

GULF COUNCIL

DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE

Hyatt Centric

New Orleans, Louisiana

January 26, 2026

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 11 Mike Allen.....Florida
 12 Kevin Anson.....Alabama
 13 Kesley Banks.....Texas
 14 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
 15 Troy Frady.....Alabama
 16 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
 17 Johnny Marquez.....Mississippi
 18 John Sanchez.....Florida
 19 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
 20 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
 21 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
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 30 Anthony Overton.....Alabama

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6 Kevin McIntosh.....NOAA
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1 The Data Collection Committee of the Gulf Council convened at The
2 Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Monday morning, January
3 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Ed Walker.

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

9 **CHAIRMAN ED WALKER:** I'll call to order the Data Collection
10 Committee. We'll start off with the Adoption of the Agenda, or,
11 actually, I'm sorry, and let me read the members of the committee
12 first. It would be Mr. Anson, Dr. Allen, Dr. Banks, Mr. Broussard,
13 Captain Frady, Mr. Marquez, Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Mr.
14 Geeslin, Mr. Sanchez, General Spraggins, and Mr. Strelcheck, and
15 so if I can get an adoption of the agenda, a motion. Mr. Marquez.
16 Second by Dr. Allen. Thank you.

17
18 Next up approval of the April 2025 minutes, a motion to adopt, if
19 there are no changes. Mr. Schieble. Thank you, and a second by
20 Dr. Allen. Thank you, gentlemen. The first step is going to be
21 our action guide. Dr. Hollensead is going to walk us through the
22 action guide and next steps.

23
24 **SOUTHEAST FOR-HIRE INTEGRATED ELECTRONIC REPORTING DOCUMENT**
25

26 **DR. LISA HOLLENSHAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The first agenda item
27 we have today is a review of the Southeast for Higher Integrated
28 Electronic Reporting document. The council has selected preferred
29 alternatives for the four actions considered in this document.
30 They're laid out here in the action guide just for review, but
31 we're going to go through each one of them one by one.

32
33 You all haven't seen this since April. At that time, you picked
34 preferreds in Action 4, which dealt with the economic survey
35 design, and the document has been updated with that, but, since
36 then, this document was tabled, as the council focused on other
37 priority items, and so we've picked this back up, to give you all
38 a review of what's been completed so far, and then to, of course,
39 get feedback from the committee of how they would like staff to
40 proceed going forward.

41
42 The latest version of the document has been updated. As I
43 mentioned, this also includes recommendations from the Ad Hoc
44 Charter-for-Hire Data Collection Advisory Panel that met last
45 February, and so those have been incorporated in the document as
46 well.

1
2 The committee should review the document, ask any clarifying
3 questions of staff, and provide direction on whether the document
4 should continue to be developed, and, if so, recommend a potential
5 timeline for developing the document for final action, and I'll
6 stop there, if there's any questions, Mr. Chair.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Sanchez.

9

10 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I would like to know what the plan is
11 on this, because, I mean, there's been strong public support from
12 the charter-for-hire industry to do this. I can't recall how many
13 years it's been since I attended a workshop, and we were piecing
14 this together. Susan Boggs and John Froeschke went, and John was
15 absolutely impressive at that meeting with his command, you know,
16 of knowledge of this thing.

17

18 That was literally, again, I don't know, six years ago, and what
19 are we doing? I mean, people want this. It's data. We work with
20 data, you know, that's just fraught with PSEs, and we make other
21 decisions, and here we're trying to bring something in for a
22 landing, that would probably bring some really good data to the
23 table, and it goes nowhere.

24

25 I mean, it's absolutely frustrating, and so, for the benefit of
26 the public, can somebody please explain why the delay and what
27 we're going to do? Are we going to do anything, and in plain
28 English, and not legal speak, and not back-and-forth, and not
29 delay, but just plain English. What are we doing with this?

30

31 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I agree. I think it's
32 time to push this over the line, but let's go ahead and work
33 through. We can go work through the issues one-by-one, but it has
34 been tabled, essentially, for a while. We've already picked
35 preferreds. However, I have at least one preferred I would like
36 to review, but I think it would be best if you go over it and
37 freshen us up on it before we continue the discussion.

38

39 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Yes, sir. We can do that.

40

41 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Please.

42

43 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Bernie, if you wouldn't mind pulling up the
44 document, please, and going to the purpose and need, and so we'll
45 just kind of give it -- Since it's been a while, we'll dust this
46 off and go -- You know, kind of do our due diligence here and look

1 through the purpose and need.

2
3 The purpose of the amendment is to improve the accuracy, precision,
4 and timeliness of landings, discard, and fishing effort data from
5 the federally-permitted for-hire vessels from the recreational
6 sector of the Gulf reef fish and CMP fisheries, and so that's
7 broadly what this is. These improvements would increase the
8 stakeholder trust and buy-in associated with the data collection.

9
10 Another purpose is to collect economic information related to the
11 operational costs and earning of federally-permitted for-hire
12 vessels participating in the Gulf reef fish and CMP fisheries.

13
14 The need for this action is to improve management and monitoring
15 of the federally-permitted for-hire component of the recreational
16 sector of the Gulf reef fish and CMP fisheries to prevent
17 overfishing and achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum
18 yield, or OY.

19
20 Just a refresher of the actions, and, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind
21 please go into Action 1, and so, Action 1, so this is going to
22 apply for vessels that are issued a Gulf for-hire permit for reef
23 fish or coastal migratory pelagic species that do not participate
24 in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, and so those are those
25 vessels that are not included under that umbrella.

26
27 Right now, the council has selected Preferred Alternative 2, and
28 so this would require the owner and operator of a charter vessel
29 or headboat issued those valid permits to provide their trip,
30 catch, and effort information after each trip.

31
32 At the ad hoc AP, there was some discussion on whether to do
33 reporting after each trip or daily reporting. The AP felt that
34 actually doing it after each trip would help with recall,
35 especially those that take multiple trips per day, and so they get
36 things muddled in their head as you go through, and that it's much
37 easier just to get it done after each trip, go ahead and submit
38 that, and then each one, and so that was what was recommended by
39 the AP, and it's been here reflected as well, with the council
40 agreeing with that methodology.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you. I think maybe we'll stop after each
43 discussion for each action, and go around the committee, and see
44 if there's any opposition to the preferred that we have, and, if
45 there isn't, then we can move on.

46

1 That way, we've kind of reviewed our preferreds, and maintained
2 that they're still preferred, and so does anybody have any issues
3 with the preferred alternative to go ahead with reporting for
4 charter vessels on the committee? Okay, and so I don't see any
5 opposition to moving forward with Preferred Alternative 1 on this,
6 so, if you would go ahead to Action 2, that would be good.

7
8 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Yes, and, actually, Mr. Chair, just one more point
9 I wanted to make, and so Action 1 would also require the did-not-
10 fishing report, and so that's a little different from the SEFHIER
11 1.0. The SEFHIER 2.0 would include that, and that helps with some
12 of the validation discussion, because this program would not have
13 the requirement for the VMS. That was the old one.

14
15 In order to still fill that sort of stipulation needed for sampling
16 methodology, the did-not-fish report would be one of those things
17 that was in there, and so I just wanted to note that, that was a
18 little difference from the prior program.

19
20 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Action 2, please, and so
21 Action 2 is written very similarly. This would apply to vessels
22 that do participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, and
23 so this would require the owner and operator, again, to report for
24 each trip.

25
26 Currently they do that weekly, and so this would basically make
27 consistency in the regulations for any for-hire, whether you're a
28 headboat and included in the headboat survey or you're not.
29 Whatever for-hire trip that you are conducting, you would have to
30 submit your logbook, and all of that information, after each trip.
31 That makes it consistent throughout, so there's a little less
32 confusion throughout the for-hire sector.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. That's Action 2. Any discussion
35 among the committee on Action 2, or are we good with preferred?
36 Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** No issue with the preferred. Just a question
39 for my clarification, Dr. Hollensead. There's going to be still
40 dockside validation associated with this? I just don't see it in
41 any of the actions, and I don't know if that's just assumed to be
42 part of this program.

43
44 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** I don't know. I would have to look over at the
45 Regional Office for some of that clarification.

46

1 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Let's table that, and I want to talk more
2 holistically about SEFHIER maybe at the end of this conversation.
3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Mr. Anson.
5
6 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** It is mentioned in the previous action, under
7 the preferred alternatives, for dockside sampling. It doesn't get
8 into the details, but it does mention it's for non-reporting or
9 misreporting of information.
10
11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Kevin.
12
13 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Great. Thanks for that. Okay. I think
14 we're okay on Action 2, and we can move on to Action 3.
15
16 **DR. HOLLENSHAD:** Okay. Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling to
17 Action 3, please. In Action 3 here, there's the three
18 alternatives, and so this has to deal with the trip notification,
19 and so these requirements would also be applied to everyone in the
20 charter vessels or the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey
21 headboats, those ones included in that program.
22
23 Currently, the council has picked Alternative 3 as the preferred
24 for both of those categories, and so that would require the owner
25 or operator of a charter vessel or headboat issued a valid permit
26 to submit a trip declaration for trips that will be engaging in
27 any type of for-hire fishing activity, and so specifically that
28 language was included in there.
29
30 If you recall in SEFHIER 1.0, the first iteration of it, the trip
31 notification, there was some issue with captains saying that it
32 was burdensome to have to do a trip notification when they were
33 just leaving the dock for gas or bait or that sort of thing, and
34 so this action would address that, and it would have just a hail-
35 out only if you're engaging in any type of for-hire fishing
36 activity, and so that would be for both of those categories, and
37 so that's what Action 3 would do.
38
39 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. Anybody on the committee have any
40 issues with the Preferred Alternative 3? I, as a charter boat
41 captain myself, I like Alternative 3, but I certainly welcome
42 discussion at this point, and, if not, we'll assume that we still
43 like our preferred alternative. Seeing none, we can move on to
44 Alternative 4, which I have a question about when you're done, Dr.
45 Hollensead.
46

1 **DR. HOLLENSHAD:** Okay, and so Alternative 4 is going to look at
2 establishing reporting of economic data for for-hire vessels.
3 Alternative 1 would not run any kind of economic data collection.
4 Alternative 2 would require the owner or operator with the permits
5 as part of the logbook when a vessel is engaging any type of
6 charter fishing or chartered activity.

7
8 That would almost be like a sort of, if you want to think of it,
9 loosely a census-level sort of reporting, whereas Alternative 3
10 would ask those three economic data questions, but it would do so
11 with a sort of survey design, and so some portion of the fleet
12 would be asked those questions throughout, and so I'll just pause
13 there.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. I'll take the lead on this one. It
16 seemed to me we went around and around, and we had the tug-of-war
17 between the economic data guys and the operators, and I felt we
18 had come to a pretty good compromise on how much we can supply to
19 get them what they need without being burdensome.

20
21 Our preferred here, technically by my read, it doesn't have a
22 number on the percentage of economic sampling. You know, it seemed
23 like we were talking about 10 percent, or it was maybe 20 percent,
24 but this doesn't actually -- By my read, it doesn't actually
25 constrain that, and I just have some concerns.

26
27 Where we ran into trouble last time is when there was an open-
28 ended economic data opportunity, and it got expanded, or was bigger
29 than a lot of charter boat operators were comfortable with, and
30 that's where we got into trouble, and so we might need to discuss
31 making sure that there's an understanding here, or actually not an
32 understanding. I think it would be better if there's something in
33 the writing in this alternative that places those constraints that
34 we're concerned about on the action. Dr. Sweetman.

35
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, I mean, recalling
37 back to that meeting, I believe it's relative to the fishery that
38 we're talking about, and the number of samples, right, that you
39 would need in order to have some sort of number that would be
40 reflective and representative of what that fishery is.

41
42 Red wnapper is not going to be treated the same as deepwater
43 grouper, right? I mean, you're going to need more samples to get
44 some sort of reflective estimate there, and so I think that was
45 why there was the discussion about why there's not a certain number
46 on here for each one, but that's just my understanding.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Banks.

3
4 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** I'm going to look to Dr. Hollensead for this,
5 but, if you read further down, during the first year of a logbook,
6 a 20 percent simple random sample of permanent vessels will be
7 selected for economic reporting.

8
9 You can scroll a little further down, and you can make this
10 language stronger if you so choose, and the center does not
11 anticipate sampling, at the aggregate, more than 20 percent of the
12 vessels in any one year, and possibly less, and so I think it's in
13 this part. If you want to put it up in the top, that's fine, or
14 you can make this language stronger, but I'm going to look at Dr.
15 Hollensead to see if those are hard numbers and not just examples.

16
17 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, and so we actually have an economist from
18 the Science Center, Dr. Christopher Liese, and you maybe remember
19 him, and he's also online, if you would like any clarification of
20 that, but he actually helped us write up this discussion, and so
21 this is not council staff thinking this is about what this would
22 be.

23
24 Dr. Liese was really good, in terms of helping us write up this
25 discussion, to make sure that those needs would be met, and just
26 a point of clarification too, because, when we say economic survey,
27 you may be wondering, well, what is that, and it's three questions,
28 and the questions asked are the trip fee, the fuel used, in
29 gallons, and the price of the fuel used per gallon, and so, when
30 it says economic survey, it's those three questions.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Hollensead, and I had read that,
33 Dr. Banks, and just, the deeper I got into the stratification, it
34 seemed like that was, if you fall into a particular strata, which
35 I'm told is maybe each species would be a strata, they may -- The
36 Southeast Fisheries Science Center may determine that you need
37 more economic reporting than other people.

38
39 To me, it still seemed like the door was open, in that Southeast
40 Fisheries Science Center, quote, will determine the strata
41 sufficient for providing something acceptable to management, if
42 you will, and so, to me, that means the Science Center determines
43 it, and that's what I thought we might tighten up in this amendment
44 a little bit. Dr. Banks.

45
46 **DR. BANKS:** I'm not sure how you would do it by species necessarily,

1 because you may have a multispecies trip, and so I'm fine getting
2 more clarification on that strata, and maybe we can kick that over
3 online, for that question to get answered, but I don't know that
4 you could start it with species, just because you're not going out
5 there for just a red snapper trip, right, and you might go for
6 something else.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I see a hand up. Dr. Assane. Yes, please.

9

10 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, just reading further
11 down to what Dr. Banks mentioned, a strata might be defined on
12 permit or vessel characteristics, from the permit application, on
13 activity levels or species caught during the last year's area
14 fished, state and port, and so forth.

15

16 What is highlighted in this section here is the stratification
17 would be guided by anticipated management needs and a desire to
18 minimize the overall sample size. As it was said, I mean, the
19 first year is going to be a 20 percent random sample, and then,
20 from there, depending on, you know, management needs and other
21 things, it will be tailored, and move to a stratified sample, and
22 so there are limits here, but maybe I guess Captain Walker would
23 look at making them stronger.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Right, and that's my read. I don't think there's
26 any sinister plan here, or anything like that, and I just think it
27 would be good if it was, you know, in writing, just to nip that.
28 Dr. Liese, do you have some input on this, sir?

29

30 **DR. CHRISTOPHER LIESE:** Yes. Can you hear me?

31

32 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes. Loud and clear.

33

34 **DR. LIESE:** Okay. Sorry. I just jumped on this call. I would
35 basically back up what Assane said. I mean, if it's phrased in a
36 way like the center decides, it's -- The only reason we'll collect
37 this data is if the management process needs it, and so, if the
38 management process is happy with a very sort of broad figure for
39 like the for-hire fleet in the Gulf of Mexico, the federally-
40 permitted for-hire fleet in the Gulf of Mexico, then like -- I
41 went through this, and we don't need a big sample size.

42

43 We are not keen on doing sample size for the sake of sample size,
44 and so, if we can get away with less interactions with fishermen,
45 we will do so, but, again, if you wanted to say -- I think this
46 was an example, that if people said we want to know about the

1 triggerfish segment, and we -- You know, we could look at the
2 historic data, the last two years, of which vessels have been
3 catching triggerfish, and we could try to oversample those people,
4 because if we random sample say to 10 percent, we're not going to
5 get many, probably, triggerfish people in Alabama, or something
6 like that.

7
8 If there is an interest, from the council and the management
9 process, to put more precise measures, you know, in terms of which
10 fishery, then we would probably have to sample a little higher,
11 and we've done something similar to that in the commercial sector,
12 where we had this basically 20 percent is the broad sample, but
13 for different -- You know, depending on if we want to focus down
14 on certain endorsements, we would oversample in that section, in
15 order to create valid scientific data, but that's the only reason
16 --

17
18 You know, that's the decision, and so, if someone tells me we want
19 that, then we would try to do the data collection necessary to do
20 that, and, without knowing the variation in the data and so on,
21 basically without seeing the data, it's hard to predict exactly
22 what sample sizes would be, need to be, for any one subset, but
23 the broader -- You know, what I'm saying is I wouldn't be the one
24 deciding that.

25
26 I try to -- If people said this is the type of data we want, then
27 we try to go about -- You know, this is the type of results we
28 want for this fishery, and we would try to go about figuring out
29 the minimum sample size that we need for that fishery to answer
30 those questions.

31
32 I think, I personally think, the initiative is on the management
33 side, and, the first year, because we don't know too much about
34 the fishery, we do 20 percent, and we generate some results, and
35 present them to the council, and then, you know, I'm happy to take
36 whatever guidance there is, and, you know, make less the next year,
37 or more, whatever. You know, how those results come out, and if
38 they are needed and appreciated or not. Thanks.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Liese. I have a question for
41 you. In our document here, it discusses that it may be broken
42 down by strata, and so was that -- Were you thinking by species,
43 when you were talking about strata, and which strata was the
44 thought on that?

45
46 **DR. LIESE:** Yes, and, I mean, that's how we would set it up, sort

1 of from a statistic and survey research perspective, is call it a
2 strata, but that -- You know, the permit is not specific to any
3 species, I believe, and so that -- That's always a problem.

4
5 Ideally, there would be a triggerfish permit, and then we could
6 just sample those people, but we don't know that, but usually it's
7 the same vessels, mostly fishing in the same regions, and the same
8 species, and so there's a lot of -- You know, if you know the
9 vessels -- This is what we've done on the commercial side of
10 things.

11
12 We look at the last two years of landings, and, if we see that
13 these are the vessels that are catching, you know, triggerfish,
14 then we can -- We can gear the sample towards oversampling those
15 vessels relative to the rest, and, again, I would say, you know,
16 if everyone is being sampled at a 10 percent, to generate general
17 values, then we might push these up.

18
19 The smaller the -- You know, this is, this is statistics. The
20 smaller a population is, the bigger a share of that population you
21 need. If you want to know about a hundred vessels, you probably
22 need about 50 percent of that population, if you want some, you
23 know, confidence intervals that are not just all over the place,
24 and so that's just a statistical problem, or you just don't know
25 about that population, and that's the alternative.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Thank you. You just kind of helped me
28 out with something there, and 50 percent snuck in under species,
29 to be honest, but so, to me, my read is that sampling by species
30 would be more of a biological issue than an economic issue.

31
32 I kind of get it for if you're on a charter boat, with eight
33 different species in the cooler, and, you know, I don't really get
34 how the economic data is going to vary that much. I get it if
35 you're trying to assess the triggerfish population or something,
36 but we're talking about economic here, and so I have Dr. Allen,
37 and then I have Dr. Sweetman.

38
39 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just wondering, Dr.
40 Liese, if -- Is the idea here to learn, from the initial years,
41 the strata weights and the sample size required to try to obtain
42 a certain level of precision for each of these species, and then
43 it would be a fairly consistent fraction of those vessels through
44 time, and is that the motivation here?

45
46 **DR. LIESE:** Yes. Exactly. I mean, we need to learn, because we've

1 looked at the -- Was it the 2022 data that we did have, but then
2 the court said we really shouldn't, and so we've learned only a
3 limited amount of that, and so we need to -- You know, I don't
4 know what the variance is, and how many -- You know, are there
5 specialized vessels, or is everyone a multispecies fisherman?
6 Probably they are.

7
8 That's why, you know, I think we might be able to get away with a
9 much smaller sample size, and the species perspective is an
10 example, right, and we could also -- You know, again, if the
11 management process sees benefit in knowing the charter fleet off
12 Texas, the charter fleet off Florida, those sorts of things, then
13 that could be the strata that we aim to have valid numbers for.

14
15 It doesn't have to be the species. It could be, or it could be,
16 if there's different gears, and I don't know if we have that in
17 the logbook, but, you know, it would depend on what is collected
18 in the logbook, since that's more or less a census on everyone,
19 and that would allow us to create strata within the overall
20 population, because that permit itself is such a big catchall for
21 -- You know, it's from Texas to the Keys, and all the species, and
22 I don't -- Is there a separate one for mackerel?

23
24 I'm sorry, and I sometimes get confused with the commercial side
25 of things, but it basically -- I think permits are not going to
26 help us much, and so we were going to figure out if there's anything
27 in the logbook, which will be much richer data to stratify the
28 population, and maybe not.

29
30 Again, we do our best with the first year, and see what looks good,
31 present it, and be completely open to feedback. If it's not
32 needed, then we'll report one number for the Gulf, and then I
33 think, you know, based on the numbers that I have seen, we can get
34 away with 10 percent, or something like that, going forward, and
35 then we'll do that. No one here wants to collect more data for
36 the sake of spending more time talking to fishermen.

37
38 **DR. ALLEN:** Okay. Yes, and I see that, but, just as a follow-up,
39 that doesn't seem consistent with a maximum of 20 percent of the
40 vessels sampled, because it seems like what you're proposing is an
41 iterative process that would weight the number of vessels sample
42 based on the required precision, and, if that's where this is
43 headed, it seems to me that it needs to be worded that way for us
44 to ponder.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. I have Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Strelcheck, and

1 Mr. Anson.

2

3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I just wanted to point out, Mr. Chair,
4 that part of the reason why we're talking about economic data here
5 on the for-hire fleet is not necessarily entirely biological, but
6 now charter-for-hire is included in fishery disasters, where they
7 can get subsequent funding from it there too, and so this is a
8 mechanism in order to get some of that information, to get people
9 back up and running when a disaster strikes, and so I just wanted
10 to throw that out there, too.

11

12 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Andy.

13

14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm glad that C.J. mentioned that, and,
15 obviously, we've selected a preferred alternative. I'm not, you
16 know, feeling the need to change it at this point, but I do feel
17 at least compelled to mention that Alternative 2 would provide
18 much better data for disaster responsiveness, because it's going
19 to provide the full picture of the entire industry throughout the
20 entire year.

21

22 We've heard industry loud and clear, in terms of concerns about
23 providing that data on a daily or trip-by-trip basis. Obviously,
24 we've pared it back to essentially three questions. The headboat
25 program, I believe currently, has to report that data. I still
26 see the better approach is to go with Alternative 2, but I
27 recognize, obviously, the industry's concerns.

28

29 The other aspect of this, and, you know, it's been a long time
30 since we heard Christopher's presentation, is we're going to want
31 to build into this, obviously, the economic cost and burden, both
32 on the industry and the government, but keep in mind the Science
33 Center has lost 30 percent of their personnel in the recent year,
34 right, and so staffing is going to be impacted, in terms of even
35 doing these specialized surveys, and so that adds an additional
36 burden and workload as well to the government, in terms of trying
37 to accomplish it.

38

39 How that balances out with the burden on the industry in providing
40 these questions is, obviously, to be determined, but we do need to
41 look, I think, very carefully at this one, as it moves forward for
42 the economics, on both sides of the equation.

43

44 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Anson.

45

46 **MR. ANSON:** Dr. Sweetman brought up my question, and Andy provided

1 some more information, but just to further talk about the disaster
2 assistance, and the ability now for the states to include charter
3 boats in their official requests, just from your vantage point,
4 Andy, then, you know, relative to the 20 percent that's identified
5 here for a non-targeted fishery, just, generally for a state, I
6 just want to make sure that, for Alternative 3, that, of the three
7 questions that are asked at the 20 percent level, that would be
8 sufficient data, in the eyes of NOAA, to qualify as a valid number
9 for the charter fleet?

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I'm certainly not the right person to ask
12 that question, in terms of sufficiency. It would be better than
13 what we've had, right, but whether or not it's sufficient, and
14 what level of detail is needed on a per-vessel basis, versus the
15 overall economic impacts of a disaster for the entire fleet, I
16 don't -- I couldn't fully answer.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Kevin.

19
20 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and certainly, you know, the devil in the details,
21 so to speak, but just thinking, you know, for Alabama's sake, a
22 state level for a hurricane, for instance, if that was the
23 disaster, and we were trying to assess the impact for the whole
24 fleet, for the state level, for a certain time period, you know,
25 that data, from the --

26
27 From the perspective that we are now, is we don't have any data,
28 really, but just trying to make sure that, if we go down this path,
29 and it gets approved, and this data collection process becomes
30 implemented, that, you know, that there is certainly the
31 opportunity for the states to utilize this data, and we don't get
32 to a point where, well, the coverage isn't good enough, or you
33 didn't ask this question, and that's kind of where I'm coming from,
34 is to make sure that we have at least the most basic infrastructure
35 in place, so that we can have something that would be a value for
36 that particular circumstance, and that's all I'm trying to confirm
37 here.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** That's a great point. I agree. I want to say
40 that this was maybe somewhere in all of our discussions on this,
41 that this was kind of deemed like it would be somewhat beneficial
42 in that department, but it would -- You're right that it would be
43 great to clarify before we come up with a number that's short of
44 what it would take.

45
46 **MR. ANSON:** Agreed.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Also, at least when it came to like the BP spill,
3 which was different, the tax returns of the charter boat guys are
4 deemed sufficient for relief, at least from British Petroleum,
5 demonstrating your history in the charter fishery, and your annual
6 income and stuff like that, and so I'm not sure how that applies,
7 but good discussion. Mr. Dugas.

8
9 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. A question, and maybe it's
10 for Mr. Strelcheck. In regard to the disaster relief, and maybe
11 I missed it, Andy, when was the charter-for-hire added to the
12 disaster relief, and has anyone benefited from it yet?

13
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I would have to go back and look as to when it
15 was added. I want to say it was a couple of years ago already, in
16 2024 maybe. In terms of has anyone benefited from it, I can't
17 think of any recent disaster requests that were including charter,
18 but am I missing one, C.J.?

19
20 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** It's hard to keep track of all these hurricanes.

21
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** That's what I was going to say. I would have to go
23 back. I mean, so Ian was the last one where fishery -- Where
24 charter-for-hire was not included. That was the old system, and
25 so every other disaster after that could, in theory, have a
26 charter-for-hire component. I would have to go explicitly into
27 our letters. We've had a lot of disaster requests in the State of
28 Florida over the last year or so, and I would have to go dive into
29 that a in a little more detail, J.D.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Sweetman.

32
33 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Well, mine is kind of more holistically about this
34 entire amendment here, and so I don't want to stop conversation
35 about this particular preferred alternative, and so I can hold,
36 unless there's more conversation.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. We'll put you on hold. Mr. Dugas.

39
40 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. I have one more comment,
41 just for possibly new council members that were not with us through
42 the first SEFHIER program, and there was a lawsuit, due to the
43 economical part of this amendment, and so I just wanted to let the
44 new council members know, and be aware, and that's why we're having
45 this conversation.

1 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. So maybe we put Preferred Alternative 3
2 here on -- Is this Action 4, I think, but just up for discussion
3 at Full Council, and, ideally, come up with something firm and
4 solid, so we can move this document forward, that's been sitting
5 there getting stale for a long time.

6
7 I think there's a lot of benefits to it outside of the economic,
8 as far as reporting your catch goes, with all the issues in MRIP
9 and state management ideas and all that, and so a lot of us would
10 like to see this thing move forward, and try not to get hung up
11 too much on something like this. Mr. Dugas.

12
13 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. One more thing, and it's
14 going to be a question for Andy. I am okay with moving this
15 document forward, if that's what the charter fleet desires, but my
16 question is who is going to fund it, because that's a sore topic
17 right now, is funding.

18
19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, J.D., for the question. You teed it up
20 nicely for me, because this is what I wanted to talk about, and so
21 the President recently signed our budget for FY26. It's certainly
22 more favorable than maybe we were expecting, although the agency
23 at this point has not received any allocations. That will take
24 some time.

25
26 We don't know, obviously, what ultimately will be provided to the
27 Fisheries Service, and specifically the Southeast Region and
28 Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

29
30 There is budget language in the Commerce bill this year that
31 provides no less than \$1.5 million for fishery management programs,
32 and another \$1.5 million for enforcement, to support the timely
33 implementation of ELBs in the Gulf for charter-for-hire, and then
34 there's also some language that says, furthermore, NMFS shall
35 continue to work in FY26 with the charter-for-hire recreational
36 fleet in the Gulf of America, as well as a number of other fisheries
37 around the country, to implement electronic monitoring and
38 electronic reporting technologies to better track information that
39 is currently collected through the use of human observers.

40
41 That one is a little bit less applicable, because we don't
42 necessarily have a lot of observers, but, regardless, I state that
43 because Congress's intention, obviously, and direction, is fairly
44 clear for now. We don't know, obviously, from the administration's
45 standpoint, how they're going to, you know, look to support this.

1 We've had executive orders that are promoting advanced technology.
2 We also have executive orders that are promoting deregulation,
3 which this is regulatory, and so, at this point, I'm not in a
4 position to tell you what our, you know, government's position
5 would be on this, and how to support it, other than to say, I
6 think, to the extent that we would abide by the congressional
7 language, and that's supported by the administration, we need to
8 be focusing on how can we run this program with a million-and-a-
9 half dollars, which to tell you --

10
11 You know, the question that was asked earlier about dockside
12 validation, when we started this program several years back, we
13 were being allocated upwards of \$2.7 million, of which I think \$1
14 million, or close to it was being shipped to Gulf States for
15 dockside validation work. Obviously, that money is not in this
16 budget currently, and so that is a concern of mine, is that we
17 could have electronic reporting, but it may not include all the
18 pieces to go along with the overall survey design.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Sweetman.

21
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I appreciate that explanation, Andy. That was
23 helpful, and it's part of my concern here. Let me just say I'm
24 fully supportive of moving forward on this. Private recreational,
25 obviously, typically tends to be the most landings from the
26 recreational sector, but for-hire is right behind that.

27
28 I mean, this is an important data source that we need to
29 effectively manage our fisheries here. SEFHIER 1.0 was highly
30 advocated for by the for-hire sector. They fought for it. It was
31 unfortunate the way it went down, but here we are, and so I guess,
32 trying to put this in a bigger picture, right, and so, yes, Andy,
33 you were highlighting some of the, you know, \$2.6 million for
34 SEFHIER initially.

35
36 I think that was cut at one point, right, by like 500 grand or
37 something like that. The South Atlantic Council also received a
38 letter, because they don't have dockside validation associated
39 with theirs, to the point where the service said basically that
40 data is not useful for fisheries management, to make decisions
41 there, and like there is part of my big concern there, is that we
42 would be putting funds up, or sorry. We would be putting time and
43 effort up, and potentially the service would be putting funds up,
44 for something that we can't even use.

45
46 Then, to further complicate things, we have the old HMS reporting

1 rule that's going on there, where this would include that, and so
2 now we have the possibility where there would be double reporting
3 there, and they do not have dockside validation associated with
4 theirs, and so that's been my biggest question relative to HMS,
5 and they do not seem willing to take our concerns off the table,
6 and they're just moving forward on some of that stuff, and so I
7 think these are all, you know, important pieces here that we need
8 to consider.

9
10 Having said all of that, despite some of those challenges there,
11 I'm still fully supportive of this, because we really, really do
12 need this kind of information there, but there's a lot of,
13 obviously, bigger-picture things that need to be flushed out behind
14 the scenes. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Banks.

17
18 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Well, C.J. hit the nail on the head right there.
19 My question was going to be where the HMS reporting, this one-stop
20 reporting initiative by NMFS and HMS and everything, and how this
21 is going to end up being duplicated, or integrated, and I don't
22 know if we ever got an update either if HMS was going to allow us
23 -- Or include our app that we currently have written in this, but,
24 yes, and thank you, C.J., for jumping on that bandwagon.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Hollensead.

27
28 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** So Dr. Clifford Hutt is online. I'm kind throwing
29 him a little bit here, if he's able to comment on any of those
30 things, or at least the progress of that proposed rule that C.J.
31 and Dr. Banks have mentioned, in terms of the electronic reporting
32 for the for-hire for HMS, and so he is available online, to maybe
33 ask questions of where they are on that process, if nothing else.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Hutt, are you on there?

36
37 **DR. CLIFFORD HUTT:** Yes, I am here. Can you hear me?

38
39 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes, sir. Loud and clear.

40
41 **DR. HUTT:** Good, and so I guess you're interested in where we are.
42 We are still in the process of finalizing this rulemaking. We are
43 very much considering the concerns that have been expressed by the
44 Gulf Council, and the other councils, as we are working on that,
45 and we are also working with the administration. You know, the
46 same limitations that Dr. Strelcheck just kind of outlined, in

1 trying to figure out what we can implement, given all of the above.

2
3 We are hoping to have some kind of final action out by the end of
4 the year, if only to kind of implement electronic reporting in our
5 commercial logbook. There's very much potential that we could
6 have to split this rulemaking out, given all those limitations we
7 are currently dealing with, but, you know, we are very much
8 considering the various concerns.

9
10 We have so far been able to implement our catch reporting in both
11 ACCSP's eTRIPS platform, and, starting this year, it's now been
12 implemented in Bluefin Data's VESL application, and so, if either
13 of those are an option for captains to use for their logbook
14 reporting, you know, a report for the SEFHIER program would also
15 count, you know, and cover whatever they're required under HMS.

16
17 We are working with, you know, SERO, and the rest of the agency,
18 on this east coast logbook project, and, you know, developing
19 separate reporting apps through that process, and so, I mean, it
20 is not our intention to create a situation where anyone is going
21 to have to report two separate logbook reports for their -- For
22 any given fishing trip.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** That's great. Thank you, Dr. Hutt. That was
25 going to be my next question, is whether HMS was open to trying to
26 blend together overlapping programs, to reduce that reporting
27 burden, and so I'm happy to hear you say that.

28
29 **DR. HUTT:** That is our primary concern, I will be honest with you.
30 The last thing we want to do is create a situation of duplicate
31 reporting.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Great. Thank you, sir. More comments? So, to
34 me, hearing that, and hearing that there is a little bit of money,
35 it seems like we could go ahead and move this forward, and not let
36 the fact that maybe we'll have overlapping reporting, and maybe we
37 won't, and maybe we'll get enough money, and maybe we won't, and
38 I think we should move it forward either way, and, you know, try
39 and iron those out as we go along, because this thing could just
40 sit there forever.

41
42 I mean, it seems like most things could sit there forever, if you
43 worry about do I have enough money for this or not, and, in the
44 past, some of the industry went out and found some money to back
45 up the program, and so that's a possibility this time. I've been
46 told, by those same individuals that, you know, if we put the

1 program out, they might try and help us find some money up at
2 Congress, and so I'm personally in favor of taking the next step
3 forward and moving this document along. Mr. Dugas.
4

5 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. One last question, Mr.
6 Strelcheck. In the event this amendment goes through, and passes
7 everything, goes through your shop, goes up to Commerce, gets
8 implemented, all these things happen, and it's ready to go, and
9 there's no funding, what does that look like?

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I think our basis for making a decision whether
12 to approve and move forward with the amendment or not would
13 probably hinge on, you know, funding, and so we can't be obligated
14 to do something without appropriations to actually support it,
15 right?
16

17 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Right, and I don't know how that works up there,
20 but it seems to me that, you know, we do our job, get it put
21 forward, put it together, pass it, and then just kind of hand it
22 off, but at least we've wrapped up this side of it, and cross that
23 next bridge when we get there. That's my outlook. Dr. Banks, do
24 you --
25

26 **DR. BANKS:** I was just confirming there was no validation in HMS's
27 proposed rule either.
28

29 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** A lot of potential tentacles here. Anything
30 else? Is this the end of the document, Dr. Hollensead?
31

32 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, Mr. Chair. This is the end of the actions.
33 I think one of the things council staff would be interested in,
34 and it sounds like there is some motivation to move forward with
35 some of this, at least direct council staff.
36

37 I guess, looking at priorities, and we can work with the Regional
38 Office too, I guess is there appetite and interest to try to
39 develop together Chapters 3 and 4, put together the complete what
40 would be required for the document, and have it by the next
41 meeting? I would have to look at leadership staff, but is that
42 the thought process, that the council might be interested in seeing
43 this again in April?
44

45 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Geeslin.
46

1 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Being that we are here
2 in Louisiana, I think I've heard, time and time again -- Every so
3 often I actually listen, but, you know, there's a contingent here
4 in Louisiana that, for whatever reason, and I haven't asked
5 specific questions, but they're vehemently opposed to this. I
6 just want to, you know, point that out. I certainly recognize
7 that opposition.

8
9 While I do, you know, see a lot of value in the data, my colleague
10 to the right here points out the validation concern, and so things
11 are spinning in my head. I'm wondering if there may be an option
12 for an opt-in and opt-out.

13
14 Without validation, why couldn't you have some kind of a, you know,
15 subsample framework to get us to -- You know, it's not going to be
16 the every charter-for-hire boat reporting, but, even without
17 validation, you still have a weakened -- In my mind, a weakened
18 estimate of those landings anyhow, and so just throwing that out
19 there, and I do look forward to both hearing and listening to our
20 charter-for-hire folks in public comment.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Banks.

23
24 **DR. BANKS:** Okay, and I might be jumping the gun just a hair, but,
25 Andy, could this document be held up with any of the permit issues?
26 I know I think you're going to give us an update, or somebody is
27 going to give us an update, on the permit portal, but I would
28 imagine Chapters 3 or 4 require some kind of permit analysis.

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** We'll be presenting on the permit update shortly,
31 and we're getting very close to releasing PIMS 2.0, which is our
32 upgrade of our permit system, and so that could happen in early
33 February, and so I don't think there's any holdup here.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Well, I'll speak to Mr. Geeslin. I was
36 personally kind of opposed to the program back in the day as well.
37 The economic data, I didn't like. I felt that was getting
38 intrusive, but I also don't like MRIP counting my fish anymore,
39 and, if we're going to have discussions about state management in
40 the charter boat industry, I would certainly like to have some
41 reported and validated catch data to go by there.

42
43 You know, I think maybe some of the holdouts against the program
44 don't realize that, you know, they could really benefit from some
45 of these points, particularly MRIP, and so, with that, if there's
46 no more discussion, I think we can wrap the SEFHIER discussion.

1 Am I missing somebody? Mr. Sanchez.

2

3 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I just want to say that, as some states
4 may or may not want this, there are equally other states with a
5 tremendous fleet that have demonstrated a long interest in this
6 process, and so I do think that we need to proceed with something,
7 or, if we're not going to do anything, again, please let me know
8 how I answer them when they ask me what are we doing with SEFHIER.

9

10 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Captain Frady.

11

12 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez.
13 Thank you, Mr. Geeslin, for chiming-in and talking about this.
14 These are real issues that we have as a fleet. My thoughts are,
15 when we went and got the money from Congress years ago, and that
16 were appropriated for the data collection program, it was an
17 industry initiative that went before Congress and asked
18 Appropriations to put this money in the account, so we could start
19 the program.

20

21 We knew that funding was drying up right there toward the end,
22 before the lawsuit settled everything, but I think it's wise, or
23 it's not going to hurt anything, to go ahead and push forward with
24 the SEFHIER program, and at least it gives the industry an
25 opportunity to do what they've got to do to try to get additional
26 funding appropriated from Congress to this.

27

28 If they fail, then they've got to figure out another way to do it,
29 but at least this gives them an avenue, or something to put as
30 something tangible, that they can put in front of the
31 Appropriations Committee and tell how important it is to an
32 industry. Thank you, sir.

33

34 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Captain Frady. All right. I think
35 we can move on. It was a great discussion, and we can finish that
36 up at Full Council. Would you like to -- Are you done, Dr.
37 Hollensead? Thank you. Should we take a break, Mr. Chair, or do
38 we roll on here? Roll on. I agree.

39

40 Okay, and so next up is Discussion on the Commercial Electronic
41 Logbook Program Implementation Plan. Do you have a presentation
42 on that? Is that you, Dr. Hollensead?

43

44 **DISCUSSION ON THE COMMERCIAL ELECTRONIC LOGBOOK PROGRAM**
45 **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

46

1 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Mr. Chair, we do have a presentation, but it's
2 going to be given by the Science Center. Dr. Walter will be giving
3 that presentation. As you might recall, for the newer council
4 members, we worked on a commercial electronic logbook program
5 amendment, and that was actually jointly done with the South
6 Atlantic, so that these things could kind of align at the same
7 time.

8
9 We got that pushed through and finalized and transmitted to the
10 Regional Office. That was some time ago, but, on November 20th of
11 last year, NOAA published a rule, or an announcement rather, for
12 comment for the logbook reporting program, and so the objective of
13 this action was to replace the existing paper logbook.

14
15 It wasn't to add anything new, or like what we're talking about
16 with SEFHIER, sort of build something from scratch. It was merely
17 to take what's already existed in the paper logbook and allow
18 participants to go ahead and electronically submit, you know,
19 improving accuracy and timeliness of data and that sort of thing.

20
21 Staff from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center will provide any
22 updates, or timelines, regarding the progress of transmitting the
23 commercial coastal logbook from paper to electronic reports, and
24 so the committee should just ask any clarifying questions of the
25 staff, and this item is for information only, and so it's sort of
26 a progress update on that item. At that point, I would hand it
27 over to Dr. Walter, so he can provide his presentation.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Great. Thank you, Dr. Hollensead. Are you with
30 us, Dr. Walter?

31
32 **DR. WALTER:** I am.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right.

35
36 **DR. WALTER:** I would ask staff to pull up the presentation. All
37 right. Great. I guess I'm probably keeping everybody from lunch,
38 and so I'll try to be rather quick here. We can go on to the next
39 slide. I also have Dr. David Gloeckner here online for any
40 specific questions.

41
42 I'll be talking about the joint commercial electronic logbook
43 amendment, and it would change from the previous paper reporting
44 to an electronic reporting. It's currently in the rulemaking
45 stage. The public comment period just recently closed, and most
46 of the feedback that we and our staff have gotten at the council

1 meetings over the time of development have been positive and
2 supportive of the switch to electronic reporting. I think most
3 people are in favor of something that's faster and easier to report
4 and avoids using snail mail to report their trips.

5
6 One of the key elements of this is the database development, and
7 the Inflation Reduction Act funded the East Coast Logbook Database
8 Project, a centralized and standardized data collection along the
9 Atlantic coast, to provide a one-stop shop for reporting across
10 many fisheries, and the data from multiple offices will be housed
11 in this new integrated database, to hopefully avoid duplication of
12 data management, and that aligns with the federal data
13 modernization efforts.

14
15 The ECLB database will serve as the single source for federal
16 logbook data for many of the fishery partners along the east coast,
17 and I believe it will also work for the HMS reporting. I think
18 we're trying to make sure that that can be harmonized there.

19
20 In terms of the reporting application, which an application is a
21 cellphone add-on, so you can report using your cellphone, the
22 Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program has an eTRIPS
23 mobile application.

24
25 There's also you can report online, on your laptop, with eTRIPS
26 online, and there's other available options, including the RADFish
27 Coastal Logbook Application for Southeast permit holders, which
28 was developed as part of the East Coast Logbook Project, and you
29 should have a number of different options for reporting.

30
31 In terms of the infrastructure status, we're developing the
32 internal infrastructure to properly take in the data from those
33 multiple different applications and then merge it with the legacy
34 data that we've been collecting with the paper system.

35
36 One of the hiccups that's come along just recently is the
37 requirement for multifactor authentication, which, if you do
38 anything online, you're probably familiar, and annoyed, by the
39 requirement to have your cellphone text you a code so that you can
40 log into things you previously were able to log into simply with
41 your password.

42
43 This MFA authentication is a necessary requirement to meet data
44 security, but it also has the potential to be a little bit
45 challenging, because of the need to be able to have that to ensure
46 data integrity and security, and so we hope that people are

1 familiar with that in other for a, and other situations, and so
2 that they'll be able to overcome the challenge here for logbook
3 reporting, but this is a requirement for us.

4
5 Then transitioning out of paper collection until the final
6 implementation date will allow for opportunity to test reporting
7 applications.

8
9 Voluntary testing will follow the successful internal
10 infrastructure testing, and so people will be able to voluntarily
11 report in late 2026, we believe, and the priority for testing will
12 be for those who expressed interest in being early adopters, or
13 early reporters, in the past, and so, if you're interested in that,
14 contact our logbook program staff, so you can start reporting in
15 late 2026, using one of the applications, and kind of work through
16 any of the kinks or bugs that might be there.

17
18 The communication plan is permit holders will be contacted through
19 physical letters and emails announcing the launch of the electronic
20 logbooks. Outreach materials, including user manuals,
21 infographics, guided demo videos, and recorded webinars will be
22 made available upon launch.

23
24 Our logbook staff have conducted outreach meetings, and will
25 continue to hold them with the available applications to answer
26 questions, and there will be a combination of online and in-person,
27 depending on funding availability to have our logbook staff
28 actually go out into the field. Otherwise, it will be online.

29
30 Then, again, our logbook staff will be available during business
31 hours to answer general questions, and the software help desks for
32 each of the applications should be able to provide support for
33 user questions, application errors, and login issues.

34
35 One of the things that many people notice is that we've been a bit
36 delayed in implementing the electronic logbook. Part of the
37 problems have been staffing losses, which have hit the center
38 fairly hard in 2025, as well as the region.

39
40 We've also had slowdowns from the government shutdown that delayed
41 progress on the east coast logbook, and left some of our partners
42 and contractors without federal guidance for a lengthy period of
43 time, and this impacted some of the project timelines. Then we
44 had some issues with our IRA funds, in terms of having to advance
45 the project timeline to be able to use those expenditures, which
46 forced and required some de-scoping of the overall project scale.

1 While we think it will meet the needs, it won't have as much as it
2 would have had had it had a longer time period.

3
4 In terms of the expected timeline, we believe that voluntary
5 testing will be able to begin in late 2026, with final
6 implementation aiming for early 2027. That is dependent on the
7 successful internal infrastructure testing of the PIMS 2.0
8 implementation that Kevin McIntosh will go over in the next
9 presentation.

10
11 Here we've got time for any questions that people may have, and I
12 think -- I know our staff are looking forward to implementation,
13 and I hope that many of you out there are also looking forward to
14 moving into the digital age for logbooks. We will miss the annual
15 holiday mailers of your Christmas cards including the paper
16 logbooks, but I think that movement to the cellphone app is
17 definitely timely. Thanks.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Any questions for Dr.
20 Walter? Dr. Sweetman.

21
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No questions, bust very supportive of this, John.
23 We kind of went through a very similar thing at FWC in the last
24 year or so, where we moved into the twenty-first century, from
25 paper logbooks to more electronic reporting on this, and, yes,
26 and, I mean, I get some of the challenges you're up against. I'm
27 very supportive of what you guys are moving forward there.

28
29 One recommendation that I will say we learned was training
30 sessions, whether in-person or virtual, were very, very helpful
31 for the commercial fishermen. We did similar things. We were
32 posting videos, instructional things, but those tutorials that
33 were kind of in-person, whether virtual or, you know physically
34 in-person, were very helpful and beneficial for the commercial
35 sector, but kudos to you guys for moving forward on this.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Others? I have a few
38 comments myself. One, whose requirement is it to have this
39 multifactor authentication, and, to my knowledge, we don't do that
40 in the commercial side, or the for-hire side, and is this something
41 new? Is there any way we can get around this, because it's
42 certainly going to make things a lot harder, cause a lot of
43 complications, and maybe even more manpower when people have issues
44 with their things, and so can you comment on that, sir?

45
46 **DR. WALTER:** Chair, I'm getting the answer to that one, and it

1 might be one -- So just stand by while we get the answer.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes, and that's fine, but am I right in thinking
4 that we don't have this in the commercial, or the charter, or the
5 SEFHIER or anything?

6
7 **DR. WALTER:** Well, just wait, because it may be required in the
8 others.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yay. I have a hard enough time keeping track of
11 my passwords, and my authentications and stuff, and so I can only
12 imagine, you know, my fellow commercial fishermen around the Gulf.
13 While we have you here, my next question was is there anything we
14 can do to make this move faster, but it doesn't sound like there
15 is.

16
17 If you have any suggestions, I know that the fish houses and other
18 fishermen are -- You know, there's a lot of issues of people I
19 know this year with the paper reporting, and just the slightest
20 little typo on your paper form, and like one time I forgot to put
21 "FL" in the box next to my county, and they have to mail it back,
22 and you fix it, and you mail it back to them, and, in the meantime,
23 your permit is held up.

24
25 Myself, and a lot of people, I know are certainly looking forward
26 to electronic logbook reporting here as soon as possible. Is there
27 anything we can do here as a committee, and a council, that would
28 make anything go any faster, or it's outside of your control?

29
30 **DR. WALTER:** Well, I hope people put that in their public comments,
31 and I think it is very clear, from many of the meetings, the desire
32 to move forward with it. I think, at this point, the wheels are
33 in motion, but I'll also ask if there's anything that maybe Andy's
34 shop at the Regional Office may want to say on this, and I believe
35 we might have an answer for some of the MFA. I'll probably defer
36 to Andy.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. Andy, and then I have Jessica Stephen
39 and Dave Gloeckner.

40
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Go ahead and go to Jessica, because she can answer
42 more about the multifactor authentication.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Stephen.

45
46 **DR. JESSICA STEPHEN:** Can you all hear me?

1
2 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** We have you, yes.
3

4 **DR. STEPHEN:** Okay, and so the MFA requirement was under an
5 Executive Order, M2209, which they call a zero trust, and so it's
6 a mandate for all of the government to move to multifactor
7 authentication, and so if any of you have recently had a log-in to
8 say Social Security or the IRS, you'll notice that it's forcing
9 you to go through login.gov.

10
11 That same mandate does apply to fisheries as well. We were given
12 a bit of an extension, in order to get it all in place, and so
13 we're rapidly coming up to that extension, which is why it's now
14 coming into play, and so, currently, I don't think any of our
15 fishery applications at all have an MFA requirement.

16
17 Most of them are single, or a simple single password and a
18 username, and so this is everything fisheries as a whole is moving
19 to, and we do have conversations that are occurring across regions
20 as we're moving towards it.

21
22 One of the benefits really will be that it will be more secure for
23 your data as you're moving forward. I have brought up, in more
24 national discussions, the concern about making sure our fishermen
25 understand how to use it, and that we do good outreach and training
26 on how to move forward to it, and so, yes, IFQ will also have to
27 move to the multifactor authentication.

28
29 That's been part of our plan as we try to figure out how that
30 works, as well as SEFHIER, if it goes into place in the Gulf will
31 have to, and SEFHIER in the South Atlantic will as well, and then
32 we're working with the commercial logbooks, and so this is all
33 something we're working together on.

34
35 Right now, I don't have a single answer on how it will go, but we
36 do have a lot of people working together towards it, and, at least
37 for IFQ and SEFHIER, we will definitely -- The SERO will be putting
38 out a lot of outreach to help as we get towards that.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Stephen. I have Mr. Dave
41 Gloeckner next.

42
43 **DR. DAVE GLOECKNER:** Well, I think Jessica covered everything that
44 I'm aware of, but, yes, just like she said, we've got a lot of
45 people working on it from the Science Center and the Southeast, to
46 the folks at GARFO, folks at Headquarters, and so we are throwing

1 a lot of people at it, to try and ensure it's as smooth a transition
2 as possible. Thanks.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Gloeckner. Frank, you have a
5 comment?

6
7 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Specifically to the
8 proposed rule, so the NOA comment period ended January 20, and we
9 received twenty submissions from the public. Most were supportive.
10 There were some in opposition that we're going to work through.

11
12 D-Day is February 20, and so we need to make a decision on whether
13 to approve the amendments by February 20, and so that will happen,
14 and then the proposed rule is in Headquarters, pending clearance
15 for publication, and so we'll let everybody know when that
16 publishes for a thirty-day comment period on the proposed rule.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Frank. All right. Any more comments
19 on electronic logbook program from the committee? Seeing none, I
20 guess this was just an informational, right, and so there's no
21 action from us, and so we can move on. Mr. Chair says let's take
22 a ten-minute break, and so we'll leave it here, and we'll take it
23 back up with the permit update program, Section VI of this
24 committee, and so we'll call it adjourned for how long?

25
26 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. We will take our lunch
27 break. It's scheduled at noon, and we will reconvene at 1:30.

28
29 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on January 26, 2026.)

30
31 - - -

32
33 January 26, 2026

34
35 MONDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

36
37 - - -

38
39 The Data Collection Committee of the Gulf Council reconvened at
40 The Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Monday afternoon,
41 January 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Ed Walker.

42
43 **MR. DUGAS:** Okay, folks. We're going to get started in a few
44 moments. We had some technical difficulties with electrical
45 outlets here. Welcome back to New Orleans, Alaska, it feels like,
46 and I'm going to turn it over to Captain Walker to continue the

1 Data Collection discussion. Captain Walker.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think the next thing on
4 the Data Collection Committee agenda will be the action guide, the
5 next steps and action guide. Is that correct, Dr. Hollensead?
6 Okay. It's all you.

7
8 **UPDATE ON SOUTHEAST REGION PERMIT SYSTEM**
9

10 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I'll quickly review
11 Agenda Item VI, and so we're going to receive a presentation for
12 Mr. Kevin McIntosh. He's at the Regional Office, and he's going
13 to provide a presentation on the Permit Information Management
14 System, and he may refer to it as PIMS.

15
16 This presentation is going to include a review of recent
17 improvements to the launch of PIMS in 2021, including the ability
18 to submit new and transfer applications along with permit renewals,
19 and he's also going to provide information regarding recent
20 developments with PIMS, including some modification on the backend
21 database design. You may have heard some concerns around the table
22 about that.

23
24 That is expected to alleviate some of these challenges when we
25 start developing some of our council documents, and the analysis
26 that we use to inform those, and so the committee should ask any
27 clarifying questions of the staff. This item is informational
28 only, and so no action is required from the committee at this time,
29 and so, at this point, Mr. Chair, I would hand it over to Mr.
30 McIntosh for his presentation.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. You're up, Mr. McIntosh.

33
34 **MR. KEVIN MCINTOSH:** All right. Great. Can you all hear me?

35
36 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes, sir. We have you.

37
38 **MR. MCINTOSH:** Perfect, and I do have a presentation. There we
39 go. Perfect. First off, I want to thank the Gulf Council for
40 having me. Looking back at my emails, I think the last time I
41 updated the council was back in June of 2022, in Fort Myers, and
42 so a lot of things have changed in that time.

43
44 Here's a brief history of PIMS, and so, in 2007, the Southeast
45 Regional Office developed and launched the Permit Information
46 Management System, or PIMS. That system is used to track

1 applications, track permits, permit history, ownership,
2 everything, and so, for eight years, it kind of stood unchanged,
3 until 2015, when we added our first ability to submit renewal
4 applications online.

5
6 For folks that remember that, those were the for-hire permits in
7 the South Atlantic and Gulf that we started with, and then, over
8 the next couple of years, 2016, 2017, 2018, and there we started
9 adding additional vessel permits. By 2021, I think we had most
10 vessel permits online.

11
12 That's also when we launched our modernized version of the PIMS
13 system called PIMS 1.0. It launched with the ability to not only
14 renew all of the permits, but it also included the ability to
15 request new permits, open access permits, and then transfer limited
16 access permits, along with operator cards, dealer permits,
17 aquaculture, live Rock, and that's it.

18
19 We started to establish the next iteration about a year-and-a-half
20 ago, with the PIMS 2.0, which is slated to launch in early next
21 month, in 2026.

22
23 Some of the successes of the PIMS 1.0, and it launched in 2021,
24 and so the previous system only allowed the renewal of some vessel
25 permits. Again, this allowed for all vessel permits and transfers,
26 duplicate requests, new permits, all submitted online.

27
28 The last check that I did, last month, we have about 96 percent of
29 our applications being submitted online, and so only less than
30 about 4 percent are submitted via paper. Because of this, because
31 we're getting most of the applications online, it has directly
32 reduced the application processing time. Because the system itself
33 reduces missing or erroneous data, we've been able to reduce those
34 processing times.

35
36 Prior to the 1.0 system, permit holders could expect anywhere from
37 two to three weeks before your permit was even reviewed, once
38 submitted to the office. With the new system, right after the
39 presentation I gave in Fort Myers in 2022, we pretty much dropped
40 it down to a day or two or three, where you submit your application,
41 and, a couple days later, you're able to have that reviewed.

42
43 One of the biggest reasons why is we were able to move to emailing
44 of deficiency letters, which reduce the time that we notify the
45 applicants from days or weeks to minutes or hours. I remember, in
46 the old days, when the paper application would be submitted to the

1 office, we would get it, we would find a deficiency, we would mail
2 it, a deficiency letter, maybe going up to the Carolinas, and it
3 took four or five days to get there.

4
5 Once the applicant received it, they returned what was needed for
6 the application, and, assuming it was correct, we could process
7 the application. If it wasn't, that whole process would happen
8 again, and so that could have been multiple weeks. I've processed
9 applications that have taken minutes for someone to get the email
10 that they're missing something and to actually provide that in the
11 application.

12
13 Another prime example was the 2018-2019 shutdown, which was the
14 one that lasted thirty-five days. We had 800 applications on the
15 shelf, and it took us six weeks to clear out those applications
16 after the government reopened. This latest shutdown, which was
17 forty-three days, and almost 500 applications on the shelf, it
18 took us nine days to clear out that backlog, and that was actually
19 with less staff as well.

20
21 The success of the PIMS 1.0 is the digitally-transmitted permits,
22 and so, similar to the deficiency letters that would take multiple
23 weeks to arrive to applicants, so would permits. We would send
24 them out similar way we would send out deficiency letters, and so
25 we would get the calls that I haven't received my permits yet, and
26 so open access permits, dealer permits, operator permits, they're
27 digitally transmitted the moment that they're approved, meaning
28 they're in the permit holder's account and can be immediately
29 downloaded, printed, and used within seconds of it being approved.

30
31 This also allows them to request a replacement for open access
32 permits, by just going back into their account and downloading
33 another copy of the permit, and then, for limited access permits,
34 the ability to request duplicate permits online.

35
36 The future of PIMS, this is the PIMS 2.0 system now getting ready
37 to launch. We have a new Freedom of Information Act page. Those
38 that were familiar with the old pages that listed all the permits
39 broken out by fishery, when we launched the new 1.0 back in 2021,
40 that was an area that didn't get a whole lot of attention, and so
41 we've had an Excel CSV file that has listed just all of our permit
42 holders since 2021.

43
44 The technology that this PIMS is built in directly connects to a
45 website that is real time, and so, if a permit gets issued,
46 transferred, renewed, anything, that is immediately going to be

1 available on our public-facing webpage that doesn't require a user
2 to log in with an account. They'll be able to visit that page and
3 find the information they're looking for.

4
5 There will be additional online account control, and so, right
6 now, in the 1.0 system, the system automatically generates a
7 renewal app for a particular vessel or a dealer. We're finding
8 that those are causing issues with those folks that didn't want to
9 renew their permit, that they intended to sell it, or they intended
10 to transfer it to another vessel, and so you would have this extra
11 application in their account, and that was causing confusion.

12
13 We're still going to alert permit holders, like we do now, two
14 months prior to the permits expiring, but they're going to have
15 the ability to go into their account and decide if they want to
16 generate a renewal application. If they don't, they can not do
17 that, and choose to transfer the permits. This will reduce,
18 really, the overall number of applications, erroneous ones, that
19 they have in their account.

20
21 Enhanced validation, and so, just like with any system, the more
22 you have validations on the front end, the cleaner the application
23 is. It reduces the application deficiencies and erroneous data,
24 along with the time, and so we've added additional validation,
25 which should make for cleaner applications, and then, as talked
26 about before, the backend data design.

27
28 The challenges with the current 1.0 system stem from how the data
29 was stored in the database. It was different from the old PIMS
30 that was launched in 2007, and so it limited the ability to use
31 the data for programs analysis and council purposes. The new
32 design of 2.0 matches, mirrors, the structure of the old PIMS
33 system, and, by doing so, the new system will accept existing
34 queries that we've built over years, and it's more familiar to the
35 people that are accessing that data. That's it, and I'll take any
36 questions.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. McIntosh. Any questions? Yes,
39 Mr. Anson.

40
41 **MR. ANSON:** You may have said it, Kevin, but when do you think
42 those updates would be implemented, specifically the real-time
43 updates of the FOIA information?

44
45 **MR. MCINTOSH:** So that's tied with the launch of the PIMS 2.0,
46 which is right now slated for the second week of February, as long

1 as the testing, the final testing, go well, the last-minute
2 testing.

3

4 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

5

6 **MR. MCINTOSH:** It will be located -- One final comment, and it
7 will be located right on the same page as it currently is on our
8 FOIA page, except the link will now go to a separate page, versus
9 the Excel file, or the CSV file, that it currently downloads.

10

11 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I have another question, Mr. McIntosh. Is there
12 any plan in the future for being able to print out your own limited
13 access permit, and, if not, why not, because I know, the open
14 access permits, you can -- I think now you can print them out
15 yourself, right?

16

17 **MR. MCINTOSH:** Correct.

18

19 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** But you can't with a limited access permit.

20

21 **MR. MCINTOSH:** Correct, and so there has been discussion. The
22 difference is, obviously, the transfer. You know, you can transfer
23 a limited access permit, and right now, to do that, you must take
24 that permit, sign the back of it in front of a notary, to kind of
25 declare that you're selling that permit, and then the new permit
26 holder then signs the bottom of it and sends that application into
27 the office.

28

29 We have started to kind of explore different options of us being
30 able to digitally transmit, like we do the open access permits,
31 but the permit transfers, and making sure that, you know, we're
32 not accidentally -- Someone is not accidentally transferring a
33 limited access permit away from somebody, that's our biggest
34 roadblock right now, is to figure out how we can do that. Again,
35 right now, we verify everything on the back of that permit when it
36 comes in for a transfer.

37

38 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Right. That wasn't my question. I get that
39 part, but, just to renew your permit, if you're not transferring
40 it to anybody else, which is probably more common, is there a
41 reason those permits, if you're renewing your own permit, can't be
42 printed out off of your email?

43

44 **MR. MCINTOSH:** For the limited access?

45

46 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes, but not a transfer, just to renew it.

1
2 **MR. MCINTOSH:** Well, so, right now, we send out those permits on
3 our special permit paper, right, and so that's another one of those
4 security features. Again, if you're printing them out at home,
5 you're not going to have that paper, and so, while you're -- As
6 you stated, your intention may be to renew it, and we wouldn't
7 know that while you're doing that application.

8
9 I think what the idea that we're talking about, while you're not
10 talking about transferring permits, would satisfy that as well,
11 and you're just renewing it. This is -- We're going to work with
12 law enforcement, because, right now, I believe the regulations
13 state that you must have that permit printed out, and on our
14 special paper as well, and so we worked with them when we got the
15 open access. That's why you have a logo on there that says
16 digitally transmitted. We would just need to work with them as
17 well, but we are working towards that.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Special paper. Any more questions on
20 this topic? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. McIntosh.

21
22 **MR. MCINTOSH:** Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Next on our agenda is I've got Deepwater Grouper
25 Complex Recreational Mandatory Reporting Discussion with Mr. Bray
26 and Dr. Hollensead.

27
28 **DISCUSSION: DEEPWATER GROUPEr COMPLEX RECREATIONAL REPORTING**

29
30 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'll just go through the
31 action guide for this last item here, and so Mr. Gregg Bray, from
32 the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and myself are going
33 to provide a collaborative presentation addressing the council's
34 August 2025 motion to request a presentation that explores the use
35 of mandatory reporting for the recreational sector for the
36 deepwater grouper fishery.

37
38 This presentation is for a report on some recent workshops
39 facilitated by the Gulf States to investigate potential novel
40 approaches in data collection for the private recreational sector,
41 and also review current and previous state and federal private
42 recreational mandatory programs.

43
44 Additionally, this presentation is going to highlight the inherent
45 challenges in implementing a mandatory reporting program and
46 provide some suggestions from state agency scientists who comprise

1 GulfFIN, and I'll go into a little bit what that is, that we
2 received at their October 2025 meeting.

3
4 The committee should review this presentation, ask lots of
5 questions of staff, and provide any direction to staff on next
6 steps regarding this item, if desired, and so, if there's any
7 questions, we can just get right into the collaborative
8 presentation here.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Take it away.

11
12 **DR. HOLLENSHAD:** Okay. As I mentioned, this is a little
13 unconventional. We'll do kind of a collaborative presentation
14 here, but it should work just fine.

15
16 Just to give you a little bit of an outline, what's in bold there
17 are slides and concepts that I'm going to cover, and then what's
18 in italics is what Gregg is going to come up and speak to you about
19 and so I'm going to go through a little bit of background, why
20 we're having this presentation, provide a little bit of context,
21 and Gregg is then going to go through all of the things that we've
22 mentioned up here that are sort of bulleted out.

23
24 They're mostly from the states' perspective, as well as from
25 GulfFIN, and so, again, we'll go into a little bit what that is,
26 but he's, you know, the man to talk to about all of those things,
27 as he's got a real wealth of knowledge associated with those.

28
29 Then he'll kick it back to me, and I'm going to give an overview
30 of recreational data collection using mandatory approaches at the
31 federal level, and so looking at HMS, which we spoke about a little
32 earlier today, as well as the for-hire sector, the SEFHIER document
33 that we talked about.

34
35 Then I'll give some conclusions and some next steps, and so I'm
36 sort of bookending this presentation, with Gregg in the middle,
37 and so just to give everybody a lay of the land here in this
38 presentation. Okay. Next slide please, Bernie.

39
40 Just some real general background, before we get kind of dive into
41 this very large overview of how do you collect fisheries data, and
42 there's sort of two broad camps in which you can collect this
43 information. You can do a census, and so that assumes 100 percent
44 of data fields are reported 100 percent of the time.

45
46 Some examples that we have here, that are pretty close to, are the

1 IFQ program and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, and so these
2 are nearly census-level programs, and the pros are that they
3 collect real-time data, with fairly low uncertainty, but there are
4 some cons associated with it, in terms of requires substantial
5 oversight, right, because you've got to make sure, you know, you've
6 got people reporting 100 percent of the time, 100 percent of the
7 people, and so that requires some rigorous oversight.

8
9 Violating the 100 percent reporting 100 percent of the time
10 assumption renders output unusual, since reporting rates, and so
11 that is how many people didn't report when they should have, like
12 you're assuming they're reporting, but they actually didn't, and
13 so that -- If you violate that assumption, the numbers you get out
14 of that, can -- You can lead to misinterpreting things, right, and
15 so those are sort of the cons associated broadly with the census.
16 It's just a really quick overview.

17
18 The second method you could use is called a survey, and so that's
19 going to be a proportion of information collected, and then
20 expanded out towards some total fishing population, and so lots of
21 examples of this, right, like LA Creel, Alabama Creel, Mississippi
22 Creel, MRIP, Texas Parks and Wildlife, SRFS, and so all of those
23 kind of programs you've heard about use a survey design.

24
25 The pros there is it requires less oversight, right, and so you
26 don't have to have necessarily all of the oversight that's required
27 for the census, and it's generally cheaper to administer than a
28 census, because of that.

29
30 Some of the cons are, as we've discussed, you know, a lot of this
31 table, sometimes the outcomes are estimates, right, and they have
32 uncertainty associated with them. Sometimes it's very large, and
33 sometimes it might be even sort of unknown, and so it makes it
34 hard to use for management decisions, and it takes a lot of time
35 to process, and QA/QC, and make sure what you're getting is
36 something that you can use, and so that's just, very broadly, a
37 broad painting of different ways to collect fisheries data, and so
38 just keep that in the back of your mind as we kind of go through
39 this.

40
41 Again, the background, and why are we here talking about this, and
42 so, in August of 2025, the council made a motion, and it's
43 underlined there, and so requesting a presentation that explores
44 the use of a mandatory reporting system for the recreational sector
45 of the deepwater grouper fishery, and so sort of specific that
46 this is the fishery we wanted to look at.

1
2 There wasn't, you know, the discussion, and this was getting a
3 little started, and this was a little abstract. At the time, it
4 wasn't, you know, really identified who might first tackle
5 addressing this motion, and so council staff requested that the
6 Gulf States Fishing Information Network, and so, if you've heard
7 me say GulfFIN, that's what I'm referring to, committee provide
8 some insights at their October 2025 meeting.

9
10 The committee is a state and federal cooperative group that is
11 tasked with cooperatively collecting, managing, and disseminating
12 marine commercial, recreational, and anadromous fish data for the
13 information of the conservation and management of fishery
14 resources in the Gulf, and so, basically, it's all your boots-on-
15 the-ground state agency and federal agency partners. They get
16 together, and have these committees, and they do a lot of really
17 good work there.

18
19 These are people that really know their programs. They understand
20 their design. These are all fishery-dependent experts, right, and
21 so this is not your scientific survey folks. These are people who
22 are collecting recreational and/or commercial data and are able
23 then to disseminate how do we warehouse this, and how do we make
24 sure that managers get to the questions, and, you know, they get
25 the information they need for the questions they have.

26
27 This is always sort of -- Whenever we have sort of like how do we
28 sort of build out these programs that we may be interested in
29 designing, this is sort of the first group we usually go to, to
30 kind of get some feedback from them, and so we did that here, and
31 the recommendations for this committee, along with some background
32 of mandatory reporting approaches in the private recreational data
33 collection at the state level. We're going to then hand over to
34 Mr. Gregg Bray to go ahead and give us some insight on those for
35 his portion of the presentation.

36
37 **MR. GREGG BRAY:** Thank you, Dr. Hollensead and Mr. Chairman. Let's
38 just get right into some of this feedback, and some of these
39 thoughts, and so next slide, please. We thought we would start
40 with a couple examples of mandatory census programs that have been
41 deployed in our region by two states as you consider the idea of
42 a mandatory reporting program for this fishery.

43
44 Alabama Snapper Check and Mississippi Tales 'n Scales are over ten
45 years old now. Both were established through state law as a
46 mandatory reporting program for red snapper, initially, and, since

1 it was mandatory, enforcement had the ability to assess fines,
2 confiscate fish, but I think it's worth mentioning that, in talking
3 with the state partners, there was a substantial grace period
4 associated with this, and so, to think about deploying a mandatory
5 reporting program, and having enforcement making immediate fines
6 and penalties that would maybe change behaviors, it took some time.
7

8 These data were critical, and are critical, because the previous
9 data source would have been MRIP general survey landings, and those
10 are only available, as you all are aware, every two months, and
11 the need to have more timely access to estimates of effort and
12 landings, such that the states could monitor their ACLs, was
13 critical, and so that was the large, one of the large, genesis for
14 these programs, and it absolutely provided that, more timely
15 estimates.
16

17 We thought we would talk a little bit about what worked and what
18 were some of the challenges that have been faced through these
19 mandatory reporting programs.
20

21 The amount of data and the timeliness of the data that was coming
22 in definitely helped, from a monitoring standpoint, especially in
23 the early years, where we were dealing with shorter fishing
24 seasons, and the need to stay on top of landings in a much more
25 timely fashion. It worked well, and, since the states were
26 deploying these surveys, it provided flexibility to implement a
27 less burdensome survey.
28

29 States could focus in on the minimum data elements they needed to
30 collect both effort and landings data, and that was a huge benefit
31 to lowering respondent burden. States provided electronic
32 reporting tools, which made it easier for anglers to report, and
33 then the states also deployed dockside validation surveys, which
34 we've all talked about, when it comes to logbook programs, how
35 critical a validation program is. They had dockside validation
36 surveys intercepting anglers at public fishing locations.
37

38 Again, the caveat, with all of our surveys, tends to be that, if
39 people are originating and returning to private docks, the
40 potential exists that we're missing those still, and that's
41 something that we need to consider when we talk about validation.
42

43 Yet, with mandatory reporting programs, we still see variable
44 results when it comes to compliance. We would like to hope that,
45 we tell someone that they have to participate, they will, but
46 that's not always the case. For both of these two states, I think,

1 in the end, you would see Mississippi got to a very high degree of
2 compliance, and Alabama not as high.
3
4 I'll even give you a third example of a mandatory program that
5 actually we didn't realize it was a precursor to SEFHIER 1.0. In
6 2010 and 2011, we ran, in conjunction with the Regional Office, a
7 mandatory logbook program in the for-hire sector in the Panhandle
8 of Florida and in Texas, and it took us the better part of two
9 years to get to a 70 percent compliance rate.
10
11 The biologists that worked on that program would tell you the
12 countless staff hours it took just to get to that number, and so
13 we need to keep that in mind when we talk about compliance
14 associated with a mandatory reporting program. It's not always
15 easy, and sometimes it's extremely burdensome to get there.
16
17 It needs to be feasible for law enforcement. The farther we keep
18 cutting the segment of the fishery, and the farther that they're
19 operating offshore, the less likelihood it is that we're going to
20 have law enforcement interactions with these folks.
21
22 You know, the offshore component is one that we focused on trying
23 to improve that, because the estimates say that 10 percent of the
24 angling population in the Gulf region fishes offshore, and now
25 we're talking about subsetting that to a very small percentage of
26 people that are targeting deepwater grouper, and so we need to
27 think about that, is what's the likelihood of law enforcement
28 interactions with this fishery.
29
30 Then, when we start getting away from our general survey protocols,
31 just the general effort and landing surveys, and start deploying
32 these specialized surveys, which are ultimately needed in many of
33 these scenarios, it comes with additional costs, like application
34 development costs, survey design costs, who is going to warehouse
35 the data, data dissemination, quality control.
36
37 All of these things are new modules that need to be deployed to be
38 able to collect this data, store this data, disseminate this data,
39 ensure its accuracy, and so we need to think about that, that there
40 are additional costs.
41
42 We helped Alabama, through GulfFIN and money that we received
43 through the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act to
44 support their survey. Mississippi paid for their survey
45 themselves, and so all of those were additional costs that were
46 present prior to the implementation of those new surveys.

1
2 Then, as many of you are aware, the need to calibrate those survey
3 results into a common currency that can be used in science and
4 management was a cumbersome and somewhat controversial, I could
5 say, process that was not easy. All of these things are -- We had
6 some really good things, and yet some challenges that maybe we
7 didn't even foresee in the beginning when some of these programs
8 were deployed.

9
10 While we're talking about this issue of how do we maybe collect
11 some better data in the deepwater grouper fishery, leading up to
12 this point, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, in
13 partnership with NOAA Fisheries and our states, have been using
14 some IRA money we received to investigate what potential novel
15 approaches would be to improving both recreational fishing effort
16 and released catch data here in our region.

17
18 It's no secret that there's been a lot of concern, and frustration,
19 with the numbers that have been produced and are being used in the
20 recreational sector, and so we took this opportunity to hold a
21 couple workshops in 2024, and the primary focus in both of these
22 areas was what are the current challenges in collecting both effort
23 and release catch data, but then what are some novel approaches we
24 could entertain that could look at maybe a new way, a better way,
25 a way that would provide more confidence from the constituents in
26 the results that would come from this.

27
28 We held these workshops, we talked about the challenges, and then
29 we brought a bunch of people in to present some novel technological
30 approaches to how we could maybe rethink how we collect these data
31 elements, and there were a lot of approaches that were presented,
32 but I'll tell you that there's challenges with all of them.

33
34 What we found out is there's no simple answer, no easy answer. If
35 there was, we probably would have deployed it already, but what
36 you see is there's caveats and assumptions with coverage, and I'll
37 give you some examples with some of these.

38
39 We're looking at the idea of satellite imagery for fishing effort.
40 How often does the satellite pass over? What's the gap between
41 what images are collected? Does it cover east to west in a region
42 offshore where we're very interested in? Shore-based cameras,
43 that are used to monitor points of ingress and egress, does your
44 geographic coastline -- Is it conducive to that? Do you have so
45 many points of ingress and egress that you just can't monitor them
46 all? The coverage issue is one that is still challenging.

1
2 Technological maturity is an issue. Some of the approaches we
3 presented are still in the R&D phase, and others are much more
4 mature, and probably ready to be implemented, but assessing that,
5 and is your technology ready to meet the needs that you have?
6

7 You're still faced with the idea of a census versus a survey. Some
8 of these approaches aren't conducive to a census, these active
9 methodologies. Passive ones, we hope that it's covering and
10 addressing the fishery, but, these active angler reporting type
11 methodologies, are you going to mandate that every person has some
12 electronic technology on the boat that's monitoring their anglers,
13 or monitoring their discarded catch that's going over, and
14 enumerating that, and measuring it, and identifying it? That
15 probably lends itself to a survey, and so then how do you do that
16 from a probabilistic standpoint,, or are you just going to do a
17 voluntary survey and be happy with that?
18

19 Then, baked into all of that, behind the scenes, are the costs.
20 With every single one of these things, there become new costs.
21 There's app development, like I said, and data storage, and app
22 maintenance, and quality control.
23

24 We've ultimately selected seven projects for this. They just
25 started January 1 of this year. We'll have some reports, and some
26 feedback, to you all, and others, once they get farther along the
27 lines, but I think the idea of a novel approach that's out there
28 being the ultimate answer is to be determined yet.
29

30 We're excited to be able to have the opportunity to research some
31 of these things, but I don't think the easy answer exists. Some
32 of the things that have been proposed, there's easy aspects of it,
33 but then there's some other unknowns that we're going to talk
34 about.
35

36 As Dr. Hollensead mentioned, we had the opportunity to put this
37 idea of how would you tackle the idea of a reporting system for
38 the deepwater grouper complex with our GulfFIN Committee in
39 October, and, sadly, it was in the middle of a federal shutdown,
40 and so none of our federal partners were there around the table,
41 and we missed the opportunity to discuss that with them.
42

43 In speaking with our state partners that were there with us, many
44 of them were very in agreement on these challenges, and the
45 possible approaches, and, you know, the challenges that were
46 presented was, as I said, it's a small -- It's likely a very small

1 group of the offshore component, and so it's a portion of a portion
2 of the overall fishery.

3
4 If the perception is accurate that a large portion of these trips
5 are originating and returning to private properties, it presents
6 a significant obstacle for being able to validate these trips. It
7 presents an obstacle for being able to get any biological
8 measurements from these trips, and so how would you validate this
9 fishery was a primary concern of the group.

10
11 Also, where they're operating on the water, how far from shore
12 they are, would make it very difficult for law enforcement to
13 interact with these individuals, and that would apply to whether
14 you chose a census approach or a survey approach.

15
16 There was also some concern too of just the -- Whether anglers
17 would be ultimately in favor of a census-based program, a mandatory
18 reporting program. We have witnessed that the appetite for that
19 isn't always -- It isn't always large, and even some would probably
20 be resistant to survey methods, but the overwhelming majority of
21 the folks around the table said the first thing we need to do is
22 identify who it is that's utilizing this fishery.

23
24 One of the thoughts that was presented, that we think is a good
25 one, is, for the states that have an offshore landing permit, or
26 some type of offshore designation, of using that sample frame as
27 a starting point to survey, to find out who, and actually how many
28 people, and how frequently those people are targeting this fishery,
29 that it would be hard to design a reporting program without knowing
30 the magnitude of the sample universe that's targeting this fishery.

31
32 There's been some examples. Louisiana mentioned that they've used
33 their recreational offshore landing permit to sample their -- Or
34 to do a focused email survey with their red snapper fishery, with
35 some moderate success. Texas staff mentioned they also have
36 sampled, through mobile apps, or online applications, their
37 alligator gar fishermen, and so there are some examples. The
38 compliance rates are probably a little lower than we would hope,
39 but that could be a potential good starting point.

40
41 I think the other interesting thought, that was brought forward by
42 our state reps, was that the need for biological sampling, the
43 need for interacting with anglers, could benefit from some type of
44 cooperative research project, something that involves either the
45 state agency, or maybe an academic institution, that somehow buys
46 some credibility with the anglers, provides some type of feedback

1 mechanism to them, whether it's based on the data they're reporting
2 or some aspect of beneficial feedback from some of the results
3 that would be collected that would make them feel part of the
4 process, part of the management process, part of the science
5 process.

6
7 I think overwhelmingly though, the take that we got, Dr. Hollensead
8 and I, was that the first thing is to identify who, and how many,
9 and then, from there, start thinking about what a reporting program
10 would look like to capture better data than we currently have, and
11 so that concludes my portion of this. I'm happy to answer any
12 questions, either now or at the end, in regard to what I presented,
13 but thank you for the opportunity to present that information, but
14 I know Dr. Hollensead has more, and so however you all want to
15 approach it.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. McIntosh. Dr. Hollensead.

18
19 **DR. HOLLENSHAD:** So Gregg had gone through sort of an overview of
20 what was considered at the state. I'm just going to touch on
21 federally some mandatory reporting in the recreational sector, and
22 so I'll focus first on Atlantic HMS. They have an automated
23 landings reporting system.

24
25 I believe Dr. Hunt might still be online, if you have any specific
26 questions. I'm just going to give you sort of a broad overview,
27 but, if you have any specific questions of how these approaches
28 work, he would be the best one to chime-in on that.

29
30 In the Gulf, recreational fishermen with an Atlantic HMS
31 charter/headboat or Atlantic HMS angling permit must report
32 swordfish and billfish landings, as well as bluefin tuna landings
33 and dead discards. For that, their timing is within twenty-four
34 hours of returning from a trip, and there are four electronic ways
35 for anglers to send reports, and so they do have some mechanisms
36 with which to -- You know, people can choose from which way they
37 want to report electronically.

38
39 They also have a tournament reporting, and so this mandatory
40 reporting program applies to operators of Atlantic recreational
41 fishing tournaments targeting tunas, billfish, swordfish, or
42 sharks, and these events must be registered with NOAA Fisheries at
43 least one month in advance, and all associated catch and effort
44 must be reported to NOAA Fisheries within seven days of the
45 tournament's end, and so that's an example, a couple examples,
46 there from the Office of HMS, Atlantic HMS.

1
2 Just here we've talked about these programs around the table, and
3 so you may be a little more familiar with these, but I mentioned,
4 earlier in the day, the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey began
5 in the Gulf in 1986. At the moment, they have mandatory weekly
6 reporting of their electronic logbook. As we have spoken, they
7 did recently lose funding for dockside intercept validation
8 throughout much of the Gulf, due to insufficient monetary support.

9
10 Again, all morning we talked about SEFHIER 2.0, and, as Mr. Sanchez
11 had noted when we first started that discussion, you know, it was
12 many years in developing that, save even the lawsuit. Just to
13 develop SEFHIER 1.0 took several years, and lots of collaboration
14 and meetings to be able to get that launched, and so you guys are
15 fairly familiar to this process, what those sorts of things would
16 entail for mandatory reporting through the for-hire sector.

17
18 Again, some just general conclusions, and so certainly mandatory
19 reporting can help fill data gaps in biological knowledge and
20 improve estimates of effort in harvest and recreational fisheries.
21 That's for sure. I don't think that's anything that anybody is
22 contesting here.

23
24 Technological advancements have allowed for nearly real-time
25 electronic reporting, and that can improve harvest monitoring
26 during short fishing seasons, which would be nice. However,
27 violating the assumptions of a census design has consequences for
28 interpreting data streams, and substantial violations can hinder
29 the ability to use these data for stock assessments or management.

30
31 Some mechanisms of validation is required in all of these cases,
32 which can be costly, and then these data must be warehoused and
33 accessible. We want to be able to use them. We want to put them
34 in analyses. We want to have all those things, and that can be
35 costly. Somebody has to house that data, and that kind of thing,
36 and then certainly, as Mr. Bray had checked on that, they've got
37 to be enforceable as well. If you have a rule, but nobody is
38 checking on it, if you're actually doing that rule, it's not going
39 to be effective.

40
41 Certainly, Mr. Chair, I would let you, you know, facilitate the
42 discussion, however you would deem fit, but staff had put up here
43 just this slide of potential next steps. It's just sort of a
44 springboard.

45
46 I guess the first question would be, you know, number one, given

1 the presentation that staff has put together for you, if this is
2 something that the committee desires to continue to pursue. If
3 so, you know, your next decision point might be, well, is it
4 interested in sort of, and as Gregg said actually before that, how
5 do we define our universe of anglers, because, if you have ten
6 anglers or 10,000 anglers, if you don't have a good design, you're
7 not going to be able to get, you know, the information that you
8 need to use for management and stock assessments. It doesn't
9 matter if, like I said, it's only ten or 10,000. You have to have
10 a good design.

11
12 The next possible steps then would be, you know, is the committee
13 interested in pursuing developing a census program, or perhaps a
14 survey, and, if so, those sort of suite of questions are just to
15 start off, and what might that look like, how that could possibly
16 be, and certainly, if the committee has any sort of explicit
17 feedback you would like to give staff, you know, if we want another
18 presentation examining exactly this, and, you know, we would like
19 to ask the Science Center, or whatever it is that identified
20 partners might come and bring you some materials back that staff
21 could begin working on those. I know it's a little open-ended,
22 Mr. Chair, but, you know, however you would like to facilitate the
23 discussion, and we'll answer questions as best we can.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Discussion? Mr. Sanchez.

26
27 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and it seems like we're all very aware of all
28 the challenges we have, and the shortcomings with our current
29 approach to estimating landings, and so we're suggesting let's try
30 to do something different, something better, knowing that it's
31 going to be a departure, and, yes, it's going to cost money, and
32 it's going to take time, but, I mean, some of the enforcement
33 concerns that were brought up, we already have those right now, as
34 far as distance from shore, and so that's a wash.

35
36 The question really becomes, if we're all frustrated with what
37 we're doing now, which we have to put in beaucoup recreational
38 buffers to address how much uncertainty there is, what is the cost
39 of not trying to do something like this, and maybe getting away
40 from that, and having a little better data for a little better
41 science? What is the cost? I don't see anybody asking that.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Who else? Dr. Overton.

44
45 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** This one is more directed at Gregg. You
46 mentioned that some of the reporting rates were between 7 and 9

1 percent, and I know that's a little bit lower than what you want,
2 but what would be the target percentage where you say, hey, I'm
3 happy with the survey percentage that we're getting now? I just
4 want to see how far away we are from something, you know, we would
5 be satisfied with.

6
7 **MR. BRAY:** There were multiple statistics in there, and so I want
8 to make sure I'm responding to your question accurately. Are you
9 referencing somebody reporting their landings or how we would come
10 to identifying the population of universal participants?

11
12 **DR. OVERTON:** The second, the population. A rough estimate is
13 fine. I know we're somewhat shooting in the dark, but I just want
14 to get an idea where you would feel comfortable with that.

15
16 **MR. BRAY:** I think, depending on the survey vehicle, if you're
17 talking about an email survey or a phone survey, I've seen numbers
18 kicked around of people being satisfied at 40 or 50 percent. I
19 think we would love it to be higher. We would always love it to
20 be higher, but I think we could do something that we would have
21 some confidence in at that level.

22
23 **DR. OVERTON:** Okay. Thank you.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Allen.

26
27 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Gregg, for the
28 presentation. You know, I feel like the -- I'm thinking about how
29 to characterize the uncertainty in these two types of approaches,
30 and the current survey methodology that we have for deepwater
31 grouper, I don't think is ever going to get there.

32
33 It's always going to have huge uncertainty, because we're trying
34 to estimate effort in a very small fraction of the fishery. We're
35 trying to estimate catch from a multiplier effort times catch per
36 unit effort for a segment of the fishery that we really don't
37 observe, and so I don't -- Any way we work that, I think we're
38 going to be stuck with huge uncertainty.

39
40 It seems to me that, and I think, Gregg, you did a nice job of
41 talking about the challenges here, as far as identifying who is
42 going after those fish and that kind of thing, but, to me, the
43 challenge with some kind of a -- I don't think it's a census, and
44 it's still a survey, but, to me, the issue is trying to estimate
45 that non-reporting rate, the people that go fish for these fish
46 and they don't get reported.

1
2 I feel like we have a chance to estimate that non-reporting rate
3 with a lot more precision than we do to estimate the current effort
4 and catch for those fish, and so, even though I agree that there
5 are a lot of challenges here, I still think that the juice is worth
6 the squeeze, really, when you get to the end of it, because, if
7 you could estimate that non-reporting rate, if you could identify
8 these anglers, and then estimate what fraction of those anglers
9 are not reporting their catch, you've gone a long way towards
10 getting a more reliable estimate than anything that we currently
11 have, and so I think this is worth pursuing, personally.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Banks.

14
15 **DR. BANKS:** Just for comparison purposes, Dr. Hutt, do you know
16 what the compliance rate is for HMS, maybe like in the swordfish
17 fishery, or tuna, that's already in the middle of this?

18
19 **DR. HUTT:** We have better estimates on the tuna side, and it
20 varies, and so we require the catch reporting for both our
21 commercial rod-and-reel fishery and our recreational fisheries,
22 and we monitor what it is in the commercial every year, because we
23 can compare it to our dealer reports, and, there, we have got
24 compliance approaching 70 percent each year. It kind of just
25 varies by a percentage point or two below that.

26
27 For the recreational, we don't estimate compliance every year, but
28 we have done various assessments of that throughout the years.
29 The most recent was done by some researchers out of VIMS a few
30 years ago, back during the time of the pandemic.

31
32 They did it for the State of Massachusetts, and they estimated a
33 compliance rate in the recreational bluefin fishery, for angling
34 permit holders, of around 40 percent. We believe, for the for-
35 hire guys, it's somewhere in between those two percentages.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you. Mr. Strelcheck.

38
39 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and it's a possible question for Gregg, and
40 so, to me, there's two challenges here, right, and so Mike was
41 talking about the effort side, right, and so our effort is sampling
42 recreational anglers, most of which fish inshore. Then you have
43 a subset of those that are going to fish inshore or offshore, and
44 then you have a further subset that fish deepwater, right, and so,
45 you know, endorsement, or narrowing the scope, obviously, could
46 help with at least better estimating that effort, but I think

1 there's still going to be wide error bounds around it.

2

3 The catch side, right, we have a hard time sampling deepwater
4 grouper, probably because of where they're coming in at, right,
5 and are you familiar, or aware, of any I'll say combination surveys
6 that might rely on logbook-reported, or app-reported, data to give
7 us some catch statistics, catch per unit effort, that can then be
8 expanded and applied to effort estimates?

9

10 I know we've talked about that as a way of kind of augmenting
11 sample sizes, especially for rare-event species, but I know part
12 of the challenge is whether or not that would be biased, and it
13 becomes a representative sample of the catch.

14

15 **MR. BRAY:** So I can't specifically, but I feel like, several years
16 ago, and Richard Cody would be a good research, and I feel like
17 something like that was deployed in south Florida, for a very
18 specific fishery, for the same exact reason. A very small
19 component, very small fishery, and there was a specialized survey
20 deployed in that manner that used a logbook like that.

21

22 I just can't remember what fishery it was, because it was so many
23 years ago, but I think there's been -- Part of some of that research
24 I felt like was the genesis, when you heard from the Office of
25 Science and Technology and staff, that there really is a need for
26 specialized surveys in situations like that, where there is just
27 no scenario where it fits into a general survey methodology, and
28 the approach that it uses, to enumerate effort and then to apply
29 a catch rate like that, but I can't remember the specific example,
30 and I would have to go back and look that up.

31

32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** All right. Well, maybe we can do some digging on
33 that. The other comment I'll make is I have a pretty large
34 skepticism that, even if we tried to improve the data collection,
35 that we would be able to fill some of these gaps, right, and I
36 think there would be a substantial cost in order to actually get
37 these sampling errors down.

38

39 One of the thoughts that crosses my mind is fundamentally trying
40 to manage these fisheries differently, and is there a way to use
41 like a fishery-independent index, if we were able to either build
42 one or create one through surveys?

43

44 We're doing this in the South Atlantic, with the South Atlantic
45 Deepwater Longline Survey, and it's going to inform our management
46 of tilefish and deepwater groupers. I think we're in year-four or

1 five.

2

3 Obviously, we're at a point with the government where we have
4 limited resources, and I don't know how good the surveys are for
5 deepwater, and the Gulf comparatively to the South Atlantic, but
6 maybe there's some opportunities as well to kind of rethink whether
7 or not we want to go the fishery-dependent route, and try to solve
8 this, or maybe there's other ways of actually monitoring these
9 trends in the population, and how they're changing, and then tweak
10 management based on those changes.

11

12 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Geeslin.

13

14 **MR. GEESLIN:** I'm going to repeat some things that certainly aren't
15 surprises here. We've got our last bullet on there, and we found
16 out the hard way that anglers don't like you telling them what to
17 do, telling them you've got to report your catch.

18

19 We tried to implement this a while back with alligator gar, and
20 this is not unique to deepwater grouper, alligator gar, narwhal in
21 Greenland, the wolf harvest in Wyoming. This is a fallacy, this
22 mandatory reporting.

23

24 Now, to Andy's point, I like the road he's going down, because if
25 -- Let's just assume, and let's play pretend land, that you do get
26 everyone that harvests mandatory reporting. Okay, and that's --
27 In my mind, that's a prime-grade ribeye steak.

28

29 Well, we got 5 to 10 percent reporting on alligator gar. I would
30 call that a choice-grade, you know, sirloin. At the end of the
31 day, it's all beef, right? It's all some kind of data that you're
32 going to be able to use to some extent, but placing this value,
33 this value associated with mandatory reporting, is something I
34 just can't get my head around, because I've seen it fail time and
35 time again.

36

37 Is it valuable? Yes. Is it rib eye? No. Is it sirloin? Possibly.
38 It may be sausage at the end of the day, and I don't know, but I'm
39 not sure where to go with this, gang, but this -- I appreciate
40 Gregg, and I know, you digging into this, and hearing back from
41 this.

42

43 Even when we send out surveys across -- You know, subsampling of
44 surveys, you know, for something of big magnitude, you know,
45 spotted seatrout bag limit changes, and, if we send out 50,000
46 surveys, and we get 20 percent of those back, man, that's a win.

1 That is a huge win, and so I think reshaping this, and just what
2 is realistic, what is the value, what is some of, you know, the
3 more extrapolated approaches with the CPUE and looking at effort
4 to get some of these estimates.

5
6 To Dr. Allen's point, I hear you coming from a Florida perspective.
7 Brother, if you're a Texan, and that's not going to fly, especially
8 with as little deepwater grouper as we catch in Texas, and I saw
9 a recommendation that we bolt that onto our state survey. No way,
10 Jose. That's not getting us down the road for this. Thank you.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I see Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Anson.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I don't know, and I look at it like we know, everyone
15 knows, that there's some uncertainty, a lot of uncertainty, in the
16 data, and, if there has to be a little responsibility from, you
17 know, groups to get better data, and maybe have more lenient
18 quotas, that are more accurate, yes, it comes with a
19 responsibility, and it is kind of a tradeoff.

20
21 I would like to believe that most people, most anglers, or people
22 in general, are law-abiding, good-intentioned people, and, if you
23 do something, and approach it correctly, and it makes sense,
24 they'll probably sign-on and follow, you know, looking for the
25 greater good, and, as far as trying to address the lawbreakers,
26 you know, you're never going to legislate for the guy who is going
27 to do whatever he wants no matter what.

28
29 I don't know, but it seems like when we bring like the Florida-
30 Texas thing into it, it sounds like a little bit of Florida
31 derangement syndrome, and, you know, there's no need for that. We
32 need to work together, for these fish to get better, and do
33 something right, because what we're doing is clearly not working.
34 It's just not working.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Anson.

37
38 **MR. ANSON:** John, I mean, ideally, we would all like to think that
39 everybody is going to buy into a system that gives better data so
40 that better decisions can be made, but it was interesting to hear
41 from Gregg, and a couple other folks commented on mandatory
42 reporting programs, and their estimates of reporting, and they're
43 very similar to Alabama's in regards to private recreational
44 anglers and red snapper reporting.

45
46 It's been hovering anywhere from about 55 to just under about 45

1 percent, and so 50 percent, and so, if 50 percent is the law-
2 abiding folks, if you will, if our method of estimating under-
3 reporting is accurate, and so, you know, it's a difficult thing.

4
5 I mean, it requires resources year-to-year just to educate and re-
6 educate the public, to make sure they're still engaged with the
7 reporting requirement. You know, for instance, we lost, after the
8 first year in Snapper Check -- We had our highest proportion of
9 reporting, and, granted, it was a very short season that year, in
10 2014, but the folks thought that they were going to have a season
11 of twenty or thirty days the following year if they reported.

12
13 That didn't happen, and so we lost a significant portion of folks
14 the following year from reporting, because they were upset that
15 they didn't get the reward that they were anticipating by doing
16 the extra work, and so it's difficult.

17
18 I mean, I certainly understand the desire amongst folks to get
19 better data, but I just don't think, you know, for this particular
20 group of fish, albeit it's a relatively small number of anglers,
21 I just -- The other problems of trying to get the biological
22 information, and get the trip information, so that you can estimate
23 those that are not reporting, is going to be very difficult.

24
25 Now, if you just want to make some assumptions, and just use the
26 non-reporting rate of other programs, and throw that in the mix,
27 then you might come out with a number that could be usable, but I
28 just think, for the amount of effort, and the cost that it would
29 take to get reasonable, somewhat-statistically-valid, results is
30 going to be very costly.

31
32 I do like Andy's point about looking at some fishery-independent
33 information for some of these fish. I think that might be
34 something that's probably a little bit more rewarding, if you will.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate those
39 comments, Kevin, because that's kind of where my head was at. I
40 think that there's just so many -- I mean, undoubtedly, we need
41 better data for this fishery. I mean, like what we're using here
42 is not really useful, and so that's the struggle that I come to,
43 where I will accept anything better that can inform us and help us
44 make better management decisions there.

45
46 When Andy is talking about a potential deepwater survey in the

1 Gulf for things like this, yes, I'm all onboard for that. I mean,
2 I think we've kind of had to -- We've already talked about having
3 to do the same, or more, with less, and having information like
4 that could be incredibly useful. Doing a survey, or a census, I
5 just see a lot of -- I see a lot of challenges with the census,
6 for sure, getting everyone -- We've kind of talked about that.

7
8 I think a survey are more realistic along those lines, but then,
9 you know, I appreciate kind of the issues that everyone has brought
10 up relative to compliance, and we're really dealing with a small
11 subsection of a larger reef fish fishery here, and so making sure
12 that you get those people, and have a representative sample, is
13 probably going to be even more challenging.

14
15 Tack on the cost associated with trying to put something together
16 like that, and I see a -- I want better data. I'm just not sure
17 the juice is worth the squeeze there relative to this approach, or
18 maybe some sort of combination approach relative to a fishery-
19 independent index and something else that gets us some sort of
20 information about effort.

21
22 I'm not exactly sure what that is, but I do appreciate Dr.
23 Hollensead and Dr. Bray going through all of this here. This was
24 very useful, and, as you can tell with me just rambling right now,
25 I'm struggling for how to approach this particular topic, because
26 we need better data.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thanks, Dr. Sweetman. I'm starting to agree.
29 After listening to the presentation, I don't see an answer here.
30 I don't see anybody putting their hands up and saying, okay, this
31 survey with the questionnaire on state surveys, this is the way we
32 need to go forward.

33
34 I don't see anybody putting any ideas up here, other than Andy's
35 new idea about maybe some fisheries-independent stuff, which, if
36 you want to maybe elaborate, now or at Full Council, on maybe a
37 different way we could go, because I agree with Dr. Sweetman. I
38 don't really see it here.

39
40 These are monumental challenges for something that's a long shot
41 that it's even going to work, and, like Dr. Anson said, these
42 deepwater guys, I know a lot of them, and, if they start getting
43 cut, or their reporting doesn't turn out the way they thought it
44 was going to go, they're going to stop giving you that information.
45 Who is next? Andy.

46

1 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mentioned, in the South Atlantic, we have the
2 SADL survey, South Atlantic Deepwater Longline. It was developed
3 about five years ago, intended to directly sample those deepwater
4 species.

5
6 It's a cooperative effort with commercial fishermen. It gives us
7 essentially a gap in information with regard to the fishery-
8 independent surveys, because they're surveying the core habitat
9 for their species, and, obviously, once you have enough years, and
10 a time series, you can look at trends in the data and see how your
11 populations are changing over time.

12
13 That's at least the idea, or concept, I have here, right, that we
14 were challenged to do stock assessments on many of these fisheries,
15 right, but, if you could either use existing stock assessments
16 and, like we do with interim analyses, change catch levels up or
17 down, based on how that index is trending, or even, you know, if
18 we don't have stock assessments, be proactive, or reactive, based
19 on changes in the population that we're seeing through an index of
20 abundance, then it could go a long way.

21
22 It eliminates the challenges of collecting, obviously, the
23 fishery-dependent data. I don't want to give up on the fishery-
24 dependent data either, and so I don't want to come across as being
25 too negative on that. I think there's still some maybe
26 opportunities there, but I think it's going to come down to some
27 citizen science, or cooperative research, and really talking to
28 the scientists about this more collectively.

29
30 You know, do we do carcass collection programs, to be able to get
31 more samples of deepwater grouper species? Are we able to, you
32 know, do some data collection, where the people can report their
33 catch rates when they actually go offshore, and how does that get
34 integrated with some of our other surveys, and then the bigger gap
35 is, and where I'm hearing the concerns, is how do we narrow the
36 universe of the actual deepwater grouper fishermen, so we actually
37 don't overexpand that fishing effort universe, right, and that's
38 the one I'm still struggling to crack, in terms of how we would
39 solve that.

40
41 With all that said, I mean, we certainly could go back. I can
42 talk to the Science Center, and Clay and John, and see what
43 opportunities there are for fishery-independent data as they stand
44 today, versus in the future, and then I think it would be good to
45 hear from the scientists more on are there any sort of hybrid
46 approaches that maybe could better improve our catch estimates for

1 deepwater grouper relative to what we're doing now.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Andy. Mr. Anson.

4

5 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate those comments,
6 Andy, and I'll go a little bit against what I said earlier about
7 the potential for doing mandatory reporting, but it's interesting.
8 I did a Google search the other day, and the European Union is
9 going to a mandatory reporting system for all of its marine
10 recreational anglers, and they're implementing rolling that out
11 right now, with like half of the countries, and then the other
12 half are supposed to come onboard in the next four to six months.

13

14 It's interesting, because there's some flexibility in each
15 country's platform, what they use, the questions they ask, and
16 there are some core questions, I'm sure, but it's interesting to
17 see how that similar reporting thing -- We'll see how that will
18 shake out.

19

20 It did not provide any details, the information I saw, as to how
21 they would address issues of non-reporting and that type of thing,
22 but it's still being looked at, and utilized in fisheries
23 management, in other places in the world.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** So are you going to make a motion, Mr. Anson?

26

27 **MR. ANSON:** No, sir.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you. Dr. Allen.

30

31 **DR. ALLEN:** Just to follow-up, and, Andy, I like your comment
32 there. I mean, one way is just to say, well, we can't do fisheries-
33 dependent monitoring the way we would like to do it, and so we're
34 going to develop a fisheries-independent index and manage the stock
35 primarily on that. That is an option. I don't know what a new
36 survey would cost, or those kinds of -- You know, we would have to
37 do a cost comparison of those kinds of things.

38

39 At the same time, I think the point I was trying to make is that
40 I think that estimating the non-reporting rate -- We could probably
41 do that with more precision than we can the current estimate of
42 effort and catch, using the current survey, and so, if you could
43 do that, you could get a better estimate than what we have now.

44

45 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right, and so I have a question. Dr. Allen,
46 can you fill me in on why a good non -- How many people are not

1 reporting could provide better data than people -- Is that what
2 you're saying? That's a better metric? I don't understand how
3 that works.

4
5 **DR. ALLEN:** The way I'm thinking about this is the enforcement
6 officers, when they encounter a vessel that has these fish, they
7 look at what fraction of those interactions have not reported their
8 catch, right, so that you have some idea of what that non-reporting
9 is, and then you have the reported catch that you can adjust to
10 get an estimate of the total catch, and so that that's the idea,
11 is that those interactions would provide you some information on
12 non-reporting.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Carrie.

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think
17 we could certainly look at the fishery-independent survey concept,
18 but, currently, I would say, I don't think we have it. We can
19 have the Science Center weigh-in, but I just don't think it exists
20 right now.

21
22 Ryan just looked at the assessment for deepwater grouper, which
23 was primarily for yellowedge grouper, right, and that's primarily
24 informed by the commercial landings and the NMFS bottom longline,
25 which is a fishery-independent index, does intercept yellowedge
26 grouper, but I don't know about the other species very much, and
27 so you would have to put a lot more resources into that index, I
28 think, to get it where you need to to look at making these
29 management changes.

30
31 I don't want to be a pooh-pooher, but, I mean, we no longer have
32 cooperative research funds. We no longer review that stuff
33 anymore. We very rarely have external MARFIN money that goes out
34 anymore. Much of it is internal, and so, in this environment, I
35 think it's going to be very much an uphill battle to change some
36 of these surveys.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Andy.

39
40 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I don't disagree with Carrie, and I think
41 the longline survey that we have probably does a pretty good job
42 with yellowedge grouper, and maybe it's on the edge of golden
43 tilefish habitat, and I don't know about the other species, and so
44 there's -- I think we can look at our existing survey.

45
46 Like the comments that were made, right, I mean, there's costs to

1 all of this, and so what would the cost be to augment, or improve,
2 that survey, and then thank you, Mike, for kind of your
3 clarification about the correction factor and, you know, non-
4 reporting.

5
6 I hadn't thought about it that way. I think the main challenge
7 is, because deepwater is so infrequently observed, right, that I
8 think that would be the hard part, is how do you estimate a
9 correction factor with probably a very, very small sample size,
10 but point well taken.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** So I heard it come up that identifying the
13 universe would be difficult, but looking at some of these other
14 things, that almost seems like it would be more of the easy one,
15 to me, and could we not put a deepwater endorsement on some of our
16 -- Like our Florida reef fish endorsement, and so you would have
17 to have a deepwater permit, and it can be free, just like the reef,
18 and I don't know how the other states would have that, but, if you
19 had a deepwater endorsement, it might narrow it down anyways,
20 through recreational. Dr. Sweetman.

21
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that's not so easy to do, Ed. I hear what
23 you're saying. It's not part of -- It's not part of our State
24 Reef Fish Survey right now. We only have thirteen species that
25 are on there, and I have not heard additional discussions about
26 adding to that, and, anytime that we add stuff to that, it goes -
27 - You know, we talk with our state legislature relative to the
28 funding that we get for the State Reef Fish Survey, and so adding
29 species is more complicated than just let's throw another one on
30 there.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Put it in the pile with too complicated
33 or too expensive. All right. Who has got the solution around the
34 table here? I'm not seeing one here. There it is. Troy, where
35 are we going?

36
37 **MR. FRADY:** Let's think about this from a different way. There
38 are so many people, as far as trying to identify the number of
39 people who use, or fish, for deepwater grouper. I've got friends
40 of mine that I had no idea they fish with \$5,000 pieces of equipment
41 for just one rod, and so, in a weird way, I mean, there's nothing
42 we're going to be able to do.

43
44 Nobody is going to want to pay for this. Kevin and I were just
45 kind of talking, just a little bit a while ago, while we were
46 paying attention, but, when I went to Texas and went duck hunting,

1 they've got the endorsements out there to identify that universe.

2
3 No matter what species that you're going to hunt for out in Texas,
4 it takes thirty minutes to fill out the license application to
5 identify the universe of redwing, GWT, BWT, and all these different
6 species of duck. You've got to identify the universe first. If
7 you can't identify the universe, you're going to go out there
8 blind, and nobody wants to pay for blind surveys, and so what's
9 the real answer?

10
11 Either you pay for the data, and nobody is going to want to do
12 that, or you try to catch it on the frontend, and just try to get
13 an estimate of how many people are fishing. There's no in-between,
14 unless you just started watching the fish sizes, just doing the
15 angle intercepts, and you start watching the average weight of
16 fish.

17
18 If you've got a yellowedge grouper, and all of a sudden you're
19 catching a bunch of three or four pounders out there, where you
20 should be catching twenty, compared to the longline surveys, and,
21 I mean, I'm kind of rambling here a little bit, but there's not
22 many ways to get this data, and so that's all I have to say.

23
24 I'm trying to identify the universe, or who is going to pay for
25 the science, or who is going to pay for the data collection, and
26 I don't know what the answer is.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I thought you had the answer. All right. Thanks,
29 Troy. Dr. Walter has his hand up.

30
31 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks, and I think the science here, in terms of the
32 surveys of the resource, and we've been talking about the surveys
33 of the resource, which we have the bottom longline survey that
34 definitely does get yellowedge, and it goes out and does get a few
35 of the other species. The indices have a CV of about 0.5, and so
36 they're not great, but it, as noted, relies in large part on the
37 commercial fishery, which is about 90 percent of the total
38 removals.

39
40 So still, even if the wreck removals are uncertain, they're not
41 very high relative to the commercial fishery, and so it seems like
42 the problem we're trying to solve is uncertainty in the
43 recreational fishing numbers, and perhaps there the solution is to
44 use these tools like multiyear ACL averages, so that we average
45 how many years would we need to average over to get a stable
46 estimate, and a low enough PSE, for setting a catch limit and

1 monitoring it.

2

3 For something like yellowedge grouper, that lives to eighty-five,
4 whether we catch it this year or the next year, or set the ACL for
5 one year, three years, or five years, it's not going to make much
6 difference to an animal that lives that long, and so it looks like
7 the solution might be in more on how we manage the rec fishery.

8

9 I'm just saying this not from -- Because I don't think it's the
10 science side right now that's going to find the solution, and I'm
11 just trying to direct the conversation. Thanks.

12

13 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thanks Dr. Walker. Ryan, did you have some
14 input?

15

16 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just going to say
17 like, as far as trying to intercept any of those fish coming in,
18 you're not going to, because the majority of those animals are
19 going to be landed at private access points, and so, from the APAIS
20 side, you'll never see them.

21

22 To Dr. Walter's point, I mean, he's right. These fish are so long-
23 lived, and grow so slow, that trying to detect meaningful changes
24 in length composition is going to take forever, and, by the time
25 you do detect it, it's probably too late.

26

27 That's kind of why like what we're looking at with yellowedge, and
28 we kind of had some of these conversations when the stock
29 assessment was concluding, was that, you know, it's a good thing
30 that it's not overfished, because the rebuilding period on that
31 would be lengthy, because the animal lives up to eighty-five years,
32 and goodness gracious, right, and so it's the oldest thing we
33 catch, by a long margin.

34

35 To some of what Captain Walker's conversations were, going back
36 and forth with you guys about trying to just identify that universe
37 of anglers, I mean, frankly, if you did do a survey of the people
38 that hold the recreational offshore fishing license, as an example
39 for Creel, or the State Reef Fish Survey endorsement for Florida,
40 to see which ones actually go out and catch these animals once
41 every period of years, like every three years, or every five years
42 or so, that would still give you a much better idea than what MRIP
43 is going to give you at this point, because, again, you're not
44 going to intercept the people that catch these animals with APAIS.
45 You'll never see more than 90 percent of them.

46

1 Even a periodic heat check, to try to get some idea of how many
2 people that are already in these other databases actually go out
3 and catch these animals, will give you a much improved idea of
4 your universe of anglers, and it really wouldn't need to be updated
5 annually. It's something that you could average out over time.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. I have Dr. Sweetman, and then J.D.

8
9 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right, and let's -- I
10 feel like we're spinning our heads around in circles here, and so,
11 I mean, I think, from what I've heard so far, the most promising
12 thing is the potential to look at the deepwater longline survey to
13 see if it's at all representative for yellowedge grouper.

14
15 This represents about, what, Ryan, 70 to 80 percent of the total
16 landings in this entire complex, and I would think that's fairly
17 representative of the complex, even if it's not got complete
18 coverage there, and so it's better than nothing. It's not ideal.
19 It's better than nothing.

20
21 Then I feel like the other thing that we're spinning our heads at,
22 and so that's good. That's good, and then we can see if it can be
23 potentially tweaked with the Science Center, to see if there's
24 ways that we can cover additional species in that complex, if
25 that's the way the council wants to go.

26
27 We've already kind of talked about the fact that we are changing
28 up our approach for the way we assess data-limited species, which
29 I would consider this definitely one of those, and so that kind of
30 moves us in that direction a little bit there too, but it's getting
31 a hold of the effort component. Ryan brought up some ideas there
32 that I thought were interesting.

33
34 I feel like I need to, at least on the state side, need to explore
35 some of these a little bit on my own, and take some time to digest
36 this here, but that seems, to me, the one remaining gap that we
37 have here, but, at the very least, I mean, the way we've been
38 talking about navigating some of these data-limited fisheries is
39 utilizing this relative abundance index, and changing catch levels
40 for that, because we understand that taking a lot of time for a
41 stock assessment on something where the data is questionable might
42 not be the best use of time and money.

43
44 Just this is one of those fisheries that we need to look
45 differently at, obviously, and thank you, Dr. Walter, about the
46 five-year, or three-year, moving ACL, because that is something

1 that I have been harping on for a while now.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I kind of
4 like Ryan's idea, too of potentially surveying people that we
5 already know have reef licenses, and asking if they caught
6 deepwater, if they fished in more than 500 feet of water last
7 month, or whatever the case may be. Anybody else? Okay. Mr.
8 Chair, I hope this wraps up Data Collection. Does it not? I'm
9 backing up here. Any other business for Data Collection? Seeing
10 none, we'll close up Data Collection, Mr. Chair.

11

12 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 26, 2026.)

13

14

15

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