

GULF COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE

Hyatt Centric

New Orleans, Louisiana

January 26, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

- 10 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 11 Mike Allen.....Florida
- 12 Kevin Anson.....Alabama
- 13 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 14 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 15 Johnny Marquez.....Mississippi
- 16 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 17 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 18 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 19 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 20 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

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- 23 Brenda Ballard.....Texas
- 24 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
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- 26 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 27 Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG
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- 30 Ed Walker.....Florida

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- 40 Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
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1 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

2 Frank Helies.....NOAA
3 John Walter.....SEFSC

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PAGE 24: Motion to request an extension of the comment period on the implementation of the proposed HMS rule of commercial and recreational shark management measures to give the Gulf Council ample time to comment. Additionally, the Gulf Council requests a presentation from HMS at the April 2026 council meeting. The motion carried on page 25.

- - -

1 The Sustainable Fisheries Committee of the Gulf Council convened
2 at The Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Monday morning,
3 January 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Kesley Banks.
4

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

9 **CHAIRMAN KESLEY BANKS:** I'm going to try to follow the General's
10 example here, but I don't have high hopes, and so the committee
11 members are myself, Mr. Anson, Dr. Allen, Mr. Broussard, Captain
12 Frady, Mr. Marquez, Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Mr. Sanchez,
13 General Spraggins, and Mr. Strelcheck.
14

15 With that, we have the agenda. There are at least two items that
16 will be put in Other Business, the proposed HMS rule and the
17 request for council review of EO public comments and updated
18 workplans. Do I have any comments on those two additions or any
19 other additional business that needs to be added to the agenda?
20 Seeing none, can I get a motion to approve the modified agenda?
21 Mr. Sanchez. General Spraggins is my second. Okay.
22

23 Moving on to the Approval of the November 2025 Meeting Minutes,
24 any comments or changes? Seeing none, I'll entertain a motion.
25 Mr. Anson and Dr. Allen. Thank you. Okay. Verena, would you
26 like to jump into the action guide?
27

28 **DRAFT WORKPLAN FOR REGULATORY STREAMLINING**
29

30 **DR. VERENA WANG:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'll give Bernie a
31 second to pull up the action guide here. Perfect. Thank you, and
32 so we have one item on the agenda for the committee to discuss
33 today, and that is the Draft Workplan for Regulatory Streamlining.
34

35 Staff will be discussing the outcomes and recommendations for the
36 regulatory process review of the other regional councils. The
37 council contracted this work, with the aim of identifying
38 approaches that are used in other regions to improve efficiency
39 and responsiveness in the management process.
40

41 The draft regulatory streamlining report was presented to the
42 council in November, and the final report was submitted in December
43 of 2025, and so staff will be presenting the draft workplan for
44 streamlining recommendations that were identified to be of
45 interest through the council's discussions in November, and then
46 the committee should comment on that workplan and prioritize

1 additional recommendations as they see fit.

2
3 Staff have proposed next steps for the committee to consider and
4 provide feedback on as we start to think about the next phase of
5 this regulatory streamlining work, which is to begin to
6 operationalize some of the prioritized findings from the report.
7 Madam Chair.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Keep going. Thank you.

10
11 **DR. WANG:** Great. Bernie, if you could pull up the presentation,
12 Tab 4(a), please. Thank you, ma'am, and you can just move on to
13 the next slide. Perfect. The regulatory streamlining review and
14 report was part of the council's Inflation Reduction Act projects,
15 and this is work that was conducted by our contractors, Deirdre
16 Boelke, of Fisheries Insight Network, and Willy Goldsmith, of
17 Pelagic Strategies, over the summer and fall of last year.

18
19 The review was initiated in July of last year, and the contractors
20 used a combination of approaches that included questionnaires and
21 targeted interviews with staff that represented each of the
22 different regional councils, as well as NMFS staff, combined with
23 a thorough document review.

24
25 The contractors presented their preliminary findings to the SSC in
26 October, and then, in November, they presented a draft report and
27 recommendations to the council, and the final report was submitted
28 after the November council meeting, in December, and you can find
29 a link to the report on this slide here, and also in the briefing
30 materials for this committee.

31
32 We wanted to bring this topic back to the committee today, after
33 we've had a little bit of time to digest the final report and to
34 think a little bit about some of the discussions that the committee
35 had in November, and come back with a path on how to move forward.

36
37 Again, the overall aim of the regulatory streamlining review and
38 report was to identify approaches that are being used in other
39 regions to improve efficiency and throughput that could
40 potentially be applied here in the Gulf, and the final report had
41 a total of fifteen recommendations on how to do this, that were
42 broken down into three different categories.

43
44 The first two categories, procedural mechanisms and innovative
45 regulatory approaches, are really recommendations that are getting
46 at how to work efficiently within the requirements of Magnuson and

1 NEPA and providing some tools, recommendations for tools, on how
2 to do so.

3
4 The third category, collaboration, coordination, and communication
5 best practices, these are not regulatory recommendations, but they
6 are more approaches on how to improve the flow of information
7 between the council, NMFS, the council's advisors, and
8 stakeholders, and you'll find a summary of all fifteen of these
9 recommendations on Table 11 of the final report.

10
11 Okay, and so I'm going to start off this morning by walking us
12 through the full suite of these recommendations category-by-
13 category, and so, on each of these tables here, you have the
14 recommendation and the expected outcome, which are pulled directly
15 from Table 11 of the report, and then, to the right there, we've
16 added some indication of the timeframe that it might take to
17 implement some of these recommendations and the contributors that
18 will be involved.

19
20 The recommendations that have a green dot next to them are the
21 recommendations that have been identified, either through the
22 committee's discussion in November as being of interest or have
23 been flagged by staff as being potentially useful to consider, and
24 the ones that have been flagged by staff tend to be the more in-
25 the-weeds recommendations that get to how to improve efficiencies
26 in document development and in data analysis.

27
28 Each of these green dot recommendations is going to have additional
29 slides later on in the presentation that outline the next couple
30 of steps to start to operationalize some of these recommendations.

31
32 I will start off here with the recommendations for procedural
33 mechanisms. Recommendation 1.1 is to consider the expanded use of
34 categorical exclusions, which could reduce the time and resources
35 needed for minor and routine adjustments.

36
37 Recommendation 1.2 is to identify potential opportunities for the
38 use of automatic management measures, which could allow for direct
39 rulemaking, and then looking into how those could be paired with
40 supplemental information reports to satisfy the requirements of
41 NEPA, and these automatically-triggered management responses could
42 allow for rapid adjustments to things that are considered to be
43 routine or minor. Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 have been identified
44 as a priority, based on the committee's discussions in November.

45
46 Recommendation 1.3 is to consider the establishment of an ad hoc

1 regulatory review group that would kind of oversee the planning
2 and development of any streamlining procedures.

3
4 Okay, and so we're moving on now to the second category of
5 recommendations, which are the regulatory approaches, and so
6 Recommendation 2.1 here is to evaluate whether there are certain
7 species in the Gulf that could be designated as ecosystem component
8 species, and this ecosystem component species designation could
9 reduce the council's workload by no longer needing to determine
10 reference points for certain species or set management measures
11 for fisheries that receive little or no targeted fishing effort.

12
13 Recommendation 2.2 is to evaluate whether a generic amendment could
14 be used to update all of the Gulf FMPs at once with provisions to
15 enhance responsiveness, and this would facilitate document
16 development and allow for efficient tools to be available for
17 future actions. Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 have been identified
18 as priorities, based on the council's discussions in November.

19
20 Recommendation 2.3 is to evaluate potential opportunities and the
21 feasibility for in-season management, and so in-season management
22 would increase the council's responsiveness, but these types of
23 management actions really do require pretty robust data, and near-
24 real-time data.

25
26 Recommendation 2.4 is to explore ways that the council can play a
27 more active role in the exempted fishing permit process, and the
28 impetus behind this recommendation in particular is to leverage
29 exempted fishing permits to potentially pilot management measures
30 before implementation or to fill data gaps and research needs that
31 could inform future management needs.

32
33 Now we're moving on to the recommendations for collaboration,
34 coordination, and communication best practices. These are the
35 non-regulatory approaches.

36
37 Recommendation 3.1 is to consider updating the regional operating
38 agreement with NMFS to more clearly define roles and streamline
39 the document preparation process, and so the regional operating
40 agreement for the Gulf was most recently updated in 2016, and this
41 is something that could be potentially updated again, particularly
42 after the process that is ongoing to streamline the IPT process is
43 complete, and so there's kind of a parallel effort going on to
44 make the IPT process more complete, more efficient.

45
46 Recommendation 3.2 is to consider implementing annual coordination

1 and strategy meetings between the council and NMFS, and this is
2 something that, of course, is already done regularly between
3 council staff and the Regional Office and the Science Center, but
4 I think the idea behind this recommendation is to have higher level
5 kind of strategic planning meetings that could also look at some
6 of these efficiency measures with our partners at NMFS.

7
8 Recommendation 3.3 is to explore strategies to grant council staff
9 direct access to federal databases, which would facilitate staff
10 analyses, and it could also reduce the burden for NMFS staff for
11 having to respond to data requests.

12
13 Recommendation 3.4 is to discuss the provision of annual data
14 updates, such as interim analyses by the Science Center to the
15 council in off assessment years, to enable more responsiveness in
16 between stock assessments, and so Recommendations 3.3 and 3.4 have
17 been identified as of interest by the council staff.

18
19 Recommendation 3.5 is to consider the development of fishery
20 performance reports. Fishery performance reports are documents
21 that are developed in other regions, in conjunction with their
22 advisory panels, to be able to provide a standardized snapshot of
23 what's going on on the water, to kind of improve the level of
24 industry information that's being provided for consideration and
25 to provide additional context for SSC and council decisions, and
26 this is something that was identified as a priority, based on the
27 council's discussions in November.

28
29 Recommendation 3.6 is to consider expanded use of SSC subgroups to
30 dive deeper into high-priority issues and to facilitate SSC
31 decision-making. This is something that is already done to some
32 degree in this region. There's currently an SSC working group
33 that is jointly being held between the South Atlantic SSC and the
34 Gulf SSC to kind of determine best practices for setting MSY proxy
35 values.

36
37 Recommendation 3.7 is to evaluate strategies for expanding AP
38 interactions with the SSC and the council. The APs already
39 interact with the council to some degree here. AP chairs are
40 invited to council meetings, and they report out from AP meetings,
41 but there are other regions that facilitate interactions between
42 their SSCs and their APs.

43
44 Recommendation 3.8, which is the last recommendation here, is to
45 explore incorporation by reference to living online references and
46 analytical documents, in order to reduce document preparation time

1 and redundancy, and this is something that has been identified as
2 of interest by council staff.
3
4 That was a brief summary of all fifteen of the recommendations
5 from the regulatory streamlining report, and so I'm going to go
6 ahead now and walk through the recommendations that have been
7 prioritized so far and some of the initial steps for how we would
8 propose to begin work on these.
9
10 Recommendation 1.1 is where we'll start here, and that is the
11 recommendation to look into the expanded use of categorical
12 exclusions, and I'll start off by saying that the NEPA vehicle to
13 use is ultimately a NMFS decision, and not a council decision,
14 but, that said, it's still worth tracking the ongoing changes to
15 NEPA.
16
17 There was an update to the NOAA NEPA companion manual in July of
18 last year, and there have been proposed changes to the existing
19 categorical exclusions that could suggest the possibility for
20 expanded use, but those proposed changes aren't final yet, and
21 there's a CCC NEPA working group, that Dr. Simmons participates
22 in, that is closely tracking these ongoing changes in NEPA and how
23 they could impact the councils, and, also, NOAA is in the process
24 of developing a crosswalk between the requirements of Magnuson and
25 the updated NEPA guidelines to facilitate compliance with both.
26
27 In addition to tracking this developing NEPA guidance, we're
28 proposing that it would be also useful to have, just in general,
29 a more thoughtful evaluation, through the IPT process, of the NEPA
30 document type to use in conjunction with the council's
31 documentation needs, just to make sure that there aren't any missed
32 opportunities for using a more efficient vehicle, when it's
33 appropriate to do so.
34
35 Recommendation 1.2 is to identify potential opportunities for
36 automatic management measures, conditional management measures,
37 that could allow for direct rulemaking, and this is a
38 recommendation that we are proposing could be explored further
39 with the help of a contractor, and so, through our Inflation
40 Reduction Act funds, we have funded this regulatory streamlining
41 project, which has the first phase, which is to conduct this
42 regulatory review and the second phase, which is to begin
43 operationalizing some of the findings, and we have plans to bring
44 on a contractor for this second phase.
45
46 Here, a contractor could do some exploratory work to identify a

1 pilot fishery that this might be appropriate for, identify the
2 data streams that could be necessary, and then develop some of the
3 mechanisms and analysis for a range of conditions and management
4 responses.

5
6 I would just like to point out here that this recommendation from
7 the regulatory streamlining report aligns with one of the
8 recommendations from the rec initiative, which was Recommendation
9 3.1 to explore the development of a harvest control rule approach,
10 which is a type of automatic management measure, and the spirit of
11 this recommendation from the rec initiative was not for regulatory
12 streamlining, but it was really to look at ways to make management
13 measures more stable, and more predictable, and to facilitate
14 recreational access.

15
16 Recommendation 2.1 is to look into designating species as ecosystem
17 component species, and the next steps here would be to work with
18 NMFS to identify species that are currently in FMPs that are no
19 longer in need of conservation and management, and this is a
20 recommendation that aligns with the recommendations that came out
21 of the council's discussion of the EO for seafood competitiveness
22 to remove low-priority species from FMPs.

23
24 There's already a workplan in place for this particular
25 recommendation through the seafood competitiveness EO, and that is
26 that the council will initiate a plan amendment to address the
27 removal of species from FMPs during the first half of 2026 and
28 expect to finalize that amendment and submit it for rulemaking by
29 May of 2027.

30
31 Recommendation 2.2 is to evaluate the potential use of a generic
32 amendment to update all Gulf FMPs at once, with provisions to
33 enhance responsiveness, and what we're proposing for this
34 recommendation is that a potential generic amendment could focus
35 on framework procedures.

36
37 That would start with conducting an inventory of all the regulatory
38 actions that can currently be considered by a framework in the
39 Gulf FMPs, with a particular focus on reef fish, and on CMP, and
40 then, based on that inventory, consider expanding the list of these
41 regulatory actions that can be considered by a framework, so that
42 we can bake in the flexibility to use the more efficient -- The
43 more efficient vehicles, when it's appropriate to do so, for things
44 like routine actions.

45
46 Moving on to the collaboration, communication and coordination

1 recommendations, again, these are the non-regulatory
2 recommendations, Recommendation 3.3 is to explore strategies to
3 grant the council staff direct access to federal databases, and so
4 the next steps here would be to coordinate with NMFS partners to
5 assess the feasibility of direct data access and to identify what
6 sorts of systems would need to be in place to allow for these
7 things like direct access, and also to discuss the tradeoffs
8 between what it would take to develop and maintain these systems,
9 versus responding to iterative data requests individually. Other
10 considerations, for later on down the line, could be direct access
11 to things like GulFFIN and SRFS.

12
13 Recommendation 3.4 is the provision of annual data updates by the
14 Science Center to the council in off assessment years. Of course,
15 the council already receives interim analyses for some species.
16 The council will be hearing about lane snapper and red and gag
17 grouper interim analyses tomorrow, but the plan here would be to
18 think more strategically to identify priority species that could
19 benefit from annual interim analyses, rather than upon request by
20 the council, and how those could be used by the council to be more
21 responsive in management, perhaps in partnership with some of these
22 more efficient documentation things that we've been talking about
23 earlier today.

24
25 Recommendation 3.5 is the development of fishery performance
26 reports, and so what we're proposing to do here is to review how
27 fishery performance reports are developed in other regions, what
28 approaches they use, and how those fishery performance reports are
29 actually used by their councils and their SSCs to aid in their
30 decision-making.

31
32 Once we review these different approaches, we would develop a
33 template of questions, and so the questions that are typically
34 asked in the development of other fishery performance reports in
35 other regions include targeted questions about changes in fishing
36 behavior, changes in levels of catch, social and economic
37 influences to decision-making, and things like ecosystem
38 considerations, and so we would develop a template of questions to
39 ask and then pilot this fishery performance report development and
40 approach with a selected AP.

41
42 Then Recommendation 3.6 is to explore incorporation by reference
43 to living online references in analytical documents, and here we
44 would be reviewing the mechanisms for incorporation by reference
45 and how we could do this while still being in compliance with
46 Magnuson and NEPA, again with the idea of just reducing redundancy

1 and increasing efficiency.

2
3 Okay, and so that was some of the initial steps that we have
4 proposed for the recommendations that have been prioritized so
5 far, and I wanted to bring us back to this slide from earlier on
6 in the presentation that outlines the three different categories
7 of recommendations.

8
9 Category 3, the collaboration, communication and coordination
10 category, these are kind of the softer, non-regulatory approaches,
11 and what we're proposing is that, aside from the fishery
12 performance report development, which would, of course, come back
13 to the SSC and the council, that a lot of these things we can
14 continue to work on internally, and behind the scenes, to improve
15 our staff processes.

16
17 I really wanted to kind of focus the council's attention on
18 Categories 1 and 2, the procedural mechanisms and the regulatory
19 approaches, because these are really the meat and potatoes of
20 actual regulatory streamlining, and I think that Recommendations
21 1.1, 1.2, and 2.2 together could really help us to focus on
22 developing mechanisms to streamline minor and routine adjustments,
23 which seem to be kind of the major findings of the regulatory
24 report and things that we should be focusing on to improve our
25 efficiency overall.

26
27 Our overall kind of broader next steps here are, first, to confirm
28 with the committee today our regulatory streamlining priorities.
29 Do the things that we've talked about so far today sound
30 appropriate? Are there recommendations that were in that full
31 suite of recommendations that we didn't discuss further that you
32 think should be further prioritized, or vice versa.

33
34 Then, after that, with the aim of focusing on streamlining minor
35 and routine adjustments, and figuring out the best ways to move
36 forward with that, the next broader steps would be to form a
37 working group with the Regional Office and the Science Center to
38 work on those recommendations from those first two categories, to
39 identify potential opportunities for automatic management
40 measures, to identify the appropriate indices and data streams
41 that would be necessary to do that, and then to identify the
42 necessary adjustments to framework procedures that we could put in
43 place, not only in service of potential automatic measures, but
44 just to improve efficiency in our documentation overall.

45
46 Then, with that working group, we would identify the deliverables

1 and the scope of work and the expertise necessary to develop an
2 RFP to solicit a contractor to begin to start some of this work to
3 operationalize some of the council's priorities and
4 recommendations.

5
6 With a contractor onboard, we would be able to do some of the
7 exploratory work that's going to be necessary to test some of these
8 procedures for developing streamlined management measures without
9 having to draw down on staff workload, and having to distract from
10 the already busy council action schedule, and that's all I have,
11 Madam Chair.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Okay. Any comments, or questions?
14 Dr. Sweetman.

15
16 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and so I appreciate
17 the presentation here. I kind of agree with the process that
18 council staff is taking, and just kind of some additional thoughts
19 on my end here. When you're talking about kind of the if-then
20 management measures, and you're looking to maybe pilot a species
21 there, I might suggest something that like doesn't have a full-
22 fledged stock assessment, something that relies more on -- You
23 know, like lane snapper.

24
25 I'm not saying lane snapper is the best example there, but lane
26 snapper is a good example, where we don't have a full-fledged stock
27 assessment. We just went through an interim assessment, and now
28 we're having to take council time, both at the SSC level and here,
29 to kind of navigate that, and so maybe there's a more automated
30 process, where it's like, if we see an uptick in this interim
31 analysis, then that catch level gets automatically updated, or
32 something along those lines, but just thinking outside the box
33 there.

34
35 Then, relative to the ecosystem component species, I think I said
36 this at the last meeting, but that can take a lot of time,
37 obviously, walking through those ten questions that NOAA provides
38 us to kind of walk through for whether it's in need of management
39 in an FMP or it can be considered an ecosystem component species.

40
41 One thing that I said at the last meeting, I think, was South
42 Atlantic Council actually has a really nice process about this,
43 where they actually post a poll before the meeting, so you don't
44 have to literally walk through and kind of debate each of those
45 ten questions there, and so we'll come to the meeting ahead of
46 time with kind of all the council members -- You know, this is

1 what they said for this particular species, whether it should be
2 within an FMP or not, answering those questions, and then I feel
3 like we can just kind of walk through that discussion, as opposed
4 to kind of, you know, deliberate it at the table right then and
5 there, and so just a thought, just to kind of help streamline some
6 things there. Thank you.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Andy.

9
10 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I think this is fantastic, and
11 I think it aligns with a lot of things that we've been thinking
12 about within the Fisheries Service. I just wanted to walk through
13 some of the recommendations and add a few other thoughts.

14
15 With the 1.1 with NEPA, obviously, we're kind of waiting on
16 finalization of that guidance, but I fully expect that there's
17 going to be things that will help us simplify our documents going
18 forward.

19
20 Kind of in conjunction with that, one of the things that my team
21 has started to look at is are there sections of documents that
22 either could be simplified, or reduced, or possibly even eliminated
23 from kind of what we're preparing, because they just -- They take
24 a lot of time, but aren't necessarily required by the regulations
25 to be included, and so more thought there.

26
27 In terms of 1.2, you know, I've mentioned this before, and I'm not
28 necessarily wanting to take on more authority, but, where there
29 may be flexibility, in terms of providing the Regional
30 Administrator authority, within bounds that are set by the council,
31 certainly something that would maybe be good to think about, just
32 because that gives me the ability to do notices and move things
33 faster through the process.

34
35 With regard to 2.1, I would say we should also look at removing
36 species, not just designating them as ecosystem component species,
37 and I've just begun some conversations with Carrie. We're going
38 to, obviously, be working with her on a risk-value matrix that the
39 Fisheries Service is conducting, and that will go hand-in-hand
40 with any sort of amendment development going forward.

41
42 Then a couple other things. 3.4, I think, with the interim
43 analyses, the SEDAR Steering Committee really needs to be a large
44 component of that conversation, and we have some things teed-up
45 for the upcoming meeting, to discuss actually a procedurals
46 workshop to evaluate how we could simplify, or what data is

1 available to actually do assessments, or interim analyses, or other
2 methods for evaluating species, and I think that could actually be
3 a huge tool for us going forward.

4
5 Then the last thing is, with the workgroup, I fully support the
6 workgroup. I think one of the challenges we often face is that we
7 have these new initiatives, but everyone is so busy, with workload
8 and other priorities, that they don't carve out the time to work
9 on it, and so having the workgroup I think is great. I would
10 encourage us to think about including the South Atlantic Council
11 as part of that workgroup, because we're going to have similar
12 issues between the two councils. Thank you.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Any other comments or questions? Mr.
15 Schieble.

16
17 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so I would like to also see, I guess,
18 Recommendation 2.4 for inclusion as a priority from the council.
19 I think that fits with the output or recommendations, that came
20 from the Recreational Initiative Working Group, and so I'm not
21 sure -- How do we do that? Do you need a motion from us, from the
22 council, to ask for 2.4 to be included as one of the
23 recommendations?

24
25 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** We're getting that up on the screen. Dr. Simmons.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I think we just put it in the report
28 for now, since it's kind of a workplan we're trying to get feedback
29 from you guys on. Just, if I could, on another point, just remind
30 everybody, when we were talking about the ecosystem component
31 species, and the removing species process, remember, in our
32 workplan that we provided on the executive orders, that we're
33 already doing, we're already planning to do that as far as looking
34 at, you know, lesser-landed, or lower-priority, species, to see if
35 we could remove them, and we thought that could be also part of
36 the ecosystem -- We could add the ecosystem component piece to
37 that at the same time we're going through that process, and so
38 that's already part of our workplan with executive order. I think
39 that's what Verena was trying to say on the slide there, and I
40 just want to make sure everybody is clear of that.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Mara, and then C.J.

43
44 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Thanks. I just wanted to note one thing in the
45 report, that I think was just a typo, but it seems important, just
46 for your information, and so, on page 66, it talks about the key

1 questions to consider when evaluating whether to use a CE, and it
2 says, if all answers to all questions is yes, a CE may be used,
3 but one of the questions is are there any extraordinary
4 circumstances, and it should probably say are there no
5 extraordinary circumstances, and it is stated correctly before in
6 the document, but, because it's so prominent there, I just wanted
7 to make sure that that was clear, that there needs to be no
8 extraordinary circumstances to use a CE.

9
10 I also just wanted to note that -- I mean, all of this is fine. I
11 just -- I guess I want to be careful about like limiting maybe
12 certain aspects, and so, for example, 1.2, you know, evaluate
13 whether SIRs, supplemental information reports, which are not
14 expressly in NEPA, but are used, yes, those can work, but we don't
15 tend to do them in this region, because we tend to use CEs for the
16 types of things that other regions use supplemental information
17 reports for.

18
19 There's no problem exploring it, but I think we need to keep in
20 mind like how we've built things here, and we've built it in a
21 particular way, and so, if you're going to like switch gears, and
22 try to use a different process, you might have to rebuild what
23 you're doing, and I'm not sure you'll get anything out of it, and
24 so I guess, as we move forward, just to kind of keep that stuff in
25 mind. Thanks.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Okay. Andy.

28
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** John Walter has his hand raised.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Dr. Walter.

32
33 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Good morning, everyone. Can you hear me well?

34
35 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Yes. We've got you.

36
37 **DR. WALTER:** Okay, and, yes, I do also want to echo that I think
38 this is an excellent progress, an excellent step forward. One of
39 the things that, from the science end, we always hear is that
40 throughput is too slow, and that the science advice is too late to
41 the game by the time it actually hits the water, and that things
42 have changed.

43
44 While the science is certainly part of that inertia, there's a
45 substantial amount of inertia in the council process and rulemaking
46 as well. That means that, oftentimes, when an ACL hits the water,

1 it is five or six years past the terminal year of data that went
2 into a stock assessment, and what I guess I would like to challenge
3 us all is how we can reduce that terminal year inertia, is what I
4 call it, and what we want to try to target.

5
6 I think having a vision, and a goal, in mind to reduce the six
7 years down to maybe four years, or even two years, would be
8 excellent for us to then know what to aim for. Could we get to
9 the process where an interim assessment provides an updated ACL,
10 with a one-year lag, which works its way through the process, and
11 then hits the water maybe only one or two years behind that
12 terminal year.

13
14 Could we even be faster, for some stocks that might need that, and
15 I think one of the examples that's going to kind of pave the way,
16 that I think this council should pay attention to, is the South
17 Atlantic Council's management procedure for dolphinfish, which is
18 going to be an index-based manager procedure.

19
20 Because dolphinfish is so dynamic, and changes so rapidly, we're
21 going to try to reduce that terminal year inertia down to as fast
22 as possible, and hope that the rulemaking, and the council process,
23 can also adapt to be able to handle advice with maybe a one-year
24 lag.

25
26 I think all of these efforts are really coalescing towards
27 something that's going to be hopefully a great improvement in the
28 system. We, from the Science Center, look forward to being part
29 of that working group, and are actively working on streamlining a
30 lot of the science process, and that's working its way through the
31 SEDAR Steering Committee, and has also gone before this council,
32 and the South Atlantic Council, in terms of identifying the stocks
33 that would be really good candidates for these streamlined
34 approaches, versus the ones that are the key stocks, that would
35 still get the full stock assessment, and so I think there's a lot
36 more to come, and we look forward to being part of the process.
37 Thank you.

38
39
40 **OTHER BUSINESS**
41 **PROPOSED HMS RULE**

42 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Okay. Any other comments
43 or questions? Not seeing any, Verena, do you need a motion from
44 us for anything? Okay. Then that concludes that agenda item, I
45 believe. We have two that were approved in Other Business. The
46 first is the proposed HMS rule. We're going to have Dr. Hollensead

1 come up for this, or jump in as well.

2

3 I listened to the HMS webinar, and this is something that I do
4 think needs to be brought before the council. There are some
5 changes to the commercial management measures of the Atlantic
6 blacknose sharks.

7

8 Mostly that is removing a boundary in the Atlantic Ocean, and
9 changing the bag limit for the commercial sector, but, in the
10 recreational portion of this document, looking at management
11 measures for Atlantic sharks, they are making some significant
12 changes to bag limits, and there was a lot of concern on that
13 webinar from recreational fishermen regarding some of these bag
14 limit changes.

15

16 I think Dr. Hollensead has read through the document as well, and
17 I'll let her jump in here. Did we get Mr. Blankenship on the
18 phone? Is Randy there? Okay. It doesn't seem like he's there.
19 Lisa and I will do our best to answer some of your questions. We
20 may have to take some to HMS.

21

22 **DR. LISA HOLLENSHAD:** Just to highlight what Dr. Banks just said,
23 and provide some context, especially looking at Atlantic sharpnose
24 and bonnethead species, they're talking about, in the preferred
25 action, moving from, you know, looking at bonnetheads as a one-
26 shark-per-person-per-trip recreational limit to a vessel limit,
27 and so headboats, and things like that, where, you know, a lot of
28 people like catching a sharpnose -- Especially, if you get into
29 them thick, you can catch a lot of them fairly quickly, and to
30 have one per headboat.

31

32 You know, in my mind, at this point, looking through it, it's
33 unclear to me if this reduction was based on some sort of stock
34 assessment, or analysis, but they have not been assessed, to my
35 knowledge. It's certainly something we could dig a little bit
36 more into, and so I'm not sure if there's a conservation rationale
37 behind this or not.

38

39 It doesn't seem obvious, to me at least, from the document that's
40 here, and so we would have to look into that, but I think what
41 Kesley was saying was that was concerning.

42

43 One of the other things is the comment period for this ends in
44 early March, and so that would be before our April council meeting,
45 to be able to discuss this, and perhaps provide a letter, that
46 kind of thing.

1
2 There was a webinar, which Dr. Banks mentioned she listened into.
3 There's also another webinar for public comment where they do this,
4 but it's Thursday, and so, when most people are traveling for this
5 meeting, that's when that would be held. It's the 29th, and I
6 think it's like from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

7
8 I think that Dr. Banks has just, you know, noted to you all that
9 there's perhaps some HMS regulations that would be coming about
10 that would be of concern for folks here in the Gulf, and would
11 like some more opportunity perhaps to speak on this, if it's
12 possible to get that comment period either extended, so that we
13 could put something in here that the council could look through
14 this and comment on, and that would be ideal, or have somebody
15 from HMS come speak to this a little bit more.

16
17 In the document, they do have sort of recreational retention
18 limits, and then it looks at the potential reductions to that. I
19 don't know, and it's a little hard for me to kind of interpret and
20 figure out, and so it would be good to have somebody from Atlantic
21 HMS sort of explain that through to the full council, and so that's
22 just to provide some context of what Dr. Banks is bringing forth.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** I have a list, but, before I let J.D. jump in,
25 just for those that don't know, currently, as I think Lisa
26 mentioned, it's one per person per trip for bonnetheads and
27 Atlantic sharpnose, and this would drop down to one per vessel per
28 trip.

29
30 I think some of this is intended to help with some flexible
31 management, allow some in-season changes as needed. However, they
32 have a range of retention limits, one to four being proposed, with
33 the default being one, and so there is some nuance that I think
34 HMS coming to speak to us about might be beneficial, but I have
35 J.D., and then C.J.

36
37 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Just to remind council
38 members that Dr. Simmons did send an email out regarding this on
39 January 14th, and so it should be in your inbox a couple weeks ago.
40 My personal comments are I don't understand. I would like some
41 more rationale why.

42
43 To me, this is taking a step in the wrong direction. We're going
44 backwards here, or not us, but HMS, and so I'm very confused why
45 this is even -- This conversation is being had the way it is. I
46 would like to get some more information, and I think us, as the

1 Gulf Council, should stay on top of it and probably send a letter
2 by March, whatever date Lisa mentioned. Thank you, Dr. Banks.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. C.J.

5
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. I agree with what J.D. is
7 saying. I think we should probably think about writing a letter,
8 maybe after we get a little more information on some of these
9 things here.

10
11 There's good parts of this rule, right? Like, I mean, there is
12 increased harvest for certain species on the commercial side, but
13 you all did kind of shock me a little bit relative to the potential
14 for Atlantic sharpnose to be decreased to one per vessel. That
15 just makes zero sense to me whatsoever, and so, I mean, obviously,
16 there's going to be some nuance there.

17
18 It sounds like HMS is really trying to streamline things, in some
19 capacity, where they have, you know, some species have bag limits,
20 some have vessel limits, and it seems like they're trying to make
21 for all of this to be locked into one, and they're going towards
22 the vessel limit route, right, and so I think it's going to be
23 different for each species, but, in general, I think what we hear
24 about at the council table is we want more harvests of sharks, and
25 not less, and sharpnose just shocked me, because that's one of the
26 most abundant sharks that are out there.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** If I have my dates correctly, the last stock
29 assessment was in 2013 for those two species, bonnetheads and
30 sharpnose. I'm not aware of another stock assessment coming
31 forward. There is some precedence for having a person and vessel
32 limit. They do for charter-for-hire for swordfish. There is a
33 person limit, with a vessel up to, and state waters also do that,
34 but, within the HMS, this is already something that can be looked
35 at.

36
37 Between my representation of you guys on the webinar, and then the
38 South Atlantic Council members speaking up, there was a lot of
39 opposition to having this one -- This very restrictive vessel
40 limit, especially with all of the negative interactions we hear
41 about with sharks, as well as the South Atlantic is looking at
42 doing kind of a scaling bag limit for their charter-for-hire and
43 headboats for their -- I believe it's reef fish, maybe, fractional,
44 and so that's something that was thrown out there for HMS to also
45 look at, and just some food for thought as you're thinking about
46 this.

1
2 My personal opinion is I would like to have HMS come present this
3 to us, and so I would like an extension to the March 6 deadline,
4 and I don't know if you need motion to that effect. It sounds
5 like we do, and so I will entertain one prior to me doing that,
6 but, before that, I have Captain Frady's hand up.
7

8 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hearing this is kind of
9 a surprise to me, because everybody is fussing about sharks, but
10 the sharks everybody is fussing about are those over fifty-four
11 inches, like sandbar, dusky, bull sharks, and stuff like that,
12 that are eating everybody's fish.
13

14 As far as Atlantic sharpnose, after twenty-four full-time years of
15 being on the water, sharpnose is an incidental catch for most of
16 us. It's not something we can go out and target, and the size
17 limit -- There's no size limit, because they don't grow to about
18 two, or two-and-a-half, feet long, and so, as far as -- It's kind
19 of like an HMS overreach, in my opinion, simply because we don't
20 have a problem with them.
21

22 It's not something we're just going to slaughter them, and so they
23 need to understand that the sharks we're talking about are over
24 fifty-four inches. Those are the ones we encounter. This one is
25 not a problem. Thank you.
26

27 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. I will clarify that,
28 in the western Gulf, we do have some headboats that do charter
29 trips for specifically for, as they call them, bull tigers, but
30 they are Atlantic sharpnose. Before you get to that point, C.J.
31 -- Okay. C.J., and then I have Dr. Walter's hand up.
32

33 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just really quick, to clarify what Dr. Banks was
34 talking about on the South Atlantic, so they are discussing
35 different vessel limits for headboats, and so, right now, like you
36 apply a vessel limit, and it's good for every recreational mode,
37 right, but they're talking -- So they've got one example for like
38 gag and black grouper, where it's one or the other you're allowed
39 to keep for a vessel limit.
40

41 Obviously, on a headboat, if you've got fifty people out there,
42 that's just one fish for that entire vessel, and so they're talking
43 about considering -- Nothing has been decided yet, but considering
44 differences for what could be applicable for headboats along those
45 lines. I just wanted to provide some clarification there.
46

1 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** I appreciate that. Thank you, Dr. Walter.

2
3 **DR. WALTER:** Old hand. Sorry.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. thank you. Captain Walker.

6
7 **MR. ED WALKER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not sure if I'm on
8 your committee or not, but I just -- I'm squirming in my chair
9 over here, and I just feel like I have to have some input. Reducing
10 shark harvest based on zero science is -- I think it really
11 highlights the issue that we have with shark management now.

12
13 This is, as you know, an extremely abundant shark, and some of the
14 boats that have been shut out of other fisheries based on closed
15 seasons, like partyboats, have developed a business around
16 bringing in sharks.

17
18 They come in with sharks hanging, extremely abundant sharks, and
19 no problem demonstrated anywhere in the science, and I think the
20 issue is that some people that have an emotional attachment to
21 sharks don't like seeing the boats come in with a bunch of sharks
22 hanging, regardless of the fact that there's no science that
23 there's a problem with this, and so they're targeting these people,
24 because they don't like looking at it, but, you know, this will
25 hurt some people's business, based on nothing.

26
27 I agree with you that maybe we should have the HMS person come in
28 and talk to us, and we can talk to her about what the fishermen
29 around the Gulf think about emotional management of fisheries.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Dr. Simmons, did you
32 want to make a comment?

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, I
35 guess I'm a little bit concerned about us getting too far down
36 this rabbit hole. I mean, I think the point is this comment period
37 was not adequate for us, right? It missed all the council
38 meetings.

39
40 They have webinars almost on top of our council meeting, and we
41 would like to learn a lot more about what's happening, and so I
42 think we just need to send that message, and ask for an extension
43 in the comment period, and get all the information from them.
44 Maybe there is some science behind some of this. I haven't had a
45 chance to look at everything that's been proposed. Maybe there's
46 not, but provide an opportunity for HMS to give us what they have

1 regarding these changes.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Dr. Sweetman.

4

5 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I totally agree. I mean, the meeting
6 happened last week here, and we're at Gulf Council today, and so,
7 I mean, I'm with you. **I mean, I'm willing to offer to make a**
8 **motion to request an extension such that the Gulf Council can**
9 **adequately draft a comment letter to this proposed rule.** Do we
10 have a time certain that we want an extension for?

11

12 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** I would suggest at least to let us have an April
13 council meeting, where a presentation can be given, is my -- J.D.

14

15 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. To Dr. Sweetman's question, I
16 would also maybe want to entertain the South Atlantic meeting
17 schedule as well. They may want to comment too, and I don't know
18 if Mr. Roller is online listening, or Mr. Carmichael, and, you
19 know, we may want to let them weigh-in too, or get information.

20

21 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Does that look like your motion? Bernie is still
22 typing. Do we want to add a portion of this to ask for a
23 presentation in April, C.J. Dr. Simmons.

24

25 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, I will. **I'll throw also out there,**
26 **additionally, request NOAA HMS to give a presentation on the rule**
27 **at the April council meeting.**

28

29 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Dr. Simmons. Mara.

30

31 **MS. LEVY:** A minor point. I think you want to request an extension
32 of the comment period, just to be clear, and just to note that, I
33 mean, the proposed rule published at the beginning of January, and
34 so, yes, they had their public hearing last week, but it's been
35 out there since the beginning of January, and just to sort of
36 reiterate that I think it's great if you send this letter, and
37 that's totally within -- And if you can get a presentation, but to
38 not, I agree, go down the whole rationale of like they're doing it
39 without science.

40

41 They've proposed it, and it does talk about it. It looks to me
42 like it's to add flexibility, and make things consistent, and so
43 to ease kind of confusion, but, I mean, clearly, if you need
44 additional information, then you should request that, but not to
45 say that, just without looking at it, that they're doing it for no
46 reason. Thanks.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. C.J., do you want to read your motion?
3

4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, Madam Chair. **To request an extension of the**
5 **common period on the implementation of the proposed HMS rule to**
6 **give the Gulf Council ample time to comment. Additionally, the**
7 **Gulf Council requests a presentation from HMS at the April 2026**
8 **council meeting.**
9

10 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay, and Mr. Sanchez is seconding. Dr. Simmons.
11

12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Just a minor point, again. **Did you**
13 **want to add in the proposed role in commercial and recreational**
14 **shark management measures, just so we're clear what we're talking**
15 **about, so folks know?**
16

17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Sure, and so that would be in the second -- There
18 you go. **Commercial and recreational shark management measures.**
19 Thank you much. John, you good?
20

21 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** All right. Okay. Any further discussion on this?
22 **Seeing none, is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none,**
23 **the motion passes.**
24

25 Okay. We have one final item that was added to Other Business,
26 and this was the request for council review of EO public comments
27 and updated workplans. Dr. Simmons.
28

29 **REQUEST FOR COUNCIL REVIEW OF EO PUBLIC COMMENTS AND UPDATED**
30 **WORKPLANS**
31

32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, and so
33 we received a request from NOAA AA, and then, most recently, a
34 follow-up from Ms. Kelly Dennett at the Headquarters, NOAA and
35 NMFS Headquarters. They had a public comment period, and I think
36 it just closed, looking at the EO 14276 on seafood competitiveness,
37 and so they're asking us to take a look at those comments that
38 pertain to the Gulf, and there's multiple comments in there, and
39 consider any changes we want to make to our workplan and provide
40 that by April 30th, and so that does cover our council meeting.
41

42 Since we've already submitted that, I think staff's proposal would
43 be to work with council leadership, see if there's enough new ideas
44 that we need to put that back on the April council agenda, as well
45 as with the Regional Office staff, if that's okay, but that could
46 come back to you, but we would like to take a look at them.

1
2 We just received them at 3:00 p.m. on Friday, and so I haven't had
3 a chance to really look at them yet, to see if it's going to -- If
4 you want to change your workplan based on any of those comments,
5 or if it's the same thing we've already received. Madam Chair.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Any comments, questions,
8 concerns. Okay. Andy.

9
10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No, and I think Carrie has said it well. Obviously
11 we had this open public comment period. There may be some new
12 ideas, or there may not be some new ideas, but just to
13 comprehensively look at those, see if there's anything in there
14 that resonates with the council.

15
16 I like the approach of kind of talking with the chair and vice
17 chair, and, if we need to, bring this back in April. It still
18 allows for time to, obviously, make some modifications, if you
19 deem them necessary, before the April 30th deadline. Thanks.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. It doesn't sound like we need a motion to
22 that effect, and so any other comments on this topic? Seeing none,
23 Mr. Chair, that concludes Sustainable Fisheries.

24
25 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 26, 2026.)

26
27 - - -