

GULF COUNCIL

DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE

The Battle House Renaissance Mobile, Alabama

April 7, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

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

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25 Brenda Ballard.....Texas
 26 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
 27 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
 28 Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG
 29 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
 30 Anthony Overton.....Alabama

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 35 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
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 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
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 40 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
 41 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
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4 - - -
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1 The Data Collection Committee of the Gulf Council convened at The
2 Battle House Renaissance in Mobile, Alabama on Tuesday afternoon,
3 April 7, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Ed Walker.
4

5 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
6 **APPROVAL OF JANUARY 2026 MINUTES**
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
8

9 **CHAIRMAN ED WALKER:** I'll call to order the Data Collection
10 committee. The first order of business is adoption of the agenda.
11 Can I get a motion to adopt the previous agenda? I've got to name
12 the committee. Sorry. I forgot to do that.
13

14 Okay. The Data Collection Committee consists of myself, Mr. Anson,
15 Dr. Allen, Dr. Banks, Mr. Broussard, Captain Frady, Mr. Marquez,
16 Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Mr. Geeslin, Mr. Sanchez, General
17 Spraggins, and Mr. Strelcheck.
18

19 All right, and so can I get a motion to adopt the agenda from
20 someone on the committee? Dr. Allen, and seconded by Dr. Sweetman.
21 Thank you. Next, I need -- If there are no changes, a motion to
22 adopt the minutes from the January meeting. Mara.
23

24 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Just a very minor correction. On page 9, line 42,
25 it's supposed to be "red snapper", but "snapper" is spelled
26 "wnapper", and so thanks.
27

28 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Thank you, Ms. Levy.
29

30 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Ms. Levy, can you repeat?
31

32 **MS. LEVY:** Page 9, line 42, where it should say "red snapper", the
33 first two words, "snapper" is just not spelled correctly. Thanks.
34

35 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you.
36

37 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** All right. Any more notes about the minutes
38 from the previous meeting? Seeing none, a motion to adopt for
39 approval, as amended? Dr. Sweetman. A second? Mr. Broussard.
40 Thank you, sir. All right, and so we're going to go to Dr.
41 Hollensead for the action guide and the next steps.
42

43 I know that we have Dr. Allen, and, if I'm not mistaken, don't we
44 have Richard Cody on the Data Collection? I don't see it, but I
45 thought we did.
46

1 **DR. LISA HOLLENSSEAD:** No, Mr. Chair, and he'll be speaking at the
2 SEDAR Committee this afternoon.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** It was in the SEDAR. That's where I saw that.
5 All right. Thank you, Dr. Hollensead.

6
7 **PRESENTATION: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE METHODS FOR ESTIMATING**
8 **RECREATIONAL LANDINGS FOR RARELY-ENCOUNTERED SPECIES**
9

10 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, for the action
11 guide, if you all recall, back in our January meeting, Mr. Gregg
12 Bray, from Gulf States, and myself gave a collaborative
13 presentation sort of talking about ways of improving recreational
14 estimates for rarely-encountered species, and sort of focusing on
15 the deepwater grouper complex, the deep-drop fishery in that case.

16
17 You know, we sort of gave a 35,000-foot view of sort of some of
18 the advantages, and maybe some disadvantages, or not necessarily
19 disadvantages, but rather challenges of improving those estimates,
20 and there was definitely a desire, certainly by Dr. Allen, to keep
21 the momentum going on that discussion, especially since that
22 discussion was spurred by a previous council motion. The council
23 is sort of interested in addressing this and sort of tackling this
24 sort of difficult problem here.

25
26 What Dr. Allen is going to do is he's going to provide a
27 presentation, and so again focusing on the deepwater grouper
28 species, and present some ideas for some experimental design
29 approaches to improve some of those estimates of recreational
30 landings for rarely-intercepted species, such as deepwater grouper
31 species here in the Gulf.

32
33 These methods are going to sort of calculate uncertainty around
34 landings estimates for these types of species, those with
35 relatively low fishing effort, and so it's a small contingent of
36 the fishery, the deep-drop fisheries, and there are just a few
37 folks that work in those.

38
39 The presentation is also going to discuss the need to quantify the
40 non-reporting rate, right, and so how many people are catching
41 these fish, but then not reporting them out, right, and so that
42 will help you adjust your estimates as you come through, to get
43 something that's more reflective of what's actually happening on
44 the water.

45
46 You know, these surveys can use either a voluntary or mandatory

1 reporting approach. I know, initially, when the council motion
2 was made, it was sort of looking at a mandatory approach, but
3 there's voluntary options, and survey options, that can be used,
4 and so he's going to touch on that for a little bit.

5
6 The committee should review the presentation, ask any clarifying
7 questions of Dr. Allen, and provide any feedback to staff on the
8 next steps that you would like us to take in terms of looking at
9 designing a recreational survey for the deep-drop fishery, and so,
10 with that, Mr. Chair, I would hand it over to Dr. Allen.

11
12 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you, Lisa. All right, and so Lisa gave us
13 a very nice setup of this, and so I want to acknowledge Dr. Gregg
14 Bray, Lisa, and Zach Siders. Greg gave the presentation last time
15 from the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Lisa, of course,
16 with the staff here, and Zach Siders is a faculty member at the
17 University of Florida, a really sharp guy, and he got involved
18 with us here on this as well.

19
20 Okay, and so, as we have discussed, and I won't spend too much
21 time reviewing all this, but traditional creel surveys like the
22 MRIP and that kind of thing are -- They're just not designed to
23 reliably estimate landings for relatively-rarely-incurred, or
24 encountered, species. They're just -- Those surveys are not
25 designed to do that well.

26
27 As we've discussed, very low detection rates of those fish at boat
28 ramps, and many of the fish are brought to private landing sites
29 and would never be seen anyway, and what this results in overall
30 is really high uncertainty in landings, and often exceeding the
31 tolerance where we can even use those estimates, which is what we
32 saw with deepwater grouper, but the point of this is not to
33 criticize the design at all. It's an issue that, these kind of
34 rare-event species, that survey design is just not intended to be
35 able to estimate those with any precision, and that's the case.

36
37 Gregg Bray pulled these data for us, and these are the deepwater
38 grouper, and so four species, the whole complex, by state and year
39 over the past decade, and this includes all the state surveys, all
40 state surveys combined, and you can see that this table has the
41 total number of fish seen in each state each year.

42
43 Obviously, Louisiana had the highest, but even Louisiana data are
44 very low numbers of fish, and many of the states, including, you
45 know, Florida, has low value. They're all low. They're all very
46 low, and what this translated to is huge uncertainty in the

1 recreational landings, where we basically don't have information
2 on recreational landings.

3
4 So what we want to do here is explore methods that could be used
5 to improve estimates of recreational landings for these rare
6 species, and, also, I want to give just a couple of examples of
7 how to provide a framework for estimating uncertainty around those
8 landings, which also happens in MRIP, so that we not only get an
9 estimate, but we get some idea of the uncertainty around it.

10
11 There's really two challenges, and I think, the last time that we
12 talked about this as a council, we mingled these two almost
13 completely, and I felt like that kind of set us back a little bit
14 in the discussion.

15
16 The first challenge is to describe what methods we could use to
17 provide better estimates of recreational landings, and like how
18 would you actually do this and get a measure of the uncertainty
19 around those landings that's better than what the current surveys
20 is, and so that's the first thing.

21
22 Then the second thing, which we can certainly talk about, but is
23 not like the first thing, but the second thing is explore the
24 management feasibility challenges to implementing such a program,
25 right, and so what we're going to focus on here first is describing
26 the methods that could be used, and so we're on that first one.

27
28 The goal of this analysis was to explore options for either
29 voluntary or mandatory reporting to improve estimates of
30 recreational landings for species like the deepwater grouper
31 complex, okay, and these are species that are targeted by a
32 relatively low number of the total recreational anglers, and
33 they're rarely detected in those surveys, and, as I mentioned,
34 currently, we don't -- We have very little information on the
35 recreational landings for those.

36
37 Now, an overarching point here is that nothing we're talking about
38 in this presentation is new information. I met with Rich Cody at
39 NOAA OST, and Rich's whole job is about estimating recreational
40 landings, MRIP, all those things, and they have designs worked out
41 to do this.

42
43 This is not -- There's nothing new here in this presentation.
44 There's a lot of published work on voluntary reporting apps,
45 estimation methods, and designs, and so there are designs out there
46 to do this, and I'm just going to give some examples of how it can

1 be done.

2

3 The big challenge here, and this is what I brought up at the last
4 council meeting, is that the challenge is to correct the reported
5 landings, what you get from reported landings, for the non-
6 reporting rate, and what are the landings that you don't -- What
7 percent of the landings do you see, so you can correct that up to
8 get an estimate of total landings.

9

10 Okay, and so I'm going to give a couple of examples here, and so
11 there's several steps here that would be important, and I think
12 the first one is really to identify the pool of anglers that are
13 seeking these fish with some kind of a required stamp or
14 registration, some kind of way that we could identify the pool of
15 anglers that are going after the deepwater grouper complex.

16

17 This is not a huge number of anglers. They have specialized
18 equipment, big boats, lots of specialized equipment, and so I think
19 that this would be a requirement, is that we're going to have to
20 be able to identify the anglers that are going after these fish.

21

22 The second is to initiate some type of an either voluntary or
23 mandatory reporting scheme for those recreational trips with
24 incentives, and we do that here in the Gulf Council, and Alabama
25 has done something similar. There's examples for tilefish in the
26 Mid-Atlantic, but the thought here would be a basic phone app that
27 is very simple to use, and has things like number of anglers,
28 harvested catch by species in the deepwater grouper, et cetera,
29 those kinds of things, so that anglers can easily report the
30 catches.

31

32 Then the biggest challenge really then is to how do you interpret
33 those reported catches, and can you correct those for the non-
34 reporting rate of anglers that didn't report their catch, and I
35 think that there's ways to do this using multiple data sources.

36

37 One would be, an example would be, we have a lot of studies that
38 have done high versus low-reward tag reward studies, including
39 things like reef fish, like gag grouper, red grouper, red snapper,
40 those kinds of things.

41

42 You can't do a tagging study with deepwater grouper, because of
43 the barotrauma mortality, but we can borrow information from some
44 of these other reef fish for cases where, for example, if we go to
45 the literature, and find examples where they tagged a bunch of red
46 snapper, for example, and they put high-reward and low-reward tags

1 out, or high-reward and no-reward tags out, if you assume all the
2 high-reward tags come back, you can get a reporting rate for fish
3 that did not have a reward, okay, and so that gives you information
4 about what reporting rates may be if there's no reward tags out,
5 which would be the case for deepwater grouper, and so that's one
6 method we could use, and you could use some studies out in the
7 literature to inform that.

8

9 If you've got this pool of anglers identified through a permit
10 system, you could do some kind of follow-up surveys about just
11 asking people, did you report catches this year, you know, how
12 many trips, that kind of thing. You know, is there a way to --
13 You can potentially get information from surveys from those anglers
14 themselves.

15

16 Then there's also the potential for dockside surveys, where anglers
17 are coming into the dock, and you would ask them if they reported
18 their catch, and actually measure the catch and see, you know,
19 what fraction of the trips coming in had actually reported catch,
20 and so there's that kind of a strategy.

21

22 The thinking there is that you could use multiple data sources to
23 get at this reporting rate, and so I'm just going to work through
24 a couple of hypothetical examples, and this will be fairly short,
25 because I know we're behind time, but, in this example you have in
26 the black, you have reported catch, right, and so that's the fish
27 that anglers called in, or put in the app and reported that they
28 caught, and then you have a reporting rate, and we need to know
29 the reporting rate to adjust the reported catch to get a total
30 catch estimate, right, that total catch estimate in blue, which is
31 what you would use for the stock assessment, and so that's the
32 estimate of the total landings.

33

34 The trick with this, and the big challenge, is this reporting rate
35 denominator, the 0.25 I have there, and that has -- I think it
36 could be informed by a lot of different data sources, but that is
37 the challenge here. That's definitely going to be the challenge,
38 but it's got -- You know, I'll say this is going to be an estimation
39 method that, just like everything else, it's not going to be
40 perfect, but I do think that there's a way to do this that would
41 be substantially better than what we get in the MRIP right now,
42 given the scarcity of those fish in the observations, and so, in
43 this case, you would have 1,000 fish reported. If your reporting
44 rate were 25 percent, your estimate would be that actually 4,000
45 fish were harvested in that simple example.

46

1 I'll just use another simple example here. This is just a
2 hypothetical, and these are just made-up numbers, but let's just
3 use, for example, and work through it with me, if we had a pool of
4 anglers that was 5,000, that had deepwater grouper stamps or
5 permits, and we've identified those anglers, voluntary reporting,
6 and let's say we had three years of data, and you had 125 trips
7 reported, and the total catch was 12,000 pounds. Year-two, 180
8 trips from those 5,000 anglers, and the total catch is 18,000
9 pounds, et cetera.

10
11 Then the challenge is to extrapolate that to the unreported trips,
12 and where we're going with this is that you could use multiple
13 data sources to try to get the idea of the reporting rate, which,
14 for example, we could say that reviews, like the tagging studies
15 I mentioned earlier, indicate that reporting rates with no rewards
16 vary from say 3 to 15 percent of the trips would actually be
17 reported, and average 8 percent, okay, and this could be based on
18 all the data sources that I mentioned earlier, like law enforcement
19 interactions, analysis of high-reward tagging studies for other
20 reef fish in the region, that kind of thing.

21
22 If you did that, you could get an estimate of the reported catch,
23 which is the ones the anglers told you they caught, and then the
24 estimated landings, and then you could get uncertainty confidence
25 intervals around those landings estimates, right, and so it's just
26 -- I put this example in just to demonstrate how you could follow
27 this through to get uncertainty in the landings based on the
28 uncertainty you have in the reporting rate, okay, and that's the
29 challenge, because we're not going to know reporting rate with
30 certainty.

31
32 You can see that, using this simple example, you could get some
33 estimates that might be reasonable, if your reporting rate was
34 estimated the way that I specified here, and so we have to see how
35 that would go.

36
37 Okay, so I'm going to work through a simple graphical example of
38 kind of the same thing, and this is what a program like this would
39 look like. You would have a registration of some type, which would
40 give a pool of a total number of captains that are going to target
41 deepwater grouper.

42
43 Through time, some of those captains are going to report their
44 catch, right, and so you would have a number of trips per captain,
45 in the lower-left, and you would have a catch per trip in the
46 center there, right, and, if you put those two things together,

1 you would get a total reported catch, right and so that's our total
2 reported catch from the registered captains.
3
4 To be fair, that alone might be better than anything we have right
5 now, right? That alone could be better than the current MREP,
6 right, but we know that that is -- Even if it's mandatory, there's
7 going to be some kind of a non-reporting rate, and so that -- We
8 ideally would want to adjust that for the non-reporting rate.
9
10 As I've used in the other examples here, you would go through and
11 look at a review of survey angler intercepts, and you would get a
12 reporting rate distribution, an average value and its
13 distribution, and you would apply that then to the total reported
14 catch, and you would get an estimate of the total estimated catch
15 for the recreational fleet and its associated uncertainty.
16
17 The hope is then that, at the end of the day, that uncertainty
18 around that total estimated catch would be substantially better
19 than what we get in the current MRIP program, given that it's not
20 really designed to estimate this anyway.
21
22 Okay, and so I'm nearly done. I think there's a good chance that
23 such a strategy could provide better estimates than the traditional
24 methods that we're using currently. Gregg Bray mentioned this in
25 his talk, and I really enjoyed working with the group on this talk,
26 but I think working with the deepwater grouper anglers is going to
27 be essential. This is going to have to be a collaborative kind of
28 process, and he brought that point up at the last meeting, and I
29 thought that was good, and that would remain to this today.
30
31 This isn't going to be perfect, and there's definitely challenges,
32 but I think this framework has a lot of potential for giving us
33 much better estimates than what we've had in the past, and so I
34 welcome any discussion.
35
36 I think, Captain Walker, you know, my take would be for the
37 committee to discuss do we think this is a good idea, and, if so,
38 then how would we go about it, and I just wanted to also -- I
39 mentioned it briefly, but the tilefish program in the Mid-Atlantic
40 is almost exactly like what I've described here, and it's a -- You
41 register as a captain, and you have to report those fish before
42 you land at the dock.
43
44 It exists now, and so, I mean, that kind of thing is being done,
45 and I think, in my mind, the question with this kind of approach,
46 and it's not a matter of if we ever do it. It's when we do it.

1 This is going to happen at some point, you know, and it's going to
2 be a -- This is going to be too valuable of a data source down the
3 road, and so, anyway, we'll open it up for discussion. Back to
4 you, Captain Walker.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** That's great, Mike. I appreciate you putting in
7 the effort. I think a lot of us, or at least myself, last time -
8 - It just kind of came off last time, Mike, that this is impossible,
9 and forget it, but, you know, those intercept numbers are one for
10 the State of Alabama and ten for the State of Florida, which could
11 have all been on the same boat one day. You know, we can't go
12 anywhere with that, and so I agree that it's worth a continued
13 look, and I appreciate everything you've put together here.

14
15 Maybe -- You know, maybe the committee could discuss getting a --
16 Maybe not a presentation, but some information on that program
17 that's already going on that's similar, and see if we can develop
18 our own along the lines of that, because I've heard relatively
19 positive feedback from some of the deepwater guys. They're not
20 diametrically opposed to reporting, the guys that I've spoken with
21 anyway, and so I think it's definitely worth pursuing, and it might
22 be better off for the fishermen. You know, all this uncertainty
23 is probably not helping them any. Yes, sir. Sorry that I don't
24 know your last name.

25
26 **MR. DEWEY HEMILRIGHT:** I'm Dewey Hemilright, liaison from the South
27 Atlantic Council. I know I'm not on your committee, but I was a
28 Mid-Atlantic Council member when this program you were talking
29 about in the Mid-Atlantic, and I think it would be very helpful to
30 have a Mid-Atlantic presentation.

31
32 This has been going on for six or seven years, but the problem
33 they've had is a compliance rate. They've watched the program
34 grow with people to get the permit, but somehow you can count more
35 fish on Facebook than you can with the issue, or with the permit,
36 and something else is, at the onset, when the permit and stuff was
37 put in place, there was -- We were under the assumption, or at
38 least I was, that there was going to be like reporting before you
39 unloaded your fish, you're at a dock or something like that.

40
41 Well, that wasn't the case. It was twenty-four hours, and so I
42 think -- I think that the Mid-Atlantic started out with a good
43 program, and then somehow there wasn't no teeth, or different
44 things, but I can -- If you could get that hurdle, and get the
45 buy-in from the constituency, anything would be better than MRIP.
46 It would be better than your zeroes, but I would ask the Mid-

1 Atlantic their ups and downs, and how much outreach you do --

2
3 You all might have a little better scenario, or system, where you
4 got a different state that you can outreach better, and know your
5 folks, and get buy-in from people that deepwater fish, but I would
6 recommend that. It sounds like you want to -- I understand what
7 you're trying to do, and the Mid-Atlantic did that, but they just
8 haven't got the success rate, and that buy-in, that maybe you all
9 could get or look at. Thank you.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** That's great. Thanks for that input. Who is
12 next, Mr. Overton or Sanchez?

13
14 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A while back, we had a
15 similar discussion, and thank you for the presentation, Mike. It
16 was very informative. Thanks for your time, and I was pleasantly
17 surprised, when it was discussed during deepwater discussions,
18 that the reporting was negligible, and then the private dock
19 intercepts was problematic, and so our data was very, very, very
20 weak, even, you know, beyond anything MRIP.

21
22 When the idea came up about, well, how do we address this, it was
23 originally pitched as, well, you know, there is an HMS permit that
24 I'm required to have to go offshore and catch tunas, or swordfish
25 or what have you, and that seemed like a good template to start
26 with for something like this.

27
28 Then, of course, we heard from Randy, from Louisiana, that he
29 presented another system, and it had maybe some real-time reporting
30 potentials and this and that, but the point of all that is,
31 regardless of which direction you go, I was pleasantly surprised
32 that there wasn't really the opposition I might have expected to
33 reporting on this from the recreational sector.

34
35 Honest to God, as Mike mentioned, what we have now for data, I
36 mean, it's just not usable for management, and so anything is going
37 to be better, and I would say, yes, let's hear from the Mid-
38 Atlantic, and see if we can't maybe shape that a little better to
39 do what we're wanting to do here, or get back to something HMS and
40 keep it, you know, with NMFS, and kind of get this better data
41 that we can.

42
43 Mike answered a lot of my questions, that a lot of the folks that
44 aren't going to report -- Well, there's ways to figure that out
45 and still get some meaningful numbers that are much better than
46 what we've got now, and so I would be 100 percent in favor of

1 moving forward, and hopefully there's some shared support for this.
2 Thank you.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Sweetman.

5
6 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate the
7 presentation, Dr. Allen. A couple questions for me. Dewey, do
8 you know if that program is mandatory in the Mid-Atlantic, or is
9 it voluntary?

10
11 **MR. HEMILRIGHT:** They are working -- I think, at the last --
12 They're working on getting it mandatory, to where you report before
13 you leave, I believe, and come back. They finally decided that
14 they kicked the can enough, and they said -- That's what they're
15 working on, and one other thing.

16
17 I also believe there was talk in the past about looking at, as
18 John said, about the offshore component, but most people in the
19 Mid-Atlantic that had the offshore component of going tuna fishing
20 or something went bottom fishing, or for tilefish, and so that was
21 something else that they could look at to get a subset or something
22 like that.

23
24 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Dewey, and so that kind of brings my
25 question, Dr. Allen, and that's one of the things I'm struggling
26 with. I mean, I am all in favor of getting better data. I think
27 we've really struggled with some of these extremely rare-event
28 species like deepwater grouper.

29
30 I guess where I'm struggling is how to ultimately get -- So you've
31 got the registration process, but, without making it mandatory,
32 how would you get the universe of anglers in order to be able to
33 figure out the non-reporting rate? Is this even possible under a
34 voluntary --

35
36 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and so, I mean, that's the whole challenge here,
37 right, and so -- But the issue I think is not just whether it's -
38 - Even if it's mandatory, you're going to have some fraction of
39 people that don't report, right, and that will probably be a lower
40 number, but there's going to be -- So the challenge, to me, is how
41 do you estimate that reporting rate, and I think it's not going to
42 be perfect, but I think those tagging studies I mentioned could
43 inform that, but we think that there's a relatively low reporting
44 rate in absence of a reward tag, for example.

45
46 The idea is that you would develop a distribution of reporting

1 rates that hopefully includes the true value, but it's going to
2 have uncertainty in it, and I'm also interested in hearing about
3 the experience from the Alabama colleagues as well on the Snapper
4 Check and things.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** So your presentation here I think is considering
7 an endorsement of some kind, and you and I have had a discussion
8 of could it be presented from a NMFS perspective, and it kind of
9 seems like, if we have to go state-by-state, it's going to be, you
10 know, tangled up and stuff, and could there be an endorsement for
11 deepwater species in the Gulf from NMFS that we could -- For
12 recreational that we could require? Is that practical? I'm
13 looking at you, Andy.

14
15 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, Mike, thanks for the
16 presentation, and, Ed, thanks for the questions. Mike and I
17 briefly talked about this a week or two back, and we don't,
18 obviously, issue recreational permits. We issue charter-for-hire
19 permits, and so you could add an endorsement to that, but we would
20 have to really set up like a deepwater grouper permit, or something
21 similar to HMS, right, that's a recreational permit that people
22 would then go online and sign up for.

23
24 I appreciate Mike's early slide, right, in trying to separate out
25 kind of the feasibility of doing this from the practicality of
26 management, right, and that's one of the added challenges, is how
27 do we avoid this kind of administrative burden and complexity of
28 the permitting process and reporting process and not -- Take
29 advantage of economies of scale when you have all these different
30 surveys that are already out there, and yet you really need to
31 create a specialized survey on top of those in order to make this
32 work.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** So would it then -- I'm kind of taking that as
35 a no. Are the current state systems that are set up, are they
36 capable of -- Do they already have this deepwater reporting?

37
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** No, and so you would have to go state-by-state,
41 on down the line, and so here we are in the challenges, and so who
42 has a good idea here? John Sanchez.

43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I don't know if it's good, but, honestly, I think
45 we've walked down the road of state-by-state datasets and
46 calibration and everything that that entails.

1
2 This is -- I hate to say it, but it's tailor-made for NMFS, kind
3 of like the HMS permit that I have, except deepwater, and I know
4 that's a challenge, and it's an undertaking, but, if it helps you,
5 I'll go ahead and start a GoFundMe page for that, and for SEFHIER
6 while I'm at it.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Andy, and then Clay, and then Kevin.

9
10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** To me, based on Mike's presentation, I mean, if
11 there's ways to potentially keep the momentum going here, in terms
12 of options, we are continuing to look at SEFHIER 2.0, right, and
13 that would be one mechanism to capture a portion of the
14 recreational universe that's going to be landing these fish and
15 reporting it through that app, if we stand that program up again.

16
17 What proportion relative to private, I don't know, but it's
18 certainly a huge opportunity. There's funding being floated for
19 that program for FY 27. Whether that makes it through Congress,
20 who knows, but there's potentially some good signs there.

21
22 In terms of the private, you know, and I was just briefly asking
23 Dave about any kind of funding streams through Gulf States, but it
24 seems like there's maybe an opportunity for a smaller-scale pilot
25 or something we can do to kind of test out some of what was, you
26 know, suggested here.

27
28 I know there's been a lot of work with Richard Cody in Science &
29 Technology, but I don't know how much has been done kind of
30 directed to these really rare-event species, but what can we learn
31 from that, to then build off of that for a larger-scale program
32 down the road?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Porch.

35
36 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** Yes, and I agree, and, of course, you know,
37 anytime that you can narrow the sampling frame, it's quite possible
38 to develop methods to get more precise and more accurate estimates,
39 and so I agree with what Dr. Allen has presented.

40
41 Nevertheless, it doesn't obviate the need for some kind of general
42 survey, unless you're planning to do the same kind of limited
43 sampling frame for all the species that we have to get management
44 advice, and so it needs to be all seen together in a broader
45 context, right, unless all you cared about was deepwater groupers,
46 and then maybe you do it as a one-off, but what about all the other

1 species where we have uncertainty?

2
3 What I would volunteer is, you know, we are looking, as an agency,
4 at re-envisioning the whole recreational statistics estimation
5 program, the whole rapid program that you've heard about. There's
6 a set of workshops where we'll talk about what that's going to
7 look like, and I think this is a viable alternative, and it's
8 something that we would hope the states will be very active in
9 participating in, because we're going to need to combine resources.

10
11 Much of it may very well be state-led, but exactly what are we
12 going to do? A lot of different one-offs in the midst of a general
13 survey, which would take even more resources, or are we just going
14 to pick a few complexes, and then have a limited sampling frame,
15 where we'll get refined estimation, the ones that we think we have
16 the biggest CVs, but all this needs to be discussed in the context
17 of an environment of the limiting resources that we're going to
18 have, and so it always makes me a little nervous when we say we
19 could do so much better with this, but then what about all the
20 other things we need to get estimates for?

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

23
24 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and, Clay, I completely agree. We talked at the
25 last council meeting about that actually, is that I think the
26 better approach is not to try this as a one-off, but to look at a
27 coordinated way, and I guess one of the first steps would be to
28 look at which species complexes or individual species are not
29 estimated with adequate precision now, you know, and do an analysis
30 of that and see what are the types of species that we would, you
31 know, target for something like this, but I agree that it's a
32 better move to think about this in a coordinated way rather than
33 a one-off or deepwater grouper.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Anson.

36
37 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, and there was -- Dr. Allen asked about
38 Alabama's history with Snapper Check and reporting, and so this is
39 from last year, and I'll give you just kind of some highlights of
40 some of the data here.

41
42 For red snapper private anglers, we had 6,642 vessel reports
43 submitted last year. We sampled 340 vessels with red snapper, of
44 which we then tried to match with reports, and we ended up sampling
45 136 of those, matching those, okay, and then, the ratio estimator
46 that we use in the SAS program that generates the estimates, it

1 relies upon those sample weights for the biological information,
2 as well as the site information and the characteristics of the
3 individual site from which we collected the observations.

4
5 Once you apply those weights to the various pieces of information
6 that you have, that's what helps determine the weighted reporting
7 rate, and so the weighted reporting rate turned out to be about
8 45.6 percent for red snapper boats for last year.

9
10 That has been declining over the history of Snapper Check. We
11 started out, when we had very short seasons, at a 60 to 65 percent
12 reporting rate, when we first started, and we had the nine or ten-
13 day seasons, but that has eroded over time.

14
15 When you look at amberjack for private anglers, we had 164 vessel
16 reports submitted, and we sampled five vessels with greater
17 amberjack, that we then matched, and we matched two of those five,
18 and so I mentioned the sample weight, and so somebody would say -
19 - Well, when you do the weighting of those samples, and where you
20 catch them, and the weights that are assigned to each of those
21 individual interviews, you actually end up with a 3 percent
22 reporting rate, and so there's some differences there, and so I
23 appreciate your nominal use, or the use of nominal, and I assume
24 they're nominal reporting rates, and not a weighted reporting rate,
25 from those prior surveys.

26
27 Those are just some issues there relative to what we're dealing
28 with with red snapper, and so triggerfish is not as much of a rare
29 -- I'll just go ahead and give that, while we're here, to give
30 some variety, but we had 963 reported vessel trips for private
31 recreational anglers last year. We ended up observing forty-seven
32 vessels with gray triggerfish, and sixteen of those were matched
33 to our database.

34
35 I didn't calculate the percentage of that after the statistical
36 thing, but, anyway, so we -- I appreciate your effort. It is going
37 to be a challenge. One of the notes that was made in the
38 presentation was, you know, you have to hit them up, and hit them
39 up often, and remind them, and we do that quite frequently for our
40 group here. We have a marine calendar, and each year, for the
41 last seven or eight years, we've been putting a page in there
42 devoted to mandatory reporting of those three species.

43
44 I agree with your general statement that probably anything we do
45 embark on for relative to deepwater grouper species would be an
46 improvement in the data, but relative to, you know, what we get,

1 and how it will shape management and the cost, and work that will
2 be entailed to do that, I'm a little suspect though. Thank you.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I have Captain Frady and Mr. Geeslin.

5
6 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Thank you, Dr. Allen, for your report. Kevin, I
7 appreciate your comments on how Snapper Check is. It's been --
8 Being a charter boat captain in Alabama, we're always appreciative
9 of anyone, or any group, trying to make things better and get
10 accurate and real-time data.

11
12 I remember -- I'm old enough to where I remember when we had
13 mandatory seat belts required for everyone. It took a while to
14 get everybody used to wearing seat belts, but over, you know, a
15 decade, it's almost kind of like the car won't start unless you've
16 got your seat belt on, and all -- Everybody's been conditioned,
17 over the years, to start reporting, and so you've got to start
18 somewhere.

19
20 My thoughts, right off the hand to keep this economical, is let
21 the states collect their data for the deepwater grouper. Let the
22 SEFHIER program capture the data for the federally-permitted
23 charter boats, and you could go as far as asking for a federal --
24 Like an HMS permit to identify the source.

25
26 You could initially require everyone to have an HMS permit for the
27 deepwater grouper, and then, after you get your compliance up,
28 then you can remove the requirement and have it done by the states,
29 and have it done by the SEFHIER program, and so I'm thinking
30 keeping things simple.

31
32 The term "mandatory", mandatory ain't worth a bucket of unless
33 it's got teeth, and so don't use mandatory, because there's people
34 out there who are defiant. If you put mandatory in front of it,
35 it's like putting a rule, and we don't have rules in my family.
36 We have procedures, and, once you have procedures, people are more
37 adept to follow the procedure than they are to follow the rule,
38 and that's all I've got, but I just want to keep it simple, and I
39 think we're overthinking it, but it can easily be done. Thank
40 you.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Geeslin.

43
44 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, following on that
45 theme, Captain Frady, Kevin, is there an enforcement component to
46 -- As you attempt to match, and you intercept those vessels that

1 you've got vessels reported, and then those sampled, and then
2 you're able to match a fraction of those sampled with those
3 matched, and is there an enforcement component there that you then
4 go back and follow up and you know that those mandatory reportings
5 are not occurring? Is there -- That's one question, and I'll give
6 you a space to answer for that.

7
8 **MR. ANSON:** There's no enforcement for any of the data that's
9 submitted. The enforcement activities occur independent from any
10 data collection.

11
12 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you for that, and, just going down this road,
13 Troy, I agree with you. I think, back to Dr. Allen's presentation
14 here, and, Mike, I applaud you coming at this from a strictly
15 academic perspective, and identifying the problem, and trying to
16 come up with some solutions.

17
18 I recognize that the paucity of the data, the challenges inherent
19 from a state management, state resource management agency, coming
20 from Texas, where it's tough to even sell, you know, my leadership,
21 the commission, on a reef fish permit, let alone to carve off
22 deepwater grouper, a deepwater-grouper-specific endorsement
23 permit, even if it's free, and it's easy to obtain. That is a
24 tough sell, in and of itself, and something for so little catch,
25 and the struggle to see the juice being worth the squeeze.

26
27 That said, that's my -- You know, going back to Texas, and putting
28 my cowboy hat on, and, here around the table, this is a problem,
29 and so I do appreciate you coming up with throwing some solutions
30 at the wall, Mike. I just -- I don't know where we go from this,
31 and, to Kevin's point, they've been doing this.

32
33 They've been kind of the poster child for mandatory reporting, and
34 hearing that that continues to decline, and from our colleague
35 there in the South Atlantic that that is continuing, and it just
36 seems like the initial -- The initial, you know, luster is great,
37 and maybe you have incentives, and maybe there's a hook out there,
38 your high-value, you know, tag reward system, and I'm just thinking
39 out loud here how that could be improved over time to get some
40 meaningful data to narrow in on those error bars associated with
41 the plus and minus of these landings.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Dr. Allen.

44
45 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Dakus. You know, I think one of the lines
46 of discussion that this usually goes down is, well, what if, you

1 know, we do all we can to encourage reporting rate, and the
2 reporting rate is declining through time, like was mentioned in a
3 couple of examples, and that's not necessarily going to cause a
4 bias in the total landing estimate as long as you can estimate
5 what that reporting rate was.

6
7 Kevin, your example from Alabama, it seems to me that you guys
8 have data that would allow you to estimate that, and probably some
9 uncertainty around it, and so, even though, you know, participation
10 rates may have declined, and you're not getting quite the reporting
11 rate that you would want to, if you can estimate that parameter,
12 and its uncertainty, you can get an estimate of the landings, and
13 so that's, I think, one of the challenges that is possible to
14 overcome.

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

17
18 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** I just want to point out, for those that have
19 not ever read those high-dollar, or high-reward, reporting,
20 there's still not 100 percent compliance in reporting. I mean, up
21 to \$200, \$300, \$400 for a tag to be reported, and that's not worth
22 people's time, and so even -- I mean, that right there, just going
23 back to having participated, that's an astronomical amount of money
24 for us to put forward to try to get good compliance and reporting
25 rates, and it's still kind of dismal in the long term.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I think I had Mr. Sanchez next, and then Mr.
28 Anson.

29
30 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I just wanted to mention that was the first juice
31 worth the squeeze reference, and let's back off on that a little
32 bit at this meeting.

33
34 **DR. ALLEN:** I regret that one, John.

35
36 **MR. ANSON:** Just to follow up, Dr. Allen, for fish, we do, you
37 know, not only vessel estimates, but we estimate the angler trips,
38 and then the number of fish that are landed, as well as the number
39 of dead fish. For fish, for greater amberjack, the PSE is 127,
40 and then, for snapper, it was twenty-six-and-a-half.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. I'm trying to think where we go from here.
43 Andy.

44
45 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I feel like we're throwing a wet blanket on Mike's
46 presentation here again, and so I did want to think about kind of

1 where we go from here, and I appreciate Kevin kind of pointing out
2 the challenges with capture-recapture methodologies, and, you
3 know, you've also acknowledged that, Mike, in your presentation.

4
5 They can be either labor intensive or come with some cost, and how
6 it's scalable across the Gulf is another question. I think we all
7 agree that there could be value in narrowing the universe of
8 participants, that there's a way to look at that, and, you know,
9 I think the next step would be, okay, well, could we look at the
10 pros and cons of the management feasibility and have a maybe more
11 organized conversation around that.

12
13 The other thing I'll mention, and I would certainly look to Clay
14 or Richard Cody if they want to speak more, but there is a newer
15 report on multi-year averaging of catches that's come out for, you
16 know, more of these rare-event species. That's a very different
17 direction than what Mike presented today, but maybe something else
18 that we should be looking into is more of an interim step as we
19 think about how to improve data collection for these rare-event
20 species.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Along the lines of maybe getting some kind of
23 universe identified, it sounds to me like it's going to be really
24 hard in Texas, at the very least, and probably so in other states,
25 and so it almost sounds like state-by-state we can cross off the
26 list of options that follow here, and so, if we're narrowing this
27 down at all, I think I would suggest that we kind of go towards an
28 overall NMFS or Gulf States something.

29
30 I don't know what, but I think it's worth pointing out that this
31 is going to be a small group of people that participate in
32 deepwater, at least where we are in Florida. It's like, if I had
33 to throw a number out, it's 5 percent of the people that go offshore
34 fishing, I would guess, and so it might not be a really big monster
35 to manage, or to fund, it seems to me, and just one thing to keep
36 in mind. Dr. Cody, please.

37
38 **DR. RICHARD CODY:** Just following up a little bit on what Mike was
39 presenting, and also what Andy mentioned, we went and did a
40 different approach to what Mike presented here.

41
42 We had some discussions just recently, so both of these things
43 have sort of come together at the same time almost, but we took
44 the approach of multiyear averaging, if that would be useful for
45 some species, and it does have some potential when it comes to
46 which species, you know, but, obviously, there are some really

1 rare-event species that maybe occur in the catch once every five,
2 eight, ten years.

3
4 Obviously, for those kinds of species, if you start multiyear
5 averaging, you lose any kind of trend information that you would
6 get, but we did put -- The report that we put together, that
7 compared just three methods to a CIE review, and that review has
8 been completed, and we expect it to be up on the NOAA website
9 fairly soon.

10
11 We're just waiting for the final approvals for those reviews, but
12 I will mention that one of the reviewers had some concerns about
13 one of the methods, because, if you're multiyear averaging, and
14 you start bumping up on the current years, which can affect the
15 assessment more so than more historical years, then you're missing
16 a year here and there.

17
18 You maybe only have two years in that final time slot, we'll say,
19 versus what you need, which is three or five to make a lot of
20 headway, and so that's basically it, but I can keep people posted
21 on the status of those reports.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes. Thank you. I appreciate that. Dr.
24 Sweetman.

25
26 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I swear I got significant
27 pushback from using multiyear ACLs, but I'm glad we're going to be
28 able to consider some of those, but I mean, I guess, to try and
29 maybe point us in a direction here, so it sounds like we all know
30 that we need better data.

31
32 We're in a condition, with yellowedge in particular, where the
33 quota was drastically reduced, and we need -- We clearly need
34 better data to manage that fishery, and can it be something along
35 the lines to move forward with maybe a small-scale pilot study,
36 kind of like what Andy was highlighting there, that could test out
37 some of these ideas here, rather than -- You know, that could show
38 some of the challenges, some of the pros that are associated that
39 we can get out of it, but it might also tell us that this is not
40 feasible at all.

41
42 I don't know and, I mean, just to try and move the ball forward,
43 at least in a small direction, and, yes, I mean, I think there's
44 obviously going to be some significant hurdles even moving forward.
45 Like certainly we haven't even ironed out who's going to be
46 implementing something along these lines, how this would stand up

1 money-wise, but, yes, and maybe that's just an idea to move forward
2 a small-scale pilot study.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** I agree, and, since it's such a small universe,
5 maybe it won't be as small as it seems, but I think we should
6 pursue something, because, with that uncertainty, you know, this
7 thing's going in a very bad direction, as far as access goes, and
8 so I think we owe it to people to try and find a better way to
9 manage it, and get better data, so we don't have to figure in
10 massive uncertainty, to the point where it's, you know, not even
11 sufficient for management advice, but we're using it anyway.
12 Anyone? Mr. Dugas.

13
14 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Does the committee, the
15 Data Collection Committee -- Is there an appetite for the Mid-
16 Atlantic to give a presentation, or is that off the table now,
17 because maybe that's just the next step to keep this in front of
18 us while we process. I don't know, and I'm just throwing ideas
19 out.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** So I was going to ask the committee if either we
22 get someone from there, maybe the architect of the program even,
23 or somebody very familiar with it to give us a presentation, if
24 they could, or have staff contact somebody and bring their own
25 presentation, but I think it would be better if we actually had
26 somebody here we could bounce questions off of that come up at the
27 time. Dr. Sweetman.

28
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I would be supportive of that. Thanks.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Mr. Strelcheck.

32
33 **MR STRELCHECK:** I would be supportive, but I think it would be
34 important for staff to talk to them about the program and whether
35 or not it addresses some of the issues and concerns we talked about
36 at the table. I wouldn't want them to present and pretty much
37 tell us that they have the same challenges that we're talking
38 about.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Right. I agree, and so maybe the move is to ask
41 staff to examine this Mid-Atlantic project, or program, and see if
42 it's a good fit, check into it, and then maybe find out who is the
43 best representative to come give us a presentation, if we're not
44 going to run into the same issues we already have, and I don't
45 know if you need a motion for that or no.

46

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and we just add it to the
2 committee report.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Okay. Very good. Anything else for Data
5 Collection?

6
7 **DR. ALLEN:** I appreciate everybody's good discussion on this.
8 Thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN WALKER:** Yes, and good job. Thank you, Dr. Allen, for
11 putting in the work and not letting this thing go, when it seemed
12 like it was slipping away, and so I appreciate that. Mr. Chair,
13 I believe this concludes the Data Committee.

14
15 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 7, 2026.)

16
17 - - -

18