

GULF COUNCIL

GULF SEDAR COMMITTEE

Hilton Palacio Riverwalk

San Antonio, Texas

August 26, 2025

**VOTING MEMBERS**

10 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana  
 11 Kesley Banks.....Texas  
 12 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas  
 13 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

16 Mike Allen.....Florida  
 17 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama  
 18 Brenda Ballard.....Texas  
 19 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana  
 20 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC  
 21 Troy Frady.....Alabama  
 22 John Marquez.....Louisiana  
 23 Lt Jason Morton.....USCG  
 24 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi  
 25 Anthony Overton.....Alabama  
 26 John Sanchez.....Florida  
 27 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi  
 28 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS  
 29 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida  
 30 Ed Walker.....Florida

**STAFF**

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

**OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

47 Frank Helies.....NOAA  
 48 Jimmy Hull.....SAFMC

1 John Walter.....SEFSC  
2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1  
2  
3 Adoption of Agenda and Approval of August 2024 Minutes..... 4  
4  
5 Action Guide and Next Steps..... 4  
6  
7 SEDAR Steering Committee Summary Report August 2025..... 4  
8  
9 Update on the Southeast Fisheries Science Center Resources..... 9  
10  
11 Review and Discussion of Updates to the Gulf SEDAR Schedule.... 18  
12  
13 Adjournment..... 30

14  
15 - - -  
16

1 The SEDAR Committee of the Gulf Council convened at The Hilton  
2 Palacio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Monday morning, August  
3 25, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas  
4

5 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
6 **APPROVAL OF AUGUST 2024 MINUTES**  
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** We're going to get started with the Gulf  
10 SEDAR Committee. The members are myself, Dr. Banks, Mr.  
11 Schieble/Mr. Montegut, and Mr. Geeslin. The first item is the  
12 Adoption of the Agenda. Are there any edits to the agenda? Not  
13 seeing any, can I have a motion to adopt the agenda? Dr. Banks.  
14 Can I have a second? Mr. Geeslin.  
15

16 Next is the Approval of the Minutes. Are there any changes or  
17 edits to the minutes? Not seeing any, can I have a motion to  
18 adopt? Dr. Banks. Can I have a second? Mr. Schieble. Next up  
19 will be the Action Guide and Next Steps. Mr. Rindone.  
20

21 **SEDAR STEERING COMMITTEE SUMMARY REPORT AUGUST 2025**  
22

23 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, sir. We're going to start off with  
24 Agenda Item Number IV, SEDAR Steering Committee Summary Report  
25 from the August 2025 webinar meeting, and so you guys are going to  
26 hear a brief overview of the agenda items that were discussed and  
27 committee outcomes and next steps.  
28

29 Some of the proposed process changes have been discussed generally  
30 with the council's SSC, and they supported operationalizing them  
31 for two of the ongoing stock assessments, SEDAR 100 for gray  
32 triggerfish and SEDAR 99, which is king mackerel.  
33

34 Council staff will continue to monitor and gather feedback about  
35 these changes, how they're going and everything, and review them  
36 with the council's SSC, and you guys should ask questions and  
37 provide direction to the staff and the SSC, as appropriate.  
38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Simmons.  
40

41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair,  
42 and so this is just an overview of our August 4 virtual steering  
43 committee we held. We don't have the written report finalized  
44 yet, and so I thought, as soon as I get that, I can share it with  
45 the council, and so this is just a summary report.  
46

47 I'm going to focus on the Gulf issues in here throughout, and so  
48 we heard an overview of the SEDAR projects report. We talked about

1 the process review and had a discussion on that as well. We got  
2 an update on the SEDAR project schedule, and we briefly discussed  
3 some other business items.

4  
5 For the Gulf, the SEDAR 87, the Gulf of America brown, pink, and  
6 white shrimp, we held a review workshop at our office June 23  
7 through 27. We have those assessment reports now, and those are  
8 going to go to the SSC for their October 2025 meeting. For hogfish,  
9 southeastern hogfish, and that's SEDAR 94. There was a data  
10 workshop held in St. Pete July 28 through August 1, and the review  
11 workshop is scheduled for July 14 through 17 of 2026.

12  
13 For Gulf red snapper, SEDAR 98, they held a data workshop in Mobile  
14 last December, and, right now, they're having a series of  
15 assessment webinars, and so that review workshop is scheduled for  
16 April of 2026.

17  
18 For SEDAR 99, which is the Gulf king mackerel, we requested two  
19 topical working groups, and the final assessment report is  
20 scheduled to be complete June of 2026. For gray triggerfish, the  
21 data workshop was just last week in Tampa. There will be some, I  
22 guess, report-outs for these two to the SSC, instead of hopefully  
23 the mini assessment webinars, which I'm going to talk about later,  
24 a change in the process, and then the review workshop will be held  
25 in February of -- Is that 2027? Is that right, Ryan, for  
26 triggerfish, 2027?

27  
28 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes. February 2027.

29  
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Next slide, please. Okay, and  
31 the other thing we just briefly talked about, and how it might  
32 affect the SEDAR schedule, is the planning for the updates for the  
33 Marine Recreational Information Program, the Fishing Effort Survey  
34 piece of that, and when that -- You know, the council received an  
35 update on the pilot, and when that project would have the final  
36 results, and so I think that is currently planned for spring of  
37 2026.

38  
39 We've been trying to get ahead of how that's going to impact the  
40 stock assessments, the monitoring, and potentially the schedule of  
41 assessments, and so we heard a presentation from the Science  
42 Center, and they're proposing, for stock assessments that use the  
43 MRIP Fishing Effort Survey, the following options.

44  
45 The Option 1 is the most timely, to just use the average adjustment  
46 factor for monitoring, and no assessment reruns. Option 2 is rerun  
47 the model with only updated recreational time series FES data.  
48 Option 3 is a full update lite model rerun with updates to the

1 other data sources, and so that would update the other indices as  
2 well.

3  
4 The proposal for the Gulf specifically was, for red grouper, gray  
5 triggerfish, and king mackerel, to use the Option 2, with the  
6 general planning that those assessments would be complete, and any  
7 changes that this final pilot MRIP-FES study may show could be  
8 considered in that time series, and then the models could be rerun  
9 with that updated information.

10  
11 What we would like to do though is take this proposal, as well as  
12 some of the other process changes, to the Gulf SSC, at its October  
13 meeting, and spend a little time talking about this and how it's  
14 going to be played out in the next year, hopefully.

15  
16 We spent quite a bit of time, I guess, going through the SOPPs,  
17 the proposed changes to the SOPPs, and, just to highlight some of  
18 those changes, the Science Center is asking, or considering taking  
19 responsibility, for the assessment component of SEDAR, whereas the  
20 data and the review components would remain unchanged for, you  
21 know, the full assessment process.

22  
23 The SSC would be presented with key decision points, and they would  
24 ask them for feedback prior to completion of the assessment, and,  
25 obviously, there would have to be close coordination with the  
26 cooperators, Gulf Council staff, and the SSC, to make sure that we  
27 can accomplish that several months in advance, and so I think we  
28 kind of tried this out with red grouper, I believe, and it worked  
29 out pretty well, not to have a lot of long assessment webinars,  
30 and trying to keep up with the information and the changes, but  
31 just have very specific requests for feedback at a certain SSC  
32 meeting before the assessment is finalized.

33  
34 **MR. RINDONE:** The check-in was great for the SSC, because it  
35 provided them an opportunity to -- Dr. Allen can speak to this  
36 too, because he was on the SSC at the time, but it provided a good  
37 opportunity for the Science Center to ask those specific questions,  
38 and get feedback, before completing all the modeling work and  
39 bringing it back to the SSC for review, and that particular  
40 instance for that went so well that it was agreed that that's  
41 something that should be continued in the future.

42  
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and we also talked about this  
44 process of the councils appointing a technical team, and it was  
45 suggested that that would be like scientific expertise and fishing  
46 expertise that would be available to provide feedback as needed  
47 during the model development, instead of having like an assessment  
48 panel, which is I think kind of the older process that we had.

1  
2 We also just talked about engaging fishermen and stakeholders  
3 during the appropriate advisory panel meetings when we might need  
4 very specific feedback from a particular fleet, a particular  
5 fishery, or just calling individuals that may have that historical  
6 and on-the-water knowledge.

7  
8 The proposal was that technical teams should have availability for  
9 ad hoc meetings with lead analysts to provide feedback about  
10 specific issues, and it was suggested it could be like a standing  
11 group that covers multiple assessments. Each council, like the  
12 South Atlantic and the Gulf, could have this, or it could be  
13 developed for specific stocks or groups of stocks.

14  
15 The lead analytic agency, whether that be FWC or the Science  
16 Center, could reach out to members of the team as needed, either  
17 as individuals or as a whole, and technical teams may be needed or  
18 consulted for all assessments.

19  
20 Internally, and with the chair a little bit, we talked about the  
21 logistics of this concept, and, for us, to me, it's hard to get  
22 people to volunteer and then tell them we don't know exactly how  
23 many times we're going to need you, and when we're going to need  
24 you, and so I think, on our side of the house, we still need to  
25 think about this a little bit more, and also make sure that the  
26 technical team, if it's got SSC members on it, that we're not  
27 duplicating efforts, right?

28  
29 We want to streamline it, and we want to, you know, be considerate  
30 of people's time and make sure we're getting the right feedback  
31 and transparency that we need in the process, and so, from my  
32 perspective, I think this is a good start, but it probably needs  
33 a little bit more thought, and probably conceptualization, as far  
34 as the Gulf goes, and there's a financial responsibility also for  
35 the councils.

36  
37 I mean we, in the Gulf, have a little bit more trouble getting  
38 academics just to volunteer for free to sit on these things,  
39 whereas I think the South Atlantic maybe has a little better, you  
40 know, participation in that avenue, without trying to contract  
41 with people, and so I had a little bit of a concern there with  
42 that, and then just, you know, the number of SSC members involved,  
43 their bandwidth, and how all that's going to work, and so, again,  
44 I think those are things we need to continue to work through and  
45 think about with the Science Center and FWC staff.

46  
47 We're going to try this approach in the Gulf right now for king  
48 mackerel and triggerfish, and I don't know that we have those teams

1 appointed yet, but we're going to see how it works, get the SSC's  
2 feedback on it, people that have participated, and the council's  
3 feedback on that process, as well as stakeholders, and so I guess  
4 to be determined. We'll try it out and see how it goes for us.

5  
6 The other thing we talked about is the consideration of holding  
7 the in-person SEDAR Steering Committee in a different location  
8 than Charleston. There's not as many flights since COVID directly  
9 for a lot of people, and just see if there was a more cost-  
10 effective location, and the analysis that was done basically  
11 resulted the most cost-effective place with the total project cost  
12 was really in the Charleston area. Tampa was close behind that,  
13 but they would like to keep it in Charleston for now.

14  
15 Then we also got an update, and SEDAR is working on developing  
16 some nice infographics to showcase to the councils and stakeholders  
17 about some of these changes to the process, and trying to make  
18 them more user-friendly, and so that is my quick summary report,  
19 and we'll send out the full report when we have it, Mr. Chair.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, for the update. Do we  
22 have any questions for Dr. Simmons? Dr. Sweetman.

23  
24 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thanks Dr. Simmons, and I agree with your  
25 thoughts there on the -- I think, in particular, the three options  
26 that we have for MRIP transition and calibration to the new numbers  
27 there, I mean for FES, is -- That's going to be a doozy. I'll  
28 just throw that out there. It's going to impact a lot of things  
29 that we're working on.

30  
31 Also, I still struggle here to see how, and maybe it will, and  
32 maybe it will be better, about streamlining the entire process  
33 here. I mean, obviously, that's kind of part of the impetus for  
34 us doing a new SEDAR process, is because we're trying to use more  
35 timely data, but fingers crossed that it does. I still have some  
36 concerns.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any other questions, or  
39 concerns, for Dr. Simmons? Dr. Allen.

40  
41 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I mean, I really like  
42 this path of going down. I'm just wondering if those technical  
43 teams could have maybe a couple of scheduled check-ins, to have  
44 this where -- Because, in a way, to get people, you need to plan  
45 it, but I really like the idea that fishers would be talking to  
46 the assessment team during the development of that, and maybe  
47 there's a way to structure where there's a couple of scheduled  
48 ones, rather than, you know, just an ad hoc when needed kind of

1 approach.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Any other questions? Mr.  
4 Rindone.

5

6 **MR. RINDONE:** Dr. Allen, would that -- Would those scheduled check-  
7 in opportunities be like public webinars, or would they just be an  
8 opportunity for the technical team to -- Like a scheduled time  
9 that they're going to touch base with the assessment team, so that  
10 they know, you know, coming up three weeks from now, we're going  
11 to hear from them about how things are going.

12

13 **DR. ALLEN:** I was thinking the latter would be --

14

15 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay.

16

17 **DR. ALLEN:** Just a scheduled time that they could weigh-in, you  
18 know, early in the model development and those kinds of things.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Allen. Moving down the  
21 agenda, next up, we'll have an update from the Science Center.  
22 Dr. Walter.

23

24 **UPDATE ON THE SOUTHEAST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER RESOURCES**

25

26 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** All right. Good morning, everyone. I'll give  
27 a presentation, or I don't have a presentation. I'll just give a  
28 verbal update on some of the kind of our situation with respect to  
29 a number of things that have happened recently with staffing cuts  
30 and not being able to backfill. There is not a document here, and  
31 so I'll just verbally convey this.

32

33 Good morning. John Walter, on behalf of the Southeast Fisheries  
34 Science Center, and a lot of the changes that were outlined in  
35 this year, our presentation, actually happened well before these  
36 staffing losses happened, because we recognized we really do need  
37 to change the process. It hasn't worked out efficiently, and so  
38 we actually proposed some of these changes, and have been working  
39 with council staff and cooperators on some of those changes, and  
40 so they're not necessarily in response to our staffing reductions.

41

42 They're actually probably a needed response to trying to match  
43 SEDAR, and the assessment management process to the need, and I  
44 think we've built a system which was really comprehensive, really  
45 thorough, but we realized that we needed to have more current  
46 advice, and we needed advice for more species, and that there might  
47 be simpler, more efficient ways.

48

1 It just happens that a number of the staffing reductions have come  
2 in after that, and so there's sort of a convergence of process  
3 with resources, and so hopefully it will help us to be able to  
4 manage through that.

5  
6 That being said, we are at a 30 percent reduction, or about a one-  
7 third reduction, in our total staff. We started the year with a  
8 fully-staffed level of 252 staff. We've lost sixty-seven since  
9 then, and we've been unable to fill sixteen staff, and so we're  
10 greatly reduced in our footprint, what our intended footprint was,  
11 at the beginning of 2025.

12  
13 That has, consequently, reduced our ability to do a lot of the  
14 things that we would have wanted to, particularly our basic  
15 operations, budget, contracts, grants, and I think that we've seen  
16 some delays, and some hiccups, in the processing of contracts and  
17 grants because of that.

18  
19 Our ability to provide scientific advice has been slowed in a  
20 number of areas, and then, in terms of a mitigation strategy, we're  
21 working with our headquarters and leadership to prioritize and  
22 mitigate those impacts, in terms of what can be backfilled and  
23 what is going to have to be either delayed or stopped, and so, as  
24 I mentioned, our general strategy is to find the efficiencies that  
25 we can find, find out what can be done easier, cheaper, faster,  
26 and then change how our operations can be conducted, leaning on  
27 advanced tech to be able to take on some of the tasks that  
28 previously might have been done by human labor.

29  
30 Ultimately, we're going to have to prioritize the most important  
31 activities, which means certain activities that we used to do we  
32 will no longer be able to do, and so one of the issues we face in  
33 the Southeast Center is that we've got multiple different labs and  
34 centers within the center that we're trying to maintain, and so  
35 facilities maintenance is a major cost to us. We're looking for  
36 efficiencies there and determining how many of those labs that we  
37 can continue to support out of our base budget. The slowing of  
38 grant and contract processing has been a bit of a struggle in  
39 maintaining things like air conditioning, et cetera.

40  
41 We've had some delays in our surveys, and the number of days that  
42 we've been able to survey. Mostly we've been able to keep our  
43 mainline surveys intact, but it's been a bit of a struggle to do  
44 that. We've lost several of our boat captains. We're in the  
45 process of trying to backfill those boat captains, because those  
46 are really critical. The boat can't go to sea if you don't have  
47 captains staffing it twenty-four hours.

1 Then we've got gaps, as we've noted, in our port sampling, in  
2 particular our headboat port sampling gaps. We had to scale back  
3 that, and so we've talked about that in previous meetings. We've  
4 also lost many of our port samplers for the commercial fishery,  
5 and so the mitigation approach to that is to see if we can acquire  
6 other funds to be able to contract that out, but, other than that,  
7 we are going to likely be dealing with reduced numbers of headboat  
8 and commercial biological samples, which means probably some  
9 greater uncertainty in our stock assessment and having to work  
10 with the data we've got.

11  
12 Then we also will hope to rely on our state partners more so for  
13 those. They tend to have more boots on the ground in some of our  
14 particular spatial locations, that we may not have federal  
15 workforce to be able to support that, and so, the more that states  
16 can pick up things like that port agent sampling, we would look to  
17 partner on that.

18  
19 We have slowed some of our progress to a transition to advanced  
20 tech. A number of our probationary staff, and those were our most  
21 recent hires, had specific expertise on artificial intelligence  
22 and machine learning, and that was going to be one of our big  
23 transitions for our visual surveys, where we would be able to  
24 automatically read a lot of the video data. That progress has  
25 slowed a bit, because we've lost a lot of that capacity.

26  
27 Then a number of things, in terms of our capacity from our gear  
28 research and our harvesting systems branch, and we've also lost  
29 some key staff there, and so our ability to support improvements  
30 to harvesting systems like gear modifications, TEDs, and BRDs has  
31 also been diminished, because of the staffing losses. There's not  
32 too many people who can mend net anymore. I think, if you're a  
33 fisherman, you know that that's a skill that's being lost. We had  
34 some expert people in that, and that that skill set is something  
35 that I think industry-wide is challenging to find.

36  
37 Then our stock assessment enterprise, which directly affects the  
38 advice that goes to this council, we have now lost most of our  
39 Highly Migratory Species Branch members and our assessment staff.  
40 We've lost Shannon Cass-Calay, who was our division director for  
41 Sustainable Fisheries, and a number of ICCAT stock assessment  
42 experts, as well as a couple of our shark stock assessment experts,  
43 and then not being able to backfill them means that we're going to  
44 have to shift some of those tasks around, and we're not likely to  
45 be able to provide the same level of support for those particular  
46 activities.

47  
48 Within the Gulf fisheries branch, we are not down as many staff,

1 and so the Gulf branch, in terms of what directly affects this  
2 staff, or this council, is not as impacted, but, because they may  
3 need to pick up some of the assessment load from other branches,  
4 they may be taxed, and, again, our mitigation approach is the full  
5 comprehensive program through SEDAR to evaluate and match the  
6 complexity and intensity of assessment with the need, and, in many  
7 cases, scale back that and work with the data that we've got.

8  
9 Some of those things will be update lites, interim approaches,  
10 index-based managed procedures, where the catch goes up based on  
11 indices, and I think that's something that we want to see moving  
12 forward, because we want to really lean on our fishery-independent  
13 indices.

14  
15 Those are where we see that we want to maintain, at all costs, the  
16 integrity of those surveys, because those are the time series which  
17 we think are going to carry us forward through what may come in  
18 the future, but then develop assessment approaches that utilize  
19 them and more fully utilize those indices.

20  
21 Then we're also challenging our ability to provide support for our  
22 protected resources. Those are the ESA-managed and Marine Mammal  
23 Protection Act and Endangered Species Act-managed species. Those  
24 certainly affect the fisheries in the Gulf, because, as many of  
25 our fisheries have had to deal with ESA species, certainly in  
26 biological opinions, that's going to be a concern for this council,  
27 and, as we'll hear from some of the other work that's been done  
28 related to bycatch and the cooperative approach to dealing with  
29 ESA-managed species and ESA management with the council, and so  
30 that's one of the things we've heard from the councils, is we would  
31 like to have more input into how that management is crafted and  
32 developed.

33  
34 Well, in these joint collaborative approaches is the way to provide  
35 input, so that we can find the compromise space between supporting  
36 fisheries while also meeting ESA and MMPA mandates.

37  
38 Then one of the big losses for us is the loss of staff who supported  
39 the Climate, Ecosystem, and Fisheries Initiatives and our ability  
40 to support ecosystem science. We lost a number of key staff in  
41 that regard, and so that's going to make it harder for us to be  
42 able to update the ecosystem status reports on as routine frequency  
43 as we had intended and wanted to be able to do.

44  
45 How that translates to our ecosystem-based fishery management  
46 footprint still remains to be determined, in terms of how much  
47 support we can get working with council staff on that, but we have  
48 lost some key staff there. With that, that's the main overview of

1 where we stand, in terms of our capacity to support a lot of the  
2 science, and I'm happy to take further questions now or throughout  
3 the week. Thanks.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter, for the update. Do we  
6 have any questions, or concerns, for Dr. Walter? Mr. Schieble.

7  
8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Dr. Walter,  
9 for the rundown, I guess. You mentioned the states helping out,  
10 I guess, in regards to some of the things, and filling some of the  
11 gaps, and I'm not trying to put you in a corner here with this,  
12 but it would be beneficial, or helpful, for us at the state level  
13 to know maybe a prioritized list of things that you have readjusted  
14 your priorities to, and then a list of the things that you no  
15 longer can do, I guess, or are unable to complete because of the  
16 staffing shortages, to see where we could fill the gaps, perhaps.

17  
18 I don't know what the proper methodology for that is, if that could  
19 be something you could bring back to the council at the next  
20 meeting, or something you just send to the council in the form of  
21 a letter, and then it gets disseminated to the states, something  
22 like that, but some feedback. Thank you.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris.

25  
26 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think that's a good suggestion,  
27 particularly for like port agent coverage, and what could states  
28 cover that our federal port agents either aren't in that area, and  
29 then maybe a sample could go out and say, all right, we need some  
30 king mackerel samples from this area that would otherwise be  
31 missing. I think we can work on that. Thanks.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Dr. Sweetman.

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on your committee,  
36 but I appreciate the report, Dr. Walter. Yikes. A lot of scary  
37 stuff going on there, but, yes, that was going to be one of my  
38 questions, is kind of what is NOAA prioritizing.

39  
40 Just a comment here, and I think we need to make clear -- I mean,  
41 in the past, and I know the South Atlantic has dealt with this  
42 issue, and we've kind of dealt with this issue, about some  
43 hesitancy to make management recommendations based on a fishery-  
44 independent index, right, and so sometimes the SSC just wants some  
45 more information, things along those lines, and so I just think we  
46 need to be openly coordinating with the SSC that we're in a  
47 different time now, and, while we would want all of that more data,  
48 unfortunately, this is the situation that we're in, and we might

1 have to make management decisions based on kind of this new process  
2 here.

3  
4 Also, John, just a question for you, and so, obviously, in this  
5 new SEDAR process, the Science Center is taking more on, right,  
6 pulling stuff back outside of the, you know, typical public data  
7 workshop and all that kind of stuff, and so, given that we had  
8 talked about this new process, and kind of the Science Center  
9 taking some more on here, and with the staff reductions, and I  
10 know that you say that the Gulf is in better shape than other  
11 jurisdictions here, but the Gulf staff are going to be trying to  
12 help out with some of the other assessments.

13  
14 How does all of this play into the fact that we are trying to  
15 ultimately streamline, and get more timely data, given some of  
16 these things that are beyond your control, even things along the  
17 lines of just getting scientific data in a timely manner, and so  
18 it's a tough question to answer, but I'm just kind of wondering,  
19 and does this still ultimately streamline and get us more, in your  
20 perspective, timely data that we can use for management?

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

23  
24 **DR. WALTER:** Well, a number of the things that we were proposing,  
25 like index-based management procedures, and so, when you've got an  
26 index, you modify the previous year's ACL, and then set a new ACL  
27 for two or three years on the basis of the index. It's timely.  
28 It's relatively quick, and it can get through the process quickly.

29  
30 It's not the same complexity of some of our really intensive stock  
31 assessments, and so I think that management bodies are going to  
32 have to accept that we won't be able to provide that same intensity  
33 of a stock assessment, and, in some cases, it maybe wasn't that  
34 useful anyway, because the timing was so delayed, in terms of when  
35 that manager device hit the streets, and so is riding the ups and  
36 downs of an index better?

37  
38 It could very well be, in some cases, where we're often hearing  
39 that we're late to the game by the time the ACL hits the streets,  
40 and so we see that there's some benefits there. In terms of being  
41 able to take on more from the Science Center, we can only take on  
42 more by actually scaling back some of the expectations, and I think  
43 that's where we would say we would have to lean on this body, and  
44 this council to say, okay, what we've got is pretty good.

45  
46 It's good enough for setting an annual catch limit. It may not be  
47 everything we want, but it's what we've got, and I think that  
48 rescaling of the expectations across-the-board is really what we

1 have to work with, and I would say that the SSCs also have to say,  
2 hey, this is what we've got. We may want all of this life history  
3 information, but, honestly, we're not going to collect all that  
4 life history information with the research that we've got, and  
5 we're not going to have that much budget for the research that  
6 will go into that. Thanks.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. I have Mr. Strelcheck,  
9 and then Mr. Anson.

10  
11 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I just wanted to follow up on Dr. Walter,  
12 and so, C.J., great question, right, and I think one of the  
13 conversations we probably are going to need to have, sooner rather  
14 than later, around this table is our acceptance of change and risk,  
15 right, and so we are looking, obviously, to change processes  
16 because we have to, right, and it's not because we necessarily  
17 want to, but the reality is we're just not going to have the same  
18 amount of resources.

19  
20 With what Dr. Walter said, I think there's some opportunities here,  
21 though, right, and so we often spend years waiting for assessment,  
22 and then we debate and argue about the results of that assessment,  
23 and maybe have just as much trust, or lack of trust, in that  
24 assessment as we would an index of abundance or some other piece  
25 of data, right, and so trying to, in my view, get the data to be  
26 as close to real time as possible I think is really critical.

27  
28 Focusing on those key species and stocks that will need those  
29 robust stock assessments, and then figuring out other methods that  
30 can be utilized to manage, you know, the rest of the suite of  
31 species under our management is going to be really critical, and  
32 I expect, obviously, there will be some challenges along the way,  
33 but the reality is it's kind of a necessity that we're faced with.

34  
35 One of the things I'll mention, kind of analogous, is the Caribbean  
36 is doing a procedures workshop, where they're actually looking at  
37 all of their species that are under management and determining  
38 what methodologies can be even used for science and research to  
39 give management advice.

40  
41 It's a comprehensive approach, and I think, ultimately, at the end  
42 of the day, it's going to bear fruit, and it will tell us what  
43 species, that maybe they can't even provide advice on, all the way  
44 up to ones that can provide robust stock assessments, but looking  
45 at the capacity of the center and matching that up with the  
46 capacity for meeting management needs is really critical.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Anson.

1  
2 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Following up with what Mr. Schieble requested,  
3 was that, if you have any either internal targets for any of those  
4 fishery-independent data, or if there is an expected number, you  
5 know, to add that, or at least have it available, when and if we  
6 can see that list, the states, so that we have a good idea as to  
7 whether or not they're reasonable.

8  
9 We just don't want to get in a situation where the data is less  
10 viable, or is not as good as it could have been if we didn't know  
11 what certain targets would be, I guess, if that's possible. I  
12 know there's a bunch of species and such, but, if you had any  
13 internal information that you all tracked relative to those  
14 fishery-independent data, that would be helpful. Thank you.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

17  
18 **DR. WALTER:** A follow-up. Are you meaning for like port sampling  
19 and species that -- Okay.

20  
21 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, for any of those things that, you know, you'll  
22 need assistance on, I guess, any of those programs, you know, if  
23 you had any guidance that you gave to the port samplers, to have  
24 that available for the states, so that we can evaluate that, to  
25 make sure that it's something that, if we're going to put forth  
26 the energy, we want to make sure that we kind of know what we're  
27 going to get out of it, and we want to -- If we knew what the  
28 target was beforehand, then we would, I think, be more apt to try  
29 to achieve it, rather than just saying, well, we'll send a certain  
30 people out in these number of days, and then come to find out that  
31 it was only 50 percent of what you were really needing, as far as  
32 having better quality data.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Allen.

35  
36 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you. I'll mirror Dr. Sweetman's comment about  
37 yikes. This is definitely concerning. Dr. Strelcheck, what group  
38 did you say was doing a prioritization and looking at data sources?

39  
40 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, first, thank you for the honorary doctorate.  
41 In terms of the group, it's the Southeast Fisheries Science  
42 Center's Caribbean branch, as part of the Caribbean Council  
43 process.

44  
45 **DR. ALLEN:** All right. Thank you. I was going to recommend  
46 something similar to that in a discussion with the center staff  
47 and the SSC, as far as, you know, one option would be to look at  
48 which indices and what data sources are the most critical for each

1 species, or complex of species, because, you know, some of these  
2 assessments, and the process, are going to be severely compromised  
3 by portions of the data that are missing, and so I think that  
4 trying to prioritize that might be a good step forward, but we're  
5 going to be forced to make decisions with a lot less information,  
6 it sounds like to me, and so that's unfortunate, and, to me, that  
7 would mean that prioritizing what are the best ones to preserve is  
8 worth a discussion.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Any other comments, or  
11 concerns? Mr. Strelcheck.

12  
13 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I like that idea, and I guess what I would add is  
14 it goes hand-in-hand with -- Both the South Atlantic and Caribbean  
15 right now are also looking at their species, and their fishery  
16 management units, and determining if there are any that they don't  
17 view as in need of conservation and management, at least through  
18 the federal council process.

19  
20 I think that's something that we probably, as the Gulf Council,  
21 also need to take a hard look at and determine, you know, is our  
22 list up to date, and is there any species that we would want to  
23 exclude from management at this point, because of state management  
24 that currently exists, or other resources, and see if that list of  
25 species can be reduced?

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

28  
29 **DR. ALLEN:** Just to follow up on that, I completely agree with  
30 that. I think that would be a good step as well. Thank you, Andy.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

33  
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I like  
35 the idea of getting some type of formal maybe memo or something  
36 from the Science Center regarding these deficits, with  
37 particularly validation of the data and the impacts.

38  
39 I mean, we spent a lot of time talking about the deficits we're  
40 going to be faced with in the western Gulf, as far as the headboat  
41 survey program, you know, and we know that there are certain  
42 species, like Mr. Anson was saying, such as lane snapper, where we  
43 based a lot of catch advice originally off of that index, and so  
44 we know there's going to be some serious challenges here in the  
45 next couple years.

46  
47 Is it possible, or practical, I guess, for that memo to go to the  
48 Gulf States Commission, as a starting point for discussion, so we

1 can get some feedback in the feedback loop from the states on that?  
2 That's just a thought as we work through this process.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Donaldson.

5  
6 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Sure. If the timing of getting it to us prior  
7 to our commission meeting, which is the week before the Gulf  
8 Council, so we could have our various committees look at that and  
9 provide some input back to the council.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Any other questions,  
12 or comments? The next agenda item will be Mr. Rindone with Updates  
13 to the Gulf SEDAR Schedule.

14  
15 **REVIEW AND DISCUSSION UPDATES TO GULF SEDAR SCHEDULE**

16  
17 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, sir, and so we're going to provide some  
18 updates to the council's Gulf SEDAR schedule, which has been  
19 finalized with the Science Center and FWC through 2027. It should  
20 be noticed that the schedule includes consideration of requests  
21 for products that will be conducted outside of the SEDAR process,  
22 and we'll note where those things are, or when they come up, and  
23 the committee should also ask questions and provide input on  
24 updating the schedule, including anything they would like to see  
25 out through 2029.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you.

28  
29 **MR. RINDONE:** So we'll bring that up. All right, and so, current  
30 year, we still have red snapper going on. Gray triggerfish had  
31 its data workshop last week. Dr. Simmons was remarkably quiet the  
32 whole time, and had nothing to say. The king mackerel operational  
33 assessment will begin later this year, and the Gulf penaeid shrimp  
34 assessments wrapped up earlier this year. For FWC assessments, we  
35 currently have hogfish going on.

36  
37 Moving on into 2026, red snapper, the saga continues, and we'll  
38 expect to see some updates from the new MRIP calibrations talked  
39 about in the spring of 2026. The same thing for gray triggerfish.  
40 King mackerel should be wrapped up in late spring or early summer.

41  
42 We'll have the gag assessment that will start about early to mid-  
43 summer, and then we're talking about having a tilefish data triage  
44 to think of ways to assess our tilefish complex, and then, as has  
45 been discussed already by Dr. Simmons in her presentation, we'll  
46 also have the MRIP updates from the updated effort calibration to  
47 talk about.

1 For FWC, we'll be finishing up the hogfish assessment, and then,  
2 in 2027, we hope to have received the results in the previous year  
3 for the great amberjack count, and for those to have also been  
4 reviewed by the council's SSC, and so that assessment will start  
5 after those data have been looked at and feedback given to the PIs  
6 for that team.

7  
8 We'll also have updated assessments done for vermilion, yellowedge  
9 grouper, and gray snapper, and I have question-marks on there for  
10 -- Or a question-mark on there for mutton snapper as a possible  
11 FWC assessment, and so, before I just keep walking through this  
12 whole thing, any questions or whatnot?

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions?

15  
16 **UNIDENTIFIED:** I'm just curious, and have you seen any delays as  
17 a result of some of the budget issues?

18  
19 **MR. RINDONE:** Like from my seat, and Dr. Simmons and I had actually  
20 talked about this a little bit, we are still, thankfully, getting  
21 pretty good throughput from the Science Center, and a lot of that  
22 has to do with, as Dr. Walter had pointed out, some of the  
23 operational changes that have been made to the SEDAR process that  
24 allow for things to be done more in-house, in a lot of  
25 circumstances, and that reduces the amount of time that their staff  
26 and our SSC members are spending on some of these projects, and so  
27 I would say maybe a little bit, but not regularly, and it's not  
28 like a sea change or anything.

29  
30 We've been fortunate, in the Gulf, in that the majority of the  
31 assessment team staff are still around, and where a lot of the  
32 shortcomings are, you know, that I expect to see in the future are  
33 going to come from being able to age fish, being able to process  
34 the data from some of these fishery-independent indices, some of  
35 those things that they still take people to do, and so we haven't  
36 felt a lot of those effects yet, but I expect that we will feel  
37 some looking forward, which is the impetus for a lot of what Dr.  
38 Walter had to say, and a lot of the proposed changes that Dr.  
39 Simmons had talked about in her presentation, and so not really as  
40 of yet, but we expect to see some.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

43  
44 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I don't know the best  
45 way to go about this, Ryan, but I've got some -- You know, I've  
46 chatted with our FWRI stock assistant scientists, and we've got  
47 some kind of recommendations along those lines, but it plays in,  
48 I guess, to the entire timeframe that we're looking here, and so

1 maybe I can just hold off until the end. Your call.

2

3 **MR. RINDONE:** Now.

4

5 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay then. All right, and here are some of my  
6 general thoughts, in terms of coordinating with FWRI. Who are the  
7 stock assessment leads for FWC on this, and so, yellowtail and  
8 mutton, those are question-marks for 2027 and 2028. We just got  
9 stock assessments on both of those. We're actively working on an  
10 amendment right now, and I don't see -- We're looking like we're  
11 in pretty good shape, and I don't see, necessarily, an urgent need  
12 to prioritize those species in this timely of a manner.

13

14 Then, of course, that brought, and they agreed, and then, of  
15 course, that brought up the question of it's like, okay, what else  
16 can we cover on here, maybe to help out with this process, and I'm  
17 going to recommend two things here.

18

19 One is gag grouper, which I think that FWC could definitely start  
20 in 2026, continuing on with that process, and hopefully we'll have  
21 an interim assessment beforehand. I know we've been a standing  
22 requests for years on that, and so then that would get pulled over  
23 to starting it after hogfish is finished, basically, in 2026.

24

25 Then 2027 would continue on with the gag grouper assessment there,  
26 and then what I would recommend is actually adding red grouper for  
27 FWC in 2028. I do realize that we did get an assessment on that  
28 relatively recently, and we're still working on some longer-term  
29 amendments here, but I think that there was -- If you listened to  
30 the SSC meeting, I think there was a little bit of concern about  
31 that assessment in general, and so I think it makes sense,  
32 considering the drastic increase in catch limits that we have right  
33 now, and so we just want to make sure that we're on track there.

34

35 Those would be kind of my recommendations, based on what is  
36 proposed right now, and coordinating with FWRI staff and  
37 understanding their capacity and where they want to go.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Rindone.

40

41 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, and so, to that, I'm looking at it and  
42 thinking about the timing. I think, right now, we're planning on  
43 the hogfish review being in August of 2026, and so the start date  
44 for gag, I think, was anticipated to be a little bit sooner than  
45 that, and that could be pushed back a little bit.

46

47 One of the upsides to pushing the start date for gag back a little  
48 is that, if it's late August, or early September, for a start date,

1 then that means that we can usually include the previous year's  
2 recreational data, and so that would be a thing to try to keep in  
3 mind, if this is a path we want to go down.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

6  
7 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I totally agree with that, but, also, on  
8 top of that, you know, I realize that gag is not one that we want  
9 to really delay at all. We want to -- You know, this has been a  
10 big concern, obviously, in Florida, and across the Gulf here for  
11 people that fish for it, and so that's why I'm hoping the interim  
12 analysis can actually help provide some changes to what people  
13 have actually been seeing on the water here before we go through  
14 a more formalized intensive stock assessment effort.

15  
16 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, and we'll get that interim analysis, or at least  
17 we're expecting to get it, at the February SSC meeting. It was  
18 originally planned for this October's SSC meeting, but there have  
19 been some video delays for the G-FISHER video index, with making  
20 sure that all those data have been read, and those data would be  
21 ready, and we would have data through 2023 if we did it now, but,  
22 if we waited, you know, just a few more months, then we would have  
23 data through 2024, and so that was the goal.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Sweetman.

26  
27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Then I, obviously, don't know how the Science Center  
28 feels about that, but that would theoretically open up another  
29 slot that was previously scheduled for the Science Center, and so  
30 there's a little flexibility, I guess, maybe.

31  
32 **MR. RINDONE:** Well, I think one of the key things to remember is  
33 that, for some species, and probably more so for red grouper in  
34 some respects than gag, because of the NMFS bottom longline index,  
35 there's still data that would need to come from like age and growth  
36 data, and fishery-independent indices that would still need to  
37 come from the federal side, but, beyond the data compilation and  
38 synthesis phase, moving it out of the Science Center -- It would  
39 take that off the plate of one of the assessment analysts, but,  
40 traditionally, the assessment analysts haven't really been where  
41 the greatest bottleneck is. It's really been on the data side.

42  
43 For red grouper and for gag, both of those are species where G-  
44 FISHER is very informative, and that's run mostly through FWC, for  
45 the data synthesis side, and so that's a plus there, but moving  
46 parts, and a lot of things probably need to be talked about.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Mr. Sanchez.

1  
2 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on the committee,  
3 but I just wanted to say that, Dr. Sweetman, I appreciate you  
4 bringing up red grouper, and trying to incorporate it into the  
5 scheduling, because we did do a dramatic increase in harvest  
6 levels, and I think it would be a great idea to check the pulse on  
7 that at some point in the future, and so I really, really  
8 appreciate that.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Schieble.

11  
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, C.J., thanks for the suggestion. I  
13 guess what's coming to mind is that I don't really know the process  
14 for how we've decided, you know, what agency does, you know, which  
15 stock assessments.

16  
17 And so, you're suggesting, obviously, FWC take on species that  
18 they haven't been assessing in recent years. I don't necessarily  
19 have a concern with that, but it seems most appropriate that we  
20 probably want to discuss that through the SEDAR Steering Committee  
21 process, which FWC is a part of, and so, if it's a recommendation  
22 of the council, that could certainly be brought forward by Carrie  
23 and the council for consideration, and then, obviously, work on  
24 the schedule thereafter.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Schieble.

27  
28 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ryan, when you went through  
29 the action guide, you mentioned assessments that were going to be  
30 done outside of the SEDAR process. Is that just the FWC  
31 assessments that are listed here, or are there other ones I missed?

32  
33 **MR. RINDONE:** No, and so I haven't got to that yet, and so the  
34 interim analyses are something that, you know, we've debated  
35 whether we wanted to put on here or not, and feedback that we've  
36 got from you guys in the past has been not to, because it kind of  
37 clutters it, but it was going to be one of the things that I was  
38 going to discuss, and so we have interim analyses that we get  
39 routinely right now from the Science Center, and perhaps from  
40 somebody else in the future, and we'll see, but we're expecting  
41 interim analyses for both gag and red grouper to be reviewed by  
42 the council's SSC at its February meeting.

43  
44 In October, coming up, we'll see one for a lane snapper. The lane  
45 snapper one is pretty straightforward. The red grouper one, this  
46 one is nearly automated, but we're trying, for red grouper and for  
47 gag, to use -- To look at the G-FISHER data, because those video  
48 data are a little bit more representative of what ages and lengths

1 are commonly targeted by the directive fleets, by the commercial  
2 and the recreational fleets, whereas like, for red grouper, and in  
3 the past red snapper, we've used the NMFS bottom longline index,  
4 which tends to be pretty stable through time, and it takes a lot  
5 to really see a change in that particular index, but it also takes  
6 a lot for a fish to be able to survive long enough to grow into  
7 being selected by that gear, you know, much larger hook size,  
8 deeper water, things like that, and that's not necessarily  
9 commensurate with where the majority of the fishing pressure is  
10 occurring.

11  
12 While it tells you something about your spawning stock biomass, it  
13 doesn't tell you very much about the fish that are actually being  
14 removed, and so that's where G-FISHER would come in and perhaps be  
15 able to tell us, you know, perhaps a little different part of the  
16 story, and so we'll see those in February for those two groups of  
17 species.

18  
19 For tilefish, tilefish and the NMFS bottom longline are probably  
20 a little bit better paired, because of how deep you have to go to  
21 get tilefish in the first place, but, when we talk about that data  
22 triage process, you know, that will be like an extra SEDAR activity  
23 also, and how that will be mapped out is still something that we're  
24 discussing.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Any other questions, or  
27 comments? I don't see any. I would like to make a few points  
28 before we get to any Other Business, if there is any, and so, Dr.  
29 Sweetman, thank you. I appreciate what I think I heard, or  
30 understood, was the State of Florida's willingness to step up and  
31 help out with red grouper and gag grouper, and that's what I have  
32 some concerns and heartburn with, and Dr. Walter knows, and other  
33 folks, too.

34  
35 Specifically, the 2028 greater amberjack being completed in the  
36 quarter of 2028, to me, it's a little unacceptable. It's a little  
37 far out, and this is what I -- Whenever I speak my concerns about  
38 the timeliness of this process, and how long it is, how long it  
39 takes us to get this data back, to make a management decision, put  
40 a plan in place, all these things, it takes too long, in my mind.

41  
42 This is a great example of what else can we do to help the Science  
43 Center out, because they need help, apparently. For the folks  
44 around the table that aren't aware, you know, the Science Center  
45 does the stock assessments for seven different bodies. I don't  
46 know if everyone knows that, and, Andy, you can correct me if I'm  
47 incorrect, but, you know, we have the Gulf, the South Atlantic,  
48 the Caribbean, HMS, ICCAT, the Gulf States, and Atlantic States.

1 There's a lot of assessments to be done by one team.  
2  
3 They just got reduced by 30 percent, and I heard Dr. Walter loud  
4 and clear. The process was slow before the reduction, and so what  
5 is it going to be now? Even slower, and so what can we do to help  
6 these folks out, like C.J. is talking about, and that's what I ask  
7 around the table all the time, and I know we don't have the specific  
8 answer, but I would hope that we could all work together and find  
9 it, because John and Clay need help, and I'm not trying to beat  
10 the Science Center up. I'm just trying to help. That's what I  
11 want to do.

12  
13 If we look at Alaska, and I talked to folks in Alaska, and they  
14 can complete a stock assessment in three months. Three months.  
15 We're talking about over three years, and so I just want to get  
16 that on the record, and make a point. Whatever we can do to  
17 assist, give some work to FWC, give some to the State of Louisiana,  
18 or Texas, and I don't care who it is. I don't care if it's the  
19 University of Florida, whoever can help us. Do we have any other  
20 business? Dr. Walter.

21  
22 **DR. WALTER:** Chair, we certainly appreciate the offer of help and  
23 the well wishes. One of the differences though with an Alaska  
24 assessment is it's usually one fishery, one index. It's a big,  
25 large-scale commercial fishery that operates with a trawl, and  
26 they got one index with a trawl.

27  
28 We've got every possible different fishery, recreational  
29 fisheries, discards, reef fish, and you can't trawl on them, and  
30 multiple states, you know, all in the picture, and so ours are  
31 more challenging, as we've tried to explain to our leadership of  
32 why our throughput isn't Alaska throughput, and so that's just,  
33 you know, the nature of our fisheries being more complex.

34  
35 Probably one of the things that this body can do is understand  
36 that the advice may not have as many ingredients in the casserole,  
37 but the casserole is still usable for advice framework, and, when  
38 I say that, I illustrate with, when we do a stock assessment, we  
39 usually want to put in every little piece of information, but,  
40 oftentimes, there's only a few things that are the main drivers of  
41 the status of the stock.

42  
43 Those are probably our large-scale indices that, as Ryan alluded  
44 to, for a couple of the species, you could probably manage that  
45 species, at least in between big stock assessments, on the backs  
46 of those indices, through interim approaches.

47  
48 What we kind of need the collective group, the SSCs and the

1 councils, is to say, you know, this is good enough to manage this  
2 stock, to set an ACL, and we're comfortable with it, and it's  
3 addressing what we need now, but also not holding the process up  
4 for perfection.

5  
6 I think that's where we get stuck, trying to be perfect in what we  
7 do, trying to squeeze numbers out of allocations, one or two  
8 percentage points on each allocation between different sectors,  
9 when we probably can't even detect that difference in the  
10 uncertainty in the landings. I think that's where we would say  
11 let's aim for good enough, and more rapid.

12  
13 Now, amberjack, that one is a particularly challenging one, because  
14 we're going to get the great amberjack count coming up in January  
15 2026, is when that report is due, and we'll get a CIE review  
16 sometime in the wintertime, and then that's when we'll start being  
17 able to incorporate it into the stock assessment.

18  
19 If there's a need for advice on amberjack prior to that, which I  
20 think, as I'm hearing it, I don't see us speeding up the  
21 integration of the great amberjack count into the stock assessment,  
22 just because we've never dealt with something like that that  
23 crosses both South Atlantic and Gulf, and is going to be -- All of  
24 our assessments for amberjack have always been challenged, and now  
25 we've got this new information to work through. It's going to  
26 take some time.

27  
28 If we're going to come up with something in the interim, it might  
29 be something based on indices that we've got, like the G-FISHER  
30 index, and so, if there is a desire from this council for  
31 management advice, and I'm hearing there's concerns, and certainly  
32 there's management concerns, that's what we need to hear, is can  
33 we get something before the 2028, when that -- That's where I think  
34 it would be good to hear, and I guess that's what I'm hearing, is  
35 you want something before. Thanks.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter, that would be great, if you could  
38 have something before. Thank you. I have Mr. Strelcheck. I have  
39 a couple of hands, but Mr. Strelcheck.

40  
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So John covered largely what I was going to  
42 emphasize, and so I'll just make a couple of additional points,  
43 right, and so he talked about, you know, the comparison with other  
44 regions, and so not all assessments are created equal, right, and  
45 we can do some assessments in this region with updates in a matter  
46 of months, and others take years, obviously, if they're a  
47 benchmark. Regardless, the faster we can get that management  
48 advice aligned with real time, the better.

1  
2 In terms of amberjack, and I'm going to look to Carrie, because I  
3 think this is an important discussion, and I don't want to just  
4 pass it by that, you know, we recommended kind of indirectly to  
5 the center to do some sort of interim analysis. I feel like there  
6 needs to be something more direct on the record, if that's the  
7 path we want to go, and I don't disagree with that.

8  
9 It's been a long time since we've had an amberjack assessment. We  
10 have the great amberjack now coming, but, in the interim, waiting  
11 until 2028 doesn't seem reasonable, and so I would like to, I  
12 think, have a more formal motion, if that's the direction the  
13 council wants to take.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think  
18 we've asked the Science Center this in the past, if there's any  
19 index we could use to get a pulse on what's happening with greater  
20 amberjack, and I don't think we have that, unless possibly G-  
21 FISHER, now that it's coming online, but I'm not sure -- When we've  
22 asked in the past, I don't think we have an index that we can use.  
23 We can certainly pass a motion, and send something formal, but I  
24 don't think we do.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

27  
28 **DR. WALTER:** Well, I will ask our G-FISHER team. I mean, I know  
29 that a lot of the machine learning has really vastly increased how  
30 rapidly we can read those images, and so I'm hoping that we can  
31 get indices out of that, and perhaps it might be some of the work  
32 that's been done in the great amberjack count that's improved the  
33 species identification, which was always a problem, because you  
34 have different congeneric species that look quite similar,  
35 particularly at smaller sizes.

36  
37 I'm going to ask about what index we might be able to use for some  
38 sort of interim advice framework, because I definitely see that  
39 the timeframe on advice coming out of the SEDAR process is going  
40 to be lengthy, and we're hearing that loud and clear on the need.  
41 Thanks.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter, and, Mr. Strelcheck, thank  
44 you for looking into ways to expedite this on amberjack. I have  
45 a list of hands. I'm going to start with Mr. Walker.

46  
47 **MR. ED WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on your committee,  
48 but I just thought I would throw out that it makes sense to me,

1 what you said before, if it were possible to have Florida do a red  
2 grouper, and/or gag, which are the state they're found, and maybe  
3 it would open up some space for a Gulf-wide species like amberjack,  
4 and so that made sense to me. Thank you.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Dr. Banks.

7  
8 **DR. BANKS:** I think my question is for Dr. Walter. I don't know  
9 why ICCAT or HMS are particularly in the Southeast Science Center,  
10 but is there a chance that maybe we could lean on some of the other  
11 science centers down the Atlantic coast to help with some of those  
12 assessments, since, as J.D. points out, you guys have seven  
13 councils, or commissions, committees, that you have to do  
14 assessments for, and maybe I think they only have two or three,  
15 and so is that an option, to help with your workload?

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

18  
19 **DR. WALTER:** It certainly is part of a conversation we're have  
20 nationally amongst the science centers, as to what synergies we  
21 can find, and that's -- You know, sharing is sometimes difficult,  
22 because, if you're saying you're going to lend one of our staff to  
23 somewhere else, and other science centers are suffering similar  
24 cuts, and so they're a little bit reluctant to take on things, but  
25 we have been much, much to Bob Beal's concern, trying to pass on  
26 some of the assessments that we did for Atlantic States to other  
27 partners, and as well as some of the survey work, the fishery-  
28 dependent survey work, for like menhaden, for example, and so we're  
29 actively working on trying to focus our efforts on the regions we  
30 can best serve.

31  
32 In terms of the HMS, I think that that's where -- Sharks are going  
33 to be one of our big lost capacities, and so that's something that  
34 we're trying to figure out who could take that on, but I think  
35 that the key there is that the assessments are going to have to  
36 become more streamlined, because there's many species, and there's  
37 emerging and growing resource concerns about not just the shark  
38 populations, but what the shark populations may be doing to other  
39 species, and so that's --

40  
41 There aren't other groups right now, other centers, who necessarily  
42 have the capacity to take it on. I think we're going to have to  
43 streamline it with index-based approaches, where we can provide  
44 advice a little more rapidly, and then the key to like ICCAT is  
45 that that's an international collaboration for assessments, and so  
46 it doesn't have to be the U.S. leading as many assessments, and we  
47 are going to scale back on our leadership of those assessments.

1 We usually were the lead authors on many of the assessments done  
2 at ICCAT. We're no longer going to be able to do that. The rest  
3 of the world is going to have to pick up more of that. That's  
4 just a process that is set in motion by events, and so, to answer  
5 your question, yes, there is active things that are happening,  
6 because they have to, and some of them are discussions that we're  
7 having with partners about who can take on which thing.

8  
9 Then I think we need to continue the conversation with the State  
10 of Florida, in particular about the offer from C.J. on how --  
11 Whether gag and red really lightens the load, because there's so  
12 much data provision that goes into it, and really handing, on a  
13 silver platter, all of the inputs to an assessment analyst, and  
14 there's so much that goes into that, and that's the question about  
15 whether that, you know, lightens the load for the center, but I  
16 think we can have that discussion through the SEDAR Steering  
17 Committee. Thanks.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Mr. Schieble.

20  
21 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I like the concept of  
22 interim assessments, and looking into more interim assessments, to  
23 at least help us kind of expedite some of these things on the list,  
24 and Dr. Allen can correct me if I'm wrong here, but I think we've  
25 also heard, from the SSC, that they find the interim assessments  
26 are not necessarily suitable for management advice all the time,  
27 or I at least recall hearing that, and so how do we determine which  
28 ones we could use, and couldn't use, or maybe reevaluate that with  
29 the SSC? Mr. Rindone.

30  
31 **MR. RINDONE:** Thanks. I'll actually take that one, and so the SSC  
32 has discussed this a lot in the past, and, recently, for red  
33 grouper, they had decided not to use an interim analysis, because  
34 of the amount of time that had elapsed from the last stock  
35 assessment to that interim analysis.

36  
37 That gap, those interim years, represents a period of time where  
38 basically all of the life history information, the age and the  
39 length compositions, are assumed to continue to be the same, which  
40 we know, especially in the case of the compositions, they might  
41 not be, and so the SSC has been talking about how long do they  
42 want to go before they get another assessment. For red grouper,  
43 I think we're pushing like six years, or something like that, and  
44 so the SSC needs to ultimately make a determination about, and  
45 talk with the council about that, about how long is too long.

46  
47 For example, in the South Atlantic, the South Atlantic doesn't  
48 provide catch recommendations to its council beyond, I think, five

1 years from the terminal year of the assessment, and so, if the  
2 assessment used data through 2023, then their SSC won't provide  
3 catch recommendations past 2028.

4  
5 Well, if the assessment wasn't delivered until 2025, and then the  
6 council puts in management actions in 2026, or 2027, depending on,  
7 you know, what had to happen, there's not a lot of projection years  
8 left, right, and that puts you back in a situation where, well,  
9 now you need to check and see what's going on again almost  
10 immediately.

11  
12 In some respects, like having the interim analysis, or some other  
13 index-based management procedure, is useful for that, because you  
14 can take a look, and you can update your catch information again,  
15 you know, not so long after, without having to go through the whole  
16 kitchen sink, but, again, that's a decision that the SSCs  
17 ultimately need to be responsible for, because, for setting the  
18 OFL and the ABC, you know, that's their responsibility, and the  
19 council is bound by it, and so it needs to be made in the sunshine,  
20 as far as like how they want to move forward with when they will  
21 and will not use an interim.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

24  
25 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Ryan, for that summary. Your memory is  
26 excellent at summarizing the SSC happenings. You know, when it  
27 comes to prioritizing species, and trying to streamline the  
28 process, I think there's some cases where we can learn from the  
29 last assessments that were done.

30  
31 It strikes me that, both mutton snapper and the yellowtail snapper,  
32 both those assessments showed pretty strong, positive population  
33 responses to the minimum size limits that were put in, and it  
34 suggested to me that -- You know, both those assessments came out  
35 as not overfished, and not undergoing overfishing, and we're  
36 probably on a good trajectory, and so I think that those are  
37 examples that we could kind of learn from and say, okay, if --  
38 When we have a species like that, that we've put in management,  
39 and it looks like there's been a positive response, and it's on a  
40 good trajectory, then we can prioritize, you know, other things,  
41 like amberjack, red grouper, gag grouper, as we've been discussing,  
42 which are clearly big priorities as well, and have a lot more  
43 uncertainty, and so thank you.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Mr. Schieble.

46  
47 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is kind of a follow-up  
48 to what Ryan was saying, and so, back to the interim assessments,

1 and I can't recall what the terminal year of the amberjack  
2 assessment was. Was that 2018, or 2020, is the most recent?

3  
4 Anyway, it's likely longer than five years, I guess, from the last  
5 time we did an assessment on that, right, and so it's probably not  
6 suitable for an interim assessment on that species to be able to  
7 move forward with more rapid management advice.

8  
9 Also, I think, with the multitude of management changes over that  
10 time period since the last assessment, those data streams coming  
11 in are probably going to be a little bit different, and so maybe  
12 we need to start thinking outside the box here for amberjack, to  
13 come up with a little different methodology, which I don't know  
14 what that is, but I would look to our SSC colleagues to suggest  
15 that, potentially.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris, and it's 2018. Any other  
18 comments, questions, concerns? Not seeing any, any other business  
19 that needs to come before the SEDAR Committee? Dr. Sweetman.

20  
21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Andy mentioned something  
22 about more of a formal motion to direct that. Do we want to  
23 continue on that pathway?

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

26  
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was thinking,  
28 in the committee report, we could prompt ourselves, at Full  
29 Council, to get an update from Dr. Walter and his team on what  
30 indices might be available for amberjack, and if we would want to  
31 put forward a motion for you all to look at this at this time,  
32 because the only one I know of is G-FISHER that would be available.  
33 We've looked at others in the past, and I think they haven't  
34 worked, and so, at that time, maybe we get that update, at Full  
35 Council, and then we decide if we want to pass a motion.

36  
37 You know, the other outstanding question I had was if we need to  
38 also formalize the changes for the Florida schedules, and  
39 suggesting the red grouper and gag, and you might want to do that  
40 at Full Council as well, if you guys are comfortable.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other business come before the SEDAR  
43 Committee? Not seeing any, okay, and we are ahead of schedule.  
44 Let's take a break, and let's reconvene at 11:05.

45  
46 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 25, 2025.)

47  
48 - - -