know we have issues with FES.
39 We've already done an interim rule to cut the TAC. Let's see what
40 happens.

41
42 You know, we've pushed that can down the road so long, and now,
43 all of a sudden, now we're on fire for it, and we're willing to
44 make an adjustment on data that our own confidence intervals say
45 is not usable, and so that's kind of ridiculous. I just -- I kind
46 of feel like we need to hold up on that.

47
48 On Amendment 62, the red grouper allocation increase, we really,

1 really need to get that like signed and sent up. With the way
2 things are coming out of the black box that would we call Silver
3 Spring these days, I would like to send less things up there, and
4 only things that we know we're going to do, especially because we
5 kind of expected those things to happen, and so we made allocation
6 decisions, and the hundreds of thousands of dollars of expenses to
7 try to make those decisions, and now we're being put in a weird
8 spot on it, and so let's get that up there as fast as we can.

9
10 I think the most important thing, the one thing that you guys
11 probably have gleaned from today, is stability in our IFQ system
12 is the biggest thing we need. We need access to capital. That's
13 a big key. We need some stability to give everybody the
14 opportunity to do what they want, one way or another. I do think
15 there's some room for some changes, and I think those changes --
16 You know, we need to talk about them.

17
18 I'm not as down with your pilot program. I'm not sure how I feel
19 about that. I get the concept, but I still don't like the concept
20 of just taking it from somebody. I would rather give them an
21 opportunity to step back and say, okay, let me sell it and move
22 on, because that seems more reasonably fair, because a lot of
23 people did buy-in, and not everybody was given it to them, and so
24 I think that's an opportunity that needs to be done, but I think
25 that's the big thing, stability.

26
27 There's no point in me beating the Fisheries Finance Plan to death.
28 I mean, I've successfully navigated it, but, to be honest, my
29 situation was different, and so I was a little better off than
30 most, but the system is overburdensome. The requirements are
31 different. It's a different asset. It's controlled differently.
32 There's no reason they can't do it differently.

33
34 Luckily, I'm meeting with the head of that program in a couple
35 weeks. He's coming to my fish house to take a look, and I'll get
36 an opportunity to discuss that with him. Really, that's about it.
37 Thank you.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Delacruz. Any questions? Not
40 seeing any, okay, and, well, that will wrap up public comment
41 today. Let's go ahead and take a break. Let's take a fifteen-
42 minute break, and we'll come back and start Supporting Agencies
43 Updates.

44
45 (Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, folks. If we can make our way back to the
48 table, we'll do some agency reports. Okay. Thank you all, and so

1 we're going to work down the agenda with Supporting Agencies
2 Updates, and we're going to start off with the South Atlantic
3 report, and Mr. Roller is online. Mr. Roller.

4
5 **SUPPORTING AGENCIES UPDATES**
6 **SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON**
7

8 **MR. TOM ROLLER:** Good afternoon. Can you hear me?
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.
11

12 **MR. ROLLER:** Thank you, Chair. My name is Tom Roller. I'm a
13 council member, South Atlantic Council member, from North
14 Carolina, serving as a liaison for this meeting. I apologize to
15 you all for not being there in-person, but, unfortunately, this
16 past Sunday and Monday's ice storm rendered air travel for me
17 impossible, and so here we are.
18

19 If you look in your briefing book, you will see our liaison report
20 from our December 2025 meeting, and so the South Atlantic Council
21 met in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, December 8 through 12, 2025,
22 and this is going to be a summary of our discussions.
23

24 The first item of business was our coral and shrimp amendment.
25 The council received an update on Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp
26 Amendment 12, which was scheduled for approval at the council
27 meeting in December. However, due to the extended government
28 shutdown, specifically the socioeconomic data section of the
29 amendment were not updated.
30

31 We opted to delay the approval to our completion of the document,
32 and we scheduled a special webinar meeting that was held last
33 Friday, January 23, 2026. We had that meeting last Friday, and we
34 heard public comment, discussed the amendment, and we approved it
35 for submission.
36

37 The next item of business is our citizen science. The council
38 reviewed and adopted the updated CitSci research priorities, which
39 incorporated input from our CitSci Projects and Operations
40 Advisory Panels. In 2020, the council adopted CitSci program
41 goals, objectives, and strategies. Council staff will use them to
42 guide the overall program's direction and to develop annual work
43 plans.
44

45 The program reviews its activities under each goal, objective, and
46 strategy every five years. The first review took place in the
47 fall of 2024 and covered program activities from 2019 to 2024.
48 Staff provided an overview of the fourteen recommended indicators

1 for regular monitoring, which were developed with input from the
2 advisory panels.

3
4 The council was supportive of the indicators as presented, noting
5 that they help monitor and assess key components of the program.
6 We also observed that, as the program matures, there may be
7 opportunities to narrow the list of indicators and monitor trends
8 over time. We also approved adding an ACCSP representative to the
9 CitSci Operations AP.

10
11 Moving on to our Grouper Snapper Committee, the first item of
12 business, which will have some updates, was state management of
13 red snapper. Each state representative presented each of their
14 exempted fishing permit applications, that were first submitted on
15 November 10, 2025, to explore state management of the recreational
16 red snapper fishery.

17
18 We also received a presentation including the methodology and
19 reports from year-one of the EFP that was awarded to Florida FWC
20 in 2024. We had a long discussion, and council members submitted
21 comments that will be used to develop a council letter in response
22 to the EFPs, and then upcoming would be a thirty-day comment period
23 announced in the Federal Register.

24
25 Since this meeting, my understanding is all the states have done
26 revisions to their EFPs, which were done last week, and the only
27 one I can really comment on is the North Carolina red snapper EFP,
28 which has had some considerable changes, bringing it more in line
29 with the other states.

30
31 The next item is black sea bass. We received an overview and
32 public comment of Regulatory Amendment 37, which proposes an annual
33 catch target below the current ACL, a reduction in the bag limit,
34 and a two-month spawning season closure during the February and
35 March.

36
37 Following public comments, the council decided to change the
38 preferred bag limit from two-fish per day to three-fish per day,
39 which would essentially limit the season by a little bit over a
40 month. It was -- We had a lot of public comment on this, and we
41 felt that this was the best decision, based off of what we were
42 hearing from the fishermen.

43
44 It also, in order to have a longer season, is why we are not
45 looking at any changes to minimum size limits, and, at the end,
46 the council approved this amendment for submission to NOAA
47 Fisheries for secretarial approval.

1 Then we're on to blueline tilefish. The council approved
2 Abbreviated Framework 5 to implement catch level recommendations
3 for blueline tilefish. The real nature of this abbreviated
4 framework was due to the fact that we did have a big increase in
5 the ACL.

6
7 The council felt that, while we did have to make some further
8 changes, that we should do everything we can to, when we have more
9 fish to put on the table, to give it to our fishermen as soon as
10 possible. That's why we're going to be working on a subsequent
11 amendment that will include reevaluating the jurisdictional
12 apportionment percentages within the Mid-Atlantic Council, sector
13 allocations, and discard estimates.

14
15 Golden tilefish, staff presented the results of the revised golden
16 tilefish stock assessment, SEDAR 89. The assessment was revised
17 when a discrepancy in the commercial landings was identified.

18
19 The biggest thing to note is a lot of the discussion here was about
20 our workload. The current ACL is set to increase in 2026, but the
21 newly recommended ABC is slightly below this level, just about a
22 thousand pounds, and so, given the workload, we decided not to
23 proceed with Abbreviated Framework 4 and adjust the catch level,
24 since the stock is not overfished. Instead, we're going to be
25 tacking this action on to another FMP that we'll be doing in 2026,
26 and which one we have not yet determined.

27
28 The next one is our snapper grouper fishery management unit
29 revision, which we had a ton of discussion over. Through the
30 development of Amendment 61, the council has identified seventeen
31 species to examine more in-depth to determine whether the species
32 should be removed from the fisheries management unit or designated
33 as an ecosystem component species. It's a long list. I'm not
34 going to read them off, but it is available in the report. We
35 received scoping comments and feedback and feedback from our
36 Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel.

37
38 We reviewed draft ecosystem management objectives related to
39 ecosystem component species, and the number of species that would
40 continue to be considered in the amendment, and potential
41 management measures to include in the amendment.

42
43 A big part of this discussion is we had previously had discussion
44 as we have looked a lot at the report that the Mid-Atlantic gets
45 for unmanaged and ecosystem component species, and what we have
46 decided, as a council, is we would like a similar report. We're
47 going to get the first one in the latter half of 2026, and then
48 annually thereafter.

1
2 There wasn't a lot of agreement on how to proceed with this, and
3 so the council requested more information to settle the species
4 and potential members that would be further considered, and we're
5 going to have a lot of discussion about this at our March 2026
6 meeting.

7
8 Then the next item is mutton and yellowtail snapper. Through the
9 development of Joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/ Reef Fish
10 Amendment 55, the Gulf and South Atlantic councils are responding
11 to the most recent stock assessments for mutton and yellowtail
12 snapper, SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96 respectively.

13
14 The amendments propose updating the stock OFL and ABC spanning the
15 South Atlantic and Gulf, the jurisdiction apportionment between
16 the councils, regional ACLs, and South Atlantic sector allocation
17 for both species. We reviewed a set of actions and alternatives,
18 and discussed an additional range of alternatives for the South
19 Atlantic sector allocation actions. We will review those
20 preliminary analysis at our March 2026 meeting.

21
22 The last item was Other Business. The council directed staff to
23 compile information on other councils' parental leave policies and
24 bring it to the next meeting of our Executive Committee, and, with
25 that, Mr. Chair, I conclude my report. I'm happy to answer any
26 questions.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Roller. Do we have any questions
29 for Tom? I'm not seeing any. Thanks for being online.

30
31 **MR. ROLLER:** Not a problem. Thank you.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We'll move on to the next report, the Louisiana
34 Law Enforcement Efforts, and Major Aucoin.

35 36 **LOUISIANA LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

37
38 **MAJOR DEAN AUCOIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, council, and
39 so I'll give you a quick brief report of where we are since our
40 last state report we gave to you all.

41
42 This past year, JEA year, we conducted a total of 4,700 hours
43 patrolling, JEA related. This is a mix between state funding as
44 well as our federal NOAA funding allocation that we're allotted
45 through the JEA program. Commercially, we had 3,400 hours, just
46 over 3,400 hours, recreational at 1,200 hours, which is a mix.
47 The commercial is a mix between IFQ as well as reef fish patrols
48 and TED patrols in the Gulf of America.

1
2 Total contacts is roughly 1,700 hours, or 1,700 contacts, between
3 the commercial and the recreational factors. Some of the cases we
4 encountered are going to be closed season snapper, violating
5 charter boat regulations, TED regulations, federal reef fish
6 permit, federal reef fish regulations, whether it's undersized,
7 over the limit, related to red snapper or other reef fish species,
8 and violation of federal shrimp regulations, along with red drum
9 in the EEZ.

10
11 Then our goal is continue to maintain and build our relationship
12 with our federal partners. Two or three years ago, we -- Tom
13 Forehand, who used to work for our department on the enforcement
14 side, and now works for NOAA, and he has been a huge asset to us
15 for the state. He continues to go on patrol with our officers
16 pretty regularly.

17
18 We've also started coordinating with the feds. We do --
19 Typically, every six months, we'll do a TED training with our state
20 and federal partners, as well as some reef fish training, just to
21 make sure our guys are up-to-date on the regulations and the rules
22 that they're out there enforcing. Our last one was, unfortunately,
23 canceled, due to bad weather that was coming in, but we are looking
24 to reschedule it for later on this year, along with NOAA and Coast
25 Guard.

26
27 One of the things I did want to mention, this past year, with our
28 federal funding, we were able to re-outfit and get two of our big
29 forty-foot offshore vessels refurbished and back into the fleet.
30 One of the things we looked at is, you know, do we buy new vessels,
31 do we repair what we had, and we felt that it was best to use the
32 JEA funding to go ahead and refurbish these vessels, and we
33 maintained them, and, this year, we just got them back in service
34 to go back on patrol. With that, any questions?

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Major Aucoin. Any questions? Mr.
37 Schieble.

38
39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Major Aucoin. Good presentation. You
40 listed charter boat violations in there. Do you recall if you had
41 any cases of state charters in federal waters this year? I think
42 I asked you this question last year as well, but we've heard
43 complaints, from some of the federal for-hire captains, that this
44 is taking place, but I wasn't sure of what level, or if at all.

45
46 **MAJOR AUCOIN:** We have. We've received several complaints over
47 the past year, or two years. We work the complaints with our Coast
48 Guard partners, as well as NOAA partners. We've only made one

1 case this past year, where we actually caught a state charter in
2 federal waters.

3
4 A lot of those violations that we do see is typically permit
5 issues, or regulatory issues, as far as not having requirements
6 for the federal hires, but we do receive our complaints. We work
7 our complaints with our partners fully. We've done some operations
8 with NOAA targeting that specific violation, and just we haven't
9 had much success with catching anybody in federal waters, but we
10 do work it heavily when we receive the complaints, and follow-up
11 with the complaints, as well as the complainants.

12
13 A lot of times, we'll get a complaint from other charter fishermen,
14 and then, you know, we ask them for more information, or their
15 contact information, and they're a little hesitant to give it to
16 us, but that's one thing I do want to say.

17
18 We always try to follow back up with that federal-permitted person,
19 to let them know that, hey, look, we're working your complaint.
20 We're not just passing it on, and we're putting resources into it.

21
22 Some of these cases take time. It takes resources. It takes
23 several days to make. You know, you may go work it, and the
24 weather turns bad on us, and we can't get out there, but, yes, we
25 do receive complaints, and we do work them when we get them.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Major Aucoin? I'm not
28 seeing any, Dean. Thank you for being here.

29
30 **MAJOR AUCOIN:** Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, online, we will have the NOAA Office of
33 Law Enforcement report. Mr. Walia.

34
35 **NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (OLE) REPORT**

36
37 **MR. MATT WALIA:** I appreciate it, Mr. Chair. Can you hear me?

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.

40
41 **MR. WALIA:** Perfect. Thank you. Yes, and I'm Matt Walia, NOAA
42 Office of Law Enforcement. I'm going to give you a couple of just
43 brief updates of what we've been up to. Our next round of council
44 report wasn't able to get finalized in time, but I do want to just
45 highlight some of our efforts where we've been, and so if we can
46 go to the next slide, please.

47
48 This is a snapshot from October to December of our enforcement

1 referrals. You know, our relationship with all the state partners,
2 and the Coast Guard, and other federal partners is essential to
3 enforcing Magnuson and everything else that falls under our
4 purview.

5
6 You can see the map here, the location of where that has occurred.
7 Specifically within the Gulf, we've gotten nineteen cases from
8 FWC, and that's a mix of everything in Magnuson, a lot of
9 undersized fish, retention during a closed season, sanctuary
10 violations. We had one from Louisiana, that you just heard, that
11 was kind of brought in there as well, and that was shrimping
12 without a federal permit, and then the Coast Guard as well. They
13 came across some shrimping violations where the BRDs were sown
14 shut.

15
16 Like you just heard Major Aucoin mention, we do what we can to get
17 out and do trainings as well. I was going to give a shoutout to
18 Officer Forehand as well, and so that's great to hear that he's
19 been integral in our relationships, specifically within Louisiana,
20 working ops, working trainings. He tries getting up there to the
21 academy when he can, when it's open.

22
23 We had a joint IFQ training session with law enforcement that,
24 unfortunately, got canceled. That happened during the shutdown,
25 but we had that in the works with Louisiana, Mississippi, and
26 Alabama, and so we're looking to hold that hopefully in the near
27 future, similar to the TED operations that we got going on, and
28 then as well as the Coast Guard.

29
30 We get out to the regional training centers. It was Officer
31 Forehand, again, and he was just out there about two weeks ago,
32 and so we go out there and help the boarding parties understand
33 what to look for when they do those boardings.

34
35 IFQ, I know it's been a topic this week a lot. I want to throw
36 some stuff out, show actions, what we've been doing. Back in
37 August, when I gave our brief, I had a reminder of some common
38 violations we were seeing, trying to give a heads-up to industry.

39
40 Since then, we've continued to see that, and we've actually made
41 some notable cases, all revolving around IFQ compliance, and so,
42 from the winter to now, we've had roughly \$100,000 in penalties
43 with our partners at GC, with NOVAs that were issued related to
44 IFQ, and it's a slew of things that you see up here, everything
45 from a boat landing early to landing at an improper location, not
46 sending a notice at all, having their VMS off.

47
48 One of the big things we've come across in the Gulf as well are

1 folks that are trailing their boats are not getting that DL code,
2 and so they're offloading the fish. They're not getting the
3 weight, and that code is not getting transmitted over and working
4 with the dealer in time, and so the dealer needs to have that
5 landing code to receive that fish, in order for that fish to get
6 transported from landing to its ultimate destination, and so that's
7 a lot of stuff we're seeing.

8
9 One case alone, one boat, was half of those penalties. It was a
10 \$50,000 charge for a boat that did not have his VMS on. He did
11 not give advance notice multiple times landing where they were
12 coming in, what they were coming in with, insufficient allocation.
13 They also failed to take an observer, and so stuff like this can
14 add up.

15
16 When we do our investigations, we do our boardings, we often see
17 ancillary charges. Folks may be using reef fish as bait. We've
18 had instances of using knives as venting tools. That's, obviously,
19 not that effective. Not having sea turtle mitigation gear, and so
20 it can add up, but we've been getting out there.

21
22 I wanted to put the sixty-plus offloads. That was in this past
23 winter. That was all during the shutdown, and so, during the
24 shutdown, all of us were working, law enforcement. We were out
25 and about. We were still doing our jobs, and so that's pretty
26 good effort across the Gulf of us still getting about to the
27 fishery, and we actually have reduced staff as well, and so, with
28 our capacity to still do that, I wanted to note that effort and
29 work with our state partners.

30
31 Illegal charters has also been mentioned a little bit here in
32 public comment between the states and feds. This has been, and
33 continues to be, a priority. We oftentimes work with other
34 agencies on this. We have done some in the past with Louisiana
35 recently, and Florida as well. We make sure we do coordination
36 when we're doing patrols out there looking for it.

37
38 Specifically off the southwest, central southwest, Florida, we've
39 had a lot of frequent presence patrols in the past couple months,
40 when the season opened back up in the winter, and the compliance
41 has been pretty good, as far as charters that we're coming across,
42 but we're making it known. We've still boarded a lot of folks
43 that have charter permits that are legit, a lot of recreational
44 boats, but we're finding other stuff. You know, they may be using
45 undersized -- They have undersized fish, reef fish as bait, stuff
46 like that, and so we're still coming across other charges.

47
48 Anytime we do a patrol, you know, and say we go in the sanctuary,

1 and we're looking for sanctuary violations, and we're also looking
2 for charters, right, and it's always on our list, when we're out
3 on the water, that that's what we're keeping an eye for, whether
4 it's through tips, concentrated ops, or patrols.

5
6 That picture on the right is a recent case that we did make for a
7 gentleman in Florida that did not have a reef fish permit. They
8 also were not using venting tools and reef fish as bait, and that
9 ended up being a little over a \$31,000 NOVA, with our General
10 Counsel partners, that they were issued, and so we're getting out
11 and about on that when we can.

12
13 The same deal, and, you know, we rely on the public and industry.
14 I get a handful of tips myself, and so, when folks are willing,
15 and this can always be anonymous. We always keep this in here in
16 the briefs all the time, to make sure people know our info, how to
17 contact us. We encourage that, and we'll run everything down and
18 get back to you, and so, with that, I'll take any questions, if
19 there are. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walia. Do we have any questions?
22 We do. Captain Walker.

23
24 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and thank you. I had a -- I was kind of stunned
25 when you told me what the charges were on the on the second-to-
26 last slide there, on the illegal charter -- The slide on the
27 illegal charters page. It's got a couple of mahi and some red
28 snapper, and did you say that was \$35 charge, and is that what
29 goes with that photo there, and what were all the charges there?

30
31 **MR. WALIA:** Yes, and that that one was about a -- That was working
32 with our partners at GC, and so that was a civil penalty of a
33 little over \$31,000. It was for operating without a federal
34 charter permit, using Gulf reef fish as bait, and not having the
35 required fishing gear onboard, which was a descending device or
36 venting tool. The crux of that is not having that federal permit,
37 and fishing without it, and so they were in federal waters. That
38 snapshot that you're referencing to, that was a picture from the
39 catch.

40
41 **MR. WALKER:** Great. Can you tell me where that was?

42
43 **MR. WALIA:** Southwest Florida.

44
45 **MR. WALKER:** All right. Good work. Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other questions for Mr. Walia? Not
48 seeing any, thank you, Mr. Walia. Next on our list is Gulf States

1 Marine Fisheries Commission and Mr. Donaldson.

2
3 **GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**
4

5 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since Mr. Bray provided a
6 comprehensive overview of the commission activities, I think it
7 would be redundant if I reported anything, and so I will answer
8 any questions, if you guys have come up with questions since then,
9 but, if not, we can move on.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Any questions for Dave?
12 No. You're free and clear, Dave. Next up is Lt. Morton and the
13 U.S. Coast Guard report.

14
15 **U.S. COAST GUARD**
16

17 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. Lt.
18 Jackson Morton, and I'm the Living Marine Resources Officer at
19 Coast Guard Heartland District.

20
21 Kicking things off with our Exclusive Economic Zone enforcement,
22 specifically the lancha mission down at the Texas and Mexico
23 Maritime Boundary Line, I do have to apologize. We did have an
24 interdiction that came up later on Friday, and so we have to add
25 some tallies to this slide, and so, so far in 2026, we have three
26 interdictions, and then sixty-six pounds of red snapper were
27 recovered on that one on Friday.

28
29 It looks a little bit smaller than the past couple of years, but,
30 in general, our interdictions are lower in the winter months than
31 they are -- They'll ramp back up in the winter.

32
33 That being said, detections are still way down for EEZ incursions,
34 essentially since we implemented criminal prosecution for the
35 Lacey Act. If you look at the first three months of fiscal year
36 2025, and so that's October, November, December of 2024, we had
37 forty-five detections. The same time series for fiscal year 2026,
38 we're down to seventeen, and I think hopefully that trend
39 continues, but we're very happy to report that we're seeing a lot
40 less incursion detections, while maintaining about the same total
41 number of interdictions, and so our rate is getting a little bit
42 better.

43
44 Then, for mission highlights, we had the six referred cases last
45 fiscal year, and, in the case we just did get on Friday, we did
46 end up referring, and so the slide says no referrals yet for 2026,
47 but we did refer the one on Friday. That was four people total.
48 Of the twenty-four individuals that were referred last fiscal year,

1 so far twenty-one have been convicted, and then we expect that to
2 continue, and then we'll have to wait and see what happens with
3 these next four.

4
5 Then just a couple highlights. We did catch a lanchas with six
6 persons out fishing. They had gear onboard, but there was no catch
7 recovered, and then, like I said, the one on Friday, four total
8 people, and then we recovered sixty-six red snapper. Sorry.
9 Excuse me. Sixty-six pounds of red snapper.

10
11 Our domestic enforcement, so far this year, we have total of
12 seventy-one boardings. That's on our domestic fleet. We referred
13 the one case to NOAA thus far, and that involves retention of a
14 red drum in the EEZ. You can see a picture there on the left.

15
16 We have a couple of cases we're still reviewing. Those are more
17 of our typical turtle excluder devices kind of boardings, which
18 are mainly what we saw last year in 2025, and, historically, that's
19 our most common violation, and so we're continuing to work the
20 domestic fleet as well.

21
22 Then, as far as our marine protected resources, we did respond to
23 one request for assistance. It ended up in an interaction. That
24 happened on the 15th of December, and so, our Sector New Orleans,
25 they responded to a request. I believe it was by Audubon Aquarium
26 Rescue, about a potential manatee stress or straining event.

27
28 We did have a shoreside unit in the area, that they were luckily
29 able to locate the animal. They captured video, and photographic
30 evidence of the animal's condition, and we forwarded it on to the
31 rescue team, so they could use that in a later time. We were
32 shoreside at that time, and so we didn't have any of the -- We
33 weren't able to get up close to the animal, or provide any
34 transport for the rescue team, but we were at least able to capture
35 some -- Confirm that this was a manatee, and send the evidence of
36 its condition to the team.

37
38 Then I would like to mention, really quick before I open it up for
39 questions, and talk about Starlink a little bit. Unfortunately,
40 I don't have a lot of new information to pass. The Coast Guard is
41 continuing to work with our partners at FCC, stakeholders. At
42 this time, the Coast Guard still stands that they do not meet the
43 requirements for communication equipment carriage for commercial
44 fishing vessels. All right, and that's all I have. Thank you.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton. Do we have any questions?
47 I'm not seeing any. Thank you, Lt. Morton. Okay. With that,
48 lunch is ready in the back of the room. We're going to break for

1 thirty minutes and enjoy our boxed lunch right here at this table,
2 and we will reconvene at one o'clock.

3
4 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on January 28, 2026.)
5

6 - - -

7
8 January 28, 2026
9

10 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION
11

12 - - -
13

14 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Hyatt
15 Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Wednesday afternoon, January
16 28, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.
17

18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, all. We're going to get started
19 with the committee reports, and we're going to just work down the
20 list, and General Spraggins will take us through Admin and Budget.
21 General.
22

23 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

24 **ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE REPORT**
25

26 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, and I would
27 like to brief on the Tab G, which is the Administrative/Budget
28 Committee report, January 26, 2026, and myself as the chair. The
29 committee adopted the agenda and August 2025 minutes, Tab G, Number
30 1 and 2, as written.
31

32 Review and Discussion of Proposed 2026 Draft Activities and Budget,
33 Tab G, Numbers 4a and 4b, staff provided a draft list of activities
34 proposed for 2026 and a draft budget based on the potentially level
35 funding. The final funding 2025 budget was presented alongside
36 the 2026 draft budget.
37

38 Staff noted that a few adjustments were made to the 2026 budget
39 based on planned activity changes, and the funded 2026 budget will
40 be brought to the council for approval later in the year.
41

42 A member of the committee asked why the budget for meetings
43 decreased if the activities were still planned. Staff replied
44 that these differences are due to activities being attributable to
45 different funding streams. Also, some meetings have been shortened
46 or held virtually, which decreased the cost.
47

48 A member asked why no funds were budgeted for leave accounts

1 contributing for new hires, and staff stated this amount may be
2 adjusted when the actual 2026 funding is known and staff are hired
3 later in the year. Another member inquired if the staff required
4 the actual expenditures compared with budget for the prior year
5 and when projecting the adjustments to each budget line. Staff
6 responded affirmatively. Any questions on that, sir? Okay.

7
8 The second part was Update of 2020-2024 Administrative Award No
9 Cost Extension Request and Inflation Reduction Act funding. Staff
10 stated that the entire 2020 to 2024 administrative award had been
11 extended, and final reports are in progress.

12
13 The Inflation Reduction Act work is continuing generally on track
14 with the workplan. The submission of a request to revise the
15 activity may be considered in the future to account for the
16 staffing change of a retiring staff person. Any questions on that?
17 If not, I'll continue.

18
19 The next part was Review Advisory Panel Appointments for Red Drum,
20 Coastal Migratory, and Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper-Tilefish
21 Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) and Ad Hoc Charter-for-Hire Data
22 Collection, Tab G, Number 6. Staff provided the activity and
23 history for the advisory panels that are due for reappointment in
24 2026 and the charge of the working groups.

25
26 A member inquired if there were results from a meeting of the Red
27 Drum AP in 2026. Staff noted that all APs except Data Collection
28 met virtually in July to review the Executive Orders 14276,
29 Restoring America's Seafood Competitiveness, and 14192, Unleashing
30 Prosperity Through Deregulation. The committee agreed to
31 advertise and repopulate the Red Drum and the Coastal Migratory AP
32 and maintain the two current Ad Hoc APs in 2026. Any questions?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins.

35
36 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** No other business, and, sir, that is presented
37 as it is.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, General Spraggins, and so the
40 way I understand it is we will go out to the public for the APs?

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we need a motion, Dr. Simmons?

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** No, Mr. Chair. Our plan is to go
47 ahead and advertise and bring you applicants for the Red Drum and
48 the Coastal Migratory Projects AP for April.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you.

3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Unless you tell us otherwise.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Is there any discussion? No?

7
8 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Sir, that's my report, and I do think if maybe
9 -- Dr. Simmons, we do have funds now, right?

10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes. We got the first three months
12 of 2026 yesterday, and so we've got to start the state contracts.

13
14 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** All right. Good to hear. Thank you. All
15 right. That's my report, sir.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, General Spraggins. Next on the
18 agenda is General Spraggins again, with the Law Enforcement
19 Committee report.

20
21 **LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT**

22
23 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. I would like to give
24 the Law Enforcement Committee report of January 26, 2026, with
25 myself as the chair. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab L,
26 Number 1, as written and approved the minutes, Tab L, Number 2, of
27 the January 2025 meeting.

28
29 Additional Tier of ID Number Size for Federally-Permitted Vessels
30 Between Twenty-Five Feet and Sixty-Five Feet, staff noted that the
31 Law Enforcement Technical Committee members considered
32 alternatives to the current ID requirements for federally-
33 permitted vessels and approved a motion to reaffirm the current
34 sizing for official number displays as adequate to assist in law
35 enforcement.

36
37 In response to the committee's questions, an LETC member stated
38 that the identifying display should be of sufficient size and
39 contrast to allow identification from a standoff distance for law
40 enforcement vessels and aircraft. Any questions on that?

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

43
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I appreciate the Law Enforcement AP's
45 review of this, and I'm still struggling with the rationale, simply
46 because we have twenty-five-foot vessels that have three-inch
47 lettering, and then, all of a sudden, you have to jump to ten-inch
48 lettering for a twenty-six-foot vessel, right?

1
2 I feel like, because we are graduating these numberings, that we
3 probably could come up with an intermediate solution for those
4 twenty-six to forty-five-foot vessels, or whatever would be agreed
5 upon, but I wanted to maybe hear from my charter boat friends on
6 the council, if you have any thoughts on this, if it's worth
7 pursuing. This would have to be something not just done at the
8 Gulf Council. I think it's regulations for the entire Southeast.
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Captain Walker.

11
12 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I agree, but is that something that we do?
13 It seems like it's outside of -- It seems like it's more of a
14 federal Coast Guard guideline, and not a council decision, but I
15 certainly support that idea.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

18
19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just to confirm, it is in our 622 regulations for
20 the Code of Federal Regulations, and so we would have the ability
21 to look at this.
22

23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Frady.

24
25 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, sir. You know, this has been around a long
26 time. It was just never enforced. As far as the different size,
27 I've thought about this, after we said that we support this, and
28 different size letters, to make sure -- I feel for the people who
29 have small boats, who are in really congested areas, who put that
30 big, large number on their vessel, and it makes them stick out
31 like a sore thumb, and, with fishing getting tougher at times, or
32 better, the opportunity for someone to see a charter boat
33 identified by huge numbers will make them draw attention to him.
34

35 Instead of running in anonymity, all of a sudden, he's there. I
36 think if we just kept it like a range of sizes, to where it doesn't
37 make a twenty-five or thirty-foot boat have sixteen-inch letters
38 out there, or, I mean numbers out there, and it just -- I mean, I
39 get by with scaling, just to support those people who still have
40 to comply, but don't want like a sore thumb sticking up.
41

42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Troy. General Spraggins and Dr.
43 Simmons.
44

45 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Being there with the committee, the rationale
46 that they used is, obviously, a lot of this is done from aerial
47 now, and because -- If you take a smaller letter aerial, for them
48 to be able to see it, even on a twenty-five-foot boat, or twenty-

1 six-foot boat, excuse me, you know, it's hard for them to be able
2 to see. You know, the bigger numbers is what they're able to see
3 from the aerial side, and that was the deciding factor, I believe,
4 that made them believe that they needed to keep this the same way.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Captain Frady, to
7 that?

8
9 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir. To that point, General, I wasn't even
10 thinking, just a second ago, about the one on top. I've got mine
11 on the bow of my vessel, and the numbers are large, where, you
12 know, you would have to really just be flying over, and you can
13 see it, and so, with the exclusion of having the fixed-size numbers
14 on the roof or the hood, or the top, or whatever you want to call
15 it -- I would say on the side, I could get by with different size,
16 but definitely on the top, if that makes law enforcement happy, I
17 would support that in a heartbeat.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. General, a follow-up?

20
21 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and I will definitely bring this back to
22 them, and we'll look at it, and, you know, we'll meet again, and
23 have a meeting, but I will definitely bring it back to them, and
24 ask them to look at that, and maybe that the possibility that the
25 side is one thing, and if they have it on top is the other, and
26 that might be something that they could look at.

27
28 I don't think that was really brought up in the conversation. I
29 don't see the Major, and I don't know if he's still in here or
30 not. There he is. Major, you just walked in at the right time.
31 Do you mind if I call him up?

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Major Aucoin.

34
35 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** What we're talking about, Major, is the fact
36 about the lettering on the twenty-five -- Above twenty-five to
37 sixty-five feet, and the major thing was for aerial, you know, to
38 be able to see it from the aerial side, and Captain Frady brought
39 up something, a fact about a possibility, and could we have put
40 the sizes on the boat this way, but have something on top of it
41 that has the right amount, and I told him I would bring it back to
42 you all, but, since you walked in, you got in the middle of it.

43
44 **MAJOR AUCOIN:** I think it's kind of come up. Lt. Morton was with
45 us for the LETC, and I think the thing is, when it comes to the
46 top, not all boats have a top. Not all boats have that ability to
47 put numbering at the top. When you talk about the current regs,
48 it's zero to twenty-five foot is three-inch, twenty-five to sixty-

1 five is ten-inch, and anything over sixty-five is eighteen-inch,
2 and so, for discussion, where is that happy medium? If you go
3 three-inch or five-inch or twelve-inch, and I'm just throwing
4 numbers out there, a three-inch and a five-inch aerial
5 surveillance, it's hard to tell.

6
7 If you're not comparing them next to each other, you can't tell,
8 okay, this is bigger. Now, ten inches, we can articulate that, if
9 that boat is the only boat in that area, and so I don't know if I
10 answered your question, but Lt. Morton will probably have some
11 insight, too.

12
13 I heard -- Before I stepped out on the phone, I heard it come up
14 about COLREGS, or regulatory authority, and he may have more input
15 on that, what that looks like, and I know he'll have some better
16 -- You know, aerial-wise, he can give some input on that as well,
17 because that was discussed heavily amongst the group.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Major Aucoin. Lt. Morton.

20
21 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I just -- Thank you, Major
22 Aucoin, for that summary, and I just wanted to bring up another
23 point, is that, when we have these -- So it is graduated, right,
24 but they're pretty big steps in between, and one of the other
25 things, you know, we've heard a lot about is state versus federal
26 charter fishermen in federal waters.

27
28 If you have, you know, the twenty-five to sixty-five-foot boat
29 with that ten-inch block lettering, it stands out, and it makes it
30 easier for us to identify which vessels are fishing under, you
31 know, a federal for-hire permit, because they have to have those
32 larger lettering.

33
34 The more steps that you add in between, the harder it is to
35 distinguish, you know, which class of vessel and things, and I
36 think, with that, coupled with the aircraft, especially because
37 we're running low on resources, and different priorities, it just
38 makes our job a little bit more difficult, and that's why we
39 recommended to maintain the size lettering that there is, to even
40 make it more easily identifiable between, you know, that's a
41 federal for-hire vessel fishing in federal waters with those ten-
42 inch block letters.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton. Mr. Geeslin.

45
46 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, just throwing this out
47 there for consideration, we are about to launch into this camera
48 at the Gulf Pass effort estimation, and one of the things that

1 Moat Marine Lab and Sea Vision AI, the contractors for this -- The
2 approach is to, you know, machine learn what type of boats are
3 entering and exiting out of the passes, and try to make a
4 determination as to effort into offshore fishing, specifically
5 into reef fishing.

6
7 This may, and I'm going to bring this back to them -- Being able
8 to determine and pick up on those vessel identification numbers
9 may further refine how they're able to categorize and machine learn
10 that effort estimation, and so I think that's a -- So I'm
11 supportive of keeping those big letters on there, for the time
12 being, just for that point alone, and I do trust in our LE, law
13 enforcement, officials there.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. Any other comments? No?
16 I'll turn it back over to General Spraggins.

17
18 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Well, thank you, sir, Mr. Chairman, and
19 the next item up is an update on the twenty-fathom boundary line
20 closure. Staff indicated that the LETC discussed the council's
21 preferred alternative in Reef Fish Amendment 62 to eliminate the
22 February 1 through March 31 recreational closed season for shallow-
23 water grouper in federal waters seaward of the twenty-fathom
24 boundary. The LETC concurred with the council's decision and did
25 not recommend any additional action, sir.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Do we have any
28 comments, questions, concerns? Move on, General.

29
30 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** All right, and so the next one up is state and
31 federal boundary line for reef fish. Staff noted that the LETC
32 discussed the federal boundary for the management of Gulf reef
33 fish and determined that, currently, there are no enforcement
34 issues related to the boundary. Staff provided a map of the
35 approved nine-nautical-mile reef fish management boundary line and
36 noted that the map is available for management and use by
37 stakeholders.

38
39 The next one is nomination for the process of Officer/Team of the
40 Year. Staff noted that the LETC members inquired about the need
41 for a virtual closed session meeting to discuss nominations. LETC
42 members suggested that the webinar may no longer be necessary,
43 because the electronic submission of the nominees would suffice.
44 The LETC approved a motion to streamline the nomination process by
45 removing the closed session webinar for discussion and nominees.

46
47 The committee concurred and approved the following motion. **The**
48 **committee recommends, and I so move, to remove the closed session**

1 of the LETC to discuss the Officer/Team of the Year nomination.
2 Sir.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General. We have a committee motion
5 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing**
6 **any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the**
7 **motion carries.** General Spraggins.

8
9 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. With that, we will
12 move on to the Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report and Dr.
13 Banks.

14
15 **SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE REPORT**

16
17 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the agenda
18 as modified, Tab E, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab E, Number 2,
19 from the November 2025 meeting were approved as written.

20
21 Regulatory Streaming Report, Tab E, Number 4, council staff
22 reviewed the recommendations for the regulatory streaming report
23 work that was contracted by the council to identify efficient
24 processes used in other regions that could potentially be applied
25 in the Gulf. Staff highlighted recommendations that were
26 previously prioritized by the council, or by staff, and proposed
27 a draft workplan with next steps to operationalize those
28 recommendations.

29
30 The committee discussed the prioritized recommendations and
31 provided suggestions for the draft workplan. A committee member
32 requested that Recommendation 2.4 to explore ways the council can
33 play a more active role in the exempted fishing permit process be
34 added to the list of priority recommendations.

35
36 Committee members discussed the recommendation to designate low-
37 priority species as ecosystem component species. A committee
38 member suggested that the council could follow procedures used in
39 similar efforts by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
40 where a questionnaire is used to streamline discussions of
41 ecosystem component species criteria.

42
43 Council staff highlighted that the workplan for the Seafood
44 Competitive Executive Order 14276 includes the consideration to
45 remove low-priority species from fishery management plans
46 altogether, without the need to designate them as ecosystem
47 component species.

1 Regarding the recommendation to develop automatic management
2 measures, a committee member suggested focusing on species that
3 rely on data-limited stock assessments with interim updates for
4 adjusting catch levels, for example lane snapper. Southeast
5 Regional Office (SERO) staff recommended building capacity for
6 direct implementation via the National Oceanic and Atmospheric
7 Administration Fisheries Regional Administrator as part of the
8 development of the automatic measures.

9
10 NOAA General Counsel encouraged streamlining efforts to be
11 developed with consideration for the processes that have embedded
12 in the Gulf, for example using categorical exclusions instead of
13 supplemental information reports.

14
15 General Counsel also clarified that CEs can only be used if there
16 are no extraordinary circumstances, noting a typo in their criteria
17 on page 66 of the report. SERO staff contributed that there are
18 ongoing efforts to identify document sections that can be
19 simplified or removed if not required.

20
21 Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff stressed the importance
22 of pursuing pathways to reduce the time lags between the terminal
23 year of data used to produce catch advice and the implementation
24 of fisheries specifications. Both SERO and Science Center staff
25 expressed support for a working group to focus on efforts to
26 operationalize the streamlining of routine minor management
27 measures.

28
29 Other Business, Atlantic Highly Migratory Species proposed rule,
30 council staff reviewed the Atlantic HMS proposed rule on commercial
31 and recreational shark management measures, which includes
32 revising the recreational bag limit for Atlantic sharpnose sharks
33 and bonnethead sharks from one per person per trip to one per
34 vessel per trip. The comment period for the proposed rule ends on
35 March 6, 2026, before the April council meeting.

36
37 Committee members expressed concern about the proposed bag limit
38 reduction for Atlantic sharpnose, given that the species is
39 abundant. The committee stated that this bag limit does not appear
40 to be related to any recent stock assessment that would warrant a
41 decrease in harvest, last assessed in 2013.

42
43 Committee members discussed the need to have additional time to
44 understand the rationale for the proposed changes, so that the
45 council could comment on the proposed rule appropriately.

46
47 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to request an extension**
48 **of the comment period on the implementation of the proposed HMS**

1 rule of commercial and recreational shark management measures to
2 give the Gulf Council ample time to comment. Additionally, the
3 Gulf Council requests a presentation from HMS at the April 2026
4 council meeting. The motion carried without opposition.
5

6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. We have a committee motion
7 on the board. Is there any further discussion on the motion?
8 Captain Walker.
9

10 **MR. WALKER:** Just the Gulf Council requests a presentation from
11 HMS, and do we need to be more specific on what? I mean, applying
12 to this rule, as we're talking about it, but should we say about
13 the shark bag limit reduction and rationale for that?
14

15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think staff
16 can cover that in the request. We tried to put commercial and
17 recreational shark management measures in there. I understand
18 that's pretty broad, but I think we can cover that in our request.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker, do you agree with that?
21

22 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
23

24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussion on the motion? **Not**
25 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? No opposition,**
26 **and the motion carries.**
27

28 I would like to let everyone know that the South Atlantic plans to
29 also write a letter. They will be -- HMS will be visiting their
30 meeting, but they plan to write a letter as well. No presentation,
31 but they plan to do the same as us. Okay, Dr. Banks.
32

33 **DR. BANKS:** Council Review of Seafood Competitiveness EO Public
34 Comments, the NOAA Office of Sustainable Fisheries recently
35 requested that the council review the public comments received
36 during their public comment period for EO 14276, Seafood
37 Competitiveness, and decide if the council's workplan that was
38 submitted in September 2025 should be amended or updated. Any
39 updates to regional council workplans are due on April 30, 2026.
40

41 Council staff suggested working with council leadership, staff,
42 and SERO staff to review the comments and determine if there is a
43 need to bring the public comments and the workplan back to the
44 council during its April 2026 meeting. Mr. Chair, this concludes
45 my report.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Is there anything or any
48 other business that needs to come before Sustainable Fisheries?

1 Not seeing any, okay. Thank you. We will move on to Data
2 Collection Committee Report. Captain Walker.

3
4 **DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE REPORT**

5
6 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection Committee
7 adopted the agenda, Tab F, Number 1, and approved the minutes of
8 the April 2025 meeting.

9
10 The first issue we tackled was SEFHIER. The council reviewed the
11 document, with discussion focused primarily on Action 4, which
12 would establish reporting of economic data for the program. A
13 committee member asked why a stipulation for a maximum proportion
14 to be sampled was not stated within Alternative 3 language and
15 asked for clarification on the definition of sampling strata.
16 Additionally, several committee members asked for an explanation
17 about the sampling methodology outlined in the action discussion.

18
19 Dr. Christopher Liese, from the Southeast Fisheries Science
20 Center, replied that the sample size could change based on
21 management needs. An initial sampling of 20 percent during the
22 first year would provide information that could then be used to
23 determine how much sampling is needed in future years to achieve
24 desired levels of precision in the survey responses. This
25 information would help fisheries economists focus sampling design
26 to better address economic analysis required for management
27 documents.

28
29 Several committee members mentioned that the for-hire sector had
30 been recently designated as a category eligible for disaster relief
31 funds. Economic data collected through the SEFHIER program would
32 provide program participants with an avenue with which to apply
33 for available funds after disaster event.

34
35 To that end, a committee member noted that the census-level
36 reporting of the economic data, Alternative 2, would provide the
37 most complete analysis for the purposes of disaster relief.
38 However, he acknowledged the concerns of the industry and supported
39 the rationale for a survey sampling approach for economic data
40 collection.

41
42 The committee then discussed availability of funding and the
43 potential incomplete implementation of the program if dockside
44 surveying could not be supported. A member noted that President
45 Trump recently signed a congressional budget bill that would
46 provide more funding for fisheries than had been initially
47 anticipated. However, it was still unclear exactly how those
48 budgeted funds would be appropriated for electronic reporting

1 projects.

2
3 Dr. Clifford Hunt, from HMS, added that their office was
4 considering the council's input on the proposed rule for modifying
5 their charter-for-hire electronic reporting program. He stated
6 that it was their intention to work towards developing sampling
7 approaches and avoid duplicative reporting for dual-permit
8 holders.

9
10 Committee members indicated that public comment for SEFHIER has
11 been mixed. Federal for-hire permit holders in some regions have
12 expressed support for the program, while those in other regions
13 have been opposed to any reiteration of the SEFHIER program.
14 Generally, the committee expressed interest in continuing with the
15 document development and decided to revisit the issue at Full
16 Council.

17
18 So I think maybe have a discussion about moving forward with
19 SEFHIER, as we've heard from the group here in nearly unanimous
20 support. We've been over all the alternatives, and we've had
21 committee discussions for a long time, and it's my view that we
22 move this thing forward, and, if that's the will of the council,
23 we ask staff to prepare a public hearing document on this issue.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Yes, and now would be
26 the time to have the discussion, and, if the motion is desired, it
27 would be now. Dr. Sweetman.

28
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for bringing that
30 up, Ed. Yes, and, I mean, I would be supportive in moving this
31 to the next phase. I mean, I think we've already selected
32 preferreds for everything in there, right, and so we're good there.
33 We've done our due diligence on that.

34
35 I think we've heard from everyone, really, that we need this
36 charter-for-hire data collection stream, and so I've been hesitant
37 on it, just a little bit, just because of the potential for funding
38 issues, and doing all this work for a program that -- I don't want
39 to end up like South Atlantic SEFHIER, where, you know, it's not
40 being validated, and, obviously, that's going to be a major part
41 in how this -- But, I mean, hearing from the public last night, or
42 this morning, they're all very supportive of it, and they just
43 want the opportunity to try and go get some funds on their own,
44 potentially, like they did in the past, and so, if that's how we
45 want to go, I'm all for it.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Hollensead.

48

1 **DR. LISA HOLLENSSEAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to Dr. Sweetman's
2 point, and so this document, the IPT, we do have folks from even
3 HMS that have been reviewing this. Of course, the Regional Office
4 has been instrumental in going through this. Also, South Atlantic
5 staff and I always deliberate on what's going on with South
6 Atlantic, because they are attempting to do something very similar
7 to what we're doing, to build up our own, so that they can go ahead
8 and move forward with their program, and so hopefully that
9 alleviates those sorts of things for everybody.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Hollensead. Any other comments or
12 concerns? Mr. Sanchez.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** If you need a motion, if staff would put whatever it
15 is you need up there as a motion to go ahead and proceed with the
16 document, and then let's take this to public hearing, and then,
17 the money issue that everybody was bringing up, I think we heard
18 loud, from the folks in the audience, that they'll find the money,
19 and so let's go ahead and get going with this, and the money will
20 come.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Dr. Simmons.

23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think
25 we have to develop Chapters 3 and 4 for this document, because we
26 kind of put it aside, I think, in March or April of last year, and
27 bring that back to you for consideration, to see if it's ready to
28 take out to public hearings.

29
30 I talked a little bit to the Regional Office about when we thought
31 we could bring a public hearing draft. I thought April was going
32 to be pretty difficult, and that June was probably a better option
33 for us to do that for this document, based on everything else we
34 have going on, but we can talk about that more at the end of the
35 meeting, if you would like.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Captain Walker.

38
39 **MR. WALKER:** Do we have to do that, or can we just try and do this
40 for April, or it's just not in the cards? All right. June it is,
41 I suppose. I think that's it for SEFHIER, and, as quick as we
42 can, we'll get a draft together? Okay.

43
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Emily is reminding me that, normally,
45 we would also ask you guys what kind of hearings you would want to
46 have, and try to get ahead of that for the meeting, if we can in
47 fact, bring a public hearing draft in April, and so maybe we can
48 think about that a little bit more, and get some guidance on that.

1 I assume you want us to do actual in-person meetings, but not sure,
2 and after June is probably not going to be a real good time for us
3 to do in-person meetings, and I just thought about that.

4
5 **MR. WALKER:** I didn't know that was up to us. I thought there
6 were set guidelines on the type of -- No? Emily.

7
8 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** So, I mean, as long as we hold a public
9 hearing in conjunction with a final action, like at a council
10 meeting, then we've met our legal requirements, as far as I
11 understand, and Mara can override me if that's not right.

12
13 However, what this is doing, timeline-wise, is sort of pushing us
14 up towards doing public hearings during the like height of the red
15 snapper season. If that isn't the way to do things, you know, we
16 always produce those videos, and we've been really getting success
17 with pushing out our Fish Rules notifications.

18
19 We can also probably do some sort of mailer, as long as we can get
20 the federal-for-hire information from SERO, and so, if you want to
21 consider doing this over the summer, you know, you're really going
22 to have to decide whether in-person meetings are a good idea, or
23 if you want us to do a sort of extra push with maybe -- You know,
24 we talked about using some of our budget to do targeted ads on
25 social media. I mean, we can think of novel ways to do this, if
26 we don't want to do it in-person.

27
28 **MR. WALKER:** So it's a fairly -- Compared to the -- Well, I guess
29 the whole public gets to have input on it, but it is a -- It's a
30 finite group of people that would be participants, but everybody
31 in the public gets to comment on it. Okay. Anyone? Mr. Sanchez.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

34
35 **MR. SANCHEZ:** We've been talking about this for so long that I
36 personally think online public hearings will be sufficient for
37 this.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Noted. Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

40
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I just want to, I guess, just set
42 expectations, because I think this is a challenge we're continuing
43 to go through, and so, when you take final action on things at
44 this meeting, my team is going to be working on rulemaking to try
45 to get shallow-water grouper, deepwater grouper, red grouper, and
46 some other actions done.

47
48 That's part of their job, in addition to writing amendments, right,

1 and so I think we need to just be thoughtful, in terms of capacity
2 to be able to accomplish it, and I know people want to move SEFHIER
3 as quickly as possible, but we only have so much throughput, given
4 everything else on our plate, and we're trying to manage that
5 workload, and be considerate of that workload, given all the other
6 priorities.

7
8 **MR. WALKER:** Understood, and I'm definitely okay with that. I
9 think just doing what we can here, and getting it in the queue,
10 would be a step forward to me, and so, with that understanding,
11 that's fine. Anyone else on SEFHIER? Are we good, Carrie, with
12 the -- Okay.

13
14 Moving on then, the Commercial Electronic Logbook Implementation
15 Plan, Dr. John Walter provided an update presentation on the
16 progress of implementing electronic reporting for the Commercial
17 Coastal Logbook Program. T

18
19 he committee member inquired why multifactor authentication was
20 being required for fisheries data collection. Dr. Jessica Stephen
21 responded that a government-wide mandate for MFA was authorized to
22 better secure government-collected data. She continued that the
23 individual fishing program would also be modified to fulfill this
24 obligation.

25
26 A committee member expressed support for electronic reporting and
27 recommended that outreach initiatives, including in-person and
28 video tutorials, be conducted to help program participants
29 transition to the new application platform. Any comments on that
30 reporting? It doesn't really seem like -- It seems like we're
31 just kind of in a sit and wait. I don't think there's anything we
32 can do at this point.

33
34 Update on the Southeast Region Permit System, Mr. Kevin McIntosh
35 presented recent updates to the Southeast Region Permitting
36 System, PIMS. A committee member asked when the updated Freedom
37 of Information Act page would be available. Mr. McIntosh responded
38 that an update would be implemented the second week of February,
39 as long as last-minute testing was successful.

40
41 Another committee member asked if there were future plans to allow
42 for participants in limited-access programs to print their permits
43 from home during the renewal process. Mr. McIntosh replied that
44 law enforcement regulations require printing of limited-access
45 permits on special paper as a security feature. I also have that
46 one noted as no action needed from the committee, but certainly
47 open to suggestion. All right.

48

1 Moving on, Deepwater Grouper Complex Recreational Mandatory
2 Reporting, Mr. Gregg Bray, from the Gulf States Marine Fisheries
3 Commission, and council staff provided a collaborative
4 presentation regarding existing mandatory reporting for the
5 private recreational sector and initiate discussion for exploring
6 novel recreational data collection for the deepwater grouper
7 fishery.

8
9 The committee acknowledged that, while relatively few private
10 recreational anglers participate in the deep-drop fishery, most of
11 these land at private docks and are never intercepted by a dockside
12 sampler. Additionally, recreational data collection programs have
13 varying compliance results, which can lead to uncertainty. Despite
14 these challenges, the committee contended that better data
15 collection was needed to manage the deepwater species complex.

16
17 The committee discussed several ideas to improve deepwater
18 management. These ideas included state-issued offshore
19 endorsements, augmentation or modification of the National Marine
20 Fisheries Service bottom longline fishery independent survey for
21 deepwater grouper species, as well as considering management
22 approaches such as multiyear average catch limits and improving
23 the correction factor for non-reporting.

24
25 Ultimately, the committee decided to deliberate on this topic and
26 revisit the discussion here at Full Council, and so I think maybe
27 we should say something about where we're at on this one. Are we
28 still moving forward with the deepwater reporting program? It
29 almost seemed like there was some thought among the committee like
30 this isn't going to work.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker, now is the time to discuss it.
33 Dr. Sweetman.

34
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think the conversation eventually dived
36 into taking a look at NMFS' bottom longline survey here, to see
37 whether it would be representative for an index-based evaluation
38 for yellowedge.

39
40 There was some conversation, obviously, about whether we --
41 Obviously, if it's not a viable survey, right, for the deepwater
42 complex, then I think there was some conversation about potentially
43 there could be tweaks to that deepwater -- Or to the bottom
44 longline survey, but I think that's going to be NMFS' call
45 altogether, and, obviously, it's been a long-running program, and
46 so I would imagine there might be some hesitancy about changing,
47 or modifying, a survey, but I still think it's worthwhile to
48 explore it, to see whether it would be useful for yellowedge and

1 the deepwater complex.

2
3 I mean, they said they get yellowedge on there. That's about like
4 70 to 80 percent of the landings within that complex, and so maybe
5 that's enough to get us what we need, but it's worth exploring, in
6 my opinion.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for your comments. Dr. Sweetman.

9
10 **MR. WALKER:** Any comments there, Andy, on what C.J. had to say
11 about the bottom longline?

12
13 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I don't know if John Walter is on, and
14 could speak to that in particular. I mean, my plan was to follow-
15 up, after this meeting, and talk to Clay and John more directly
16 about that idea.

17
18 While I have the mic, I heard, and we've been hearing it for a
19 long time, obviously, interest in reporting via phones, and, even
20 with my Q&A last night, I was a little bit dismissive of Ken's
21 comments, and I really appreciated them, because there is this
22 willingness, and interest, from the industry to provide some data,
23 right? How widespread that is may be hard to tell.

24
25 The challenge, as he noted, wasn't necessarily with fishermen not
26 being willing. It's with figuring it out from a scientific and
27 implementation standpoint, and I see that still to be the struggle.
28 I haven't gotten a scientific presentation on how voluntary or
29 mandatory reporting, with potentially gaps in the, you know,
30 reporting accuracy, and, you know, the enforcement of that can
31 really help us, and so that's where my skepticism comes in, but I
32 feel like there's still maybe some things we should at least be
33 looking into.

34
35 At this point, maybe we just table this, but with the thought that
36 we could bring back some further discussions, and keeping an open
37 mind, from a scientific standpoint, as to how this data could
38 potentially help us get to the questions we're trying to answer.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter, I see your hand is up. John, if
41 you're muted, we can't hear you. John, you're self-muted. Mr.
42 Anson.

43
44 **MR. ANSON:** Just to follow-up on Andy's comment, I think it was
45 discussed a little bit yesterday, or Monday, and that is -- I don't
46 know how much staff time it will take, but the commission had
47 hosted -- I think, as part of the IRA funding process, there was
48 some kind of review of those types of programs and such, and I'm

1 sure there's other scientific literature on that, and so, to the
2 extent that staff can kind of have that available, and I wouldn't
3 say it's a high priority, but, you know, if they have time to kind
4 of compile some of that, to address some of the questions that
5 Andy just brought up, as well as during our discussion on Monday,
6 you know, relative to sampling precision, coverage in the survey.

7
8 You know, surveys potentially that try to address those specific
9 issues, because we know they're out there. As it was discussed on
10 Monday, a lot of the folks that would prosecute this particular
11 deepwater grouper fishery are in bigger boats.

12
13 Most of them are probably not launching at boat ramps, where we
14 would have our typical dockside sampling. We might catch a few at
15 marinas, certainly, but there's probably a good portion of those
16 that are accessing the fishery through private docks, and that's
17 a big question. You know, that's a big hole to try to fill.

18
19 You know, you could, potentially, if they report the same, at the
20 same rate, and you were to interview enough of them at the dock,
21 at the public access points, it should be, you know, better, but,
22 you know, it's still the unknown as to whether or not -- Again,
23 what the behavior of those fishermen are, and not only their
24 fishing behavior, but their reporting behavior is going to be
25 similar to what you would get at the public dock site, and so,
26 anyway, that's my suggestion. Thank you.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Before I get to Mr. Sanchez,
29 I'm going to try Dr. Walter again.

30
31 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** All right. Can you hear me, Chair?

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Now we got you, John. Go ahead.

34
35 **DR. WALTER:** Technical difficulties here, and so let me just
36 confirm. I think there's two questions at play. One is can our
37 bottom longline survey be used for an index for deepwater grouper,
38 specifically yellowedge, to provide some sort of interim
39 management advice, and that's the question that C.J. posed,
40 correct?

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir.

43
44 **DR. WALTER:** Okay, and I would say, yes, it could, and we probably
45 could provide some kind of an interim approach for that stock,
46 which would update, potentially update, the OFL and ABC. I don't
47 -- I think then that's fairly straightforward, and probably would
48 be something that certainly we could work into the process, and

1 that fits into what we would like to be able to use our indices
2 for already. That survey gets the edge of the yellowedge grouper
3 habitat.

4
5 The second issue, or the second thing that seems to be coming up,
6 is the uncertainty of the recreational catches, which this survey
7 wouldn't do anything to address that. It would just adjust the
8 current OFL, but there would still be uncertainty, in terms of
9 what the recreational removals are, and I think that's a different
10 and separate question, and gets to some of the questions about
11 reporting, and the reliability of voluntary reporting, and so I
12 would just separate those two topics.

13
14 One would adjust the ABC more rapidly than the stock assessment,
15 if that was the concern. The other on getting reliable catch data
16 is another aspect altogether. Thanks.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Next I have Mr. Sanchez.

19
20 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is very frustrating.
21 We've identified that there is a gap in the recreational data for
22 this deepwater fishery, and now I agree with getting better data,
23 and using the longline information to inform the status of the
24 stock and all that, but, if you really break it down, it's kind of
25 like, okay, the commercial industry is the vehicle used to provide
26 data to inform the fishery.

27
28 Then we guesstimate what the recs are catching, and probably
29 overestimate, and then we circle back and try to reallocate. It's
30 ridiculous. We need to do something, and stop screwing around
31 with this stuff. I mean, it's absolutely ridiculous.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Next, I have Dr. Allen.

34
35 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I'm not sure the exact
36 next steps, but I feel like there's -- You know, Dr. Bray mentioned
37 the carrot approach to working with anglers, and we've heard, from
38 multiple of the recreational angling community, that they're
39 willing to provide information, and that they're willing -- You
40 know, they're open to this kind of reporting at some level.

41
42 I still think there's opportunity here to get data that we could
43 use, and one of the challenges, probably the biggest challenge, is
44 to understand the non-reporting rate, what fraction of the total
45 catch that you're actually observing.

46
47 There's some ways to go about that, like I mentioned on Monday,
48 and I just feel like the discussion on Monday was a little bit too

1 negative. I think there's opportunities here to work with the
2 recreational industry to try to get some data that we could use,
3 or at least trend or estimates of absolute catch of the
4 recreational landings.

5
6 I'm not sure the best way to go about that. One way would be maybe
7 a literature review, to look at the non-reporting-estimation-type
8 strategies, you know, and see what's out there to look at those
9 kinds of things, but I hate to see this just get tabled, and not
10 discussed anymore because it's a critical need, not just for
11 deepwater grouper, but for many of our species that are relatively
12 rarely intercepted.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen, for your comments. Mr.
15 Strelcheck.

16
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm just going to throw this out there.
18 I don't even know if it would be possible, but, as part of this
19 year's budget, the \$5 million that went to Gulf States last year
20 for work on example species, cobia, tripletail, red snapper,
21 triggerfish, is in this year's budget, right, and it's talking
22 about, you know, essentially partnering with academic partners,
23 universities, and others to conduct this research.

24
25 Now, those are example species. I don't know what flexibility
26 might be beyond those species, to actually do some research on
27 deepwater species, but I think it's worth at least asking some
28 questions, and exploring that, and whether this would be an
29 opportunity to fill a gap, in terms of some of the issues we're
30 talking about around the table, and we would have a funding source
31 to support it, if that is a viable option, and so I just wanted to
32 mention that.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I'm looking around
35 the table for any more comments, or suggestions? Captain Walker,
36 and then Dr. Allen,

37
38 **MR. WALKER:** Just to keep the conversation going, so we can, you
39 know, see that we did not do this, and bring it up the next meeting
40 and do the same thing, but eventually we're going to have to make
41 some decisions here.

42
43 After Dr. Bray's, or Mr. Bray's, report, it really sounded
44 extremely difficult, and almost unlikely, that we would be able to
45 -- Well, I would love to see it happen, but it sounds almost
46 insurmountable, with his description of what the recreational
47 reporting thing may look like, and so, unless somebody has a good
48 idea of how to go forward, I would agree with Andy to maybe table

1 it for now, and, next time we bring it up, have some ideas to start
2 talking about, rather than on the spot how are we going to solve
3 recreational reporting in thirty seconds.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

6

7 **DR. ALLEN:** I'll just say I would be willing to spend some time
8 thinking about this, and come back to the council with some
9 suggestions for next time on literature review options for non-
10 reporting, and maybe some ways to get some estimates out of this
11 approach, and so I don't know if it's okay if I report back to the
12 committee next time after this.

13

14 **MR. WALKER:** I think that would be great.

15

16 **DR. ALLEN:** Okay.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

19

20 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I just wanted to thank you, Dr. Allen, for
21 that, because just to leave this table, and leave it in limbo,
22 where there's clearly a need, and clearly an interest, and I
23 appreciate you volunteering to ask the questions that need to be
24 asked, so that we can feel like we are moving forward in some
25 fashion. Thank you.

26

27 **DR. ALLEN:** Absolutely. I'm happy to report back at the next
28 meeting.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So I guess what I'm hearing is Mr. Sanchez is not
31 in favor of tabling, and so I guess my question is to staff, and
32 what do we need to do to keep this on the radar going forward?
33 Dr. Simmons.

34

35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I
36 understood that Dr. Allen was going to maybe give us a couple of
37 slides, or maybe a little white paper, and we would just work with
38 him to figure out how much time he needed for the April council
39 meeting.

40

41 **DR. ALLEN:** Sure, and I'm fine to do that.

42

43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Simmons for clarifying.
44 Okay. Captain Walker.

45

46 **MR. WALKER:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. If there's nothing else -- Dr. Walker, do

1 you have your hand up?
2

3 **DR. WALKER:** I do, and I think my computer is working. I just
4 wanted to, one, commend Mike for taking that on. Thank you. Then
5 just ask the group if that is going to be focused just on the
6 deepwater groupers or if it would be worth looking into some kind
7 of reporting across the rec suite of species as Mike does some of
8 that literature search, and if there's an appetite to explore that
9 a bit wider than just deepwater, because my thought is that the
10 problems are not just confined to deepwater. Thanks.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walker. Dr. Allen.

13
14 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and follow-up on that, Dr. Walker. This is --
15 It's definitely -- It wouldn't just be focused on deepwater. This
16 is a broader issue, and the examples in the literature that are
17 there are going to be for a wide range of recreational-caught
18 species, and so that's what I would be bringing back, is just some
19 -- Kind of a summary of some methodologies.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Allen. Anything else for
22 the Data Collection? No other business. Okay. We'll move on
23 with the Outreach and Education Committee report, and that will be
24 Dr. Overton.

25
26 **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT**

27
28 **DR. OVERTON:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted
29 the agenda, Tab O, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab O,
30 Number 2 from January 2025 meeting as written.

31
32 The first task was Management Area Mapping, Tab O, Number 4. The
33 committee heard an update on the project to develop a dynamic
34 mapping tool to replace the static images used to communicate
35 management areas. Based on the feedback received from the O&E
36 Technical committee, staff continues to work on the tool and
37 perform data testing with advisory panel members before it's
38 published later in 2026.

39
40 The committee received an update on the progress for getting
41 management areas and boundaries added to commercially-available
42 mapping tools, indicating that the process was complex, may require
43 a national effort, and should be spearheaded by NOAA.

44
45 Captain Dylan Hubbard, O&E chair, emphasized that a national effort
46 would be more enticing for the industry than a regional one, and
47 shared the O&E Technical Committee motion suggesting that the
48 council draft a letter to NOAA encouraging the effort. A committee

1 member suggested staff package and share Gulf areas, so that users
2 can install them on their machines themselves.

3
4 The committee decided to develop a motion for Full Council that
5 would consider requesting that NOAA develop a system for providing
6 appropriate marine regulatory areas and boundaries to companies
7 producing marine charts and mapping units while proposed
8 legislation, the Modernizing Access to our Public Oceans Act, is
9 finalized.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Overton. Emily. Okay. I think
12 Ms. Muehlstein is looking for a motion. Ms. Ballard.

13
14 **MS. BALLARD:** Okay, and so I've got a motion. **I move that the**
15 **Gulf Council send a letter to NOAA Fisheries encouraging NOAA**
16 **Fisheries to develop a system for providing appropriate marine**
17 **regulatory areas and boundaries to companies producing marine**
18 **charts and mapping units.**

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board from Ms.
21 Ballard. Is there a second to the motion?

22
23 **MR. GEESLIN:** Second.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin seconds. **Is there any discussion on**
26 **the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Overton.

27
28 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes, thank you for the motion and pushing that
29 through. Our second order of business was Recreational Initiative
30 Communications Recommendations, Tab O, Number 5. The staff
31 presented an overview of the five recreational initiative
32 communication recommendations first prioritized by the council
33 during its 2025, and subsequently prioritized by the O&E Technical
34 Committee.

35
36 The committee directed staff to focus on top of two communication
37 recommendations prioritized by the O&E Technical Committee.
38 Specifically, to fulfill Recommendation 5.2, the council should
39 work with partners to develop scaled-down modules of the Marine
40 Resource Educational Program, MREP, to share with a wider audience,
41 possibly including short videos on specific components of the
42 fishery science and management process.

43
44 The committee recommended staff develop a video series emulating
45 the curriculum from MREP, explaining the science and management
46 process. The committee also asked staff to improve messaging
47 across various platforms around how species life histories are
48 impacted by fisheries -- By fishing behavior.

1
2 To fulfill Recommendation 2.2, the council should better
3 communicate the conservation implications of different fishing
4 activities based on its individual species biology and life
5 history, for example, depth, location, and months of spawning,
6 empowering anglers to make better decisions based on their
7 conservation ethic.

8
9 The committee noted that the council may want to partner with Sea
10 Grant to accomplish Recommendation 5.1, which aims to develop a
11 leadership program with the recreational community. The committee
12 also indicated that the council accomplishes Recommendation 6.2
13 when it gathers public input on preferred seasons ahead of making
14 management changes. I'll continue on, and we'll keep it moving.

15
16 The next order of business is our infamous anonymous voicemail box
17 Tab 0, Number 6. The committee heard a presentation on a pilot
18 effort to test the anonymous voicemail public comment service.
19 Staff noted that the comments received to-date were substantive
20 and relevant to the council's business, and shared that it plans
21 to provide an anonymous voicemail comment summary in the meeting
22 materials for each council meeting.

23
24 The committee supported the continuation of the anonymous
25 voicemail public comment service and encouraged staff to increase
26 visibility and knowledge of the service. Anything?

27
28 Keeping it moving, the next order of business was the 2025
29 Communications Analytics, Tab 0, Number 7. Staff presented an
30 overview of council communication analytics for 2025. Analytics
31 are down across all platforms, with the exception of its email
32 listserv and Facebook.

33
34 This drop is, in part, attributed to an intentional and voluntary
35 reduction in visibility occurring in response to communication
36 limitations put on federal agencies. A committee member indicated
37 that staff could improve numbers across social platforms by
38 producing video content featuring fishing and research. All right.
39 I'll keep it moving.

40
41 2026 Communications Improvement Plan, Tab 0, Number 8, staff
42 presented a draft 2026 communication plan, which was shaped using
43 past analytics, staff, and O&E Technical Committee
44 recommendations. The committee noted that the plan was ambitious
45 and supported staff in moving forward to accomplish its goals.

46
47 Our last order of business are other items from the O&E Technical
48 Committee summary presented in Tab 0, Number 8. The O&E Technical

1 Committee chair, Mr. Dylan Hubbard, presented remaining items from
2 the December 2025 O&E Technical Committee meeting summary.

3
4 He highlighted a Sea Grant reef fish extension update, discussed
5 the ecosystem-based management outreach discussion, and explained
6 why trying to add a council learning opportunity to the council
7 meetings was difficult. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Overton, for leading us through
10 that. Is there any comments, or questions, for Outreach and
11 Education? Seeing none, I'm going to ask Emily if she needs
12 anything from council. No? Okay. We're good.

13
14 All right. Before we move into Reef Fish, I would like to take a
15 break. Let's take a fifteen-minute break, and then we'll dive
16 into Reef Fish. Thank you.

17
18 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you all. We will dive into the Reef
21 Fish Committee report, and Dr. Sweetman will lead us through.

22 23 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**

24
25 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A reminder that we've got a
26 couple items here that we probably need to have some further
27 discussion on, and I'll pause during those times.

28
29 Reef Fish Committee report, the committee adopted the agenda, Tab
30 B, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab B, Number 2, from the November
31 2025 meeting were approved as amended.

32
33 Presentation: 2025 Reef Fish, Tab B, Number 4a, and IFQ landings
34 update, Tab B, Number 4b, Southeast Regional Office staff reviewed
35 reef fish and individual fishing quota program landings relative
36 to catch limits. Preliminarily, recreational landings for gag
37 grouper are estimated to be about 18,000 pounds gutted weight under
38 the 2025 annual catch target of 230,009 pounds gutted weight.
39 National Marine Fisheries Service will confirm these landings by
40 the April 2026 council meeting.

41
42 A committee member discussed the reopening of red snapper for the
43 federal for-hire fleet at the end of 2025. The committee member
44 noted inconsistent dissemination of the notice that the season
45 would reopen, which made fisheries management more difficult for
46 state agencies.

47
48 NMFS staff acknowledged the narrow timing of the Federal Register

1 notice, the administrative delay due to the government shutdown,
2 and their desire to reopen the season quickly. NMFS stated it
3 would better communicate in advance with states in the future.

4
5 A committee member discussed the delay in implementation of the
6 season change for the federal for-hire component for red snapper,
7 which was finalized by the council in August 2025. NMFS again
8 noted the government shutdown and the backlog of other actions
9 before the Department of Commerce.

10
11 Another committee member stated that, in their state, they intend
12 to open their private recreational fishing season when the federal
13 for-hire season opens.

14
15 A committee member sought flexibility, given the delays in
16 implementation, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric
17 Administration General Counsel advised building such flexibility
18 into fishery management plans in the future.

19
20 Council staff noted that final action was taken on the document in
21 August 2025, and that has yet to be transmitted, due to an
22 incomplete section in the document is pending review by the
23 Southeast Fisheries Science Center. I know -- Mr. Frady, I think
24 this actually would be an appropriate time, and I know you've got
25 a motion kind of lined up here, and so if you would, Captain Frady.

26
27 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bernie. Thank you, ma'am.
28 **I would like to make a motion to direct staff to begin a document**
29 **to designate authority to the Regional Administrator to modify the**
30 **federal for-hire fishing regulations for red snapper on an annual**
31 **basis, given predetermined constraints on bag limits, minimum size**
32 **limits, fishing season start and end dates, and reopening the**
33 **fishing season prior to the end of the fishing year.** If I could
34 get a second on this, I would give you some rationale.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board by Mr. Frady,
37 and we do have a second by Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Frady.

38
39 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, sir. The federal for-hire component for
40 red snapper is interested in having more flexible fisheries
41 management, to allow it to adapt to changes on an annual basis.
42 Delegating a more adaptive management authority to the Regional
43 Administrator will allow that person to receive feedback from the
44 federal for-hire component at council meetings and to make
45 modifications for federal for-hire component regulations for red
46 snapper that are in the best interest of that directed fleet.

47
48 Similar to the way which fishery regulation changes were limited

1 under Reef Fish Amendment 50, the same style of rules would apply
2 for the sorts of modifications the Regional Administrator could
3 make from one fishing year to the next. Thank you.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Frady. Do we have any
6 discussion on the motion on the board? Mr. Strelcheck.

7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so this was, obviously, an idea I just
9 tossed out for consideration, and so I appreciate you thinking
10 about it, Troy. The way I would envision this, if this passed,
11 would be we would develop a process, and there would be, obviously,
12 bounds.

13
14 Troy mentioned, obviously, me receiving feedback from the charter
15 industry, but I think, with this type of authority, if it was
16 granted, I would want to hear from the council, right, and really
17 have discussions. Your recommendations wouldn't necessarily be
18 binding, but it would, obviously, go a long way in terms of any
19 sort of flexibility and decision making, and avoid some of the
20 challenges we've tossed around this table the last couple of days
21 with regard to timing of rulemakings, and how long that process is
22 taking.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I have a question for
25 you, Andy, and so, if this motion passes, just for clarification,
26 this will not benefit this year's start season, and let's just get
27 that -- Make that clear. Okay. Thank you. More discussion on
28 the motion? Ms. Levy.

29
30 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and, just from a process perspective, so this is
31 essentially developing a specific type of framework procedure,
32 right, and so you would have to do a plan amendment, and the
33 procedure, what can be done, what can't be done, how it's going to
34 be done, what kind of input you have, that's all going to have to
35 be in there, and so I just want to make that clear. It's not just
36 like, you know, an action, you know, that Andy gets the discretion
37 to do X, Y, and Z. Thanks.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Captain Walker.

40
41 **MR. WALKER:** This is the first I've seen this. I'm not sure I
42 understand it, and so this would just be giving you an expedited
43 time period to modify federal for-hire regulations?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

46
47 **MR. WALKER:** Including size limits and season start dates? I'm
48 not sure I'm following the purpose here. I'm not opposed to it.

1 I just don't understand it.

2

3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I'll weigh-in first, and then Troy can maybe
4 dig into the details. The way I'm at least interpreting Troy's
5 motion is kind of patterning after what was done in Amendment 50,
6 right, which was delegating authority to the states for private
7 anglers, and the states each year can determine size limits, bag
8 limits, and season start and end dates within what we analyzed in
9 Amendment 50, right, and so I think the size limit is fourteen to
10 eighteen inches, and the bag limits are up to four fish, and then
11 the season start dates and end dates are patterned after
12 constraining catch within their survey estimates.

13

14 Like Ms. Levy was saying, right, there would have to be a lot of,
15 in my view, sideboards, in terms of how this process would work,
16 what you would want, obviously, that authority to look like. A
17 great example of kind of the challenge today is we have a baked-
18 in June 1 start date for the fishing season, right, and everyone
19 is wanting that earlier start date, but I don't have authority to
20 change that without the regulatory change.

21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks.

23

24 **DR. BANKS:** So I have a -- This might be a little too far in the
25 weeds as of now, but we hear a lot from the for-hire industry about
26 needing stability for their business. We heard a lot when we were
27 talking about changing the start date to the Friday before Memorial
28 Day, and so I'm just trying to figure out how that stability will
29 fit into this if we're able to go back and forth and change those
30 start dates.

31

32 Would we put in a minimum time that NMFS has to announce? Is that
33 something that, Andy, that you would consider, because I'm just -
34 - I'm worried that giving this, without going through the
35 regulatory process, might allow for a little too much change up,
36 and we're already hearing that there's too much uncertainty as
37 there is.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

40

41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I think that's a fair point, and that
42 would be, I think, part of the conversation, if this moved forward,
43 in terms of how do we maintain that stability and provide for
44 adequate notice? Do we want all of these things to have, you know,
45 the ability for me to modify or change each year, or is it going
46 to be narrower in scope, and only focus on the season start or end
47 dates, or something like that, right, and so all of that, to me,
48 would be subject to discussion.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble, and then Captain Frady.

3
4 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, you know, we've heard
5 from the federal for-hire fleet, from numerous folks in here, as
6 well as within our individual states, that they're after more
7 flexibility, especially with season structure, across the entire
8 Gulf, and it's part of the impetus for why we started, you know,
9 the request for the document on state management of the federal
10 for-hire fleet, and so I can see the need for this. It's similar
11 in direction as to why it's being asked for.

12
13 So, you know, I'm willing to see this through, because I'm not
14 necessarily opposed to that. It's part of what we heard for the
15 impetus of why I made that motion in the first place, and so I'm
16 in support of it for now.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Captain Frady.

19
20 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and Chris. With all due respect
21 to the State of Louisiana, and those in Louisiana who want state
22 management for their federal-permitted fleet, the past two
23 meetings, we've had overwhelming responses, from so many of the
24 federally-permitted charter boat guys, in a large number, and my
25 feeling was they didn't want any part of state management.

26
27 Now, for the past couple of years, I've watched Mr. Strelcheck
28 over there not being able to be flexible, and, those of us who are
29 in the charter fishing fleet, who make our living fishing, we've
30 felt hamstrung along, because the regulations allowed Andy to
31 manage -- Well, NMFS to manage from the back-end, but never from
32 the front-end of the season.

33
34 From a businessman's standpoint, simply by giving the Regional
35 Administrator the ability to move us back five days, to start the
36 Friday before Memorial Day, without having to sit here and worry
37 about what's been transmitted, and what hasn't been, gives those
38 of us who make our living -- We feel like we're being a part of
39 the system, and being able to have a flexible system, just like
40 the state management has for the private recreational angler.

41
42 I mean, I don't think you all's system for the private anglers has
43 failed. I think there's some things that can be tightened up, and
44 the same thing, and I don't expect the charter-for-hire industry
45 to come out here and just ask the agency to just open it up carte
46 blanche, and let's just go wild, because we don't want to do that.

47
48 We want to come up under our quota, but we still want that

1 flexibility on the front-end, where he can set that date five days
2 earlier, and/or I've talked to him for years about we don't get
3 the wave data in until the middle of September, or October, and so
4 we can have a set opening in the fall, like October, when we have
5 customers coming in for fall break.

6
7 Those two weeks are critical to us, whether my son gets a GI Joe
8 with a kung-fu grip or not, versus we're struggling all winter,
9 and I'm driving an eighteen-wheeler hauling sod, and so I'm just
10 asking for the flexibility, you know, mimicking what the states
11 have already done, and so it gives Andy that flexibility, and
12 that's all I'm asking for, is let's meet in the middle. Let's do
13 something, and let's try it. Thank you, sir.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble, to that?

16
17 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes. To that point, so I don't disagree with you,
18 Troy. In fact, like I said, I support this motion, you know, to
19 test it out to see, because it's a similar desire as to what the
20 impetus was for my motion with state management of the federal
21 for-hire fleet, and so these are steps towards solving a problem.
22 I'm fine with that.

23
24 The only thing I would say about this is that it's still going to
25 be a Gulf-wide start and end point to a season, and that is not
26 necessarily what the entire Gulf wants, and that is part of the
27 reason for testing out, or at least looking at a document, for
28 state management, to have us discuss that, and so we're on the
29 same page. We're just looking at different portions of the puzzle.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Dr. Sweetman.

32
33 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I could be supportive
34 of this. I mean, I think really the main discussion point has
35 been like the season start and end dates, right? I mean, sure, we
36 can see this --

37
38 I'm okay with seeing this document, but, I mean, I don't really
39 want constant changes in bag limits and minimum size limits, and
40 so, really, the issue is the start date of the year, and kind of
41 when we end, and so, I mean, sure, we can list these options out
42 there, see what the document looks like, and, yes, I'm okay with
43 this flexibility. I find it absolutely absurd that it's taken us
44 like two years to change a date by one week, you know, a season
45 opening by one week. That's just ridiculous. Three years. Sorry.
46 Good correction, Dr. Simmons.

47
48 So, I mean, seriously, and, I mean, we're talking just a few days

1 change, and it's taken us three years of time to do that, and like
2 I'm okay with a little flexibility here.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any more discussion on
5 Mr. Frady's motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion on the**
6 **board? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right. Moving on, Final
9 Action: Reef Fish Amendment 62: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper
10 Management Measures, Mr. Trevor Moncrief, chair of the SSC,
11 presented the SSC's discussions on an interim analysis health check
12 for Gulf red grouper, which was informed by the Gulf Fishery
13 Independent Survey of Habitat and Ecosystem Resources, or G-
14 FISHER, survey.

15
16 Mr. Moncrief noted that the index is trending in a positive
17 direction in recent years, and that the SSC would keep track of
18 that trend via annual updates from the Southeast Fisheries Science
19 Center. Council staff presented the latest draft of Reef Fish
20 Amendment 62 and public hearing summaries, and NOAA General Counsel
21 reviewed the associated codified text.

22
23 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council**
24 **approve Reef Fish Amendment 62: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper**
25 **Management Measures, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of**
26 **Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text**
27 **as necessary and appropriate, giving the staff editorial license**
28 **to make necessary changes in the document. The council chair is**
29 **given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as**
30 **necessary and appropriate.** The motion carried without opposition.
31 Mr. Chair.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
34 motion on the board. We'll open the floor, if there's any
35 discussion. Dr. Sweetman.

36
37 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I just think we've thoroughly discussed this,
38 whether it's the catch limits, you know, the twenty-fathom closure.
39 This stock is in very good shape right now, and I hope we can move
40 this forward as quickly as possible, so we don't have any lapses
41 relative to the emergency rule and the fishing season. Thank you.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Okay. If there's no
44 further discussion, we're going to have a roll call vote. It's
45 final action. Dr. Simmons.

46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Captain Walker.
48

1 MR. WALKER: Yes.
2
3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you. Dr. Sweetman.
4
5 DR. SWEETMAN: Yes.
6
7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Frady.
8
9 MR. FRADY: Yes.
10
11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.
12
13 DR. BANKS: Yes.
14
15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Schieble.
16
17 MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes.
18
19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Strelcheck.
20
21 MR. STRELCHECK: Yes.
22
23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Allen.
24
25 DR. ALLEN: Yes.
26
27 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Broussard.
28
29 MR. BROUSSARD: Yes.
30
31 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Osborne.
32
33 MR. OSBORNE: Yes.
34
35 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Ms. Ballard.
36
37 MS. BALLARD: Yes.
38
39 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.
40
41 MR. ANSON: Yes.
42
43 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: General Spraggins.
44
45 GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes.
46
47 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Overton.
48

1 DR. OVERTON: Yes.
 2
 3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Sanchez.
 4
 5 MR. SANCHEZ: Yes.
 6
 7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.
 8
 9 MR. MARQUEZ: Yes.
 10
 11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Geeslin.
 12
 13 MR. GEESLIN: Yes.
 14
 15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Dugas.
 16
 17 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes.
 18

Names	Vote		Row Labels	Count of Vote
Capt. Walker	yes			
Dr. Sweetman	yes		yes	17
Capt. Frady	yes		Grand Total	17
Dr. Banks	yes			
Mr. Schieble	yes			
Mr. Strelcheck	yes			
Dr. Allen	yes			
Mr. Broussard	yes			
Mr. Osborne	yes			
Ms. Ballard	yes			
Mr. Anson	yes			
Gen. Spraggins	yes			
Dr. Overton	yes			
Mr. Sanchez	yes			
Mr. Marquez	yes			
Mr. Geeslin	yes			
Mr. Dugas	yes			

19
 20
 21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: It passed unanimously, Mr. Chair.
 22
 23 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Sweetman.
 24

25 DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on to the next topic,
 26 and this one will require a little discussion. Final action: Reef
 27 Fish Amendment 58A: Shallow-Water Grouper Complex Management
 28 Considerations, council staff reviewed the public comment summary,
 29 the updated document, and NOAA General Counsel reviewed the

1 codified text.

2
3 Several committee members expressed hesitation on taking final
4 action. Of highest concern was informing the scamp complex annual
5 catch limit allocation based on landings history that incorporated
6 the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort
7 Survey (MRIP-FES) data for the recreational sector. They noted
8 that a pilot study examining MRIP-FES estimates is due later in
9 2026 and suggested delaying the document until the study results
10 were available.

11
12 Other committee members cautioned that delaying final action could
13 have consequences for the fishery. They stated that the terminal
14 year of SEDAR 68 was 2020, and continued that an SSC review to
15 update catch advice with more contemporary data resulted in a
16 reduction in recommended catch advice. They argued that the
17 recently-finalized framework action was meant as a short-term
18 measure to reduce harvest of the shallow-water grouper complex.

19
20 Currently, catch levels of scamp and yellowmouth exceed the
21 recommended acceptable biological catch, and the council is
22 obligated to address this issue by reducing harvest. The committee
23 decided to continue discussion on whether to direct staff to
24 finalize the document at Full Council. Mr. Chair, I think this is
25 a good time to try and hash this one out here.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman.
28 Mr. Sanchez.

29
30 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would like to make a motion to bring Amendment 58A
31 back to the council after receiving the results of the MRIP-FES
32 pilot study.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Sanchez has made a motion, and we'll
35 give Bernie a minute to get that up on the board. Mr. Sanchez, is
36 your motion correct?

37
38 **MR. SANCHEZ:** After receiving and reviewing the MRIP-FES pilot
39 study.

40
41 **MR. BROUSSARD:** I'll second.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We had a second by Mr. Broussard. Further
44 discussion? Mr. Schieble's hand is up, but I was going to give
45 Mr. Sanchez an opportunity, if he wanted, to get some rationale
46 for his motion.

47
48 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. Yes, and I think we've heard a lot of

1 people, during public comment, that here we are moving forward
2 once again on data that's questionable, the MRIP-FES data, and, in
3 this case, even, I guess, more troubling is the fact that the pilot
4 study is out. The South Atlantic Council just had a presentation.
5 We haven't seen one, and it would suggest, you know, these numbers
6 are likely to change.

7
8 Here we are, rushed to final hearing, when this information is
9 literally available, rather than using it to inform this decision
10 better. I understand there were risks, as was mentioned in the
11 earlier read by C.J., that delaying this might result in more pain.

12
13 I personally am willing to take that risk, because I don't like -
14 - This, to me, as it reminds me of Amendment 53, red grouper, all
15 over again, and doing things based on data that we probably
16 shouldn't, and the data, that might make this better or worse, and
17 I don't know, but at least it's more current, and updated, is
18 literally around the corner. I would rather do things with the
19 best scientific information available data, and I don't think we're
20 doing that right now.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I have a list. I'm going
23 to go to Mr. Schieble, and then Captain Frady.

24
25 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so I'm not necessarily opposed to this at
26 all. I think there's quite a few things around here that we would
27 like to see at least the MRIP-FES study results, before we make
28 decisions, but, just for consideration, should we change, or amend,
29 the motion to say after receiving SSC review of the MRIP-FES pilot
30 study? Would we want that to come back from them to us with a
31 recommendation?

32
33 **MR. SANCHEZ:** If you would like to make a friendly amendment, I
34 would not be opposed to that.

35
36 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I think that would be better, unless
37 someone has a counterpoint to that.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I would ask Mr. Broussard if he's okay, as a
40 seconder, and he is.

41
42 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** It would be consideration back to the council after
43 receiving the SSC review of the MRIP-FES pilot study results. Does
44 that work for you, John?

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Broussard? Okay. All right, and so Captain
47 Frady. Dr. Simmons, and then I'll come back to you.

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so the
2 actual report is not out yet, apparently. It's coming, but it's
3 still being reviewed, and it's supposed to be finalized. I'm just
4 looking at an email we got from Dr. Papakostas on this, and she
5 said they're in the final stages of an internal review, and so we
6 don't have a report yet in-hand, and we don't know how it's going
7 to be applied to the Gulf species yet either.

8
9 I don't know that we're going to get all that in the February SSC
10 meeting, and so this could be like years before we know how it's
11 going to impact scamp, because it has to go through the stock
12 assessment process.

13
14 At the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, we're supposed to talk
15 about how we're going to handle these updates for the pilot for
16 red snapper, gray triggerfish, and king mackerel. Are we going to
17 hold those up and rerun, hopefully, that new recreational data
18 stream that we get with the pilot, and then we get our catch
19 advice?

20
21 If we would want to get that level of information on how the pilot
22 is impacting scamp, we would have to include it, or ask for that,
23 in that process, that MRIP lite, and so I don't know that you're
24 going to get any more information specific to gag for many years
25 on the pilot, or scamp.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the information, Dr. Simmons. Dr.
28 Sweetman, and then Captain Walker.

29
30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm all over the place on this one here. It does
31 make me a little uncomfortable for the potential length of time we
32 would have to wait here, considering there appears to be a
33 biological issue associated with scamp, and so that does concern
34 me a bit, but I also get the intent of this. I'm wondering if
35 there's almost a middle-of-the-road approach here.

36
37 Obviously, the issue, right, is dealing with MRIP-FES data, to
38 utilize that to generate allocation decisions, right, between the
39 various sectors. I think that's the big concern, and so I'm
40 wondering, and is there an alternative way we can look at
41 allocation between the sectors there, rather than relying on MRIP-
42 FES numbers, maybe a more formulaic approach to it that would be
43 less -- You know, people would be less fired up about it, but I'm
44 kind of trying to work through that in my head. I don't know
45 exactly how it would ultimately play out, but I see Dr. Froeschke
46 has something to say to that.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** John.

1
2 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Just a thought, and a crude idea, but, if you
3 were to take the new MRIP-FES data landings, and you were to --
4 That would come with new landings, and, potentially, if you were
5 to apply the same formulas in 58, you could recalculate the
6 allocation, right, based on the same approach.

7
8 If you did that, the approach that you used in the framework, where
9 you kind of scale the landings on a percent basis, you might be
10 able to do something like that, and then you could move forward,
11 perhaps, with new catch levels, in the different currency, without
12 waiting for the whole thing. I don't -- I would have to think
13 that through, but that -- In gist, that's what I'm thinking.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, to that?

16
17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that's kind of what I'm trying to think
18 about, Dr. Froeschke. Like that's kind of exactly where my head
19 is going, something like that, but I feel like we need more time
20 to think about what those options could be, or whether they're
21 even feasible, and so I keep going back and forth.

22
23 I mean, maybe we could see if there's interest in looking at that.
24 I mean, we don't have the statutory deadline right now for -- To
25 act on this today, and so, I mean, that could come to a meeting in
26 the relatively near future here, but I don't know. I'm trying to
27 think of a middle-of-the-road approach here, but I also understand
28 where Mr. Sanchez is coming from with this motion.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, C.J. Dr. Froeschke, to that? I do
31 have a list.

32
33 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and, just as a follow-up, I mean, one thing
34 -- Say that we have the new landings for the April council meeting.
35 We could provide them for the same time series as using the
36 documents, and just give you a picture of what the allocations
37 would be in a relative scale to the other part. I don't know if
38 that would -- I mean, if it's not a big difference, maybe we just
39 go back and do 58. I don't know.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. I have Ed, then Andy,
42 then John, then Kevin.

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** So it sounds to me like maybe there's a chance we
45 could try and evaluate the landings estimate and the allocation
46 based on something other than FES, which I would be in favor, and
47 that's -- I agree with the motion on the board.

1 My rationale is that mostly MRIP, and I'm not in favor of using
2 data that we know is highly questionable, because we feel like we
3 need to hurry up and get something done, when technically we don't
4 -- My read out there is scamp is not collapsing. That's my personal
5 observations.

6
7 There's still scamp. They might not be what they used to be, but
8 they're not in like any dire straits, and so I really don't feel
9 like we have a gun to our head, and I feel like we have time to
10 keep working on this, particularly if -- When you look at the MRIP
11 estimates for gag and red grouper, they were sometimes 100 or 200
12 percent off.

13
14 You know, now we're thinking that it's okay for scamp, and, I mean,
15 that could change every -- That could make it not overfished, and
16 none of this would have been necessary, when you compare that to
17 SRFS. You know, MRIP compared to SRFS were over 100 percent
18 different estimates.

19
20 I know we don't have SRFS, but I'm just saying we've demonstrated
21 that MRIP can be 100 percent off or more in some situations, and
22 so I don't have a lot of confidence here in hurrying up and going
23 with those estimates.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Simmons, to that point.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, I mean,
28 to John's point, we haven't heard from S&T. It says, regarding
29 the timeline for the calibrated time series, as noted in December
30 at the South Atlantic Council meeting, the fall 2025 government
31 shutdown did necessitate a shift in our schedule, and so they can't
32 even tell us when they can give us that, and so I don't think it's
33 going to happen in April, by any means.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, for that info. Mr.
36 Strelcheck, and then Mr. Sanchez.

37
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I've given a lot of thought to this since
39 committee, and talked to a few folks. I feel like there's three
40 options. This is what I would go to as the third option, and the
41 struggle I'm having with this one is the uncertain timeline, right,
42 and how much down the road is this going to push us into taking
43 action, and so we do have an old assessment, that's getting older
44 by the day, and we have ACL advice, or ABC advice, that came from
45 the SSC to us that we need to act upon and implement.

46
47 I also agree with, obviously, the comments, and struggle with kind
48 of where we're at today, because, if we took final action today,

1 and move forward, well, sometime during the rulemaking phase, we're
2 going to learn what the revised landings are going to be, right?

3
4 The middle option, and what C.J. was at least mentioning, is where
5 I've been going, which is we don't -- Well, at least we shouldn't,
6 and maybe some people consider it, but we don't decide the
7 allocation based on the actual numbers. We decide it based on the
8 rationale for the time series or other basis that we're, obviously,
9 determining that allocation, right, and so it's really a formula.

10
11 If the numbers are going to change based on where we're at now
12 with FES, and the new FES pilot, maybe there's a way that we could
13 modify the allocation action in this amendment to be more formulaic
14 and build the amendment so we can take final action. As that data
15 and information comes in, we can actually plug in the numbers and
16 go to rulemaking specifying that allocation.

17
18 The downside of that is you may not know what that number is before
19 we take final action. We know it's going to be somewhere less
20 than -- Or it will reduce the recreational allocation and increase
21 the commercial. By how much would be unknown, but, if we're basing
22 our rationale on a formula, and we're agreeing that that is the
23 methodology we're using, to me, that's the best path and logic
24 that we could use to actually get to final action.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy, for the information. Next is
27 Mr. Sanchez, and then Mr. Anson.

28
29 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes. How we accomplish my concerns, you know, with
30 a formulaic approach, that's more automated or what have you, I'm
31 in support of that, and will leave that to the number crunchers,
32 or the scientists, to come up with.

33
34 I just have concerns with using data that we kind of know, whether
35 it's all we had or not, is fraught with uncertainty, and then being
36 forced to use it because we're at some final hearing, and I would
37 rather do the right thing, and maybe have a more correct result,
38 and not be overly concerned with the final hearing and the rush,
39 because, quite frankly, we probably have nine documents that we've
40 finalized that are still in status waiting to be pushed over the
41 finish line, and so I don't buy into that there's this dire need
42 to rush. Let's do the right thing.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Anson.

45
46 **MR. ANSON:** I may have misheard, but what is the -- I mean, we'll
47 have to run these numbers, once we get the calibrated effort
48 information, which would then be the calibrated landings

1 information, and we'll have to run that through an assessment
2 again, and has that been discussed, that that's a relatively quick
3 thing? That's what I missed, that I didn't hear, was the timeline
4 between when we would have the calibrated landings information and
5 when they would also go through the assessment, another assessment.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

8
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you,
10 Kevin, and sorry if I wasn't clear. Right now, we don't even have
11 that on the schedule with the Science Center for the MRIP-FES for
12 scamp.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Kevin.

15
16 **MR. ANSON:** So that needs to be part of this discussion calculus
17 too, whether or not what we do, and how we do it. I mean, I think
18 it's a little outside the box, if we look at just landings
19 information and compare it against the previous assessment's
20 status determination criteria and all that, and apply that
21 proportion to that OFL and ABC, and, I mean, just a thought.
22

23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. I have Mr. Rindone and Dr.
24 Allen.
25

26 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to remind you
27 guys that you're not bound to use a time series of landings to
28 determine what the allocation is going to be. You simply need to
29 justify whatever method it is that you're using to determine that
30 percentage.
31

32 It's not even recent anymore, and I guess we're all getting old,
33 but the last time that we deviated from that was with kingfish,
34 when we redid the commercial zone allocations for kingfish, and
35 that was like 2012, or 2013, something like that, but I mean,
36 usually we do use a landings history, but, if there's another
37 innovative way that you guys would like to consider -- I know that,
38 in the past, we've considered, for amberjack, like setting the
39 commercial value at a set amount that we knew the commercial sector
40 could use, and then the recreational sector got the rest.
41

42 That's an example of not necessarily using a time series to split
43 it for both sectors, and so, if there was a way that that was
44 useful to you, that might be an option on either side, and so just
45 don't pigeonhole yourselves, because you don't have to.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ryan. Dr. Allen.
48

1 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I certainly understand
2 everyone's viewpoint and thoughts that have been brought up here.
3 I'll just make a couple of comments. One is that the MRIP precision
4 estimates for the scamp, for the Gulf-wide landings, are not
5 terribly uncertain. It's not like the deepwater grouper. There
6 were, I think, two out of fourteen years that were flagged as red,
7 and so, most of the years, the precision was within the bounds
8 that they would consider reasonable.

9
10 I'll also point out that small changes in the landings, small
11 random changes in the landings, are probably not going to change
12 the stock status much, and we're also doing more with this
13 amendment than just scamp. It's splitting out the complex, and
14 not tying up black grouper with the scamp complex, and, when I
15 weigh that with the fact that the latest data and assessment is
16 six years old today, if we delay this more, then it would seem, to
17 me, the most prudent thing to do is to go and do a new assessment,
18 and that would be a perfectly reasonable outcome.

19
20 I can see why people would argue for that, but that's going to be
21 more years down the road, and, you know, the concern is then that
22 we may be in a much worse condition with scamp, and so I know I'm
23 rambling, but those are my thoughts, but I kind of come at it as
24 I feel like we either need to act on this now or really do it right
25 and go back and do an assessment, you know, an updated assessment.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Mr. Rindone.

28
29 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. To that point, we don't have
30 scamp on the schedule again for a stock assessment until 2028 at
31 present, and so, if we were to want to move that up, we would need
32 to probably let the Science Center know here in a couple of weeks,
33 Mr. Chair, when we're at that steering committee meeting, and see
34 what sort of musical chairs we would need to do to accommodate
35 that.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Ryan. Thank you for that information. Any
38 more conversation? Any more discussion on Mr. Sanchez's motion on
39 the board? Okay. Let's try this. **Is there any opposition to the**
40 **motion?** Okay. **We have five in opposition. It seems to me the**
41 **motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

42
43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. All right. Moving on
44 to the next item here, Presentation: Reef Fish Amendment 63:
45 Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper Individual Fishing Program, Tab
46 B, Number 6, and I think we might need a little discussion on this
47 one too.

1 Staff gave a presentation on Reef Fish Amendment 63. The amendment
2 would establish a three-year pilot commercial red grouper quota
3 pool and distribute the resulting annual allocation to eligible
4 participants in the grouper-tilefish IFQ program. Staff discussed
5 amounts of red grouper quota to be held in the pool, eligibility
6 criteria, and distribution methods for the quota pool annual
7 allocation.

8
9 A committee member pointed out that this amendment is designed to
10 help account holders who own little or no red grouper shares and
11 suggested that varying levels of share ownership be considered.
12 Staff replied that the ownership thresholds could be included.

13
14 The committee thought a minimum landings should be included in the
15 eligibility criteria to receive quota pool allocation. A committee
16 member said ratios of share ownership relative to landings could
17 also be considered.

18
19 Another committee member suggested that the minimum landings
20 requirement lower than 400 pounds per two-year period be
21 considered, since some fishermen may have limited red grouper
22 landings because they could not buy allocation. The table below
23 provides the number of eligible accounts for various landings
24 thresholds below 400 pounds, and you all can look at that.

25
26 A council member asked whether the amendment would be implemented
27 in time to start distributing quota pool allocation on January 1,
28 2027. Staff indicated that the quota pool allocation could be
29 distributed early in 2027. SERO staff noted that the Amendment 63
30 would move to the top of SERO's priorities and mentioned the option
31 to explore quota holdback provisions to mitigate potential delays.

32
33 A committee member asked about additional guidance council staff
34 would need to further develop the amendment. Staff replied that
35 recommendations relative to the inclusion of share ownership and
36 the consideration of minimum landings as eligibility criteria
37 would be helpful. The committee member noted that public comments
38 could help provide guidance.

39
40 Mr. Chair, I just kind of want to point this out. We were kind of
41 waiting to hear public comment, and kind of see what some of our
42 commercial folks were interested in, how they wanted this
43 structured, and this might be a good time to help out Assane, to
44 try to move something forward and get him some direction.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We can open the floor
47 for discussion. Captain Walker.

48

1 **MR. WALKER:** After listening to public testimony, and talking to
2 some of the guys, I think I've moved, in my mind, my minimum
3 threshold a little higher, and, if I've got to pick a number, I'll
4 pick 300.

5
6 I think 300 pounds over two years will keep it from going to
7 someone in a place that doesn't really have red grouper, that
8 happened to randomly catch one in Alabama, or, I don't know,
9 Mississippi, or something like that. I don't know if they have
10 red groupers up there or not, and so we don't want to distribute
11 it that way.

12
13 I don't think we want to make it a big hurdle, and so, for the
14 sake of picking a number, I'll go with 300. I'm not locked in.
15 If somebody disagrees, that's fine, too, but, just to get the ball
16 rolling there, I would pick 300 as a minimum threshold to qualify
17 for this.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Diagne.

20
21 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Yes, and just a question, because, I mean, to
22 develop the amendment, we would need a range of options, right? I
23 understand that 300 would be your preferred value, and so,
24 essentially, we wouldn't include anything below 300, but we would
25 need a range of say between 300 and 1,000, or above, and so, in
26 terms of guidance, if you would, that range would be more helpful
27 to us.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Assane. Mr. Anson.

30
31 **MR. ANSON:** I recall a number from one of the individuals who
32 provided some testimony today, but I think that number might be a
33 little excessive for what we were trying to do here with this, but
34 certainly I understand providing a range of alternatives, and so
35 I'll suggest, and, Assane, let me know if I'm going astray here,
36 but maybe go 300, 500, and 1,000. Would 1,000 be too much in this?
37 I would look around the table here at my fellow council members,
38 and certainly other folks can weigh-in, but that would be my
39 suggestion.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I see a thumbs-up from Dr. Sweetman. Assane, are
42 you good with that?

43
44 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and that's perfect, and so 300, 500, and 1,000.
45 That's perfect.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

48

1 **MR. WALKER:** I just thought of another question. Maybe we've been
2 over this, and I don't remember, and so the idea here is that this
3 is going to be non-transferable allocation, correct? How are we
4 going to check that? If a guy has 1,000 pounds in his account,
5 and you give him another 300, I mean, I guess, how does that work?
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Diagne.
8

9 **DR. DIAGNE:** One of the ways would be that, if you have 1,000
10 pounds, and we give you 300, you won't be allowed to transfer
11 anything unless you land 300 pounds, meaning whatever it is that
12 was given to you would have to be used first, and, in talking to
13 some of the fishermen yesterday, I mean, they clearly understand
14 that, for example, if you have multi-use shares, you cannot use
15 them unless you use that share category first, and so it's going
16 to be kind of similar to that. That would be one way, but maybe
17 Mr. Strelcheck is thinking about a different way.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Andy.
20

21 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Jessica is raising her hand, and so I'll let her
22 respond.
23

24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Stephen.
25

26 **DR. JESSICA STEPHEN:** Can you hear me?
27

28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and we have you.
29

30 **DR. STEPHEN:** Okay, and so the way we would handle this, because
31 of the non-transferability, is we would create a separate
32 allocation category, which would be the red grouper quota bank
33 allocation category, and so that would not be transferable, and we
34 would run this similar to the way we run the multi-use, and so
35 there would be order of operations that the system would take from
36 first, and so we would use all the quota bank red grouper
37 allocation first, before they got into their normal red grouper
38 allocation.
39

40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Stephen. Captain Walker, you have
41 a question?
42

43 **MR. WALKER:** I knew Jessica would have that figured out, actually.
44 She's pretty sharp on this, and so thank you for that, Dr. Stephen.
45

46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any further -- Mr. Anson.
47

48 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you. While Dr. Stephen is on the phone, Dr.

1 Stephen, how -- Administratively, how would you then be monitoring
2 those accounts relative to identifying that number, whatever the
3 number is, you know, if we decide to go forward with the number,
4 and it would just be that 300, and I guess it would be caught at
5 the trip level, that, if they were standing at 200 pounds that
6 they had already, you know, submitted, and then, on the next trip,
7 they're going to submit 150 pounds, and so then the system would
8 notate that they met their 300-pound allocation, and then the next
9 fifty pounds would be coming out of their quota pool, I guess,
10 account, or allocation, and would that be how it works?

11
12 **DR. STEPHEN:** So not quite, and so what we would do is we would
13 use the minimum landings pounds over the two-year time period to
14 determine if someone would be eligible to receive the quota bank
15 allocation, and, after that designation, whether they're eligible
16 to receive it, they would have the quota bank allocation.

17
18 They would be able to land that. They would not be able to transfer
19 it for value to someone else moving forward, and so, for the next
20 time period, when we're looking at people who qualified, it would
21 your red grouper landings, regardless of what share category they
22 came out of, because red grouper, in theory, could come out of
23 straight red grouper, red grouper multi-use, gag multi-use, and
24 then the red grouper quota bank.

25
26 We'll build that in, so that, when we're looking for the landings,
27 it's strictly on the species, regardless of what share category.
28 Does that make more sense?

29
30 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, it does. Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. All right. Do we have any more discussion?
33 Does Assane have -- Mr. Strelcheck.

34
35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** One of the other things that came up during the
36 Q&A, and I think I heard in public testimony this morning, was
37 metrics for evaluating this pilot, and so I think, as the team
38 works through this, we'll definitely want to be building in some
39 evaluation criteria, or information as to how we'll determine kind
40 of success, or performance, of the pilot program.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Any further discussion? Dr.
43 Diagne, do you have what you need?

44
45 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Dr. Sweetman.

48

1 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you. Appreciate the discussion. Okay.
2 Moving on to the next topic, Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment
3 59A: Permit Requirements and IFQ Programs, council staff reviewed
4 preferred alternatives in Reef Fish Amendment 59A and discussed
5 recommendations from the March 2025 Ad Hoc Red Snapper and Grouper-
6 Tilefish IFQ Advisory Panel meeting.

7
8 In Action 1, obtaining and maintaining a shareholder account, the
9 AP approved a motion to add an alternative that establishes a
10 control date for a requirement to obtain and maintain a shareholder
11 account and make the control date the date of implementation of
12 the amendment. Council staff noted that a similar motion was
13 approved for Action 2, obtaining and maintaining IFQ shares, and
14 Action 3, obtaining IFQ allocation.

15
16 SERO staff asked about the rationale for the control date
17 recommended by the AP. Council staff responded that the AP's
18 motivation was to exempt those already participating in the IFQ
19 programs from permit requirements.

20
21 A committee member expressed concern about locking some
22 participants in and noted that previous amendments had already
23 considered the issue. NOAA General Counsel noted that the "control
24 date" phrase was not appropriately used and that grandfathering
25 existing participants would be the appropriate concept.

26
27 In Action 2, the AP approved a motion to add the following
28 alternative. To obtain and maintain IFQ shares, in addition to
29 the U.S. citizenship or permanent residency requirement, a
30 shareholder account must be associated with a valid or renewable
31 commercial reef fish permit and/or a Gulf or South Atlantic dealer
32 permit.

33
34 A committee member responded that vertically-integrated operations
35 should continue to participate, but expressed concern that dealer
36 permits are open access permits. The committee indicated that the
37 potential loopholes should be evaluated if dealer permits are
38 included in the eligibility requirements.

39
40 Another committee member noted that it is important to limit
41 potential adverse impacts on those already active in the IFQ
42 programs and suggested that the inclusion of dealer permits should
43 be further explored. SERO staff indicated that there's a wide
44 range of business structures operating within the IFQ programs.
45 They also noted that there are many participants in the IFQ
46 programs in the audience and recommended hearing from dealers
47 during public comment.

1 A committee member noted that some dealers are vertically
2 integrated, are actively participating in the IFQ programs, and
3 own permits. Another committee member stated that one common model
4 of operation is for a fish house to own shares and distribute the
5 corresponding allocation amongst their vessels.

6
7 A committee member asked for council staff to consider active
8 participation in the fishery. Another committee member clarified
9 that speculators are not selling fish, rather they are selling
10 allocation, and the goal of this amendment is to address that.

11
12 The committee indicated that participation in IFQ programs from
13 quota banks and other nonprofit organizations should be considered
14 as the permit requirements are designed. A committee member
15 suggested that the council should determine specific eligibility
16 criteria for quota banks and vet applicants, which the committee
17 admitted could be cumbersome.

18
19 NOAA General Counsel stated that the council develop standards for
20 quota banks. Those standards will have to be applied equally to
21 all applicants.

22
23 Council staff noted that the AP discussed hardship conditions and
24 indicated that a one-year grace period before divestment may not
25 be enough in some instances, for example in the case of death or
26 boat damage. AP members also stated that fishermen who plan to
27 retire would not be able to sell their IFQ shares in installments
28 to young fishermen with limited capital.

29
30 A committee member asked about the difference between
31 noncompliance in Preferred Alternatives 2 and 3 in Action 4.
32 Council staff replied that alternatives in Action 4 address
33 noncompliance once the amendment is implemented, Preferred
34 Alternative 2, and noncompliance when a participant who used to be
35 compliant falls out of compliance in the future, Preferred
36 Alternative 3.

37
38 A committee member expressed support for longer grace periods for
39 noncompliant participants. Another committee member indicated
40 that a one-year grace period should be sufficient. The SERO staff
41 confirmed that the one-year grace period is equivalent to two
42 years, the year after the expiration notice is sent plus the one-
43 year grace period.

44
45 The committee recommended that staff should further explore the
46 inclusion of dealer permits as alternative eligibility criterion
47 and begin developing options for continued participation of quota
48 banks in the IFQ program. All right.

1
2 Next topic, Presentation: Regional management of Greater Amberjack
3 for the Recreational Sector, council staff presented on greater
4 amberjack management measures, summarized the timeline for greater
5 amberjack interim analysis and the Greater Amberjack Count, and
6 highlighted key decision points for regional management.

7
8 Several committee members expressed concern surrounding the
9 accuracy of MRIP-FES landings data. SERO staff said the largest
10 challenge with management of greater amberjack is monitoring of
11 the recreational fishery, whether through MRIP-FES or state-
12 specific surveys.

13
14 SERO noted that state/regional management hinges on whether these
15 data collection and monitoring methods are adequate and suggested
16 identifying the monitoring methods as a first step in determining
17 how to best proceed with state or regional management.

18
19 A committee member suggested using the Southeast For-Hire
20 Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program to better
21 monitor greater amberjack landings. Another committee member
22 asked whether the council would receive a presentation from the
23 principal investigators of the Greater Amberjack Count, similar to
24 that being presented to the Gulf SSC in May 2026.

25
26 A committee member also asked about the timeline for the interim
27 analysis to inform catch advice, and council staff clarified that
28 it was requested to be developed for the purpose, or for that
29 purpose, but were unsure whether it will just be a health check,
30 due to the stock still being in a rebuilding plan.

31
32 A committee member noted there are several avenues of incoming
33 greater amberjack research moving through the council process that
34 may be used to inform decision points surrounding state/regional
35 management. They suggested waiting for some data to move through
36 the process, prior to development of the document, to allow staff
37 to determine how to incorporate new data sources into management
38 advice.

39
40 Another committee member noted the need for a document for greater
41 amberjack state/regional management to be developed concurrent
42 with the assessment process, to allow for catch advice and
43 management decisions to be better aligned, and to expedite the
44 process.

45
46 The committee agreed to recommend that staff develop a draft
47 document outlining action items for greater amberjack regional
48 management, recognizing the process is likely iterative, and staff

1 will include new information that develops from the interim
2 analysis for greater amberjack and the Greater Amberjack Count.
3 It looks like we have a question here. Captain Walker.

4
5 **MR. WALKER:** I'm sorry. I had a little comment on the previous,
6 on the red grouper, but I kind of missed you, when you went by
7 from one to the other, and can I throw that in here before we go
8 any further?

9
10 We asked that staff further explore inclusion of dealer permits
11 and look at continued participation of quota banks in the IFQ
12 programs. I've since -- I found out, since we had this discussion,
13 that there's -- The nonprofits have some pretty strict regulations
14 to qualify as a nonprofit, and what I had heard anyways, you know,
15 is they have to prove their nonprofit. They have transparent
16 record keeping. They have to have -- I don't know, and there's a
17 bunch of qualifiers, and, to me, that was almost kind of like --
18 It would be like a vetting process that we talked about.

19
20 Not officially, but it sounds like it would be rather difficult
21 for just a quota flipper to actually set up a pseudo quota bank
22 just to, you know, check that box, and so that made me more
23 interested in quota banks, if they were documented nonprofits, and
24 so maybe if we could include, in the pending information, some
25 more information about nonprofits, and how that would apply, that
26 would be helpful.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Captain Walker, staff received your
29 message. Thank you. Dr. Sweetman.

30
31 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll pause for a second.
32 Any discussion about greater amberjack? Seeing none, okay. Moving
33 on to the next topic of Presentation: Recreational Initiative
34 Working Group Prioritization and Recommendations.

35
36 Council staff reviewed the six council-prioritized recreational
37 initiative working group recommendations, relevant background
38 information, and proposed workplans that would align with the
39 working group recommendations.

40
41 SERO staff highlighted that there is ongoing work between NMFS and
42 the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to implement a database
43 to which Gulf States can import data to provide further
44 transparency for Gulf landings and be accessible to the public,
45 aligning with the working group's Recommendation 1.1. Council
46 staff stated that, when the database is completed, it would be
47 beneficial to bring through the council process to educate the
48 council and identify the database as a resource for stakeholders.

1
2 A committee member expressed support for additional measures for
3 carryover provisions for reef fish species in support of
4 Recommendation 3.2.

5
6 Another committee member suggested reprioritizing the action on
7 the proposed red snapper accountability measures document to
8 include discussion on carryover provisions and payback measures
9 for the private recreational sector. NOAA General Counsel noted
10 that there is a framework for carryover provisions in Amendment
11 50, but it was predicated on the implementation of the currently
12 tabled generic carryover amendment.

13
14 A committee member also expressed interest in reinitiating that
15 previously-tabled document that considered a broader
16 implementation of carryover provisions across FMPs. SERO staff
17 noted that there is a framework used by the South Atlantic Council
18 for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel to allow for
19 reallocating unused quota between regions. This framework may
20 serve as an example of a way forward, albeit there may be some
21 challenges and differences in execution, due to state survey data
22 units.

23
24 Another committee member expressed interest in investigating a
25 similar quota transfer system for red snapper. Council staff
26 highlighted continued efforts to engage with the working group on
27 council initiatives that align with working group recommendations,
28 and I think the General has a motion here.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** General Spraggins.

31
32 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and I would like to make a motion, and I
33 think she has that, if she can bring it up for me, Bernie. Okay.
34 **The motion is to direct staff to begin a document to explore**
35 **options for enhanced flexibility for private red snapper**
36 **recreational management. Develop an action to consider carryover**
37 **of uncaught quota from the previous year within a state. Also**
38 **consider an action to allow transfer of some uncaught quota between**
39 **states within current fishing years, similar to 50 CFR**
40 **622.384(c)(2), which allows a fish in season transfer of Atlantic**
41 **Spanish mackerel commercial quota between states in the South**
42 **Atlantic.**

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board. Is there
45 a second for the motion? It's seconded by Mr. Marquez. Discussion
46 on the motion? General Spraggins.

47
48 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I would -- You know, basically, I know we have

1 something that was back last year, that I think was Item 13 on our
2 list or something, Carrie, that we have been able to look at this.
3 I think this is just more clarification about what we're talking
4 about here.

5
6 It's more of a clarification to tell them what we want to look
7 for, rather than changing the actual motion that was done before,
8 and so I think it's given us a little bit of -- You know, basically,
9 after listening to Mr. Strelcheck and them talk about, yesterday,
10 how it has been done in the Atlantic, and how it's done with the
11 Spanish mackerel, how could we do this.

12
13 Now, I don't think this is going to be a fix that's going to happen
14 in the next hour. You know, we're going to have to ask them what
15 we want to do to be able to bring this forward. Even if we got
16 them -- If we asked staff to move it up to take it to the point to
17 where we put it in April, to bring a draft, it would probably be
18 June before we could try to do any type of finalization on it, and
19 it would probably be next year before it could even go to
20 implementation, but I just wanted to clarify.

21
22 I think it is moving things forward, that we talked about over a
23 year ago almost, or about a year ago this time, and it's something
24 to help move this forward a little bit quicker.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Any more discussion
27 on the motion? No? Okay. **Is there any opposition to the motion?**
28 **One opposed.** Mr. Sanchez. **The motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

29
30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Home stretch. Okay. Presentation: January 2026
31 Science and Statistical Committee webinar summary, Mr. Moncrief
32 reviewed SSC discussions about interim analyses for Gulf lane
33 snapper and gag grouper, which are both also informed by the G-
34 FISHER index of relative abundance.

35
36 Mr. Moncrief discussed trends in the index for lane snapper and
37 briefly discussed the SSC's evaluation of various reference
38 periods to inform the SSC's catch recommendation.

39
40 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to begin**
41 **a document to update catch limits for lane snapper based on the**
42 **SSC's recommendations.** The motion carried without opposition.
43 Mr. Chair.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
46 motion on the board. Is there any further discussion on the
47 motion? No further discussion. **Is there any opposition to the**
48 **motion? Seeing none, motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

1
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. For gag, Mr. Moncrief noted
3 that this interim analysis was conducted as a health check and
4 shared the rationale for that from the Southeast Fisheries Science
5 Center.

6
7 He then reviewed the index trend for gag and the related SSC
8 discussion. He noted the SSC will continue to monitor gag and
9 that a new stock assessment is presently underway, SEDAR 105. A
10 committee member noted that there may be a delay in between
11 observations on the water and fishery-independent indices. Other
12 Business, no other business was brought before the committee. Mr.
13 Chair, that concludes my report.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, for leading us through
16 that. Anything else? Okay. I would recommend we take a short
17 break, bathroom break, and then we'll wrap up, finish up. 3:45.
18 Let's get started at 3:45.

19
20 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Are you all ready to wrap this up?
23 All right. We're going to move down the agenda to the update on
24 documents that were just transmitted for rulemaking, and Mr. Helies
25 will give us an update.

26
27 **UPDATE ON DOCUMENTS TRANSMITTED FOR RULEMAKING**

28
29 **MR. HELIES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If that would be all right,
30 can we pull up that sheet you just sent out, Carrie, and that would
31 be helpful. If you could slide down to the bottom, 58B, and I'll
32 start with that.

33
34 We're almost done with that. I anticipate being able to have that
35 transmitted by the council probably early next week, and so that's
36 the deepwater grouper catch level adjustments. At the end of 2025,
37 we held back quota, in anticipation of trying to get this rule
38 implemented by June 1 of this year. That's going to be a very,
39 very tight squeeze, and so, if we're not able to accomplish that,
40 we will redistribute the shares that we held back on the deepwater
41 grouper quota, and we will likely do that sooner rather than later,
42 to give the fishermen ample opportunity to harvest those fish.

43
44 Once we get 58B, red grouper will be our top priority, to get that
45 finalized and implemented, and so that's 62. We do have a deadline
46 for the shrimp permit moratorium of October. It needs to be in
47 place by October, and so that is a priority as well.

1 We heard loud and clear that the red snapper for-hire season start
2 date is a priority for stakeholders, and so we'll try to work on
3 that as quickly as we can as well, but these are the bandwidth and
4 workload issues that we've been discussing all week.

5
6 I don't want to make promises. You know, the top three things,
7 we'll try to do as fast as we can, and other items will fall out
8 as they will. We'll try to work on them as time allows, and so
9 those are the items that are in the queue to be transmitted by the
10 council. Questions on those, before we go to active rulemaking?

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Helies. Dr. Simmons had her hand
13 up.

14
15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you,
16 Frank, and so I guess I'll be the mean one, the bad person, and
17 people are going to get mad at me, if they're not already, but the
18 staff does not see the reef fish framework action to modify the
19 red snapper for-hire season being able to be implemented in time
20 for 2026.

21
22 We don't have it completed yet. It hasn't been reviewed by the
23 Science Center, and it's not in rulemaking yet. I mean, we just
24 had too many other priorities, and so, that being said, hopefully
25 people can plan accordingly, but we just don't see that happening.
26 Thank you.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the update, Dr. Simmons. Mr.
29 Strelcheck.

30
31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'll just add that I heard the industry
32 loud and clear, in terms of needing to know that sooner rather
33 than later, and so what we plan to do is try to announce the red
34 snapper season considerably earlier this year, if we can.

35
36 Typically, we're rolling it out late April, or early May, and we're
37 going to try to get it out sooner, so that people have a better
38 planning horizon. We'll start, obviously, June 1, and estimate
39 the season. It likely will be longer than the mid-September season
40 that we estimated this past year, because of lower than expected
41 landings.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the update, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we
44 have any questions for Mr. Helies? Not seeing any, Frank, go
45 ahead.

46
47 **MR. HELIES:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. For rulemaking, if you
48 want to slide down, that would be great, and we have four actions

1 that have been transmitted to us for rulemaking.

2
3 We're prioritizing the reef fish framework action to adjust the
4 catch levels for shallow-water grouper. That was sent over in
5 July. We started the package immediately. The shutdown delayed
6 us getting that package up to headquarters, but it is in
7 headquarters, pending clearance, and it's been up there for a
8 little while now.

9
10 We did hold that quota for shallow-water grouper as well at the
11 end of the year. We have a better feeling about hopefully this
12 will be in place before June 1, and, if that's not the case, then
13 we'll be giving that quota back to fishermen as well.

14
15 Lane snapper size limit adjustments, we're working on that
16 internally with the Regional Office. The shrimp framework action
17 was just sent over to us last week, and so that's an administration
18 priority, and so we're going to be working on that heavily here in
19 2026.

20
21 The commercial e-logbook amendment, that's been -- We're working
22 on that for a long time now. The NOA published in November, and
23 comments were due this month, January 20. As I mentioned earlier
24 in the week, we received I think twelve comments, is what I said,
25 and the proposed rule is pending clearance in Headquarters, and so
26 we have to make a decision on the amendment by February 20.

27
28 Ideally, we like to have both comment periods finished before you
29 make a decision on the amendment, but we're waiting on the proposed
30 rule to publish for that action as well. That's all I've got.
31 Thanks.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Mr. Helies. Do we have any questions
34 for Frank? Not seeing any, okay. Dr. Simmons.

35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Just I guess maybe a good
37 communication plan when the other shallow-water grouper management
38 measures go in place, because of the recreational closure, right,
39 and it's supposed to be in place now. Just make sure that we try
40 to get that out to everyone as early as we can.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Ms. Levy.

43
44 **MS. LEVY:** Well, just on that point, so we're doing a rulemaking,
45 right, and so we've got to propose it, then final, then there will
46 be a thirty-day cooling-off period, and so there's no way that
47 it's going to go in place immediately, and so there will be plenty
48 of notice.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Okay. Nothing else for
3 Frank? Then we'll move on to the next agenda item, Discussion of
4 Council Planning and Primary Activities. Dr. Simmons.

5
6 **DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES**

7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so
9 this is staff's plan for April. That being said, we have to be
10 able to get the permit data that we need to bring a public hearing
11 draft for Reef Fish Amendment 63, the program to establish a
12 commercial red grouper quota pool.

13
14 We would like to try to bring a draft final abbreviated framework
15 for lane snapper catch limits, a revised draft of the joint
16 Amendment 55 and 44 for yellowtail and mutton snapper, a
17 presentation, again, and maybe a white paper, but I think a
18 presentation, for the delegation of federal for-hire management to
19 the Gulf states.

20
21 Options paper to start exploring what we said we would do in our
22 workplan for the Executive Order, which is to review the low-
23 priority species in the FMPs, to consider if they're in need of
24 federal management, or if we want to consider them as ecosystem
25 component species.

26
27 Potentially an update on the generic amendment to modify the
28 essential fish habitat, and then a discussion document to consider
29 changes to red snapper private recreational accountability
30 measures. That includes the payback and the carryover provisions.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the update, Dr. Simmons, and do we
33 have any questions for Dr. Simmons?

34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** If you scroll down, you can see some
36 of the things that were brought up that people were interested in
37 I think for April, but we're shooting for June, and so I'll just
38 point that out, and I'm not going to read them.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I'll give the council a minute to look it over,
41 if you have any questions. Okay. No questions for Dr. Simmons.
42 Thank you. The next agenda item is Other Business, and we'll have
43 Mr. Schieble has other business for us.

44
45 **OTHER BUSINESS**

46
47 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and it's just some housekeeping, and so we had
48 a news release go out on Monday, which was our final private

1 recreational red snapper landing estimates for the year. We
2 generally wait a little bit after the season, to make sure some
3 weights don't continue to come in, or modify, over the course of
4 the last couple of weeks, which they didn't.

5
6 We sent it out. However, it had two numbers transposed in the
7 news release, and so the second one went out today, this morning,
8 and I don't know if you can see these or not, and so that's why
9 I'm going through this, but, anyway, the allocation was mistyped.
10 The overage was the same. We had a 52,148-pound overage from this
11 past season, 2025.

12
13 There will be a payback of that going into this year, likely a May
14 season for us, which means that the allocation that we'll be
15 fishing to, minus that 52,148, will be 882,439 pounds, and so
16 882,439 is the correct allocation for Louisiana for this year.

17
18 Also, I wanted to mention that, during the Reef Fish Committee, we
19 discussed -- During the landings update, they had listed the
20 federal-for-hire landings in that document. It was in that table,
21 and I had brought up the point that I thought -- That they weren't
22 correct, compared to what ours were.

23
24 Andy's staff worked with my staff in data management to figure out
25 what happened, and essentially what it was is the combined state
26 charter landings with the federal-for-hire landings was the amount
27 that you saw. That's what we suspect is happening.

28
29 They are working together now to figure that out, and finalize it,
30 and so we should get some updated numbers I guess at the next
31 meeting with that, but, essentially, what I presented to you guys
32 in November for the federal-for-hire is likely the closer number
33 for that.

34
35 It would be without the state charter landing, and so our landings
36 that we present for LA Creel always include the state charter
37 landings. Just keep that in mind, and so, when I present that
38 total landings number, which includes this 52,148-pound overage I
39 just mentioned, that is the state charter within that. They're
40 always managed in Louisiana. That's it. If you have any
41 questions, let me know.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any questions for Mr. Schieble? Not
44 seeing any, Chris, and thank you. Is there any other business to
45 come before the council? General Spraggins.

46
47 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** You know, this has been a fantastic three days.
48 Any way to keep it?

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Well, General, if you can continue having
3 government shutdowns, probably so. All right. No other business?
4 All right. I have a few comments to make before we adjourn.
5
6 Just for council members to be aware, the next meeting in Mobile,
7 the week it follows is Easter Sunday, and so just be aware that
8 the meeting is going to start on Tuesday, and not Monday. We're
9 going to travel on Monday, and it will last through Friday, and so
10 you may be traveling on Saturday, depending on where you're coming
11 from. Also, congratulations to Charlotte on her retirement.
12
13 Let's see, and I would like to thank the Charter Boat Association
14 again for the social last night. Thank you, Richard Fischer. The
15 presenters, the staff who are working on all these documents, Major
16 Aucoin with Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Enforcement for
17 being here all week. Thank you, sir.
18
19 The council members for working through lunch today, and expediting
20 the process of this meeting, and thank you all. Safe travels, and
21 we'll see you in Mobile.
22
23 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 28, 2026.)
24
25 - - -
26