

GULF COUNCIL

REEF FISH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Hyatt Centric New Orleans, Louisiana & Virtual

January 27, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

- 10 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
- 11 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- 12 Michael Allen.....Florida
- 13 Kevin Anson.....Alabama
- 14 Brenda Ballard.....Texas
- 15 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 16 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 17 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 18 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 19 Johnny Marquez.....Mississippi
- 20 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
- 21 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 22 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 23 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 24 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 25 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 26 Ed Walker.....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

- 29 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 30 Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG

STAFF

- 33 Assane Diagne.....Economist
- 34 Matt Freeman.....Economic Analyst
- 35 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 36 Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- 37 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
- 38 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 39 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 40 Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
- 41 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 42 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
- 43 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 44 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- 45 Anabelle Suito.....Social Scientist
- 46 Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

1 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**
2 Gregg Bray.....GSMFC
3 Rick Burris.....MS
4 Frank Helies.....NOAA
5 Mike Larkin.....NOAA
6 Tom Roller.....SAFMC
7 Jessica Stephen.....NOAA
8 John Walter.....SEFSC
9
10

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PAGE 26: Motion to recommend the council approve Reef Fish Amendment 62: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The council chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate. The motion carried on page 27.

PAGE 60: Motion to direct staff to begin a document to update the catch limits for lane snapper based on the SSC's recommendations. The motion carried on page 60.

- - -

1 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf Council convened at
2 the Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Tuesday morning,
3 January 27, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman C.J.
4 Sweetman.

5
6 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** We're going to start with Ms. Levy's litigation
7 update. Ms. Levy.

8
9 **LITIGATION UPDATE**

10
11 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Thank you. I have a brief update on the challenge
12 to Amendment 56, which was the gag amendment, and, if you recall,
13 there was a challenge based on the Appointments Clause issue, and
14 so it wasn't really about what was in the rule. It was more about
15 the authority of the council system, and whether it was in
16 violation of the Appointments Clause, whether members of the
17 council are officers of the United States and need to be basically
18 appointed by the President and Senate confirmed.

19
20 On November 24th, and this case was in the Southern District of
21 Alabama, that court issued its decision and held that members of
22 the council are principal officers under the Appointments Clause,
23 insofar as they exercise these pocket veto powers over the
24 Secretary's action under the Magnuson Act.

25
26 There are three particular provisions that say that the Secretary
27 can only do something if the council approves it by, for example,
28 a three-quarter majority vote, like repealing an FMP, establishing
29 a limited access privilege program, and then the state delegation.

30
31 The court found that those provided the council a significant
32 authority, making the members officers of the United States, but
33 the court held that the core functions of the council, like this
34 whole process where we develop FMP amendments, and they get
35 reviewed, and the Secretary does the rulemaking, that that was not
36 significant authority, and so the court provisions were fine.

37
38 These three other provisions were not, and so the remedy that the
39 court employed was to sever those basically from the act, saying
40 that they're illegal.

41
42 This is consistent with two other decisions that have looked at
43 the same thing. One was the Third Circuit, that did the same
44 thing, and then there's another case that was in Maine, and that
45 district court essentially held the same thing. That Maine case
46 has been appealed to the First Circuit Court of Appeals, and, just
47 recently, last week, the plaintiffs in this case filed an appeal
48 in the Eleventh Circuit, and so the case is now going to be on

1 review in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

2
3 For your purposes, nothing has really changed, and we still have
4 the pending case that is the greater amberjack Amendment 54 case,
5 which raises the same issues. It's still with the Fifth Circuit
6 Court of Appeals, but we don't have a decision on that yet.

7
8 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy, for the update. Do we have any
9 questions for Ms. Levy? Not seeing any, thank you. Okay. We're
10 going to move on down the agenda to the Reef Fish Committee, and
11 Dr. Sweetman will lead us through that committee. Dr. Sweetman.

12
13 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
14 **APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 2025 MINUTES**
15 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
16

17 **CHAIRMAN C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm bringing the
18 Reef Management Committee to order here. The committee is the
19 entire council, and so I'm not going to read off names. I'm the
20 chair, and Mr. Schieble is the vice chair.

21
22 The first order, or the first item here, is Adoption of the Agenda.
23 Do we have any other business to add? Seeing none, can we get a
24 motion to adopt the agenda?

25
26 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** So moved.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Allen. Do I have a second?

29
30 **MR. ED WALKER:** Second.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker. Okay. The agenda is adopted.
33 The next item is Approval of the November 2025 Minutes. Do we
34 have any edits or updates to that? Ms. Levy.

35
36 **MS. LEVY:** Just caught one thing that I think is an error. On
37 page 26, it talks about a timeline for staff getting a document
38 together, and it has two dates, April 2026 and August 2026, but I
39 think you were talking about the past, and so I think it should be
40 2025, and so maybe just take a look at that.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Ms. Levy. Page 26.
43 Okay. Thank you for that edit. We will note that, and make that
44 --

45
46 **MS. LEVY:** Page 6. Wait.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Page 6, and not 26?

1
2 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and I might have said 26. It's 6. Sorry.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Ms. Levy. Okay, and so, with that
5 edit to the minutes, any other edits? Seeing none, can I get a
6 motion to approve the edited minutes for November 2025?

7
8 **MS. JASON OSBORNE:** So moved.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Jason. Thank you, and a second from Dr. Banks.
11 Okay. The minutes have been adopted. The next item is the Action
12 Guide and Next Steps. Mr. Rindone.

13
14 **PRESENTATION: 2025 REEF FISH AND IFQ LANDINGS UPDATE**

15
16 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, sir. Frank is going to lead off hit
17 with us today to present the 2025 reef fish and IFQ landings
18 update, and this is provided for the committee's information only,
19 and it's part of an ongoing report to the council. It requires no
20 action, and you guys should consider the information presented and
21 ask questions as appropriate.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Frank.

24
25 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning. We'll
26 pull up the reef fish to start. Okay. Great, and so the normal
27 caveats here. The data is preliminary at this point. We haven't
28 seen Wave 5 landings yet from MRIP, and so we'll probably have to
29 come back to you in April and give you a more comprehensive
30 presentation on the recreational landings for 2025. You can find
31 updated ACLs at the link included there.

32
33 We'll start with red snapper federal for-hire landings. I want to
34 make note that, in 2024, total landings were about 2.2 million
35 pounds, which was 72 percent of the ACT. For 2025, we do have LA
36 Creel landings through Wave 5. It's approximately 1.9 million
37 pounds, which is 63 percent of the ACT. Questions on this one?
38 Okay. Next slide, please. I was asked to break them out by state,
39 and we can continue to do this if this is informative to you all.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.

42
43 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Are we asking questions now or at the end?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** You can ask now.

46
47 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, Frank, our landings for Louisiana through LA
48 Creel are 147,830 pounds, and that's through November. I presented

1 those at the November council meeting.
2
3 **MR. HELIES:** Okay.
4
5 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Where -- hat is the 241,766? Where is that coming
6 from?
7
8 **MR. HELIES:** I would have to go -- I would have to ask Mike. This
9 is what he provided me. Let me get back to you, please.
10
11 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Is that through December? It wouldn't be through
12 December for you all, right?
13
14 **MR. HELIES:** No, I think it's just through --
15
16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** It would be through September 16th, correct?
17
18 **MR. HELIES:** Well, we have the Wave 5 from LA Creel.
19
20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** You should have all of ours then.
21
22 **MR. HELIES:** Okay. I don't know. This is federal for-hire, right?
23
24 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Say again?
25
26 **MR. HELIES:** This is federal for-hire?
27
28 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes. Federal for-hire, we have 147,830 pounds
29 through LA Creel monitoring.
30
31 **MR. HELIES:** Okay.
32
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** We had zero landings after you reopened in December
34 from Louisiana. I'm guessing this may be average weights applied,
35 if you use the Gulf-wide average versus the Louisiana average.
36 That may be one thing to look into.
37
38 **MR. HELIES:** Yes, and we can do that.
39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any more questions for Frank here? All right,
41 Frank.
42
43 **MR. HELIES:** Thank you. Red grouper in 2025 so far is 1.56 million
44 pounds, which is 57 percent of the ACT. It looks good so far.
45 Okay, and so this is greater amberjack commercial landings. For
46 2025, we had a slight overage of 8,000 pounds, and so there will
47 be a minor payback.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** It looks like we got a question there, Frank.
2 Captain Walker.

3
4 **MR. WALKER:** So that's just a commercial guy that's got 8,000 after
5 this season closed, I guess, and how do you think that -- It seems
6 strange, with a seven-fish bag limit. It seems like they would
7 have cut it off right then.

8
9 **MR. HELIES:** I don't have any updates on the amberjack season, and
10 so I don't have a slide in there for rec. Lane snapper, in 2024,
11 we did exceed the stock ACL again. For 2025, we're currently at
12 76 percent.

13
14 Gray triggerfish, pretty consistent findings there, and the same
15 for rec. Gray snapper is currently at 65 percent. This is
16 monitored in MRIP-FES. Mutton snapper, it does look like we
17 exceeded the stock ACL in 2025. It's currently at 107 percent.

18
19 The next slide will show that commercial landings have increased
20 for mutton, and so, because we exceeded in 2025, the accountability
21 measure is we have to monitor in-season. and we will close early
22 if it looks like we're going to exceed the stock ACL. Questions
23 on that? Okay.

24
25 Yellowtail, the 2025-2026 season, we're currently at 17 percent,
26 and, last year, the 2024-2025 fishing year, we were at 42 percent
27 of the stock ACL. The next slide shows commercial landings for
28 Yellowtail. Pretty consistent there.

29
30 Vermilion snapper is currently at 64 percent of the stock ACL.
31 Okay. Cubera, we went over in 2024. We did not close in-season
32 in 2025, and we're currently at 76 percent for 2025, and so we'll
33 see where the final landings are for cubera. It's a pretty small
34 stock ACL, though. It's 5,000 pounds. It looks like the
35 commercial landings for cubera have increased, and so that's where
36 the increase is showing.

37
38 The jacks complex, for 2025, we're at 25 percent. It's
39 substantially under the stock ACL. You had asked us to break out
40 for each individual species, and we tried to do that, and so this
41 is more of a historical trend for commercial. It looks like it's
42 driven by almaco primarily, and then the next slide shows the
43 recreational breakdown. It's generally almaco as well, but we did
44 have a spike for banded rudderfish in 2021. Questions on jacks?
45 Okay.

46
47 Midwater snapper, we were addressing, a few years ago, with the
48 wenchman issue, the commercial trawlers, and it looks like we

1 exceeded the stock ACL on midwater snapper last year.
2 Interestingly, it's not wenchman. This is commercial, and it's
3 showing higher commercial landings, and the next slide, please.
4 It's not showing wenchman. It's showing silk snapper are driving
5 those landings. Something to think about and discuss maybe later.
6

7 Next slide is rec, and those are pretty consistent, and that's it
8 for reef fish. I did want to make a note about gag. We do have
9 preliminary landings from the State of Florida and MRIP, and it
10 looks like we're under, which is great news, and so we'll be able
11 to give you guys a better idea about what the season may look like
12 hopefully in April.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Frank, and I appreciate the
15 presentation. To that point about gag, yes, and so we were
16 managing to the ACL in this last year, right, 230,000 pounds,
17 approximately. Private recreational is 122,203 pounds, MRIP
18 charter-for-hire is 82,231 pounds, and headboat was 6,449 pounds,
19 for a total of 211,883 pounds, and so we went under. Praise the
20 Lord. Mr. Schieble, you got a question?
21

22 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Frank, you mentioned -- I'm sorry, and Andy has got
23 his hand up to that point.
24

25 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Yes, let me just put a big preliminary behind
26 that, because those are not the Fishery Service's estimates. Those
27 are what the State of Florida has derived so far. I agree that I
28 think we're in good shape, and they were probably under. Keep in
29 mind that those estimates could be subject to change up to April,
30 because of changes in MRIP data that evolve that affect your
31 survey, but we will come back, obviously, with those final
32 estimates and season projections in April. Thanks.
33

34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Andy. I thought that was understood
35 with everything that we presented here, but, yes, and I know you
36 had to say it. Go ahead, Mr. Schieble.
37

38 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, speaking of seasons, Frank, you mentioned you
39 don't have an update to the recreational amberjack landings yet,
40 but can you speculate on the status of an amberjack season this
41 year?
42

43 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'll take that, Chris. No, we don't
44 have the landings, and we just received Wave 5, and so we'll be
45 taking a look at them, but we're waiting on data from the Science
46 Center, and I think that'll be a conversation we can come back and
47 have in April, in terms of the status of the greater amberjack
48 season this year.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I see Mike Larkin has his hand up online. Can
3 we unmute Mike?
4
5 **DR. MIKE LARKIN:** Can you hear me?
6
7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We got you.
8
9 **DR. LARKIN:** Okay, and so go back to the LA Creel stuff, and so
10 did I understand correctly that -- One thing to keep in mind, when
11 we get the LA Creel, and I'm looking at the estimates that Frank
12 has on LA Creel up to November 2nd, and we get -- LA Creel is in
13 numbers of fish, and then we convert it to average weight.
14
15 At the end of the year, the following year, then we really work
16 closely with LA Creel to make sure we have the same average weight,
17 but can we go back? What was the question? Is it someone reported
18 \$100,000 less than what Frank had for LA Creel, and is that what
19 the question was?
20
21 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.
22
23 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mike, and so our LA Creel estimates for
24 the federal for-hire charter landings are 147,830 pounds. I
25 believe the table there has 241,756, and I'm trying to figure out
26 where the difference is coming from.
27
28 **DR. LARKIN:** It may be headboat. I'm actually, while we're talking
29 here, I'm trying to do that right now.
30
31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Headboat is --
32
33 **DR. LARKIN:** No, and I think it's not headboat, because we only
34 have 11,000 there. To explain why our numbers would be higher,
35 right, because LA Creel is -- In Louisiana, there's headboat and
36 there's LA Creel, but all right. It's not headboat. It's not as
37 much. It's not 100,000 pounds of headboat in 2025, and so I can
38 look into that. I'm not sure why.
39
40 I mean, they can't -- You know, we do use different average
41 weights. At the end of the year, we correct for that, but I can't
42 see that making as much as 100,000 pounds difference either, and
43 so, anyway, I'm sorry. I guess I don't have a clear answer for
44 that. I can look at that further.
45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Mike. Andy.
47
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Chris, if you wouldn't mind sharing your estimates

1 and numbers and pounds with me, and then I can pass them on to
2 Mike, and we'll look into this, and maybe circle back at Full
3 Council, just to resolve any discrepancies.
4

5 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'll get Kevin to send you our actual workbook. It
6 has the charter, state charter and federal charter, landings, in
7 numbers of fish and in pounds.
8

9 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks.

10
11 **DR. LARKIN:** Thank you.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mike. It looks like we'll try and
14 clear this up here. Mr. Geeslin.
15

16 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** If we could please go back to slide 2, and,
17 while we're getting there, I'll quote one of my favorite senators
18 from this great state of Louisiana, that God gave me the right to
19 remain silent, but not the ability, and so, if I could, and this
20 -- Dave, if you will tee this up for an agenda item later in
21 February, when we're with our Gulf delegation, and let me just
22 start by saying I'm fully supportive of opening the charter-for-
23 hire sector back up for fishing in mid-December, December the 11th.
24

25 I think that's a great management action, especially when we've
26 got, you know, significant pounds on the table. However, my
27 concern lies with the notification there, and the timing of the
28 notification there, and I've conferred with other state directors,
29 conferred with charter captains.
30

31 My issue here, gang, is that we were noticed of the opening, and
32 we received a notice from the Gulf Council staff, and thank you,
33 Emily, at 10:30 in the morning of the opening, and it just so
34 happens that myself, Andy, and Clay were attending the South
35 Atlantic Council meeting during the time when that notice was
36 provided by the council, and I, again, talked with my fellow state
37 directors, and we had not received any prior heads-up to that.
38

39 That's problematic for us, not only in terms of a relationship,
40 and a partnership, but also enacting and signaling and messaging
41 to our state law enforcement, that, oh yeah, by the way, has to
42 enforce some of these, you know, practices and opening of a sector
43 to take advantage of additional pounds on the table, but also our
44 creel agents.
45

46 We've got a signal to our folks that, hey, we've got a charter-
47 for-hire sector opening up, and hopefully you can understand how
48 that's problematic from a state perspective, and I'm looking around

1 the table at my fellow directors. That's a problem, gang.

2
3 Also, even more troubling is that I conferred with several select
4 groups of charter captains that they were given advance notice up
5 to three days prior to that opening, and so I guess what I'm asking
6 is, one, for this to be discussed either somewhere, so we can work
7 to improve that the timing of that messaging, the timing of that
8 communication, so we can help better manage the season opening,
9 again, which I'm all in favor for, but I guess what I'm asking is
10 that we be given the same consideration, notification that some of
11 the selected charter-for-hire captains --

12
13 I'm thrilled they got the early heads-up, because, you know, again,
14 I'm very supportive of that. I want them to be able to take
15 advantage of that season, but, in my mind, and talking with a few
16 of them, opening up on December the 11th, you know, trying to book
17 trips, and I will, you know, turn the floor over, and I would love
18 to hear from some of them during public testimony.

19
20 That's problematic for booking trips. It almost seemed a little
21 too little too late, as they're -- You know, some of them are
22 booking duck hunting trips, and out deer hunting, and trying to
23 fill their calendars, and take advantage of this, again, innovative
24 management strategy with those remaining pounds on the table. I'll
25 stop there, but I do hope we can have some future conversations to
26 address this issue.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So, thanks, Dakus, for bringing this up, and I
31 fully agree. A fair criticism. I'll own this, right? Let me
32 just give you a little bit of the background, right, and so, when
33 we reopen in the fall and winter months for red snapper, we like
34 to give a heads-up. We like to give charter captains time to book
35 trips. Typically, that's at least one to two weeks, which isn't
36 ideal, but it is at least something in terms of a heads-up.

37
38 As you're well aware, we experienced an unprecedented government
39 shutdown this year, which delayed, obviously, when we were
40 receiving landings data. When I was at the South Atlantic Council
41 meeting, that you were, we were working on actually two Fishery
42 Bulletins.

43
44 The first one was, hey, heads-up, we're going to reopen, and the
45 second one was we're reopening on date certain, right, and so fast-
46 forward to December 10th, and we were told, essentially, that the
47 notification was going to publish December 10th, or December 11th,
48 and so we had to take down, obviously, that first bulletin, because

1 we got an expedited clearance of the actual season opening, and so
2 we published, obviously, the notice with no, obviously, update for
3 timing for consideration for the charter industry to prepare for
4 those trips, to give them the maximum number of days.

5
6 In the meantime, I stepped out of that South Atlantic Council
7 meeting several times to make phone calls. What I failed to do is
8 make phone calls to my fellow state directors, and I value that
9 relationship, but we were trying to call as many charter captains,
10 both me and Frank and my team, and say, hey, please get the word
11 out that we are opening within twenty-four hours, or less than
12 that, and we want you to be able to book trips as quickly as
13 possible.

14
15 So, we, obviously, can't call every charter captain around the
16 Gulf of Mexico, or Gulf of America, excuse me, and we can't send
17 out a Fishery Bulletin until it files, right, but we were doing
18 everything in our capability, obviously, to get the word out as
19 best we can.

20
21 Do I want to repeat that in the future? Absolutely not. We want
22 to go back to that process of giving advance notice, making sure
23 that you're aware of those openings, and so I own this. I
24 apologize, and I appreciate you bringing that up, and we'll do
25 better in the future.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dakus.

28
29 **MR. GEESLIN:** Andy, I appreciate that. I really do. If I was
30 going to beat you down just a minute ago, I'm going to build you
31 up and pay you a compliment now. It's an old leadership principle
32 I learned.

33
34 During that shutdown, and I do sympathize not only with, you know,
35 the operations of the organization, but the impact that has on our
36 fellow human beings, colleagues and peers, across the federal, all
37 the federal, agencies, and so I do want to extend that to you all,
38 but I was also, Andy, and you will recall, you know, our private
39 rec sector closing on November 20th in Texas, and that was right
40 during the heart of the shutdown.

41
42 It seemed like there was maybe one individual, or maybe a couple,
43 working within your office, and, Andy, I believe that was you. In
44 years past, I've been asked to get that notice to you all that,
45 hey, we're closing, you know, when those ACL is projected to be
46 reached, or for other factors, and to give you a heads-up about
47 two weeks in advance.

1 I believe I gave you a fair amount of time, but you had the register
2 notice out in about three days, and so I don't know what that says
3 about shutdown, and efficiency of your work over there, but I sure
4 appreciated the expedited register notice under extenuating
5 circumstances during the shutdown, and so I did want to, again,
6 publicly pay you that compliment, and so thank you.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Kumbaya. I love it. All right. Captain
9 Walker.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** I generally agree with Mr. Geeslin. Overall, a lot
12 of the charter boat guys would just like more timely notice to
13 book trips. I mean, you know, I understand that issue, and some
14 of the issues, but if I could take the opportunity to say, yes, us
15 charter guys certainly could use as much advance notice as we can
16 get.

17
18 You know, it's my understanding we've got something going on with
19 the opening date this year that is fluctuating around. Maybe it's
20 not going to open Memorial Day weekend. Maybe it's going to be
21 June.

22
23 I kind of promised a guy the other day that, yes, you can -- We
24 passed Memorial Day weekend, and go ahead and book those days, and
25 now it sounds like I have to call them back and say, no, you're
26 not going to get that first week, when you booked all your best
27 clients, and it's going to be June, but I'm not sure about that
28 either, and so, again, charter boat guys are kind of scratching
29 their head waiting for some guidance, and so, overall, I agree
30 with Mr. Geeslin's point there.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Chris.

33
34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Just to follow along with what Dakus said, and I'm
35 not going to beat you down any further here on this. I think it's
36 been done, but, just from a perspective of Louisiana, some examples
37 as to why communication would be helpful, when we have a creel
38 assignment, for example, and we know snapper season is open, we
39 send additional staff to those creel assignments to handle the
40 biological sampling, so that the creel assignment is not
41 interrupted by the biological sampling, but that's how we get the
42 otoliths and lengths and weights on snapper that go into all these
43 estimates that we just talked about a minute ago.

44
45 If we don't know that ahead of time, we can't schedule those folks,
46 to make sure that they capture that, and so that's a problem.

47
48 Also, from an enforcement standpoint, to let our agents know that,

1 hey, the season is reopening this coming weekend, and prepare
2 yourselves for that, and we weren't able to do that as well, and
3 so some advance notice leads to more things than just what we see
4 around here at the council level.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Point well taken. Thanks, guys. So, in terms of
9 what Ed just spoke to, one of the things that we want to do is
10 start updating the council more regularly on status of rulemakings,
11 and so this is, obviously, one of the challenges we're facing right
12 now, is we have some actions that have been slowed because of the
13 economic work, because we've lost a lot of economic staff, and
14 we're trying to, obviously, right that ship and bring on a
15 contractor, more capacity with the Science Center, but then also
16 rulemaking.

17
18 It used to be pretty much a guarantee we could do rulemaking in a
19 certain period of time, and we would get it done. Now, a lot more
20 uncertainty with regard to the timeframe for that process, things
21 that are now backlogged and in front of this, and so I don't want
22 to say today that we can't open May 22nd or 23rd, or whatever the
23 date is this year, but there is a likelihood that we won't be able
24 to get that rule finished and completed so that the for-hire season
25 would open before Memorial Day.

26
27 It's not something we're trying to hide. It's just the reality of
28 we're trying to get rulemaking moved forward, and completed, and
29 it's getting hung up, or slowed down, and we're continuing to
30 monitor the status of this one, and we'll definitely try to think
31 about how we can convey this as soon as possible for-hire fleet,
32 and so thanks for that comment, Ed.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Chair.

35
36 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Andy, to those points, I'm
37 trying to understand. We took final action in August on that
38 document, and you're saying there's a chance it will not be
39 implemented before the end of May, and is that correct?

40
41 That's quite some time, and so I guess my question is, is there
42 anything we can do to help fast-forward this, because now it's
43 affecting the industry, like Ed said, and I'm looking for another
44 avenue. How can we help?

45
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So there's a few things. I don't know if you can
47 help or not. Obviously, one is a capacity issue. Two is a
48 prioritization issue, right, and so we work with Carrie and team

1 to prioritize rulemakings, right?

2
3 If you guys are going to say this is your top priority, then we'll
4 move it to the top of our list, but it means it comes at the
5 expense of something else, right, and so there are things that are
6 currently being worked on, or developed, that are higher priority,
7 because of timing requirements related to IFQ quota changes, or a
8 red grouper quota increase going in place the middle of next year,
9 that we are prioritizing ahead of this.

10
11 If you want to have that dialogue, especially at the end of this
12 council meeting, and say this is where this falls in terms of the
13 priorities, then we will take that into consideration and move it
14 around with regard to the rulemaking to try to make this happen.

15
16 What I can't control is once it leaves my office and goes through
17 the NMFS and NOAA clearance process. That is taking considerably
18 longer, or at least is less predictable these days, and so I can
19 certainly call my bosses, and talk to them about the priority this
20 is, but the reality is I lose control of essentially the timing of
21 it after that, because there's people making decisions above me.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.

24
25 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** As we're closing this out, I just wanted to make a
26 point to all council members. When we finally get the discussion
27 back on the agenda for federal for-hire under state management,
28 please recall the last twenty minutes of discussion we've just had
29 here.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dakus.

32
33 **MR. GEESLIN:** Just from a, you know, ideological perspective, it
34 would be great, and I do encourage our fellow council to think
35 about those priorities, and that's a great suggestion, Andy, you
36 know, to think through priorities, and how we message that back to
37 you all, but, you know, having anticipated this coming from the
38 State of Texas, we will be opening our private recreational red
39 snapper fishery in federal waters on that Friday, May 22nd, in
40 anticipation of this charter for-hire being opened early.
41 Ideally, those would be in sync, to provide anglers that
42 opportunity to take advantage of whichever boat they want to get
43 on.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

46
47 **MR. WALKER:** All right, and I'm just going to throw this out there.
48 It might be a naive comment, but I was going to kind of sit on it,

1 but you've inspired me to throw it out there. I kind of maybe
2 know the answer to this, but what if there was -- Is there no
3 mechanism for there to be some kind of a buffer when the Gulf
4 Council has passed something, and it's been agreed upon, that we
5 could implement it until final rulemaking on it, and then, if we
6 went over, or something like that, that we could pay it back? Like
7 I said -- I see Ms. Levy shaking her head, and I think I knew that,
8 but, you know, that would solve a lot of issues here. If we're
9 waiting six to twelve months for rulemaking to pass, it's all kinds
10 of trouble going to be down the line here.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Our federal partner's hands are
13 going up like crazy, and so Mara, then Andy.

14
15 **MS. LEVY:** Well, partially because we just talked about the
16 Appointments Clause cases, right, and so the council is an advisory
17 body to the federal government, part of the government, but to the
18 agency, and so you're working with NMFS, and then you're providing
19 recommendations.

20
21 The Department of Commerce, the Secretary, is the entity that has
22 the authority to actually implement those recommendations, and
23 that's a very important distinction for purposes of Appointments
24 Clause things and how you are put on the council. You make the
25 recommendations, but it can't actually go into effect until the
26 Secretary promulgates rulemaking.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and two things. So, one, to Dakus' point
31 about aligning the seasons, I fully agree. We did also, to our
32 credit, warn you that there's potential that we would not have
33 that in place, right, and so we did advise on that.

34
35 In terms of Ed's comment, right, I've thought a lot about this. I
36 made a comment yesterday, during the regulatory kind of
37 streamlining, and, you know, the states have this immense
38 flexibility, because of delegation of authority, right, and so,
39 within certain confines and bounds, size limits, bag limits, season
40 lengths, right, they have the authority to modify that from year
41 to year.

42
43 There's potential, in my view, that the council could look at a
44 similar mechanism that provides the Regional Administrator, the
45 Fisheries Service, that authority, right? Going back to Mara, and
46 it's recommendations, but I could work with you then, from year to
47 year, to communicate out, okay, well, do we want to shift the
48 season forward, or do we want to shift it backward.

1
2 You have bestowed the authority that, if the catch limit is not
3 caught for red snapper, I can reopen it, and choose when that
4 reopening occurs, right, and so I just want you to think about
5 that as well, because I think there's some things that we haven't
6 thought of that could avoid some of the rulemaking challenges that
7 we're encountering now.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mara, then Dr. Simmons.

10
11 **MS. LEVY:** Well, just to that point, and I think you could set up
12 a mechanism to allow the flexibility, right, so that you've
13 incorporated it into your fishery management plan, and you have
14 bounds, and there's triggers, and then things automatically
15 happen, but we have to set up that system to allow that
16 flexibility.

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so
19 I just want to make sure that everyone knows where the document is
20 that we were referring to regarding the red snapper for-hire
21 season. The council did take final action on that in August of
22 2025. We have yet to complete a section. The Regulatory
23 Flexibility Act has not been completed.

24
25 The Science Center hasn't reviewed it, and so it hasn't been
26 transmitted yet, and so I think, when we get to the priorities,
27 and we're talking about this at the end of the meeting, if we are
28 pretty confident, based on recent history, that this is not going
29 to be implemented in 2026, that's going to change our priorities,
30 and so we need to be clear, when we get to Full Council, what that
31 means, so this can move down, if we know it's not going to happen
32 in 2026, and other things can go up.

33
34 I think we need to maybe have a larger, more robust conversation
35 about that public as well, so they know what's happening, but this
36 is not rulemaking, so people know.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that clarification, Dr. Simmons.
39 All right. I see another hand. Mr. Sanchez.

40
41 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** As we get into this, and try to work our way
42 out of this situation, in order to prioritize things, I would like
43 to, me personally, have a better understanding of what the
44 challenges are at NMFS with the agency right now, in terms of what
45 is the nature of these delays, and is this something that's going
46 to be resolved at some point in the future, so we could factor
47 that into our prioritization schedule for certain species,

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I mentioned, obviously, with the
4 Regional Office, the main delays relate to our economics personnel,
5 right, and we lost 60 percent of our economics personnel to
6 retirements or not being able to backfill positions in the recent
7 year.

8
9 We have two, essentially, economists that are working for three
10 fishery management councils to develop amendments and framework
11 actions. It's not an excuse, but just a reality, right, and so,
12 how we work to address that, we just recently brought on a
13 contractor as an economist. We also have been working with our
14 Science Center colleagues who are economists to fill in for the
15 management sections, and so we are at least building capacity
16 there.

17
18 In the meantime, with any new administration, there is a transition
19 period where rulemakings tend to stop, and don't get reviewed for
20 a period of time, until the political teams are onboard. They,
21 obviously, get up to speed with, obviously, the issues we're
22 working on.

23
24 We now have a full political team in place, but, because of the
25 administration's executive orders, especially focused on seafood
26 competitiveness, and as well as deregulation, there is increased
27 scrutiny of rulemakings in the Fisheries Service, right, and so I
28 can't speak to the specific reasons why things are taking longer,
29 other than they are reviewing all of these regulations very
30 carefully, in light of those executive orders, in light of the
31 work that the councils are doing.

32
33 We are trying to prioritize things that go to our headquarters for
34 review, and ultimately advise about key deadlines and timing
35 requirements, and so that is why we put a number of things ahead
36 of this for-hire charter boat rulemaking, which I hate to say,
37 right, and I hate to tell my charter captain colleagues that, but
38 the reality is that there's a number of other major rulemakings
39 that have considerable timing requirements, statutory mandates,
40 other things that we felt were higher priority, and we've
41 communicated with Carrie and team about that, and this has fallen
42 more to the middle of the priority list at this point, and so I
43 hope that helps.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I think we
46 definitely need to have a more thorough discussion in Full Council,
47 when we're kind of looking at the priorities list. Obviously, you
48 know, this will impact kind of the day-to-day operations of what

1 we talk about here.

2
3 I mean, I know we're talking about red snapper for-hire. Dr.
4 Simmons mentioned that hadn't been transmitted yet, but the
5 shallow-water grouper framework action was transmitted, and now -
6 - We worked really hard to try and push that forward, right, in a
7 timely manner, so we would close in January, to get that
8 recreational season in place, and now we're in the end of January,
9 and that hasn't been implemented, and so I really think we just
10 need to have a more thorough conversation during Full Council about
11 how we prioritize some of these things here. J.D.

12
13 **MR. DUGAS:** Thanks, C.J. I'm ready to move the conversation
14 forward, but I do have one last question. It could be for Andy,
15 and it could be for Dr. Walter. On the amendment for the charter-
16 for-hire fleet, what I don't understand is all we're doing is
17 moving a start date, and so my question is what does the Science
18 Center have to review to move a start date?

19
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So anytime the council takes action, and we
21 complete an amendment, it goes through a scientific review. Some
22 are, obviously, more comprehensive than others, but we do have
23 them take a look at, obviously, any scientific rationale and
24 reasoning and justification, as well as the economic sections that
25 are in an amendment, and they provide comments and edits that we
26 then address as part of the review process, and so that's just a
27 typical part of our process that we implement, but I agree with
28 you that this one is a fairly straightforward one, relative to
29 some of the other ones that we work on.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I'm going to try to move this along
32 here. That was a lot of time spent on this one agenda item, but
33 maybe if we could move into our next action, unless there's other
34 -- I don't want to stop the conversation, but -- All right. Not
35 seeing any, we're going to move on. Frank, go ahead.

36
37 **MR. HELIES:** Did you want me to skip IFQ presentation, or would
38 you like to --

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I can't believe we hadn't even gotten there
41 yet. No, I do not want you to skip that. Go ahead, Mr. Helies.

42
43 **MR. HELIES:** This one will be quick. Next slide, please. 2025
44 red snapper IFQ landings, 99.5 percent of the ACL. Red grouper,
45 we did have a quota increase through emergency rulemaking last
46 year, and so, for 2025, we harvested 62 percent of the updated
47 quota. It was actually 93 percent of the previous quota, and so,
48 for 2026, until we get Amendment 62 in place, the quota will be

1 2.79 million pounds. Questions on red grouper?

2

3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

4

5 **MR. WALKER:** Not to beat a dead horse, but can you give me odds on
6 the additional red grouper allocation being issued this year after
7 the -- Assuming we pass today?

8

9 **MR. HELIES:** It's high on our priority list. I can tell you that.
10 Next slide, please. Gag landings, in 2025, we landed 91.6 percent
11 of the quota. The 2026 quota is 255,000 pounds.

12

13 I have shallow-water grouper in here, and so we're working on that.
14 In 2025, we landed 23 percent of the quota, which is 525,119
15 pounds, and so, when the framework -- When the framework action
16 gets implemented, the quota will be reduced to 245,000 pounds.
17 Questions on shallow-water grouper? Okay.

18

19 Deepwater grouper, in 2025, we landed 563,000 pounds, which was 55
20 percent of the quota. 58B, which we're working on getting
21 transmitted, will reduce the quota to 478,000 pounds. I haven't
22 presented on tilefish in a while, and so we added this slide.
23 Okay. Thanks.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any questions, or comments, about IFQ landings?
26 All right. Seeing none, thank you, Frank. I think we're going to
27 move on here.

28

29 The next item on the agenda here is Amendment 62: Modifications to
30 Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures, and this is scheduled for
31 final action. Is it Mr. Rindone or Dr. Freeman that's going to be
32 walking through the action guide on this one?

33

34 **MR. RINDONE:** Dr. Freeman can do it. He's sitting up there.

35

36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Freeman, the floor is yours.

37

38 **FINAL ACTION: REEF FISH AMENDMENT 62: MODIFICATIONS TO GULF RED**
39 **GROUPE MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

40

41 **MR. MATT FREEMAN:** Thank you, and so, for this item, Mr. Moncrief,
42 the chair of the SSC, will present the SSC's discussion on the
43 interim analysis health check for Gulf red grouper, which was
44 informed by the G-FISHER survey.

45

46 Council staff will present public hearing summaries and written
47 comments received on Amendment 62, and then we'll review the
48 amendment, including the council's preferred alternatives. SERO

1 staff will review the qualified text, and the committee should
2 consider the information presented and ask questions.

3
4 If the committee finds the proposed regulations to be necessary
5 and appropriate, it should recommend that the council take final
6 action on the document to transmit to the Secretary of Commerce
7 for implementation, and so I will turn it over to Mr. Moncrief to
8 review the SSC's discussions.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Freeman. Trevor, good to see
11 you.

12
13 **MR. TREVOR MONCRIEF:** All right. Good morning, everyone, and so
14 the SSC covered three topics here. The first one we'll talk about
15 is red grouper. Go ahead and go the next slide, and so we looked
16 over an interim analysis that switched the index from the bottom
17 longline survey over to G-FISHER. G-FISHER, you know, pretty well
18 matches the range of red grouper across the board, whereas bottom
19 longline seemed to focus on one part of that fishery.

20
21 G-FISHER was also used in the assessment and everything else, and
22 so it's the main one we wanted to look at, and, since you're
23 already working on Amendment 62, this was really just a health
24 check for us to look at.

25
26 In general, you can see a positive trend over time, really just
27 continuing that outlook on the fishery. There wasn't much
28 discussion from the SSC on this one, other than it will be
29 interesting to see, as access increases in the fishery and
30 everything else, how the fishery itself responds when it comes to
31 success, length comps and everything else like that, and so this
32 is one that will be nice to keep our eyes on and see. I don't
33 think there's another slide. If you have any questions, I can
34 answer them.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Questions for Trevor? All right. Seeing none,
37 thank you, Trevor. All right. I think the next part of this is
38 rolling through public comments. Yes, Dr. Freeman?

39
40 **DR. FREEMAN:** Correct, and so we'll have Ms. Muehlstein review the
41 public comments.

42
43 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay. Thank you and so, for this effort,
44 we did host two virtual meetings, public hearing meetings. The
45 first one, held on January 15th, had nineteen members of the public
46 attend.

47
48 During that meeting, we heard that there was some support for a

1 regional management of red grouper. We also heard that the council
2 needed to move forward as fast as possible, so that the IFQ quota
3 could be released as soon as possible this year. There was also
4 encouragement that the agency push rulemaking as fast as they can,
5 to the extent that they can.

6
7 We did hear support for Action 1, Preferred Alternative 3 during
8 this hearing, and we also heard some concern for the large jump in
9 allowable harvest, because fishermen said they were not seeing the
10 fish that the stock assessment was reflecting, and that not all of
11 the red grouper were harvested last year from the commercial
12 sector, once the quota was distributed, and that could be a sign
13 that maybe the stock is not doing what we think it's doing.

14
15 Moving on to our second virtual hearing that was hosted on January
16 20th, there was twenty-one members of the public that attended. We
17 did hear pretty similar sentiments during this public hearing as
18 I just summarized for the last one, but, in addition to that, we
19 also heard that folks supported the removal of the shallow-water
20 grouper, because maybe it doesn't have great compliance, and that
21 it does increase discards closer in. However, it was indicated
22 that, even with the removal of shallow-water grouper, the
23 recreational pressure and discards were reasonably heavy.

24
25 We did hear support, again, for Action 1, Preferred Alternative 3,
26 because that precautionary approach, and that stepwise increase,
27 would make sure that, if there is an issue with the stock that we
28 are not seeing, that we are sort of slowly easing into an increase.

29
30 Next, we will move on to our written comment summary, and so we
31 did produce a public hearing video for this, and we had 631 views
32 of that video. We received five comments through that.

33
34 From those comments, we heard encouragement, again, for finalizing
35 this document, and pushing an implementation timeline as fast as
36 possible. We, again, heard support for Preferred Action 1,
37 Alternative 3. We heard that the stock does seem very healthy,
38 with plenty of juveniles.

39
40 We also heard that the council might want to consider a maximum
41 size limit, so a slot limit for red grouper, to allow those
42 breeders to breed, and then we heard support for keeping the
43 recreational season closed, in order to reduce gag discards out of
44 season, and that concludes my report.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Emily. Any questions for Emily?
47 Mr. Sanchez.

1 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I just wanted to thank Emily for hosting those
2 meetings. She's very engaging, and welcoming to the public, and
3 she really does a good job of having the public talk, and kind of
4 reading the size of the room, the audience, and turn it into a
5 less, you know -- I'm not going to say, or, well, yes, less formal
6 and engaging than a question-and-answer, and so just great job all
7 around. I wanted to make sure everybody knows that.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I second that. Thank you, Emily, and thank
10 you, Mr. Sanchez, for that comment. Anything else for Emily? All
11 right. Seeing none, Dr. Freeman, I think next step is to roll
12 through the document.

13
14 **DR. FREEMAN:** Thank you, and so I'll do a quick review of the
15 purpose and needs statements and then review the preferred
16 alternatives for the three actions.

17
18 As a reminder, the purpose of this action is to modify the catch
19 limits and sector allocations of Gulf red grouper based on the
20 SEDAR 88 stock assessment and through use of private recreational
21 landings data from SRFS, and to consider eliminating the
22 recreational closed season for shallow-water grouper in federal
23 waters seaward of the twenty-fathom boundary.

24
25 The need for this action is to consider new stock assessment advice
26 and SRFS landings data that allow increases in catch limits and
27 fair and equitable modifications and allocations, thereby
28 providing economic benefits to the commercial Gulf red grouper
29 sector and additional fishing opportunities to the recreational
30 Gulf red grouper sector.

31
32 Due to the healthy state of the red grouper stock, and other
33 ongoing management changes to shallow-water grouper species, the
34 seasonal closure for the recreational sector has limited
35 conservation value and can be eliminated to alleviate overly-
36 burdensome restrictions on recreational anglers.

37
38 Bernie, we'll go to Action 1, and so, as a reminder here for Action
39 1, the preferred alternative is Alternative 3 to revise the MSY
40 proxy and catch limits for red grouper based on the results of
41 SEDAR 88 and recommendations of the Gulf Council's SSC using a
42 three-year constant catch scenario.

43
44 The OFL and ABC for red grouper would be set based on an MSY proxy,
45 the yield when fishing at 40 percent SPR and the yield when fishing
46 at 75 percent of FMSY proxy, respectively. The OFL and ABC are
47 derived in part using SRFS data for private recreational vessels.

1 The total ACL is set at 80 percent of the ABC in 2026, 90 percent
2 of the ABC in 2027, and 100 percent of the ABC in 2028 and
3 subsequent years, and then the OFL, ABC, and total ACL, in million
4 pounds gutted weight, are listed in that table, and so, if there's
5 no questions, I'll move forward to Action 2. Okay.

6
7 In Action 2, the preferred alternative is Alternative 2 to revise
8 the sector allocations of the total ACL between the rec and
9 commercial sectors as the average landings using SRFS data during
10 the years 1986 through 2005. The allocations for red grouper are
11 68.2 percent commercial and 31.8 percent recreational. The
12 commercial buffer between the ACL and ACT is 5 percent, and the
13 recreational buffer is 9 percent. I'll see if there's any
14 questions. If not, I'll move forward with Action 3.

15
16 Okay, and so, Action 3, we have Preferred Alternative 2, which is
17 to eliminate the February 1 through March 31 recreational closed
18 season for shallow-water grouper in federal waters seaward of the
19 twenty-fathom boundary.

20
21 Those are the preferred alternatives, and then certainly, if the
22 committee would like to make a motion towards final action, the
23 only thing we would still need to cover would be to have SERO
24 review the codified text.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that, Dr. Freeman. Any
27 questions? We, obviously, went through the document, and we've
28 kind of discussed this at length at previous meetings. I think
29 we're in a good spot, but any questions or comments about the
30 preferred alternatives that are currently in this amendment?
31 Seeing none, I'll turn it over to Ms. Levy for the codified text.

32
33 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you. It's in the briefing book, 5(d) I think.
34 We can put it up on the board, or you can take a look at it. It's
35 pretty straightforward. It removes the paragraph in 622.34 that
36 was the shallow-water grouper closure provision, and it updates
37 all of the commercial quotas, commercial ACL, and rec ACTs and
38 ACLs in the relevant provisions, and so it's essentially just a
39 number change. If you have any questions, let me know.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Anything for Mara? Thank you, Ms. Levy. I'm
42 not seeing any. Okay, and so I think we're in a spot here where
43 we could potentially make a motion, if the committee signed-off on
44 it, and so, Mr. Sanchez, I think you've got a motion.

45
46 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and so motion to recommend the council approve
47 **Reef Fish Amendment 62: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper**
48 **Management Measures, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of**

1 Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text
2 as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to
3 make the necessary changes in the document, and the council chair
4 is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as
5 necessary and appropriate.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. We've got a motion on
8 the table. Do we have a second? Billy is the second. Any
9 discussion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion?**
10 **Seeing none, the motion passes unanimously.** Thank you very much,
11 Dr. Freeman. Congrats on not having the most complicated item in
12 a meeting for once, and, on that note, Dr. Hollensead.
13

14 Our next item on the agenda here is final action for Reef Fish
15 Amendment 58A: Modifications to Other Shallow-Water Grouper
16 Management Measures. Dr. Hollensead, do you want to go through
17 the action guide, or would you like Ryan to do it?
18

19 **FINAL ACTION: AMENDMENT 58A: MODIFICATIONS TO OTHER SHALLOW-**
20 **WATER GROUPER MANAGEMENT MEASURES**
21

22 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** I can do it, Mr. Chair, and so, similar to
23 what we just did for 62, we're going to go through some of the
24 same mechanisms here. Council staff is going to present the latest
25 draft of the amendment. You're also going to hear the public
26 hearing summaries and the written comments.
27

28 In this case, we had three in-person public hearings for this,
29 Madeira Beach, Florida, Galveston, Texas, and Lafayette,
30 Louisiana, as well as an online, a virtual public hearing, and it
31 was all done earlier this month, and so you'll get the results of
32 that, a summary of that, as well as the associated codified text
33 for all of the preferreds that have been selected in the document.
34

35 Again, this is up for final action, and so the committee should
36 discuss the document, and, if desired, move forward with final
37 action, and so I would turn it over to Emily to provide the public
38 hearing summary at this point.
39

40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Emily.
41

42 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so we'll start with Madeira Beach,
43 Florida. We hosted that meeting on January 8th, and there was
44 fourteen members of the public that attended that meeting. During
45 that meeting, we heard concern that Amendment 58 reallocates
46 fishery shares, or reallocates the fishery prematurely, and the
47 group suggested that we wait for the results of the MRIP-FES pilot
48 study before taking final action on this.

1
2 We also heard criticism that the data that's available, the
3 recreational catch estimates, are of poor quality, and that that
4 commercial IFQ data is definitely viewed as more reliable.

5
6 We heard that we should maintain a larger commercial allocation of
7 scamp, due to perceived data issues and potential discard mortality
8 that would result from reducing the allowable harvest for the
9 commercial sector. We heard concern about high dead discards if
10 seasons and allocations are reduced, especially in light of a lack
11 of venting by recreational anglers. We also heard some support
12 for aligning the scamp season opening with red snapper, in order
13 to reduce waste and improve fishing opportunities.

14
15 Moving on to Galveston, that meeting was held on January 12th, and
16 there were eight members of the public in attendance at that one.
17 During that meeting, there was regional differences for this
18 fishery cited, or highlighted.

19
20 Texas and Louisiana habitat and pressure patterns seem to be
21 distinctly different from those in Florida, so the idea here was
22 one-size management might not be appropriate, and that regional
23 management might work for scamp and the other shallow-water
24 groupers.

25
26 We heard concerns that were similar to Florida about using the
27 MRIP-FES data, and there was a preference for delaying reallocation
28 until better data are available. We heard support for the
29 preferred allocation options that maintain higher commercial
30 proportions while accommodating recreational needs.

31
32 We did hear some suggesting that scamp should open after the red
33 snapper season, in order to maximize fishing opportunity and to
34 reduce discard mortality, and we also heard emphasis on considering
35 the Magnuson-Stevens Act bycatch provisions when we are making
36 decisions about allocation.

37
38 Moving to Lafayette, Louisiana, that meeting was held on January
39 13th, and we had two members of the public in attendance there. We
40 heard recreational fishermen at that meeting highlighting that
41 local scamp fisheries appear to be really healthy, and they
42 expressed concern over large reductions.

43
44 The gentlemen there suggested that there are regional differences,
45 again, between the fishery off of Louisiana and Florida, and think
46 that regional management might be appropriate for this.

47
48 We were asked to improve recreational reporting requirements for

1 all federally-permitted for-hire vessels, in order to better
2 understand what's being harvested, and we also heard concern that
3 a 58 percent reduction in harvest could make it difficult for the
4 fishery to recover, and it would impact future access.

5
6 I will move on to a summary of the virtual hearing, which was
7 hosted on January 21st, and we had fourteen people at that hearing.
8 We heard recreational anglers expressing worries that splitting
9 the complex and lowering the limits would lead to more discards
10 and drive anglers to target other species. We were asked to delay
11 action until better data are available to consider reallocation.

12
13 We also heard some suggestions to overlap the scamp season with
14 the red snapper season, in order to reduce discards. The folks
15 there asked us to consider slot limits, or bag limit adjustments,
16 rather than season adjustments for scamp, and we were also asked
17 to address differences in ecology across the Gulf regions, and
18 potentially these regionally-specific solutions, like regional
19 management, might be more appropriate here. We also heard some
20 folks urging mandatory reporting and attention to bycatch and
21 discard mortality issues.

22
23 So I will also now move on to our written comment summary, and so
24 this is a summary of all the comments that we've heard since we
25 started a version of this document in November of 2024, and so I'm
26 sorry I don't sort of have them binned as action-specific, because
27 we've changed the action numbers over time.

28
29 We had 336 people watch our public hearing video for this, and we
30 received twenty-eight written comments. We did hear support for
31 splitting the complex. We also heard that the council should take
32 no action. The rationale provided here was that the MRIP data
33 used in the assessment is proven to be incorrect, and no action
34 should be taken until the SRFs data can be used.

35
36 We heard that data improvements are essential, that shallow-water
37 groupers not undergoing overfishing, that harvest should not be
38 reduced based on faulty data. We also heard that the amendment
39 interferes with the Executive Order to restore American seafood
40 competitiveness and that it burdens fishermen unnecessarily,
41 especially since the stock is not overfished or experiencing
42 overfishing. We also heard that shallow-water grouper are doing
43 great off the Panhandle of Florida, and that scamp and black
44 grouper closures are not evidence-based.

45
46 Now, regarding scamp allocations, we heard that the council should
47 follow the motion it passed in October of 2023 regarding the use
48 of MRIP-FES to make allocation decisions.

1
2 We heard that using data from 2001 through 2004 to make allocations
3 decisions makes no sense. We heard that allocation decisions
4 should better reflect current social and economic realities, and
5 that reliance on historical landings is a self-reaffirming sort of
6 cycle, and that it should instead focus on long-term economic value
7 to Gulf communities. We also heard support for Action 5,
8 Alternative 2c, that the most recent time series better reflects
9 current conditions.
10
11 We heard some input on recreational scamp management measures,
12 including that the scamp season should overlap with red snapper to
13 reduce dead discards. We heard that the scamp season should be
14 open year-round.
15
16 We heard that the council should consider a slot limit for scamp,
17 in order to protect breeders. We also heard that the council
18 should consider reducing the scamp bag limit, rather than reducing
19 the season, and it was recommended that we consider one fish per
20 person and six per vessel.
21
22 We heard that we should reduce the charter season and bag limits.
23 We also heard that we should ban the use of electric reels to
24 reduce pressure on grouper in general. We heard that the spawning
25 potential ratios for yellowedge grouper and scamp should not be
26 the same, since yellowedge have a longer lifespan and reach sexual
27 maturity at a much later age, and then we also heard support for
28 mandatory reporting, and that concludes my report.
29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Emily. That was very thorough.
31 Any questions, or comments, for Emily? Captain Walker.
32
33 **MR. WALKER:** So I did the meeting in Madeira Beach, and there was
34 some good crowd there, and good participation, and, again, Emily
35 did a great job managing it all, and we heard from a lot of
36 commercial guys, and they had a similar theme, and I'm pretty
37 confident you're going to hear it in public testimony.
38
39 They were pretty, you know, open to management on this, but they
40 said that, you know, MRIP -- We've kind of promised them we were
41 going to make allocation shifts on MRIP, which, you know,
42 technically, maybe we are, and maybe we aren't, but, I mean,
43 they've got a strong point, and, like I said, I think you're going
44 to hear it, and it was hard to move forward with these guys
45 passionately saying, look, you said MRIP, and we all know sometimes
46 MRIP has been 100 percent off on things like gag, or red grouper,
47 and so now we're telling these guys this is what we're going to
48 use to shift allocation away from you and put it over here.

1
2 Like I said I'm not that comfortable with it. They had really
3 good points that they made, and so, you know, I think it's worth
4 considering. I don't I don't have a great alternative,
5 unfortunately, but, you know, they're not wrong, in my opinion.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Captain Walker. I think, as we kind
8 of dive through the document itself, we can try to strategize for
9 what would be the best pathway forward there, and maybe address
10 some of those concerns. Okay. Any other comments, or questions,
11 for Emily? All right. Seeing none, I think we're going to move
12 through the document, Dr. Hollensead.
13

14 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Great, Mr. Chair. Bernie, if you wouldn't mind
15 bringing up the document and go to purpose and need, please, and
16 so, just doing due diligence to run through the purpose and need,
17 the purpose of this amendment is to modify the status determination
18 criteria, catch limits, sector allocations, and accountability
19 measures for individual species within the other shallow-water
20 grouper complex by creating two new complexes in response to the
21 results of SEDAR 68, which assessed scamp and yellowmouth grouper
22 as a complex.
23

24 The need for these actions is to consider new stock assessment
25 advice for scamp and yellowmouth that is consistent with the best
26 scientific information available to implement measures to avoid
27 future overfishing, avoid triggering a rebuilding plan, and to
28 achieve optimum yield for the species considered here and
29 consistent with the authority under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
30

31 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Action 1, please, and so,
32 again, just a general overview that, as we discussed the purpose
33 and need, one of these is to break out the existing shallow-water
34 grouper complex, and that is what this first action would do, and
35 so everything is sort of a domino effect after that.
36

37 Currently, this had just, you know, sort of a singular decision
38 point of does the council want to break up shallow-water grouper
39 or not. Currently, the council has selected a preferred to break
40 out the shallow-water grouper complex and form two new complexes.
41 The first would be the scamp and yellowmouth grouper complex, known
42 as the scamp complex, and then the second would be the black
43 grouper and yellowfin complex, which would be known as the black
44 group complex.
45

46 Shares would be distributed such that shareholders for IFQ --
47 Excuse me. Shares would be distributed such that shareholders
48 would receive the same percentage in each of the two new categories

1 that they held upon dissolution of the other shallow-water grouper
2 complex, and so, for example, if you had 1 percent of shallow-
3 water grouper, break out the new categories, and you're going to
4 have 1 percent of the scamp complex and 1 percent of the black
5 grouper complex.

6
7 Then that complex would be capped at that 7.266147 percentage, as
8 that was associated with the old other shallow-water grouper
9 complex, and actually provides consistency over that mechanism of
10 keeping the shares from shallow-water grouper consistent across
11 the two new ones, and you would also have a similar cap for each
12 one of those, and so that's why those are associated and were
13 selected the way they were.

14
15 Bernie, go ahead and go to Action 2, please. Now that the decision
16 point has been made to split out the complex, the next two actions
17 are just going to deal with the black grouper complex, and so
18 that's all we're going to talk about here.

19
20 Of course, dissolving the shallow-water grouper, and now creating
21 a new complex, you have to build sort of the management scaffolding
22 back up for each one of these complexes, and so that's what the
23 rest of these actions do.

24
25 For Action 2 here, there's, again, only one decision point of, you
26 know, do we establish the maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield,
27 status determination criteria, catch limits, and sector
28 allocations for the black grouper complex, and you sort of have to
29 do this. If you want to manage the complex this way, you have to
30 have these criteria.

31
32 These criteria are formed largely from the Generic ACL/AM
33 Amendment, and so the council has selected to do that through
34 Preferred Alternative 2, and those various criteria, or values,
35 are there on the table. Okay.

36
37 Action 3, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going through, and so this
38 one considers looking at an accountability measure for the
39 recreational sector for black grouper, and so, in the commercial
40 sector, the IFQ system would act as an accountability measure, and
41 so this one is going to establish recreational AM for the black
42 grouper complex.

43
44 This was looking at, you know, perhaps using a -- Either not
45 establishing one or having the council's preferred alternative,
46 which would establish a post-season recreational AM that would be
47 implemented for the black grouper complex in the year following an
48 overage of both the recreational ACL and the complex ACL. That's

1 the council's current preferred alternative.
2
3 Alternative 3 would similarly do that, but use sort of this three-
4 year average, although an analysis looking at that found that
5 perhaps that would add some complication, and that maybe, at least
6 for here, just straightforward having a post-season recreational
7 AM is appropriate at this time.
8
9 Okay, and so that's all the actions for black grouper. We're now
10 done with the black grouper complex, and everything else will be
11 for the scamp complex, will be addressing the scamp complex, and
12 so Action 4, please, Bernie.
13
14 Similarly, again, in building up the black grouper complex, we've
15 got to build up the scamp complex similarly, with these various
16 management criteria here, and so, again, just sort of one decision
17 point. Either you don't provide these criteria or you do define
18 these criteria.
19
20 The council has selected a preferred to establish an MSY proxy,
21 and the various criteria types through there, and this is being
22 informed of the SSC recommendations, and this is largely being
23 informed by the most recent stock assessment.
24
25 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Action 5, and this is the
26 one that I think is sort of the meat and potatoes of this document
27 here, and, as Emily had mentioned, and Captain Walker, was sort of
28 a lot of the focus of discussion during the public hearings.
29
30 Again, you have to establish catch limits and sector allocations
31 for this new scamp complex. Alternative 1 would not establish
32 these, and so, obviously, that's problematic. If you want to
33 monitor to a certain value, you have to, you know, have some
34 information on what that value is, and then monitor it, and so
35 Preferred Alternative 2 would do that.
36
37 It would set up these catch limits and sector allocations, but we
38 do have three options with which could be considered in here. That
39 Option 2a is going to look at the allocations between commercial
40 and recreational established in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment, and
41 that would have been through the years 2001 to 2004, and, again,
42 MRIP-FES didn't exist in those years, and so that's why you see
43 those percentages the way you do.
44
45 Bernie if you wouldn't mind scrolling down for me, please, and if
46 there's a way to get all of that on the screen. Okay. Thank you.
47 Everybody squint.
48

1 Then Preferred Option 2 is going to look at allocating the sectors
2 based on a little bit more longer time series of landings, from
3 2012 to 2023, excluding the 2020 COVID year, and so, in that case,
4 the commercial and recreational sector allocation is going to be
5 38.6 of the scamp complex ACL, and the recreational sector would
6 be 61.4, and that is the council's current preferred.

7
8 Option 2c, the commercial and recreational allocations would be
9 based by reducing catch equally, through percentage-wise, between
10 the commercial and recreational sectors, based on the most recent
11 years, and so this is a little more like a contemporary time
12 series, but also a little, you know, truncated here, and so this
13 is like 2021 to 2023.

14
15 With that allocation, you would see the commercial sector would be
16 allocated at 29.7 percent of the scamp complex ACL, and the
17 recreational sector would have 70.3 percent, but, again, the
18 council's preferred alternative is sort of that those middle values
19 right through there.

20
21 Bernie if you wouldn't mind going to Action 6, and so, here, these
22 next suite of actions, and so it's actually one action and then
23 two sub-actions, is only going to be considering the scamp complex
24 recreational sector of the fishery.

25
26 This action would establish an annual catch target, and so an
27 annual catch target provides a buffer between the ACL, and it
28 creates an ACT, and that's what you monitor to, to lessen your
29 probability of exceeding your recreational ACL.

30
31 Alternative 1 would be to not establish one. Currently, the
32 council has selected Preferred Alternative 2. This is going to be
33 informed by the council's ACL ACT control rule, and it would be
34 considering scamp and yellowmouth grouper as a single stock, and
35 so that was done with the stock assessment, and so this is sort of
36 consistent with that, and it would set the ACT 14 percent below
37 the recreational ACL.

38
39 Alternative 3 would similarly look at the council's ACL ACT control
40 rule, but would use scamp as an indicator species for the complex,
41 and so that would lead to a little bit more uncertainty, and so
42 the ACT would be set 18 percent below the recreational ACL, but
43 the council's preferred alternative is sort of consistent with
44 what was done with the stock assessment, and pushing that rationale
45 through for informing the ACT, and so that's why the council has
46 selected that.

47
48 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind please going to Action 7.1, and so

1 7.1 is going to consider establishing a recreational fixed closed
2 season for the recreational sector for the scamp complex. As
3 mentioned earlier, the result of the stock assessment indicates
4 that a marked decrease in harvest is needed for the complex.

5
6 Therefore, in order to achieve that, the recreational season is
7 going to have to be constrained, in order to meet that reduction,
8 and so Alternative 1 would not establish a fixed closed season,
9 and so it would be fishing through January throughout the calendar
10 year, which is likely to lead to an overage.

11
12 Alternative 2 would establish a fixed closed season for the
13 recreational sector and open June 1. The council's current
14 preferred alternative would open the season July 1. This is also
15 consistent with the framework action that we mentioned a little
16 earlier this morning that has gone through, and so that that
17 opening start date of July 1.

18
19 You know, the season predictive analysis came out to about, for
20 either one, Alternative 2 or Alternative 3, you know, about a
21 ninety or ninety-four-day season. The thought with having the
22 opening July 1 is that you get some overlap with red snapper, but
23 then also potentially overlap into the gag season in September,
24 and so that was sort of the thought process there of the council.

25
26 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to our last action here, 7.2,
27 and so 7.2 is going to consider whether or not to establish a
28 payback provision. Currently, the council has a preferred
29 alternative to not establish a payback provision, the rationale
30 being there was already, you know, establishment of a recreational
31 ACT, as well as fixed closed season, and so, you know, it's working
32 towards to constrain harvest that, at this time, there's no need
33 to establish a recreational payback provision.

34
35 Mr. Chair, that's through the document. The codified text is in
36 your meeting materials, and so, if Ms. Levy wanted to just touch
37 on that before you begin your discussions of the document.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think we're going to have some
40 pretty thorough discussion about this amendment here, and so, for
41 the sake of time, maybe, Ms. Levy, we go through the codified text,
42 and then we'll have the broader discussion about the amendment, if
43 that's okay with you.

44
45 **MS. LEVY:** Sure. We can do that. You can look at it in the
46 briefing book, and pull it up on the screen. It's more complicated
47 than the last one, and so, if you do look at it, and have some
48 questions, let me know, but we had to account for creating the two

1 new complexes.

2

3 In the very beginning, in the definition section, we get rid of
4 the shallow-water grouper complex definition, because it's not
5 needed anymore, and we create a definition for the black grouper
6 complex and the scamp complex, and then throughout we use that
7 terminology.

8

9 If you scroll down to the second page, it shows that we're removing
10 the warsaw-speckled hind flexibility and scamp flexibility
11 measures, because you decided not to include those in that
12 document, and so, when the shallow-water grouper complex, the other
13 shallow-water grouper complex, goes away, those flexibility
14 measures go away, and so that will no longer be here.

15

16 You'll notice that, in 622.22, which is the IFQ program, that we've
17 changed things to reflect that there are six share categories now,
18 instead of five share categories. We do spell out those categories
19 occasionally, and so you will see that it says black grouper
20 complex and scamp complex.

21

22 If you just scroll through those provisions, you'll see on the
23 notes about where we add that, and that's essentially what we're
24 doing throughout all of the IFQ, is changing it to reflect that
25 there's six categories, and what those reflect. I'm not going to
26 go through every single one of those. You can scroll through them
27 and take a look.

28

29 Then, when we move to the seasonal closures, which is 622.34, which
30 is on page 8, you'll just note that this is going to remove the
31 other shallow-water grouper closure that is being put in place by
32 the framework action, and it makes it a scamp complex closure,
33 right, and so we have to change that through this rule making, and
34 then, if you continue to scroll down, we have the commercial
35 quotas.

36

37 It reorganizes that section a bit, and so you'll see that gag and
38 red grouper are included here. Those values are not changing. We
39 just have to reorder the numbers of the paragraphs, to then have
40 both the black grouper complex and scamp complex reflected, and so
41 we have to keep the structure, and those are why those are there,
42 but we're not changing the numbers here.

43

44 Then, if you continue to scroll down, we have the annual catch
45 limit and accountability measure sections. You'll see that there's
46 going to be a section for the black grouper complex, and it
47 reflects all of the numbers. It reflects that the commercial quota
48 is -- The ACL is the commercial quota.

1
2 It reflects that there's the recreational sector, and it has the
3 accountability measure in there that says that, if recreational
4 landings reach -- Exceed both the rec ACL and stock complex ACL,
5 then, in the following year, NMFS will monitor and close if it's
6 projected to reach the recreational ACL, and so that is included.

7
8 Then it has the numbers, if we continue to scroll down, the actual
9 numbers for the complex ACLs, et cetera, and then, further down,
10 we have one for scamp, and so the same thing. The commercial ACL
11 equals the commercial quota, and then we have the recreational
12 sector accountability measure that says that, if landings reach,
13 or are projected to reach, the recreational ACT, then we will
14 close.

15
16 It does not have a payback provision, because you did not put that
17 in the document, and then it also specifies what the ACT is, and
18 what the ACL is, for the recreational proportion of the scamp
19 complex, and so that's a lot. If you if you go through it after
20 today, and you have questions, we can certainly talk about it at
21 Full Council.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you very much, Ms. Levy. Any questions,
24 or comments, for Miss Levy at the moment? Otherwise, we can
25 discuss that at Full Council, as she recommended. All right.
26 Seeing none, Mr. Chair, I might recommend maybe a break before we
27 dive into the discussion. I think it's going to be a lengthy one.

28
29 **MR. DUGAS:** Yes, Dr. Sweetman, and let's take our break now, and
30 we'll come back at 10:20.

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

33
34 **MR. DUGAS:** Okay. Welcome back. We're a few minutes behind
35 schedule. Dr. Sweetman is going to continue on. Can we please
36 quiet down in the back of the room? Thank you. Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, J.D., and so, before the break,
39 obviously, we were -- We walked through the document, and as well
40 as the codified text for shallow-water grouper, Amendment 58A. We
41 took a little break here, but I think we need to have some
42 discussion on the table.

43
44 We do have -- We have selected preferreds. This is scheduled for
45 final action, but I know that there's going to be some discussion
46 around the table, and so, at this time, let's get that started.
47 Does anyone have comments, or questions, about the document? Mr.
48 Sanchez.

1
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** First, I want to, I guess, kind of figure out how
3 Matt got 62, and poor Lisa got 58A, but, besides that, I've been
4 looking at this document long and hard, and trying to come up with
5 a reasonable way to address the concerns I have with it, with --
6 You know, you heard them a lot, and there's a lot of public
7 testimony, the MRIP-FES data using being used to inform this
8 assessment being questionable, and then, of course, the updated
9 information is literally around the corner, yet here we are at a
10 final hearing. Then --- Can you all keep it down please? All
11 right, and I'll hang on a second, so I don't lose my train of
12 thought.

13
14 Then we're looking at what we're trying to accomplish here with
15 dubious data, and then the fact that scamp are not the most
16 resilient, hardiest fish to barotrauma, and we're dramatically
17 reducing the quota, from the 30 to 40 percent SPR change, and then
18 now we're doing allocations, which further lower everybody,
19 recreational and commercial, and it's just lose-lose, and I don't
20 see how regulatory measures, that kind of result in discards,
21 rebuild a fishery.

22
23 I'm just not happy with a lot of the ways that we're going about
24 this, and then the rush. I had thought, well, maybe can we get
25 creative, and phase-in these reductions, in the of doing something,
26 but I don't think there's any room between the ACL and the ABC to
27 be able to even do that, and so I don't know what to do, except
28 maybe delay this and wait until we get some updated MRIP-FES
29 information, something, because this just seems like a -- I don't
30 know, but I'm just not excited about this, and I've really tried
31 to work through this, and come up with some creative ideas, and I
32 got nothing. Everywhere I turn, I'm roadblocked, and so I would
33 rather wait for that MRIP-FES data, if we could postpone this at
34 all.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I mean,
37 I think there's just some issues at play here, right, and so we've
38 got a stock assessment that now we're probably entering on six
39 years past the terminal data date, but, at the same point,
40 obviously, we've heard from a lot of folks about the motion that
41 was previously passed relative to the FES pilot study.

42
43 I will say even -- So we had catch level recommendations from the
44 stock assessment. The stock is not overfished or undergoing
45 overfishing, technically there, and so there is no statutory
46 mandate to act immediately, but the concern, obviously, is for
47 losing some of the -- You know the data is just getting old, and
48 there clearly are some concerns in this fishery relative to

1 declining catch streams.

2
3 I understand your frustration, Mr. Sanchez. I also -- It does
4 seem a little weird. I mean, there's -- I feel like there's some
5 analyses within this document that aren't fully completed. I
6 really would like to see kind of economic information, and things
7 along those lines, but, yes, and I'm going to keep it there, and
8 see if there's anyone else that has any comments here. Captain
9 Walker.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** As Mr. Sanchez mentioned, the people that I know on
12 the council here, we've been agonizing over this one for a long
13 time here, trying to figure out something that makes us feel like
14 we're doing the right thing, and, you know, I haven't found it,
15 myself.

16
17 I don't -- I don't like this, and I don't like the MRIP association.
18 I don't think the stock is collapsing out there, and particularly
19 we heard that at the public input. They said that most guys have
20 -- It may not be booming, but it's not collapsing either. There
21 may have been a decline, and it's usually not a target species for
22 people. It's more of a bycatch species anyway, and, if there's an
23 opportunity to wait for some better data, and a little more time
24 to figure out what's maybe a more comfortable decision here, I
25 would support it.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Captain Frady.

28
29 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, after looking
30 at this, on the allocation shift, when you're looking at the 2000,
31 or 2001, to 2004 timeline, with the commercial catching 80 percent,
32 and now, all of a sudden, you look back from 2012 to 2023, and
33 they drop from 80 percent down to 38 percent.

34
35 My thought is trying to be thoughtful for everybody, all the
36 participants, and I think this is a little bit premature, until we
37 get some more MRIP-FES data converted over into this, because, if
38 this were the other way, and, all of a sudden, we were taking 80
39 percent recreational, and taking them down to 40 percent, I would
40 be upset, too.

41
42 I think, you know, a tiered step, or slowing it down, and not
43 making such a huge knee-jerk reaction may be more the appropriate
44 thing to do, or just delaying it for a little bit, until we get
45 that, and so I'm not in support for continuing with this at this
46 time. Thank you.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just a
3 couple of things that -- To make sure everybody is aware of, and
4 so remember you transmitted the framework action, which was a stop-
5 gap measure that keeps the complex together, right, and that was
6 supposed to be effective, as we talked about earlier this morning,
7 January of this year.

8
9 It is not yet effective, but, when we get our update, I guess,
10 from the Regional Office, hopefully that will become effective
11 soon, and so that's going to tie black grouper up in those scamp
12 regulations for the recreational sector, and so I guess, when that
13 happens, and the commercial guys have already had their quota
14 withheld, right, for this species, and so I guess we're kind of
15 already experiencing some pain, so to speak, on scamp, the scamp
16 complex and shallow-water complex.

17
18 I think just a quick history, and remember we got this assessment,
19 and started work on this, I think it was October of 2022, and we
20 had it, the deep water grouper, in the same amendment, and we split
21 them out.

22
23 We asked the SSC to go back and look again at the different SPR
24 proxies, which took quite a bit of time. Because of that, we asked
25 the Science Center to update the information they could, such as
26 landings, and rerun the projections, and what that showed was the
27 stock was in worse shape than what it was from the previous
28 assessment, in addition to the other changes that were occurring,
29 as far as recruitment, and the SPR changes as well. I just wanted
30 to kind of remind everyone of the history of this, and so we have
31 been working on this for some time.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Mr. Sanchez, Mara,
34 Andy.

35
36 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Then I think, where black grouper is concerned, the
37 last real assessment we did was I think 2010, and then we took a
38 run at doing some black grouper in I think 2017, and collectively
39 decided we don't have enough information, and we've got to pull
40 the plug on this.

41
42 You know, I don't know that there's anything good in black grouper
43 coming either. The only thing I can suspect, if I was a gambling
44 man, is, when we look at it again, it will probably be a 40 percent,
45 and these numbers will have changed a little bit some more, in the
46 wrong direction.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez, and I'll just say I do

1 believe that there's an active black grouper MSE that's ongoing
2 right now, and so we should get some information in the relatively
3 near future, but Mara.

4
5 **MS. LEVY:** Just to add a little bit to what Carrie said, and so,
6 yes, and so you have recommendations for scamp, and one of the
7 yellow ones, that's not that's not implemented yet, but if it were
8 implemented, right, there's a potential for overfishing.

9
10 You're correct that there's no statutory mandate in that regard
11 yet, but you do have an ABC recommendation, and we are above, in
12 terms of catch limits for that ABC recommendation, and that is
13 part of the statutory mandate. We've been talking about this for
14 years. We are above this SSC recommendation, and the risk of
15 waiting here is we have the stop-gap measure that keeps everything
16 together, but there is not a real solid way to constrain
17 recreational landings in that stop-gap.

18
19 You have the seasonal closure, but there's no other real effective
20 accountability measure. That's what we were addressing here, and,
21 if you continue to harvest shallow-water grouper, and scamp in
22 particular, in the way that it's been, the chances are that, when
23 you come back to this, and you get new information, you're going
24 to have lower catch limits, because of what Carrie said.

25
26 The Science Center ran new projections, and they went down, and
27 so, the more you delay on this, the potential is for more pain,
28 and so I get the hesitation, but we have been doing this for six
29 years, and we need to work with the best information we have, and
30 it seems pretty clear that we need to ratchet down on the scamp
31 landings, and that's what this is attempting to do.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I understand that. I will also say, I mean,
34 we put in the framework to have that stop-gap, and the agency has
35 been unable to put that forward here, and so there's part of my
36 concern, is how quickly can the agency move this forward here,
37 and, I mean, we really tried to work hard for that stop-gap, Mara,
38 and then it's not in place now. I mean, that was the entire
39 intent, and so --

40
41 **MS. LEVY:** Just to respond, I hear that. I mean, I agree with
42 Andy that the rulemaking stuff is up in the air, but we also had
43 a shutdown, which really -- It was at the worst time for this,
44 right, because we had nobody available to actually get the stuff
45 going, and so I do -- I do hear what you're saying.

46
47 I'm just saying purposely delaying this -- I just want you all to
48 understand that there is the chance that, when you come back,

1 you're going to be even lower than you are now, and that's a real
2 possibility.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I agree with you. Andy.

5

6 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so good conversation, and so, first, we
7 did submit the proposed rulemaking in November or December of last
8 year, and so it's been with Headquarters for review for a little
9 while, and we're waiting, obviously, on clearance. It's our top
10 priority right now, given timing requirements.

11

12 The goal is to, obviously, have that in effect in 2026, and, if
13 necessary, a stop-gap for 2027, if this didn't move forward, and
14 so I think, you know, one of the things I wanted to just touch
15 upon was delaying versus taking final action.

16

17 I really agree with everything that both Carrie and Mara have said,
18 and other people have said, and so, if the delay is simply to wait
19 for the MRIP data, the revised MRIP data, I think the plan was for
20 the Science Center, at some point this summer, to begin what we
21 would call update lites, right, which is essentially update the
22 stock assessments based on the new landing streams.

23

24 It's not simply like we get the new data and we just correct the
25 allocation formulas, because the new landings data can also affect
26 the productivity of the stock, and the ultimate calculations within
27 the stock assessment, and so you would probably be deferring this
28 until at least the fall, at that point, and so you're definitely
29 not going to have it in effect for the 2027 season, but, if the
30 delay at least occurred where you can take final action sometime
31 later this year, then it would be in effect, obviously, after the
32 framework stop-gap measure goes into place for 2026 and 2027, and
33 so just wanted to mention that.

34

35 The other thing I will mention is that my expectation, based on
36 the revisions that I've seen with MRIP, and so what they're
37 showing, for those that may not be aware, is that the differences
38 in kind of the current MRIP survey versus the revised MRIP survey
39 are greatest during the months of low fishing effort, and more
40 consistent during the months of higher fishing effort, during the
41 core summer months.

42

43 The actual magnitude of the difference for scamp, I have no idea
44 at this point, but it will probably be an allocation somewhere
45 between historically, where the commercial fishery was the
46 majority of the harvest, to where we're saying now the majority of
47 the allocation will go to the recreational.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks Andy. Dr. Allen.

2
3 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, welcome to the Gulf
4 Council I say to myself. This is a -- I don't have a great solution
5 to this, to this issue. I'll just make a few comments.

6
7 You know, this assessment was reviewed very thoroughly by the SSC
8 last year, and, even at that time, the data were somewhat aged at
9 that point. You know the conclusion of that assessment is that a
10 reduction in landings needed to happen, as you've seen, obviously.

11
12 I will make the point that uncertainty in the landings from the
13 MRIP will not necessarily change that stock status, okay, and it
14 will rescale the model, and so it could change recruitment and
15 those kinds of things, but, you know, as long as the trend in
16 landings is the same, with an increasing recreational landings
17 that we see in the data so far, it wouldn't change the stock
18 status.

19
20 I'm not anticipating that an update in the MRIP landings is going
21 to all of a sudden make it where we don't need those catch
22 reductions. A trend in the -- A change in the trend of the landings
23 would have an effect on the stock status, but I don't expect that
24 to happen with the MRIP recalibration study.

25
26 However, what's really difficult in this is the error in the MRIP
27 will affect the allocation, and I think that's what gives me pause
28 in this, is just that the MRIP allocation is based -- The
29 allocation is based on the most recent MRIP data, which we
30 certainly have some error in it.

31
32 Where I've landed on this is I think that catch reductions need to
33 happen. I think that we probably should go ahead and pass this,
34 and then -- Then revisit it as soon as those MRIP calibration study
35 results are out, because I think that the basic conclusion here,
36 that the landings need to be reduced, is probably going to hold
37 after that, and so that's my take.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. J.D.

40
41 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. A question, and I don't know
42 who it's for, but I'm going back to Mr. Sanchez's comments earlier
43 about you mentioned a potential buffer between the ABC and the
44 ACL, and my question is, I guess, maybe to the SSC, that would
45 produce that for us, but is that a possible route to take? Is it
46 feasible at this point, and I don't know who I'm directing my
47 question to, but --

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** It looks like Mr. Sanchez has an answer.

2
3 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Not hardly, and I was just trying to -- I understand
4 the need to do something, and, you know, to reduce stuff, but I
5 also feel that, with the dramatic reductions to both sectors, and
6 the resulting, you know, possible discards and everything, I was
7 looking for a way to accomplish this, but thinking out of the box,
8 and I just came up empty, because that phase-in idea I was hoping
9 could get this going, and then we wait for another review, and see
10 what we're doing with the SSC, and maybe even SEDAR down the road,
11 and plug in the new information, because --

12
13 I'm not being critical of the SSC or the SEDAR folks. I think
14 they do a great job with what they have to work with, but, in this
15 case, it wasn't that great.

16
17 There was a lot of uncertainty in the data, and I guess I'm just
18 trying to have this process reflect that sometimes we've got to do
19 stuff, but maybe we should be mindful, and considerate, of the
20 uncertainty that is present, and that, unfortunately, we've got to
21 do something, but let's be mindful of that, and maybe find a way
22 to phase this in until the more appropriate numbers, with less
23 certainly, come in.

24
25 Then, if we got to take our lumps, you know, we do it, but at least
26 I think we could feel better about it. Right now, making decisions
27 with such high PSEs, it doesn't bode well for confidence in the
28 whole process, and so I don't see the rush to do that.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Any other comments
31 here? I mean, it's pretty clear to me that we probably need to do
32 some more thinking before Full Council here, but Dr. Simmons.

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a
35 reminder, and I think you made the point that the economic
36 environment, and the effects, were not available for the public
37 hearings. That is correct. They were being updated from the
38 Regional Office staff, as well as our staff, in preparation for
39 final action, but that is available, and is included in your
40 briefing book for final action.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you Dr. Simmons. Okay, and so I'm not
43 seeing a clear pathway here, as far as this document goes, not as
44 straightforward as 62, but -- Dr. Simmons.

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Sorry, and just one more point. Thank
47 you, Mr. Chair, and so I'm not sure, and maybe we could get this
48 information for Full Council from the Science Center, Andy, but I

1 don't know that this would be a good candidate for the MRIP lite
2 process, because all the other indices are so old on this
3 assessment, and I think this the SSC was even questioning this
4 last time when we updated the landings, and asked them to rerun
5 the projections, because the other indices couldn't be updated,
6 and so I just would say I'm not sure, and we probably should seek
7 clarification, but I don't think it is a good candidate for that.
8

9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks.

10
11 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** I just have a -- Maybe this is for Andy or Dr.
12 Stephen, but, since we're creating two IFQ categories with this
13 one, how will that come into play in the timeline if we are to
14 delay taking final action on this?
15

16 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So the benefit, obviously, of taking action now
17 at this meeting is it gives us the ten or eleven months to do
18 rulemaking and start doing the coding and changes to the IFQ system
19 to prepare for the 2027 season. Obviously, if you delay action,
20 then that slides the schedule to 2028. There's the potential,
21 obviously, that, if we took action in April, then you could still
22 make that schedule for 2027, but there's, you know, the risk there
23 that we wouldn't be able to get the coding done in time or the
24 rulemaking completed in time.
25

26 **DR. BANKS:** Just a follow-up to that. About how long you anticipate
27 the coding to get that into the system?
28

29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** We have an app developer, right, and so we would
30 be prioritizing that, and working on that, and trying to frontload
31 that as much as possible, and so that, to me, is less of the risk.
32 The greater risk is, obviously, the timeframe for rule making.
33

34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.
35

36 **MR. WALKER:** I think -- Andy, did they not already withhold the
37 scamp from the commercial quota, and so they've already taken some,
38 you know, precautions with this, but they can give more out, if we
39 don't pass this, is the way that works, and so it's just a
40 precautionary hold-back right now, and, if this doesn't go through,
41 I would assume that that would be given out later in the season.
42

43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy, do you want to respond to that, and then
44 Mara and Dr. Froeschke.
45

46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so what Ed is talking about is not
47 related to this action. It's related to the framework that was
48 previously passed by the council, and so we have authority, that

1 you granted us, to hold back quota when you've completed an action
2 and we're working on rulemaking, and so we've done that at the
3 start of the fishing year, January 1, but, if we do not complete
4 the rulemaking, and have a final rule in place by June 1, then we
5 have to release that quota that we've held back, right, and so
6 we've typically been able to complete the rulemaking, and allow
7 for that reduction to continue, but, in the event that we're unable
8 to do that, then we would release back the remaining quota.

9
10 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and just to note that would not be available for
11 this document, because we're creating two new complexes, and so
12 there's nothing -- So, typically, when we do IFQ things, we have
13 some flexibility, because we can hold it back at the end of the
14 year, and we have six months. That cannot happen here, because we
15 don't have the categories to hold anything back.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. All right. I think we need to have
18 some discussions at Full Council here, and maybe some deliberations
19 after this, but I think that's probably as far as we're going to
20 take this today, Dr. Hollensead, but I'm going to pause again, to
21 see if there's any further discussion on the topic. All right.
22 Seeing none, we'll continue this discussion in Full Council. Thank
23 you very much, Dr. Hollensead, and, like I said, you got a doozy
24 on this one here.

25
26 Okay. It looks like we can probably get through one more item
27 here before our lunchbreak. This will be Draft Options: Reef Fish
28 Amendment 63: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper IFQ Program. Dr.
29 Diagne.

30
31 **DRAFT OPTIONS: REEF FISH AMENDMENT 63: MODIFICATIONS TO GULF RED**
32 **GROUPEL IFQ PROGRAM**
33

34 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good
35 morning, and so I'll go over the action guide first, and then the
36 draft options for Reef Fish Amendment 63, which, in short, really
37 is the red grouper commercial IFQ pool quota pool.

38
39 We will give a presentation on this amendment, and this action
40 addresses measures that are needed to establish a three-year pilot
41 program to set aside a portion of the red grouper commercial quota
42 and determine eligible recipients, and distribute it, and we'll
43 discuss the eligibility criteria as well as the distribution
44 methods. The committee should review the information and options
45 presented, discuss them, suggest revisions, and, as needed,
46 advice, and recommend next steps. Thank you.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Diagne, and I think I'm

1 going to turn it right back over to you to walk through the
2 document, or the presentation.

3
4 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and I'll wait for Ms. Roy to put the presentation
5 on the screen. All right. Thank you, and so this is a Reef Fish
6 Amendment 63. We are going to discuss some options and covering
7 those items.

8
9 Okay, and this is the purpose and need statement. It hasn't
10 changed between the last meeting and today, but I'll just read it,
11 in case there are some questions. The purpose of this action is
12 to establish a three-year pilot commercial red grouper IFQ quota
13 pool and distribute the resulting annual allocation to eligible
14 participants in the grouper and tilefish IFQ program.

15
16 The need for this action is to enhance economic profitability and
17 reduce discards by improving access to red grouper annual
18 allocation by fishermen engaged in the commercial harvest of red
19 grouper and provide new opportunities for obtaining red grouper
20 annual allocation, and so it's the same purpose and need, and here,
21 perhaps, you know, emphasis is placed on annual allocation, which
22 tells us, right from the bat, that what is to be distributed would
23 simply be the annual allocation, meaning year in and year out.

24
25 The first action here deals with the amount of quota to be held in
26 the pool. The no action alternative, Alternative 1, would not
27 establish a commercial quota pool for red grouper, and so,
28 essentially, the totality of the red grouper quota would continue
29 to be distributed according to the usual method, which is
30 essentially to distribute it based on share ownership at the time
31 of the distribution.

32
33 Alternative 2 would establish a commercial quota pool for Gulf red
34 grouper beginning in 2027. If the commercial quota is below 2.79
35 million pounds, and that's in gutted weight, the commercial quota
36 pool is set at zero percent of the commercial quota.

37
38 If the commercial quota is at or above 2.79 million pounds, the
39 quota pool would hold, and we have four options here, between 15
40 percent and 20 percent of the commercial red grouper quota increase
41 above the 2.79 million pounds, and, as you recall, the 2.79 million
42 pounds, that is the commercial red grouper quota before the
43 emergency rule, I mean the last year's emergency rule.

44
45 Alternative 3 is very similar to the one we just discussed. The
46 difference here is that the threshold for stopping to distribute
47 quota is higher. It is set at 4.28 million pounds, which is the
48 preferred alternative in Reef Fish Amendment 62, which was

1 discussed earlier today.

2
3 The options, we have the same four options there between 15 and 30
4 percent of the increase in quota above the 2.79 million pounds,
5 and so the percentages above the increase in quota are the same,
6 and the reference here is the same, is 2.79 million pounds, because
7 that's the official, quote, unquote, quota on record prior to the
8 emergency rule.

9
10 In terms of numbers, what are the amounts that could potentially
11 be held in the quota pool? We have, of course, we start in 2027,
12 and this is a pilot program for three years. The commercial red
13 grouper quota for those three years is the first indicated, and so
14 between 4.83 million pounds and 5.37 million pounds, and so the
15 increase above the baseline then of 2.79, by a difference then,
16 would be, for example in 2027, 2.04 million pounds. In subsequent
17 years, it would be slightly higher, 2.58 million pounds, for 2028
18 and 2029.

19
20 The next four columns would give us the quota amounts for the
21 various percentages that were listed in the options. The lowest
22 one would be at 15 percent, and let's say, in 2027, that would be
23 306,000 pounds and then that amount would grow, for the 15 percent,
24 to 387 million pounds.

25
26 If we go to the largest amount, in terms of percentage, if you go
27 to 30 percent, in 2027, it would simply be, I guess, the double of
28 what we just discussed for 15, 612 million pounds, and,
29 subsequently, 774,000 pounds. I did say 612 million, and that
30 would be a lot, and it's 612,000 pounds with 30 percent.

31
32 As discussed previously, this process would have to include and
33 consider appeals, and so, for any distribution, 10 percent of the
34 quota pool amount would be withheld to address potential appeals.
35 At the end of those appeals, any remaining quota would be
36 distributed among qualifying participants.

37
38 The second part of the table here, the second table, would simply
39 give us the amounts to be distributed, considering that 10 percent
40 will be withheld to address appeals, and those are the amounts
41 listed there in the second table.

42
43 Now that we've discussed the amounts that could potentially be
44 held by the quota pool, we are going to discuss the potential
45 recipients, those that may be eligible. We did hear, last time,
46 that perhaps, I mean, we could do a better job of describing, or
47 discussing, the various groups that may receive a quota, and that's
48 why we are offering this figure here, which we are going to discuss

1 now.

2
3 Essentially, the elements that will be considered for eligibility
4 to distribute the quota pool would include ownership of a red
5 grouper share, ownership of a valid or renewable permit, and,
6 finally, having red grouper landings on record, and so those are
7 the three, if you would, subsets that we have to consider, and so
8 I will start with the permits, which are represented here by the
9 green circle, and then move to the landings.

10
11 Obviously, for one to have landings, you have to have a permit to
12 able to land red grouper. That is why the red square is essentially
13 fully included within the universe of permits, right, and now we
14 have the ownership of a red grouper shares, which is represented
15 here in blue, I mean light blue, or something close to that, and
16 then our potential recipients are those that have red grouper
17 landings.

18
19 Essentially, all the recipients would be within the red squares,
20 and we have two groups, or subsets, if you would, those that have
21 red grouper shares, and that would be Group A, and those that do
22 not own any red grouper shares, and that would be the portion B.

23
24 In terms of percentages, those that have shares would represent
25 about 41 percent of the total number of accounts, and, by
26 complement, then those that do not have shares would approximately
27 represent 59 percent, and so, A and B, these are the recipients of
28 whatever it is that we have to distribute and that we are now going
29 to distribute essentially the proportions as well as the
30 distribution methods that are considered in this amendment.

31
32 For the distribution of the quota pool, we have a no action
33 alternative, and, essentially, this would not distribute anything
34 to anybody, and so that would be status quo, and Alternative 2
35 would distribute 60 percent of the quota pool amount among
36 fishermen with a valid permit, valid or renewable commercial reef
37 fish permit, and red grouper landings within the reference period,
38 but with no red grouper shares.

39
40 Essentially, we would take 60 percent of the total and give it to
41 those in Group B, meaning having everything, but no red grouper
42 shares. The 40 percent would then be given to those that have
43 permits and landings, but own red grouper shares.

44
45 How would we distribute this? Two options here, for each group
46 really, and you could have an equal distribution, or you could
47 distribute proportionally based on red grouper landing. Option 2a
48 deals with those in Group B. Option 2a would deal with those in

1 Group A, meaning those that have shares.

2
3 Essentially, Alternative 3 would do pretty much the same, but,
4 rather than a 60/40 split, it would just have a 50-50 split between
5 Groups A and B. The distribution methods considered are the same.
6 Either you do it equally or you do it proportionally based on red
7 grouper landings.

8
9 Something that we did mention when we talked about the purpose and
10 need for this action, the red grouper quota to be distributed would
11 be annual allocation, and this is going to be non-transferable,
12 and so whatever this quota pool is distributing is meant to be
13 landed by the recipient. If they do not land it, obviously, at
14 the end of the year, they lose it. There's no opportunity to
15 transfer any of this.

16
17 Now let's -- Before we look at, I guess, numbers, in terms of what
18 people may receive, we did mention that landings would have to be
19 recorded during the reference period, and the reference periods
20 that we are considering right now would essentially be a two-year
21 running period.

22
23 For 2027, the reference period would begin January 1, 2025, and so
24 meaning has begun, and will end on December 31 of this year. For
25 2028, the reference period to qualify would then cover two years,
26 but this time starting from January 1, 2026 and ending December of
27 the following year, and we do that one more time for 2029, and so,
28 essentially, to qualify for this one would have to show landings
29 for a two-year time period.

30
31 Now, if we look at some of the estimates here, and assume an equal
32 distribution for the various percentages chosen between 15 and 30
33 percent, and let's start with the 50-50 scenario.

34
35 Those with shares would each receive, for example, 343 pounds if
36 we took 50 percent -- I mean 15 percent of the quota increase above
37 the baseline, and those without shares would receive 282 pounds.
38 That is simply because we have more accounts without shares than
39 those with shares. If we went to 30 percent, they would receive
40 -- Those with shares would receive 686, and those without shares
41 would receive 564.

42
43 The second scenario, if the split now is 60-40, then we are going
44 to increase the amount received by those without shares, because
45 they are going to get a bigger portion, if you would, of the pie,
46 and so, for example, for 15 percent, they would receive 338 pounds,
47 and those with shares would receive 274 pounds each.

1 Now, if you were to double it to 30 percent, then, you know, we
2 would double those numbers, and, respectively, for those with
3 shares and without, 549 and 676 pounds. This would be for let's
4 say everyone gets the same and take the total equal distribution.

5
6 Now, before we discuss a little bit more what a proportional
7 distribution based on landings would do, let's look at some average
8 numbers, an average as well as the median landings by share status,
9 and this is between 2023 and 2024, and, as you recall, the number
10 of accounts with shares, that would be 130 of them. Without
11 shares, 186, roughly you know 60-40 between the two. The average
12 number of pounds landed by accounts with shares is 13,225, and for
13 accounts without shares it is higher. It is 17,446. Mr. Chair.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** It looks like we have a question, Dr. Diagne.
16 Captain Walker.

17
18 **MR. WALKER:** Not to interrupt your flow here, but I'm kind of hung
19 up a little bit. We'll probably need to discuss this. We're
20 trying to help out the leasers with this program, obviously, but,
21 when you go by share ownership, I don't think we define -- So, if
22 a guy owns fifty pounds of red grouper shares, that's still going
23 to be a leaser. He's a guy that's leasing most of his quota, but,
24 if we go by ownership, I don't think we want to eliminate that
25 guy, because he owns ten pounds of red grouper, and put him in the
26 shareholder category, when he's a really small shareholder.

27
28 We might need to kind of nuance that a little bit somewhere here
29 in discussions, in my view, because those are -- There are some
30 guys that make a living leasing quota, but they might have ten
31 pounds that they own in their account, that they inherited with
32 their boat, or something like that, and so we might need to discuss
33 it.

34
35 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Captain Walker. I mean, I understand the point,
36 but, at the beginning of this process, the understanding was that
37 the council wanted to do something straightforward, and
38 essentially without, quote, unquote, additional complications.

39
40 Obviously, one could begin to consider levels of share ownership,
41 but, if you were to do that also, then you would have to begin
42 discussing at what point are you going to evaluate that share
43 ownership, because I can own fifty pounds of shares today, and,
44 after you distribute, then I become a 50,000-pound, you know,
45 owner, and so those are things for, I guess, you guys to decide,
46 but, if you want us to consider thresholds, in terms of share
47 ownership, that's certainly a possibility, and I would, you know,
48 discuss with Dr. Stephen and the LAPP branch in how to best

1 approach this.

2

3 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I think -- I know it's complicated, but that
4 is exactly what I was thinking, if maybe you establish a threshold,
5 a minimum, of, you know, 300 pounds, or 500 pounds and below, you
6 are not a share owner, or whatever the term we come up with.

7

8 You're a leaser, maybe, and you go in the leaser category, or
9 whatever the name may be, and I think that might be better,
10 because, you know, there's a lot of small shareholder guys, that
11 are the guys that I think we're trying to help out with this, and,
12 if we're make a big break between who gets it and who doesn't,
13 these are still the guys that need it, I think, and so maybe, you
14 know, just for discussion.

15

16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Captain Walker. I mean, maybe there's
17 a way to look at this a little bit differently relative to like a
18 ratio of shares relative to landings that could potentially work
19 here, but I don't know. I need to think about it a little more
20 relative to what Captain Walker was saying there, because where do
21 you draw that line there, but I had Dr. Banks.

22

23 **DR. BANKS:** I just have a clarification question. On this slide,
24 Dr. Diagne, when you say accounts with shares versus accounts
25 without shares, does this negate if I receive all of my -- I
26 receive all of my allocation in my share account, and then I split
27 it between my boats, and is this removing any of those shares, or
28 are those accounts -- Do you understand that question? Do I need
29 to try to --

30

31 **DR. DIAGNE:** Here, I guess, you know, the title of the first row
32 here, doesn't include everything, because we are talking about
33 accounts with shares that have landings, and so, if you have a
34 master account and distribute to your vessels, that master account
35 does not have landings. It's not part of the picture. It is the
36 account that have the permits with the landings, and so, you know,
37 not to repeat this, but, Bernie, if you could go back until, you
38 know, the figure with the circles.

39

40 Essentially, really, the title of the slide, I mean, those boxes
41 would be fully accounts with shares, with a permit, and use red
42 grouper landings, or an account without shares, with a permit, and
43 with red grouper, but I just, you know, have it understood, because
44 we started discussing it. Thank you.

45

46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think we can carry on, Dr. Diagne.

47

48 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and perhaps just one more point. I mean, relative

1 to Captain Walker's comment earlier, nobody is cut out here. If
2 you own shares, you are going to be part of one group or the other
3 group, right, and you will get either 50 percent of the total or
4 essentially be 40 percent, and so no one is eliminated because
5 they only own ten portion of the shares.

6
7 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and that's good point. Thank you for that.

8
9 **DR. DIAGNE:** Where were we? Okay. Move forward, Bernie, please.
10 Actually one more. We can go one more. Okay. thank you. Okay,
11 and so this is just to give us an idea of the frequency
12 distributions of the landings for the two groups.

13
14 You remember that the accounts without shares, on average, land
15 more red grouper than the accounts with shares, and this would
16 show us the distribution, how many do we have in the various bins?
17 Some land very little, obviously, you know, fifty pounds or less,
18 and some land a lot. Okay, and I guess I'm going to stop. I see
19 Dr. Stephen has her hand up.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Go ahead, Dr. Stephen.

22
23 **DR. JESSICA STEPHEN:** Yes, and so I just wanted to clarify what
24 the question asked earlier about the accounts, and so, if you're
25 talking about having a shareholder account that has two vessels,
26 and one vessel lands and one doesn't, we are summing up the
27 landings to the shareholder account level.

28
29 If you were talking about someone who had a related shareholder
30 account which had one that had a vessel fishing and one not, those
31 would be considered two separate accounts, and so hopefully that
32 clarified a little bit more how we got to the accounts that we
33 were using.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Stephen. All right. We're
36 still going. Dr. Diagne, back to you.

37
38 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and this was just to give us an idea of the
39 landings distribution, in case the distribution of the quota pool
40 based on landings, proportionally based on landings, was the
41 selected method of distribution, just to give us an idea here.

42
43 To illustrate a proportional distribution based on landings, we
44 picked a scenario, and, by we, I mean mostly Dr. Stephen here,
45 because she's the one that provided, you know, the data and the
46 figure, but we did talk about the scenario to pick.

47
48 Okay, and so the scenario here is a 25 percent proportional

1 distribution of the quota, essentially, and so 25 percent above
2 the increase, and using a proportional distribution based on
3 landing, and so that would correspond to 510,000 pounds.

4
5 Okay, and the other, I guess, scenario we picked here to complete
6 this was the 60 percent to those without shares and 40 to the
7 accounts with shares, and so, for that, the distribution would
8 look like this.

9
10 For the accounts without shares, most of the accounts, a lot of
11 them, about 118, essentially over there, and, in terms of the
12 allocation bins, from zero to fifty, all the way to 15,000 pounds,
13 there about, and there is no account without share that would be
14 part of that distribution if we went to the far right there, the
15 15,000 pounds. Few accounts with shares would receive that much
16 under this scenario.

17
18 This is just an illustration here, because, I guess, for
19 confidentiality reasons, we cannot really list, you know, all the
20 different allocations, because then, by back-calculating, you
21 could possibly say it's Shareholder X that's going to get this
22 much, and so we are just giving you an idea here.

23
24 I think this is pretty much it, or close to, but we'll finish with
25 a question, similar to what Captain Walker talked about, but this
26 time in terms of landings. Would it make sense to consider minimum
27 landings thresholds in this, because, for someone who lands less
28 than 400 pounds, would it make sense to turn around and give them,
29 quote, unquote, 500 pounds or more, and so that's an open question,
30 and part of the data Dr. Stephen put together here look would look
31 at minimum landings thresholds and how many accounts would qualify
32 under each one of the categories.

33
34 For example, if we use the 400-pound minimum landings, that would
35 cut the number of accounts with shares from 130 to ninety-five,
36 and, similarly, that would cut the number of accounts from without
37 shares from 186 to 127, and the numbers would decrease as, you
38 know, the minimum threshold increases, and so, if you had let's
39 say a 2,400-pound landing minimum, then you would have, you know,
40 about half of the accounts remaining for the accounts with shares
41 and without shares. Okay, and so that is just a question for your
42 consideration.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

45
46 **MR. WALKER:** I have no question we should have some kind of a
47 minimum. I think we could debate what it may be. I think it could
48 be a lot smaller. I think the point here is just to demonstrate

1 that you do participate.
2
3 You may have been constrained in your landings, due to the fact
4 that you didn't have allocation available previously, and so there
5 might be some people in the lower category that would have had
6 more, had they had the opportunity that we're talking about
7 offering up here, and so I would -- I would be in favor of a much
8 lower minimum, that just shows that you have some -- You know, and
9 part of it would also be to eliminate people that have never fished
10 for red grouper, and never will, in other parts of the Gulf where
11 there aren't any.

12
13 We, obviously, don't want to distribute red grouper quota to people
14 that live in, you know, Texas where there's no red grouper, and so
15 some minimum. My choice would be even lower than the 400 pounds,
16 myself.

17
18 **DR. DIAGNE:** Understood. The thing is, at the minimum of 400
19 pounds, if we take the accounts with shares, you are, quote,
20 unquote, cutting out thirty-five accounts, all said and done,
21 right? 130 minus ninety-five is thirty-five, and so a much lower
22 minimum -- I mean, is that something that we want to consider if
23 that results in cutting out two accounts or three? At that point,
24 you know, would it be worth it?

25
26 That's a question, and we could make the same argument on the other
27 side, and so I guess, you know, it may be there is a sweet spot
28 there, another value, but, you know, open to suggestion if there
29 are values that you are thinking about.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck and Captain Walker.

32
33 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and Jessica was just sharing with me that
34 the minimum poundage that's listed here is cumulative over a two-
35 year time period, right, and so it's essentially an average of 200
36 pounds, with a minimum of 400 pounds, and so you really can't go
37 too much lower, or you could, right, and then the main concern
38 here that we had is we don't want to, obviously, redistribute quota
39 to accounts that aren't going to use it, because it's not going to
40 be transferable, and so we're trying to avoid, obviously, locking
41 up quota in these accounts.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** That's kind of what I was going to talk about. If it
44 were not a difficult thing to do, could we maybe just put a -- See
45 what a fifty-pound minimum looks like, and how that would change,
46 and we don't have to go and redo everything, if it's difficult,
47 but, if it was it was simple, it might be interesting just to look
48 at for comparison.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Captain Walker. Assane.
3
4 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and we'll ask, I mean, after this Dr. Stephen,
5 and probably she's already starting to see how it is, and so, you
6 know, if you do a fifty-pound minimum per year, and so that's
7 essentially here a threshold of 100 pounds, and so, you know,
8 hopefully we'll have some kind of an answer for you at some point.
9
10 **MR. WALKER:** Just for discussion.
11
12 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes. Absolutely.
13
14 **MR. WALKER:** I'm not saying I'm going to make a motion to push
15 that, but it would just be interesting to see how it all shakes
16 out.
17
18 **DR. DIAGNE:** Absolutely.
19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks for that discussion. I agree, and I do
21 think some threshold here probably is warranted, so we're not
22 distributing this to people that don't need it. Okay. Assane,
23 did you have anything more in this presentation?
24
25 **DR. DIAGNE:** I think maybe the last slide would remind us that,
26 you know, there's an appeal process, and there's a National Appeals
27 Office. Bernie, could you go to the last slide, please? Yes, and
28 I think -- Yes, that's what it is, and, you know, we'll be working
29 with them to be able to address any appeals that may come up, and
30 that's the last slide, Mr. Chair. Thank you.
31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank yo, Dr. Diagne. A real quick question
33 from me, and it's kind of in line with some of the discussion we've
34 been having around the table, and so we've got this program
35 technically starting, proposed, in 2027, right, and so we're in
36 draft option phase right now.
37
38 I imagine we probably would take this -- If we continue to move
39 forward on this for another couple meeting or two, I'm just
40 wondering if this would be able to be implemented in time for that
41 2027, and maybe 2028 might be a default time that we might have to
42 rely on, and so just throwing that out there, just because I just
43 don't know how quickly this can be passed forward there.
44
45 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and I'll let Mr. Strelcheck answer most of this,
46 but, I mean, this is a program in which nothing is, quote, unquote,
47 taken away from anyone, and so, I mean, the January 1 deadline is
48 not really a hard deadline.

1
2 It would be best, optimal, and, I mean, in our most optimistic, I
3 guess, estimation, it would be great if we could be, you know,
4 considering final action by June. It would be great, but, you
5 know, I do not know, and maybe Mr. Strelcheck has something to
6 add.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I saw Andy's hand go up before, and probably
9 not to that, but go ahead, Andy.

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, you know, we talked earlier about
12 priorities. We see this as moving to the top of the priority list,
13 in terms of amendments the council is working on, and so working
14 on this over the next couple of meetings, and if we took final
15 action in June.

16
17 You know, the question is I guess maybe for Mara, and we maybe
18 need to look at this, is whether or not the current holdback
19 provisions would allow for us to hold back quota and distribute it
20 sometime after January 1, versus having a specific holdback
21 provision for this pilot program that may be independent, that we
22 would have to build into this amendment, and so that's one thing
23 that maybe we need to investigate, and may need to be added as an
24 action and alternative in this document.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Strelcheck. Captain Walker.

27
28 **MR. WALKER:** While we're on the topic, I think I maybe pointed out
29 that, you know, we've been struggling for years on how we can help
30 lower allocation prices in the IFQ fishery, and this pilot program
31 may prove to be a really useful way to do that. You know, it might
32 not be the most -- Red grouper allocation is going to be fairly
33 inexpensive this year, but the concept is , I think.

34
35 I think, you , if we look at this as not just a little red grouper
36 help-out, but perhaps a concept to help improve the IFQ fishery,
37 you know, it deserves a lot of focus, in my view.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Captain Walker. Any further discussion
40 here? Assane, what do you need from the committee here to kind of
41 move this forward? Are you looking for recommendations
42 specifically on some of these items?

43
44 **DR. DIAGNE:** I guess the two suggestions, or recommendations, that
45 are beginning to emerge, one would be to revisit the threshold of
46 ownership of shares. To the extent that you would want us to
47 consider that, I mean, we need a little more guidance, but, if we
48 keep in mind that, regardless of your level of share ownership,

1 you are going to get some of this quota pool, if that is no longer
2 an issue, we need to know clearly, and because that will help us
3 streamline. That's number one.

4
5 The other thing is some directions when it comes to the minimum
6 landings threshold, and that -- Hopefully we'll have some
7 information when it comes to 100 pounds, or, if that's the wish of
8 this committee, to tell us that, in the next iteration, include
9 one lower landing threshold, and so we will , for example, 200,
10 400, and 1,000, just as an example, and build that in, so that we
11 know where to go from here.

12
13 Those are the two, I guess, questions that I may have, but, for
14 the rest of it, it seems to me that we can move forward, and, you
15 know, we have a full expectation that we'll get all the data we
16 need working with Dr. Stephen and the LAPP Branch. Thanks.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Diagne, and so, if anyone has
19 perspectives that they want to offer, and I certainly want to hear
20 from our commercial folks in public comment about , to gather your
21 feedback here that could help drive some of this discussion here
22 at Full Council, but, at the committee level, any further
23 discussion on this?

24
25 Okay, and I'm not seeing any, but, Dr, Diagne, it seems like we
26 got a little homework to do too for this, to kind of get you the
27 information that you need, and we can kind of finalize that at
28 Full Council, if that's okay with you.

29
30 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay, and it looks like we still have a little
33 time left, and I'm just going to switch some things up here.
34 Perhaps we could do Agenda Item XI, which is the SSC January 2026
35 Webinar Summary. Mr. Rindone, would you want to just talk about
36 the action guide real quick, before we bring Trevor up?

37
38 **MR. RINDONE:** I can do that, and so Mr. Moncrief is here to review
39 the SSC discussions about the interim analyses for Gulf lane
40 snapper and gag grouper, which are both also informed by the G-
41 FISHER index of relative abundance. This is the same one that was
42 used for red grouper.

43
44 These interim analyses were developed to inform revisions to catch
45 advice, if warranted, and Mr. Moncrief will talk about that pivot
46 for gag to being a health check. He'll also discuss trends in the
47 index, any catch advice recommendations, which I guess we won't
48 have that for that part, and so you guys should review the

1 information presented, ask questions, and make recommendations, as
2 appropriate.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Trevor, the floor is
5 yours.

6
7 **PRESENTATION: JANUARY 2026 SSC WEBINAR SUMMARY**

8
9 **MR. MONCRIEF:** All right, and so these are the other two topics
10 that we covered in the webinar. All right, and so we were able to
11 look at the interim analysis for lane. Previous looks were at the
12 Southeast Region Headboat Survey.

13
14 Obviously, it's fishery-dependent based. There's been some
15 management changes, and everything else like that, and so sometimes
16 playing off the CPUE directly isn't as informative as what a
17 fishery-independent index can provide. Given the same
18 conversation we had about red grouper earlier, G-FISHER was looked
19 at. It combines all three video surveys. It has large-scale
20 coverage, and it samples the habitat pretty well.

21
22 We made two motions after going through everything. We had a few
23 scenarios to look at. I'll say the discussion really centered
24 around the scenarios themselves, trying to find stability in the
25 time period, something representative of the fishery, and trying
26 to stay away from, you know, what might be noise on the backend,
27 or whatever else.

28
29 There was a question about the increased sampling size on the
30 backend that might have some correlation to the increasing trends
31 in the index. After going through that with the PIs and everything
32 else, we kind of settled on the 2009 to 2018 timeframe, which was,
33 you know, also one of the higher options when it came to the
34 Science Center folks.

35
36 We made two motions, and so we considered the 2026 lane snapper
37 interim analysis using G-FISHER for 2009 to 2018 as consistent
38 with BSIA. You can see most it was pretty much across-the-board.
39 We had one opposed, and one abstention, and it was basically
40 centered around those discussions with the scenarios and the
41 questions we had.

42
43 Then we had a recommendation for an OFL that you see before you,
44 and an ABC, and, once we got through the first motion, that one
45 carried without any opposition. I don't know if there's another
46 slide on lane snapper. I don't think there is. Let's go and go
47 back to that one. Anyone have any questions about lane snapper
48 specifically?

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any questions for Trevor? It looks like we're
3 getting an SSC recommendation for a little bit of a quota bump
4 there. Always positive.
5
6 **MR. RINDONE:** A nudge for a motion to consider changing the lane
7 snapper catch advice, or catch limit. It's about a 200,000-pound
8 increase to the OFL and ABC for lane snapper from where it is
9 currently.
10
11 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Good news. Does someone want to press forward
12 on a motion like that to adjust -- Thank you, Captain Walker.
13
14 **MR. WALKER:** I guess we're picking a preferred?
15
16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I would just say recommend basically what the
17 SSC is suggesting.
18
19 **MR. WALKER:** All right. **I'll make a motion to recommend what the**
20 **SSC is suggesting, an increase in lane snapper.** That's the best
21 I've got. Can we put the SSC numbers up there?
22
23 **MR. RINDONE:** **To direct staff to begin a document to update the**
24 **catch limits for lane snapper based on the SSC's recommendations.**
25
26 **MR. WALKER:** **That's what I meant to say.**
27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Well said, Ed.
29
30 **MR. WALKER:** You're welcome.
31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Let's wait to get this motion on
33 the on the board here.
34
35 **MR. RINDONE:** To recommend -- Sorry. **To direct staff to begin a**
36 **document. I know, and I'm sorry, and so to direct staff to begin**
37 **a document to update the catch limits for lane snapper based on**
38 **the SSC's recommendations.**
39
40 **MR. WALKER:** Good. Thank you, Mr. Rindone.
41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. We've got a motion on the table. Do we
43 have a second? Seconded by Dr. Banks. All right. The motion is
44 direct staff to begin a document to update catch limits for lane
45 snapper based on the SSC's recommendation. Are there any
46 discussion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion on**
47 **the table? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Froeschke.
48

1 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Before we leave this, is there -- Is it too early
2 to determine if we could do this as a CE, and maybe expedite this
3 through?
4

5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.
6

7 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, we can talk about it. I mean, it's really how
8 long it takes to develop whatever kind of document, abbreviated,
9 regular, or framework, to come back to the council and the council
10 to take final action. The CE part of it is not the only
11 consideration, but, I mean, given what we did last time when we
12 increased the lane snapper catch limits, and I think we did an
13 abbreviated framework, and supported that NEPA with a CE, and so
14 it seems reasonable, but I think we should discuss it at the staff
15 level.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you for that. I'm going to pass
18 it back over to you, Trevor.
19

20 **MR. MONCRIEF:** All right. Let's go back to the presentation. The
21 last one was gag that we talked about. As they're getting it
22 pulled up, I will say we had, within the conversations each time,
23 to try to keep up with, you know, gains and efficiencies that were
24 presented by more of the groups prior.
25

26 We did try to ask a few questions about the fishery, what it was
27 observing directly, just to have an idea of that while we were
28 going through our discussions. All right. Back to my
29 presentation.
30

31 We conducted a first time interim analysis for gag grouper, to try
32 to put an eye on it. Once, you see that G-FISHER was the composite
33 video index. There was a discussion around the G-FISHER side as
34 a whole, just in a sense of, if we're using it more and more often
35 for these uses, maybe the SSC can take a look a little bit closer,
36 understand it a little bit better. That way, the questions that
37 they ask can be, you know, a little bit more informed.
38

39 It was a good start, to get some literature on it, and then we'll
40 go down it, but it was completed as a health check. Obviously,
41 the rebuilding plan had just started. The catch limits are
42 changing, and the stock itself is not considered to be in a stable
43 condition, but, if you go to the next slide, while the stock is
44 not in a stable condition, you can see there is some stability in
45 that index, where it's just a flat line, and so it will be
46 interesting to see how that responds as time goes on with the
47 management measures that are in place.
48

1 In general, the SSC -- It was limited discussion, but, for the
2 most part, it was keep an eye on it, and see how everything changes,
3 and we'll do our best to stay up with it. I'll take any questions.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Trevor. Any questions for Mr.
6 Moncrief? Dr. Allen.
7

8 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Trevor. I was just going to mention that
9 I had mentioned in that SSC meeting that the -- You know, this
10 very flat trend in the index doesn't seem to match what I've been
11 hearing about the more inshore fishery, with lots of smaller female
12 fish, and it was acknowledged that this index is generally more
13 offshore, and that there may be a lag between what we see inshore
14 and what's happening offshore, as those fish grow and change sex,
15 and so just FYI.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Dr. Allen. I think this is some of
18 the challenge when you're looking at one index to cover an entire
19 stock. Obviously, it's a much larger geographic distribution for
20 some of these things across their life history, and so it is what
21 it is, but any questions comments for Trevor? All right. Seeing
22 none, I appreciate your leadership, Trevor. Thank you. Mr. Chair.
23

24 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We'll break for lunch. We're
25 a little early, but we're a little ahead. We'll break for lunch,
26 and come back as scheduled at 1:30.
27

28 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on January 27, 2026.)
29

30 - - -

31
32 January 7, 2026

33
34 TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION
35

36 - - -
37

38 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf Council reconvened
39 at the Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Tuesday
40 afternoon, January 27, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman
41 C.J. Sweetman.
42

43 **MR. DUGAS:** Okay. We're going to get started, if we can quiet
44 down in the back of the room, please. Okay. Thank you. Before
45 I turn it over to Dr. Sweetman and Reef Fish, I have a couple of
46 announcements to make. I would like to recognize Mr. David Walker
47 is here, a past council member. Thank you, David.
48

1 I also would like to announce that the Louisiana Charter Boat
2 Association is going to host a social this evening, at 6:45 on the
3 sixth floor of Jack's Brewery, 620 Decatur. There will be no
4 transportation provided, but food and drinks will be provided.

5
6 I also want to remind folks that, at 5:35, there's a question-and-
7 answer session with Mr. Strelcheck, Dr. Walter, and Dr. Simmons,
8 and also a reminder for everyone that tomorrow's lunch is a working
9 lunch, and so council members will remain in the room, and we will
10 work through lunch. We will have a short break, Dr. Simmons is
11 telling me, for a few minutes, and so just a few reminders. Dr.
12 Sweetman, whenever you're ready.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right. Welcome
15 back for lunch. We're going to hop right into some other
16 challenging discussions. We're going to move into the next agenda
17 item, which is a Reef Fish Amendment 59A: Permit Requirements in
18 IFQ Programs, and I think Dr. Diagne will lead us through this, if
19 you wouldn't mind touching on the action guide, please.

20
21 **REEF FISH AMENDMENT 59A: PERMIT REQUIREMENTS IN IFQ PROGRAMS**

22
23 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you Mr. Chair, and so onto the action guide for
24 Reef Fish Amendment 59A : Permit Requirements in the IFQ Program.
25 We will provide a very brief overview of Reef Fish 59A, and
26 essentially today discuss recommendations from the March 2025 Ad
27 Hoc Red Snapper Grouper-Tilefish IFQ Advisory Panel meeting.

28
29 The amendment addresses permit requirements in the IFQ programs
30 that we have here in the Gulf, and, essentially, it would set
31 requirements for owning and maintaining shareholders accounts,
32 shares, and annual allocation, and it also includes some divestment
33 provisions for non-compliant accounts. The committee should
34 review the information presented today, make recommendations, and,
35 as warranted, recommend next steps. Bernie, if you would -- Thank
36 you very much, and so onto the next slide, please.

37
38 I'm going to start just with the recommendations that were made by
39 the AP and highlight, wherever they are available, preferred
40 alternatives that the council selected previously.

41
42 We can start with the first action, which deals with requirements
43 to open and maintain shareholder accounts. The Preferred
44 Alternative 3 here is the alternative that the council selected
45 previously, and it reads as follows: In addition to the U.S.
46 citizenship or permanent residency requirements, all applicants
47 are required to possess a valid or renewable commercial reef fish
48 permit to obtain and maintain an IFQ shareholders account.

1
2 The AP discussed this Action 1 and approved the motion below. The
3 AP essentially is recommending to add an alternative that
4 establishes a control date for a requirement to obtain and maintain
5 a shareholder account and make the control date the date of
6 implementation of the amendment. This motion carried with no
7 opposition. Should I pause, Mr. Chair, or just keep going until
8 a question arises?
9

10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that sounds good. I think we can
11 keep going until a question arises, and it looks like we got one.
12 Mr. Strelcheck.
13

14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Can you go back a slide?
15

16 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, go back one slide please, Bernie, to Action 1.
17 Yes. Thank you.
18

19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So what this doesn't say is the permit
20 requirements, and so I assume that what they were emphasizing is
21 a permit would be required after the control date, correct?
22

23 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and that's correct, Mr. Strelcheck.
24

25 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, and can you talk a little bit more about
26 their rationale and reasoning, in terms of this recommendation?
27

28 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, before I do that, you know, as recognized
29 by the chair, Mr. David Walker, who is the chair of the AP, is in
30 the room, and, you know, he, of course, can chime-in and add to
31 the rationale and to the discussion points here.
32

33 I mean, the main rationale would be essentially to, and I'll put
34 that in quotes, shield, or protect, if you would, those that are
35 already active in the IFQ programs, and the thinking was, you know,
36 depending on the date that you select, those who are already
37 operating without a permit today may be shielded from whatever
38 requirement is implemented in the future.
39

40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker, you got something?
41

42 **MR. WALKER:** I know we've already been over this, but, I mean, if
43 we're trying to solve a problem, we're actually locking in the
44 problem going forward, and I don't know if that's progress or not.
45 We're locking everything in the way it is right now with this
46 motion. It doesn't seem to make much sense to me.
47

48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy, do you have something?

1
2 **MS. LEVY:** Well, just that I think that it's not really a control
3 date. It's more of a grandfathering, right, and so you're picking
4 a date on which -- Forward which it applies, which we had -- When
5 we were looking at this in 36B, we had different dates about when
6 it would -- Who it would actually apply to, and so I just think
7 the terminology is not exactly on point.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ed.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** That's kind of my point. You know, if we're -- If
12 we're acknowledging that there's a problem in the fishery, do we
13 want to grandfather that problem in going forward, or are we going
14 to try and do something about it?

15
16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Any more discussion on this, and
17 we'll have an opportunity to talk more, for sure, but Dr. Diagne.

18
19 **DR. DIAGNE:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so on to the
20 next action then. For Action 2, here we did a list all of the
21 alternatives that are currently in 59A, because, at this point,
22 the council hasn't selected a preferred alternative yet, and so
23 this is just as a reminder that, essentially, to obtain and
24 maintain IFQ shares these requirements could be considered.

25
26 As I just mentioned in Action 2, the council did not select a
27 preferred alternative, but the AP made a motion, which is here.
28 In Action 2, the AP is recommending to add an alternative, which
29 reads as follows: To obtain and maintain IFQ shares, in addition
30 to the U.S. citizenship or permanent residency requirement, a
31 shareholder account must be associated with a valid or renewable
32 commercial reef fish permit and/or a dealer permit, you know, a
33 Gulf or South Atlantic dealer permit.

34
35 Presumably this motion, which was approved afterwards, could also
36 be applicable to Action 1, essentially, and so to consider the
37 possibility of having a dealer's permit or/and a permit, a reef
38 fish permit, a commercial reef fish permit.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We've got some we got some hands going up here.
41 I've got Captain Walker and Dr. Banks.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** I support the idea of, and we've talked about it
44 before, vertically-integrated people not being eliminated from
45 shareholders. There's certainly, you know, dealers that have a
46 fleet of their own that, you know, should be included in this, in
47 my opinion.

1 However dealer permits are open access, and I think they're twenty
2 bucks.

3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** (Dr. Sweetman's comment is not audible on the
4 recording.)

5
6 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, but you can -- You can buy one. The point being
7 I don't I don't see this -- I think we should maybe do it, with
8 some caveats, maybe grandfathering people in that had dealer
9 permits, or some way to just keep this from being a loophole to
10 get around, you know, having to be a permit requirement.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Kesley.

13
14 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and so I was the council rep at this AP, and I
15 apologize that I have slept since then, but what I do remember is
16 a lot of discussion, Ed, following those same concerns, this open
17 access permit.

18
19 This intent was -- Or this motion intended to explore maybe some
20 options to keep some of those that are active in the fishery, and
21 maybe not directly fishing, but have those shares for certain
22 reasons, but there were very valid concerns regarding this might
23 introduce an unintentional loophole, or a way to skirt that, and
24 so I just echo Ed's point but that was also brought up at the AP.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. I appreciate that. It
27 sounds like, at the very least, Dr. Diagne, something that we can
28 explore a little bit more here. I understand Ed's concern, what
29 he's referencing there, and maybe there's some way we can -- These
30 folks need to actively be engaged in IFQ fisheries, and dealing
31 with IFQ fisheries in their dealer permit.

32
33 I don't know necessarily the feasibility about doing some of that
34 stuff, but I think it's worth exploring a bit more, because I think
35 we don't want to -- I think the large part of this entire process
36 has been we don't want to negatively impact the people that are
37 actively involved in the fishery, right, and like those are the
38 people we're trying to help support here, and so we've had a lot
39 of conversation about indirect impacts here, and so maybe we can
40 explore this a little bit more.

41
42 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Absolutely, and, as Dr. Banks
43 mentioned, there were a lot of discussions around this idea, and
44 folks did share some of the business of -- How do you say -- The
45 arrangements, or structures, because the reality is that several
46 dealers are not the direct participants in the fishery, but they
47 are tied to vessels that essentially harvest IFQ fish, and those
48 fish are processed in their dealer houses, and so, essentially,

1 this idea definitely needs to be further explored, and possibly
2 bring in some threshold minimum amounts, of whatever IFQ species,
3 to be processed in specific dealer houses, so that it's not let's
4 say anyone that just says I have a permit, but I'm not using it,
5 to be in it. The integration with some activity level, as you
6 mentioned, with this I think is worth exploring.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Dr. Diagne. Dr. Banks.

9
10 **DR. BANKS:** Just building on that, I think the activity level that
11 Dr. Diagne just mentioned was also a very large component of that
12 discussion, because now -- I think, in the other amendment, it
13 looks at landings as maybe the actual activity component, where
14 your dealer, if they are a part of this, if we consider this, does
15 not necessarily have it as landings. Whatever we decide here,
16 just remember that it has downstream effects in the next amendment
17 in our definitions.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That's a very good point, Dr. Banks, and, Mr.
20 Walker, I certainly would lend the table to you, if you have
21 anything to add here, but, in the meantime, Mr. Strelcheck.

22
23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I appreciate Kesley's comment, because that was
24 one of my thoughts as well, in terms of future amendments, and how
25 we would actually be able to track this in the system.

26
27 The other statement I'll make is, knowing that we have public
28 testimony tomorrow, and we have a lot of IFQ shareholders here in
29 the audience, I would love to, obviously, hear from anyone that's
30 kind of in this situation as a dealer, as well as an owner of a
31 vessel.

32
33 I know there's a number of different companies that are operating
34 in the system, and they operate as a dealer in one company name,
35 and as a vessel in a company in another name, but they're operating
36 as one kind of unit, or vertically-integrated company, and so how
37 do we address something like this, and I agree with Ed, and others,
38 like this is something worth exploring, and, if we can figure out
39 a solution, it would be good to understand it better.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Sanchez.

42
43 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and, also, tomorrow, I would like to hear, at
44 testimony, some potential concerns of where we overlook quota
45 banks, non-profits like the Shareholders Alliance, where, you
46 know, to make them have a permit, it just doesn't fit what they're
47 doing, and they're doing something to help, you know, get shares
48 into the hands of the people that need them, and so I think we've

1 got to be considerate of them as well.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Okay. Back to you,
4 Dr. Diagne.

5

6 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Next slide, please. For this
7 Action 3, this essentially would set the requirements to obtain
8 annual allocation. I mean, there wouldn't be any requirement to
9 maintaining , because, at the end of the year, annual allocation,
10 of course, expires.

11

12 For Action 3, the council did not select a preferred alternative
13 to-date, and the AP approved two motions under this action. The
14 first one would be to add an alternative that establishes a control
15 date for a requirement to obtain annual allocation and to make the
16 control date March 18, 2024. The motion carried with no
17 opposition.

18

19 I guess, as a cleanup for the previous actions, the same control
20 date of March 18, 2024 was also applied, if you would, by this
21 motion to the previous actions we discussed, 1 and 2, and one
22 comment here is, as Ms. Levy mentioned, and Captain Walker, a
23 control date is loosely used to allow to grandfather some people,
24 and this -- I guess we went down this road maybe in Amendment 36A,
25 B, and C, and so forth, just out of context.

26

27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Why March 18, 2024?

28

29 **DR. DIAGNE:** One year before the meeting, we had. Next slide
30 please, Bernie. Okay and so, for Action 4, here the council did
31 select preferred alternatives and options. The Preferred
32 Alternative 2, under this one, NMFS will reclaim shares from
33 shareholder accounts that are not compliant with requirements that
34 will be set in this amendment.

35

36 The Preferred Option 2a would give, quote, unquote, a grace period
37 of one year following the effective date of the final rule
38 implementing these requirements, and so that would be initially,
39 once, you know, the program gets started, but, if subsequently
40 someone became non-compliant, that would be addressed in Preferred
41 Alternative 3.

42

43 After implementation of this amendment, if a shareholder account
44 is no longer in compliance with the requirements, the owners of
45 the account must divest of their shares, or the shares will be
46 reclaimed by NMFS, and the preferred option is that the shares
47 would be reclaimed one year following the non-compliant status,
48 and so these were the preferred alternatives that the council

1 selected.

2
3 The AP discussed the divestment provisions at length, and
4 essentially highlighted the hardship, and indicated that a one-
5 year grace period before divestment may not be sufficient in some
6 instances. For example, in the case of a death, or of boat damage,
7 the AP felt that, you know, a longer time period should be needed
8 to allow for orderly, if you would, divestment.

9
10 A second point that was discussed by the AP is they noted that a
11 fisherman who plans to retire, but wants to let's say support
12 younger fishermen, who do not perhaps have the financial resources
13 to buy everything at once, would not be able to sell progressively,
14 like in installments, with, you know, a one-year grace period, and
15 perhaps a longer time period would allow them to divest and sell
16 in installments their shareholdings, and so these were two of the
17 main points that the AP discussed when it came to the length of
18 the divestment grace period offered in this amendment.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Dr. Diagne. Captain Walker.

21
22 **MR. WALKER:** I'm trying to delve it out here from Preferred
23 Alternative 3. When is the start of the no longer in compliance?
24 When would the clock start running? Is that after your first year,
25 and then you get another year? Is this two, or is this one? I'm
26 not sure how we establish the compliance date.

27
28 **DR. DIAGNE:** Preferred Alternative 3 deals with what happens once
29 the program, I mean this amendment, has been implemented. Let's
30 say that, when the amendment is implemented, the account holder is
31 in compliance. They have a permit, and then, three years down the
32 line, they decide, for whatever reason, to sell their permit, to
33 no longer have a permit. Once they are notified by the agency
34 that they are no longer in compliance, then the one-year clock
35 starts from there right.

36
37 Preferred Alternative 2 deals with what happens when we implement
38 this amendment, because, at that time, we will look around and
39 say, okay, this fisherman is not in compliance, and that fisherman
40 would have one year to be in compliance, meaning to get a permit
41 or else, but, for someone who is compliant, when the amendment is
42 implemented, that person may fall out of compliance in three, four,
43 or five years, and that's what Preferred Alternative 3 does, and
44 so one at the onset and one down the line, once the program is
45 implemented.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Diagne, for explaining that.
48 Just me, I mean, I tend to be in favor of trying to offer

1 flexibility for people that do have hardships there. I mean, I
2 recognize that the preferred option that we have on the table is
3 one year right now, but I tend to lean towards being a little bit
4 more flexible, but that's just me, and clearly the council chose
5 the Preferred Alternative 3, which would be one year, but maybe
6 two years could be something that the council would be willing to
7 entertain, but maybe not. Mr. Sanchez.

8
9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I agree with that. Maybe a little more
10 time, and maybe we'll get some comment to that effect, and the
11 reason being as we dramatically reduce some of our quotas,
12 deepwater and shallow-water, and then the impacts to shares, it
13 just doesn't seem to be very compatible to try to accommodate new
14 entrants at a time when you're dramatically reducing the quota.

15
16 Conversely, like in red grouper, where we've dramatically
17 increased the quota, it has its effect on the share prices, and
18 then you're forcing somebody to exit the fishery at the time when
19 the prices are most, you know, depressed.

20
21 I'm a little sympathetic to that. I'm not opposed to what we're
22 trying to do, but I think we do need to be mindful of those things
23 happening in conjunction with this, and just -- You know, that
24 there's going to be some financial consequences.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, John. Dr. Banks and Mr. Strelcheck.

27
28 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and so I appreciate those comments. I also just
29 want to throw out there, for consideration, that I think a year is
30 plenty of time to divest.

31
32 That being said, we've also talked about an exemption process, or
33 having something where the fishermen can come and say, hey, it's
34 going to take me an extra six months or whatever to do this, and
35 then, that way, you still have the year that's like the hard I'm
36 not compliant, and I'm just not doing it, but you give them the
37 option. If there is something that is extreme, there is an option
38 to extend that time.

39
40 I mean there's an appeals process now, right, and so I don't know
41 that you -- That we need to set a two-year, and I don't have my
42 mind made up on that. I don't know that we need to move past the
43 one year. I personally think that's enough time in this fishery
44 to sell your shares. They do it every year now, currently, when
45 you get your new allocation, et cetera, and so I don't know.
46 That's just something to consider, and we might -- Instead of
47 moving the default time, have an appeals process.

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Jessica Stephen has her hand raised, and so she
4 could speak after me. Just a couple of comments. One, you know,
5 I appreciate the AP's recommendation, but I do have concerns of is
6 it really accomplishing what we're trying to accomplish with this,
7 which is move the quota into the hands of the fishermen, right,
8 and then, from the divestment standpoint, I'm certainly not averse
9 to a longer period of time.

10
11 At least with the non-compliant status, I think one year actually
12 equates to two years, right, because of the time period for the
13 permit to expire, and be renewed, and so it's actually a longer
14 period of time, even though we're only referring to it as a one-
15 year for non-compliance, and Jessica may be able to add more to
16 that.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that's a good way of explaining that.
19 Dr. Stephen.

20
21 **DR. STEPHEN:** I was going to speak also to the fact that the one
22 year is in reality two years since they were last fishing, and so
23 it's been a while since I looked at this amendment, but I believe
24 that we were considering renewable permits as still meeting the
25 status, because we don't want to have, if there's a time lag
26 between renewing your permits, to have your account flipping in
27 and out of a status, and so you have the entire year of expiration,
28 and then your permit would terminate.

29
30 That's when you would lose the permit, if you didn't renew it, and
31 so then your hurdle actually to get back into the fishery is much
32 larger too, because you would have to purchase a limited access
33 permit for someone to get into it. This was the reason behind we
34 said the one year after the permit no longer met that requirement,
35 because of that year of expiration.

36
37 The other scenario would be if someone was selling their permit,
38 but then they know what their intention is to do, and I'm not sure
39 about giving the two years, when they have an intention to get out
40 of the fishery by selling their permit, and I'll just remind
41 everyone, and I believe it was January 2024 presentation that I
42 gave, has a lot of this outlined, if people need a refresher, and
43 it has different examples of how different actions for permit
44 requirements between the account, the shares, or the allocation
45 can result in different impacts to the different types of players
46 within the IFQ system.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Jessica. Mr. Sanchez.

1
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and it also occurred to me something else that
3 might require us to maybe lengthen the time is what if there's
4 another government shutdown, and they don't reach a budget here
5 shortly, and there's another shutdown, and then that eats up a lot
6 more time.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Kesley.

9
10 **DR. BANKS:** Aren't there mechanisms in place when there's a
11 government shutdown, and delayed permits, and we're sending out -
12 - I guess I'm looking at Mara or Andy for that, but isn't there
13 already a mechanism in place for potential shutdowns?

14
15 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, I guess I'll just say that we try not to penalize
16 people if we're not there to do the work, and so, I mean, this is
17 like a big what-if, and like somebody is into the end of their two
18 years, and, all of a sudden, they try to get a permit transfer,
19 and we're closed, and so we can't do it.

20
21 I mean, I think we would look at it and be like, well, they
22 submitted this application, and we're giving them the permit, and
23 like we weren't there to actually -- But that's a lot of steps,
24 right, to actually make that a thing.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

27
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm happy to share out the Fishery
29 Bulletin guidance, if you guys want to see it, but we sent
30 something out similar to that during the previous shutdown.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

33
34 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I agree there was -- They did that on the
35 permit renewals, right, Andy, where they said that, if you're in
36 the queue, we're not going to count this government shutdown
37 against you, and I think that would most likely apply here.

38
39 You know, I don't know if I support holding up any progress at all
40 in IFQ trying to think of every possible scenario in the universe
41 that might affect somebody, and so I don't -- That one there's not
42 enough to change my outlook on it.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. That was probably a good point to
45 get back to Dr. Diagne with the presentation.

46
47 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, you know, as this document progresses, if
48 the council wants to revisit the time period, I mean the amendment,

1 there was an option that lengthened it to two years instead of
2 one. Yes, for the permit, it always says valid or renewable, and
3 so, as mentioned by Mr. Strelcheck and Jessica, that renewability
4 year is still counted in, and so that's an extra year.

5
6 This was the last action in the document, and the last, I guess,
7 points of discussion raised by the AP. The remainder of the
8 presentation, those slides were there just for your information,
9 essentially, listing the actions and alternatives in the document,
10 and so I'm going to stop here, Mr. Chair.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Further discussion around the table
13 about kind of these draft options that we have before us? I think
14 Dr. Diagne, and Dr. Stephen, is probably looking for a little bit
15 of direction on some of these items here. I think we've kind of
16 addressed a couple of them, relative to exploring the dealer permit
17 a little bit more, relative to this divestment, you know, and we've
18 kind of talked about that a little bit here, realizing that, in
19 reality, it's two years, and so maybe we're okay there, and we
20 kind of talked about other mechanisms that are kind of built in.
21 Any further discussion here? Dr. Banks.

22
23 **DR. BANKS:** I will admit that I, obviously, am not a commercial
24 fisherman, but I am not sure how the dealer personally fits into
25 this. I am struggling with any of the landings, or the activity
26 requirement, and how that would manifest in these documents, and
27 so, if anybody has maybe some insight, or creative ideas, I would
28 personally like to see a little bit of discussion around that,
29 because I do not understand, and cannot come up with anything.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

32
33 **MR. WALKER:** So, at first, I was going along with you there on
34 that. I wondered if this dealer thing is going to be kind of a
35 can of worms. Does it have to be addressed here, or can
36 we take that out and do work on that later, or do we have to do
37 that?

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** No, and this is an AP recommendation. We
40 currently have -- You know, we've worked through selecting our
41 preferreds here, but it's an AP recommendation that's up for
42 discussion.

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** I think there's a lot of work to be done around the
45 dealer thing. It's going to take some time, probably, and I don't
46 see an easy solution there, but, as far as the participation thing
47 goes, to Dr. Banks' statement, you know, the non-participants are
48 the ones that our people regard as the issue here, and so that's

1 why we're trying to get at some kind of a participation
2 requirement, in some way, in some fashion.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks.

5

6 **DR. BANKS:** But if you're truly vertically integrated, you would
7 have a permit and landings, correct, and so the dealer aspect
8 should technically be taken care of if you are truly landing.

9

10 I think that's where I'm getting hung up, versus someone that just
11 has shares, that are not actively fishing them, so fish can come
12 through their fish house, whereas I see, at least with capitalism,
13 someone else is fishing, and now you have a partnership, and maybe
14 I'm thinking about that too simply, but, with the truly vertical
15 integration, you would have the participation, and so I'm not sure
16 where I'm rectifying, in my head, adding the dealer.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ed.

19

20 **MR. WALKER:** So the dealers, a lot of them that I know, are -- You
21 know, the fish house owns all that stuff, and they have -- They
22 distribute it out to their boats to use, but a non-participant can
23 go buy a dealer permit and get himself right out of it. Currently,
24 anybody can buy a dealer permit, and, if we leave that as an
25 option, to not be caught up in this, or impact you, I think a lot
26 of speculators and investors in this fishery just buy a dealer
27 permit to keep their program rolling.

28

29 **DR. BANKS:** Right, and so in your -- Sorry, C.J. In your scenario
30 one, they're vertically integrated. They have landings, and
31 they're getting fish through their fish house, but they are
32 distributing it to their boats, versus, in your scenario two, they
33 are just the dealer, and they are not actively fishing, and then
34 distributing, and so I think, in option two, they're not, in my
35 mind right now, an active participant in the fishery part.

36

37 They are selling the fish, but, at that point, where are we cutting
38 it off? If you have a restaurant that you want to sell fish, or
39 you have family members you want to sell fish too, and like at
40 what point do we cut it off, and so, for me, I think I'm thinking
41 more simply. An active participant is fishing in the fishery.
42 I'm open to discussion on that definition, Ed.

43

44 **MR. WALKER:** The speculators aren't selling fish either. They're
45 selling allocation, and that's all they sell. That's my point,
46 and so those -- That's the goal here, is to address that, and not
47 people that participate, but there's a certain element of the
48 fishery that sells allocation for a job, and, if we leave the door

1 open, and just let them buy a dealer permit, nothing will change.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Diagne and Mr. Strelcheck.

4
5 **DR. DIAGNE:** I'm just trying to understand better Dr. Banks' point,
6 because sometimes you could be vertically integrated, but the
7 businesses have separate names, meaning I have a business, for
8 whatever reason, that's, you know, the fish house. Then, if I get
9 shares, and I have let's say three vessels, and each one of those
10 vessels may or may not be under a different company name, but the
11 fact remains that, you know, the dealer at the top gets all the
12 shares and then distributes the annual allocation to their vessels,
13 but, for business reasons, probably liability and other things,
14 the names are different, and sometimes the ownership is slightly
15 different, and who knows.

16
17 So, in that case, I mean, practically, functionally, it is
18 vertically integrated, but, if you came and said everybody needs
19 to have a permit, then, at the top, essentially, that master
20 account, if you would, or that parent account, may not be able to
21 qualify, and so I don't know if that helps in this discussion of
22 vertical integration.

23
24 **DR. BANKS:** Sorry, C.J. It does. I'm just thinking, no matter
25 what we do, some of these business models are just going to have
26 to change, right? We're changing this program, potentially, and
27 so they're going to have to change no matter what, and so, if
28 you're vertically integrated, and you go through the method, or
29 the scenario you have, they may have to change where they're
30 submitting them.

31
32 We were also talking about the shares earlier, as we were talking
33 in red grouper, or the accounts earlier we were talking in red
34 grouper, where, I mean, you're going to have to have a permit to
35 land, right, and so the dealer is going to have to change his
36 accounts, or the business model is going to have to change, period,
37 to be able to prove an activity requirement. No?

38
39 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes. Understood. No matter what you decide as a
40 council, the industry is going to have to change, but, I mean,
41 let's say the question I guess that you are discussing is how much
42 change, and in what direction, and that's, I guess, for you guys
43 to determine. However you determine it at the end of the day,
44 that's what the amendment would reflect.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

47
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think we all agree, around this table, that the

1 pure shareholder that doesn't have a permit, that's leasing to
2 unrelated accounts, is what we're really trying to address here,
3 right? The challenge is, and Jessica has given presentations on
4 it, there's tens of -- Maybe hundreds of different ways people
5 operate within this system, and so I just caution us to not over
6 generalize.

7
8 For example, you could have a dealer that has multiple businesses,
9 and has their permits for a vessel, right, and they move allocation
10 from their dealer or shareholder account to that vessel, but
11 they've also invested capital in this fishery to also distribute
12 that quota to vessels that are unrelated to them, right, and so
13 that's the vertical integration that we're also talking about,
14 which is there's a relatedness, and people that actually are
15 working with their business to actually sell the landings back to
16 them, based on the quota they hold.

17
18 I think their concern is mostly then what is the use-it-or-lose-
19 it provision going to look like if we go down the road farther,
20 because there are ways of, obviously, moving quota, and
21 shareholdings, into different businesses based on permit holdings,
22 but, if there's a use-it-or-lose-it provision that also comes along
23 with it, how does that ultimately affect their business, from a
24 dealer standpoint, and so I just want to acknowledge that, and
25 certainly it's complicated, but I think we're all in the same --
26 We all have the same goal. It's just a matter of how we achieve
27 it.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Okay, and so it
30 seems to me that it is at least worth exploring this a bit more,
31 Dr. Diagne. Maybe we could get that at a later meeting, to
32 understand a little bit more about the nuances of what we're
33 talking about here relative to a dealer permit. I think that makes
34 sense to me, and I'm seeing heads nod around the table. Captain
35 Walker.

36
37 **MR. WALKER:** I agree. I would love to see some options and
38 alternatives to address what we're trying to do with dealer
39 permits, and what we're trying to address, because there's some
40 overlap there, and it's kind of complicated, but we're going to -
41 - I think we're going to have to figure out something, and so have
42 some directed conversation about that particular issue, maybe.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Captain Walker, and, obviously, we
45 haven't selected a preferred, right, for Action 2. This is related
46 to that, and it could also be related to Action 1, and so it's
47 kind of looking like further evaluation of this might impact other
48 actions that we've already selected preferreds for, Dr. Diagne,

1 potentially.

2
3 I guess I'm wondering, because we're going to explore this a little
4 bit more, and I didn't hear too much appetite about hardship
5 exemptions, or anything along those lines, for extending that time
6 period, and so I don't know how much we need to look into that in
7 further detail, but what would be your suggestion path, suggested
8 pathway, forward here for us to kind of get out of this quagmire
9 and actually try to move something here?

10
11 **DR. DIAGNE:** I'm not sure that I have a suggestion that would
12 qualify, but it seems, to me, that exploring the dealer permit for
13 Actions 1 and 2, for both of them, because, if you require a permit
14 in Action 1 then you shut the door for everything down the line,
15 right, and so exploring the possibility of having a dealer permit,
16 with or without a permit, with or without some level of
17 participation, meaning processing IFQ species, with some
18 thresholds, and that would be, as you suggested, the first thing.

19
20 As far as the time period, the amendment already includes an option
21 that you didn't pick, which was two years, and so, if you so chose
22 at the time, you could revise your preferred and go with two years,
23 and so it seems, to me, the bulk of our effort would be to offer
24 options that can, essentially, I guess, protect some of these
25 businesses, if you would, you know, the vertical integration,
26 dealership and boats and shares and the like.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I guess, along those lines, Dr. Diagne, we
29 haven't selected a preferred for Action 3 either, which, you know,
30 consideration of a control date, which would also impact Action 1
31 and 2, potentially, and so I didn't hear too much discussion about
32 that, and so I'm trying to help give you a little direction on
33 that. Was there any appetite around the table? I mean, I think
34 it does make sense to have -- We're loosely using the word control
35 date, and do you have something?

36
37 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, I mean, a suggestion would be that we've
38 been down this road before, and, at the end of the day, it was
39 dropped, because, the minute you do that, then, you know, if I'm
40 right at the cusp, is that fair to me, and so on and so forth, and
41 so I would suggest that we put the bulk of our effort, if you
42 would, on the dealer permit and looking at the business structures.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That sounds like a plan to me. Mr. Strelcheck.

45
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Apologies if it was mentioned. Did the AP discuss
47 at all entities that have quota banks in the system currently and
48 any concerns about those?

1
2 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes. The AP did discuss, and part of the reason why
3 it's not included in this presentation here is that they made a
4 motion, but in the discussion for Amendment 60, but, because 60
5 was not, you know, on the agenda here, but we can discuss it.

6
7 I mean, this is an introduction for it, and they did have a motion
8 suggesting that, whatever it is to be distributed, you know,
9 including the shares collected from inactive accounts, non-
10 compliant shares from divested accounts, et cetera, to be all given
11 to a quota pool and explore then, you know, creation of quota banks
12 and the like.

13
14 That was where the bulk of the discussion on quota bank was, and
15 it was mentioned also that, you know, whatever exemptions, or
16 carve-outs, and, I mean, I'm looking for a different term, and so,
17 you know, the eligibility of non-profit entities, to use, you know,
18 a larger term, be considered somewhat, and Mr. Sanchez touched on
19 that point.

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

22
23 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I agree that it would be good to leave some
24 kind of a door open for legitimate quota banks and legitimate co-
25 ops. It doesn't make sense to leave another loophole open for
26 everybody to start their own co-op, or so-called quota bank, and
27 continue status quo, and so I'm in support of considering quota
28 banks and co-ops, exempting them, but I would suggest that they
29 would have to be vetted in some way, and maybe even approved by
30 the council for their exemption. I don't know. I mean, if I'm a
31 guy that makes a living leasing quota, and I can just start a co-
32 op and keep doing my thing, how are you going to address that?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That's a fair point, Captain Walker. I mean,
35 I -- We tend to agree that there are certain non-profits that are
36 involved in the fishery, trying to help accomplish the goals that
37 we have for IFQ, but vetting -- A lot of this can be subjective,
38 I guess, and so -- But I do think maybe it's worth a further
39 exploration, but I see a lot of concerned faces at the table right
40 now, and I'm going to go to Mara before I go to Dr. Banks.

41
42 **MS. LEVY:** Well, I mean, I would just say that you have to set
43 standards that can be applied to everyone, right, and so you can
44 develop that, and you can set the standards, but they have to be
45 able to be applied evenly, right, and you can't just like make,
46 like you said, a subjective decision about who is legitimate.

47
48 **DR. BANKS:** I'm not really sure we want to be in the business of

1 doing the vetting either. We seem to be already weighed down with
2 things for the fishery, and so I would highly discourage us being
3 the vetting party.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Anson.

6
7 **MR. ANSON:** Just a thought. You know, I tend to agree that, to
8 the extent that we can stay focused on the primary issues, but, if
9 we want to still entertain quota banks, maybe, instead of us just
10 looking at personal information, you know, and that being the
11 criteria, but maybe looking at it has to have a certain number of
12 individual shareholders that would be submitting shares into this
13 entity that is vetted, or at least established, and maybe they
14 have to maintain, again, a certain number of minimum shareholders
15 that would be supplying allocation.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. I see where you're going
18 there. Mr. Strelcheck.

19
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** My suggestion is, since we're going to look at
21 the issue of the dealer a little bit more carefully, that maybe we
22 can just have staff consider the concept of a quota bank. We know
23 we have at least one, and maybe others, that are operating within
24 the system now, and what the implications of that would be, based
25 on 59A and other amendments, and if there's a process or anything
26 we would want to at least consider or not going forward.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I tend to agree.
29 I would think that, maybe kind of whenever we're able to see
30 something, you know, relative to the dealer information, maybe
31 this can be part of that kind of discussion, and then we can kind
32 of go from there, but I'm going to look to you, Dr. Diagne.

33
34 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Chair. We can go from there. Just a
35 question, and probably for Mr. Strelcheck. In discussions for
36 Amendment 60, I think there was mention of a NMFS-administered
37 quota bank. Would that still be in the cards, or has, I guess,
38 the environment changed so that that would no longer be something
39 to be explored down the line?

40
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think the devil is in the details with regard
42 to the cost of administering it, and other factors, and the
43 complexity of it, and so I wouldn't rule it out, but I would want,
44 obviously, to know more before saying we could move forward with
45 it or not.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. This was a good discussion. Dr.
48 Diagne, do you think you have as much as we can give you right

1 now? I mean, we can certainly bring this up in Full Council, if
2 you need additional things here, but I'm looking to you to see if
3 you have what you need for the time being.
4

5 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, I mean, additional suggestions during Full
6 Council, if they come up, would be welcome, but, for the time
7 being, what we get from this is concentrate on looking at the AP
8 motions relative to the dealer permit, and also begin to think
9 about how possibly to include let's say non-profit organizations,
10 in the general sense, quota banks and the likes, in this, if we
11 have any avenues of doing so, and so those are the two main topics
12 that we'll be exploring.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Diagne. All right. We
15 definitely have more time allotted to this topic if there's further
16 discussion. Looking around, and not seeing any, okay. Thank you,
17 Dr. Diagne. Mr. Chair, we were scheduled for a short break after
18 this, but we're ahead of schedule. I'm curious what you think.
19 Okay we're going to keep going.
20

21 Okay. A little side discussion here. All right. I think we're
22 going to move into the next agenda item here, and then we will
23 probably take a break after that, and so we're going to go into
24 Agenda Item IX. We are going to work with Ms. Gardiner, receiving
25 a presentation on regional management of greater amberjack of the
26 recreational sector, and I'll kick it over to you for the action
27 guide.
28

29 **PRESENTATION: REGIONAL MANAGEMENT OF GREATER AMBERJACK FOR THE**
30 **RECREATIONAL SECTOR**
31

32 **MS. SARAH GARDINER:** Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Today, I'm
33 going to provide a presentation on current greater amberjack
34 management measures, a summary of the ongoing work that may inform
35 greater amberjack stock status, and highlight the key decision
36 points necessary for regional management.
37

38 The committee should consider the work in progress for greater
39 amberjack and the necessary decision points for regional
40 management. The committee should discuss the information
41 presented, ask question, and recommend next steps, as needed.
42 We'll just pull up the presentation, and we can start on slide 2.
43 Great. Thank you.
44

45 Today, I kind of just want to provide a high-level summary of the
46 history of management, kind of look at the current timeline for
47 the Greater Amberjack Count review, the assessment, and catch
48 advice timing that may be used to inform some of the management

1 advice that we want moving forward, and then present a figure that
2 I put together that kind of highlights the key decision points for
3 the state or regional management.

4
5 I just wanted to throw this up here as what we have as our current
6 management measures. I will highlight that, in 2023, Amendment 54
7 went through, which adjusted our allocation to 80 percent
8 recreational and 20 percent commercial, and it also revised our
9 ACL to 404,000 pounds, which was a significant decrease from what
10 it was previously, and I kind of have a figure that details that
11 and then highlights some of the other management measures that
12 we've taken since, over the last couple decades.

13
14 For some background, I mean, I think most of you are pretty
15 familiar with this stock, but greater amberjack is overfished.
16 The overfished determination has been in place for quite some time,
17 despite the attempts to end overfishing, and, ultimately, it would
18 require an updated assessment to kind of determine if it was a
19 rebuilt status or we were looking at -- If the stock had been
20 rebuilt or not.

21
22 We have quite short seasons, due to the low ACLs. We have some
23 difficulty constraining our landings to the ACL, which then trigger
24 these accountability measures and paybacks, and so there's been
25 some ongoing interest in exploring alternative management
26 approaches that may improve the outcomes and allow for some
27 additional stability for anglers when looking at this stock.

28
29 One of the avenues that the committee and the council are
30 interested in investigating is state or regional management, which
31 may offer some more flexibility in setting seasons and regulations,
32 as well as some ability to tailor management measures to specific
33 regions and/or states, and so this link here is just kind of the
34 2025 overfishing and overfished stocks map for all of the regions
35 in the United States, if you're interested.

36
37 We have some historically-low ACLs compared to the time series,
38 and so we can see that in the green in the far right in the last
39 couple of years. This was when Amendment 54 was put into place,
40 following the results of the stock assessment from SEDAR 70.

41
42 Over the last few decades, there's been several management levers
43 that have been pulled to try to improve stock condition and stock
44 status, including size limits, bag limit changes, season length
45 changes, but, ultimately, we haven't really seen a change in the
46 stock so much.

47
48 We know that the Greater Amberjack Count is going on, and I'm going

1 to talk about that a little bit more, and the current timeline for
2 that, and how that information is going to be presented to you
3 all, but hopefully some of that information could be used to inform
4 the next stock assessment, but one of the things that I want to
5 highlight, when we're looking at our stock assessment, and I know
6 that this was -- There was some frustration about the data that
7 was used for our landings, and I go into that in the next slide,
8 but SEDAR 70 used MRIP-FES calibrated landings for Florida,
9 Alabama, and Mississippi, and then Louisiana and Texas uses their
10 own data units.

11
12 In our next stock assessment, one of the things that we need to
13 think about is, as Mississippi and Alabama are moving to creel
14 units, you know, what that's going to look like in the assessment,
15 and that's something that will come out in like, you know, in the
16 data workshop, as we start looking at that assessment a little bit
17 more in-depth, but just something to keep in the back of your mind
18 as some of those things are revolving in the pipeline.

19
20 This is something that John presented back in April 2025. I wanted
21 to present kind of an updated landings figure that we have here.
22 This is from the Science Center as of August 2025. The 2024-2025
23 landings are preliminary, noting that there's probably a couple
24 waves that were included in this, but Mr. Strelcheck mentioned
25 earlier today that this data may be available in April 2026, and
26 so a little bit more finalized, to inform some of the recreational
27 season for amberjack.

28
29 One of the things that I do want to highlight, when you're looking
30 at this figure on the left, is you can see that Florida does have
31 a majority of the landings here in most years.

32
33 I think it's important that we think about that when we're looking
34 at historical landings, and, if we're thinking of decision points
35 for state and regional management, how this is going to play into
36 some of the allocation discussions that we're going to be having.

37
38 On the right-hand side in the table, we have individual years of
39 landings for the private rec and for-hire sector. We have
40 predominantly private recreational landings, with interannual
41 variability, and kind of my rationale for bringing this forward is
42 there was a lot of discussion around this figure in April of 2025,
43 when this was first discussed, about the recreational landing
44 estimates and whether folks felt like these were an accurate
45 representation of the landings.

46
47 This is not a problem I have a solution for today, but it's
48 something that we do need to consider when we're looking at all

1 the decision points for state and regional management, because, if
2 the committee feels that, you know, the data may not be wholly
3 representative of the landings, when we're looking at the broader
4 decision factors, are we basing some of our allocation decisions,
5 or I guess division between state and regional lines, based on
6 historical landings, and, you know, this is the data that we have.
7 This is the data that we're using to monitor.

8
9 This isn't particularly going to change as of right now, but there
10 are things going on that may be used to inform this, such as, you
11 know, the Greater Amberjack Count may be a better way to get
12 abundance estimates.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

15
16 **MR. WALKER:** I'm looking at this chart, and is there any
17 explanation for why there's virtually no Texas landings compared
18 to the other states?

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We are down our Texas -- There he is.

21
22 **MS. GARDINER:** He's getting coffee. That's very important.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Geeslin.

25
26 **MR. WALKER:** I was asking her.

27
28 **MS. GARDINER:** Well, while he is getting situated, I have the same
29 question for Chris.

30
31 **MR. GEESLIN:** You're interrupting my tea hour. Why is there no
32 Texas landings? We may have gone a year where we didn't intercept,
33 as these are so infrequently landed, but I would have to -- Give
34 me a minute, and I can go back. What timeframe are we looking at?

35
36 **UNIDENTIFIED:** (The comment is not audible on the recording.)

37
38 **MR. GEESLIN:** Okay. I'll get back to you after my tea. Thank
39 you.

40
41 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'll have to look at the landings table, and pull
42 it up. I'm pretty sure we have some landings, but they're dwarfed
43 by the amount that's within that, because of the season duration
44 that had been truncated to two months at that point, you know, and
45 so, really, it's become a rare-event species that you're going to
46 have landings from that season that are so small.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I think Captain Walker is satisfied.

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, in 2024-2025, we still had -- We had the May
3 season, which was the previous fishing year, and then we reopened
4 for the September season, and I'll have to look at it separately.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Back to you Sarah.

7
8 **MS. GARDINER:** Great. Thank you, and so I just -- I wanted to
9 just -- These figures in this table are kind of something that we
10 need to kind of keep in mind. I think, you know, people have
11 qualms with some of this information as it's presented, almost
12 every time it gets brought forward, and so it's something to
13 consider when we're looking at the broader picture of decision
14 points for state and regional management.

15
16 Many folks are pretty familiar with the Greater Amberjack Count
17 effort, but, for those of you who are not, I just wanted to
18 highlight some background. It is administered through Mississippi
19 and Alabama Sea Grant to provide more refined abundance estimates
20 of amberjack in the Gulf and South Atlantic regions.

21
22 It's fairly similar to the Great Red Snapper Count, for those of
23 you that are familiar with that, and this is something that's going
24 to be reviewed in late March 2026 by the CIE and select Gulf and
25 South Atlantic SSC members, and this will be hosted in the Gulf
26 Council office, and so folks can kind of tune into that.

27
28 I don't have any preliminary idea of what the results are going to
29 be, but that's something that's in the pipeline that can be used
30 to inform some of these decision points that we may want to
31 reference as we're moving forward.

32
33 While we're thinking of different decision points, and how we're
34 going to move forward with state and regional management, I wanted
35 to highlight, you know, this broader greater amberjack workplan
36 that we have going on to see the key information that we have being
37 brought through the process that may be used to inform some of
38 these decisions.

39
40 In February 2026, the SSC is going to review the amberjack interim
41 assessment. Then, in late March, the CIE and select Gulf and South
42 Atlantic SSC members are reviewing the , the Greater Amberjack
43 Count, which will go in front of the Gulf SSC in May, and then the
44 Reef Fish AP in May, and likely, you know, we'll get some results
45 through the committee and council process in June.

46
47 Then, hopefully from that, we're able to send some of this
48 information to the Science Center to be used for the assessment,

1 which I think is currently in scheduled 2028, and then hopefully
2 we can get some catch advice coming from that.

3
4 From the catch advice, then we would be looking at shifting, you
5 know, into some of our management advice decisions, and what I
6 want to highlight is changing management advice, and looking at
7 broader larger-scale changes in management regimes, such as state
8 and regional management, may be a little bit challenging without
9 updated catch advice. It's not impossible to do, but it's
10 something that would be easier as we're looking for this
11 information to flow through the pipeline.

12
13 When I was thinking about this presentation, and, you know, John
14 provided a lot of this information back in April, I wanted to put
15 together a way to visualize, and better depict, all of the
16 different kinds of decisions that are going to feed into regional
17 or state management for greater amberjack.

18
19 I think, when you look at this figure, the key thing that I want
20 to take away is that it's not necessarily a flow chart, where we're
21 looking at, you know, we can make an easy decision on management
22 units, and it's an if, and then then, and then we move to the next
23 one, and then we move to the next one.

24
25 It's really a lot of very different decision factors that are very
26 intertwined with one another. For example, when we're looking at
27 allocation, and I mentioned this, you know, are we going to be
28 using historical landings? Are we looking at biomass coming out
29 of the Greater Amberjack Count? What time series are we using?

30
31 If we're looking at historical landings, then we kind of are
32 hopping over to data currencies, because we have the concurrent
33 transition from Mississippi and Alabama to creel units, and are
34 the other states going to be calibrated to FES? Kind of, you know,
35 a lot of these things feed into one another, and they're not very
36 easy to isolate from one another.

37
38 Moving through the process, we may want to take a second to look
39 at what information is coming through the interim assessment, and
40 the Greater Amberjack Count, before we start deciding some of this
41 information, and so this is just a way to, you know, visually
42 depict all of the decisions that need to be made and kind of how
43 they interact with one another.

44
45 I mentioned this just on the last slide, and I think, you know, at
46 this point, staff's recommendation may be to wait a little bit for
47 some more updated catch advice, or at minimum the Greater Amberjack
48 Count information to come through, before directing staff to

1 develop an analysis based on some of these decision tools.

2
3 Although not impossible to do at the moment, I just think we have
4 a lot of information moving through the pipeline right now that
5 the committee and the council may be interested in integrating
6 into some of these decision factors, and so, if the if the
7 committee is interested in moving forward, and continuing to make
8 movement on this, you know, they could direct staff to review the
9 count, and then start kind of piecing together some options for
10 some of these decision factors, like management units for states
11 versus regions, et cetera.

12
13 Ultimately, I think we're looking for a little bit more directive
14 and discussion from the committee on what the next steps are, and
15 the desire is, and timeline is, for that to move forward, and,
16 with that, I'll take any questions, or I'm opening the floor for
17 discussion.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Sarah. Any questions for Sarah, or
20 comments about the presentation? Yes, General Spraggins.

21
22 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Back on the slide where you showed the states
23 by the year, and how much that they had allocated, and it showed
24 2022, and did Mississippi catch two fish or something, and it just
25 blew everything out of the water? I mean, if you look at it
26 there's -- You know, Mississippi is the largest amount, and so
27 they must have caught two fish or something. I don't know.

28
29 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks, General. I think this was a discussion
30 that was pretty lengthy back in April, about that year
31 specifically. Looking at that I can't speak to it.

32
33 **MR. WALKER:** You guys have got some really good fishermen in
34 Mississippi. That's what it is.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Moncrief.

37
38 **MR. MONCRIEF:** Just so we're all on the same page, every instance
39 where Mississippi has an elevated amount was a time where we just
40 intercepted one or two, and so it was a single survey, one or two
41 fish, and the resulting estimate was between 150,000 and 300,000
42 pounds, every time.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you Mr. Moncrief. General.

45
46 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and I wanted to make that statement for
47 one reason, and one reason only. You see where the system is not
48 right, obviously, and it's like Trevor said. When we can catch

1 two fish, and I was joking, but I wasn't joking, and it takes
2 350,000 pounds. That means that the system is so antiquated that
3 we need to do something with it.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dakus.

6
7 **MR. GEESLIN:** Just back to Captain Walker's question about Texas
8 landings, they were extremely low. I'm looking at, oh gosh, 2024,
9 and, Ed, you may have that in your inbox now. This is a
10 presentation we gave at the Biloxi council meeting of rec landings.
11 In, gosh, 2024, a combined 4,000 pounds, and so really low. That's
12 why you're not seeing it on that, even from the private sector, of
13 a tenth of that, 400 pounds.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Schieble.

16
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I appreciate the General's point here,
18 because it's been one of my concerns, that I've really been
19 struggling with since the November council meeting, and I was
20 really appreciative of the fact that all the states came to the
21 table and presented their landings data, but it also became
22 apparent that there's a huge challenge with just surveying this
23 fishery, not only at the MRIP level, but at the state level, with
24 the lack of samples.

25
26 I remember SRFS had I think one estimate, and another eight from
27 MRIP, and, you know, Texas didn't even have for-hire landings, and
28 so, when we start talking about regional management, it's really
29 hard to even think about how do we even allocate something when
30 we're not adequately sampling it in the first place.

31
32 I think you know where I'm at least at is I'm okay with moving
33 forward, and down this path, and it was certainly something that
34 the rec initiative supported, but I also think we need to maybe
35 start looking at alternative ways to manage this fishery that may
36 be less reliant on the fishery-dependent data, because of the
37 uncertainty surrounding this. Maybe the Greater Amberjack Count
38 will be a step in the right direction to help us inform that going
39 forward.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble. Sorry. J.D.

42
43 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To add to Andy's comments,
44 the way I understand it in Louisiana's perspective, and I'm not
45 speaking for the state, the season is September and October, and,
46 in Louisiana, we don't have many landings.

47
48 We don't have much effort, because everyone shifts gears, and goes

1 hunting and to football season, and so we're not going to have
2 much data, to my knowledge, to contribute in September and October,
3 and that's why I keep saying one size doesn't fit all across the
4 Gulf. You know, if we were able to land amberjack in June and
5 July, I'm pretty sure Chris and team would have a lot more landings
6 that we can use for data.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dakus.

9
10 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes, and I agree with both Mr. Strelcheck and
11 Chairman Dugas. I think the effort is on both sides of the
12 equation. We don't see the effort here. We fish through, and now
13 we're seeing longer seasons in red snapper. Folks are shifting,
14 and we see landings drop in the fall.

15
16 Folks are pivoting to other activities, but, at the same time, to
17 Andy's point, we also have less -- Especially in Texas, we double-
18 down our creel efforts during the red snapper season, but we hire
19 these folks in for a period of time, three or four months, and, by
20 that time, you know, they're starting to peel off.

21
22 I think, you know, we've got a unique situation, and certainly a
23 challenge before us, as Andy is pointing out, and some innovative
24 you know ways to look at this, but, from a state perspective, I
25 think we own some of that too, and need to think about, if we're
26 going to, you know, advocate and champion for state management,
27 and you know I am, then we need to think long and hard about how
28 -- What efforts we would put forward to better capture any of those
29 landings, if in fact they're -- We know we're missing some, but,
30 to J.D.'s point, there's also a lack of effort from anglers as
31 well.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I've got a number of hands up here.
34 Mr. Schieble, you're next.

35
36 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so, to fit the conversation, since we're
37 talking about the landings, going back to the November council
38 meeting, for Louisiana, we landed 68,000 pounds, roughly, in 2024,
39 68,059.

40
41 If you go back in time to the start of LA Creel in 2014, we averaged
42 about 164,000 pounds over that time period, but keep in mind, in
43 the part of the presentation that Ms. Gardiner showed us, there's
44 been multiple management changes over that time period that have
45 changed that, and so it ranged from over a quarter-million,
46 actually almost 400,000 pounds in some years, all the way down to
47 the lowest of 25,000 pounds in 2022, and so there's quite the range
48 there.

1
2 Also, most recently, the 2025 season, and so we're talking about
3 that as being preliminary, we only have three weeks that this
4 season was open this past year, and I have -- Right now, I don't
5 have weights, but I have a total of 534 fish, right, and so it's
6 such a minuscule three-week season, at the wrong time of the year,
7 the landings are very low, but it's 534 fish.

8
9 To wrap that up we have approved a motion, the council has, to
10 where we are going to have the state directors present their
11 amberjack landings in association with their red snapper landings
12 at the April meeting coming up, and so, the next meeting, we'll
13 have whatever that 534 fish equals in pounds will be extrapolated
14 at that point, but the hope that the other states will present
15 that, as well as National Marine Fisheries Service can show what
16 the landings are in FES units, too. I have further questions, but
17 I'll wait until we're done with this discussion.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Dr. Allen.

20
21 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you could, Bernie, could you
22 go to slide 5, please? That one. Thank you, and maybe it was
23 already up, and I wasn't looking on the screen.

24
25 You know, the SSC has talked about this stock a lot, and multiple
26 times in my time on the SSC, and it's been through a lot of attempts
27 at management. There's a rebuilding plan there, and then, in 2023,
28 a sixty-plus percent reduction in the ACL.

29
30 As of the last assessment that we had, the stock had not responded
31 to any of those catch reductions, which generated a whole lot of
32 discussion on the SSC, you know, and so I think that's something
33 for us to consider and, to me, where we're at now is that we have
34 a lot of scientific information that's about to come out, with the
35 Greater Amberjack Count and a pending assessment update and stock
36 assessment.

37
38 It seems, to me, that it would make sense, before we consider any
39 management changes, to really look at how the stock has responded
40 to this pretty drastic change in management that has happened in
41 the last few years, and I'm -- You know, I'm hoping, of course,
42 that we see some response in that stock, and, if we don't, then
43 it's going to be a different conversation, but hopefully we will
44 see that, and so I'm not opposed to the state management concept.

45
46 I think actually I would kind of term it -- I like the term "co-
47 management", because that state management is really co-
48 management, co-managing with the council, and allowing the states

1 more flexibility in the seasons and those kinds of things, and I
2 think that's a really good concept, and it has shown some success
3 in some cases, but, at this point, it seems, to me, like we should
4 wait and see what's going to happen with the Greater Amberjack
5 Count and the stock assessment that's coming up, and so thank you.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Mr. Sanchez.
8

9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** The slide before that showed the state estimated
10 landings by state, if that thing doesn't screen the need for
11 SEFHIER, I don't know what does. I mean, that would have been a
12 tremendously useful data point right now in informing perhaps what
13 -- Shedding some light on what's going on there, and so I would
14 say -- I'm going to give SEFHIER another plug, and this would be
15 a perfect example of where it would be absolutely useful.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I have Kevin, and
18 then Dr. Banks.
19

20 **MR. ANSON:** Beginning with the last meeting for sure, and maybe
21 even a little bit longer than that, and then certainly at this
22 meeting it's been mentioned a couple of times, is the reliance
23 upon fishery-independent data for us to kind of be looking at and
24 such, and I'm just wondering, J.D. or Dr. Simmons, is the PI going
25 to be coming to the council for the Greater Amberjack Count at the
26 April meeting? Could we request them to have a summary? I know
27 they're going to be presenting at the SSC, but maybe they can at
28 least provide a thirty-thousand-foot level of the research and
29 kind of what data might be available that we, or the Science
30 Center, or SSC, would be looking at to help us with that co-
31 management idea that Dr. Allen just talked about.
32

33 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons.
34

35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think
36 -- I don't know about the turnaround on that review, because it's
37 late March, and if that would give the PIs enough time to make any
38 changes where they would want to come back in a public, real
39 public, format and present it that's something I guess we could
40 talk to them about, but I think -- I believe, on Sarah's plan, and
41 where's that flowchart, and what slide was that, that we would be
42 bringing it to the SSC in May, I believe right now.
43

44 I guess, just while I have a mic, if it's okay, as far as fishery-
45 independent indices for AJ, other than the new information I guess
46 we're getting on the amberjack count, I think the G-FISHER -- This
47 is going to be the first time I think we're looking at it, and
48 hopefully we'll get some good information from that in February.

1
2 I think, because the survey is just now expanding more into the
3 western Gulf, and on the shelf and sampling artificial reefs,
4 hopefully we'll have enough information for amberjack, but,
5 because it's kind of in its infancy in the western Gulf, it may
6 have a lot of limitations, and so I just want to set some
7 expectations there.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That's a very good point, Carrie. Okay. Mr.
10 Schieble.

11
12 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so, while we have this slide up, and to
13 the point that Dr. Simmons just made, looking at the timeline here
14 -- You know, this morning we received the SSC report on the lane
15 snapper interim assessment, and we immediately made a motion to
16 start a document for catch advice, or management changes, to that.

17
18 Theoretically, if that were the same scenario, that could take
19 place here when the SSC gets this in February at their meeting,
20 and we could potentially have a motion before a September amberjack
21 season, with some catch advice from the SSC, if that's how things
22 take place, and is that correct in the timeline?

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Rindone, is this a -- For the interim, is
25 this a health check for greater amberjack?

26
27 **MR. RINDONE:** We've requested that it be done in such a way that
28 it's possible to modify catch limits. However, amberjack is still
29 on the rebuilding plan, and so it's ultimately up to the Science
30 Center to determine whether they're comfortable putting forward
31 the catchment recommendation for the SSC to consider.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Froeschke.

34
35 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I guess there's two parts. There's the interim
36 assessment, that's the index-based, but then there's also the
37 information that would involve the amberjack count, and then the
38 subsequent stock assessment. Are you talking about that part being
39 available for September, or are you talking about just the what
40 the SSC is going to look at next month?

41
42 I guess it's my understanding the stock assessment is going to be
43 a longer-term thing. Okay, and so I guess it was a question about
44 new information for September, but I'm making sure that wasn't
45 intended to be based on the amberjack count, the stock assessment,
46 and all that.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** None of that is going to be ready.

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** For clarity, I was speaking just to the interim
3 assessment, that we made a motion for the council.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that's what I thought, too. Okay.
6 Any further discussion here? I know this is a tricky one. Ms.
7 Gardiner, I don't think we're necessarily giving you too much
8 direction here for how to approach this, but I think we all
9 recognize that this is a tricky one.

10
11 I don't know, and I'm looking around the committee here, to see if
12 there's any recommendations. You know, I've heard Dr. Allen
13 highlighting to hold off for at least the Greater Amberjack Count.
14 Mr. Schieble, what have you got?
15

16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'm just taking a stab at this. I think, in the
17 timeline of the council process, let's see how things unfold going
18 forward ahead of potentially a season, or not a season, this year
19 for September, and then potentially have this come back to the
20 council in document format maybe at the October meeting.
21

22 We'll know if we had a season by then, and we could start looking
23 at that, to where we can start picking things that we would like
24 to have in a document, so that our time series falls out similarly
25 to when we would expect catch advice to be coming out of an
26 assessment, the full assessment, including the amberjack count,
27 which is at the end of this, in 2028, I'm guessing when that is
28 right, roughly?
29

30 So, I mean, it takes us a while to develop a document over the
31 course of council time. If we would start maybe with that, in the
32 infancy, in October-ish, maybe, and then we would see it back again
33 the following year, maybe in April of 2027.
34

35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Gardiner.
36

37 **MS. GARDINER:** Thank you. I mean, I think we can bring a document
38 forward, but I don't know that it would say anything much different
39 than what I've outlined in the presentation for the decision
40 factors, without the committee making a clear direction and what
41 they prefer moving forward. I also think, you know, that would be
42 based at that point, for October, off of historical landings data,
43 pending -- Maybe we could include some of the Greater Amberjack
44 Count stuff, and the results coming out of that, but I think
45 there's some uncertainty around that a little bit right now.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Gardiner. To me, it seems like
48 we have a lot of informative information and reviews coming up

1 here in the relatively near future. I mean, in February, we're
2 going to see the -- Well, the SSC is going to see the interim
3 assessment.

4
5 I assume that will come back to the council in April, and so that
6 there will be a decision point there, and then, obviously, you
7 know the Greater Amberjack Count in March. I mean, there's a lot
8 of things that are kicking up, and then I think we start the
9 assessment, the full-fledged stock assessment, at the end of this
10 year, I believe. Dr. Banks.

11
12 **DR. BANKS:** So I just want to remind, or get on the record at this
13 point in the conversation, that, with the rec initiative, we heard
14 a lot about this would be a good pilot species to start looking at
15 regional or co-management.

16
17 We've also heard that the charter fleet is more supportive of going
18 down the amberjack co-management route than they are red snapper,
19 and so there's a lot of, I think, industry support in figuring out
20 why we can't have an amberjack season, or what's happening with
21 amberjack, and so I do think there's also benefit in continuing to
22 push this document forward while we have the momentum of all of
23 this data coming out while we're moving this document forward.

24
25 This might be a way to have this data coming as we're pushing these
26 potential management regimes, and not have a six-year lag between
27 the end of an assessment and the beginning of implementing it, and
28 so, if you're pushing at the same time, I think that might also
29 help, especially since we don't have some strict timeline guidance
30 from the agency in headquarters.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I mean, I guess, the way I see it -- I don't
33 disagree with what you're saying, Dr. Banks in terms of trying to
34 improve timelines. I just don't know what staff can put forward
35 and draft right now, in the absence of this information, as it
36 comes iteratively.

37
38 Like, yes, we'll have one piece of it within the interim
39 assessment, and then maybe there's some bits and pieces that they
40 can pull into a document there, but then that would hold off until
41 we see it in April, and then we're going to have other sources of
42 data that are going to be coming in. I'm just -- I get what -- I
43 get where your head is going on that, to try and kind of streamline
44 this process here. I can see that, from a staff perspective, how
45 that would be tricky though.

46
47 **DR. BANKS:** Just to that point, I think there are some decisions
48 we can make moving this forward that we can -- That may not include

1 the interim assessment. Do we want sector separation? Do we want
2 to look at really allocating between states, or western versus
3 eastern and Gulf, and I think there's some philosophical
4 discussions that can happen there as well. Just putting that out
5 there.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I hear you.

8

9 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Sarah.

10

11 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I hear you. There's a lot -- There
12 definitely a lot of decision points there, and I guess, the way I
13 struggle with it, is, you know, when you're talking about how we
14 would allocate, or anything along those lines, sector separation,
15 I feel like so much of that is going to be informed by a lot of
16 the analyses that we're going to be getting, and I don't want to
17 make rash decisions.

18

19 I feel like we've thrown the kitchen sink at this fishery for over
20 a decade, and it hasn't done anything, and so that's part of -- I
21 mean, I'm in favor of moving forward on this. I'm just trying to
22 put myself in staff's shoes about how they would move forward with
23 some of those things.

24

25 **DR. BANKS:** I agree, and point well made. I'm just saying that we
26 also like to kick this can down the road and wait for the perfect
27 data, and you're as much a researcher as I am, and that's never
28 going to happen.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Point well taken. Mr. Schieble. Sorry. I am
31 going to go Mr. Strelcheck first.

32

33 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So, first, kudos to Sarah for this graphic. I
34 really like this graphic, and I think it's really helpful, in terms
35 of seeing all the decision points, and so, you know, I agree
36 there's information, obviously, that's going to come forward. It
37 doesn't necessarily mean we have to slow down progress on this.

38

39 I think there's also a lot of decision points, and I think where
40 my head is that is there's decision points in terms of what's the
41 catch limit going to be, and how is it going to change, or not
42 change, based on the Greater Amberjack count, the interim analysis,
43 other information, and then, to me, the biggest decision, and
44 challenge, is we've really struggled with this fishery for quite
45 some time.

46

47 MRIP is not adequately monitoring it, but I'm not convinced that
48 the state surveys right now are equipped and ready to adequately

1 monitor it as well, and so having regional management really hinged
2 on the success of the state surveys, and the ability to adequately
3 sample and estimate landings from those surveys, and so could they
4 be better than MRIP? Yes. Are they sufficient for regional
5 management, or some other finer-scale management?
6

7 To be determined, but I think we need to have kind of those level
8 discussions, to really think carefully about this, because,
9 otherwise, you start splitting up and separating sectors, and
10 separating states, or separating regions, and that data, all of a
11 sudden, gets a lot more variable, and uncertain, with some of the
12 surveys that we have for some states relative to others.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.
15

16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, and so I think I agree with what Andy
17 just said, and this graphic here is great, because it really
18 outlines five actions that you would need in the document, at
19 least, right there. That's the template, and, you know, going
20 back to Amendment 50, that's how we started.
21

22 We had more actions than we ended up with in there, and we had
23 multiple allocation decisions to make, and some of those were
24 biomass-based 50 percent, and some were historical landings 50
25 percent, and we ended up going with the Amendment 40 calculations
26 in the end, right, but we had those options in there to start with.
27

28 I think that's what we need in whatever we're going to do with
29 this, is a multitude of options to look at, and multiple actions,
30 and then we can, you know, decide to consider but reject things as
31 we get to that point in time, but we need to start with those to
32 get the process going.
33

34 Back then, with Amendment 50, we had the benefit of being on the
35 back end of a recent stock assessment, right, and so we had just
36 gotten a stock assessment for red snapper then we started on the
37 state management path with that, and so we knew all those things
38 to fill in those blanks where we were working with, but, here,
39 we're in the opposite situation.
40

41 We're on the uphill path to a stock assessment. We're trying to
42 lay out a document, so the timing of that comes out almost
43 simultaneously as we consider what we're going to do before that,
44 with potentially testing out things to get to that point, and so
45 that's the only difference here I see.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Chris. I've got Dr. Banks and Dr.
48 Allen.

1
2 **DR. BANKS:** So I'm going to say the quiet part out loud, but the
3 red snapper count has never actually been integrated into the stock
4 assessment, and so we're going to delay amberjack, looking for an
5 amberjack count recommendation that may or may not get integrated
6 into the stock assessment, and so, at this point, how many more
7 cans do we want to keep kicking, because all of the big ifs are
8 going to stay ifs.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Allen.

11
12 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I think that's a good point, Dr. Banks, and
13 I see your point, Chris, as well, that there's a lot of work that
14 can be done on the frontend to kind of move this along, in
15 anticipation of the new science that's going to come in.

16
17 I had the same thought about the Greater Amberjack Count, because
18 that count, in and of itself, has to be integrated into an
19 assessment at some point, I would think, to be useful for
20 management, or at least inform catch, right, and so it's -- But I
21 but I agree. I like this figure, Sarah, and I think that there's
22 a lot of work that we can do, you know, in the interim to kind of
23 get ready for that new information.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Froeschke.

26
27 **DR. FROESCHKE:** One thing on this, and so the yellow on the left
28 is what we pulled, and that's what we framed in for the flexibility
29 -- You know, the options for the states to control. Is that the
30 suite of options, or is there other hexagons that we should put in
31 there?

32
33 To me, that color, that orangish color, the data currencies and
34 things like that, we can start doing something sooner rather than
35 later, to at least figure those out, but like -- Whether the
36 calibration in the top, you know, what data we would use, and how
37 that -- I mean, that's probably going to be outside of the council
38 discussions, with states and everything else, and so that will
39 probably be a longer conversation, and so, to the extent we can
40 start on those, it probably would be helpful.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I agree with you, Dr. Froeschke, and,
43 even in kind of the last slide, next steps, there's even a
44 recommendation to look at management units, and that's something
45 that could be looked at in the background, and so -- Relative to
46 what John is saying for the data currencies, yes, that's going to
47 be a longer timeframe, and so maybe there's some things that we
48 can look at in the background there, and so get the ball rolling

1 here. J.D.

2

3 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. A question, and maybe it's
4 for Dr. Walter, and I don't know, but will the Great Amberjack
5 Count even be utilized, or are we waiting for -- Is it worth
6 waiting for?

7

8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons.

9

10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, I mean, certainly I would let
11 Dr. Walter weigh-in, but I don't know that the final report is
12 even available yet to the Science Center, or to staff to look at,
13 to know how we would start, again, breaking this up and talking
14 about it with the SSC, and so, I mean, we've had a very high-level
15 presentation, without any details, that was given to us. I don't
16 know if the Science Center has more, but I don't think they can
17 answer that question until they get the data, and the report, and
18 it goes through the review.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Final report in April, is what I'm being told.
21 I see Dr. Walter has his hand up. Dr. Walter.

22

23 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Thanks for the question, and the question is is
24 the Great Amberjack Count going to get used, and the answer is
25 absolutely we're going to try to use as much as we can of it, and
26 as much of the data that's we can from it.

27

28 There's a lot of tagging data, and there's spatial analyses, that
29 might inform spatial partitioning and then there's, obviously, the
30 count data that might be informative in the stock assessment.
31 Until it works its way through the CIE, the Center for Independent
32 Experts, we won't necessarily be able to say how, or exactly what
33 is going to get used from it, and then it's got to --

34

35 Once that process is completed, and I think it's a March CIE
36 review, then we'll get that report, and start working it through
37 the SEDAR process, and the analytical process, and then it will
38 work through there, eventually going to the SSC, and then ideally
39 before the council.

40

41 The problem is that that timeframe is going to be rather extensive
42 before that gets completed, so that, if there is a desire for
43 management advice to inform the next steps here prior to probably
44 2028, or 2029, which is where I guess I would anticipate a full
45 stock assessment coming to completion, and coming before this body,
46 then we would need to set up something that would give other advice
47 in the interim, and I think that's still to be determined, in terms
48 of how -- What that would look like and how much of that would be

1 needed to inform each of those boxes on the screen. Thanks.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Welter. To that point, Dr.
4 Banks?

5
6 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, to that point, and so the hope was that the red
7 snapper count would also get used, right, and we're eight years
8 after that went through its CIE review, and it's still not being
9 used.

10
11 In fact, the data -- I sat through that data workshop in Mobile,
12 and the data that they are talking about using is lengths, which
13 was not technically taken during the red snapper count. It was
14 taken prior, during vertical longline surveys, and it's being
15 folded in. It was a secondary request, and so, yes, the hope is
16 that it would be used, and I would hope it would be used, but I
17 don't have faith.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Point taken. Mr. Strelcheck.

20
21 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So it's a fair comment to say it hasn't been used
22 in a stock assessment, but this council did take action twice to
23 increase catch limits based on the Great Red Snapper Count, right,
24 and so it's not a fair statement that it has not been used, but it
25 has not been integrated into the stock assessment.

26
27 In all fairness, that also has gone through some CIE review, and
28 it's been very complicated to, obviously, figure out how to make
29 that Great Red Snapper Count work within the stock assessment, and
30 so there's some other compounding factors that have, obviously,
31 affected the use of that survey, that maybe could have been better
32 thought out on the frontend, that would have been better integrated
33 in the stock assessment in the long run.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks.

36
37 **DR. BANKS:** To that point, just a reminder that NMFS staff was in
38 the room when that study was also being designed, and so, if there
39 were concerns at the front of that study, the same that I feel
40 like we'll have with amberjack, then those could have also been
41 brought up at that time as well, but, again, I think we're going
42 to end up with the same issues with the amberjack count, because
43 how are we going to integrate that into the stock assessment?

44
45 Yes, Andy makes a good point that we will be able to use it to
46 make other decisions, but it's not solely on just the CIE review,
47 because that's not been -- The red snapper has not been included
48 in that stock assessment, and so where is the amberjack fitting

1 in? There's no predetermined path that's been paved.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. That's a good discussion, a complicated
4 one. This is a fun Reef Fish Committee today. I think, Sarah --
5 Dr. Walter. Sorry.

6
7 **DR. WALTER:** C.J., you were almost to move on, and I thought my
8 hand -- I was going to pull my hand down fast enough. I'll just
9 follow-up, and so that, the CIE review -- When the Great Red
10 Snapper Count was included in the stock assessment, the CIE review
11 was quite critical of that assessment, and the incorporation of
12 that data, because it was in conflict with a lot of the other
13 information in the model, and so, from a Science Center
14 perspective, we tried very hard to include it.

15
16 We were severely challenged by a CIE review for inclusion of that,
17 and that's why it's not that easy to just include the data
18 verbatim, and, in terms of being in the room where a lot of the
19 design in the red snapper count was done, I was in that room. I
20 was collaborating on the project, and a lot of the concerns were
21 brought up, in terms of calibration of the two gears, the challenge
22 being that it's just not that easy to do that, and this is not a
23 criticism of the project.

24
25 It's really a criticism of the difficulty of doing a lot of that
26 work, and I think, if we're going to say that the information is
27 not being used, and it's not used in the stock assessment, it's a
28 bit of a disservice to the scientific challenge that it is, in
29 terms of trying to incorporate multiple diverse data into an advice
30 framework, and certainly the Great Red Snapper Count numbers play
31 into the current ACL and OFL very strongly.

32
33 That's how it was derived, and our staff are going to do their
34 best to try to incorporate the information as best they can into
35 the ongoing stock assessment, but it does concern me when we hear
36 that it's not being used at all, because I think it's always being
37 considered. There are times when it becomes challenging to just
38 stick it in the stock assessment, and so I think I just want us to
39 be a little bit cautious with how we use those terminology about
40 being used or not used. Thanks.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Okay. Ms. Gardiner,
43 I think we've at least given a little direction for things that
44 staff can look at kind of behind the scenes, maybe to start working
45 on something that, you know, ultimately will be an iterative
46 approach, as we kind of get more information available to us, but
47 it does sound like that there are some things that could be done
48 in the background by staff to kind of explore some of these things,

1 and flesh it out a little bit, and so do you have what you need
2 here?

3
4 **MS. GARDINER:** Yes, and I think I can use this figure as an outline
5 to kind of look through the actions and bring a not fully-fleshed-
6 out analysis of options, but potentially bring some forward, and
7 I'll let Dr. Simmons decide the timing on that, but I think that
8 we have at least enough to bring back a very, very rough draft
9 document, and then maybe it will change as we get more information
10 through the process.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Chris.

13
14 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Just -- I'm sure you're aware of this, but, for the
15 management, I guess, regime, or zones, we had a document, that I
16 think Ryan put together in 2017 or 2018, where we had -- Right?
17 It had the regions. It had three regions, two regions, whatever,
18 and I would use that, because the council has seen it before,
19 obviously, and, also, obviously, Amendment 50 is a template.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you. That was a good
22 discussion. Mr. Chair, I might recommend a little break here.
23 I'll turn it back over to you.

24
25 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Yes, and let's take a break.
26 We'll reconvene at 3:45.

27
28 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

29
30 **MR. DUGAS:** All right. If we can quiet down in the back of the
31 room, please. Thank you. Before I hand it over to Dr. Sweetman,
32 we are pacing ahead of schedule. Can we quiet down the back of
33 the room, please? Thank you. So, before we hand it over to Dr.
34 Sweetman, we are ahead of schedule, and we will move up the
35 question-and-answer session this afternoon, and it will start at
36 4:30, just so everyone is aware. Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. One more item in the
39 Reef Fish Committee. This will be Recreational Initiative Working
40 Group Prioritization and Recommendations. Ms. Gardiner, would you
41 like to go over the action guide, please?

42
43 **PRESENTATION: RECREATIONAL INITIATIVE WORKING GROUP**
44 **PRIORITIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

45
46 **MS. GARDINER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, for this, I'm going to
47 have a brief presentation to review the council-prioritized
48 Recreational Initiative Working Group recommendations and proposed

1 workplan based on the feedback received at the August 2025 council
2 meeting. The committee should review the information presented,
3 ask questions, and make recommendations to the council regarding
4 how to move forward with the identified prioritized
5 recommendations, and we'll just start on slide 2 of the
6 presentation.

7
8 Yesterday, the O&E Committee was able to hear from Emily about the
9 education recommendations and the prioritization activities that
10 the O&E did, and kind of moved through those, and so what I'm doing
11 here today is kind of discussing the six prioritized management
12 recommendations.

13
14 As a reminder, we started with nineteen consensus recommendations
15 that came out of the Recreational Initiative Working Group. There
16 were thirteen management recommendations out of those, and, at the
17 August 2025 council meeting, the council prioritized six of those
18 to move forward with and develop kind of a more fleshed out
19 background information, and then a proposed workplan for those,
20 and I'll be walking through those today.

21
22 This lists the six prioritized management recommendations. I'll
23 just briefly summarize what those are, the first looking at Gulf-
24 wide consistency in recreational data providers, and the second
25 looks at the feasibility of implementing carryover provisions, or
26 the potential for looking at paybacks, measures to be distributed
27 across multi years, rather than on an annual basis, to provide
28 some stability in the fishery.

29
30 The third is looking at implementing regional and state management
31 flexibility for reef fish, all recreational reef fish. The fourth
32 looks at regional or state management for greater amberjack. The
33 fifth is looking at replacing and/or enhancement to the DESCEND
34 Act, and the last one would be looking at maximizing season overlap
35 amongst focal species, with specific emphasis on overlap with red
36 snapper.

37
38 In green, we have those that the council have taken final action
39 on. In yellow, we have those of the priorities that are in
40 progress, or the committee and council are looking to move forward
41 on and have more of an established timeline.

42
43 I want to highlight that the Recommendation 6.1 coming out of the
44 working group to replace or enhance the DESCEND Act, the council
45 took final action on this in November 2025.

46
47 I want to put a little bit of emphasis on how quick of a turnaround
48 that was in consideration of the council process. For the working

1 group recommendations to have come out in 2025, and then the
2 council to have already taken final action on one of those, is
3 pretty amazing, when you look at the typical council timeline. We
4 are still waiting for Regional Office review of the economic
5 sections for that, finalized codified text, and the Science Center
6 review and certification. Following that, we'll go ahead and move
7 through the transmittal and rulemaking process.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I just want to say I think the real kudos goes
10 out to staff for getting this developed, implemented, and
11 transmitted as quickly as possible.

12
13 **MS. GARDINER:** Thank you. So, I think, you know, for those
14 listening online, and hopefully some working group members are,
15 for the typical council process timeline, this was a pretty quick
16 turnaround, and I think that's really great, that we were able to
17 address some of the prioritized recommendations coming out of the
18 working group.

19
20 For the remainder of the five prioritized working recommendations,
21 I'm going to walk through some background information and then a
22 proposed workplan for some of these, and then maybe some potential
23 avenues. If the committee is interested in moving some of this
24 information forward, they can, or, if they're kind of interested
25 in keeping status quo, or keeping a pulse check on it, they can do
26 that as well.

27
28 The first working group recommendation that was prioritized by the
29 council is Recommendation 1.1, which would be to achieve Gulf-wide
30 consistency. Specific and measurable guidelines and expectations
31 must be set for Gulf recreational data providers regarding the
32 quality of data that will be acceptable beyond the ambiguous,
33 quote, best available data, end quote.

34
35 Some relevant information specific to this recommendation is that,
36 at the February 2025 GulfFIN meeting, they discussed the MRIP
37 standards for data collection, and all the states had a discussion
38 of implementing statewide standards, and so I think this really
39 addresses the working group recommendation, and is something that
40 continues to feed into overall the states' efforts in trying to
41 implement consistent recreational data collection.

42
43 At the October meeting for GulfFIN, they discussed the transition
44 for Alabama and Mississippi to creel data units, and so the last
45 I heard is Mississippi is looking to have that implemented by the
46 end of 2026, and Alabama is looking to have that implemented by
47 the end of 2027, and so that's something to keep a pulse check on,
48 and I think we are as a whole. Proposed workplan -- I'll pause

1 for a question.

2

3 **MR. ANSON:** Just a point of clarification is that our intention is
4 to follow as quick of a certification process as possible, and so
5 we're trying to come behind Mississippi, and so we'll also be
6 trying to get it certified by 2026, end of 2026.

7

8 **MS. GARDINER:** Excellent. Great to know. Thank you. So, for
9 this specific recommendation, I think some of the council agenda
10 items that would be consistent with the working group
11 recommendation is we continue to receive updates following GulfFIN
12 meetings to the Gulf States Commission report.

13

14 I think that's something that is ongoing, and really speaks to the
15 continued effort to achieve Gulf-wide consistency in our data
16 collection, and then any efforts of the Data Collection Committee
17 as well.

18

19 One of the things that was mentioned during one of the GulfFIN
20 meetings was to look at Gulf-wide consistency for an offshore
21 endorsement, as many states have this implemented already. That's
22 not necessarily a recommendation coming from staff, that the
23 committee should really move forward with this, but that's an
24 example of something that, if the committee were interested, the
25 type of idea of thing that they could kind of bring forward to
26 suggest to the council that would align with this working group
27 recommendation. A question.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

30

31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so Dave said earlier he doesn't pay
32 attention too much in the meeting because -- No, and just kidding.
33 I'm going to ask him a question, or ask him to weigh-in on this,
34 and so one of the things that I think we should add to the previous
35 one is that we are working with IRA funds through the Gulf States,
36 and all the five states, to have a data warehouse that's going to
37 create transparency and standardization of our data for all of the
38 state surveys going forward, and I don't know if you want to weigh-
39 in further on that.

40

41 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thanks, Andy. Yes, and that's one of the tasks
42 that we're working on. We're in the process of developing that
43 database, and working with the states. Gregg, I don't know the
44 timeline, if you can provide a timeline when that might come to
45 fruition, but I know we are working on that, and so Gregg can
46 provide a little more detail.

47

48 **MR. GREGG BRAY:** Yes, and just some brief detail. We're almost

1 done with phase one, and what we would consider phase one is an
2 import process to receive both estimate and raw survey data, and
3 to warehouse it, and then to disseminate that back to both our
4 federal scientific partners along with summarized reports that the
5 public would have access to to download data.

6
7 We feel like maybe in the next month or so we'll have that phase
8 completed, and then we have some additional money, as people use
9 the system, to make improvements or changes to better meet the
10 needs of our both state and federal partners, but we're almost
11 completed with that. Thank you.

12
13 **MS. GARDINER:** Great. Thank you, and that sounds like a great
14 product. If the committee was interested, I'm sure that that
15 report could be included in background information, or somehow
16 brought through this process, so it can make the public more aware
17 of that, and that's something that, through this recommendation,
18 could be, you know, implemented as well.

19
20 This working group recommendation looks at examining the
21 feasibility of implementing carryover provisions for the uncaught
22 portion of annual catch limit for reef fish species, along with
23 assessing the ability to distribute paybacks for annual catch limit
24 overages across multiple subsequent years to increase stability.
25 Implementation of these could be explored through a pilot study,
26 and would be contingent upon stock status and/or trend.

27
28 Relevant information for this kind of background, I think we have
29 a current council request for a document to look at the red snapper
30 accountability measures, looking at payback provisions, and this
31 also looks at potential carryover provisions.

32
33 I think this was brought to the council in early 2025, but this
34 document is on our docket, but it has not necessarily been
35 highlighted as a priority for the council, as far as staff capacity
36 and allocation of resources, and so that's something that's on the
37 docket already, but it's not necessarily something that we have a
38 timeline for bringing it back forward, but the committee can make
39 a recommendation to further prioritize that higher in looking at
40 our council agenda.

41
42 Something to note, you know, in previous efforts, I briefly looked
43 at some historical information on where it kind of derailed, from
44 my understanding, based on the science requirement to pay back
45 overages for all stocks. I think that's supposed to have that say
46 that have an overage.

47
48 The proposed workplan, if the committee is interested in moving

1 forward with this in additional species, we would have to identify
2 what species that we would want to be looking at and initiate
3 action. I think that would be something that committee would have
4 to move forward and kind of highlight who, what, where, when, and
5 potentially some rationale for why, and then staff -- Direct staff
6 for an analysis on that.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think we've got a question here. Mr.
9 Schieble.

10
11 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, to the bullet, two
12 bullets up from where you are right now, there's a proposed
13 document to be brought back to the council in 2026 for the
14 potential carryover provision. Do we have an idea roughly when
15 this year we may see that, Ryan, or Carrie?

16
17 **MR. RINDONE:** Sorry, and I was reading.

18
19 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** The carryover provision document?

20
21 **MS. GARDINER:** It's actually -- Some clarification, and it's the
22 red snapper. It's technically the payback accountability
23 measures. We were looking at paybacks, and I think, at the last
24 meeting I brought it forward, it was the January 2025 meeting, and
25 we -- The discussion suggested highlighting some options for
26 carryover provisions. I don't think it's currently on --

27
28 **MR. RINDONE:** You guys tabled that carryover document, once upon
29 a time, in part because the difference between the OFL and ABC for
30 red snapper was only like two-and-a-half percent, and, I mean,
31 gosh, that was in like 2017 or something like that.

32
33 **DR. FROESCHKE:** The paybacks.

34
35 **MR. RINDONE:** Well, the paybacks were something that Science Center
36 had advised to accompany the carryovers, in order to balance things
37 out, balance the pluses and minuses, and so, at this point, we
38 really only have the paybacks in place for species that are in
39 rebuilding plans, but you could certainly find yourself in a
40 situation where a carryover could turn into, you know, an overage
41 later on, depending on how the fishery responds, but we also had
42 a whole suite of different rules in place for -- You know, you had
43 to have harvested so much of an ACL in the previous year in order
44 to even get carryover to the following year.

45
46 So, you know, like we're dealing with kingfish right now, and I
47 think only like 40, 30 or 40, percent of the total stock ACL is
48 being landed. We wouldn't then carry over 60 percent of the

1 previous year's ACL the following year.

2
3 It serves no real purpose, because, right now, like we wouldn't
4 expect them to be caught, but, for other species, maybe it would,
5 like gag, and maybe it would be a problem, and so I think another
6 one of the rules though is that, if it's in a rebuilding plan,
7 then it wasn't eligible for carryover, and so we would just bank
8 that interest earned as part of the progress for rebuilding, but,
9 I mean, if that's something that you guys wanted to look at again,
10 I mean, we still have that. We just haven't worked on it in some
11 time.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that. Mr. Geeslin.

14
15 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you. I appreciate that, Mr. Rindone, and, as
16 we think about this carryover provision, I know there's been some
17 fairly robust conversations and discussions, and perfect timing
18 for General Spraggins here. Regarding Mississippi's allocation,
19 and their ongoing efforts, you know, through Mississippi Creel,
20 and this evaluation, which is forthcoming, but, as we think about
21 this carryover provision, this is a prime opportunity, and
22 potentially a conduit to address some of the -- You know, some of
23 the -- What I'll say is not -- I don't want to use "shortage", but
24 to allocate, or move, some pounds over to Mississippi, in order to
25 recognize some of the, you know, more extended seasons that we
26 have been able to provide in other Gulf states.

27
28 Some of that is just because our pattern of landings has been
29 lower, but this is a -- I know this has been discussed,
30 specifically within the state directors, and certainly within the
31 council, but this is a prime example of where we could think
32 innovatively to address some of the particular states, and their
33 anglers, and their fishermen needs over there in Mississippi.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. Mr. Schieble.

36
37 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, Ryan and Dr. Simmons, what would it take to
38 resurrect the carryover provision document within this year, 2026?

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons.

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Sorry, and I was searching for some
43 stuff, and so just a point of clarification. I think what Ryan
44 was referring to is a larger carryover effort, and I think what
45 Sarah was talking about, from the recreational initiative, is
46 reflected on row 13 of the action schedule, I believe, and that's
47 specific to red snapper and the private angling component in
48 states. Is that correct? Are we talking the same thing? Are you

1 talking about both documents or one?

2

3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** The fishbowl with the goldfish, that was snapper
4 specific.

5

6 **MR. RINDONE:** The fishbowl one would do this too, but it wouldn't
7 do it just for red snapper. It would be applicable across FMPs.
8 It would be a generic amendment that would affect our ABC control
9 rule, in that it would allow for carryover, and the accompanying
10 paybacks if there was an overage, for species that are eligible
11 for carryover, and so you guys could take another look at that,
12 and we could -- You know, we can dust that off. It's just a matter
13 of asking and prioritizing.

14

15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Hands going up. Dr. Froeschke,
16 and then General Spraggins.

17

18 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I mean, just as a reminder, the principal problem
19 with that approach was that the carryover was limited between the
20 ABC and the OFL, whereas the payback is essentially unbounded, and
21 so, if you were to run that out, it's possible that your long-term
22 retained harvest may actually decline, based on the way it was set
23 up, and so I think it would be worth thinking about, if there are
24 ways that we could alleviate that problem, in order to figure out
25 how we would move it forward.

26

27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I would agree. Go ahead, Ryan.

28

29 **MR. RINDONE:** There were things in that document that throttled
30 exactly how much could be carried over, and you guys can certainly
31 specify even which species you wanted to do it for, and which
32 species you didn't, and so it would -- You could constrain it to
33 just red snapper, or it could be for other things as well, and,
34 you know, we're a little bit more precise in managing some things
35 than we are other things, and you guys can be sensitive to that,
36 to the extent to which you were amused to do so, and so the world
37 is your oyster.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I've got a lot of hands going up here.
40 I'm going to go to Mara first, and then the General, and then
41 Chris.

42

43 **MS. LEVY:** Well, just specific to this conversation, recall that
44 you have carryover baked into the Amendment 50 documents, and so
45 we have -- It's a payback and a carryover, but the carryover relied
46 on the fishbowl document to be implemented, and so it's in there.
47 It anticipates state carryover if you go under for each state, but
48 it was relying on you then going forward with that larger document,

1 and so you could do something, like Ryan said, smaller, and we've
2 already baked it into the state management. We would just need to
3 implement it through another document.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that, Mara. General Spraggins.

6
7 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I mean, I'm all for the carryover. I'm all
8 for the idea of what we're talking about here. I think it's a
9 smart move, if we do it the right way. Number one, obviously, it
10 would be voted on with the council here, to say whether it could
11 or could not happen that year, and, you know, to keep anybody from
12 just misusing the situation. I don't think that we ever want to
13 get to the point that, you know, we leave that open to where it
14 can be misused.

15
16 I would like to ask another question too about the possibility of
17 how. You know, we keep looking at the numbers, and, you know,
18 Mississippi, as Dakus brought up, Mississippi is down to, you
19 know, forty days, and everybody else is doing 120 to 200 days, you
20 know, as far as snapper fishing, and this is tough.

21
22 It's tough to be able to bring this up. It's tough to be able to
23 bring it up into our state, and get them to understand why, and,
24 you know, when your neighboring state is catching four a day, and
25 doing 200 days, and you're down to thirty-five or forty days, and
26 two a day, and they're like, why, and we don't understand this.
27 You know, we don't understand it, and it's a pure thing of
28 landings.

29
30 I mean, we could go over and fish in Louisiana, or go over and
31 fish in Alabama, and catch the snapper, but they can't bring them
32 back to Mississippi. I mean, so it really doesn't matter, and so
33 the point is we're all catching the fish. The fish are there.
34 I'm not arguing about what Louisiana is doing, and I'm not arguing
35 about anybody else.

36
37 The point I'm saying is, you know, we've been trying to figure it
38 out, and I know MS Creel -- I feel strongly, and I feel very
39 strongly, that MS Creel, when we get this done, it's going to be
40 okay, and I feel like we'll have a good, very, very good, basis to
41 work off of that we won't have to ask this question.

42
43 As we talked in the state directors, you know, talking about a
44 possibility of could we move some allocation of that for, you know,
45 a short term, maybe one year, because I don't know that we're going
46 to get MS Creel done this year, but I feel strongly we can get it
47 done within the next year, that we could get MS Creel into effect,
48 and so is there a way to do it, and the question I would have to

1 ask the council is, is there a way to do this to where -- If we
2 had 40,000 more pounds, that's all we're talking about, just 40,000
3 pounds of fish, and that's not even a weekend, you know, to some
4 states, but is there a way that we could do something like this
5 without having to go through a large wicket of changing things?
6

7 You know, I talked with Trevor about it, and, you know, if you use
8 calibration, and you give -- If you put 40,000 pounds, Mississippi
9 is only going to get 20,000 of it, because the way it is, because
10 we're 0.50, where Florida is at 1.34, and we're -- I guess you've
11 got Louisiana, and you've got Texas, at 1.0, basically, right,
12 somewhere close, and, you know, just a number.
13

14 The point I'm getting at is, you know, is there a way to do it?
15 Can we just move? Could it be a possibility, if it was okay, and
16 they said, hey, we want to move 40,000 pounds in there, just for
17 one year, and see what happens, and is there something we could do
18 to that?
19

20 Is there a way to do it without having to go through nine miles of
21 paperwork, and that's the question I would have to ask. Can we do
22 it without going through nine miles of paperwork, and, you know,
23 how is it easiest way?
24

25 We're not talking -- The same 40,000 pounds that we're talking
26 about is not any different than if we caught it in Louisiana and
27 it was one-to-one. It's not going to be any different. It's still
28 going to be 40,000 pounds of fish, and so, you know, instead of
29 making us ask somebody to give up 80,000 pounds to make the 50
30 percent, why not the 40,000 and be realistic and say this is where
31 we're at, because if we -- I mean, it doesn't matter where it's
32 from.
33

34 I'm not trying to say how it gets there. It could be that, because
35 we had an overage last year, that we can do it automatically, and
36 just say we'll use the overage, you know, and we did not go over
37 last year, and we were a million pounds under, and that we could
38 use from last year, and is there a way to do it?
39

40 We're only talking just a smidgen of what we're talking about out
41 there. I mean, if I was asking for 400,000 pounds, or something
42 like that, that's entirely different, but we're only talking --
43 We're not even talking a basically 1 percent, if it's that, and I
44 don't even think it's 1 percent, and so I think it's less than
45 that. I think it's closer to half a percent of the allocation,
46 but, anyway, just bringing it up, and thanks, Dakus, for bringing
47 it up for me.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, General. Chris.

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, hearing the General's sense of urgency, I don't
4 have an immediate solution, off the top of my head, to what you're
5 asking for. I'm sure there is, if we get our brains together and
6 think about it, but, in the meantime, what would it take, Dr.
7 Simmons, to get, I guess, Action Item 13 on the action guide
8 document to consider changes to private recreational
9 accountability measures for red snapper somewhere on to our agenda
10 this year?

11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we
13 could certainly bring it back this year. The question is when? I
14 mean, is it something that needs to come back in April? I'm not
15 sure, or could it be June?

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Chris.

18
19 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Well, I mean, it sounds like, around the table, it
20 wouldn't take us long to start making decisions on it, if we have
21 something by April or June, to get moving on it, in a sense of
22 urgency, to potentially have where, if states underfish, they could
23 carry over a percentage of their ACL of that underfishing next
24 year.

25
26 Then I think we would have to have the discussion about, you know,
27 what the mechanism is for intersector trading of, or interstate
28 trading of, allocation, which is done in other regions of the
29 country, which I guess would be a separate action, but I don't
30 know.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons, then General Spraggins.

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. The other thing I was
35 just thinking about is the red snapper assessment. The review is
36 April of this year, I believe, and then that will go to the SSC in
37 May, or June, depending on the MREP-FES lites, and so we also have
38 that coming out, potentially, in 2026, the new OFL and ABC
39 recommendation.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** General Spraggins.

42
43 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Strelcheck, I have just a question about
44 this. You know, I know we've talked, a lot of us, and we talked
45 about, you know, we can change the allocations, and we can change
46 how much each state gets, and, once again, I go back to this.

47
48 You know, if Mississippi was rated one to one, 3.55 is all we need.

1 We don't need any more than that, all right, and so, where we're
2 at, we're good, if we had the ratings to where we're at, and,
3 rather than trying to change something like that, to where maybe
4 Mississippi got 4.55, well, then we would have more than we needed,
5 and it would just cause a problem in the future.

6
7 That's what I'm asking, and is there a way that, without going
8 through a change of Amendment 50, or a change in anything else,
9 that we could possibly do something with the amount that we had
10 left over from last year, and just say we're going to do it in a
11 one-year deal only, and not ask for, you know, a long-term? Is
12 that something possible even?

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

15
16 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm wracking my brain, General, but I'm not coming
17 up with anything that's just immediately available to us as a tool
18 to be able to do that. The other thing that comes to mind, which
19 is more of a long-term effort, is we had talked about, obviously,
20 evaluating allocations with the new stock assessment.

21
22 We do have transfer provisions for Spanish mackerel, for example,
23 in the South Atlantic, and there's a northern portion and a
24 southern portion. We actually used that tool this year between
25 Florida and North Carolina, and so there's potentially mechanisms
26 to do that.

27
28 What complicates it a little bit here is, obviously, the different
29 units between the various surveys, and how that would work, but I
30 think there's definitely some possibilities there that maybe don't
31 lock in allocations, but allow for some flexibility of quota, and
32 then certainly I support exploring the idea of fish left on the
33 table that can be carried over and applied to the next season.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that, Mr. Strelcheck. Yes, we
36 did utilize that. As Andy was saying, I think we gave 325,000
37 pounds to North Carolina of Spanish mackerel, because they needed
38 it this year, and our historical catch was not -- We weren't
39 getting to our level of quota there, and so we transferred that to
40 them this year.

41
42 It's a process that's set up specifically for Spanish mackerel,
43 and it's as simple as an email coming from the state director to
44 a state director, and then coordinating with NOAA Fisheries on
45 that, after something has been agreed to. General.

46
47 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and I think -- Once again, I'm not trying
48 to invent a whole new wheel for no reason, and I think what you're

1 talking about, and what Mr. Strelcheck is talking about, is a
2 possibility, and we could look at something, and there may be a
3 way to do it.

4
5 I mean, you know, it may not happen in the next hour. I'm not
6 asking that, but, you know, it's something that we could look at.
7 We've got until -- We know we're not going to open the season until
8 May, and, if we could have an answer in June, that would be
9 something that we could look at, and it would carry us to that
10 next one, and I think that, rather than trying to reallocate
11 everything, it would be a whole lot simpler if we could just do
12 that for a one-year term.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Great. Any other comments about carryover and
15 paybacks here? It sounds like maybe we're going to unearth that
16 document a little bit here, to explore that a little bit. Okay.
17 The fishbowl, or whatever it was called. All right. That was a
18 good discussion. Ms. Gardiner.

19
20 **MS. GARDINER:** Thank you. I appreciate that. I think, you know,
21 staff will work on this red snapper accountability measures, and
22 kind of investigate that a little further, and we'll work with Dr.
23 Simmons on the timeline for that.

24
25 The next recommendation coming out of the working group would be
26 to consider implementing regional and state flexibility in
27 recreational reef fish management while maintaining federal
28 management authority, whenever possible, and so I think the
29 relevant background information for this -- You know, we've kind
30 of talked about this with greater amberjack as well, but the red
31 snapper Amendment 50, which was state management, as you all know,
32 and I think that, if the council is interested in broadly looking
33 at this for reef fish, I think the next step is to identify which
34 species, and a priority in that.

35
36 The next recommendation for the working group looks at regional or
37 state management for greater amberjack, and, for this one, I would
38 suggest really using greater amberjack as our pilot, and moving
39 forward with one species at a time, until we have a better process.

40
41 As we all know, as we just talked about, there's a lot of decision
42 factors that go into state and regional management for a specific
43 species, and so doing multiple at one time sounds overwhelming to
44 me, and I think would probably be fairly overwhelming, and a lot
45 of work, for the committee and the council to take on, but
46 definitely the conversation could be started about identifying
47 what species, and potential species, this may be a useful avenue
48 for, should the committee be interested.

1
2 The next recommendation is state or regional management for greater
3 amberjack. I'm really not going to go into this one too much. I
4 think we beat this one today. This one is in progress. I think
5 that we keep it in progress, and that really speaks to meeting and
6 achieving the goals of the working group's recommendation on this
7 one.

8
9 This last prioritized recommendation coming out of the working
10 group would be that the council should work with the recreational
11 community, including the for-hire and private angler sectors, to
12 develop seasons that maximize overlap in focal species, to enable
13 harvest of multiple species on a given trip and reduce discards.

14
15 Maximizing overlap with the season for red snapper, the primary
16 target for reef fish anglers Gulf wide, should be a key priority.
17 At the same time, the council should recognize the for-hire and
18 tackle industry needs to have a focal species available for harvest
19 at all times.

20
21 We talked about this exact recommendation with the O&E Committee
22 yesterday. The O&E Committee expressed that they feel that they
23 continue to do this in all of the management actions that get
24 brought forward through the council. I think, if this committee
25 has the same sentiment, it's kind of this is a prioritized
26 recommendation, but it's something that we incorporate on our day-
27 to-day, as we take actions on different things, and so I think
28 that one's a fairly easy one to address as well.

29
30 We've got five remaining prioritized management recommendations,
31 and I'm not going to go through these, one of which is the greater
32 amberjack. We're already in progress for these. I think we need
33 to look at the -- We've already looked at 6.2, or the last one,
34 and we've kind of -- I saw nodding heads that indicated that we're
35 comfortable with saying that we address these consistently through
36 a lot of our management actions.

37
38 It's really looking at the first three prioritized
39 recommendations, and if the council wants to move forward with
40 them, and so, with that in mind, on the next slide, I just have a
41 couple things to consider.

42
43 For Recommendation 1.1, I think, you know, there are a lot of
44 ongoing projects that look at achieving Gulf-wide data
45 consistency. I think it was interesting to take a look at that
46 database that's going on with IRA funds. I think an avenue to
47 continue prioritizing the working group's recommendation would be
48 to follow-up on that, and keep taking that information in.

1
2 If there's additional avenues that the committee is interested in
3 taking action on, or initiating, or directing staff to take a look
4 at, now is the time to speak out on that and highlight what they
5 wish to do with that.

6
7 I heard from the committee on the carryover provisions. I think
8 we're going to get started on working on the red snapper
9 accountability measures document, and that would look at paybacks
10 and carryover provisions to address that recommendation, and we
11 can kind of incorporate some other things from there, if we're
12 interested.

13
14 My personal view is that, for Recommendation 4.1, for reef fish
15 state regional management as a whole, we should tackle greater
16 amberjack first, before we start looking at other species, but I
17 think the main takeaway is that this is the time for the committee
18 to direct the council on additional action that they want staff to
19 move forward with for these recommendations.

20
21 It's my intent, in the future, to kind of keep the recommendations
22 from the working group as a whole in consideration, I think as we
23 move through all of our management decisions, and I think Emily,
24 with the O&E, has intentions to kind of bring back her stuff every
25 year in January. It would be very easy to do kind of a review
26 every year of how we've addressed some of these recommendations
27 that came out of the working group with the actions that the
28 council has taken in the past year.

29
30 With that, I'll open the floor for discussion, and see if there
31 are any additional recommendations from the committee other than
32 that moving forward on the red snapper accountability measures
33 document.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Gardiner. Well thought out
36 presentation, very clear, and so I'm looking around the table here
37 to see if there's any suggestions for items that you would prefer
38 to move forward and kind of give a little bit direction to staff
39 on some of these issues here. Mr. Schieble.

40
41 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Nothing specific, but I'll say it seems like we're
42 sort of well on our way with a good number of them already, as
43 Sarah pointed out, and so I think -- I say we just keep on moving
44 like we are.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that makes sense to me too,
47 and I think, kind of as some of these discussions continue, right,
48 whether it's regional state management for greater amberjack, you

1 know, and we might identify other species that we might want to
2 consider along those lines too, and similar for carryover
3 provisions that we might identify as we're kind of working through
4 some of that stuff with red snapper. We might have some subsequent
5 conversations for figuring out where that could be applied for
6 other species too, and so I think it's going to just be an iterative
7 process, from my perspective, Sarah, and so back to you.

8
9 **MS. GARDINER:** Absolutely, and one of the things I want to mention
10 is that, you know, every time we talk about this, or it gets
11 mentioned, the working group recommendations, I do try to send out
12 an email to working group members to say, hey, we talked about it
13 at this council meeting, and these are the things that came out of
14 the meeting. If you're interested in tracking it, this is the
15 next meeting we plan on talking about this, just to keep those
16 working group members informed on the process, so they don't feel
17 like we -- They did all this work, and then it kind of fell off,
18 and so that's something that myself and Emily are doing along the
19 way as well.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I very much agree with that. Thank
22 you, Sarah. All right. Anything else for Ms. Gardiner here?
23 Seeing none, we didn't have any other business, but I'll look
24 around the table, really quickly, to see if anything has popped
25 up. Seeing none, that will the conclude Reef Fish Committee, Mr.
26 Chair.

27
28 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 27, 2026.)

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30 - - -
31