

GULF COUNCIL

310<sup>TH</sup> MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore

Tampa, Florida & Virtual

June 1-3, 2026

**VOTING MEMBERS**

J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana  
Michael Allen.....Florida  
Kevin Anson.....Alabama  
Brenda Ballard.....Texas  
Kesley Banks.....Texas  
Billy Broussard.....Louisiana  
Rick Burris (designee for Joe Spraggins).....Mississippi  
Troy Frady.....Alabama  
Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas  
John Marquez.....Mississippi  
Jason Osborne.....Mississippi  
Anthony Overton.....Alabama  
John Sanchez.....Florida  
Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana  
Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS  
C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida  
Ed Walker.....Florida

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Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG

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 3  
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 42  
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TABLE OF MOTIONS

PAGE 82: Motion to approve the workplan and membership for addressing protected resources interactions with Gulf federal shrimp trawls. [The motion carried on page 83.](#)

PAGE 102: Motion to approve the Essential Fish Habitat Generic Amendment to the Shrimp, Reef fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, Spiny Lobster, and Red Drum Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) in the Gulf for public hearings, following inclusion of the EFH inland boundary when it becomes available. [The motion carried on page 103.](#)

PAGE 104: Motion to take Draft Generic Amendment: Modifications to Gulf For-hire Data Collection Program out for virtual public hearings. [The motion carried on page 104.](#)

PAGE 107: Motion to modify the purpose and need section of the document as follows: The purpose of this action is to establish a three-year pilot commercial red grouper IFQ quota pool and distribute the resulting annual allocation to eligible participants in the GT-IFQ program. The need for this action is to test whether a quota pool may enhance economic profitability and reduce discards by improving access to red grouper annual allocation by fishermen engaged in the commercial harvest of red grouper and provide new opportunities for obtaining red grouper annual allocation. [The motion carried on page 108.](#)

PAGE 109: Motion to discontinue work on Reef Fish Amendment 63: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper IFQ Program. [The motion failed on page 114.](#)

PAGE 115: Motion in Action 1, Alternative 4, to create a new Option 4e: Alternative 4: Establish a three-year commercial quota pool for Gulf red grouper beginning in 2027. If the commercial quota (ACT) is at or below 4.28 million pounds gutted weight, the quota pool is set at zero percent of the commercial quota (zero pounds). If the commercial quota is above 4.28 million pounds gutted weight, the quota pool would hold: Option 4e: 50% of the commercial red grouper quota increase above 4.28 million pounds gutted weight. [The motion carried on page 119.](#)

PAGE 119: Motion in Action 1 to make the new Alternative 4, Option 4e the preferred. [The motion carried on page 120.](#)

PAGE 120: Motion to approve Reef Fish Amendment 63: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper IFQ Program and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the

1 codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial  
2 license to make the necessary changes in the document. The  
3 Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the  
4 codified text as necessary and appropriate. [The motion carried on](#)  
5 [page 122](#).

6  
7 [PAGE 123](#): Motion to select Alternative 3b in Action 1 as the  
8 preferred alternative. [The motion carried on page 123](#).

9  
10 [PAGE 123](#): Motion to select Alternative 4b in Action 2 as the  
11 preferred alternative. [The motion carried on page 123](#).

12  
13 [PAGE 126](#): Motion in Action 1 to remove Option 2a from Alternative  
14 2. [The motion carried on page 126](#).

15  
16 [PAGE 128](#): Motion in Action 2 to make Alternative 3 the preferred.  
17 [The motion carried on page 128](#).

18  
19 [PAGE 128](#): Motion in Action 3 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.  
20 [The motion carried on page 128](#).

21  
22 [PAGE 129](#): Motion to ask NMFS/SEFSC for commercial CPUE from 2010  
23 through 2025 for red grouper. [The motion carried on page 129](#).

24  
25 [PAGE 131](#): Motion to request a presentation on the G-FISHER survey  
26 at an upcoming council meeting. [The motion carried on page 131](#).

27  
28 [PAGE 132](#): Motion to request NMFS review and assess the efficacy  
29 and need for the current sea turtle release gear requirements for  
30 federally-permitted charter for-hire and commercial reef fish  
31 vessels. As part of this assessment, NMFS should consider  
32 streamlining the current regulatory burden on these fleets,  
33 including proposing a simplified gear kit that represents the most  
34 recent research on interactions with sea turtles when fishing for  
35 reef fish species. [The motion carried on page 132](#).

36  
37 [PAGE 141](#): Motion to request that the principal investigators make  
38 a presentation on the methods and results of the greater amberjack  
39 count at the July SSC meeting. [The motion carried on page 145](#).

40  
41 [PAGE 150](#): Motion to request NMFS conduct a CIE review of SEDAR  
42 99: Gulf king mackerel. [The motion carried on page 150](#).

43  
44 [PAGE 157](#): Motion to request the SEFSC evaluate the possibility of  
45 a Gulf king mackerel tagging study that focuses on the mixing zones  
46 in the Gulf in order to obtain information on king mackerel  
47 movements in the Gulf. [The motion carried on page 160](#).

1 The Full Council of the Gulf Council convened at The Hilton Tampa  
2 Airport Westshore in Tampa, Florida on Monday afternoon, June 1,  
3 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Okay, and so, being that we're ahead of  
6 schedule, we're going to rearrange some of our agenda items, and  
7 we're going to move into Full Council, so we can knock out some  
8 supporting agencies reports, and so, with that said, we'll go in  
9 the order of the South Atlantic, Ms. McCawley, and then we'll go  
10 to Gulf States, Mr. Bray, and then the Coast Guard, Lt. Morton, as  
11 third, and so, with that, I'm going to turn it over to Ms. McCawley.

12  
13 **SUPPORTING AGENCIES UPDATES**  
14 **SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON**  
15

16 **MS. JESSICA MCCAWLEY:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so  
17 I don't know that we have had another meeting. I think you guys  
18 have met before we have met again, and so our last meeting was in  
19 March. Our next meeting is next week, and so these things are a  
20 little bit old, and so you guys might have heard about them at the  
21 April meeting, but I'm just going to hit some of the highlights.  
22 You guys have a copy of the report, and then I can answer any  
23 questions for you.

24  
25 We talked about the NMFS proposed risk-value matrix for managed  
26 stocks at the March council meeting, and kind of looked at this.  
27 We spent a lot of time talking about this, and we raised some  
28 concerns, and we sent a letter with some of those concerns.

29  
30 We started working on coastal migratory pelagics, and so we have  
31 been waiting on some information on Spanish mackerel for some time.  
32 We're waiting on the stock assessment, but we are going to bring  
33 the advisory panel together later this year to discuss the results  
34 of our port meetings, and possible changes to management, so that  
35 we can start working on this amendment, and maybe look at some  
36 changes that aren't tied to catch levels, while we are waiting on  
37 the stock assessment.

38  
39 Then we looked at the dolphin management strategy evaluation  
40 update, and we're going to have more on this at our meeting next  
41 week, and so we were looking at some items that the group that's  
42 conducting the MSE is working on, and so we'll be convening to get  
43 further input on items for the model, and then the SSC was supposed  
44 to have looked at this at their April meeting.

45  
46 Under snapper grouper, we worked on a commercial management  
47 measures amendment. This is Amendment 60 for us, and, also, after  
48 the March council meeting, we met again, I believe in early April,

1 just that, because we have a commercial Snapper Grouper  
2 Subcommittee that meets to look at this, and so primarily we're  
3 looking at the potential to remove the two-for-one provision for  
4 the unlimited commercial permit, which is the SG 1, and so we  
5 looked at that, and then also looked at a range of trip limit  
6 options, commercial trip limits, for several snapper grouper  
7 species, and talked about that.

8  
9 We were looking at a way of what we call temporary trip limit  
10 adjustments that would be considered for a number of species, but  
11 the timing of that was a little strange, and so we're looking at  
12 what we're calling static trip limits. That was what the  
13 subcommittee looked at in April, was focusing more on static trip  
14 limit changes, in addition to the two-for-one.

15  
16 Black sea bass, basically, the council had paused work on their  
17 long-term amendment, in order to move the short-term amendment  
18 through the process. At the council meeting next week, we will  
19 pick back up with the long-term amendment, and this amendment has  
20 a lot of different things in there, but it also has options for  
21 reopening the nearshore areas that have been closed to black sea  
22 bass pots to protect endangered North Atlantic right whales. We  
23 have approved -- The council a while ago approved this on-demand  
24 gear, and so that's why we're looking at possibly opening these  
25 areas back up.

26  
27 We've also been working on a snapper grouper fishery management  
28 unit revision, which is Amendment 61, and so we're considering  
29 changes. We were originally looking at possible removal, or moving  
30 to ecosystem component, of seventeen different species, and now we  
31 have that down to maybe about fourteen different species, and so  
32 we will be considering that next week, meaning are some of them  
33 just going to be removed from the FMU altogether, which would allow  
34 the states to manage them, or would we be moving some of these to  
35 ecosystem component, and then maybe we've decided that some of  
36 them need to stay in the amendment.

37  
38 All right, so then there were two new amendments that the council  
39 initiated development on at the March meeting. One of them had to  
40 do with looking at our five spawning special management zones.  
41 They have a sunset coming up in 2027, and so we need to look at  
42 this and go through a process as to whether we're going to keep  
43 them in place, or sunset them, or modify them in some way, and so  
44 we'll be looking at that next week as well.

45  
46 Then the council also initiated a framework amendment to consider  
47 changing retention limits of several snapper grouper species for  
48 headboats. These are species that have vessel limits in place,

1 and so the vessel limits aren't working great for headboats,  
2 because those vessel limits don't -- They aren't necessarily  
3 divisible by six, and so, instead, the council is starting a  
4 process to look at a vessel limit that would be something such as  
5 per six paying passengers, and so you can see the species there.  
6 It's just gag, black grouper, scamp, and yellowmouth grouper that  
7 we're considering, and that concludes my report, but I'm happy to  
8 take any questions, and, Mr. Chairman, I'll be here all week.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

11  
12 **MR. ED WALKER:** Thank you. I had some questions about, one, that  
13 considering removal of the two-for-one provision, and was there -  
14 - Whenever that was started, was there a goal, a number that they  
15 wanted to reach, because, if it goes on forever, you're going to  
16 end up with two permits, right?

17  
18 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, and no --

19  
20 **MR. WALKER:** I know it's pretty low now.

21  
22 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, and so, no, there wasn't a goal put in place.  
23 That's something that the subcommittee has discussed, but, no, no  
24 goal of number of permits that they wanted to get down to, or  
25 anything like that, but there are people out there that have  
26 purchased one permit, and haven't been able to find a second permit  
27 within that one-year timeframe, and so definitely some concerns.

28  
29 The subcommittee had a long discussion on this at the April  
30 meeting, and talked about how they feel like this needs to be  
31 removed, and it's a hindrance to new entrants into the fishery,  
32 and so they want to allow new entrants without -- I guess you would  
33 say kind of overrunning this, you know, or letting everybody in.

34  
35 They also had a conversation, the subcommittee did, about a use-  
36 it-or-lose-it provision, and things like that, but the  
37 subcommittee decided that they didn't want to do a use-it-or-lose-  
38 it provision at this time.

39  
40 **MR. WALKER:** Okay, and one more, while I have the microphone, and  
41 maybe it's along the same lines. Discussing the commercial permit  
42 structure, including a limit on permit ownership, does this mean  
43 that you're examining ways to deal with permit leasing, because I  
44 know that you really can't lease permits, but permit leasing is  
45 going on, and I didn't know if there was any way to address that  
46 or not.

47  
48 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, and we had a discussion from Jessica Stephen



1 about this at this April subcommittee meeting, and you're right,  
2 and it's not really leasing the permit. It's leasing the vessel,  
3 and so we had a bunch of discussion. I would have to look back to  
4 my notes, but I believe that we decided that we weren't going to  
5 address the leasing at this time.

6  
7 We got a lot of information at that meeting, and it was really  
8 interesting, in looking at latent effort, looking at all the  
9 different species where the trip limit isn't being reached. I  
10 would have to go back and look at it, but I believe that the  
11 subcommittee said to not address leasing at this time.

12  
13 **MR. WALKER:** How many of those permits are left active? There's  
14 like less than 300 now, isn't there?

15  
16 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** I would have to go look at that. I can tell you  
17 the majority of those are in Florida though, as you would imagine,  
18 but, yes, and I can go get my South Atlantic stuff out of my car  
19 and bring it in here for you to check out.

20  
21 **MR. WALKER:** You can tell me later. That's fine. Thank you.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jessica. We had two more hands. Mr.  
24 Anson, and then Mr. Sanchez.

25  
26 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Jessica, for being here. Thank you  
27 for the report. I'm just curious. On the last paragraph there,  
28 where you were talking about the special management zones, and you  
29 mentioned the two artificial reef areas, and where -- How did the  
30 artificial reefs get there, as far as who bought them, or put them  
31 down, and then where are they located, generally? Which state or  
32 states?

33  
34 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** The ones that are under consideration I believe are  
35 off of South Carolina, and they were, I believe, paid for with  
36 Sportfish Restoration funds, but I would have to triple-check that  
37 with the document to be sure.

38  
39 **MR. ANSON:** Then, with Sportfish Restoration funds, there's some  
40 issues that come up regarding, you know, access for fishermen.  
41 Has that discussion been had, or how are you all addressing that?

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** There was some discussion, it's my recollection,  
44 when the SMZs were formed, but I think we're going to embark on  
45 that discussion again starting next week.

46  
47 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

2  
3 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Yes, and thank you for that. I'm very pleased  
4 to hear that they're getting rid of that, or trying to work towards  
5 the two-for-one snapper grouper, because, many years ago, when  
6 this was all starting out, part of the genesis was there was a  
7 large number of retirees in the Keys that subsidized their  
8 retirement and their fishing habit with selling some fish, and  
9 they were on the chopping block.

10  
11 You would go to these hearings, and they would inundate the room,  
12 and break your heart, and so you couldn't help but try to do  
13 something for them, and then that evolved into the, all right, if  
14 you're going to grow this universe, albeit their permit will, in  
15 essence, pass with them, because it's non-transferable, and we're  
16 going to have to do something with this other.

17  
18 Then I guess the ball dropped there, and what we missed was not  
19 having a target on what is the number you're going to get down to,  
20 so you don't have death by attrition of an industry, and so I'm  
21 very pleased this is being corrected. Thank you very much.

22  
23 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, and remember we also have that SG 2, or what  
24 people call the 225 permit, and so that helped some folks, but,  
25 technically, that permit shouldn't be transferable, but some of  
26 those are with corporations now, and so, as the corporation  
27 continues, then the permit continues.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Ms. McCawley. Any other  
30 questions? Okay. We're going to move on to Mr. Bray.

31  
32 **GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**

33  
34 **MR. GREGG BRAY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a brief  
35 presentation, just a few slides to lead people through our liaison  
36 report. Our fishery disaster program, which thankfully at this  
37 time is one thing, and that's Return 'Em Right, and I think  
38 everybody in the room is pretty familiar with Return 'Em Right is  
39 trying to accomplish.

40  
41 Our update at this meeting is, for the first time now, South  
42 Atlantic anglers, if they go through the education module, are  
43 eligible to receive descending gear. Project staff have told me  
44 that there was one change to that entire process now. They're  
45 requiring people that go through the education module and to pay  
46 shipping costs for receiving their gear.

47  
48 The hope is that that's going to help reduce the amount of people

1 that are getting it just because they can get it for free, but the  
2 good news too is, the people that pay shipping costs, that money  
3 is going back into the pool to allow them to distribute more gear.  
4 That money is directly being used to support additional gear  
5 distribution.

6  
7 They're working to implement the same human dimensions survey that  
8 was run in the Gulf in the South Atlantic, to take a look at angler  
9 attitudes and behaviors towards release practices and rates of  
10 descending fish, and Nick Haddad, from Florida Sea Grant, will be  
11 at the next South Atlantic Council meeting to update council  
12 members on that progress.

13  
14 The infrastructure improvement projects, that's being run through  
15 our GulfFIN program. That's the program I oversee. We have  
16 development going on in several areas, and so we're providing  
17 funding to states and both our own commission to improve our  
18 fishery-dependent monitoring data management systems.

19  
20 We've put an award in place with the State of Mississippi for them  
21 to develop a call center for implementing the effort survey for  
22 their MS Creel survey. We've put an award in place with the State  
23 of Florida to make some improvements for their own effort survey  
24 on the State Reef Fish Survey, and I think we are working -- We  
25 will be working with both the State of Florida and the State of  
26 Alabama on developing electronic tools for collecting dockside  
27 data for both Florida SRFS and Alabama Creel.

28  
29 Another priority task for this work is to develop a centralized  
30 data warehouse that will totally encompass all the state  
31 recreational survey data. I'm happy to report that that system  
32 has gone into production, at least for our federal partners.

33  
34 The public-facing website is not ready yet, as we're working to  
35 get some historical data into the system, but I just received a  
36 note last week from Science Center staff of how pleased they are  
37 with the system, how much efficiency it's gaining, how happy they  
38 are that it's standardizing estimation datasets for them, and we  
39 continue to work with them to make sure that our federal partners  
40 are ingesting those data correctly, and understanding and  
41 interpreting those data correctly, but we're very pleased with the  
42 progress on that, and we'll continue to work on that. No data  
43 management system is ever in a final resting place, but we're  
44 thankful for the opportunity to centralize all of this information.

45  
46 I think Mr. Donaldson, in the past, has mentioned about the Red  
47 Snapper Recreational Research projects we have in place. All seven  
48 have been awarded. We just passed our first quarter, and all the

1 projects are on a good trajectory. I will mention that, right  
2 outside that door, one of our projects is highlighted on the table  
3 from Mote Marine Lab.

4  
5 It's some exciting work. We're very excited about the work they're  
6 doing, and that everybody else is doing, but, if you want to learn  
7 a little bit more about one of the projects, step outside there  
8 and talk to the staff at that table. They're doing some exciting  
9 stuff.

10  
11 We expect that most of those projects are going to run through  
12 late 2027, and that's when we'll be expecting to have some results  
13 from those, and we'll be reporting out on that in the future.

14  
15 Lastly, as part of this funding agreement, we also had some money  
16 to expand our at-sea sampling program in the for-hire fishery into  
17 Louisiana and Texas. This is the start of year-two, and the final  
18 year that we have funding, and so we are -- We would love to be  
19 able to continue that, but, for now, we're just focused on getting  
20 a second year of field sampling in the books, and we're making  
21 those data available also to NOAA Fisheries.

22  
23 It goes alongside with longer standing at-sea sampling programs  
24 that have been in place in the other states in the Gulf, and so  
25 I'm thankful for that opportunity, and we will continue to report  
26 upon the success of that work in future meetings.

27  
28 Lastly, Congress was directed -- Would direct the National Marine  
29 Fisheries Service to partner with our agency to conduct some  
30 fishery-independent research on data-poor multijurisdictional fish  
31 species. That grant -- It went through a competitive RFP process,  
32 and that grant was awarded to a consortium with the University of  
33 South Alabama, and that grant was just recently put in place from  
34 our office with them, and so they've just started to begin their  
35 work, work with their subcontractors, ordering supplies, and so  
36 we're excited about the results from that project to come as well,  
37 and we'll have some more concrete findings at future meetings.  
38 Mr. Chairman, that concludes my report.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Bray. Do we have any questions?  
41 Mr. Anson.

42  
43 **MR. ANSON:** I have two questions. Thanks, Gregg. The first  
44 question is related to the Return 'Em Right and the descending  
45 devices. Will Gulf anglers -- I mean, it's not restrictive to  
46 just South Atlantic folks, and Gulf anglers can still request --  
47 Or go through the survey and get a descending device?

1 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and it's an expansion of the program. The Gulf  
2 continues, and it's expanding into the South Atlantic.

3  
4 **MR. ANSON:** All right, and then the second question relates to the  
5 research, the red snapper research projects. Will you be having,  
6 like, through the commission meeting, a session that will be an  
7 opportunity for those researchers to provide the results there at  
8 that venue or --

9  
10 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and our hope is, in October of 2027, to hold a  
11 general session, have all the research teams come in and present  
12 their findings, and then spend some time talking about it. My  
13 hope would be is that we could do that morning into the early  
14 afternoon, and then spend some time in the afternoon, as a group  
15 of regional, you know, data collection and fishery management  
16 specialists, and NOAA Fisheries staff, talk about what did we learn  
17 from this, and what could that help inform, as decision makers, of  
18 what's the best way to sample recreational fisheries in a way that  
19 gives us better confidence in the decisions that need to be made  
20 around tables like this.

21  
22 That's our hope, is to do that in October, and we'll have more  
23 information. We've talked to all the research teams, to kind of  
24 prepare them for that eventuality, and that's what we're working  
25 towards at this point.

26  
27 **MR. ANSON:** Will that be compiled in like a summary report or  
28 something that just kind of provides some of the highlights of  
29 each program? I guess I'm looking to the council if any of those,  
30 those projects, any of those -- Any specific projects that deal  
31 with some of the issues we're talking about, like data collection,  
32 and if those would be brought back here to the council at a future  
33 date.

34  
35 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and so we would get final reports, comprehensive  
36 final reports, from every single research team, but then, from  
37 that general session, our intention would be to produce a summary  
38 report from that, and that might be something that kind of  
39 summarizes the biggest and most significant take-home messages  
40 from all those projects, and the discussions that would be held as  
41 a state-federal cooperative body that might be useful to come back  
42 here to the council, and so yes.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We have a couple more. Mr. Geeslin,  
45 and then Captain Walker.

46  
47  
48 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'm glad Kevin raised

1 some of those questions. Gregg, I appreciate you highlighting the  
2 research-based, and pointed towards recreational effort. I would  
3 encourage everyone, while you have the opportunity to visit with  
4 Carol, Max, and Kate from the Mote Marine Lab team, as several of  
5 the states have engaged in that research, in the spirit of, you  
6 know, embracing modernized technology, advanced techniques, to  
7 look at, you know, the choke points, or the Gulf passes, if you  
8 will, with camera traps, machine learning, artificial  
9 intelligence.

10  
11 Really, Greg, and you were getting there, but where the rubber  
12 hits the road, in my mind, is comparing some of those effort  
13 estimates that are generated from that research study, a one-year  
14 research study, and comparing that to our existing programs, Kevin,  
15 and really thinking about how we utilize, and capitalize, on those  
16 advanced technologies moving forward, from a statewide  
17 perspective, bringing that forward into this body, and so, again,  
18 I appreciate Carol, Max, and Kate being here, and I encourage  
19 everyone to visit with them, and certainly view the poster outside.  
20

21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Next up, Captain Walker, and Dr. Allen.  
22

23 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Gregg. I just  
24 had a question, maybe kind of like what Mr. Geeslin said. On this  
25 fishery-independent research on data-poor multijurisdictional  
26 fish, do you have any idea what kind of program -- Are these are  
27 going to be acoustic telemetry in the inlets, and is that what I  
28 have gathered? Do you have any info on exactly what type of  
29 projects we're talking about?  
30

31 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and I'm not as forefront on the specifics of this  
32 as Steve VanderKooy in our office would be, but, yes, definitely  
33 a lot of telemetry work, and tracking. I believe there's some  
34 reproductive work also being done, but really trying to look at  
35 distribution habits, movement patterns, reproductive biology.  
36 Those are some of the key things I remember taking away from those  
37 proposal reviews when I assisted with that a while back.  
38

39 **MR. WALKER:** Great, thank you.  
40

41 **MR. BRAY:** Really trying to fill in some gaps, I think, that we  
42 don't have really good answers on with regards to some of those  
43 species.  
44

45 **MR. WALKER:** Like Cobia stands out to me, right?  
46

47 **MR. BRAY:** Yes.  
48

1 **MR. WALKER:** Very interesting.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

4  
5 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you. Thank you, Gregg. It's exciting to  
6 hear about this database for recreational fisheries data, and so  
7 who do you see would be the end users of this, and I'm wondering  
8 if having this -- If having this database could facilitate stock  
9 assessments being more efficient, and that kind of thing, and just  
10 a little bit about your vision of how this would work.

11  
12 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and so, you know, we were approached with this  
13 concept because -- As the evolution of state recreational surveys,  
14 apart from the previous general survey that most of us in the Gulf  
15 participated in, it became more burdensome for Science Center staff  
16 and Regional Office staff to have to go get these individual  
17 components from individual states, and be on different delivery  
18 schedules, and so it makes sense. Let's centralize this, and let's  
19 put it in one place.

20  
21 I would tell you that there's multiple focuses here. Like we're  
22 definitely trying to make it more efficient for our federal  
23 partners to get access to these data, to use them in the science  
24 and management process, but we also see a public-facing component  
25 to this, because there's a need for increased transparency and  
26 understanding of what the states are now doing.

27  
28 Our first step is to try to get these data into a system, into a  
29 standardized system, and make it available for our federal  
30 partners, but we're also working, as fast as we can, to have a  
31 public-facing website, so people can come in and query results,  
32 and see what those surveys are telling them, get access to survey  
33 documentation, to understand how they were designed, how they're  
34 implemented, how the quality control processes work, all of those  
35 different aspects, and so it's equally scientifically focused as  
36 much as it is publicly focused.

37  
38 **DR. ALLEN:** I wasn't aware of that, and I think that's super  
39 exciting. Thanks. Thanks for sharing that.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other questions for Mr. Bray? I don't  
42 see anything. Next up, Lt. Morton, Coast Guard.

43  
44 **U.S. COAST GUARD**

45  
46 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right, and so good  
47 afternoon everyone. Lt. Jackson Morton, the Living Marine  
48 Resources Officer at the Coast Guard Heartland District. I just

1 want to say I'm glad to be back in-person, and it's much better  
2 than coming here virtually.

3  
4 First, going into our Exclusive Economic Zone enforcement, through  
5 April of this year, we've had thirteen interdictions, resulting in  
6 270 pounds of red snapper seized off of lancha vessels. I like  
7 the fact that we're continuing to see a 46 percent reduction in  
8 interdictions, when you compare it to last year, and so hopefully  
9 that continues.

10  
11 I wanted to talk about a great case we just had on the 30<sup>th</sup> of  
12 April. It involved federal partners as well as folks over in Texas  
13 Parks and Wildlife, Coast Guard, and CBP. We detected a group of  
14 lanchas fishing north of the Maritime Boundary Line in our EEZ.  
15 Texas and Station South Padre Island launched, and were each able  
16 to interdict a lancha. A total of nine people were detained, and  
17 then no catch was recovered. That's a really good example of us  
18 working together with both our federal and our state partners,  
19 making sure we keep our waters free of these launches.

20  
21 Then these are a couple of pictures taken by the aircraft of kind  
22 of that nighttime interdiction. You can see five people, in that  
23 bottom-right corner, and then see one of the enforcement boats  
24 coming up on the lancha in the top-left.

25  
26 For domestic fisheries, we've got 200 boardings thus far this year.  
27 Six of those boardings resulted in significant violations, and no  
28 update on our marine protected resources. We're still at one  
29 request for assistance and interaction for the year, and I'll end  
30 by saying, unfortunately, I do not have an update regarding  
31 Starlink approvals. All right. I'll open it up for questions.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton. Do we have any questions?  
34 Mr. Anson.

35  
36 **MR. ANSON:** Lt. Morton, thank you for being here. It is good to  
37 see your face, rather than hear your voice. Regarding the table  
38 you provided on the interdictions over the last few years,  
39 including this year, is there any way for you to include some  
40 metric to show the effort, like number of hours or number of days  
41 of patrols or anything like that?

42  
43 **LT. MORTON:** Yes, and I can provide that information. Off the top  
44 of my head, I think we have it broken down for hours. I will say  
45 that we are -- Since January of 2025, and so back in January, we  
46 have dedicated, as to the best of our abilities, to have at least  
47 one Coast Guard Cutter patrolling that area, and doing our best to  
48 stick to that, making sure we have something out there.



1  
2 Before, it was still a priority, but it was a little bit harder to  
3 have 100 percent coverage, and so we call it 1.0 coverage, meaning  
4 one surface asset out there at all times, with gaps for weather  
5 here and there, and sometimes boats break, but we're doing our  
6 best to keep out there, but I can surely provide an update with  
7 hours.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

10  
11 **MR. ANSON:** I don't want to put you on the spot, but, since you  
12 said that one asset was started in January of 2025, and dedicated  
13 to doing said patrols, do you think 2026 numbers bear out to maybe  
14 a greater, more consistent presence in that area with the cutter?  
15

16 **LT. MORTON:** Yes, and I would -- Without knowing off the top of my  
17 head, I would say probably, but I can come back to you in a little  
18 bit. I have to look through our numbers, but I can provide an  
19 update. I should be able to get you hours.  
20

21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any other questions for Lt. Morton?  
22 Not seeing any, thank you again.  
23

24 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you.  
25

26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, and so, being as we're ahead of  
27 schedule, we're going to continue doing things a little different.  
28 Let's take a fifteen-minute break, and allow the public to depart  
29 from the room, and we will come back to our closed session that's  
30 scheduled this afternoon, and so let's plan to start at 3:05.  
31

32 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on June 1, 2026.)  
33

34 - - -  
35

36 June 3, 2026  
37

38 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION  
39

40 - - -  
41

42 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Hilton Tampa  
43 Airport Westshore in Tampa, Florida on Wednesday morning, June 3,  
44 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.  
45

46 **CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS**  
47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We're going to get started, if

1 everyone could quiet down in the back of the room. Thank you.  
2 First, I want to remind the folks listening online that the virtual  
3 testimony registration is open now. It will be closed thirty  
4 minutes after testimony begins.

5  
6 We will move into Full Council. Welcome to the 310<sup>th</sup> meeting of  
7 the Gulf Council. My name is J.D. Dugas, chair of the Gulf Council.  
8 Please place your cell phone or similar device on silent or  
9 vibrating mode. For the benefit of all, we ask that private  
10 conversations take place outside the meeting room. Additionally,  
11 alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the meeting room.

12  
13 The Gulf Council is one of eight regional councils established in  
14 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, known as the  
15 Magnuson-Stevens Act. Our purpose is to serve as a deliberative  
16 body to advise the Secretary of Commerce on fishery management  
17 measures in federal waters of the Gulf of America, ensuring  
18 sustainable fisheries resources that benefit the nation.

19  
20 The council consists of seventeen voting members, eleven appointed  
21 by the Secretary of Commerce from various Gulf regions with diverse  
22 fisheries experience, plus the five state fishery managers from  
23 each Gulf state and the Regional Administrator from NOAA's  
24 Southeast Fisheries Service. Several non-voting members also  
25 participate.

26  
27 Public input is essential to our deliberative process. We welcome  
28 both oral and written comments throughout the process. Virtual  
29 attendees wishing to speak during public comment must register  
30 online. Registration for virtual testimony closes thirty minutes  
31 after public testimony begins. In-person participants should sign  
32 in at the registration kiosk in the back of the room. Only one  
33 registration per person is allowed. Public comment may conclude  
34 before the scheduled time if all registered participants have  
35 spoken.

36  
37 This meeting is being digitally recorded for the public record.  
38 As a courtesy, I ask that all seated at the table introduce  
39 themselves beginning on my left, but, before, I want to get with  
40 Mr. Broussard, and check him first. Billy.

41  
42 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** I'm here. Billy Broussard, Louisiana.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you.

45  
46 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Kesley Banks, Texas.

47  
48 **MR. GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

1  
2 **MS. BRENDA BALLARD:** Brenda Ballard, Texas.

3  
4 **DR. ALLEN:** Mike Allen, Florida.

5  
6 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida Fish and Wildlife  
7 Conservation Commission.

8  
9 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Jessica McCawley, South Atlantic Council  
10 representative.

11  
12 **MR. WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.

13  
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida. What's up, Billy?

15  
16 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.

17  
18 **MR. ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama Department of Conservation and  
19 Natural Resources.

20  
21 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Anthony Overton, Alabama.

22  
23 **LT. MORTON:** Lt. Jackson Morton, U.S. Coast Guard.

24  
25 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

26  
27 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.

28  
29 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast  
30 Regional Office.

31  
32 **MR. BRAY:** Greg Bray, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

33  
34 **MR. JOHNNY MARQUEZ:** Johnny Marquez, Mississippi.

35  
36 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** Jason Osborne, Mississippi.

37  
38 **MR. RICK BURRIS:** Rick Burris, Mississippi Department of Marine  
39 Resources.

40  
41 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana.

42  
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.

44  
45 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you all. So, moving down the agenda,  
48 the first item is the Adoption of the Agenda. Are there any edits

1 to the agenda? Dr. Walter.

2  
3 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, Chair. I would like to give a short presentation  
4 on king mackerel landings from Mexico and the potential impacts on  
5 the ongoing stock assessment.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, Dr. Walter. Noted. Got it. Thank  
8 you. Mr. Sanchez.

9  
10 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I have something in king mackerel as well  
11 for Other Business.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr.  
14 Strelcheck.

15  
16 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Not something we often deal with, but I want to  
17 give you an update on our live rock program and some developments  
18 that have occurred with permitting.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any other items to be added to the  
21 agenda? Not seeing any, can I get a motion to adopt the agenda?  
22 Dr. Banks. Seconded by Mr. Sanchez. Next up will be the Approval  
23 of the Minutes. Are there any edits to the minutes? Not seeing  
24 any, can I get a motion to adopt? Dr. Banks. Can I get a second?  
25 Dr. Sweetman seconded. Okay. Before we get to public comment,  
26 next up, we have a presentation of the 2025 Law Enforcement Team  
27 of the Year Award, and I'm going to turn it over to our colleagues  
28 from the State of Florida, Dr. Sweetman and Ms. McCawley.

29  
30 **PRESENTATION OF THE 2025 LAW ENFORCEMENT TEAM OF THE YEAR AWARD**

31  
32 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. Good morning, everyone. It is my honor to  
33 award Officer Specialist Kyle Yurewitch and Officer Specialist  
34 Matthew Rubenstein of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
35 Commission with the Gulf Council's Law Enforcement Team of the  
36 Year Award.

37  
38 This award recognizes and acknowledges service above and beyond  
39 duty requirements and recognizes their distinguished service,  
40 professionalism, and dedication to enforcing federal fishery  
41 regulations in the Gulf of America.

42  
43 These gentlemen operate off of the Gulf Ranger, the Offshore Patrol  
44 Vessel Gulf Ranger, in Marco Island, with over 270 hours of service  
45 in federal waters, patrolling and enforcing federal fisheries  
46 regulations, and these gentlemen go as far as they can. They go  
47 off to Pulley Ridge, and the Dry Tortugas, and some of the more  
48 pristine habitat that we have in the entire Gulf of America, and

1 a truly amazing job that they do, and I'm very honored to give  
2 them these awards here, and so if you would, Officer Specialist  
3 Kyle Yurewitch and Matthew Rubenstein, please join us up front  
4 here for your plaques, and, please, a round of applause.  
5 (Applause)

6  
7 **CAPTAIN SCOTT PEARCE:** Dr. Sweetman, may I add one thing? I just  
8 want to give a shoutout also to Lt. Edwin Harp. He challenged --  
9 He supervises OPV squads on both coasts, and he challenged his  
10 team this year to go out and not only excel, but we have a certain  
11 number of TED inspections that we have to do statewide for the  
12 entire OPV program.

13  
14 He challenged his team to accomplish that goal within their own  
15 squad. Not only did that squad accomplish that goal, but Officers  
16 Rubenstein and Yurewitch actually matched it, and so we more than  
17 doubled our TED inspections for the year because of the efforts  
18 they put into it, and so I just want to say that the work they do  
19 is tremendous, and this is well-deserved, and I just wanted to put  
20 on a few sentences. Thank you.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We're going to move into public  
23 comment. Good morning. Public input is a vital part of the Gulf  
24 Council's deliberative process. Both oral and written comments  
25 are accepted and considered throughout.

26  
27 The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all statements include  
28 a brief description of the background and interests of the persons  
29 in the subject of the statement. All written information shall  
30 include a statement of the source and date of such information.

31  
32 Oral or written communication provided to the council, its members,  
33 or its staff that relate to matters within the council's purview  
34 or public in nature. Please give any written comments to Gulf  
35 Council staff, as all written comments will be posted on the  
36 council's website for viewing by council members and the public,  
37 and will be maintained by the council as part of the permanent  
38 record. Knowingly and willfully submitting false information to  
39 the council is a violation of federal law.

40  
41 We welcome public comment from both in-person and virtual  
42 attendees. Virtual participants who wish to speak should register  
43 online. Registration for virtual testimony closes thirty minutes  
44 after public testimony begins, in which participants wishing to  
45 speak must sign in the registration kiosk located at the back of  
46 the meeting room. Only one registration per person is permitted.

47  
48 Each speaker will have three minutes to deliver their testimony.

1 In-person participants should follow the timer lights on the  
2 podium. The light will remain green for the first two minutes,  
3 switching to a blinking yellow during the final minute, and turn  
4 red when time has expired. Virtual participants should monitor  
5 the on-screen three-minute countdown timer to track their  
6 remaining time. Additional time for dignitaries may be granted at  
7 the discretion of the chair.

8  
9 If you have a cell phone or similar device, please place it on  
10 silent or vibrate mode during the meeting. To ensure everyone can  
11 hear the proceedings, we also ask that any private conversations  
12 be conducted outside the meeting room. Please note that public  
13 comment may conclude before the published agenda time if all  
14 registered in-person and virtual participants have finished their  
15 remarks. Okay, and so we'll go to Mr. Marino first in the room,  
16 and then we'll rotate online. First up is Lawrence Marino, and  
17 then online we'll have Mark Friudenberg.

#### 18 19 PUBLIC COMMENT

20  
21 **MR. LAWRENCE MARINO:** Good morning. My name is Larry Marino, and  
22 I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrell.  
23 Regarding Amendment 63, the modification yesterday to the purpose  
24 and need emphasized that this is just a pilot program. Its purpose  
25 isn't the quota pool itself, but to test whether a quota pool would  
26 be beneficial or not, or with what changes, and much of the  
27 criticism against the amendment misses this point.

28  
29 A lot of that criticism also misses the point that the program  
30 isn't solely about enhancing profitability or reducing discards.  
31 It's also about investigating whether a quota pool improves  
32 accessibility to the quota. Of course, accessibility is a focus  
33 of National Standard 4, requiring fair and equitable access to the  
34 fish and preventing anyone from acquiring an excessive share.

35  
36 This essential program focus must be kept in mind as the council  
37 considers the various criticisms that have been made. One of them  
38 is that this is a solution in search of a problem. The quota is  
39 already higher than the catch, and allocation is cheap right now,  
40 and so there's no problem to be solved, but, again, this is a pilot  
41 program.

42  
43 The point isn't to solve problems as such, but to see whether a  
44 quota can -- Whether a quota pool can solve problems. It tests  
45 whether the particular mechanisms, limits, and requirements set  
46 here in Amendment 63 help, hurt, or have no effect, and whether a  
47 quota pool might be better if it were set differently.

1 Far from a reason not to do Amendment 63 now, the low quota price,  
2 and the abundance of quota, are great reasons for doing this  
3 program with red grouper, and now. It's a very low-risk context,  
4 and that's a good thing. We're starting with red grouper precisely  
5 because it's a much easier nut to crack than red snapper.

6  
7 There was concern that this would set a precedent, but the actual  
8 purpose of a pilot program is to set precedent. Maybe that  
9 precedent is that the quota pool works, or would work better if  
10 done differently, or maybe that it doesn't work at all, and  
11 shouldn't be done more permanently, but, either way, setting  
12 precedent is a feature, and not a bug.

13  
14 Another criticism is that the council should wait for Amendment  
15 59A to be finalized first. This doesn't make sense. Amendment  
16 59A requires a permit to hold shares, and so does Amendment 63.  
17 This argument is a red herring, and waiting for Amendment 59A would  
18 just kick the can down the road once again.

19  
20 Another major category of criticism was about metrics. How will  
21 we know if the program worked? Talking with Dr. Stephen, there  
22 are numerous metrics for every aspect of this that NMFS can and  
23 will use. If that's really the sticking point, I urge the council  
24 to ask Andy or her about it, as they've got a good handle on it,  
25 and keep in mind that the program is exploring the idea of  
26 redistributing quota.

27  
28 Working for this program means redistributing the quota to improve  
29 access by fishermen overall. That is measurable. In fact, it's  
30 simply numeric. The distributions themselves, and to whom, are  
31 the measures of success or failure, and we would also learn about  
32 how the various limitations and requirements for redistribution  
33 that are set here impact that, and perhaps how to do it better.  
34 This is another red herring.

35  
36 Amendment 63A, or even a permanent quota pool for red grouper, of  
37 course, won't solve everything, but some improvements to the IFQ  
38 program are needed, and this is a cheap way to get some insight  
39 into what improvements might help.

40  
41 Amendment 59A also isn't a complete fix, but it's another step.  
42 These are the only IFQ programs in the country that allow public  
43 participation. 59A will at least get us back on par with all other  
44 IFQ programs. In the long run, the participation requirements  
45 under 59B are more important, but at least this is a step in the  
46 right direction. The frustration has been clear on both sides of  
47 the podium. Let's take the easy way and push this one out.

1 Allowing an exemption for 501(c)(3)s would create more problems  
2 than it would solve. It wouldn't even solve the fundamental  
3 problem of access, much less price. Since the 501(c)(3) would be  
4 privately governed, it would have complete control over who it  
5 leases to, just like the shareholders do now, and just as subject  
6 to blackballing or favoritism, and not only could, but apparently  
7 would, charge more or less the same price as the shareholders do  
8 now.

9  
10 Just because an organization is a 501(c)(3), regardless of its  
11 charitable purpose, is no guarantee of anything, and I don't mean  
12 to disparage what the Shareholders Alliance has done in setting up  
13 their quota bank, but creating an exemption for it circumvents  
14 every protection 59A is intended to give, and that's not the way  
15 to go.

16  
17 A loophole like this is big enough to drive a truck through. It  
18 will ultimately be exploited, regardless of what current  
19 management might do, nor is it even necessary to exempt it, since  
20 the shareholders could just lease directly through the 501(c)(3),  
21 using the 501(c)(3) as the agent, or it could acquire, or be  
22 gifted, those shares, and a permit to go with those shares. We  
23 shouldn't have gotten to where we are with the IFQ programs, but  
24 we did, and we're never going to fix this unfair system if we don't  
25 start trying. Thank you.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marino. Do we have any questions?  
28 Not seeing any, thank you, Larry. Next, online, we're going to go  
29 to Hannah Medd.

30  
31 **MS. HEATHER MEDD:** Thank you. Can you hear me?

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, we can.

34  
35 **MS. MEDD:** Perfect. Okay. Thank you so much. I really appreciate  
36 the opportunity to speak today. My name is Hannah Medd. I'm a  
37 researcher for the American Shark Conservancy, based over in Palm  
38 Beach Gardens, over here on the Atlantic Coast of Florida.

39  
40 My background is definitely in marine science and academia, and  
41 our organization focuses on research that applies to management.  
42 I've worked in the recreational -- I've worked with recreational  
43 shark anglers on post-release mortality, developing best  
44 practices, submitted those data to SEDAR 77 as a data contributor,  
45 worked with the commercial and recreational fishing sector for  
46 twenty years, starting in South Africa, where I got my master's,  
47 and in the U.S. now, an invited member of the FWC Shark Expert  
48 Panel, and just a little background about myself, and I participate



1 in regulatory meetings at the local, state, and federal level.

2  
3 I do appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of my own  
4 organization, as well as Shark Advocates International and  
5 Havenworth Coastal Conservation with respects to the council's  
6 formation of the working group to address shrimp trawl bycatch of  
7 protected species.

8  
9 As a group, we kind of got together, and we seek to ensure that  
10 the council includes representatives from the conservation and  
11 research communities among the final list of working group members.  
12 Such experts, particularly those focused on the ESA-listed  
13 smalltooth sawfish and giant manta rays, clearly offer expertise  
14 and perspectives that are highly relevant to the working group's  
15 purpose.

16  
17 Including those voices is vital to a well-rounded panel and  
18 decision-making process, especially in light of the urgent threats  
19 that are facing these elasmobranchs. We really appreciate and  
20 thank you for considering our views.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Hannah. Do we have any questions?  
23 I'm not seeing any, Hannah. Thank you. Next, we'll move in the  
24 room to Richard Fischer, and then we'll go back online.

25  
26 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the  
27 council. Thank you all so much. I will go ahead and get started  
28 by supporting the amberjack regional management and the amberjack  
29 EFP that came up yesterday, and, of course, in Louisiana, we would  
30 support at least the option for Louisiana's federally-permitted  
31 charter captains to be part of that regional management for  
32 amberjack, as well as the amberjack EFP.

33  
34 I'm going to spend the rest of my time talking about state  
35 management for red snapper, which is not on this month's agenda,  
36 but will hopefully be on a future agenda, and I'm going to take a  
37 little bit different approach. You know, in the past, I've kind  
38 of come up here and just said I support it.

39  
40 Well, I've heard, obviously, and you've heard too, a lot of  
41 opposition to state management, and I would like to, one, challenge  
42 the federally-permitted captains, that are going to be able to  
43 comment later today, to provide some additional reasons as for why  
44 they're against it, and I am going to address many of the reasons  
45 that I've heard so far, and I know it's the first week of red  
46 snapper season, and so there may not be a lot of federal captains  
47 speaking later, but I know there will at least be a couple.

1 I'll start with addressing some of those concerns, and I'll pull  
2 an Emily and say I've heard a whole lot of different things, and  
3 so I've heard that state management would make my federal permit  
4 go away. There's no basis for that. This is just reckless  
5 speculation, and it's also something that we wouldn't support.  
6 Why would we want our captains to lose the value of that permit?

7  
8 We've heard that state management would make sector separation go  
9 away. That's false. Gulf Council Amendments 40 and 45 would have  
10 to be repealed for that to have any basis in reality. That's a  
11 completely different discussion, independent from this one.

12  
13 I've heard that this is a fish grab. Well, due to the nature of  
14 the current one-size-fits-all management scheme, Louisiana can't  
15 reach half of its historical catch, but, from a scientific  
16 perspective, taking biomass and pressure into account,  
17 conservationists need to ask themselves, from a conservation  
18 standpoint, is a fish grab necessary, and let's also point out  
19 that the fish grab has already taken place if Louisiana can't get  
20 to half of its historical catch.

21  
22 I've heard that the status quo provides sustainability, and, short-  
23 term, sure, that's true, but, long-term, again, we're talking about  
24 perpetuating the cycle of harvest, where you've got regional  
25 differences in biomass and pressures.

26  
27 I've heard that different season lengths for different states  
28 wouldn't be fair and equitable, and I just need to point out that  
29 the status quo is already not fair and equitable, because, in the  
30 eastern Gulf, two and three trips a day can be taken.

31  
32 There's better weather, and there's better tourism. It's already  
33 not fair and equitable, and so, for us to use that as an argument  
34 against trying something different, I don't really think that's  
35 fair as well, and, also, by the way, you all are still going to  
36 have better weather, and you all are still going to have better  
37 tourism, and you all are still going to have the ability to take  
38 two and three trips a day if we went to this, which, by the way,  
39 we're not trying to force on anybody.

40  
41 If states want to opt out, we fully support and encourage states  
42 to opt out, and so this is not Louisiana saying you need to do  
43 something that you all don't want to do. Quite frankly, it's the  
44 rest of the Gulf saying you all can't do something that you all  
45 want to do.

46  
47 I've heard that it would reduce the value of federal permits. I  
48 am not an economist, but, as long as federal permits are able to

1 be traded from state to state, sold from state to state, I just  
2 don't see how that's a legitimate concern.

3  
4 I've heard that the current permit system is designed so that the  
5 market will determine where members of the public will choose to  
6 go fishing. Council historians say this is not accurate, and not  
7 why the permit structure was created. If it has incidentally  
8 become the result of the current system, then that's fine when  
9 there are not regional differences in the Gulf, but, as I've gone  
10 through, there are regional differences in the Gulf, and the  
11 management structure should also primarily take into account  
12 what's best for the resource.

13  
14 I've heard different rules from different states would confuse law  
15 enforcement. Current private recreational state management allows  
16 states to create individual seasons and creel limits for the  
17 private sector and the non-federally permitted charter boats. Very  
18 little, if any, opposition to that.

19  
20 There is the opposition though to season and creel limit  
21 differences for the federally-permitted charter sector. I just  
22 think it's really insulting to enforcement to claim that they are  
23 not going to be able to tell the difference, especially when the  
24 council can make a very simple endorsement and say, hey, this is  
25 your primary port for the year. Like there are ways around this,  
26 for sure.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Richard, I'm going to have to ask you to wrap it  
29 up.

30  
31 **MR. FISCHER:** Yes. Thank you for the extra time there, and, like  
32 I said, I encourage the federally-permitted charter captains that  
33 are going to speak to provide additional reasons, and let's keep  
34 hashing those out, whether it's in public or in private. I just  
35 want to keep the conversation going, and I greatly appreciate the  
36 time this morning. Thanks, everyone.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Richard. Do we have any questions for  
39 Mr. Fischer? Mr. Geeslin.

40  
41 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Richard. I appreciate your perspective.  
42 Very succinctly, in your -- From your perspective, what is the  
43 greatest benefit to the charter-for-hire sector if they were to go  
44 under state management?

45  
46 **MR. FISCHER:** I would say the greatest benefit would be being able  
47 to drive up to the Louisiana Room in Baton Rouge, at Wildlife and  
48 Fisheries Headquarters, and be able to put every single federally-

1 permitted captain in one room, hash out what season they all want,  
2 and what's best for you all.

3  
4 Rather than five meetings, one in each of the five Gulf states,  
5 two of which are usually flying distance, and not driving distance,  
6 to be able to get the seasons that we're fighting for, and as well  
7 as the expediency of our state government doing things considerably  
8 faster than the council.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Any other  
11 questions? Thank you, Richard.

12  
13 **MR. FISCHER:** Thank you, all.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next, we'll move virtual to Nicholas Guitierrez.  
16 Nicholas, can you hear us?

17  
18 **MS. BERNADINE ROY:** Nicholas, you have to unmute yourself.

19  
20 **MR. NICHOLAS GUITIERREZ:** Can you hear me?

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes. Go ahead.

23  
24 **MR. GUITIERREZ:** Hello. I'm Nicholas Guitierrez. I'm calling  
25 from Katie's Seafood in Galveston, Texas. I'm talking about  
26 Amendment 63. This sets a bad, harmful precedent for other  
27 species. All this does is take from one group and give to another.  
28 Doing this will create a new class of commercial fishermen that  
29 will push the council to give them something for nothing.

30  
31 Fishermen-run quota banks and cooperative efforts are already  
32 creating access opportunities without forcing a quota  
33 redistribution. They're working within the market system.

34  
35 The actions and alternatives in the document will not address the  
36 stated purpose and need. The council and National Marine Fisheries  
37 cannot adequately distinguish between related or linked IFQ  
38 accounts. Making fair implementation and evaluation are extremely  
39 difficult. There will not be an economic benefit, because red  
40 grouper allocation prices and shares are at a record low.

41  
42 There has never been a better time for fishermen to invest in  
43 themselves, and invest in quota. Amendment 63 will devalue the  
44 IFQ program. Why would someone invest in shares when a portion  
45 could be taken away at any time? Amendment 63 will harm active  
46 commercial fishermen who invested substantial capital into  
47 purchasing IFQ shares. Some of these active commercial fishermen  
48 took out loans to buy these shares. Why have some taken out loans

1 with NOAA?

2  
3 This directly impacts their ability to repay their debt. Creating  
4 a redistribution mechanism in a quota-rich environment provides  
5 little economic value, while introducing additional market  
6 uncertainty into the IFQ program.

7  
8 Commercial fishermen continue to report declining catch rates and  
9 worsening fishing conditions for red grouper on the water. Some  
10 say it's the worst they've seen. Why are we looking for ways to  
11 increase harvest when we should be focusing on taking action that  
12 protects the health of the red grouper stock? That's it. Thank  
13 you.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Nicholas. Do we have any questions?  
16 Not seeing any, thanks again, Nicholas. Next, we're going to go  
17 to the room, to Mr. Brad Gentner, and next, online, will be Will  
18 Atkins.

19  
20 **MR. BRAD GENTNER:** Brad Gentner, Southeast Conservation Director  
21 for the Coastal Conservation Association. This is probably going  
22 to be the shortest public comment you've ever heard me make, but  
23 I just want to commend the council for continuing to work on  
24 alternative management strategies. I think we really need to focus  
25 on those things going forward.

26  
27 State management, moving forward with state management, as fast as  
28 we can, for as many species as we can, which we're seeing the  
29 council do right now, is a step in the right direction. Also,  
30 looking at alternative assessment strategies, like the Great  
31 Amberjack Count, which we just received last night, and we're very  
32 excited to see those results, and see those results be used for  
33 management.

34  
35 We want to see more of that. I think our assessment process has  
36 gotten too weighty, too lengthy, too complicated, and it's really  
37 hampering the speed at which we can do management, and I'm excited  
38 to see the council starting to think outside the box and move in  
39 a direction that helps everybody, that helps conservation, and  
40 keeps our access to the water intact. Thanks, guys.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thanks, Brad. Do we have any questions for Brad?  
43 Thank you again, Brad. Next, virtual, we'll go to Will Atkins.  
44 Hello.

45  
46 **MR. WILL ATKINS:** Can you hear me?

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Will. Go ahead.

1  
2 **MR. ATKINS:** All right. My name is Will Atkins. I run the Rachel  
3 Marie for Katie's Seafood Market down in Galveston, Texas. I take  
4 pride in bringing quality seafood back to the dock, to provide the  
5 public with a superior product they cannot find anywhere else.

6  
7 I do not support Amendment 63, because all it does is support a  
8 bad, harmful precedent for other species. The council and National  
9 Marine Fisheries Service cannot adequately distinguish between  
10 related or linked IFQ accounts, making fair implementation and  
11 evaluation extremely difficult. All this is doing is taking from  
12 one group, or individual, and giving to another.

13  
14 I make a living on leasing and catching red snapper. I've been  
15 working my tail off, and putting money back to invest in buying  
16 shares for my future, but Amendment 63 is a little discouraging  
17 for a fisherman like myself. Why would I put money into a system  
18 that could potentially be taken away from me? It doesn't sound  
19 like a very good business plan.

20  
21 I believe that Amendment 63 will devalue the IFQ program, and it  
22 provides little to no economic benefit for anyone like myself  
23 trying to get into the fishery as a future shareholder, and that's  
24 all I have to say today.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Will. Do we have any  
27 questions? Not seeing any, thanks again, Will. Next, in the room,  
28 we'll go to Andy Egeland, and next online will be Bubba Cochrane.

29  
30 **MR. ANDY EGELAND:** Can you hear me? Good morning. My name is  
31 Andy Egeland. I'm a commercial fisherman out of Florida. I'm  
32 here in regard to the red grouper distribution through allocations.

33  
34 I am a shareholder. I 've been in the industry for fifteen years,  
35 and I have never owned a share. I've leased 100 percent of our  
36 fish all the time. I paid over \$5.25 for red snapper this year.  
37 Red Grouper was at a low, but we have seen it as high as \$3.50  
38 throughout our history.

39  
40 I do not believe that this program was intended to place a value  
41 on the fishery of any kind, and, as a fisherman, I have a hard  
42 time believing that somebody else owns that allocation before I  
43 catch it, and just that basic premise is something that we struggle  
44 with every single day.

45  
46 If we have the opportunity to get shares, as a fisherman, and not  
47 lease them, and just go catch them, that's what we believe the  
48 program was intended to do, to give the fisherman the opportunity

1 to catch those fish. You're not supposed to deny us access to the  
2 fishery.

3  
4 When I called my fish broker, to see if I could get red snapper  
5 for the first six months, he said they're not coming off it,  
6 they're not coming off it, they're not coming off it, and, finally,  
7 he says that I've got some red snapper at \$5.25.

8  
9 I'm not a rich man, and that doesn't sound like much to some  
10 people, but \$5,000 to me is a new fuel tank, it's bait, it's ice,  
11 it's work on my trailer, it's food in the refrigerator, and clothes  
12 on my kids' backs.

13  
14 This opportunity for you guys to make a difference in my life would  
15 mean a lot, and I had a council member say that she was wondering  
16 where all the representation of the fishermen in these meetings  
17 are. Well, as a fisherman, I feel that nobody cares anyway. It's  
18 just part of life, and it's something that we say on the boat.  
19 Like you're hurt? Well, nobody cares. You can't do that? Nobody  
20 cares. You have the opportunity to care today. Please take that  
21 opportunity and give us the access to fish. Thank you.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Do we have any questions for  
24 Andy? We do. Mr. Strelcheck.

25  
26 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Andy, for being here. You said you've  
27 been leasing allocation for fifteen years. It sounds like you've  
28 been part of the program pretty much since the beginning. How  
29 much red grouper do you typically land in a year, and how much do  
30 you typically lease?

31  
32 **MR. EGELAND:** It has ranged between 40,000 pounds to 10,000 pounds.  
33 I mean, there's been a considerable fluctuation between --  
34 Sometimes I have other vessels that work with me, and sometimes I  
35 work by myself, and, currently, we're back to by myself, and so  
36 every little bit helps.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Any other questions? Seeing  
39 none, thanks again. We're going to move online to Bubba Cochrane.  
40 Bubba, you have to unmute yourself. Bubba, can you unmute  
41 yourself? Okay. We'll circle back to Bubba. Let's go back in  
42 the room. Paul Reeves.

43  
44 **MR. PAUL REEVES:** Good morning. My name is Paul Reeves. I'm a  
45 commercial fisherman out of Steinhatchee, Florida. I primarily  
46 target red grouper, and I'm here to oppose Amendment 63 on the  
47 allocation, the modification of the red grouper allocations.

1 For fifteen years, you've promoted -- Well, let me qualify. I  
2 came in after the initial allocation. I've bought my way into  
3 this fishery. For fifteen years, I've invested every dime I've  
4 made into the fishery. I didn't just stand in line and wait for  
5 somebody to give me something, and I think that's what this is.

6  
7 The model that you guys projected to us was buy your shares, lease  
8 your way, lease fish, work your way into the industry, build up,  
9 grow your business.

10  
11 Well, it seems like now there's a third category, that we stand  
12 aside and wait for you to give us something for free, and then,  
13 secondary, I don't like the fact that, in this program, the biggest  
14 players are going to get the largest portion of this. That doesn't  
15 make sense.

16  
17 This was initially designed to help the little guy, but yet, in  
18 turn, I think my understanding of it is that the biggest players  
19 are going to end up with the lion's share of this, and that -- I  
20 mean, you just handed my competition more fish, which really I  
21 don't think is right.

22  
23 Also, you know, when I purchased my fish and the allocation was  
24 lowered, you took my fish away. Now that 62 is coming back, and  
25 you're giving our fish back, I'm not getting 100 percent of what  
26 I've purchased with my money. You know, I'm trying to run a  
27 business here, and I'm not out there just playing.

28  
29 One other mention here with the 503(c), and I think there needs to  
30 be an exemption for them. I utilize the one, the leased fish,  
31 when I need to, but I think there needs -- There's a place for  
32 them in this system. Thank you.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Paul. Do we have any questions for  
35 Paul? Not seeing any, thank you, Paul. Next, online, is William  
36 Atkins. William, you have to unmute yourself.

37  
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** You've already heard from Will, unless there is  
39 --

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We'll have to circle back, William.  
42 We're going to go back in the room, to Jim Zurbrick.

43  
44 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak.  
45 Jim Zurbrick from Steinhatchee, Florida. I'm one year and two  
46 months boatless, but, if you all remember, I used to hold up my  
47 data from Mote Laboratory, because I had cameras on my boat. Well,  
48 now I don't have that to hold up, but I wish that everyone would



1 get a chance to talk to the folks from Mote. I'm a huge camera  
2 supporter. I think it's the future of the commercial fishing  
3 industry, and I would like to see it be the future of the  
4 recreational fishery. Okay.

5  
6 I'm on the ad hoc advisory panel, and we looked at 63. I voted  
7 for the motion that we pass 59. It was always the concept, and  
8 Leanne Bosarge was a leader in this, that we pass the permit  
9 requirement and see what happens. Do we loosen up some shares,  
10 which in turn loosens up allocation?

11  
12 There are folks that, regardless of whether it was a dollar a pound  
13 for red grouper, will never buy. It seems like they're the people,  
14 because somebody that has been in the business for fifteen years  
15 had a chance to buy red grouper when it was two and three and four  
16 dollars, fifteen years ago, okay, and I know people get it in their  
17 mind that they don't want to buy, and it's ridiculous, and it's  
18 wrong, and it's a public resource, but this fishery works, okay?

19  
20 I didn't know. I didn't know, when we developed this program,  
21 what we would end up with, but we really do have a smooth-running  
22 fishery management plan with our IFQ, and so I would like to see  
23 59 passed. This is sad. This probably should have been one of  
24 the easiest things there was to pass, and it's just lingering now.

25  
26 The other thing is the charter data, the SEFHIER. We've got to  
27 move. These guys want this, and I think there's a hold up because,  
28 the more that the charter fleet becomes accountable, more  
29 accountable, like they were before it was ruled illegal, that the  
30 states are not going to be able to try to take over the federal  
31 charter fleet.

32  
33 I understand all of us who are smart enough to figure out strategy  
34 know that we're making this very slow in the process, and this  
35 should be done very quickly, and I thank you. That's about all  
36 I've got. Thank you very much.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jim. Do we have any questions? Not  
39 seeing any, next up, on the line, is Ryan Bradley.

40  
41 **MR. RYAN BRADLEY:** Hello.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Hi, Ryan.

44  
45 **MR. BRADLEY:** Ryan Bradley here. I'm the Executive Director of  
46 Mississippi Commercial Fisheries United. I'm a fifth-generation  
47 commercial fisherman. I've been reef fish fishing in the Gulf  
48 commercially for the last fifteen years.

1  
2 I appreciate the work you guys are doing on Amendment 63. We fully  
3 support that for Mississippi, even though we don't have much red  
4 grouper over here. I think it's very important Gulf-wide that we  
5 set up these types of set-asides. They're fully authorized in the  
6 Magnuson-Stevens, to have these types of set-asides, that should  
7 have been set up in the beginning of these programs, but there's  
8 a lot more work that needs to be done.

9  
10 These IFQ programs have been a disaster for fishing communities  
11 all across America, and probably the worst case is here in the  
12 Gulf. The trend is consolidation, and just really, really bad  
13 situations for our fishermen, that they shouldn't have to be in,  
14 and so this Amendment 63 is important, because it sets up an access  
15 point for these fishermen, where they don't have to depend on these  
16 Shareholder Alliance people, because what's happening is, when  
17 these real fishermen come and speak out about the problems they're  
18 facing in this IFQ fishery, these Shareholder Alliance people are  
19 threatening, and they're blackballing these people, and they're  
20 keeping them from having access to these fisheries for exercising  
21 their First Amendment rights.

22  
23 I encourage the council to move swiftly on this 63, and then  
24 immediately start looking to expand it to other species, and this  
25 is one step in the right direction to help right the huge injustice  
26 that has happened here in our commercial fisheries for far too  
27 long now with these IFQ programs.

28  
29 These IFQ programs were set up by a bunch of frauds, far-left  
30 liberal leftists and the Obama administration that set all this  
31 crap up to allow this to proliferate. We must reject these  
32 policies fully, and we need to start thinking about the future of  
33 commercial fisheries in the Gulf outside of these catch-share  
34 programs. We must sever them completely, and move away from them  
35 completely.

36  
37 All this talk about recreational state management, you all need to  
38 start thinking about commercial state management. Let's get away  
39 from this IFQ scam. It's a complete and total scam, that has been  
40 perpetrated on American fishermen for far too long. I'm calling  
41 on you guys to stand up and start taking actions to move away from  
42 it completely and fully.

43  
44 Let's do something good for the future of our fishermen, our young  
45 kids that are coming up. Let's give them some real opportunities  
46 to make our fisheries great. That's all I have for you guys today.  
47 I'll stand by if you have any questions. Keep up the great work,  
48 and I thank you for your service to the United States of America.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ryan. Do we have any questions for  
3 Ryan? Not seeing any, thanks again for your comments. Next, in  
4 the room, Trenton Knepp, and he'll be followed by Johnny Williams  
5 online.

6  
7 **MR. TRENTON KNEPP:** Hi. My name is Trenton Knepp. I'm a commercial  
8 grouper fishing fishermen, and a stone crabber. My parents have  
9 had commercial boats since I was like that tall of a little kid,  
10 and so I've been in the industry a real long time, and I'm here to  
11 plead on your behalf to end this IFQ robbery. We're being  
12 extorted.

13  
14 I look at this IFQ situation as this is worse than the Minnesota  
15 daycare fraud by 10,000. In the Minnesota daycare fraud, the  
16 government handed a resource to individuals and said go help the  
17 people. They took the resource, and they bought cars, and they  
18 bought homes, and they bought whatever the heck they wanted to  
19 buy.

20  
21 The same situation over in the fishery. The government gives a  
22 resource to individuals and says that no value is to ever be placed  
23 upon these shares, and they didn't help the fishermen. No  
24 fishermen got any kind of anything, other than gouged and  
25 blackballed. If you speak up against them, you get blackballed,  
26 and it's really hard to get fish. It's insane. The amount of  
27 pressure for speaking out is crazy.

28  
29 Red snapper, like the gentleman that spoke earlier, \$5.25 a pound,  
30 and a lot of people have said, Trent, why are you even showing up  
31 to the meeting anymore, and the grouper quota is so cheap, you  
32 know, and just shut up and go fish, and what's the big deal?

33  
34 Well, After Amendment 53, we were being gouged \$3.50 a pound for  
35 red grouper, and I can show the paperwork. I paid \$3.50 a pound.  
36 The second the quota gets cut again, which we know eventually it  
37 will happen, the knives will come back out, and the backstabbing  
38 will begin. We need to set it back to where the law was intended,  
39 no value to be placed upon the share. That's all I've got, and I  
40 appreciate your questions, feedback, anything you've got. Thank  
41 you.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Trent. I have a question from Mr.  
44 Geeslin.

45  
46 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Trent. I appreciate you speaking out.  
47 Directly from Amendment 63, or the red snapper amendment, how would  
48 you directly benefit from that?

1  
2 **MR. KNEPP:** Personally, I don't see myself benefiting huge on the  
3 reallocation. I look at it more as a crack in the armor as the  
4 ball is starting to roll the right way. Like I don't think it's  
5 going to make a gigantic difference, but anything helps. I mean,  
6 to be honest with you, I lost my home two years ago in the  
7 hurricanes, and the times have been really, really tough for us,  
8 and the last thing I should have to do, as I'm struggling to  
9 survive, is to pay that money.

10  
11 As far as how it would help me on the red snapper, I think it's  
12 just a doorway to get into that area. It's interesting that we  
13 keep getting all these people speaking from Texas against red  
14 grouper when they don't even catch red grouper. They know it's a  
15 doorway.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Trent. Any other questions? Not seeing  
18 any, thanks again. Next, we're going to move, online, to Mr.  
19 Johnny Williams. Johnny, unmute yourself. Johnny, you have to  
20 unmute yourself. All right. We're going to have to move on.  
21 We'll circle back, Johnny. Let's go back in the room. Jerome  
22 Young.

23  
24 **MR. JEROME YOUNG:** Good morning. I appreciate this opportunity to  
25 speak. My name is Jerome Young. I'm the Executive Director for  
26 the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association. I want to  
27 address an ongoing discussion about king mackerel abundance and  
28 the narrative that declining landings may reflect a decline in the  
29 stock.

30  
31 As you know, that conclusion is not supported by the last best  
32 available science. The last full stock assessment was completed  
33 in 2014, and updated in 2019, and a new assessment is now underway.

34  
35 Still, we must recognize an important limitation. The last  
36 assessment found no clear problem with the stock, and, as currently  
37 designed, stock assessments cannot determine whether kingfish have  
38 shifted further offshore or away from traditional fishing grounds,  
39 despite anecdotal evidence suggesting that possibility.

40  
41 Across the Gulf, fishermen are reporting two different realities.  
42 Many fishermen testify that kingfish are simply less abundant in  
43 the places they've always caught them. Others, including  
44 experienced commercial fishermen, report seeing large bodies of  
45 kingfish and bait far offshore, in 400 to 500 feet of water, in  
46 areas where these fish have never historically been observed.  
47 Both sets of reports can be true, and, in my opinion, both point  
48 to the same conclusion.

1  
2 At a minimum, I would suggest we need updated modern tagging work  
3 to understand how kingfish are moving today. The tagging studies  
4 we rely on date back to the 1970s and the mid-1980s, and were  
5 probably okay then, but the Gulf has changed dramatically. The  
6 northern Gulf has endured oil spills, dispersants, massive  
7 freshwater pulses, and removal of fish aggregating structures.  
8 The temperature and salinity patterns have shifted, and migrating  
9 timing may have shifted as well.

10  
11 If kingfish have moved further offshore, or deeper, or along new  
12 routes, our current assessment framework is not designed to detect  
13 that, to my knowledge. Landings cannot detect that, and dockside  
14 sampling cannot detect it, and so I would ask the council to  
15 prioritize the modern Gulf Atlantic-wide kingfish tagging program  
16 using today's technology, maybe satellite tags, coordinating  
17 tracking across the Atlantic and Gulf, with state, federal, and  
18 academic partners.

19  
20 We need to answer fundamental questions of are these fish mixing  
21 differently than they did forty or fifty years ago? Are they  
22 shifting further offshore in response to temperature, salinity, or  
23 forage changes? Are eastern, western, and northern components  
24 behaving differently than assumed? Are we managing a stock whose  
25 center of gravity has simply literally moved?

26  
27 I believe we need to answer these questions as a fundamental part  
28 of any attempt to manage this stock. If kingfish are in trouble,  
29 we want to help solve the problem, and I think that starts with  
30 recognizing existing testing and sampling methods may require  
31 revision, peer review, and it may be necessary to seek fresh  
32 perspectives, and new input, to ensure their effectiveness and  
33 accuracy. Thank you for your time.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jerome. Do we have any questions?  
36 Thank you for your public comment. We'll move online to Mark  
37 Friudenberg. Mark, you'll have to unmute yourself.

38  
39 **MR. MARK FRIUDENBERG:** This is Mark Friudenberg from Freeport,  
40 Texas, Captain Mark's Seafood. I'm calling in on the opposition  
41 of this proposal on the red grouper. I mean, there are several  
42 things in it.

43  
44 You know, this is a distribution of the red grouper shares that,  
45 you know, have not been earned, you know, that, basically, they're  
46 just giving those shares, you know, to these fishermen, when  
47 there's availability for those guys, and they could buy it just  
48 like all the rest of us have.

1  
2 I've been in this industry for forty years, and, you know, all the  
3 shares that we've ever gotten, and not all of them, but the  
4 majority, we've had to bust our butt, and not that the other  
5 fishermen don't, but we had to purchase those. That's one fact of  
6 it.

7  
8 The other point I have is the enforcement. When you start  
9 distributing all these shares out, you're going to have a problem  
10 with enforcement, you know, with the people, and, you know, the  
11 third part about it is, you know, when you start cutting the pie  
12 too thin, everybody goes hungry, and it opens up for illegal  
13 fishing. That's my concerns of it, and, you know, you're talking  
14 about the red grouper fishery right now, and what other fisheries  
15 is this going to bleed over to, and that's my big concern about  
16 it, but I appreciate your time. Thank you.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mark. Do we have any questions? We  
19 do. Mr. Geeslin.

20  
21 **MR. GEESLIN:** Hi, Mark. Dakus Geeslin, from Texas. It's good to  
22 hear your voice again.

23  
24 **MR. FRIUDENBERG:** Yes, sir.

25  
26 **MR. GEESLIN:** Regarding red grouper, do you have shares, or do you  
27 lease shares for red grouper?

28  
29 **MR. FRIUDENBERG:** I do not have shares of the red grouper, and so,  
30 you know, that's more -- That's kind of out of our area, and, just  
31 to be really honest there, Dr. Geeslin, our concern is, and, you  
32 know, I think I speak for most of the guys in Texas, is that this  
33 is going to bleed over, and so are we going to start this program  
34 for the red snapper fisheries, or are we going to do it for the  
35 different fisheries, and so where does this really stop at, you  
36 know?

37  
38 You know, like I said earlier in my comment, you know, there are  
39 shares out there available to buy, and we've all busted our butts,  
40 even at a time when we didn't know if we were going to -- If we  
41 were going to have a livelihood anymore, and we busted our butts.  
42 Like I said, not that all fishermen -- You've got to bust your  
43 butt, and we all know that, and I highly respect all of them, but  
44 the thing about it is that we had to get our money, and we had to  
45 scrimp, and we had to save to buy what we have.

46  
47 Then, for those just to be redistributed out, in another free basic  
48 government program -- You know, I compare it to people, a lot of

1 times, like this. It's like, back in the day, if I went and bought  
2 Amazon stock for dirt cheap, and then that Amazon stock, you know,  
3 excelled, and the price went up on it, I mean, should I be able to  
4 -- Or somebody be able to come back and go, well, you know, this  
5 ain't fair. It ain't fair, you know, and I need you to sell me  
6 that Amazon stock for whatever it was back in the day, and that's  
7 basically what this boils down to.

8  
9 Like I said, I know your red grouper shares are about \$10 a share.  
10 That's a very, very affordable price, and, you know, also, by  
11 purchasing those shares, it shows that you're vested into this  
12 industry, and I think, by being very vested in this industry,  
13 you're less likely to do illegal fishing, you know, do the  
14 overharvesting, or anything like that.

15  
16 I know, in our area, we have seen this, that the guys that --  
17 Believe me, and I am not calling out anybody, okay, and I'm just  
18 saying that, when you have very limited shares, you're more apt to  
19 put a few more fish on the boat, and not report those, and so,  
20 there, it screws up your whole reporting program, and so I see no  
21 -- I see no good in any of this.

22  
23 I think that it's -- You know, I don't feel like it's a good  
24 program, and, like I said, I respect all fishermen. Fishermen are  
25 hard workers, and I respect them very much, but I think, to get  
26 into the program, you should need to purchase them, just like I  
27 did.

28  
29 I got a very minimal, when they went to the snapper shares, and I  
30 took what I had. I put myself on the line, and I put all the chips  
31 in the middle of the table to purchase these shares. It was a  
32 good investment on my part. You know, let them do their due  
33 diligence, and let them do the same.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mark.

36  
37 **MR. FRIUDENBERG:** Yes, sir. I appreciate your time, sir.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Appreciate you. Next, we're going to  
40 move on to Paul Loughridge, and next, online, will be Larry  
41 Huntley.

42  
43 **MR. PAUL LOUGHRIDGE:** My name is Paul Loughridge. I'm a fish house  
44 owner in Yankeetown, Florida, and commercial fisherman. Amendment  
45 63 is not going to help the commercial fishing industry, and the  
46 council should not move forward with it.

47  
48 I'm in agreement with some of the other guys. If you buy into

1 something, or, in my case, in 1998, I bought my first boat and  
2 permit, and I qualified for the quota by working hard. I also,  
3 you know, have bought some shares out over through the years.

4  
5 I just think that this gives you ownership, and you care about  
6 this fishery, and you care about what goes on. It was a big part  
7 of the process, and, you know, trying to move this IFQ program  
8 forward when it first came out, and so I think it's been a good  
9 thing for the fishery.

10  
11 Again, it gives you a vested interest in owning shares, and I just  
12 think it's been a great program. I'm against this. I just -- I  
13 think that a giveaway is never going to be good. Thank you, guys,  
14 very much.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Paul. Do we have any questions for  
17 Paul? Mr. Strelcheck.

18  
19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Paul, for being here. You've been  
20 fishing, obviously, for quite some time. You qualified for some  
21 shares, it sounds like.

22  
23 **MR. LOUGHRIDGE:** Yes.

24  
25 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Under Amendment 63, in order to qualify for the  
26 quota pool, you will have either had to have held shares or leased  
27 quota in the last several years, and so how do you view that as  
28 similar or different to kind of your experience with regard to  
29 entering the fishery?

30  
31 **MR. LOUGHRIDGE:** Well, I just think that, you know, as I understand  
32 it with Amendment 63, you're going to take from people that either  
33 qualified or have bought in. I just don't see that as being a  
34 fair way to do it. We've -- You know, I've had to buy shares over,  
35 you know, the course of my career. I saved my money, bought a  
36 fish house, and, you know, have built this up, and so I just don't  
37 think, in any sense, giving -- You know, right now, you can get  
38 red grouper shares for hardly anything.

39  
40 Gosh, I think I leased them last year for fifteen-cents, and I  
41 don't even think the guy paid, and I didn't even call him, and so,  
42 you know, it's just one of those things right now that you can  
43 get. The shares are, you know, not super expensive either. Buying  
44 into something, putting your money in, and working hard for it I  
45 think is the way, you know, to have value in this, and so that's  
46 my opinion.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Paul. Any other questions? Not seeing



1 any, thank you again. All right. We're going to go online to  
2 Larry Huntley.

3  
4 **MR. LARRY HUNTLEY:** Hello?

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Larry. We can hear you.

7  
8 **MR. HUNTLEY:** Yes, sir. Can you hear me okay?

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes. Go ahead.

11  
12 **MR. HUNTLEY:** Good morning. Larry Huntley, out of Pensacola, in  
13 the red snapper fishery, a very small player, but I got started in  
14 the fishery back in 2007, when it went into the catch share  
15 program, and I understood the rules at the time, and what was going  
16 to be required, and I made business plans based on the rules, and  
17 I never violated them, never had a violation. I've been at it  
18 now, well, since 2007, and so 2007 to 2026, and never had a  
19 violation.

20  
21 What I wanted to just mention is the idea of a grandfather. For  
22 those of us that went into it as fishermen, and did what we were  
23 supposed to do, and have done it for twenty-something years, and  
24 made plans, and I'm not able to fish as much as I used to. I'm  
25 seventy-nine, and I just can't do it, and I had counted on being  
26 able to maybe do some fishing, at least continue to lease some,  
27 and so on.

28  
29 That was based on how I went into the program, the guidance that  
30 I've followed, and now we're looking to change that, if I  
31 understand right, and not try to grandfather.

32  
33 It just seems like, you know, a way would be the folks that have  
34 been in it, grandfathered, to come up with a control data, I guess  
35 you would call it, and, from here forward, here are the new rules,  
36 and everybody knows what they are, and you move forward, and, maybe  
37 twenty years from now, you decide to say change it again, and, you  
38 know, folks that have lived by the rules for the next twenty years,  
39 let them continue as they've done, and then grandfather, and you  
40 make new rules, and people know what they are, and they move  
41 forward.

42  
43 I realize that it wasn't designed to be a retirement program, and  
44 I recognize that, but I guess we would need to remember that,  
45 people that are in the fishing business, that don't have fish  
46 houses or family to pass the business on to, you get old, and, you  
47 know, you kind of count on how you've been operating.

1 You count on the rules. I'm a rule follower, and I've always, you  
2 know, just made my decisions based on, you know, what the fishery  
3 rules were, and so I guess that I would just like for you folks to  
4 rethink the idea of possibly grandfathering, and, you know, no  
5 passing down. You know, I'm the one that's made plans based on my  
6 involvement in the fishery. I'm not interested in passing it down  
7 to my daughter or granddaughters or anything like that once I'm  
8 gone.

9  
10 You know, the shares then maybe go back to Marine Fisheries and,  
11 you know, redistribute it, because I do believe that we've got to  
12 encourage young people to get into the fishery. There's no  
13 question about that, but, anyway, that's the main thing I wanted  
14 to do, is ask the council members to reconsider the idea of a  
15 possible grandfather.

16  
17 One of the thoughts -- If I'm forced to divest to get rid of my  
18 shares, I'm not even sure how I would do that at this point, and  
19 a question I would have is, if I can't get rid of my shares, and  
20 they go back to Marine Fisheries, what happens to my shares? Are  
21 they just given out, or does -- If they go back to Marine Fisheries,  
22 where do they go? Anyway, gentlemen and ladies, I appreciate you  
23 all taking time to listen, and I would ask you to reconsider the  
24 possibility of a grandfather situation. Thank you.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Larry. Do we have any questions? I'm  
27 not seeing any. Thanks again, Larry. We're going to move, in the  
28 room, to Eric Brazer, and, after Eric, we're going to try Mr. Bubba  
29 again virtually.

30  
31 **MR. ERIC BRAZER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Eric Brazer,  
32 Deputy Director, Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance.  
33 I apologize for breaking your stuff. I appreciate the opportunity  
34 to talk today.

35  
36 I do want to start out with Amendment 59A. We appreciate the  
37 advisory panel's input and the council moving this forward. It's  
38 getting on time to land this thing, and so we started this in  
39 October of 2023, but the roots go back more than ten years. We  
40 support the timeline, looking at a public hearing document in  
41 August and going to final action in October.

42  
43 There is one thing I do want to hit on in particular, and it  
44 shouldn't be a surprise. You know, the council is prioritizing  
45 promoting participation by fishermen engaged in the harvest of  
46 reef fish. We hear this in 59, and we hear it in 63, and we hear  
47 it in the general comments.

1 Legitimate fishermen-run non-profits help make this happen. These  
2 programs go out, and they acquire allocation. Oftentimes, that  
3 allocation is not easily accessible to fishermen, especially the  
4 smaller operators and the new entrants. We make this allocation  
5 available to those active harvesters. We've been doing this since  
6 2015, and we've worked with nearly eighty fishermen in almost the  
7 last ten years to make this happen.

8  
9 This program, and programs like it, help new entrants access quota,  
10 help fishermen build ownership over time, and help allocation reach  
11 harvesters who otherwise would have a hard time accessing it. This  
12 is exactly what you're trying to do, and this is what we're trying  
13 to do. We're trying to do the same thing. We're just coming at  
14 it from a bottom-up, community-based fisherman perspective, and  
15 I'm very concerned about loopholes, too.

16  
17 You know, we've put too much time and effort into building this  
18 thing to have somebody come around and subvert it. I'm not --  
19 Sorry, and I'm getting passionate. I'm not looking to create  
20 opportunities for workarounds, and I want to work with you guys.  
21 I hear your concerns about potential loopholes, and I appreciate  
22 the opportunity to address them and come back in August with that.  
23 I've got my homework to do, and I appreciate it.

24  
25 I'm running out of time. 63, you know, we still have a lot of  
26 concerns that we've raised over time that haven't yet been  
27 addressed. You know, what are those metrics for success? Give us  
28 more certainty around how you're going to measure discards.  
29 Explain how it's fair to take from fishermen that have invested in  
30 this fishery. Some of those fishermen are carrying debt right now  
31 on those share purchases.

32  
33 A majority of the industry doesn't like this. Most of the comments  
34 submitted to-date have raised concerns, and the AP doesn't support  
35 moving forward today with it. There's not much more that we can  
36 say. I just -- I don't think this is the impactful solution that  
37 you're looking for.

38  
39 In the last five seconds, real quick, Amendment 55, you know, we  
40 don't have a big dog in this fight, but I just wanted to flag that  
41 this appears to be a reallocation away from the Gulf to the South  
42 Atlantic in both mutton and yellowtail, and so I just want to point  
43 out that it's going to be important for the council to follow its  
44 own allocation policy, and NOAA's allocation policy, to make sure  
45 that this reallocation, if it does happen, is properly justified.  
46 Thank you for the extra time.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Eric. Do I have any questions? Not

1 seeing any.  
2  
3 **MR. BRAZER:** Appreciate it.  
4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. All right. Let's try online with  
6 Bubba Cochrane.  
7  
8 **MS. BERNADINE ROY:** Mr. Cochrane, you'll have to unmute your line  
9 to speak.  
10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We're going to move on. Let's go back in the  
12 room.  
13  
14 **MR. BUBBA COCHRANE:** Hello.  
15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Bubba, is that you?  
17  
18 **MR. COCHRANE:** Yes. Can you hear me?  
19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Bubba.  
21  
22 **MR. COCHRANE:** Okay. Sorry about that. I just --  
23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Bubba, are you still with us?  
25  
26 **MR. COCHRANE:** Can you hear me?  
27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Now we can.  
29  
30 **MR. COCHRANE:** Okay. We'll try it. I'll try it again.  
31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead.  
33  
34 **MR. COCHRANE:** My name is Bubba Cochrane. I'm from Galveston,  
35 Texas. I've been commercial fishing since the early 1990s, during  
36 the derby fishery, and the mine-derbies, and now into IFQ. I  
37 primarily fish red snapper, owner/operator, and, real quick on the  
38 IFQ, I can't believe anyone would give testimony against the IFQ.  
39  
40 We wouldn't be here right now, basically fighting over red snapper,  
41 if it wasn't for the IFQ. It's been called a scam, or a gimmick,  
42 or whatever, but that has got to be coming from someone who is not  
43 a red snapper fisherman, or has not historically fished red snapper  
44 during the derby, when using the word "tough" is an understatement.  
45 You know, after the IFQ was implemented, fishing took off like  
46 crazy, I mean, and there's no reason for that to have happened  
47 without the change in the management to the IFQ.  
48

1 I'm also the president of the Shareholders Alliance, and so I can  
2 promise you that the Shareholders Alliance is not comprised of  
3 non-fishermen. Like I just said, I am a fisherman. I have IFQ  
4 shares. Since the beginning of the IFQ, I've landed all my shares.  
5 After I get done with that, I do get shares from other people, and  
6 so I am a 100 percent harvester and a member and president of the  
7 Shareholders Alliance.

8  
9 On Amendment 63, no, I'm not a grouper fisherman, but I think  
10 there's been enough testimony already given today to show that  
11 this is only going to set a precedent to move on to other fish. I  
12 think the first speaker even said this is an easier nut to crack  
13 than red snapper, which I agree with 100 percent. No one is  
14 expecting to get much pushback on red grouper, and so let's just  
15 go after the red grouper, and then the red snapper. I mean, that  
16 kind of makes sense from a strategic point.

17  
18 The only thing is there's so many people that have already bought  
19 red snapper, like myself, and we're looking forward to future  
20 increases, you know, by being in the IFQ like you're supposed to  
21 be, like we were told, you know, we were supposed to be doing it,  
22 and now, you know, future increases being set aside for people who  
23 don't want to pay for it, or say it's too expensive, and I don't  
24 see how that's going to make things any more fair. It seems to be  
25 the opposite of fair, really.

26  
27 I just hope that people would be more inclined to use other  
28 methods, like the Fisherman's Finance Program, or the quota bank,  
29 or a co-op, or even figure out their own way to access the fishery  
30 without asking to be in it for free. That's just not going to --  
31 That's just not going to work. That's all I have to say.

32  
33 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Bubba. Any questions? Not seeing any,  
34 thank you. We're going to come back in the room with Clay Shidler.

35  
36 **MR. CLAY SHIDLER:** My name is Clay Shidler, and I own Hang 'em  
37 High Sportfishing in Crystal River, Florida, as well as Shrimp  
38 Landing Marina. Thank you very much for allowing me a moment to  
39 speak.

40  
41 First, I would like to say that it's very important to the charter  
42 fishing sector to have SEFHIER re-established. I was on the AP  
43 for SEFHIER after it was dismantled, but it is very, very important  
44 to re-establish it, so that we can get quantifiable data on our  
45 fishery, and have a much better idea of what we're doing.

46  
47 I would also like to say that I oppose state management of the  
48 for-hire red snapper fishery, especially without SEFHIER being in

1 place. I think that's not a conversation that we can even have,  
2 based upon the way that we don't have data that can support it.

3  
4 We have a functioning system right now. We're staring at arguably  
5 one of the longest seasons in my memory as a young charter  
6 fisherman, and I'm very happy with where we're at right now in the  
7 federal for-hire sector, as far as red snapper go, and I think,  
8 moving forward, we should continue to stay with federal management  
9 of that sector, and that fishery. Thank you very much.

10  
11 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you. Any questions for Clay? Not seeing any,  
12 thank you, Clay. Sorry. Andy.

13  
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Clay, it's good to see you. I know you're a big  
15 gag fisherman, and I would love to hear what you're hearing about  
16 the gag, and seeing on the water for gag right now, knowing we're  
17 going to have a thirty-day season.

18  
19 **MR. SHIDLER:** So, understandably, I would always love a longer  
20 season for gags. I think that we're kind of on the right track  
21 from last year going into this year. We are seeing a lot of gags  
22 that were born in the closure, and so I think this is the first  
23 year we've really seen -- Obviously, we've seen upticks in gags,  
24 and everybody has said they've seen a pile of gags, but, at this  
25 point, we're seeing fish that are an actual product of the  
26 rebuilding plan, and it's been very encouraging. We're seeing a  
27 lot of fish from between eighteen and twenty-six inches enter the  
28 fishery.

29  
30 I do a lot of catch-and-release fishing for gags, and so my gag  
31 fishing is not limited to the fifteen-day season, or the thirty-  
32 day season. They are a shallow-water target for us, and we're  
33 able to catch them with little to no adverse effect on the fishery,  
34 but we are seeing a lot of fish, a lot of fish in the size class  
35 that we should see, based upon the management efforts that you  
36 guys have put in place over the past few years.

37  
38 **DR. BANKS:** All right. We have another question. Mr. Sanchez.

39  
40 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hi, and thanks for coming. How are the sharks  
41 treating you?

42  
43 **MR. SHIDLER:** We're having a lot of issues with sharks, and it's  
44 predominantly sandbars, and I think that, you know, in years past,  
45 and I'm going to say, eight years ago, we had some shark problems,  
46 but it would tend to ebb and flow, and they were in very finite  
47 regions.

1 My zone that my offshore boats fish in is from twenty miles north  
2 of the Middle Grounds to the Elbow. We spend a lot of time at  
3 eighty feet to 140 feet, fishing east of the grounds and just west.  
4 There are now sharks everywhere, and they're very keen on following  
5 the boat, which is something that we didn't see historically.

6  
7 Now, if you fish a spot, and you choose to idle a half mile to the  
8 next one, the sharks will follow you, and it's to the point that  
9 you can spin your boat around, and you can mark them on sonar, and  
10 they're fifty feet behind the boat, and, obviously, modern  
11 electronics let us do that, but we are seeing it. These fish are  
12 following us. They have picked up on all the cues, and so we're  
13 seeing a lot of issues with sharks being habitual repeat offenders.  
14 This is not just a --

15  
16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Just to follow-up, if you had a guesstimate, and I  
17 know that changes day to day, about what percentage of fish are  
18 you losing to the sharks that you hit?

19  
20 **MR. SHIDLER:** So that would change based upon the region that you  
21 fish, but I will tell you, right now, north of the Middle Grounds,  
22 between the Middle Grounds and Apalachicola, St. George Island, is  
23 probably the worst sharks that we're seeing. It changes based  
24 upon the species. They do eat less red grouper.

25  
26 Historically, red snapper and gag grouper tend to be their  
27 favorites, if we're going to be honest. I would say, on your red  
28 snapper and your gag grouper, somewhere around 15 to 20 percent.  
29 We don't -- We can't always quantify that, because we don't always  
30 see the head, but, red grouper, it's probably a little bit less,  
31 and that's over the course of a day.

32  
33 In a standard charter, we fish for about six hours, and our average  
34 seems to be between three and five attacks a day, and that's trying  
35 to aggressively stay away from them, and moving when you get  
36 sharks, and so --

37  
38 **DR. BANKS:** All right. Not seeing any more questions, thank you,  
39 Clay. We're going to go online to Dale Woodruff.

40  
41 **MR. DALE WOODRUFF:** Good morning. Do you all read me?

42  
43 **DR. BANKS:** Yes. We've got you.

44  
45 **MR. WOODRUFF:** Awesome. This is Captain Dale Woodruff, president  
46 of the Alabama Charter Fishing Association, and also owner of two  
47 federally-permitted vessels. One is a multi-passenger, and one is  
48 a six-pack boat.

1  
2 As far as the Alabama Charter Fishing Association is concerned, we  
3 are still not in favor, or do not want, any state management of  
4 our federal for-hire fishery. We would like to get the SEFHIER  
5 program going, and we would love to get some good real-time data,  
6 and that's something that we just don't really think the states  
7 can do.

8  
9 Just being an observation of what we see, it just seems like  
10 there's just some rogue situations of states going over their  
11 quota, states wanting to shift quota from one area of the Gulf to  
12 the other, to what they think they need to match their needs.

13  
14 Well, yes, that's going to happen if you have your seasons open as  
15 long as they are, and then have a higher bag limit. Well, of  
16 course, you're going to need more fish, but we've got to keep in  
17 mind that we do have a historical catch asset to that, too, but,  
18 yes, let's get the SEFHIER going for the charter-for-hire boats.

19  
20 Then the turtle gear, and I do like what Troy was talking about  
21 yesterday. That definitely needs to be changed, and just keep in  
22 mind that there's only a few, compared to federal boats, compared  
23 to all the other private rec boats going out in the Gulf, and they  
24 don't have to have that turtle gear. I think everybody should  
25 have to have it.

26  
27 Then it seems like the only people that are in favor of the federal  
28 for-hire -- Or the state federal for-hire takeover are people that  
29 don't have permits. I mean, I've been to your meetings, and I've  
30 heard them on the phone, and it seems like some guy from Louisiana  
31 will call up and say he's in favor of it, but he don't have a  
32 federal boat, and I don't even think he fishes, and then a guy in  
33 a suit and tie will stand up behind the podium and say their state  
34 wants to take it over, but, you know, there's no skin in the game,  
35 except for a speech and an appointment.

36  
37 Then, you know, we are concerned about state takeover. I know, at  
38 the last council meeting, one of your council members made a  
39 comment about states cooking the books, and it seems like some of  
40 the people took offense to that, but, you know, at one time, I was  
41 at a sermon, and the preacher man says, if you throw a rock at a  
42 pack of dogs, the one that gets hit is the one that yelps, and  
43 it's just I do not -- I don't believe the states could do a good  
44 job for the federal boats, and that's all I've got to say.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dale. Do we have any questions for  
47 Dale? Not seeing any, thank you, Dale. We're going to move on,  
48 in the room, to Sean Heverin, and then next, online, we're going



1 to try Mr. Johnny Williams.

2  
3 **MR. SEAN HEVERIN:** Sean Heverin, and I own four commercial vessels  
4 in the Gulf of Mexico, three longliners that fish primarily the  
5 eastern Gulf, but they also travel to Louisiana and Texas, and one  
6 bandit boat in Texas.

7  
8 I've invested most of my life savings into buying shares, boats,  
9 permits, et cetera. I'm about seven months deep into trying to  
10 get a loan through the Fishery Finance Program, but I'm still  
11 unsuccessful at this point, and so I don't know how many more  
12 months it will take to get a loan.

13  
14 Real quick, I'm just going to say I'm in support of Amendment 63.  
15 I've stated in previous Gulf Council public comments about that.  
16 I think it's good for the fishermen and me, as a shareholder who  
17 has invested a lot of money into it, I still think it's a good  
18 idea, but I want to move to I think it was the seafood competitive  
19 -- The seafood competitiveness from the President.

20  
21 I think one thing that could help our longliners here in the  
22 eastern Gulf is when they fish outside of fifty fathoms for  
23 deepwater groupers and tiles, I think that, if they were to remove  
24 the hook limit, it may make them more competitive. It might make  
25 them more successful on their trips in the deep water.

26  
27 I think that it can help the boats effectively fish better if they  
28 can maybe run multiple sets, have one set soaking and another set  
29 that they're putting out, or hauling in, and they rotate, because  
30 I fished west of the 85-30 line for about five years, five to six  
31 years, between Panama City to Texas, and I would routinely run  
32 multiple sets at the same time, two to four sets, depending on  
33 where I was fishing, and I think that the fishermen in the eastern  
34 Gulf are fishing at a disadvantage in the fifty fathoms, but we're  
35 fishing outside of fifty fathoms, and so I think that would be a  
36 positive thing, if they were able to remove the hook limit outside  
37 of fifty fathoms for longliners in the eastern Gulf.

38  
39 Then I've heard a lot of people speak about the shark and dolphin  
40 issues. I think I've said before that, if we can't really harvest  
41 the sharks, because we're unable to sell them or whatever, and  
42 can't really thin their population out, and, obviously, we can't  
43 harm any dolphins, then fish traps may be a good solution to avoid  
44 predation with the sharks and dolphins from eating our catch.

45  
46 You know, these fishermen have a lot of money invested in their  
47 trip, between field bait, ice, tackle, and then, for half their  
48 catch sometimes, it can be very extreme, it being eaten by sharks

1 and dolphins, and it's very frustrating to maintain a profitable  
2 business, and so that's all I have to say.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Sean. Do we have any questions? Mr.  
5 Geeslin.

6  
7 **MR. GEESLIN:** Sean, just to clarify, to make sure I heard you  
8 right, you're supportive of 63, and you've been fishing your own  
9 shares, and also you're seeing benefits to new entrants within  
10 that potential pilot program?

11  
12 **MR. HEVERIN:** I don't know so much about new entrants. I think  
13 that it benefits the fishermen who are producing fish, and catch  
14 history, and so, if you're actively fishing, and catching fish on  
15 your vessel, then I don't know that it really hurts you. I think  
16 it really just benefits you.

17  
18 Like me, for instance, I have three longline boats, and I think I  
19 have maybe 11,000 or 12,000 red grouper shares that I purchased.  
20 I wasn't given anything. I was too young to be around when all  
21 this stuff was handed out, and so I purchased everything, but,  
22 obviously, my three longline boats catch way more than what I own,  
23 and so we have a high landing history, and so, you know, if they  
24 did something like this, then, you know, it would just mean that  
25 I don't have to lease as much quota at the beginning of the year.

26  
27 A lot of these people that were commenting on here catch their own  
28 fish, and so I think it would benefit them as well, and so anybody  
29 with landing history I think it benefits, but, anybody that's not,  
30 you know, actively catching fish, then they may have to change  
31 their business plans around, and adjust things, and so forth.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Sean. Any other questions? Not seeing  
34 any, all right, and we're going to go online to Mr. Johnny  
35 Williams.

36  
37 **MS. ROY:** Mr. Williams, you'll have to unmute to speak.

38  
39 **MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS:** Good morning. Can you hear me now?

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead Johnny. We can hear you.

42  
43 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Good morning. This is Johnny Williams with Williams  
44 Party Boats in Galveston, Texas, a third-generation partyboat  
45 operator. I speak this morning against state management pertaining  
46 to for-hire vessels.

47  
48 I had a meeting with Robin Riechers several years ago to discuss

1 this matter, and I asked what assurance I would be given that I  
2 would be able to maintain my business if the State of Texas  
3 regulated my operation, and Robin was not able to give me an  
4 answer.

5  
6 While the program may benefit my business, I cannot agree to  
7 support an effort to delegate authority to the state blindly hoping  
8 for benevolent results. At least I know what I have to work with  
9 under federal control.

10  
11 In 2018, I addressed the absence of king mackerel in the Gulf of  
12 Mexico. I spoke to others across the Gulf, and unsurprisingly  
13 heard the same answer, that the king mackerel were in trouble.

14  
15 The lack of ability to catch the quota did not result in reducing  
16 the quota, but increased the bag limit from two to three. I think  
17 this was a mistake. We're experiencing the same with red snapper  
18 currently. Fishing has been on the wane for the last two years.  
19 I believe the effect of state management probably has been the  
20 culprit of this, and so that's another concern that I have with  
21 putting the for-hire sector under state management.

22  
23 I think we need to decrease the red snapper quota, along with many  
24 others, and I asked the council not to increase the quota, a couple  
25 of years ago, but our concerns were ignored, and the quota was  
26 increased anyway. Like I said, I believe this is a mistake.

27  
28 I'll also speak against the pilot program for red grouper Amendment  
29 63. There's a mechanism to lease or buy quota allocation, if they  
30 desire to participate, and, from what I understand, the prices are  
31 very reasonable to do so, and so I don't see the necessity for  
32 Amendment 63. If these folks want to be given free fish, what are  
33 they going to want next? Free boats?

34  
35 The other thing is the cost probably that's going to be associated  
36 with 63. I participated in a pilot program, 42, that was an  
37 overwhelming success, and it was just swept aside after two years  
38 of the pilot program, and I'm sure there's going to be additional  
39 costs that are going to be associated with Amendment 63, and so  
40 that's another reason I think that it's not a good program. That's  
41 about all I have today. Thank you for your time. I appreciate  
42 it.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williams. Do we have any  
45 questions? Not seeing any, Johnny, thank you again. We'll move  
46 back into the room with Mr. Bill Tucker, and next online will be  
47 Steve Maisel.

1 **MR. BILL TUCKER:** How are you? Bill Tucker, commercial fisherman  
2 in Dunedin, Florida. On a positive note, I want to thank you for  
3 the IFQ marketplace. That was a good idea, and thank you for  
4 requesting commercial CPUE calculations in red grouper for 2010 to  
5 present.

6  
7 Something is wrong with SEDAR 88. It contradicts what we're seeing  
8 on the water. Red grouper are harder to find, and, when you do  
9 find them, they're smaller. I'm asking that you reassess the red  
10 grouper stock in the eastern Gulf. SEDAR 88 needs an update.

11  
12 Regarding Amendment 59A, the permit requirements, please ask me  
13 what I think about that. As for Amendment 63, I want to see a  
14 motion for Considered but Rejected. This is a horrible amendment.  
15 It's anti-business to expropriate allocation from one shareholder  
16 just to give it to somebody else. If you want to redistribute  
17 quota, then buy it and redistribute it, and redistribute it from  
18 the unopened accounts. Don't pilfer it from shareholders who you  
19 deem out of favor so you can give it away to those who you do  
20 favor. That's not right.

21  
22 In 2018, this council reduced the red grouper quota by 60, and now  
23 that Amendment 62 just increased the quota, against the better  
24 judgment of full-time fishermen, Amendment 63 attempts to siphon  
25 off a portion of this quota increase before we even get back to  
26 where we were before the 60 percent cut. It's like you're dealing  
27 from the bottom of the deck, and this doesn't impart confidence in  
28 the council process.

29  
30 You would have a lot less opposition to a quota pool if you let  
31 shareholders get whole first before redistributing their  
32 allocation at a lower baseline than we were in 2018.

33  
34 I heard somebody mention the Apple stock. You know, when you buy  
35 quota, when you're a shareholder, it's like buying Apple stock,  
36 and then the dividend goes to somebody else. It doesn't make sense  
37 to me. Amendment 63 is nothing but a socialist welfare program  
38 that does not belong in fisheries management.

39  
40 In the end, these socialist systems always end up screwing the  
41 little guy. This looks like what Zohran Mamdani is trying to do  
42 in New York. I thought Trump got rid of this woke environmental  
43 justice nonsense. We elected a President who promised to remove  
44 ten regulations for every new regulation, and this proposed new  
45 regulation is unnecessary.

46  
47 It looks like the council is intentionally trying to damage a very  
48 effective market-based catch-share system by poisoning the

1 incentive structure that makes it work, and the idea that Amendment  
2 63 is a vehicle to open up meaningful new opportunities is  
3 laughable.

4  
5 This doesn't expand any opportunities. It shifts the opportunity  
6 from one group of fishermen to another. It's arbitrary, and based  
7 on emotion, and not on logic, and the fact that you changed the  
8 need definition the day before final action is a bad look.  
9 Changing it may be a Hail Mary CYA move at the eleventh hour, but  
10 it sure looks like a bait-and-switch to me.

11  
12 The purpose and need are foundational to an amendment. Was the  
13 originally stated need just an ostensible rationale to move the  
14 agenda forward? I mean, why would I be cynical about that?

15  
16 If fishermen really had a problem finding red grouper allocation,  
17 then why aren't there any posts on the marketplace? Why aren't  
18 they posting looking for it? It's because it's a fiction. There's  
19 plenty of allocation available, and it's cheap, and Amendment 63  
20 introduces a real opportunity for grift and fraud.

21  
22 Have you thought about the loopholes this amendment will introduce?  
23 Do you even understand it? We need to reject this amendment.  
24 We've got enough problems without creating more of them. If you  
25 want to fix the real problems in the IFQ program, you should ask  
26 me what I think. I'm in it, and I've got some ideas.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Bill. Do we have any questions? Not  
29 seeing any.

30  
31 **MR. TUCKER:** Thank you.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. We'll move online to Steve Maisel.

34  
35 **MR. STEVE MAISEL:** Hello.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead. We've got you, Steve.

38  
39 **MR. MAISEL:** All right. You all got a lot going on in there today.  
40 My name is Steve Maisel. I'm commenting on Amendments 63 and 59.  
41 Amendment 63 will not help the commercial fishing industry, and  
42 the Gulf Council should not move forward with it.

43  
44 I've been a commercial fisherman at a Clearwater, Florida for over  
45 forty-two years. I fish with vertical lines for grouper and  
46 snapper in the eastern Gulf, and I've owned multiple boats, and  
47 I'm a shareholder. The idea that we need a quota pool to improve  
48 access or reduce bycatch is ridiculous. Allocation is readily

1 available and cheap.

2  
3 Some people have been speaking today, and I don't think they really  
4 understand the history of how we got to the IFQ program. This is  
5 a boutique fishery. We're three million or under pounds quota.  
6 You don't need a lot of people to catch those fish.

7  
8 Before we got to the IFQ program, we were closing the seas, closing  
9 the year two, three, or four months ahead of time, and so we were  
10 overcapitalized, and, if they hadn't closed it, we were probably  
11 going to be overfishing, and so what the IFQ program did was it  
12 capped that, and it allows for fishing as we need it.

13  
14 If you want more fishermen, you're going to have them when the  
15 quota goes up. It's going to take -- When the quota goes down,  
16 you're going to have fewer people fishing, and so that's just a  
17 little of the history there, and the value of the shares and quota  
18 and allocation is already built into the program. It's justified  
19 by the council. It even has -- On the IFQ website, you've got a  
20 marketplace right there, and so it shows that there is value to  
21 this stuff.

22  
23 Anyway, Amendment 63 will degrade the IFQ program by taking  
24 valuable allocation away from participants who put hard-earned  
25 dollars into buying quota, leaving them with less allocation to  
26 fish, reducing their income and ability to recover the investment  
27 in the program.

28  
29 Amendment 63 is going to create a huge windfall for large fish  
30 houses that have multiple boats and permits with lots of landings.  
31 These fish houses have based their business on buying allocation,  
32 and not owning shares. The allocation they could receive will  
33 certainly be charged to the vessels that they have, at or above  
34 the market price, and so you're not helping the fishermen, only  
35 the fish house, and how is this fair and equitable for me as a  
36 shareholder and a fisherman?

37  
38 Amendment 63 also sets a bad precedent, especially if it's applied  
39 to red snapper. If applied to red snapper, the amount available  
40 allocation for purchase will reduce by 15 to 30 percent, depending  
41 on which alternative you pick. This will certainly increase the  
42 price of allocation and the demand for what is left. This will  
43 create a huge bycatch issue for everyone that relies on buying red  
44 snapper allocation to cover their yearly catch.

45  
46 Now, 63, you're creating much more uncertainty in the IFQ program,  
47 and who is going to want to invest in a program where you're  
48 constantly being threatened of change in the rules? The IFQ

1 program works very well. It isn't broken, and it doesn't need  
2 tweaking.

3  
4 There are entirely too many questions, and many unintended  
5 consequences, for the quota pool to move forward. It should be  
6 considered and rejected, like the Reef Fish Advisory Panel has  
7 suggested.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Steve.

10  
11 **MR. MAISEL:** Am I out of time?

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir.

14  
15 **MR. MAISEL:** Let me just say, real quick, on 59, I think that  
16 should be considered and rejected, also. I mean, a permit is one  
17 thing, but, if you ever require landings on that, it's going to do  
18 the same thing that the quota pool does. It's going to raise the  
19 price on everything, and the availability. Thank you.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Steve. Do we have any questions? Not  
22 seeing any, thank you for your comments. Next up, in the room, is  
23 Captain Dylan, Hubbard and next will be Tricia Kimball online.

24  
25 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** Hi. Yes, and thank you for the opportunity to  
26 speak. Captain Dylan Hubbard, from Hubbard's Marina. I'm also  
27 the president of the Florida Guides Association, the vice president  
28 of the Charter Fishermen's Association, and today speaking on  
29 behalf of both those organizations, and also the Destin Charter  
30 Boat Association.

31  
32 SEFHIER, we desperately want SEFHIER back in operation as quick as  
33 possible. We've been after this for more than a decade. We  
34 finally got it up on the water, and unfortunately lost it, and so  
35 please help us to get it back on the water.

36  
37 During discussions, a lot of comments around the table, I think  
38 the way it was set up previously worked. If you don't have fish,  
39 within thirty minutes of landing. If you have fish, before  
40 offload.

41  
42 As far as the turtle gear conversations, I have been,  
43 unfortunately, a victim of those fines with the turtle gear. We  
44 were caught without the appropriate dog toy to place in a turtle's  
45 mouth and received a \$1,500 fine. While that sounds like a joke,  
46 it is not, and it is very frustrating. The turtle gear  
47 requirements are just -- I can't speak to it while remaining  
48 professional, but it needs to be reviewed heavily.

1  
2 As far as mutton snapper and yellowtail and the current amendment  
3 discussion, mutton snapper and yellowtail are following the same  
4 path that we saw with lane snapper. We're seeing them more  
5 frequently, in more areas, moving further north into areas we  
6 didn't historically see them.

7  
8 We're seeing them more frequently of larger size, and so I'm very  
9 concerned, as we watch this amendment move forward, if we were to  
10 lose quota, or potentially lower our quota, we're going to start  
11 running into the issue we saw with lane snapper, with overages and  
12 harmed access, and so please make sure that our side of the Gulf,  
13 or our side of the state, gets as much quota as possible.

14  
15 As far as state management goes, our federal for-hire fleet really  
16 is happy with the way things are currently going, and we do not  
17 want to be included in any sort of state management discussion on  
18 any species, or any EFP.

19  
20 Besides that, sharks were brought up, and so I just want to echo  
21 the sentiment that sharks are a very large issue for our fleet  
22 across the Gulf. Thank you for your time.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dylan. We have a question from Mr.  
25 Geeslin.

26  
27 **MR. GEESLIN:** Dylan, your family owns a long-standing outfit over  
28 there. How many turtles have you caught?

29  
30 **MR. HUBBARD:** So I cannot say. I'm not as old as some of the folks  
31 that mentioned it, and like I know Captain Walker was mentioning  
32 that he's never seen it before. Actually, when I was younger, we  
33 did encounter turtles from time to time, and so I have personally  
34 caught and interacted with turtles before.

35  
36 I'm not saying a whole bunch, but it has probably happened a dozen  
37 or two times, but these are very large loggerhead sea turtles that  
38 -- I mean, I'm perfectly comfortable admitting that there's no  
39 possible way would I ever endanger my life, or the life of a  
40 deckhand, or one of my passengers, by bringing that animal on the  
41 boat like I'm supposed to, according to the turtle regulations.  
42 You're supposed to have a tire to place it in, and a dog toy to  
43 put in its mouth, and that thing is not coming on my boat. It's  
44 ridiculous, and I don't even know how I would. I'm a pretty large  
45 guy, and I don't think I could get that turtle on the boat if I  
46 wanted to.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dylan. Any other questions? All



1 right, Dylan. Thanks.  
2  
3 **MR. HUBBARD:** Thank you.  
4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next, we'll move online to Tricia Kimball.  
6  
7 **MS. TRICIA KIMBALL:** Can you hear me?  
8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Tricia. Go ahead. Tricia, you still there?  
10 We lost you. All right. We have to move on. Tricia? All right.  
11 We'll circle back. Let's go back to the room, to Ms. Rachel  
12 Hisler.  
13  
14 **MR. RACHEL HISLER:** Good morning. This morning, I wanted to  
15 comment on 59A, and I would like to say that I agree with Mr.  
16 Marino that I wish we weren't here today talking about this, but  
17 I do want to thank you all that we are going to be putting fish  
18 back into the hands of fishermen with this requirement, and so  
19 thank you for that.  
20  
21 I wish that past iterations of the council, who made this, what  
22 we're dealing with today, would have listened to fishermen who  
23 came to the podium at that time and said we don't think this is a  
24 good idea, but this is where we are today, and so I'm thankful to  
25 see you taking steps in order to get that permit requirement back  
26 into place, and so I would like to see that get passed sooner  
27 rather than later, because I think it's a step in the right  
28 direction, and so thank you for that. That's all I have for today.  
29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Hisler. Do we have any questions?  
31 Thank you, Rachel. All right. Let's try online again with Tricia  
32 Kimball.  
33  
34 **MS. KIMBALL:** Can you hear me?  
35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We've got you, Tricia.  
37  
38 **MS. KIMBALL:** Okay. Fabulous. All right. My name is Tricia  
39 Kimball, and I'm the wife of a shrimper, Kyle Kimball, and also  
40 the Port Arthur Area Shrimper's Association vice president. Thank  
41 you for allowing us to speak today.  
42  
43 Okay. First off, the sargassum bloom that's going on in the Gulf  
44 right now, unfortunately, we are currently in the midst of a record  
45 high amount at this time of year. It's projected to increase in  
46 June, and the abundance of the sargassum grass causes TEDs and  
47 BRDs and nets to become clogged up. When this happens, there's a  
48 loss of between 60 to 100 percent of the shrimp catch in the nets.

1  
2 In our current economic shrimping climate, those losses are more  
3 difficult to bear, and, because of the graying of the fleet,  
4 shrimpers are not getting to, and past, retirement age, and  
5 eventually hanging up their white boots to retire, or get forced  
6 out of the fishery, and so we're being faced right now with a  
7 dwindling number of experienced shrimpers.

8  
9 There needs to be a greater push to get new people into the Gulf  
10 shrimp fishery. We need to increase the number of young  
11 fishermen's development programs and mentorships. New blood is  
12 needed in the shrimp fishery as current shrimpers retire, or are  
13 forced out of the fishery.

14  
15 To that end, we need to get rid of the SPGM moratorium licenses to  
16 open the fishery to new shrimpers. States also need to release  
17 new licenses for state inshore fishing. In Texas, you can no  
18 longer purchase a new bay, bait, or Gulf license. You can transfer  
19 a license to a like-sized boat, and you can go smaller in size,  
20 but you cannot transfer a smaller vessel license to a larger vessel  
21 in the bay, and we're wondering how many SPGM permits were active,  
22 and how many inactive, in the federal shrimp fishery for 2025.

23  
24 The shrimp fishery has become too expensive, because of fuel costs,  
25 among other expenses. It's now too expensive to go far offshore  
26 to catch the brown shrimp that are desired, because docks pay more  
27 for brown shrimp, because they're wild caught only in U.S. waters,  
28 and they're not grown in those overseas ponds.

29  
30 Right now, there's a very high cost of regulation, both state and  
31 federal, because of compliance and equipment costs. All supplies,  
32 like nets, doors, and fuel, have exponentially increased in cost.

33  
34 The shrimping industry has self-limited, because we've lost 80  
35 percent of the shrimping vessels in the Gulf since the 1980s. Most  
36 of the very large vessels are gone, and much of it boils down to  
37 the imports coming in.

38  
39 There's no reason to regulate a yearly crop of shrimp, because  
40 it's exempted from the Magnuson-Stevens Act, because most species  
41 of domestic shrimp live eighteen months or less, and, so far,  
42 there's been no appreciable decrease in regulations, per President  
43 Trump's executive orders of 2025 in the shrimping industry. There  
44 are currently three amendments that are in the process, yet no  
45 decrease in regulation has taken place.

46  
47 There also needs to be more commercial fishermen represented on  
48 the Gulf Council. Currently, not a single shrimper is represented

1 on the Gulf Council, when we are made to abide by the mandates  
2 created by that body. Thank you for your time.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Tricia. Do we have any questions for  
5 Tricia? I'm not seeing any, Tricia, but, before you hang up, is  
6 Kyle with you?

7  
8 **MS. KIMBALL:** Yes, sir. Right next to me.

9  
10 **MR. KYLE KIMBALL:** Yes, sir. I'm right here.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Kyle, you're up next, if you want to go ahead.

13  
14 **MR. KIMBALL:** You want me to go ahead now?

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir.

17  
18 **MR. KIMBALL:** Okay. Kyle Kimball, and I'm Port Arther Shrimp  
19 Association president. I've been there for probably twenty or  
20 twenty-five years, and I'm also a fisherman. We've been to MREP  
21 over in Florida, MREP, whatever you want to call it, and I've been  
22 to the roundtable discussions up in Florida, or, I mean in  
23 Washington, D.C., and, anyhow, I also on a small business, Kimball  
24 Shrimp.

25  
26 You know, there's a number of issues that we've been trying to get  
27 into industry here that need to be examined. Something needs to  
28 be done about the overabundance of the sharks in the Gulf, and,  
29 when they're trying to go into the nets to get whatever it is,  
30 their prey, their food, they're tearing everything up.

31  
32 They keep having different things where they restricted shark  
33 fishing in the past, and this needs to be done. It's very unsafe.  
34 We cannot get in the water to get gear out of the wheels, and  
35 things of this nature, and take care of any problems we've got out  
36 there. There's a bunch of things that these sharks, on top of the  
37 expense and the time shutdown -- We lose sometimes hours, and  
38 sometimes days, when we get hit with this.

39  
40 The scientists need to work on the real percentages of loss with  
41 the TEDs. They've got this -- I think it's eight to ten, and don't  
42 hold me to the number that they have, but it's a small amount in  
43 comparison to what it really is. They need to check this in  
44 accordance to what it is. They need to go out more times per year  
45 and check it, and not under perfect conditions.

46  
47 They only count when the nets come up and they're clean.

1 They don't count when we've got tires, and we've got plastic bags,  
2 and we have, you know, grass out the wazoo, that just will not let  
3 the TEDs work at all. On top of that, these TEDs with these open  
4 slinging things, and I don't have to tell you all, and maybe some  
5 of you all have been on boats, but these things are above your  
6 head, with these big open holes, and I've been hit with catfish,  
7 stingrays, you name it.

8  
9 Sometimes you can't see that stuff in there, and we try to get it  
10 out the best we can, but, when it comes out, it will flat hit you,  
11 and I've been stuck a few times, had crew members stuck a few  
12 times, and so it's something that needs to be addressed.

13  
14 When we have something that's as bad as what it is right now with  
15 sharks and grass, something needs to be done with these TEDs, and  
16 I don't care if they make a small exemption on it, but we need to  
17 have something to where we can work with this, and not just be  
18 stuck at the house. We're losing way more than what they're  
19 talking about. It's just not that little small amount.

20  
21 Anyhow, other than that, I think that's about it. Inshore and  
22 offshore, the offshore fishing, you know, I had never seen any  
23 turtles when I've been offshore, as far as myself. They may catch  
24 them on longlines, or fishing lines, but, inshore, I've probably  
25 had maybe a dozen or so in my lifetime, or maybe, you know, even  
26 close to eighteen or twenty, and I don't know, but that needs to  
27 be also looked at for the hazards for them offshore, and also us  
28 in. Thank you, and I appreciate you all letting me talk.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kyle. Do we have any questions? Not  
31 seeing any, thank you, Mr. Kimball.

32  
33 **MR. KIMBALL:** Thank you.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next in the room is Tim Dillingham, and then we'll  
36 go online to David Krebs after.

37  
38 **MR. TIM DILLINGHAM:** Good afternoon, everybody. Tim Dillingham,  
39 commercial fisherman and dealer. I run my own boat. I also land  
40 fish for another four or five other boats, and buy fish from a lot  
41 of other guys around the Gulf.

42  
43 A lot of what's being said here, and I don't mean to be insulting  
44 in any way whatsoever, and I appreciate the effort everybody has  
45 made to try and continuously update the IFQ program. I was one of  
46 the first people that said, hey, you know, people that aren't  
47 involved in our fishery should not have access to our quota, and  
48 so I think having a permit in place, to make sure that the people

1 holding the quota, is very important, but I also started from  
2 nothing.

3  
4 I'm a first-generation guy. I didn't have any help. I didn't  
5 have anybody show me how to do this. I started out with reading,  
6 and just finding my way through the endless amount of regulations  
7 and requirements it takes to become a commercial fisherman, and so  
8 I do want to support 59A, as far as holding a permit, but I also  
9 do support the nonprofits playing a part in this, because I was  
10 somebody that didn't know anybody in the industry.

11  
12 I was somebody that couldn't find quota. You know, going around  
13 on these websites, and trying to get that, that's not a real  
14 economic positive decision there. I was paying way more for quota  
15 than you need to pay at this point in time, and so being a member  
16 of the Shareholders Alliance has been a huge boost to my business,  
17 in which I sell directly to all restaurants in southwest Florida.

18  
19 I've got about twenty-five to thirty chefs I sell to every week,  
20 and so everything stays within our community, but I was unable to  
21 get the quota for the longest time, in order to take care of those  
22 chefs, and so I want to show support on that, with a little bit of  
23 reluctance, with the fact that everybody finds a work around, and  
24 so, before you guys make those decisions, try and analyze those  
25 workarounds, and make sure that, you know, the wrong people aren't  
26 getting involved in this situation.

27  
28 I also heard a couple things about sharks. Sharks have been a  
29 huge problem for us down in southwest Florida as well. Like  
30 literally they do follow our boats. Like you start catching fish,  
31 and, if I don't get up and run away from them, they will follow me  
32 for miles and miles and miles, and so I think we have a big problem  
33 there that gets a blind eye, because of all of the bad publicity  
34 and that type of situation.

35  
36 Also, Amendment 63A, I do not support. I was new in the industry,  
37 and, like I said, it was very difficult to get quota, but I, over  
38 time, have bought and acquired certain quota here and there, and  
39 so to take something like that, where someone like me has invested  
40 tens of thousands of dollars in something, because I was told this  
41 is something I should have confidence in, and then it constantly  
42 gets redone over and over again, and then now some of that is being  
43 taken away from me, it isn't exactly fair to guys like us, that,  
44 you know, do it the hard way, and continue to work through finding  
45 the quota, and so I do support the IFQ program.

46  
47 It's important for me to be able to provide grouper snapper to my  
48 chefs year-round, and, in that case, I do not support this getting

1 moved to the states, because, if you look over at what's happening  
2 on the Atlantic side as well, and I don't want closed seasons.

3  
4 I like the IFQ program, because I can fish for this stuff year-  
5 round, and I will, you know, work my way around the quota program,  
6 in order to be able to provide that for my chefs, because, at the  
7 end of the day, the important thing is us catching the fish and  
8 providing food for our fellow Americans, and our local communities,  
9 and so thank you everybody.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Tim. Do I have any questions? Not  
12 seeing any, thanks again. All right. We'll move online to Mr.  
13 David Krebs.

14  
15 **MR. DAVID KREBS:** Good morning. Can you hear me?

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Good morning. We've got you, David.

18  
19 **MR. KREBS:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. David Krebs, owner  
20 of Ariel Seafoods in Destin, Florida on the Gulf and Sebastian  
21 Seafood -- Or Ariel in Sebastian, Florida on the Atlantic coast.

22  
23 I want to give a big shout out to Mr. Sanchez for great work in  
24 figuring out a part of this kingfish debacle, which you guys have  
25 asked me for years what do I think, and I'm like, well, we're  
26 seeing healthy animals, and we're just not seeing what we were  
27 seeing.

28  
29 Through the SEDAR process, I guess he has found out that the net  
30 fleet in Mexico has been decimating this population, and we're  
31 just caught in a downstream effect, and I'm not sure what you guys  
32 are going to be able to do with that, working with Mexico, but at  
33 least we finally, I think, have some answers.

34  
35 You know, I would always give testimony that I never saw the  
36 Mexican fish showing up on the U.S. markets, and how could they be  
37 doing this, from my commonsense thinking, and apparently it was  
38 not a quality enough product to put in the American markets, but  
39 just a net-caught fish. Moving on to -- So thank you again, Mr.  
40 Sanchez for that.

41  
42 The quota pool, I'll speak in opposition to that, because, as it's  
43 written -- If you want to have a set-aside quota pool, I believe  
44 you have to give the shareholders the baseline of the highest ACL  
45 that that species has ever had, and then, if you are going to get  
46 more fish after that, that's something to consider a pool about,  
47 and the reason I say that is all of us shareholders bought into  
48 the IFQ system under the guise of we were going to consolidate the

1 fishery, because we had a massive footprint in the 1990s.

2  
3 We were going to consolidate this footprint, and, as the fisheries  
4 grow, you grow. You're going to take some pain, but you're going  
5 to eventually benefit from it.

6  
7 This red grouper management has been a disaster, whether it's  
8 episodic events, overfishing. Whatever has created this up and  
9 down flow of the ACL is just something that you just can't jump in  
10 right now and say, oh, we're going to do this quota pool for.

11  
12 I would support a government buyback of funding a pool. That puts  
13 the government on par with what the commercial industry is doing.  
14 Obviously, the more quota that's available, the more opportunities  
15 people will have to buy into the fishery.

16  
17 State management has been an absolute failure for regional  
18 management in the Gulf for the recreational sector. Yes, it's  
19 giving them access, but the discards associated with that access  
20 has got to be fixed. It's not the fishermen's fault. They're out  
21 there trying to catch a fish, but, the discards, we have got to do  
22 something other than just sitting around talking about descending  
23 devices and bladder puncturing tools to teach recreational anglers  
24 how to not have to discard fish.

25  
26 It's time to move to aggregate bag limits. The closed season  
27 discards are probably the biggest problem in any of the  
28 recreational fisheries, and so I would encourage the council to  
29 spend a little bit more time on trying to help the recreational  
30 angler have better seasons, and more population of fish in the  
31 future, because we are seeing a serious decline in red snapper  
32 throughout the northern range. Thank you for your time.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Krebs. Do we have any questions?  
35 Not seeing any, we'll move on, in the room, to Mr. Jason Delacruz,  
36 and next up will be Duane Smith online.

37  
38 **MR. JASON DELACRUZ:** Good morning. Thank you, all. I think we  
39 need to look back at what Tim said and think about it, because Tim  
40 is a prime example of the guy who is doing things right. He used  
41 our quota bank to grow his business. He took some of that money,  
42 and he invested it in quota, and the potentials of 63, even though  
43 on paper it wouldn't hurt me, and it wouldn't hurt Tim, it scares  
44 the crap out of us.

45  
46 We've changed the incentivization of why people participate. They  
47 do it to make money and invest in the business, at least in this  
48 quota system, so that you have stability in the long run, but yet

1 I know at least three or four different guys that have come to me  
2 and said how can I invest in this, and it's too unstable.

3  
4 Unfortunately, that's because of this body. We have made comments,  
5 and made suggestions, and played around with it to make it as  
6 unstable as possible to scare people out of it, and I've said it  
7 before when I stood here, and maybe I'm a fool, because I've  
8 invested more than anybody, you know, time and time again, and  
9 built my business up, and I'm very proud of what we do, the fish  
10 we catch, the fish that we supply to the American public.

11  
12 I think we do something really unique, and I think it's a great  
13 thing, but, to me, it scares me to death that we're going to move  
14 into the next species. When we get to utilized species, gag or  
15 snapper, what does that conversation look like? Somebody is going  
16 to lose fish that's catching that fish now.

17  
18 You want to move the money from this person to that person, but  
19 somebody is going to pay the price, and I think having stability  
20 in this fishery gives people the willingness to invest in this  
21 fishery, and we're actively working on solutions of that in the  
22 Shareholders Alliance.

23  
24 I do hope, on the 59A conversation, we can really think about doing  
25 something for non-profits. I think this work around that everybody  
26 keeps talking about with non-profits isn't what they think it is.  
27 Because I am in the Shareholders, and I do have to understand that  
28 a little bit more, because we are a non-profit, and it's not easy  
29 to get around a (c)(3) guideline. It's a pretty big deal.

30  
31 You know, if move the money over here to over here directly,  
32 without actually showing that you're doing any benefit, the IRS  
33 wants to talk to you, and so I think that's worth putting the  
34 effort into, so we can help people like Tim, and help other people  
35 throughout the fishery do the right thing.

36  
37 One last thing, too. As far as the President's mandate for seafood  
38 competitiveness, that hook comment, that hook issue in deepwater  
39 for the eastern Gulf, that would really make it go a long way.  
40 That really changed our fishery, and you can see the  
41 underutilization of that stock in the eastern Gulf, right from  
42 when we went to that hook comment, and it's a real easy fix.

43  
44 I actually talked to -- I don't want to say the turtle girl, but  
45 it's Shep's wife. I apologize, and I talked to her yesterday, and  
46 she said we had like next to no interactions past fifty fathoms,  
47 and so it's a real simple solution, and it might actually make us  
48 -- Give us the ability to supply these fish, and we have an IFQ



1 now, and so we don't have to worry about overfishing them, and so  
2 it's a safe thing, too. Even though that stock is in trouble,  
3 we'll be within our reason, and I talked a lot today. Sorry about  
4 that, J.D., but, anyway, if anybody has any questions, I'll happily  
5 answer them. Thanks, Ed. Go ahead, buddy.

6  
7 **MR. WALKER:** Well, I'm not doing it for you. I'm doing it for me.  
8 I'm curious, and I don't know much about deepwater longlining, and  
9 so, asking for more than 500 hooks, is that asking for more miles  
10 of gear, or is that more hooks on the same length of gear?

11  
12 **MR. DELACRUZ:** So we don't have a limitation in miles. We only  
13 have a limitation in hooks. Hooks generate their limitation, and  
14 it's 750, but the problem is, in deep water, the fish don't do the  
15 same things they do in shallow water. You need to be able to put  
16 that gear on the bottom, and let it sit there, and then go back  
17 and pick it up later, so you catch that timeline when those fish  
18 are chewing, and so it really is -- It's a hook thing more than it  
19 is a mile thing, but it will increase the mileage.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

22  
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Two questions. One, while we're on the number of  
24 hooks, do you think -- Since that was implemented, has that  
25 contributed, and is it a plausible explanation, for the reduction  
26 in deepwater landings?

27  
28 **MR. DELACRUZ:** Absolutely. I don't think you could argue anything  
29 else, because, if you remember prior to the IFQ, we would close  
30 deepwater in like June, in April. I mean, everybody rushed to  
31 deepwater fish, because that was our big-money fish, and it still  
32 is. We're actually paying almost \$9 a pound for a large yellowedge  
33 right now, and we don't even cut them.

34  
35 Our smalls are three, and it's three and up that we're paying  
36 almost that much, and so it's an insanely valuable fish, but you  
37 can look at the correlation of when we did that, because that rule  
38 went into place the exact same time as IFQ.

39  
40 They were back-to-back, and what we did originally is we said,  
41 okay, we're going to wait and fish for those fish in the  
42 summertime, and so that kind of started it, but we kind of didn't  
43 realize that we had shot ourselves in the foot, because we were so  
44 eager to get back on the water, because the longline had been  
45 pushed out, because of our sea turtle interactions, which we've  
46 found out now, with video cameras, we have very little to none,  
47 and that that was just a glitch in the matrix, for lack of a better  
48 phrase, and so absolutely. The correlation is clear as a bell.

1 Any dataset you pull would show it clearly.

2  
3 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Next question. Getting back to 63, given your  
4 business model, and how you've evolved into this model, with the  
5 redistribution as, you know, following the options available, how  
6 is that going to affect Jason Delacruz? Are you going to see a  
7 big increase to you, and how does it compare to shall we say the  
8 intended recipient of this whole experiment?

9  
10 **MR. DELACRUZ:** So I'll talk more about me, because I think it's an  
11 interesting example, and so I'm very lucky that I have some great  
12 captains. I have one of the best, and even my other guys are  
13 really good.

14  
15 I will probably get more than most than everybody else, because I  
16 have guys that just smash it, but, in my eyes, that's not what  
17 we're intended to do, because our system's gotten so sophisticated,  
18 and nothing against Jessica, but she can't parse that out, and so  
19 all of my boats are in the pool that doesn't own shares, but yet  
20 I own a chunk, you know, and it's not a secret.

21  
22 We do that, and so I'll get a significant amount, and, I mean, the  
23 uncertainty that this system brings to -- This concept brings to  
24 play is really challenging for a fish house, because we go out to  
25 lease that quota the first of the year, and now we don't know what  
26 all these guys are going to get, and so now we don't show what  
27 we're going to lease.

28  
29 It's going to really throw some wildcards that we don't really  
30 have good answers for, and that worries me a lot, because that's  
31 one of the things. You're in business, and you plan business, and  
32 sometimes when you get a wildcard like this, and you can't figure  
33 out the plan.

34  
35 It's going to help me. I'm not going to lie. It's going to be  
36 good for Brickyard Fishing, but it's -- I just -- It doesn't feel  
37 right to me. You know, if you don't -- If you can't -- Like Ed  
38 said the other day, if you can't go out right now, for \$8, and buy  
39 a share of red grouper, and go catch that fish, which we're paying  
40 \$7.25, then you're never ever going to buy a pound, and, if that's  
41 the case, what are we doing? That was the system, and so, anyway,  
42 thank you.

43  
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Jason, I guess you're suggesting that you're going  
45 to be a great beneficiary of this, and I want to be clear. Are  
46 you in support of this?

47  
48 **MR. DELACRUZ:** I don't like that it changes why the system works.

1 I mean, maybe that's a greediness on my part, because I've invested  
2 so much, but I don't think it's fair that some people like Tim  
3 come in and start buying, and working their way through, and other  
4 people just say, well, I'm not going to invest, and give it to me,  
5 and that just seems wrong.

6  
7 It feels like a handout, and I didn't think that's what this  
8 country was about. If you worked hard, you got someplace, and  
9 there are people that have done the things that they're supposed  
10 to. I mean, we've had testimony at this podium of a guy saying,  
11 well, I'm going to go buy a new truck, and I don't want to buy  
12 quota. I mean, come on. That's not what this is about. Thank  
13 you.

14  
15 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Jason. We're going to go online to Duane  
16 Smith.

17  
18 **MS. LEVY:** So Duane accidentally registered. He's actually a NOAA  
19 Enforcement attorney who is listening in.

20  
21 **DR. BANKS:** We're going to ignore you then, Duane. Thank you.  
22 All right. We're going to come back in the room then with Nathan  
23 Putman, and then we'll follow up with Ms. Susan Boggs.

24  
25 **DR. NATHAN PUTMAN:** Good morning. I am Nathan Putman, a scientist  
26 at LGL Ecological Research Associates, and I wanted to mention to  
27 the council a little bit of more information on a project that  
28 Gregg Bray was talking about the other day looking at these new  
29 research projects aimed at better understanding private  
30 recreational fishing effort for snapper and grouper across the  
31 Gulf.

32  
33 My company, LGL, is working on one such project. We're aiming to  
34 develop methods for non-self-reported effort data collection, and  
35 our aim is to gather robust data without increasing the burden on  
36 the private angler.

37  
38 However, before we can, you know, not increase burdens on private  
39 anglers, at this phase of our research, it would be beneficial to  
40 have a handful of private anglers help us obtain vessel movement  
41 data on their offshore trips, and so, knowing that there's a  
42 collection of people who go fishing, I would like it if anyone who  
43 would like to contribute to sort of volunteering on their offshore  
44 trips to collect some vessel movement data for this project to get  
45 in touch with me.

46  
47 I'll be here all day, if you want to talk. Also, there is a  
48 website for potential volunteers to look at,

1 [www.reeffisheffort.com](http://www.reeffisheffort.com), and that's what I've got.

2  
3 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Nathan. Any questions for Nathan? Not  
4 seeing any. thank you. We'll move online to Ms. Susan Boggs, and  
5 then Brian Lewis in the room.

6  
7 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Good morning, council. Thank you for allowing  
8 me to speak this morning. My name is Susan Boggs. I'm president  
9 of BND Maritime, Inc. in Orange Beach, Alabama. We own two  
10 federally-permitted vessels. One is a six-passenger, and one is  
11 a headboat.

12  
13 A couple of comments I heard this morning, just quickly, is someone  
14 asked, or mentioned, that a council member asked where are the  
15 fishermen, and it sounds like they're in the room, and they're  
16 online. If not, they're on the water doing their job.

17  
18 Richard Fischer made a lot of positive points that confirmed that  
19 Amendment 42 is a good plan, and the council should move forward  
20 with that. As far as the data collection, and I'll be honest that  
21 I did not hear the discussion, and so I'm just making comments  
22 based on what I read of the document, and I support Action 1,  
23 Preferred Alternative 2, Action 2, Preferred Alternative 2, and  
24 Action 3, Preferred Alternative 3, but Action 4 perplexes me.

25  
26 I timed myself this morning when I did a fishing report from  
27 yesterday. In that fishing report, I had to answer two economic  
28 questions, and I also had to answer two new added questions as it  
29 relates to discards.

30  
31 It took me three minutes. Asking economic questions is not that  
32 hard. What I'm seeing in Action 4 would take more time than the  
33 three minutes to do it on a daily basis, and so I just don't  
34 understand the thought process behind picking a few to report at  
35 the end of the year, and they have to go through their records and  
36 pull the data, and that's going to take longer than three minutes.

37  
38 The last comment I have is loopholes. There are loopholes in  
39 everything, and I'm not going to call them out right now, but, if  
40 you want to ask me where the loopholes are, call me, and I will  
41 personally tell you the loopholes. There's always a loophole, and  
42 so, whatever you do, whatever actions you take, make sure there's  
43 a way to enforce them. Thank you for your time.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Do we have any questions?  
46 I'm not seeing any, Susan. Thanks for your comments. Next, we'll  
47 move into the room with Brian Lewis.

1 **MR. BRIAN LEWIS:** Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of  
2 council. My name is Brian Lewis. I am a commercial fisherman,  
3 vessel owner, shareholder, and I lease quota to keep my fishing  
4 boat.

5  
6 We are operating out of Clearwater, Florida. I've been active in  
7 this fishery for thirty-four years in total. I've worked on  
8 fishing boats that commercially fish, and part of my reason for  
9 being here today is that I am in strong opposition to Amendment 63  
10 and the proposed red grouper pilot program.

11  
12 Some of the points I want to make, and so here's my point one, is  
13 undermining financial investments. When the grouper-tilefish  
14 program was established, we were told it would provide stability  
15 and secure our investments. Over the years, many of us have spent  
16 hundreds of thousands of dollars to invest in our businesses and  
17 shares and leasing and so on to build our viable businesses.

18  
19 Taking a portion of this commercial quota to create a separate  
20 pool for a pilot program directly devalues our private property  
21 rights. even though we don't own the fish, we do invest in it,  
22 right, and this penalizes the very fishermen who have financially  
23 invested in this fishery.

24  
25 Point two is market distortion, right, and subsidies. New entrants  
26 are vital to our industry, right, but they should enter the fishery  
27 the same way as the rest of us have. Given the way quota set-  
28 asides creates an unfair subsidized advantage, it disrupts the  
29 market economy of the IFQ system and sets a dangerous precedent  
30 that council can claw back quota at any time to redistribute as a  
31 handout.

32  
33 Point three, rewarding activity, right, and so rewarding activity  
34 over active businesses. This pilot program risks distributing  
35 valuable allocation to individuals who simply hold a permit, but  
36 may not actively fish, rather than rewarding the full-time  
37 operators who maintain vessels, employ crews, and supply seafood  
38 to the American public. Our businesses operate on razor-thin  
39 margins, and losing access to this quota directly threatens our  
40 bottom line.

41  
42 My fourth point, regulatory complexity, right, and so, finally,  
43 the current IFQ system works because it is predictable, and it is  
44 transferable. Introducing a non-transferable quota pool creates  
45 unnecessary administrative overhead and complicates fishery  
46 accounting at any time. We should be focusing on simplifying  
47 regulations. That's what we should be focusing on.

1 In conclusion, the commercial sector has already sacrificed  
2 immensely through severe quota cuts in recent years, and we should  
3 not be forced to give up more of our hard-earned access for an  
4 unproven pilot program. I urge the council to vote no on Amendment  
5 63, and I thank you for this time to speak.

6  
7 I would also be open to any questions, and I also want to make one  
8 more final comment on a couple of things, and so, overhearing some  
9 of the conversation about CPUE, I was contacted by Ashford, and  
10 I've made up three years in my logbooks, so that you can try to  
11 utilize that information, and she could probably demonstrate how  
12 easy that would be to see, you know, what these fishermen are  
13 actually catching.

14  
15 I want to remind you the Gulf fishery is a micro-fishery compared  
16 to many other fisheries in the world, and so we're already  
17 struggling as it is, and so, you know, the rod-and-reel boats,  
18 they may not catch as much as a longline fishing vessel, and so,  
19 you know, this CPUE could demonstrate, you know, the effort that's  
20 being put forth, and how little fish they're really catching, and  
21 so I appreciate this time to speak, and thank you.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lewis. Do we have any questions?  
24 Not seeing any, thank you again. Next up, online, is Chris  
25 Guindon.

26  
27 **MR. CHRIS GUINDON:** Can you hear me?

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Chris. Go ahead.

30  
31 **MR. GUINDON:** Yes, sir. My name is Chris Guindon. I'm a commercial  
32 fisherman out of Galveston, Texas, and I do not support Amendment  
33 63, and so, to me, it's going to take away fish from the people  
34 who have actually earned it and put it into the pocket of people  
35 who have not earned it.

36  
37 For the past seven years, I've worked as a deckhand on my brother's  
38 boat, and I've earned my way into this fishery. I've started a  
39 beautiful family in the past three years. I became a quota holder,  
40 and, within the next year, my commercial fishing vessel will be  
41 ready to fish, and I'll be a full-time captain myself, and I will  
42 be able to better support my family.

43  
44 For Amendment 63 to come out would be a total slap in the face to  
45 me, I believe, and just for everything I've worked so hard for in  
46 this fishery, and so I'm asking you all to do not pass Amendment  
47 63, and, fishermen, I hope you all have a safe time on the water,  
48 and, councilmen, I hope you all have a safe time getting home.

1 Thank you.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. Do we have any questions? Not  
4 seeing any, Chris, thank you. In the room, we'll go to Lisa  
5 Schmidt, and next online is Kary Zarem.

6  
7 **MS. LISA SCHMIDT:** Good afternoon, council. My name is Lisa  
8 Schmidt, and I'm on the board of the Shareholders Alliance. I  
9 took over my husband's business in 2015, and I had to learn to  
10 speak in front of the council then, and I hated it, and, eleven  
11 years later, I still hate it, but I'm up here. Let me see here,  
12 and, also, I lost my glasses in the meeting yesterday, and so I'm  
13 trying to read my own writing. Let's see.

14  
15 I challenge the Gulf Council to take a moment to think and really  
16 analyze how Amendment 63 really helps the future of the fishing.  
17 It seems that the actions proposed may be done with intent on  
18 helping the future, but, often, the implications do just the  
19 opposite.

20  
21 For example, is Amendment 63 really doing what you want it to do  
22 if some of the bigger players in the fleet get the most of the  
23 allocation, and is it supposed to help the smaller player? It's  
24 very confusing to me to what the real agenda is and what's behind  
25 it. It just seems like you're moving allocation around to change  
26 it, but not really changing anything, and so I can't support it  
27 the way it's written now.

28  
29 I'm proud to be on the Steering Committee of the National Future  
30 Fishermen Coalition, committed to uplifting the next generation of  
31 women and men, and they are willing to work hard, and invest, and  
32 make good decisions and business plans, and so I hope, as they get  
33 comfortable in their business, they will come to the council and  
34 share their stories. Thank you for your time.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lisa? Do we have any questions?

37  
38 **MS. SCHMIDT:** Thank you.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Not seeing any, thank you again. All right. Next  
41 online is Kary Zarem.

42  
43 **MR. KARY ZAREM:** Hi. Can you hear me?

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes. We've got you. Go ahead.

46  
47 **MR. ZAREM:** Okay. Thank you very kindly. My name is Captain  
48 Kary Zarem. I own several vessels. I own a dayboat as well as a

1 bandit boat. I'm also a commercial wholesale dealer, a new entrant  
2 into the fishing industry. I've been involved in commercial  
3 fishing for the last four years.

4  
5 I am currently a shareholder. I started buying red grouper shares  
6 over the last year, and I am -- You know, I have a lot of respect  
7 for the IFQ system. I've come to understand the history that, you  
8 know, it has perpetuated, for lack of a better word. You know, I  
9 understand that it saved our fishery, by speaking to a lot of the  
10 people that have been involved in the industry over the years,  
11 and, you know, while there's some things about the system I don't  
12 like, you know, I think it's an effective system for tracking fish.

13  
14 What I would like to see in the future is, you know, the  
15 recreational sector have the same type of tracking that we do in  
16 the commercial sector, because I think, without that information,  
17 you know, we're just pissing in the wind, for lack of a better  
18 word. I don't see how you can have sound science without having  
19 a full picture of the data. If you have two sectors that are  
20 pushing out accurate data and one sector that's not, you can't  
21 paint a full picture.

22  
23 The sharks are a big issue. I've heard several people speak about  
24 that. I mean, it's a constant battle on spots, you know, whether  
25 you're going to get your fish in the boat or not. Something has  
26 to be done. I'm also a diver. I'm seeing these populations on  
27 these sharks blow up to the point where there's some spots we can't  
28 even dive anymore.

29  
30 I'm against Amendment 63, as a shareholder, and I would benefit  
31 from it, because I'm going to get more shares. I just don't see  
32 a lot of benefits to the program. I've consistently listened over  
33 the last few meetings, and I've talked to a lot of people. I just  
34 don't think the shares are going to get into the right hands.

35  
36 I mean, you've got guys that have twenty or thirty permits out  
37 there. They're going to be the ones that benefit the most. You  
38 know, the guys that, you know, are the new fishermen, that are  
39 leasing their permits, they're never going to see those shares. I  
40 guess that pretty much covers everything that I can think of off  
41 the top of my head. I appreciate everybody's participation, and  
42 involvement, and thank you very kindly for your time.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kary. Do we have any questions? Not  
45 seeing any, all right. Thanks again, Kary. That will conclude  
46 our public comment today. Let's take a break. Let's take a  
47 fifteen-minute break, and we'll come back at 11:20.



1 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you. What we're going to start  
4 with is the Shrimp Committee report. I would remind you all we  
5 have a working lunch that starts at noon, but, before that, we  
6 will do the Shrimp Committee report now. Mr. Schieble, whenever  
7 you're ready.

8  
9 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**  
10 **SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT**

11  
12 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the  
13 agenda, Tab D, Number 1, and approved the April 2026 meeting  
14 minutes, Tab D Number 2. We received a presentation and update on  
15 the working group for shrimp bycatch methodology for finfish  
16 species, Tab D, Number 4.

17  
18 Council staff presented an update on the working group from its  
19 May 11 and 12, 2026 webinar meetings. He noted the working group's  
20 recommendations and findings will be presented to the Standing and  
21 Special Shrimp SSCs at its July 2026 meeting.

22  
23 They solicited feedback on the possibility of convening the working  
24 group for another meeting to address bycatch estimation for king  
25 mackerel that will be integrated into the next king mackerel stock  
26 assessment. A committee member recommended convening the working  
27 group again for this purpose.

28  
29 A council member inquired if king mackerel constituted much of  
30 shrimp bycatch. Dr. Walter, from the Southeast Fisheries Science  
31 Center, stated that shrimp bycatch of king mackerel is common  
32 enough that it needs to be accounted for in the king mackerel stock  
33 assessment.

34  
35 Council staff stated that the working group found the proposed  
36 approach of using observer data for estimating red snapper bycatch  
37 to be acceptable. He added that the working group also reviewed  
38 the proposed approach of using lane snapper as a proxy species for  
39 gray triggerfish to estimate bycatch from the Gulf shrimp industry.

40  
41 He noted the working group questioned the use of a proxy species.  
42 The committee member asked for more information on the working  
43 group's discussion on the use of lane snapper as a proxy for gray  
44 triggerfish bycatch. Council staff responded that a perfect option  
45 does not currently exist, but better data will exist for future  
46 stock assessments as the observer program began characterizing  
47 gray triggerfish bycatch in 2025. Dr. Walter noted that several  
48 strategies are being used to account for uncertainty and use of a

1 proxy for gray triggerfish bycatch as a source of mortality by the  
2 shrimp fleet.

3  
4 We then moved to discuss the workplan and membership for the  
5 working group to address interaction and bycatch of protected  
6 resources and shrimp trawls, Tab D, Number 5. Council staff  
7 presented the draft workplan and membership for the working group  
8 to address protected resources interactions with Gulf federal  
9 shrimp trawls.

10  
11 For the draft working group membership, council staff inquired if  
12 the committee had interest in expanding industry representation  
13 for shrimpers that target pink shrimp. A committee member stated  
14 that a pink shrimp industry representative from the Fort Myers  
15 area would be beneficial.

16  
17 A committee member suggested potentially having more researchers  
18 in the working group, as in the case with the South Atlantic  
19 Fishery Management Council's working group on this topic. Council  
20 staff responded that they perceived the role of those individuals  
21 as presenters, rather than serving on the working group. Council  
22 staff stated that they would bring additional industry  
23 representative names to Full Council for membership consideration.  
24 I'm going to pause at that moment there, because I think we're at  
25 that point.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Simmons, or Dr. Freeman?

28  
29 **DR. MATT FREEMAN:** Yes, sir, and so, based off the committee's  
30 suggestions, we reached out to Ernie Donini. He docks in Tampa,  
31 Florida, and they have three vessels that target primarily pink  
32 shrimp, and he said that they go some in north Florida, but also  
33 shrimp in south Florida, inclusive of Fort Myers and Key West, and  
34 so that would be an additional name that we could add to that draft  
35 membership list before we get a motion for approval of the  
36 workplan.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

39  
40 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm certainly supportive of adding him. I guess  
41 the other broader comment is, you know, at the end of this process,  
42 we're wanting some support, buy-in, from industry, from other  
43 groups and representatives, right, and so one of my concerns is I  
44 think we have four NMFS representatives on this, right, and this  
45 shouldn't be a NMFS-driven process.

46  
47 We certainly want to be here to support it, and we think there's  
48 a place for representation, but I would certainly be supportive of

1 additional shrimp industry members, or even other academics or  
2 researchers that were suggested during public testimony.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Geeslin,  
5 and then Mr. Sanchez.

6  
7 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, to Andy's point, I've  
8 been contacted by some stakeholders, I guess you would call them,  
9 and it appears -- Based on their comments and looking at the  
10 representation here, it does appear there's a void from the sawfish  
11 conservation and research community.

12  
13 Andy, I would look to you to maybe think about someone within the  
14 Fisheries Service that would represent either someone from the  
15 sawfish recovery team, or someone within your ranks that may be a  
16 suitable representative from that sawfish community.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, to Mr. Geeslin's point, and then  
19 Andy.

20  
21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I fully support where Mr. Geeslin is going  
22 with this, and certainly two folks that are on the sawfish recovery  
23 team, Dr. Dean Grubbs or Dr. Gregg Poulakis at FWC, I think would  
24 both be highly relevant and important to this discussion. I think  
25 Gregg is actually participating in the South Atlantic working group  
26 too, and so there could be some nice overlap there.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, you had something to that point?

29  
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I had mentioned Dean Grubbs' name  
31 earlier. I know Carrie had kind responded about seeing some of  
32 those individuals as more support staff for this, and so I think  
33 that's the question, of are they going to provide supporting roles,  
34 or we want them directly on the working group. I agree though  
35 with Dakus that I think it is a gap where we would want someone  
36 that's involved with sawfish research on the working group.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Sanchez.

39  
40 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. I don't disagree with populating this  
41 with the right people, and the balance of people and composition,  
42 so that we can get the task done that we're looking to do, try to  
43 mitigate some of these interactions, and we need, you know, industry  
44 input, as well as scientific expertise and what have you, to arrive  
45 at how do we get this done, but I would -- Not knowing all of the  
46 players around, you know, that may be invited to participate, I  
47 would feel better about it if the working group had some kind of  
48 collective decision in helping identify, from a suite of options,

1 which person, or persons, from the different backgrounds would be  
2 the correct ones, because, honestly, it's just human nature.

3  
4 I don't want to put a lightning rod there and then thwart  
5 legitimate efforts to try to accomplish something there, and so I  
6 would feel better if the working group kind of helps create the  
7 balance and the population of these additional folks coming in.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Any other comments? Dr.  
10 Walter.

11  
12 **DR. WALTER:** Two things. I think this is a good broadening of  
13 some of the key players here. One thing that I would also put out  
14 there in an offer, and I think some of the staff under my shop are  
15 probably playing more of a support role than probably like a real,  
16 you know, decisional role, and so I think that they could be very  
17 much put into the support side, and perhaps Kyle could be support,  
18 in which case we're always available to support those things, in  
19 terms of providing the basic data, but that might offer at least  
20 some additional slots.

21  
22 One thing I did want to raise, and I think broadening this group's  
23 participation is probably good, and in particular because we want  
24 the solutions that come out of this group to get widespread  
25 acceptance, so that there's things that the council can make fairly  
26 -- Decisions that they know are going to be supported and are going  
27 to have impact.

28  
29 There are major stakeholders who are not part of the fishery,  
30 necessarily, and those are the NGOs that have been brought up,  
31 that have had a lot of concerns here, and the question is are they  
32 going to be part of the process early on, or will they be part of  
33 the process at the end, and I think that involvement early is  
34 probably one of the best ways to get to a consensus solution,  
35 because there may be some difficult decisions that need to be made,  
36 and certainly there need to be difficult discussions, and this  
37 workgroup is where that really can be had.

38  
39 I guess I would like to think also that a lot of the researchers  
40 -- I hope the researchers wouldn't necessarily play the role of  
41 advocates. They would bring the best science to the table, but  
42 there might be a role for advocates, and I bring this up because  
43 it was brought to us that some of the advocates might be willing  
44 to participate, and might be willing to be solution-oriented, and  
45 also look to some of the carrots that would be available to the  
46 fishery for finding proactive solutions, and, by carrots, that is  
47 certifications for sustainability that might indeed be part of the  
48 conversation here, and are ongoing in terms of their paying

1 attention to this bycatch situation with respect to certification.

2  
3 There may indeed be some positive outcomes, in terms of including  
4 them, and I would put that out there, that there were at least two  
5 people who might be available, and might express some interest in  
6 being part of this group. Thanks.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Ms. McCawley, and then  
9 Mr. Sanchez.

10  
11 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the South Atlantic  
12 rep, I guess I was wondering what the nexus is going to be with  
13 the group that's working on the South Atlantic, because we  
14 populated our group a certain way, and, I mean, this is a great  
15 discussion that you guys are having, but I guess I'm wondering, at  
16 some point, you know, are the two groups across the two councils  
17 going to come together with some recommendations, because it's  
18 going to be a little weird for Florida, you know, if the Gulf  
19 Council is suggesting one thing from their workgroup, and the South  
20 Atlantic is suggesting another thing from a different perspective,  
21 and we kind of have a mix of people.

22  
23 I was trying to pull up the original directive, but, yes, I thought  
24 that part of the original directive was that the two councils were  
25 going to work together on this, and so I just wanted to bring up  
26 some points. Thank you for recognizing me.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. McCawley, for bringing that up.  
29 Dr. Simmons, and then Ms. Levy.

30  
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I guess,  
32 to Ms. McCawley's point, we haven't completely fleshed that out  
33 yet, but, in our draft objectives, we did note that we would be  
34 paying close attention to what the South Atlantic Council's  
35 workgroup is looking at recommending, and seeing if there's  
36 anything that we could consider in the Gulf, and the applicability.

37  
38 I think the understanding of how the fleets are operating in the  
39 two regions is very different, and we're probably going to have to  
40 reconcile some of that as well.

41  
42 Just a couple of points I wanted to bring up for the council as  
43 you all are deliberating these things, and so staff spent a lot of  
44 time contacting industry representatives, contacting the staff and  
45 SSC members, to be sure that they were willing and able to  
46 participate in this working group.

47  
48 The finfish working group, we had a lot of logistical issues with

1 trying to get a schedule when everyone was able to meet, and we  
2 had many delays, like three months' time, before we were able to  
3 get everyone together to meet, and so it kind of makes me a little  
4 nervous to start putting -- Or assuming some of these researchers,  
5 or NGOs, or anyone else that we may put forward, is going to be  
6 willing and able to participate in this working group without  
7 having a clear understanding of what we anticipate the involvement  
8 is at this point.

9  
10 I just -- I would bring that up and just note that, if that happens,  
11 and we start adding a bunch more people on here, that they may or  
12 may not be able to participate, and we're going to have to come  
13 back to the council and explain, you know, why we couldn't do  
14 something at the next meeting, or why we can only do this at the  
15 next meeting, and so just, you know, please keep that in mind.

16  
17 We also have to notice these in the Federal Register. That's  
18 thirty days, right, and so we have to give the public notice that  
19 we're having these meetings, and so that's an additional layer of  
20 timing on the logistics side that we have to consider, and so just  
21 keep, you know, some of those things in mind as you're thinking  
22 about this.

23  
24 Bernie does have the Word list, if you all would like to put that  
25 up and make some of these changes. I do think it's important that  
26 we have a clear understanding of, you know, who is willing and  
27 able to participate in this. I am looking at the South Atlantic  
28 Council's working group membership, and I don't think -- You said  
29 Dr. Grubbs, and he is not on there. I believe it's Gregg Poulakis.

30  
31 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.

32  
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and so that's a similar --

34  
35 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, and we have researchers from each of the state  
36 agencies, and so Gregg Poulakis is on ours, as representing FWC,  
37 but we also have other research scientists. We have members of  
38 the SSC, and we have industry representatives, shrimp industry  
39 representatives, and so we have a combination of folks that are on  
40 there, in addition to council staff and council members, like our  
41 Shrimp Committee chair and things like that.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a couple of hands. Mr. Sanchez,  
44 and then Dr. Sweetman.

45  
46 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I've got a question, and maybe Carrie can  
47 help me. How big of a group is this right now, and potentially,  
48 as we start to add people, and populate it, albeit in different

1 supporting or active capacities, where's that sweet spot where it  
2 will become so big that it becomes inefficient to gather everybody  
3 and get things done?

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

6  
7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, right  
8 now, we have thirteen members, as was drafted in the workplan.  
9 Staff is suggesting we add one more industry representative from  
10 the pink shrimp fishery, which would make it fourteen. Originally,  
11 we were trying to keep the group at fifteen maximum.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Carrie. Dr. Sweetman.

14  
15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and so I have a suggestion here. I mean, based  
16 on what we've kind of heard around the table, maybe, because we're  
17 bumping right up against the max amount for this group, and kind  
18 of what I've heard is this shouldn't be a Science-Center-driven  
19 working group here, and so maybe we consider taking one of them  
20 off, at least, and adding not only the additional commercial fisher  
21 that we identified, but also another researcher.

22  
23 I mean, I highlighted two names, but I haven't coordinated with  
24 Dean. I would like to ask him about this or anything, and Gregg  
25 certainly can do it, but maybe it's not prescriptive right now for  
26 who that should be, until we can contact both of them, or I'm  
27 curious of your thoughts, but that would be my suggestion there,  
28 to kind of keep us up against, you know, based on what I heard  
29 from our federal colleagues over there, as well as kind of where  
30 we're trying to go with this.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr.  
33 Schieble.

34  
35 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, just for formality, we're going to need a motion  
36 to approve the list here, right, as we move forward, and do we  
37 know which of the NMFS staff that are listed on here are on the  
38 Florida or South Atlantic working group already, so we can keep  
39 some things congruent?

40  
41 **DR. SWEETMAN** It's just Jenny.

42  
43 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, just Jenny.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

46  
47 **MR. STRELCHECK:** John can certainly weigh-in as well, and our  
48 recommendation is we feel it's important that Jeff Gearhart

1 participate in this. He has a wealth of knowledge about the shrimp  
2 industry, and gear research, and so maintain him, and I think it's  
3 important, given the shrimp observer program, for Gary to  
4 participate. We think Kyle can play more of a supporting role.  
5 Yes, information about effort is going to be important, but we  
6 don't necessarily see him as needing to be directly on the working  
7 group.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

10  
11 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** A question for Andy. What about Jenny Lee? Does  
12 she need to be on both?

13  
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So Jenny is going to be leading the Section 7  
15 consultation. I think she provides a lot of value, just in terms  
16 of informing the working group about the process, and the steps  
17 that will be taken with the consultation, and so I would recommend  
18 she be maintained on the group.

19  
20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I would agree with that, since she's given us all  
21 the background information for this from the get-go.

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

24  
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we can  
26 certainly move Mr. Dettloff down to support staff, but just keep  
27 in mind, I mean, if we need these folks to help us develop materials  
28 for the meeting, we're still relying on them for their  
29 availability, their time commitment, writing memos to have that  
30 information together, and have it ready for the meeting, and so  
31 we're kind of robbing Peter to pay Paul a little bit here.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I would be supportive of -- I understand  
36 what you're saying, Carrie. I still think anyone that's involved  
37 in this group, even as a support staff participant, will be  
38 committed to this, to the goals of what we're trying to accomplish  
39 here, particularly our federal colleagues, and I will say that,  
40 and so I would be supportive of putting Kyle as the support staff,  
41 and then adding another seat on the working group for a researcher.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, C.J. Dr. Freeman, did you  
44 want -- Anyone else around the table? Go ahead, Matt.

45  
46 **DR. FREEMAN:** Just while we're working on the list, would you all  
47 like for Bernie to go ahead and add Mr. Domini to this list that's  
48 in front of you all?



1  
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I would be supportive of that.  
3

4 **DR. FREEMAN:** So Bernie, for Number 14, if you could add Ernie  
5 Domini. He's on that list that I provided you with, or as Number  
6 7, and he would be an industry representative.  
7

8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.  
9

10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought there  
11 was also a request to either add Mr. Gregg Poulakis/Dr. Dean  
12 Grubbs.  
13

14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that's what I was getting at. I wanted to  
15 say maybe we can add another researcher to the working group list,  
16 and I wasn't trying to be prescriptive for whether that should be  
17 Gregg or Dean, just because I haven't spoken with Dean.  
18  
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. I've got two hands. Mr. Sanchez, and  
21 then Mr. Strelcheck.  
22

23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would feel better if we're adding the recent name,  
24 either Grubbs or Gregg Poulakis, if we put them in the support  
25 staff, rather than the actual working group, because, one of the  
26 letters that they signed on to, it started off with a non-starter  
27 of let's have a year-round closure of shrimp fishing in southwest  
28 Florida. I don't think that's going to set the tone with the extra  
29 industry people coming here, and so I welcome them as support  
30 staff, but not working group.  
31

32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, Mr. Sanchez. Thank you for your  
33 comments. Mr. Strelcheck.  
34

35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I just want to be cognizant of what  
36 Carrie was suggesting. In terms of us being able to contact these  
37 people to determine whether they're going to be available to  
38 participate, willing to participate, could we just put a  
39 placeholder for like a sawfish researcher, or a manta ray  
40 researcher, to be determined, and give you the flexibility to  
41 contact those individuals?  
42

43 I'm just trying to figure out flexibility here, because, if  
44 everyone says no, right, then we've given you the flexibility to  
45 determine that we're not going to add anyone to the group, right,  
46 but, if you want us to specifically identify people, I'm also fine  
47 with doing that. I'm just trying to address your concern.  
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thanks, Andy, for that. Dr. Simmons.

2  
3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. I think that could help  
4 with our flexibility. Just to make sure I understand though what  
5 the council would prefer right now to see, as far as a researcher  
6 goes, it would either be Greg Poulakis or Jessica Pate participate  
7 in this, and then, if we need another researcher, we can consider  
8 that? Either one of those would be from Florida Fish and Wildlife.

9  
10 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So you're saying it's either/or, Gregg or Jessica?  
11 Jessica doesn't work for FWC. She's Marine Megafauna Foundation,  
12 and is focused on mantas. Gregg is on the sawfish side.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Freeman.

15  
16 **DR. FREEMAN:** I'm trying not to drag this out, and so, if Number  
17 14 and Number 15, based off what Mr. Sweetman said, are researchers  
18 dealing with giant manta ray, and then with smalltooth sawfish,  
19 would it be worthwhile then, since we still have to contact them,  
20 if we just, after each of those individuals' names, Gregg and  
21 Jessica, put "or alternate", or something along those lines, so  
22 that we recognize that, if they do not have that availability, we  
23 know to find -- Or perhaps "or substitute", so that we know then  
24 we have that flexibility to reach out to someone else.

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

27  
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that makes sense, Dr. Freeman.

29  
30 **DR. FREEMAN:** Thank you, Bernie.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

33  
34 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Again, I would feel a lot better if Number 14, Greg  
35 Poulakis, was put as a support staff participant, rather than as  
36 part of the working group.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Well, are there any other comments  
39 for the list? I think we're going to entertain a motion. Dr.  
40 Sweetman.

41  
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I've got you, Mr. Chair. Bernie, I have a motion,  
43 whenever you're ready, to approve the workplan and membership for  
44 addressing protected resource interactions with Gulf federal  
45 shrimp trials. I can slow that down. To approve the workplan and  
46 membership for addressing protected resource interactions with  
47 Gulf federal shrimp trials.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We have a motion on the board by Dr.  
2 Sweetman. Is there a second? Dr. Banks seconded. Is there any  
3 further discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**  
4 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any opposition, the motion**  
5 **carries.** Dr. Simmons.  
6

7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I know  
8 I kind of beat this one already, but just -- We wasted a lot of  
9 time during the first bycatch working group for finfish, and so  
10 just, again, Mr. Strelcheck and Dr. Walter, if you would please be  
11 clear with staff, and support staff, if this is really a priority,  
12 that that is conveyed throughout, and people understand that we're  
13 trying to do the best we can to work around folks' schedules, but  
14 we need assistance in that area to get this done, and so thank  
15 you.  
16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.  
18

19 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and we're going to be committed to this, but I  
20 would also say that, based on my understanding of the objectives,  
21 it's really to find solutions. It's not to go take deep dives  
22 into the data, or the methodology for calculating the bycatch,  
23 because that doesn't seem to be the charge of the group, because,  
24 if that's the case, then that will delay any progress on finding  
25 workable solutions, and really that's why we populated it with  
26 people who know the industry, to be able to do that.  
27

28 I just want to make sure, and reiterate, that my understanding of  
29 the focus and charge of this group, versus the finfish working  
30 group that took a soup-to-nuts dive into the bycatch calculations,  
31 and I think, at this point, if people are expecting that for this  
32 one, then that's not what I read in the objectives here. Thanks.  
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have a couple of hands, Dr. Froeschke and Dr.  
35 Allen.  
36

37 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Just to that point, noted, and I don't  
38 disagree with that necessarily, but I would expect that the group  
39 may come up with, if we were to change X, either in the spatial  
40 fishing operations or the gear modifications or something, what  
41 kind of reductions could we expect.  
42

43 I do think that that's an analytical thing, and it's going to come  
44 in, you know, to the data, and they're going to have to look at -  
45 - To be able to provide us some guidance with regard to the  
46 uncertainty of the estimates and all that stuff, and so I think it  
47 will come in that way, even if it doesn't come in in -- You know,  
48 I don't think we need a soup-to-nuts presentation on how the

1 estimates were derived, but, on the back end, I think that might  
2 be applicable in some way.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. Dr. Allen.

5  
6 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just make the point that  
7 the SSC did review this, and had some specific recommendations  
8 with regard to bycatch estimation, with regard to expanding  
9 observer coverage, incorporating uncertainty in the bycatch  
10 estimates, and so it would seem to me this working group doesn't  
11 need to dig into that, but there are recommendations, you know, on  
12 record from the SSC, and that it should go back to them as well.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for bringing that up, Dr. Allen. Any  
15 other comments, conversations? All right. Mr. Schieble, do you  
16 continue with the committee report?

17  
18 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I can't remember. Did we vote on that motion, all  
19 in favor? We did? All right. A committee members stated that  
20 the council had previously been told by the National Marine  
21 Fisheries Service that the clock was ticking and inquired how  
22 quickly the working group needed to conclude. A committee member  
23 responded that the Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation  
24 will be initiated by the end of the year, regardless of whether  
25 the working group has concluded or not.

26  
27 Moving to the Draft Options: Status Determination Criteria for the  
28 Penaeid Shrimp, Tab D, Number 6, council staff reviewed the purpose  
29 and need and actions and alternatives. He noted that the council's  
30 motion from its April 2026 meeting requested that this amendment  
31 address not only status determination criteria but also the minimum  
32 threshold number of shrimp permits.

33  
34 The council has requested Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
35 provide an updated multidisciplinary analysis of the minimum  
36 threshold number of federal Gulf shrimp permits from Shrimp  
37 Amendment 17B, and staff are awaiting completion of these analyses  
38 to further develop an action in the document.

39  
40 In Action 4, modify the overfish threshold for penaeid shrimp, a  
41 committee member confirmed that Alternative 2, which sets the  
42 minimum stock size threshold equal to the biomass at maximum  
43 sustainable yield, was consistent with the SSC's recommendation.

44  
45 In Action 4, council staff noted that Alternatives 3 and 4, which  
46 respectively set the MSST at 90 percent and 80 percent of BMSY are  
47 presented for the committee's consideration, since they would  
48 accommodate a modest reduction in stock size that could be expected

1 with normal fluctuations and environmental conditions without  
2 triggering an overfished condition for the stock. Staff will  
3 continue working on the amendment.

4  
5 Just for reference purposes, I'm going to pause there for a second.  
6 Dr. Freeman, in the action guide, we will receive this back at the  
7 October meeting, correct, just for awareness for everyone?

8  
9 **DR. FREEMAN:** I think that would be reasonable. Again, some of it  
10 would depend on how quickly we get the analysis for that minimum  
11 threshold of permits, so that can go in front of, at a minimum,  
12 the SSC, and likely the AP would want to review it as well, and so  
13 I think October will be a reasonable expectation for this.

14  
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Dr. Freeman. Council staff inquired how  
16 often National Marine Fisheries Service would rerun the stock  
17 assessment model to update the status determination criteria  
18 values for white and brown shrimp.

19  
20 Dr. Walter reminded the committee that SEAMAP indices are the  
21 primary input in the model and stated that the model could be  
22 updated if the council requests updated advice for management. We  
23 have no other business. Mr. Chair, this concludes the Shrimp  
24 Committee report.

25  
26 **FULL COUNCIL CLOSED SESSION REPORT**

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. All right. We'll go  
29 ahead and take our break for our working lunch, or maybe we're  
30 not. I'm sorry. I thought I heard food come in the back. All  
31 right.

32  
33 We'll knock out one more item. I'll do the closed session report,  
34 and so it's Tab T. It was the Full Council Closed Session,  
35 Selection of Coastal Migratory Advisory Panel members. The council  
36 made the following appointments to the CMP Advisory Panel: Susan  
37 Boggs, Anthony Coletti, Justin Fadalla, Benjamin Graham, Andrew  
38 Gude, Frank Harwell, Robert Hilliard, Ben Knight, David Krebs Jr.,  
39 Jacob Mouton, Alex Murray, George Niles, Rick Owens, Lance  
40 Robinson, Derek Saucier, Lily Walker, and Robert Woithe.

41  
42 Also, we had the selection of the Red Drum Advisory Panel members,  
43 and the council made the following appointments: John Aukeman,  
44 Shane Bonnot, Charles Elkins, Charlie Gray, William Hammond, III,  
45 Ty Hibbs, Costa Kouzounis, Susan Lowerre-Barbieri, Mark Luitjen,  
46 Jerry McNew, Lance Robinson, Stephen Smith, Rudy Valenciano, and  
47 Lily Walker, and that concludes the Full Council session report.

1 All right. Now we're ready for lunch, working lunch, and let's  
2 take our thirty-minute lunch break, and we'll come back at 12:35.

3  
4 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on June 3, 2026.)

5  
6 - - -

7  
8 June 3, 2026

9  
10 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

11  
12 - - -

13  
14 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Hilton Tampa  
15 Airport Westshore in Tampa, Florida on Wednesday afternoon, June  
16 3, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. If we can quiet down, and we can  
19 reconvene and stay on schedule. All right. Thank you, and so  
20 we'll switch a couple items around, and we're going to knock out  
21 the Florida Law Enforcement Efforts by Captain Pearce first, and  
22 then we're going to go to NOAA OLE, with Mr. Walia, and so Captain  
23 Pearce.

24  
25 **FLORIDA LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

26  
27 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** Chairman Dugas, council members, Dr. Simmons,  
28 thank you all for having me today. You all remember, last time we  
29 did this, I got up here and wore my contacts, and I couldn't see  
30 the screen, and so I came better prepared this time, and so we'll  
31 go ahead and get started.

32  
33 You know, I like to come out and talk about some of the things  
34 we're doing with our federal fisheries programs. My PowerPoint is  
35 based on our statewide assets, and statewide numbers, but the case  
36 examples I have are primarily what we're doing in the Gulf, and so  
37 we can go ahead with the first slide.

38  
39 To give you an idea of our footprint around the state, this gives  
40 you an idea of all the vessels we have. These are our dedicated  
41 vessels to our offshore patrol vessel program. These are the  
42 different classifications.

43  
44 We have two heavy Endurance Class vessels, one named the Gulf  
45 Ranger out of Marco Island, and it's a forty-one-foot Safe boat.  
46 We have a sister vessel that we haven't named yet, the same vessel,  
47 a forty-one-foot Safe boat, that is based out of Carrabelle, and  
48 those are our big Endurance Class. These vessels are capable of

1 berthing onboard, things like that, and they can handle weather  
2 conditions. These can do long-range, you know, multiday patrols,  
3 you know, a couple days, or maybe three at the most, but typically  
4 they're our long-range heavy Endurance Class boats.

5  
6 We have fifteen Endurance Class vessels. These are vessels that  
7 are very much the same category, as far as capability with weather,  
8 but they just don't have the berthing capability and things like  
9 that to do overnight patrols.

10  
11 These patrols will do long, sixteen-hour patrols, whether  
12 throughout the day or overnight, and then, a lot of times, these  
13 boats, we'll have them cover an area, and they'll leapfrog.  
14 They'll go offshore, and work a while, and come into a port, and  
15 maybe stay the night, and then go back out and leapfrog again, and  
16 go to another area, or circle back where they started, but we cover  
17 a lot of area with these vessels.

18  
19 Our last boats are the four Intermediate Class boats. These are  
20 smaller vessels. They're somewhat limited to range and weather  
21 conditions, but they're still very capable. We have a twenty-  
22 nine-foot Rapid out of Carrabelle, and have a thirty-two out of  
23 Pensacola, a Fincat, and another twenty-nine Contender out of St.  
24 Petersburg, and a thirty-five Contender out of Crystal River.

25  
26 If you noticed, the large vessel we had, the Gulf Sentry, is  
27 absent. We decommissioned that vessel last year, and eventually  
28 we are going to bring another larger sixty-five-foot catamaran  
29 back into the St. Pete area, and so that twenty-nine will be  
30 replaced with a larger platform, once we get to that point, but  
31 we're a few years out from that.

32  
33 All right. Just to give you an idea, these stats are based on the  
34 offshore patrol vessel fleet, and this is our fleet around the  
35 state, and so these are statewide numbers, but these are like the  
36 gentlemen you gave the award to earlier. These officers are  
37 dedicated to JEA patrol. Every day they leave the dock, their  
38 primary mission is to go out and do federal enforcement. Now,  
39 they do some state enforcement along the way, but their primary  
40 mission every day, and goal, is to go out and get offshore and do  
41 federal enforcement.

42  
43 When you look at the total hours of federal enforcement, these  
44 numbers are based on June of 2025 to April 30<sup>th</sup> of this year, and  
45 so we're still in our contract season with NOAA, and so these  
46 numbers are based on what they started in June of 2025 through  
47 April 30<sup>th</sup> of 2026.

1 They conducted 1,618 hours of federal enforcement patrol combined.  
2 1,160 hours were based on reef fish or our CEP patrol hours. 176  
3 hours were based on TED enforcement. 241 hours were for marine  
4 mammal, and we had 645 total enforcement actions, which means 253  
5 were warnings, and 392 were citations, whether it be state or  
6 federal citations.

7  
8 Then, along with our OPV program that does such great work, we  
9 also lean on our regional assets to help us out, and so all of the  
10 different regions have a set number of JEA hours they're required  
11 to accomplish with our normal regional assets, and they really  
12 step up to the plate. They always exceed the numbers that are  
13 required. They always do a great job, and these are all more  
14 Intermediate Class boats that are going out and getting out to  
15 that nine-mile line, and maybe a little bit further, and conducting  
16 that federal enforcement, or maybe working shrimp boats, thing  
17 closer to inshore.

18  
19 For dockside, for our regions, they had over 602 hours of vessel  
20 patrol. Combined for the state was 1,582 hours. In the marine  
21 mammal, they had 265 hours. Outreach was 268 hours. Our illegal,  
22 unreported, and unregulated was 188 hours.

23  
24 The total regional federal patrol efforts, all combined, were 2,184  
25 hours of patrol. 861 enforcement actions, and it breaks down to  
26 -- I think it's 583 combined warnings, and then 278 combined  
27 citations, and that's all just regional assets, and so you take  
28 our dedicated OPV assets, our fifteen vessels, and our multiple  
29 crewmen on that, and then you have all of our regional assets  
30 putting it together, and we really put a lot of effort in  
31 patrolling our federal fisheries.

32  
33 All right, and so this is specific to the Florida Keys National  
34 Marine Sanctuary, and so the total patrol hours for Florida Keys  
35 National Marine Sanctuary was 1,864. The sanctuary preservation  
36 areas and management areas were 687 hours. Western Sambo  
37 Ecological Reserve and Special Use Areas were sixty-nine hours.  
38 Our WMAs were 964 hours. The Tortugas, we had forty-five hours,  
39 and then all other hours combined were ninety-nine.

40  
41 All right, and so that gives you an idea of all the different  
42 effort we're putting into this, the timeframe we've been able to  
43 put this together, and it's pretty incredible for me to look at,  
44 from where I'm at, and then I'll go into some case examples.

45  
46 The next slide, we'll start talking about some of the -- This is  
47 a sampling of some of the cases that our officers have made in the  
48 Gulf this past year.



1  
2 The first case we'll talk about was a commercial longline vessel.  
3 When they boarded the vessel, they found the vessel to be in  
4 possession of undersized red grouper. They had no venting tool or  
5 descending device onboard.  
6

7 As a matter of fact, when the officer was onboard, and they were  
8 bringing in the gear, he was counting hooks, and he observed a  
9 crewman using a fillet knife to vent fish. He probably started  
10 doing that because we were onboard, and they realized they had no  
11 tool whatsoever, and so they were trying to do whatever they could,  
12 but, obviously, the officer addressed that, and they were cited  
13 for not having the proper gear onboard.  
14

15 Also, in counting the hooks, as a matter of fact, the captain,  
16 when they got onboard, told them right off the bat that they were  
17 going to be illegal, based on the amount of hooks they had on the  
18 lines themselves, but the total amount of hooks they had onboard,  
19 rigged and ready to go, including what was on the line, was 1,078,  
20 and, of course, you're limited to 750 hooks that should be rigged  
21 and ready to fish with at any time.  
22

23 The next boat is going to be a commercial bandit-rigged vessel.  
24 Again, the failure to make fish available. As the officers were  
25 approaching the boat, the crew were throwing bits and pieces  
26 overboard of fish, and what they were doing was they were using  
27 reef fish for bait, and so, when they realized it was law  
28 enforcement, they were trying to get rid of those pieces of fish,  
29 where they had them on the cut table and things like that, and so  
30 they were making those things -- That's basically destruction of  
31 evidence, and so we charged them for failure to make the fish  
32 available for inspection.  
33

34 Use of reef fish for bait, as you can see in the picture, you have  
35 a -- I think it's vermilion snapper, and the failure to land in  
36 whole condition, and we had filleted banded rudderfish, and then  
37 possession of undersized vermilion snapper onboard as well, and so  
38 that was that.  
39

40 You can see the cooler in there, the picture of the cooler, and  
41 that was what they called their bait cooler. As you can see, that  
42 cooler is full of reef fish, and so, again, you know, it's a big  
43 deal when they're using those reef fish for bait, and those are  
44 good cases we like to get out there and make.  
45

46 All right, and so the next one is going to be a recreational  
47 spearfishing vessel. I think this one stopped probably just off  
48 of the coast of St. Pete, but, when they got onboard, they had

1 possession of four gag out of season, and they had possession of  
2 one greater amberjack out of season, and they had two undersized  
3 hogfish, and then they also had no venting tool or descending  
4 device onboard, and so they were cited for that, but this was a  
5 spearfishing vessel, with multiple people onboard and, again, they  
6 weren't making very much of an attempt to follow any of the  
7 regulations.

8  
9 All right, and then we have -- We go into the Ecological Reserve  
10 and the Tortugas, and so, in this boarding, they found the vessel  
11 to be in possession of twenty reef fish while actively fishing  
12 inside the reserve. They had nine red grouper, three red hind,  
13 six silk snapper, and two mutton snapper, and then, of course,  
14 they were over the possession.

15  
16 There were four people onboard, and so they were over the  
17 possession of red grouper, and so they were cited for fishing, and  
18 then you see the chart plotter up there, and it shows that they  
19 had been fishing within that reserve. They had been moving around  
20 within that reserve the whole time, and so, basically, all the  
21 fish they had onboard had pretty much been harvested within the  
22 reserve.

23  
24 This is another example of a boarding that occurred in the South  
25 Ecological Reserve. In this one, they had thirty-five -- They  
26 possessed thirty-five reef fish while actively fishing. When they  
27 pulled up, they had active lines in the water. They had twelve  
28 mutton snapper, fifteen silk snapper, two yellowtail snapper, four  
29 margates, one red hind, and one horse-eye jack. They were using  
30 reef fish for bait, and they had no venting tool or descending  
31 device onboard.

32  
33 This our last case example. If you see the vessel in this, it  
34 looks like a commercial vessel. The vessel was actually registered  
35 as commercial, but nobody onboard, the owner included, had -- They  
36 did not have a commercial license. There was no commercial license  
37 assigned to the vessel, and I don't know whether he had done work  
38 for that vessel before, or had purchased it with that registration  
39 in place, and hadn't changed it yet, and I'm not sure what the  
40 situation was there, but, again, this was a commercial-type vessel,  
41 but total recreational harvest.

42  
43 When they boarded the boat, they were in possession of twenty-  
44 seven snapper over the allowed aggregate of Gulf snapper. They  
45 had three mutton snapper, forty-four yellowtail snapper, nineteen  
46 mangrove snapper, five lane snapper, and two vermilion snapper  
47 onboard.

1 They had possession of undersized mangrove snapper, undersized  
2 vermillion, and they were fishing with j-hooks, and not circle  
3 hooks. There wasn't a circle hook on the boat, and they did not  
4 have a venting tool, and they had a descending device, but it was  
5 not rigged and ready.

6  
7 They found the device up in the forward part of the boat. It was  
8 just by itself, and there was no line attached to it, and no  
9 weights attached to it, or anywhere near, where they could hook it  
10 up, and so they charged them with that as well.

11  
12 That's just a small sample of cases that our guys are making out  
13 there, guys and girls are making out there, and, again, we could  
14 do this for a whole day, if I want to talk about different case  
15 examples, but that just gives you a good sample, but that will  
16 conclude my presentation, and I'll be happy to take any questions  
17 you might have.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Pearce, for your presentation.  
20 I know we have a question from Mr. Walker, and then Dr. Sweetman.

21  
22 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Captain Pearce. I just had a -- It struck  
23 me that -- Is a spearfishing vessel required to have a venting  
24 tool or a descending device?

25  
26 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** Yes. If they're going to participate in -- If  
27 they have those reef fish onboard, they have to have a venting  
28 tool and a descending device onboard. It applies to any vessel  
29 participating in the fishery, because they could be bottom fishing  
30 at the same time.

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

33  
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you for the presentation, Captain Pearce.  
35 Some of these cases that you guys have made here have just got me  
36 shaking my head, and Florida is going to Florida, I guess, but I  
37 just want to say I appreciate -- I mean, just looking at some of  
38 these things here, it's just crazy, and so I just want to -- Thanks  
39 to you, and your staff, and the entire team that goes out there.  
40 Some of these areas are incredibly far offshore, and, yes this is  
41 -- You guys are the last line of resort here, and so I really  
42 appreciate all your guys' efforts.

43  
44 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** Thank you. I went out with them not long ago.  
45 We left out of Marco Island, and patrolled all the way to the Fort  
46 in the Tortugas, all in one big day patrol, and so they cover a  
47 lot of ground, and they're very dedicated to what they do.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have a couple more questions, Captain Pearce.  
2 I have Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Anson.

3  
4 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Captain Pearce, I appreciate you being here.  
5 Excellent presentation. I really appreciate all the great work  
6 your team is doing. Two questions. Gag season has, obviously,  
7 been very short for recreational. Have you seen an increase in  
8 out-of-season illegal harvest of gag?

9  
10 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** It's not something I've seen a lot, but I don't  
11 get to review every single case that comes across on it. That's  
12 definitely something I could take a deep dive on and find out for  
13 you, but this reference to the gag out-of-season is one of the  
14 first I've seen, but that doesn't mean we don't have a lot of cases  
15 that are being done.

16  
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I've had a few people mention that to me, and so,  
18 yes, I would be interested to follow-up with you on those cases,  
19 if you're seeing any sort of update.

20  
21 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** Absolutely.

22  
23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Then it was mentioned, and we may come to it in  
24 the Reef Fish Committee report, about eliminating, or maybe  
25 alleviating, some of the hook restrictions for outside of fifty  
26 fathoms. I'm curious, from your perspective, given the work you  
27 do offshore, how you would see that working, or, you know, limiting  
28 enforcement.

29  
30 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** I can't -- I mean, I don't really know the history  
31 of how we landed on 750. I can only speak from a law enforcement  
32 standpoint, but, that number of 750 -- You know, if we're going to  
33 count hooks, I mean, that's a reasonable amount of hooks that we  
34 can count. We can spend a reasonable amount of time on your vessel  
35 and not impede your ability to do your job.

36  
37 When you start expanding that number, unless you go to unlimited  
38 hooks -- If you expand it beyond a thousand or more, it just means  
39 we're going to be there a lot longer doing our job, while you're  
40 out there trying to do your job, and so 750, I feel like, was one  
41 of those places we probably landed because it was a reasonable  
42 amount of hooks that we could verify in law enforcement, and then  
43 it was also a reasonable amount of hooks that they could go out  
44 and harvest. Of course, they can have stuff, you know, onboard  
45 that's not rigged and ready to roll, but everything that's rigged  
46 has to be within that 750.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Pearce. Next, we have Mr.

1 Anson.

2  
3 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Captain Pearce, for the presentation, and  
4 thank you for the work that you do, as well as the rest of your  
5 team members as well. Good synopsis here of some of the cases  
6 that you and your staff have been involved with.

7  
8 I was curious about the comment you made relative to the commercial  
9 bandit-rigged vessel that had a few citations. The failure to  
10 make fish available for inspection, you mentioned the destruction  
11 of evidence, and so were those two distinct violations?

12  
13 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** No, and, essentially, that was my way of  
14 describing what that meant. So, when they're throwing fish  
15 overboard, they're depriving our ability to inspect those fish.  
16 They were clearly onboard the vessel, and clearly were taken, and,  
17 again, that just impeded our ability to verify what was on the  
18 vessel. There's a difference between somebody reeling up a fish,  
19 taking it off the hook, and throwing it back, and these were  
20 clearly in the boat, and on the bait table, some were on the deck,  
21 and they were reaching up and throwing it over. It was mostly  
22 parts and pieces of fish.

23  
24 **MR. ANSON:** Okay. Thank you.

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

27  
28 **DR. ALLEN:** I was just going to say thank you, Captain Pearce, for  
29 being here, and I would also be interested in seeing if there's  
30 any uptick in the gag violations since this. I think that the  
31 council would be interested in seeing that.

32  
33 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** I will pull those stats together, and I'll give  
34 those to Dr. Sweetman.

35  
36 **DR. ALLEN:** Great. Thank you.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Pearce. Mr. Geeslin.

39  
40 **MR. GEESLIN:** I've got a question from the western Gulf, and one  
41 observation, from a leadership perspective. Earlier, two of your  
42 team were recognized. You also went above and beyond and  
43 recognized the other members of the team. Excellent work. We all  
44 realize it's a team effort, and so I appreciate you, you know,  
45 from a leadership perspective, sharing those accolades with your  
46 team.

47  
48 A question related to the descending devices and venting tools.

1 In Texas, we have the same. In fact, we mirrored what my colleagues  
2 over at FWC did in ensuring that -- Or putting in regs that put  
3 into place the provision of rigged and ready, and actually  
4 utilizing those devices.

5  
6 What you've shown today is that, in fact, it is enforceable, to  
7 some degree, and what do you feel is the limiting factor there?  
8 Is it awareness, education, and outreach? Why aren't folks  
9 utilizing that more often?

10  
11 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** I think part of it might be misinformation. The  
12 case where the guy had the device onboard, but he had it up in the  
13 front of the vessel, and he didn't have a line attached, or  
14 weights, he -- He probably thought that, by having it, he had  
15 satisfied the requirement, but he didn't realize that he had to  
16 have it rigged and ready. Given the situation, those most times  
17 are going to be educational moments. You know, the other factors  
18 may take it beyond education, you know, but, for the most part, we  
19 are enforcing these now.

20  
21 If you don't have them onboard, then you're going to get a citation  
22 for it. If you do have them, but you don't know how to use them,  
23 or you're not sure how to set them up, then we're here to educate,  
24 and help out as much as we can, and so I think, with those  
25 descending devices, education is going to be a very important tool  
26 in getting people onboard to use it, and we want to promote that.  
27 We want to get people onboard, but we're going to hold people  
28 accountable that are just ignoring it altogether.

29  
30 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you. Excellent work.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Pearce. Do we have any other  
33 questions? Not seeing any, thank you again for being here, and  
34 your presentation, and you and your team. Great work. Thank you.

35  
36 **CAPTAIN PEARCE:** Thank you, all. I appreciate it.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, we'll do the NOAA OLE report. Mr. Walia.

39  
40 **NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (OLE) REPORT**

41  
42 **MR. MATT WALIA:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the time. I'm  
43 happy to be here in-person as well, and not virtual, when we're  
44 able to. I'm Matt Walia with NOAA OLE. I'll give you an update  
45 on January through March, and some notable cases as well of where  
46 we are, and I'm happy to take questions afterwards.

47  
48 I wanted to do -- I always like throwing these in. This is a

1 snapshot. You just heard all the great work from Captain Pearce,  
2 what him and his folks are able to do, and this is overall, all  
3 the JEA, the Joint Enforcement Agreement, partnership referrals  
4 that we've gotten from January to March, and so fifty-two overall  
5 throughout the whole Southeast.

6  
7 You see the numbers down below specific to the Gulf partners.  
8 Florida was a smattering of everything from Magnuson, sanctuary,  
9 Endangered Species referrals, and, Texas and the Coast Guard, most  
10 of those were involving shrimpers, and so those were ESA-related,  
11 like TED and BRD violations that were coming over our way.

12  
13 We always rely on -- We're doing a lot of trainings, whether it's  
14 at the academies or ad hoc with our partners, and so this is a  
15 great relationship. This helps us get the work in, and so I can't  
16 speak enough to this aspect.

17  
18 I wanted to highlight something here a little different. I know  
19 this isn't in your purview as a council, but we're still  
20 responsible for enforcing HMS violations, and we've had a slew.  
21 Some recent ones that I thought were noteworthy to talk about, the  
22 bluefin tuna catch, this was a recreational fisherman that was out  
23 of Texas.

24  
25 This actually started as a referral from a Texas Game Warden. The  
26 season was closed, and he was out there fishing. You would be  
27 amazed what we find on social media, that people post on  
28 themselves, but there was pictures all over of this guy and his  
29 catch and what he had.

30  
31 He didn't have any permits, and he didn't report anything. They  
32 cut the fish up, and they shared the fish along with everyone.  
33 Just ignorance, and he didn't realize what he needed. That ended  
34 up going to our attorneys at General Counsel Enforcement Section  
35 with a \$5,500 NOVA, is what he got for that, and we've had a couple  
36 cases of that as well.

37  
38 Tournament registrations is another one I want to highlight, that  
39 people don't think about. You actually have to report four weeks  
40 prior to your event happening, and register that with NOAA staff.  
41 If you fail to do that, you also have to get your catch over. All  
42 that is important for data and everything you're talking about for  
43 stocks and what's going on out there getting caught from the  
44 tournaments.

45  
46 If you fail to do that, that's a \$1,000 summary settlement, and  
47 we've actually had a handful of tournament registers that are  
48 multi-year, multi-offenders that we're currently looking into that

1 we get referrals from our line office as well, and that snapshot  
2 on the bottom right is what -- It's public access, and you can go  
3 to it, and click on it, and register your tournament, and submit  
4 everything you need to through there as well.

5  
6 Finally, the last one is just having the correct permits and  
7 knowledge. We've had some recent referrals come our way as well,  
8 and mostly recreational. A lot of people, and I get calls all the  
9 time, don't even realize they need an HMS angler permit to go fish  
10 in federal waters. It's very easy to access. It's open access.  
11 I think it's \$20 or \$25 on the database, or versus even being a  
12 charter for HMS fishermen, to make sure you have that, or vice  
13 versa, and that's going to depend on what retention, what you can  
14 keep out there.

15  
16 We get a handful of those cases. A lot of it is just knowledge,  
17 people understanding to have the right permit, no matter what  
18 fishery, and not just HMS, and so I wanted to highlight that.

19  
20 One of the things that we continue to do too is take an uptick, I  
21 would say over the past year or two, has been involved in anything  
22 with trade. Seafood import monitoring is a big factor that we do.  
23 We had a recent big operation at Houston International Airport.  
24 We brought in staff from Headquarters, and we had local folks here.  
25 We worked with our partner agencies, and you see down below too,  
26 and it's always a big effort, but our main deal is to inspect  
27 seafood coming in.

28  
29 We want to make sure it's accurately labeled. We want to be able  
30 to trace where it came from, and was it harvested, whether  
31 aquaculture or wild sourced, in a sustainable way that we approve  
32 of as a country. We work with the Department of State on that.

33  
34 We're checking all that paperwork, and one of the other neat things  
35 we're doing, that you see in that picture there, is we're working  
36 a lot on doing field DNA tests. Our goal is to have some rapid  
37 DNA tests that we can do on the scene to determine what species  
38 that fish is, and then whether we can hold it or release it back  
39 into commerce right away.

40  
41 Otherwise we're sending it to our forensic labs, and that takes  
42 time, whether we're putting some product on hold for a while, and  
43 that can slow things up, and we're trying to work with Customs and  
44 Border Patrol on that as well, and so definitely more to report on  
45 that in the future.

46  
47 Closed area cases, we've had a handful here that I wanted to  
48 highlight, just some stuff we hear, you know, coming to the



1 councils of where enforcement is, and what we're doing, and a  
2 couple of key things to highlight here.

3  
4 One would be down in the Keys. You also heard from Captain Pearce  
5 on that. We try to get down there when we can. The way we try to  
6 manage our resources, and our staffing, and what we can do, there's  
7 actually -- When there's an upcoming sanctuary council, we usually  
8 have one of our folks go to that, and we plan to op around it at  
9 the same time, and so, at the same time we're down there, and we  
10 have one upcoming right now, but we recently did one in the Upper  
11 Keys, and so it was great.

12  
13 We had a crew going out, patrolling out there, patrolling all the  
14 SPAs. We came across some folks that didn't have diver flags,  
15 making sure people are safe, and some of the coral nurseries are  
16 protected too, and so that's something we'll do continually  
17 throughout the year. We're, obviously, planning for the mini-  
18 season. It's a big effort. We go before, during, and after mini-  
19 season, and we'll be down there as well.

20  
21 We had a Tortugas case that I wanted to highlight. It was  
22 recreational fishing. This is a referral from FWC, and so it was  
23 far offshore. It was a recreational angler. They had thirty-one  
24 fish onboard, mostly yellowtail, and a couple of red grouper, and  
25 they just didn't know. They didn't realize they weren't supposed  
26 to be out there fishing, but that still came our way, and that  
27 ended up being a little over a thousand-dollar NOVA that was issued  
28 to them as well, and so just being aware of the boundaries.

29  
30 There's a lot of tools out there, the Sanctuary Explorer app, and  
31 you have Fish Rules, and there's no lack of education of what to  
32 do. You just have to make sure you're responsible and go look for  
33 it.

34  
35 Madison Swanson, that's come up as well. We've had an uptick, I  
36 would say, since last summer. A lot of referrals from all these  
37 OPV crews you're seeing from Florida coming over, and it's great.  
38 We've been able to get some ride-alongs on, when we can, and we  
39 look forward to doing that in the future too, and so we'll get our  
40 folks out there with them.

41  
42 We are seeing, with the summertime, an increase in recreational  
43 activity there. We've had a handful of cases. Talking to my local  
44 guy there, what he's seen, it's a lot of inland recreational folks,  
45 that live inland a little bit, in Alabama and Georgia, and they're  
46 driving down to the coast. They're heading out for the weekend,  
47 and they're going out for a couple of days.

1 They know about the area, but they're still out there fishing.  
2 It's a small box, and they're taking what they can out there, and  
3 so we've had a handful of cases, and it's been anywhere from \$800  
4 to \$1,500 summary settlement. We will give a civil penalty to  
5 folks when we come across.

6  
7 Sometimes you get the excuse that I caught this fish outside,  
8 elsewhere, but just a reminder for recreational that you can't  
9 have any reef fish at all in that area. The only way you can is  
10 if you're a commercial folk with a permit, and then you can transit  
11 through with stowage, and so that's definitely an uptick we've  
12 seen. There's no lack of making a case, as long as we can get out  
13 there or work with FWC, especially on the weekend. There's usually  
14 a few folks out there.

15  
16 The Joint Presence Patrol, I'm not going to highlight too much,  
17 and it was actually one that Captain Pearce highlighted. This was  
18 a recent one we got our -- One of our folks went out on their new  
19 Safe boat. It was a really good case, and it's the same deal.

20  
21 He was over the hook limit, and the same deal with the venting.  
22 We saw the fish were floating everywhere. You know, venting with  
23 a fillet knife is not the proper way to do that, but that was just  
24 a good example of us working together, getting a case, making a  
25 presence out there.

26  
27 A couple reminders, and I actually kept this in from the last time,  
28 because I know my connection was pretty garbled. You know, we  
29 start the federal for-hire season, and the states have theirs as  
30 well, and so just a reminder to be aware of your boundaries, be  
31 aware of your permits, and I'm hoping, near the end of the season,  
32 we'll have some more stuff to report on.

33  
34 We do have some ongoing ops right now. We've got more planned  
35 throughout the summer that are targeting illegal charters. All  
36 the time when we have patrols, that's one of our top things that  
37 we're trying to look for. No matter what our goal is out there,  
38 we're stopping recreational boats, and we're stopping other boats  
39 on the line, and we're seeing where they are, what permits they  
40 have, and so that's definitely a priority for us. Like I said,  
41 hopefully, at the end of the season, I'll have some more specifics  
42 to report out.

43  
44 One of the other things, as far as compliance goes, and this is in  
45 the VMS and the IFQ world, we're seeing a lot of folks that are  
46 forgetting certain things you've got to do. You get used to going  
47 out all the time.

1 Trip declarations, you have to send that before you go out fishing,  
2 declaring what gear you have, what you're targeting. You've got  
3 a lot of folks that are not doing that, or maybe they're sending  
4 wrong notifications when they're landing, or, if you change it,  
5 you have to do a subsequent notification. All that is good for  
6 us, so we know when to meet a boat, where to meet a boat, and the  
7 same for the port samplers.

8  
9 Our folks, we have an investigative support staff. They make a  
10 lot of calls. They work with industry, and they're constantly  
11 doing outreach with them, to try to get folks onboard, but those  
12 are some good reminders too that I wanted to highlight, as well as  
13 HMS.

14  
15 For some boats that come around the area, they have some new  
16 reports for commercial boats, that they need to dial-in on their  
17 VMS report if they're in or out of that closed area, and so just  
18 some new stuff folks may see on their actual VMS unit, depending  
19 on what fishery they're in, and, that bottom bullet you see, I  
20 think the main thing in all these cases is just know before you  
21 go.

22  
23 No matter what fishery you're in, do your due diligence, and know  
24 what the rules are. That's half the stuff we come across. You  
25 know, you had some questions with the descending device, and I  
26 feel like that's one of our most common recreational violations.  
27 You either don't have a descendant device, or you have some fish  
28 out of season, or you have an undersized fish.

29  
30 Those are some of the most common violations we see all the time,  
31 and rigged and ready is what we need for the descending device.  
32 Failure to have that is a \$250 summary settlement fine that we  
33 have, but a lot of it is more of education, making sure folks know  
34 what to do the next time they go out.

35  
36 Then, within the Gulf, we had ninety incidents, with a 32 percent  
37 compliance rate, and so that's our folks at the docks working with  
38 people, working on boardings, making sure people know what they're  
39 doing right, and so that's all I've got for now, and I'm happy to  
40 take any questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walia. We do have a question from  
43 Mr. Geeslin.

44  
45 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thanks, Matt. I always enjoy seeing you. You're  
46 one of the good guys over there. Know before you go. An ounce of  
47 prevention is worth a pound to cure, and, similar to the question  
48 I asked Captain Pearce, and you hit on it, some of the descending

1 devices, but anything you all are noting out there, and these  
2 presentations I find incredibly valuable.

3  
4 Us at the state level, and some of our outreach partners, Emily  
5 included, we can work to address, you know, some of those  
6 deficiencies. I recognize ignorance is not innocence, right, but,  
7 the more that we can educate, provide that level of outreach, and  
8 encourage that awareness, so they are -- They do know before they  
9 go, and, you know, maybe serve as a deterrent to some of the  
10 infractions and violations you all see, and that's where that  
11 collaboration really has a lot of value, and so I appreciate both  
12 your presentation and Captain Pearce's presentation, and how we  
13 continue to build and address these deficiencies. Thank you.

14  
15 **MR. WALIA:** I appreciate it. I'll just note, real quick, that we  
16 always try to note, and, you know, I'll say I go to -- I'm a  
17 frequent guy at MREP, and, you know, our whole goal is to work in  
18 partnership with industry, with fishermen, with management. We  
19 all need to work together to get it done.

20  
21 You know, a prime example in the Keys, when our folks are down  
22 there doing those patrols, the majority of that is compliance  
23 assistance, to make sure people know what the SPAs are, where they  
24 are, where they're fishing, and so I appreciate it.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have another question. Dr. Sweetman.

27  
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks for the presentation, Matt. A question for  
29 you, and kind of a nuanced one, just to kind of see how you guys  
30 approach this when you're on the water. The DESCEND Act, the  
31 regulations that kind of put the descending device federal  
32 regulations, that sunset on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

33  
34 We have subsequently passed regulations here, but they haven't  
35 been implemented yet, and so I'm just wondering how you all are  
36 approaching that on the water, given kind of a little bit of --  
37 There's a little bit of a period right now where there's no  
38 regulations, even though we're trying to put them forward, but  
39 they just haven't been implemented yet.

40  
41 **MR. WALIA:** A lot of that is a case-by-case basis. You're going  
42 to see -- We have officer discretion. You're going to see how  
43 that boarding goes, and are those folks being cooperative when  
44 you're asking them questions, when you're asking them to inspect  
45 the hold, what other catch they have.

46  
47 If they have a lot of undersized fish, or fish out of season, that  
48 may have a different course of action versus, hey, you don't have

1 a descending device ready to go, and so it's hard to give a straight  
2 answer on that. We'll just have to see as it goes, but usually,  
3 as new rules go, we realize, when stuff is in effect, or pending,  
4 coming down the pipe, that we're going to have some sort of leeway,  
5 and we're doing what we can to make sure people are aware and work  
6 with them.

7  
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks Matt.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walia. Any other questions? Not  
11 seeing any, thank you.

12  
13 **MR. WALIA:** Thank you.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thanks for being here. Okay, and so we'll jump  
16 back on committee reports, and we'll go to Habitat Protection, and  
17 I'll turn it over to Mr. Marquez.

18  
19 **COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)**  
20 **HABITAT PROTECTION & RESTORATION COMMITTEE REPORT**

21  
22 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Habitat and Restoration  
23 Committee met, and the committee adopted the agenda, Tab P, Number  
24 1, and the minutes, Tab P, Number 2, from the November 2025 meeting  
25 were approved.

26  
27 Council staff reviewed the Public Hearing Drafts: Generic  
28 Amendments of Shrimp, Reef Fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, Spiny  
29 Lobster, and Red Drum fishery Management Plans in the Gulf to  
30 update essential fish habitat descriptions and identifications.

31  
32 A committee member asked about the inclusion of wrecks when  
33 describing the habitat association of some reef fish. Staff  
34 responded that artificial reef structures are not a recognized  
35 habitat type within the scope of EFH management. The inclusion of  
36 wreck or other official reef structures in the species-specific  
37 habitat descriptions were provided to reflect habitat associations  
38 obtained from the updated literature review and describing the  
39 general association of many reef fish species with artificial reef  
40 structures.

41  
42 Staff highlighted that additional information to inform the EFH  
43 inland boundary was brought forward by the Southeast Fisheries  
44 Science Center, but was not available in time for this meeting.

45  
46 Previous EFH reviews and agency recommendations have identified  
47 that establishing an EFH inland boundary is a research priority to  
48 better describe and identify EFH in the Gulf. Staff will continue

1 work on the delineation of an inland boundary to include in the  
2 document prior to going out to public hearings.

3  
4 General Counsel noted that the document will need to be approved  
5 by the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council prior to public  
6 hearings, as it is looking to modify the FMPs for coastal migratory  
7 pelagics and spiny lobster, which are jointly managed by both the  
8 Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

9  
10 Public hearings will be two virtual sessions, one during the  
11 regular business hours to accommodate agency participation and one  
12 in the evening, consistent with our typical practices. The  
13 committee members supported approval of the document for public  
14 hearing and directed staff to include pertinent EFH inland boundary  
15 information provided by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
16 when it is available.

17  
18 The current workplan is for staff to continue work on development  
19 of an EFH inland boundary, present public hearing drafts to the  
20 South Atlantic for approval, conduct public hearings in late 2026  
21 or early 2027, and schedule final action after completion of the  
22 virtual public hearings. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marquez. Is there anything -- Mr.  
25 Walker.

26  
27 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think this is a good time to  
28 make a motion to approve the draft essential fish habitat amendment  
29 document for public hearings, just to keep the ball rolling.  
30 That's what Ms. Gardiner suggested that we do. just to keep things  
31 flowing in this direction, and so, if it's all right, I would like  
32 to make that motion to -- Is the language already up, or do I need  
33 to read the language here?

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I think Ryan is working on it.

36  
37 **MR. WALKER:** Okay, and there's more to the motion. Can we put a  
38 comma at the end of that and add "for public hearings following  
39 inclusion of the EFH inland boundary as it becomes available".

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Mr. Walker, is this your motion?

42  
43 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, Mr. Chair, it is.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Do we have a second for Captain  
46 Walker's motion? Seconded by Ms. Ballard. Any discussion on the  
47 motion? **Not seeing any discussion, is there any opposition to the**  
48 **motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Ms. Levy.

1  
2 **MS. LEVY:** Just because the committee report said that I advised  
3 that it had to go to the South Atlantic Council before public  
4 hearing, and I don't necessarily think that's true. We can talk  
5 about it. The South Atlantic Council definitely has to approve  
6 the final plan amendment, but, I mean, the act requires public  
7 hearings in the area that's going to be affected, and that's not  
8 on the South Atlantic side, so I don't know that they need to  
9 approve the public hearing draft. That's more for staff. We can  
10 talk about timing and whether you still want to do that.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Ms. Levy. All right. Is  
13 there any other business to come before the Habitat Protection and  
14 Restoration Committee? All right. Seeing none, we're going to  
15 move on down the agenda. I'm going to look at Mr. Walker to lead  
16 us through the Data Collection Committee report.

17  
18 **DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE REPORT**  
19

20 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection Committee  
21 adopted the agenda, Tab F Number 1, and approved the minutes of  
22 the April 2026 meeting.

23  
24 Public Hearing Draft of Generic Amendment: Modifications to Gulf  
25 For-Hire Data Collection Program, Tab F, Number 4, in Action 1,  
26 the committee discussed language requiring reporting of the  
27 logbook prior to offload of catch. There is concern that a  
28 dockside sampler could begin interviewing a for-hire captain  
29 before they have had a chance to submit their electronic report,  
30 which would violate the independent reporting assumption.

31  
32 A few committee members indicated that the language of the  
33 alternative could be modified such that reporting would be required  
34 within some period of time of landing fish to potentially alleviate  
35 this issue. Other committee members suggested that training of  
36 dockside samplers could address this concern to prevent conducting  
37 an interview before a captain's logbook is electronically  
38 submitted. The committee reviewed the rest of the document and  
39 decided to retain the current selected preferred alternatives.

40  
41 A committee member inquired about funding and the implementation  
42 timeline for the program. SERO staff indicated they were aware of  
43 funding for the program that had been proposed in a recent budget  
44 and noted that modernizing fisheries data collection is a priority  
45 of the current administration.

46  
47 The program implementation timeline is difficult to estimate. The  
48 amendment would need to work through the rulemaking process,

1 engagement of state agency partners would be required, and  
2 specifications for electronic reporting applications would need to  
3 be developed. The committee acknowledged that some time may be  
4 required to operationalize the program and wished to move the  
5 document through the council process.

6  
7 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to take Draft Generic**  
8 **Amendment: Modifications to Gulf For-Hire Data Collection Program**  
9 **out for virtual public hearings. This motion carried with no**  
10 **opposition.**

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, Mr. Walker. We have a committee motion  
13 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? All right.  
14 **No discussion on the motion, is there any opposition to the motion?**  
15 **Seeing none, the motion carries. Mr. Walker.**

16  
17 **MR. WALKER:** The committee received a presentation, a review of  
18 the Mid-Atlantic Tilefish Recreational Mandatory Reporting  
19 Program. After discussing the recreational mandatory reporting  
20 for blueline and golden tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic, the committee  
21 acknowledged the difficulty of building out a similar reporting  
22 program for the deepwater grouper complex in the Gulf of America.

23  
24 The committee member reiterated the need to define the universe of  
25 recreational anglers targeting deepwater grouper and expressed the  
26 desire to continue exploring the feasibility of developing such a  
27 program.

28  
29 The committee suggested that some potential next steps -- Suggested  
30 that some potential next steps, including investigating the  
31 feasibility of a cooperative research program and engaging anglers  
32 through scoping. The council should provide any further direction  
33 to staff during Full Council. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Is there any other  
36 business to come before the Data Collection Committee? All right.  
37 Dr. Sweetman.

38  
39 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Well, just to this last point, that the council  
40 should provide any further direction, I mean, we talked a lot about  
41 this, and some of the challenges associated with getting some of  
42 these rare-event species and better data collection.

43  
44 At this time, I'm not necessarily sure there's anything for the  
45 council to be drafting, or council staff to be drafting, a document  
46 for some sort of mandatory reporting system or anything like that.  
47 I think a lot of this, through -- I like Andy's suggestion about  
48 some sort of cooperative research that can get us some information



1 along those lines, rather than going through kind of a full-on  
2 rulemaking process, kind of cart getting ahead of the horse here,  
3 and that's my two-cents.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Strelcheck.

6  
7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I know it was kind of joked about,  
8 possibly making it a MARFIN priority, and certainly we can add  
9 things like this to the priorities. We have limited pools of  
10 funding for it.

11  
12 One side conversation I've had with Gregg is Gulf States has \$5  
13 million. It's directed at certain species. You know, they just  
14 awarded funding to University of South Alabama for tripletail and  
15 cobia. We're not sure if there's flexibility there, in terms of  
16 how that funding might be used in the future, and we'll need budget  
17 direction, but that could also be another avenue, and something  
18 the council would maybe consider writing a letter to Gulf States,  
19 to request, you know, this be considered as part of a priority for  
20 that. I don't know, Gregg, if you want to comment.

21  
22 **MR. BRAY:** Yes, and I've been communicating with Dave Donaldson,  
23 just here in the last ten minutes, and that funding appropriation  
24 came out of Senator Britt's office, and he met with them today,  
25 and he's trying to get some clarification on that.

26  
27 It sounds like it depends on which fiscal year of federal funding  
28 the second year of funding came from, and, depending on the answer  
29 to that, it will help us determine what type of flexibility and  
30 capability we have with that funding, and so we'll come back with  
31 some information on capabilities with that, and, if there is some  
32 flexibility to address some of these issues, because they are data  
33 gaps, and this money was identified to address data gaps, then we  
34 can have some more detailed conversations, both for this issue,  
35 and then another issue that Andy mentioned to me as well, and so  
36 we'll get back in touch with you if we have some flexibility there.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Bray. Dr. Allen.

39  
40 **DR. ALLEN:** I was just going to say I appreciate that. I think  
41 moving forward with a research kind of topic on this is a good  
42 next step, and so thank you.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck mentioned possibly writing a  
45 letter. Dr. Simmons, do you need something from the council to  
46 write that letter, a motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

47  
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I guess we could approach it one or two ways.

1 You could be proactive with the letter, or you could wait to see  
2 what Gregg and Dave were able to come back to, and then, based on  
3 what they inform me about, you could write a letter thereafter as  
4 needed.

5  
6 **MR. BRAY:** My intention, and I was just chatting with Dave, is I'm  
7 going to go back and talk to him about the potential priorities  
8 that were identified here regardless, and then, in the meantime,  
9 if he can get some direction from the Senator's office, and NOAA,  
10 then we can coalesce those two ideas, and bring that back to you  
11 guys. If you want to write a letter, that's fine, but I think I  
12 have enough information to carry back with me that it wouldn't  
13 burden staff's time.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you for clarifying that. All  
16 right, and so we'll move on down the agenda with Dr. Sweetman, and  
17 we'll go through the Reef Fish Committee report.

#### 18 19 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**

20  
21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll wait for that to  
22 get pulled up here, for the Reef Fish Committee report, and we'll  
23 get started. The committee adopted the agenda, after adding an  
24 item under Other Business, and the minutes, Tab B, Number 2, from  
25 the April 2026 meeting were approved.

26  
27 Final Action: Reef Fish Amendment 63: Modifications to the Gulf  
28 Red Grouper IFQ Program, Tab B, Number 4, staff reviewed a summary  
29 of input received at public hearings and written comments received  
30 on the public hearing draft for Reef Fish Amendment 63. This  
31 amendment would develop a three-year quota pool to set aside a  
32 portion of the red grouper commercial quota and distribute the  
33 resulting annual allocation to eligible participants in the  
34 grouper-tilefish IFQ program.

35  
36 Most of the public comments received were not in support of the  
37 quota pool and challenged its effectiveness in reducing discards  
38 and enhancing economic profitability. Council staff reviewed  
39 recommendations from the Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper-Tilefish IFQ  
40 Advisory Panel. AP comments echoed public comments received, and  
41 questioned the fairness of the quota pool, and inquired about its  
42 potential beneficiaries.

43  
44 Captain David Walker, AP chair, noted that the AP did not support  
45 the quota pool and expressed concerns over the increase in the  
46 commercial red grouper quota. He asked why a quota pool is under  
47 consideration when there are not enough fish to support it.

1 A committee member inquired about industry support for the quota  
2 pool if the commercial quota were lower and the annual allocation  
3 prices were higher. Captain Walker stated that the IFQ program is  
4 a well-functioning program and that Amendment 63 is a Trojan horse  
5 that will set precedent for other species.

6  
7 A committee member noted that the AP initially recommended  
8 scrapping the quota pool entirely, but elected to leave an  
9 opportunity for its future consideration by unanimously approving  
10 a motion to request the council cease work on Reef Fish Amendment  
11 63, the commercial red grouper quota pool, until Reef Fish  
12 Amendment 59A, IFQ permit requirements, is finalized.

13  
14 The committee asked how share caps are calculated and whether they  
15 account for related accounts. Dr. Jessica Stephen, NMFS Southeast  
16 Regional Office, replied that share caps are calculated at the  
17 shareholder account, entity, and individual levels.

18  
19 A committee member noted that red grouper IFQ shares could  
20 currently be purchased for about \$8 a pound. Dr. Stephen stated  
21 that available reported data indicate higher prices, but do not  
22 reflect the anticipated release of additional allocation when Reef  
23 Fish Amendment 62 becomes effective.

24  
25 Staff reviewed the purpose and need for the amendment. Based on  
26 the AP summary, NOAA General Counsel suggested the committee  
27 further discuss the purpose and need to note that the pilot program  
28 is experimental.

29  
30 A committee member asked how the quota pool would reduce discards.  
31 Another committee member offered a motion for consideration and  
32 replied that outcomes of the quota pool, including a reduction in  
33 discards, are not to be evaluated. A committee member noted the  
34 oddity of modifying the purpose and need at this time.

35  
36 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to modify the purpose and**  
37 **need section of the document as follows: The purpose of this action**  
38 **is to establish a three-year pilot commercial red grouper IFQ quota**  
39 **pool and distribute the resulting annual allocation to eligible**  
40 **participants in the grouper-tilefish IFQ program. The need for**  
41 **this action is to test whether a quota pool may enhance economic**  
42 **profitability and reduce discards by improving access to red**  
43 **grouper annual allocation by fishermen engaged in commercial**  
44 **harvest of red grouper and provide new opportunities for red**  
45 **grouper annual allocation. The motion carried with no opposition.**  
46 Mr. Chair.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, and so we have a

1 committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the  
2 motion? Mr. Osborne.

3  
4 **MR. OSBORNE:** Not on this one. I'm good.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussion on the motion? Dr.  
7 Sweetman.

8  
9 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just one bit here. I am not a fan of modifying the  
10 purpose and need when we are in final action. I think that sets  
11 a very bad message to the public in general, and so, I mean, I get  
12 this is where we are with this, but that -- I don't think that was  
13 appropriate.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

16  
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I agree in part, C.J., right, that ideally  
18 we would like to keep the document as close to its final form as  
19 possible, but this is a very public process, right, and modified  
20 this in committee, and we've had an opportunity for the public to  
21 comment on it, and so, to me, it's well within our purview to be  
22 able to make changes like this. Ideally, if we thought about this  
23 sooner, we could have made that modification sooner.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any other  
26 comments? Okay. **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing**  
27 **none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

28  
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Council staff reviewed the  
30 management alternatives and options. A committee member indicated  
31 that increases in red grouper commercial quota are expected to  
32 result in cheap, if not free, red grouper annual allocation.  
33 Another committee member noted that quota increases are  
34 independent from Amendment 63.

35  
36 A committee member asked why the quota pool should proceed before  
37 the implementation of Reef Fish Amendment 59A permit requirements.  
38 Another committee member replied that the timely completion of  
39 Reef Fish 59A is not a foregone conclusion, and added that the  
40 council missed opportunities when sizable quota increases were  
41 implemented for other species. They added that work on Reef Fish  
42 Amendment 59A needs to continue, but the permit requirements should  
43 not delay the work on the quota pool. A committee member noted  
44 that the quota pool is a proof of concept and added their support  
45 for its implementation.

46  
47 NOAA General Counsel presented the codified text for the proposed  
48 federal regulations. The committee indicated that public

1 testimony will be helpful in supporting discussions during Full  
2 Council, and, Mr. Chair, given that this is a final action, I think  
3 we've received public comment on this, and it probably warrants  
4 another conversation, to see if this council wants to move  
5 something forward here.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Agreed. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman.

8  
9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Given everything that I've heard throughout the last  
10 couple of months, and umpteen phone calls from the industry, I  
11 don't think this exercise is going to yield its intended results,  
12 nor benefit new entrants, because you have to be an existing  
13 person, and then there's that modicum of like a social  
14 redistribution of people's work and investment. **With that said,**  
15 **I'm going to make a motion that we move Amendment 63 to Consider**  
16 **but Rejected.**

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Sanchez. We'll give Bernie a minute to  
19 put your motion on the board. Okay. Do we have a second for Mr.  
20 Sanchez's motion? Okay. Mr. Sanchez, is this how you want your  
21 motion to read?

22  
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Sure.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Do we have a second for Mr. Sanchez's  
26 motion? Dr. Allen seconded. Mr. Broussard has his hand up. I  
27 would like to acknowledge him.

28  
29 **MR. BROUSSARD:** That was to second the motion.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Billy. Is there further  
32 discussion on the motion? Dr. Allen, and then Mr. Strelcheck.

33  
34 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I'll just offer a perspective on this. I've  
35 struggled with this one, because I do think that it's a very well-  
36 intentioned process here, to try to reduce barriers to  
37 participation in this IFQ program.

38  
39 I'm also generally very supportive of kind of the process of  
40 learning by doing, you know, try things experimentally, and I think  
41 that was the intent of this, but I think that the economic climate  
42 that has evolved since we started work on this -- Really, there's  
43 no significant barriers to participation in this fishery, because  
44 of the low prices of leased allocation, and then we've heard almost  
45 -- Very little buy-in from the industry with regard to it, and so,  
46 when I think about this, as far as not really being barriers to  
47 participation already, and the majority of the fishers that we  
48 heard from aren't in support of it, that's why I seconded this

1 motion, and I support the motion.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Thank you for your comments, Dr.  
4 Allen. Next is Mr. Strelcheck.

5  
6 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and this has certainly been a challenging  
7 amendment. I think, you know, the amendment itself was developed  
8 with good intentions. You know, we have heard, for a number of  
9 years, about the need to reform the program.

10  
11 I talked earlier in the week about the goals and objectives of the  
12 program that this council passed, and I do still feel like 63  
13 addresses some of those goals and objectives in a research/pilot  
14 phase of the program that would be no more than three years.

15  
16 I certainly heard, from public testimony, the concerns from  
17 industry about what does this mean for other species, and, right  
18 now, my view is we're focused on red grouper. We would focus on  
19 59A and B as the next steps.

20  
21 I also want to kind of point out a couple of things, because I  
22 feel like this has been maybe misleading, in terms of the impacts,  
23 right, and so, yes, the quota prices are considerably lower. The  
24 quotas are going to go up considerably. The shareholders that are  
25 participating in this program, when we implement 62 this year,  
26 will get a 60 percent, roughly 60 percent, increase in their quota,  
27 right? That's without the quota pool.

28  
29 We're only talking about 8 percent of the overall quota that would  
30 go to this quota pool, of which half of that goes back to the  
31 shareholders that participate in the program, and so that means  
32 only 4 percent, or less than 4 percent, is actually going to go to  
33 non-shareholders that were leasing allocation, and I know there  
34 was concerns about new entrants, and expanding capacity, and  
35 increasing participation, but those that qualify for the program  
36 are those that actually leased quota in the two most recent years,  
37 and so they have skin in the game, right?

38  
39 They've actually gone out and leased red grouper, and have been  
40 participating in the fishery, and so we're not necessarily  
41 expanding access.

42  
43 We're just providing quota, or allocation, as part of the quota  
44 pool to those individuals that are already participating in the  
45 fishery in recent years, and so I just wanted to note that, because  
46 I did hear, obviously, a lot of concerns about these major impacts,  
47 but I see this as kind of a win-win for both the quota holders,  
48 that they're already going to get this nice increase, and we're

1 going to also focus on meeting some of the goals and objectives  
2 that we've laid out for the program, and try to get more quota  
3 into the hands of those that are actually landing the fish.  
4 Thanks.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that explanation, Mr. Strelcheck.  
7 Mr. Osborne.

8  
9 **MR. OSBORNE:** I would also like to issue that I'm in support of  
10 this amendment as well, and not this motion. I talked to Andy  
11 about it, and a few others, that I was confused during the  
12 discussion on this, about this argument that folks are getting  
13 something for free, when the requirements in order to get the  
14 allocation would be that they had to demonstrate that, over the  
15 last two years, I believe, that each year, or total, 500 pounds,  
16 and so that means they have money in the game. They have skin in  
17 the game. They've worked for it.

18  
19 The other issue that I had was, well, what if the stock assessment  
20 comes back and we have to lower this number, the quota number?  
21 Well, the net effect of that is the pilot program would end, and  
22 I think Andy said the stock assessment is in 2028. If it goes  
23 down, then the program ends. If it goes up, then I don't know  
24 what that means, necessarily, if the percentage -- If we raise the  
25 number then, but I do feel like this is worthwhile to at least  
26 explore.

27  
28 It is a pilot project. Any other species that we're going to look  
29 at, or fish that we're going to look, at is something that we can  
30 discuss later, and so I am in support -- Opposed to this motion,  
31 and in support of the overall amendment.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jason. I have a couple of hands. Mr.  
34 Geeslin, and then Mr. Sanchez.

35  
36 **MR. GEESLIN:** No, and I appreciate those sentiments, Mr. Osborne  
37 and Andy. I appreciate the explanation that further clarified,  
38 where I'm going to speak in opposition to this motion as well, and  
39 echoing some of the sentiments I shared yesterday.

40  
41 You know, to the economics, and the market conditions, those --  
42 While it may be favorable to entrants now, those are not static.  
43 Those are dynamic, and change readily, and I do believe this moves  
44 us towards achieving some of those goals. This is a very  
45 incremental, and small incremental, step in achieving some of those  
46 goals that we spent considerable time and effort fleshing out.

47  
48 Speaking of time and effort, the fact that we get to this point in

1 final action, and ready to kill this, it just speaks of  
2 inefficiency, and a waste of time on the council staff, on our  
3 time. You know, in looking through, and I hear public comment,  
4 and I will say, in my mind, public comment was a little more varied  
5 than I expected.

6  
7 There's also a great, you know, nugget within our agenda, and it's  
8 termed anonymous voicemail comment summary. I would encourage  
9 folks to go back and read some of that.

10  
11 That is even more varied. You know, it's buried back there in the  
12 agenda, and we don't really talk about it, but there's some nuggets  
13 in there, and it's not like, you know, buried back in the funny  
14 pages of a newspaper, but it's in there, and I think it also  
15 carries value, and I think it reflects those that may be less  
16 inclined to verbally and publicly share their thoughts and opinions  
17 about this amendment, and so I'm also in opposition to the motion,  
18 and I fully support us moving incrementally towards achieving those  
19 goals.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

22  
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I respect and understand everybody's position on  
24 this. I'm coming at it from a perspective of this is predominantly  
25 a Florida fishery, and I'm hearing a lot from the local guys, and  
26 the majority of them don't want it, and so, while I love the fact  
27 that we have this anonymous comment thing, it's a few nuggets of  
28 comments, as you said, but a handful compared to probably two-  
29 thirds against this, if we're going to weigh paper, or weigh  
30 commentary.

31  
32 I just felt obligated to have to address that on behalf of this  
33 predominantly Florida fishery, and make this motion, and so, while  
34 I respect everybody's positions, and opinion or disagreement on  
35 this, I'm sorry, and I had to do that as a Florida representative.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any other discussion on Mr. Sanchez's  
38 motion? All right, and so we're going to take a roll call vote.  
39 Mr. Geeslin requested.

40  
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Broussard.

42  
43 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.

46  
47 **MR. WALKER:** Abstain.



1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.  
2  
3 MR. ANSON: No.  
4  
5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.  
6  
7 DR. BANKS: No.  
8  
9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Ms. Ballard.  
10  
11 MS. BALLARD: No.  
12  
13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Frady.  
14  
15 MR. FRADY: Yes.  
16  
17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Overton.  
18  
19 DR. OVERTON: No.  
20  
21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Allen.  
22  
23 DR. ALLEN: Yes.  
24  
25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Geeslin.  
26  
27 MR. GEESLIN: No.  
28  
29 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Schieble.  
30  
31 MR. SCHIEBLE: No.  
32  
33 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Strelcheck.  
34  
35 MR. STRELCHECK: No.  
36  
37 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.  
38  
39 MR. MARQUEZ: No.  
40  
41 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.  
42  
43 DR. SWEETMAN: Abstain.  
44  
45 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Sanchez.  
46  
47 MR. SANCHEZ: Yes.  
48

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Osborne.

2  
3 MR. OSBORNE: No.

4  
5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Burris.

6  
7 MR. BURRIS: No.

8  
9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Dugas.

10  
11 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: No.

12

| Names          | Vote    |             |               |
|----------------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| Mr. Broussard  | yes     | Row Labels  | Count of Vote |
| Capt. Walker   | abstain | abstain     | 2             |
| Mr. Anson      | no      | no          | 11            |
| Dr. Banks      | no      | yes         | 4             |
| Ms. Ballard    | no      | Grand Total | 17            |
| Capt. Frady    | yes     |             |               |
| Dr. Overton    | no      |             |               |
| Dr. Allen      | yes     |             |               |
| Mr. Geeslin    | no      |             |               |
| Mr. Schieble   | no      |             |               |
| Mr. Strelcheck | no      |             |               |
| Mr. Marquez    | no      |             |               |
| Dr. Sweetman   | abstain |             |               |
| Mr. Sanchez    | yes     |             |               |
| Mr. Osborne    | no      |             |               |
| Mr. Burris     | no      |             |               |
| Mr. Dugas      | no      |             |               |

13  
14  
15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Okay, and so the motion failed four  
16 to eleven, with two abstentions.

17  
18 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. We'll go back to Mr. Sanchez.

19  
20 MR. SANCHEZ: I guess, if you loved that, you're going to love  
21 this one, but I have a motion to prepare. It is more in the spirit  
22 of working together, and finding some compromised position,  
23 particularly since I just went down in flames, but if that motion  
24 could come up, and then I'll -- If I get a second, I'll explain  
25 the rationale for it, and, Andy, if need be, I'll roll up my  
26 sleeves. Mr. Chair, I can read it if you'd like, if it fits on  
27 the page.

28  
29 Motion in Action 1, Alternative 4, to create a new option, Option

1 4e. Alternative 4 is establish a three-year commercial quota pool  
2 for Gulf red grouper beginning in 2027. If the commercial quota  
3 (ACT) is at or below 4.28 million pounds gutted weight, the quota  
4 pool is set at zero percent of the commercial quota, zero pounds.  
5 If the commercial quota is above 4.28 gutted weight, the quota  
6 pool would hold option, the new added one to the existing ones,  
7 Option 4e, 50 percent of the commercial red grouper increase above  
8 4.28 million pounds. If I get a second, I'll try to explain.

9  
10 DR. SWEETMAN: I'll second for discussion.

11  
12 MR. SANCHEZ: Okay. If you, I guess, work the numbers, and it's  
13 rather easy, even though it's newly introduced, at 50 percent, you  
14 end up, in the subsequent years of 2028 and 2029, with actually  
15 16,000 more pounds than the current preferred.

16  
17 The first year, it's less, but that's just the way it worked out,  
18 and I'm going to say it follows the spirit and the intent of my  
19 original a while back motion to phase in these types of things,  
20 because you know my feelings on the assessment right now, and so  
21 this would essentially phase in this redistribution experiment,  
22 and actually give you more fish after year-one.

23  
24 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Stand by. We're having electronic  
25 difficulties. All right. Let's try again. Okay. I'm going to  
26 look around the table. Did everyone catch Mr. Sanchez's rationale?  
27 No? Mr. Sanchez, would you mind going over that again? Thank  
28 you.

29  
30 MR. SANCHEZ: Does this one work? All right. Perfect. You guys  
31 shut my mic off, didn't you? Basically, what this is, it's a way  
32 to phase in this, and, you know, granted, it has some added  
33 guardrails. We had 4.28 as the original -- What this does is it  
34 gives the 4.28, and the rationale being, as I mentioned earlier,  
35 there's years in the past when the fish were available, and the  
36 industry could catch them if the quota is there, and, I mean, the  
37 landings are there.

38  
39 If you look at 2009, they're upward to 2.79, and on up to 2.17,  
40 and, if you go more recent, there's some years where it was four  
41 and five million pounds, for a couple years back-to-back, and so,  
42 at 4.28, both of these ceilings, guardrails, I feel that there  
43 won't be any impact to any existing business models that have  
44 evolved over time.

45  
46 Then, with the surplus, which comes in more pronounced in 2028 and  
47 2029, at 50 percent of roughly over a million pounds, you have  
48 like five-hundred-and-some-thousand pounds to do the experiment in

1 those years, which is even more than what the preferred alternative  
2 is now, and so I'm trying to meet you halfway, and play with that  
3 percentage to preserve the four-million-ish-pound secondary  
4 guardrail. That's my logic.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez, for your  
7 rationale. I have a couple hands. I'm going to start with Dr.  
8 Banks, and then go to Ms. Osborne.

9  
10 **DR. BANKS:** I think my question is for you, Mara. Are we able to  
11 add this, considering we're at final action, without delaying  
12 taking final action? I believe these numbers are outside of the  
13 original analyses that we did for the document.

14  
15 **MS. LEVY:** Well, I mean, actually, it's quite close to your  
16 preferred alternative. I mean, it's a different way of getting  
17 there, and, yes, the preferred alternative is higher in 2027, and  
18 then a bit lower than what this is going to produce in 2028 and  
19 2029, but the actual results of what's in the allocation, what  
20 allocation is in the pool, is within what we've analyzed. It's  
21 very similar.

22  
23 My only comment is this is going to create extra work, for  
24 something that's quite similar, and so the timing then goes to how  
25 fast staff can incorporate it, and update all the discussion, and  
26 things like that.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Mr. Osborne. Okay. Jason  
29 is good. Any other conversation, or comments, on Mr. Sanchez's  
30 motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

31  
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Sorry. I'm trying to scroll through the amendment  
33 and understand the differences here, and so, John, help me here.  
34 Under this alternative, I believe year-one, 2027, would be 275,000  
35 pounds for the quota pool, versus our preferred, which is 306,000  
36 pounds. Is that correct?

37  
38 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, on the first year, and then I think it jumps up  
39 to where it's slightly higher than your numbers in the subsequent  
40 year.

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so 275,000, versus 408,000 for year-one,  
43 and then, for the preferred currently, we're at 516,000, and this  
44 would go to 545,000? Okay.

45  
46 I guess while I have the mic, I mean, one, I'm going to point out  
47 the irony that we were being criticized for changing the purpose  
48 and need, and now we're actually adding a brand-new alternative,

1 but, with that said, I appreciate the olive branch, and the effort  
2 that John is making here.

3  
4 I don't see a lot of difference between the two alternatives, and  
5 I prefer to keep with the preferred, just simply because we've had  
6 a lot of discussion around that, and we made that selection at the  
7 last meeting. We have, obviously, gone out to public hearing with  
8 that preferred alternative, and the rationale really hasn't  
9 changed for me, in terms of why we've selected that preferred  
10 alternative.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

13  
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Since you threw a shot across the bow there for me,  
15 Andy, it is well within the council's purview to add it at this  
16 time, the exact same response you gave me.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

19  
20 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would love for, obviously, mine to be the  
21 preferred, and, in the spirit of olive branch, and moving forward,  
22 let's do this.

23  
24 Yes, the differences are seemingly insignificant, but I think that  
25 secondary guardrail to not disrupting existing businesses, should  
26 we be able to catch this quota, which seemingly seems depressed  
27 right now, and hopefully we have an assessment done in the somewhat  
28 near future, and we find the bandwidth, and we could check under  
29 the hood with this again. For now, this is a really sincerely  
30 good-faith attempt to meet you halfway, and allow this experiment  
31 to continue, but in a less potentially impactful way to existing  
32 business models.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

35  
36 **MS. LEVY:** So I'm just -- I'm trying to understand -- I have no  
37 opinion, but I am trying to understand what this secondary  
38 guardrail is, because the current preferred alternative says  
39 there's no quota pool if the quota is at or below 4.28 million  
40 pounds, and so both of these say, in order to even have the quota  
41 pool, you have to have a commercial quota that's above 4.82 million  
42 pounds.

43  
44 The allocation that goes into the commercial quota pool is either  
45 a percentage of the amount above 2.79 or a percentage above the  
46 amount of 4.28, but the quota pool does not exist unless the quota  
47 is above 2.48, and so I think that's where I'm having a disconnect,  
48 in terms of what a second guardrail might be.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Mr. Sanchez.

3  
4 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm going to say the second guardrail, the second,  
5 I guess, reintroduction of the 4.28, it stems from -- I'm looking  
6 at some landings figures, gross weight. 2011 is 4.78. 2012 is  
7 5.219. 2013 is 4.599. You know, these are million pounds. 5.61  
8 in 2014. 2015 is 4.798. 2016 is 4.497. 2017 is 3.328. All above  
9 2.79.

10  
11 To take me with the guardrail, the solitary guardrail of 4.28, and  
12 then ratchet me back down anything above 2.79, it ignores the fact  
13 that, historically, if the fishing conditions are right, our fleet  
14 of boats can catch above 2.79, and that's what I feel is being  
15 compromised with the existing business models that have  
16 demonstrated clearly they can catch upwards of 4.28 million pounds  
17 if the situation is there.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Are there any other  
20 comments? Dr. Diagne.

21  
22 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Just only, I guess, to clarify one thing. We  
23 have two numbers in these alternatives. One is the threshold below  
24 which the quota pool disappears, and we have some alternatives  
25 that put that threshold at 2.79 or at 4.28, right, for the first  
26 condition.

27  
28 Your preferred alternative sets that threshold at 4.28, meaning,  
29 if the quota is at or below 4.28, there is no quota pool, okay,  
30 and we can dispose of that. That's the first step.

31  
32 Now the second part is how do you compute the amount of pounds in  
33 the pool? The preferred alternative says you take X percent of  
34 the difference between the quota and 2.79, and Alternative 4 says  
35 you take Y percent of the difference between 4.28 and wherever the  
36 quota is, and so some of these numbers are very close, because, if  
37 you take 15 percent of a larger base, or you take 30 or 50 percent  
38 of a smaller base, you come up with the same numbers, roughly.

39  
40 That is why Mr. Strelcheck said, and Ms. Levy, that the numbers  
41 are very close, and so the guardrail here is that there is no quota  
42 bank if or when the quota goes below 4.28, both in your preferred  
43 alternative as well as in Alternative 4 and the new option here.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for clarifying that, Dr. Diagne. Mr.  
46 Strelcheck.

47  
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, it's a danger to, obviously, do math on

1 the fly, and so, based on my quick calculations, I think we're  
2 looking at about a 27,000-pound net difference between our current  
3 preferred and the proposed preferred by Mr. Sanchez. What Mr.  
4 Sanchez is proposing is less in year-one, but higher in year-two  
5 and three, and, overall, it would cumulatively be higher than what  
6 our preferred is, and so I actually view this as impacting the  
7 shareholders more, that have had concerns about this, right, and  
8 maybe providing less guardrails, especially in the second and third  
9 year, comparative to our preferred alternative.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any other comments?  
12 Mr. Sanchez.

13  
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm not going to belabor the point, you know, going  
15 over it ad nauseam, but, to me, again, having that secondary not  
16 going back from 4.28, or 5.3, or wherever we're at, down to 2.79,  
17 when, with quota available, we might very well catch more than  
18 that. The existing folks, and their existing model, that's what  
19 I'm trying to preserve, yet still allow for this experiment to  
20 take place. It's -- You know, I don't know if it needs more  
21 explanation. I think, at this point, it's pretty clear.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Well, no other comments, and I'll ask  
24 Bernie to pull the motion back up. Thank you. All right. I'll  
25 try this. **Is there any opposition to the motion? We have five**  
26 **opposed. Are there any abstentions? The motion carries.** Okay.  
27 I think that's going to wrap up 63. Dr. Sweetman.

28  
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Not at all. We still need to go to final action,  
30 and, the way I'm looking at this here, we haven't -- We added an  
31 alternative, but we already have a preferred, and so, if the  
32 decision is to change the preferred, that would need to come  
33 through in a separate motion, Mr. Chair, and then we could take  
34 final action, if the council deems to be -- Did I get that right,  
35 Mara?

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Mr. Sanchez.

38  
39 **MR. SANCHEZ:** If that is what we need, I will gladly make a motion  
40 that we make this motion we just -- That I just read and passed  
41 and fought with microphones over the preferred.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We'll let Bernie get your motion on  
44 the board. Mr. Sanchez has a motion on the board, and do we have  
45 a second for it?

46  
47 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Second for discussion.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman seconded. Any discussion on the  
2 motion? Dr. Allen.

3  
4 **DR. ALLEN:** I'll just make the comment through the discussion so  
5 far. I don't see a substantial enough difference between these to  
6 change the preferred over what's in the amendment now, and so  
7 that's just FYI.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other comments or concerns on the motion?  
10 All right. Is there any opposition to the motion?

11  
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, just a clarification for  
13 Bernie, just to make sure that it says Action 1, new Alternative  
14 4, Option 4e, correct?

15  
16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Correct.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Now we'll try to vote. **Any opposition?**  
19 **We have five opposed. Any abstentions? All right. Motion**  
20 **carries.** Mr. Strelcheck.

21  
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just for the record, since Billy is online, did  
23 you confirm how he voted?

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Billy was a yes. Okay, and so now we're going to  
26 look for a motion to take this to final action, and it will be a  
27 roll call vote. All right. I'm going to look around the table  
28 for someone to offer a motion to take Amendment 63 to final action.  
29 Mr. Osborne. Mr. Osborne makes the motion, and Dr. Banks seconded,  
30 and so we'll give Bernie a moment. All right. Mr. Osborne, would  
31 you mind reading your motion into the record please?

32  
33 **MR. OSBORNE:** All right. **The motion is to recommend the council**  
34 **approve Reef Fish Amendment 63: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper**  
35 **IFQ Program and that it will be forwarded to the Secretary of**  
36 **Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text**  
37 **as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to**  
38 **make the necessary changes in the document. The council chair is**  
39 **given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as**  
40 **necessary and appropriate.**

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Osborne. Is there any discussion?  
43 Ms. Levy.

44  
45 **MS. LEVY:** Right, and so it goes without saying that we're going  
46 to have to change the codified text, because you have a different  
47 preferred, and then that one change that I noted during committee  
48 related to the landings requirements, and so that will happen, and



1 it will go back to the chair to re-deem that, consistent with  
2 what's in the document as the preferred now.

3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.  
5 Captain Walker.

6  
7 **MR. WALKER:** Abstain.

8  
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.

10  
11 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.

12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Allen.

14  
15 **DR. ALLEN:** No.

16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.

18  
19 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.

20  
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.

22  
23 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.

24  
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.

26  
27 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.

28  
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Ballard.

30  
31 **MS. BALLARD:** Yes.

32  
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

34  
35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.

36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.

38  
39 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.

40  
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.

42  
43 **MR. BROUSSARD:** No.

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.

46  
47 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.  
2  
3 DR. SWEETMAN: Abstain.  
4  
5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.  
6  
7 DR. BANKS: Yes.  
8  
9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Osborne.  
10  
11 MR. OSBORNE: Yes.  
12  
13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Geeslin.  
14  
15 MR. GEESLIN: Yes.  
16  
17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.  
18  
19 MR. MARQUEZ: Yes.  
20  
21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Dugas.  
22  
23 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes.  
24  
25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: The motion carried thirteen to two  
26 with two abstentions.  
27  
28 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Simmons? Is there anything else  
29 that needs to be discussed regarding 63?  
30  
31 DR. SWEETMAN: That will conclude us for Amendment 63, Mr. Chair.  
32  
33 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you for keeping me in line, Dr. Sweetman.  
34 We're going to take a break. Let's come back at 2:25.  
35  
36 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)  
37  
38 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. We're going to get started, if we  
39 could quiet down in the back. Thank you. Dr. Sweetman, whenever  
40 you're ready.  
41  
42 DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next thing we have is  
43 Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment  
44 44: Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, Tab  
45 B, Number 5. Reef Fish Amendment 55 and Snapper Grouper Amendment  
46 44 is a joint amendment to consider modifications to southeastern  
47 U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper management between the  
48 Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

1  
2 Council staff reviewed an updated version of the document that  
3 includes updated fishery closure analyses based on the current  
4 alternatives. Under Action 1, a committee member noted that Option  
5 3b in Alternative 3, which uses a more recent ten-year time series,  
6 and includes State Reef Fish Survey data for the majority of the  
7 time series.

8  
9 Under Action 2, the committee discussed removing the buffer in the  
10 Gulf between the ACL and the Gulf's apportionment of the ABC, given  
11 the southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper stock is considered  
12 healthy.

13  
14 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend that the**  
15 **council select Alternative 3b in Action 1 as the preferred**  
16 **alternative.** Mr. Chair, that's somewhat lengthy, and I'm not going  
17 to read this in detail here, but I'll just leave it up there for  
18 people to read. Mr. Chair, the motion carried without opposition.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a  
21 committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the  
22 motion? **Not seeing any discussion, is there any opposition to the**  
23 **motion? Seeing none, the motion carried.** Dr. Sweetman.

24  
25 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In this next one, we'll touch  
26 on yellowtail snapper. **The committee recommends, and I so move to**  
27 **recommend that the Gulf Council select Alternative 4b in Action 2**  
28 **as the preferred alternative.** Again, I'm not going to read that.  
29 You can see what that lists on the board. That motion carried  
30 without opposition, Mr. Chair.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Do we have any  
33 discussion on the motion on the board? **Not seeing any discussion,**  
34 **is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**  
35 **carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

36  
37 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right. That will conclude that amendment right  
38 here, and so I'll just pause to see if there's any further  
39 discussion on that. Mr. Rindone.

40  
41 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you. Yes, and I just wanted to point out  
42 that, in Action 2, Alternatives 3 and 4 result in the same  
43 percentage, albeit they get there with different reference  
44 periods, and so the effects between them numerically are the same.  
45 The principle behind them might be a little bit different, because  
46 we're using a ten-year reference period for Alternative 4, compared  
47 to a twenty-year reference period for Alternative three, and so,  
48 if you guys don't find Alternative 3 is necessary anymore, staff

1 won't miss it.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

4  
5 **MS. LEVY:** So I guess I'm going to advise against taking it out  
6 just because it gives you the same percentage. I mean, I feel  
7 like we've had this conversation a lot. It's the method, and not  
8 the result, that we're looking at, and so it's fine if you don't  
9 want to pick it as a preferred, but it's consistent with the  
10 alternatives in the other actions, the twenty versus the ten-year,  
11 and it -- Just to take it out because it gives you the same  
12 percentage, I guess I would advise against that.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, Ms. Levy. Thank you. Go ahead, Ryan.

15  
16 **MR. RINDONE:** But why, like advising against it? I'm genuinely  
17 curious. I mean, I get that we're applying a different method,  
18 and does end with the same result, but, if the council is willing  
19 to choose one as being preferred over the other, and it's kind of  
20 establishing that, you know, it wants to focus on a more recent  
21 time period, it's considered the other one at this point. I was  
22 hoping you could elaborate.

23  
24 **MS. LEVY:** So the whole point of having the alternatives is to  
25 explore different ways of doing things, particularly with respect  
26 to an allocation, and so you've explored it, and it happened to  
27 come out the same, and so why not then pick the other alternative,  
28 right, and like the same reasoning goes.

29  
30 It's the same, and why not pick the twenty-year? It's because,  
31 from an analytical reasoning, you've decided that ten years is  
32 more appropriate. Okay, but it should still be in there to show  
33 that we looked at this time series as a reasonable alternative,  
34 and it happened to come out the same, but, from a policy  
35 perspective, we've decided that ten years is a more reasonable  
36 approach.

37  
38 I don't see why you wouldn't leave it in. It doesn't change what  
39 you're going to analyze. You're still going to analyze the same  
40 numbers. You're just leaving in another option that wasn't  
41 considered.

42  
43 **MR. RINDONE:** I understand that. It's just, in other  
44 circumstances, we have taken things like this out, to streamline  
45 the analyses when it comes to creating the public hearing draft,  
46 and for making the information that we ultimately present to the  
47 public more digestible and focused on the choices that the council  
48 is trying to make.

1  
2 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, I'm happy to debate it further. Ultimately,  
3 it's the council's decision. I'm advising against it, because, in  
4 this particular situation, and not talking about other situations  
5 where we might have seven alternatives, and three come out fairly  
6 similar, with like three years difference, and, in this particular  
7 situation, you have two actions.

8  
9 They both have same alternatives, in terms of time series, and it  
10 just makes more sense, to me, to keep it in for consistency in  
11 this particular circumstance, but I'll leave it at that.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I think Mr. Anson would like to weigh-in.

14  
15 **MR. ANSON:** I mean, Ms. Levy covered one of the points I wanted to  
16 make relative to the request that's made by staff, and that is  
17 that, yes, we may have done this in the past, but the circumstances  
18 may have been different. Ms. Levy has been at this table for a  
19 long time, and she's, you know, pretty diligent on listening to  
20 our conversation, and so I think, if that opportunity, or that  
21 rationale, was provided in previous instances, there must have  
22 been a legitimate, or better, reason than we've got now.

23  
24 She has always said that it's better to err on more options, I  
25 guess, within reason, so that the council can show that there was  
26 some analysis, and thought, and trying to look at different ways  
27 on how we might want to get to an answer, and so, anyways, I just  
28 wanted to add that. Thank you.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kevin, and so, in the event a council  
31 member would maybe want to remove it from the document, we need a  
32 motion. I'm looking around the table. Is there any appetite?  
33 Not seeing any. Dr. Sweetman.

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. All right, and so, moving on,  
36 the next topic is Draft Options: Modification to Red Snapper  
37 Private Recreational Post-Season Accountability Measures, Tab B,  
38 Number 6.

39  
40 Council staff providing an overview of the historical private  
41 recreational red snapper landings and the draft options document  
42 for modifying private recreational accountability measures.  
43 Following this presentation, a committee member reminded the  
44 council that the red snapper stock assessment is currently underway  
45 and asked that the results of the stock assessment could indicate  
46 a change in stock status, which could affect this action.

47  
48 Another committee member suggested, and the committee agreed, that

1 future iterations of the document should modify the purpose and  
2 need statement by removing, quote, "and providing sustained access  
3 for recreational participants and members of fishing communities  
4 and states across the Gulf", end quote.

5  
6 The committee discussed whether to add an alternative proposed by  
7 the interdisciplinary plan team, IPT, which proposed to not cap a  
8 state's overage and manage to the full private recreational ACL.  
9 The committee agreed that the proposed alternative does not meet  
10 the overarching intent of state management and suggested not  
11 including it for future iterations of the document.

12  
13 Committee members discussed the proposed options under Alternative  
14 2, and the committee found Options 2b, 2c, and 2d to be reasonable,  
15 given the historic range of overages and the range of uncertainty  
16 that comes with state-specific data collection estimates.

17  
18 However, the committee found Option 2a to be too low. As a result,  
19 the committee made a motion. **The committee recommends, and I so  
20 move, to recommend, in Action 1, to remove Option 2a from  
21 Alternative 2.** When Bernie brings it up, you can see exactly what  
22 2a is. It's the 2.5 percent of the state-specific private angling  
23 ACL. This motion carried with no opposition, Mr. Chair.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee  
26 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion?  
27 **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,  
28 the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

29  
30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee discussed  
31 additional guardrails to put restrictions on the frequency with  
32 which a state can exceed its ACL without requiring paybacks. The  
33 committee suggested including limitations on back-to-back overages  
34 and limiting overages to no more than once every three years for  
35 the next iteration of this document. NOAA General Counsel stated  
36 that limitations on frequency do not need to be added as another  
37 action item, but can be included as conditions under the proposed  
38 action.

39  
40 Two committee members indicated interest in continuing work on red  
41 snapper carryover and transfer quota sharing document. Council  
42 staff noted that the council requested the document to modify  
43 accountability measures to come prior to discussion on carryover  
44 or transfer provisions, but further discussion on prioritization  
45 of documents can occur in Full Council.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, just to  
2 make sure staff is clear, and so, when you see this document again,  
3 and not the carryover transfer, but the post-season accountability  
4 measures document, it will just have the limitation of the once  
5 every three years written into that, and so just to make sure  
6 everyone understood that. Correct? Okay.

7  
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. That sounds good. I'm seeing heads nod  
9 around the table. Okay. Moving on. Draft Options: Reef Fish  
10 Amendment 59A: Permit Requirements and IFQ Programs, Tab B, Number  
11 7, council staff stated that the Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper-  
12 Tilefish IFQ AP received presentations on quota banks from Ben  
13 Martens, of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, and from  
14 Ashford Rosenberg, of the Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders  
15 Alliance.

16  
17 Council staff reviewed recommendations from the AP, highlighting  
18 the motions made. AP members discussed the continued participation  
19 of dealers in the IFQ programs and noted that there were challenges  
20 with requiring dealers to have reef fish permits and with carving  
21 out exemptions for dealers.

22  
23 In Action 2, requirements to open and maintain shareholder  
24 accounts, the AP supported the council's preferred alternative,  
25 which requires all applicants to possess a valid or renewable  
26 commercial reef fish permit to obtain and maintain an IFQ  
27 shareholder account. In Action 4, divestment from non-compliant  
28 shareholders accounts, the AP supported the council's preferred  
29 alternatives and options.

30  
31 AP members discussed the role of nonprofit organizations, such as  
32 quota banks, and recommended that changes to participation  
33 requirements in Reef Fish Amendment 59A not be applicable to  
34 501(c)(3) nonprofits that serve commercial fishermen and fishing  
35 communities. Committee members suggested further discussions on  
36 criteria for nonprofits that serve commercial fishermen and  
37 fishing communities and how these nonprofits would be incorporated  
38 into the IFQ system.

39  
40 Staff presented the actions and preferred alternatives selected by  
41 the council. In Action 2, staff noted that the council previously  
42 selected Preferred Alternative 3. Preferred Alternative 3, which  
43 is, in addition to the U.S. citizenship or permanent residency  
44 requirement, all applicants are required to possess a valid or  
45 renewable commercial reef fish permit to obtain and maintain an  
46 IFQ shareholder account.

47  
48 The committee discussed Action 2 requirements to obtain and

1 maintain IFQ shares, and made the following motion. **The committee**  
2 **recommends, and I so move, in Action 2, to make Alternative 3 the**  
3 **preferred. Alternative 3 is to obtain and maintain IFQ shares, in**  
4 **addition to the U.S. citizenship or permanent residency**  
5 **requirement, a shareholder must be associated with a valid or**  
6 **renewable commercial reef fish permit. That motion carried with**  
7 no opposition. Mr. Chair.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee  
10 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr.  
11 Osborne.

12  
13 **MR. OSBORNE:** My question is the nonprofit is not in this, right?

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

16  
17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No, Mr. Osborne. My understanding was that Dr.  
18 Stephen was going to take a look, and do a data dive, and bring  
19 something back to us, that we could then subsequently use at a  
20 later meeting to inform that. We're not going final on this here  
21 today, and so we're just selecting preferreds, and so that could  
22 be added in at a subsequent time.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other discussion on the motion? **Seeing none,**  
25 **is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**  
26 **carried.** Dr. Sweetman.

27  
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee discussed  
29 Action 3, requirements to obtain IFQ allocation, and made the  
30 following motion. **The committee recommends, and I so move, in**  
31 **Action 3 to make Alternative 2 the preferred. Alternative two is**  
32 **to obtain annual allocation, in addition to the U.S. citizenship**  
33 **or permanent residency requirement, the shareholder must be**  
34 **associated with a valid or renewable commercial reef fish permit.**  
35 This motion carried with no opposition. Mr. Chair.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion  
38 on the board. Is there any discussion? **Seeing none, is there any**  
39 **opposition? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

40  
41 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Staff noted that the council  
42 already selected preferred alternatives in Action 4, divestment  
43 from noncompliant shareholder's accounts. Preferred Alternative  
44 2 is NMFS will reclaim shares from shareholder accounts that are  
45 not compliant with requirements set in Actions 1, 2, 3, or 4.  
46 Preferred Option 2a is one year following the effective date of  
47 the final rule implementing these requirements, and then Preferred  
48 Alternative 3 is, after implementation of this amendment, if a



1 shareholder account is no longer in compliance with the  
2 requirements set in Actions 1, 2, 3, or 4, the owner or owners of  
3 the shareholder account must divest of their shares, or the shares  
4 will be reclaimed by NOAA Fisheries. Preferred Option 3a is one  
5 year following the noncompliant status.

6  
7 Council staff presented AP recommendations made during Other  
8 Business in the AP meeting, including the addition of a request  
9 for commercial catch per unit effort data, CPUE, from the IFQ  
10 landings data, a discussion of the new USDA Office of Seafood, the  
11 Executive Order 14276: Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,  
12 and a mandatory reporting under Other Business.

13  
14 The committee members discussed AP recommendations related to  
15 catch per unit effort. **The committee recommends, and I so move,**  
16 **to request the council ask NMFS/Southeast Fisheries Science Center**  
17 **for commercial CPUE from 2010 through 2025 for red grouper.** The  
18 motion carried with no opposition. Mr. Chair.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion  
21 on the board. Is there any discussion? **Seeing none, is there any**  
22 **opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carried.** Dr.  
23 Sweetman.

24  
25 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Staff presented the other  
26 motions made by the AP recommending the council initiate documents  
27 to address sea turtle gear, for-hire and commercial, the hook  
28 limitation beyond fifty fathoms, and crew limitation on dually-  
29 permitted vessels.

30  
31 The AP also approved a motion to support the proposed mandatory  
32 pilot program for permit and reporting for deepwater grouper for  
33 the recreational sector. A committee member reiterated that the  
34 crew limitation for dually-permitted vessels is no longer  
35 necessary and would be a positive deregulatory action. The  
36 committee suggested a law enforcement perspective on this issue  
37 would be helpful.

38  
39 Moving on, Draft Amendment 65: Regional Management of Recreational  
40 Greater Amberjack, Tab B, Number 8, council staff presented  
41 decision points and options for considering regional management of  
42 recreational greater amberjack.

43  
44 Broadly, greater amberjack is harvested by both the commercial and  
45 recreational sector Gulf-wide, and the recreational sector has  
46 historically requested regional-specific seasons and management  
47 measures.

1 The stock has remained overfished, despite numerous management  
2 approaches, which have resulted in shorter recreational fishing  
3 seasons, modifications to commercial trip limits, and decreased  
4 angler satisfaction.

5  
6 The committee considered several major decision points, including  
7 whether to include the federal for-hire component of the  
8 recreational fishery in regional management, state or regional  
9 management boundaries, allocation, a common data unit, specific  
10 management tools for delegation, and accountability measures.

11  
12 In considering whether to include the federal for-hire component,  
13 the committee requested staff provide additional information on  
14 historic landings between for-hire and private vessels that could  
15 be used to inform this action.

16  
17 When considering state or regional management, a committee member  
18 recommended that action alternatives include options for state  
19 management and regional management. Possible regional management  
20 could include a three-region configuration, with the western Gulf  
21 including states west of the Mississippi River, a northern Gulf  
22 region, including the State of Alabama and the Panhandle of  
23 Florida, and an eastern Gulf region, which would include the rest  
24 of peninsular Florida.

25  
26 For an allocation mechanism, the committee suggested staff review  
27 what was previously discussed for Ree Fish Amendment 50 and explore  
28 the stock biomass results from the Greater Amberjack Count.

29  
30 When discussing possible allocation values and next decision  
31 points, such as common data units, specific management tools, and  
32 accountability measures, the committee acknowledged that a stock  
33 assessment would need to be completed in order to inform these  
34 actions. Updated catch advice would be required before calculating  
35 allocation values between states or regions, and a range of  
36 management and accountability measures would have to be aligned to  
37 that allocated quota to ensure the stock is sustainably managed.  
38 Tentatively, the greater amberjack stock assessment is expected to  
39 be completed in the fall of 2028.

40  
41 A committee member stated the importance of sustainability when  
42 considering state or regional management for greater amberjack,  
43 given its current overfished status. The committee stated that  
44 work on portions of the document could be developed while the stock  
45 assessment is ongoing. Council staff indicated that information  
46 on greater amberjack for-hire and private vessel landings history  
47 could be presented to the council during the October 2026 meeting.

1 Okay. Presentation: May 2026 SSC summary, Tab B, Number 9, Mr.  
2 Trevor Moncrief, chair of the SSC, reviewed SSC discussions about  
3 the G-FISHER Index of Relative Abundance.

4  
5 A committee member asked whether the SSC discussed instances of  
6 truncating G-FISHER data relative to specific circumstances. Mr.  
7 Moncrief replied that the SSC discussed those possibilities in  
8 general and acknowledged the need for situation-specific  
9 decisions.

10  
11 The committee member also asked about the expansion of the G-  
12 FISHER survey into the western Gulf. Mr. Moncrief replied that  
13 the possibility of leveraging new camera technologies to expand  
14 the survey was widely supported by the SSC. The Southeast  
15 Fisheries Science Center noted that a high-level overview of the  
16 G-FISHER survey may be of interest to the council, given its  
17 importance to the stock assessments of many council managed  
18 species.

19  
20 **The committee recommends, and I so move to request a presentation**  
21 **on the G-FISHER survey at an upcoming council meeting.** The motion  
22 carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee  
25 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? All  
26 right. **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing**  
27 **none, the motion carried.** Dr. Sweetman.

28  
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Discussion of Exempted  
30 fishing Permits, the committee heard an update from the State of  
31 Florida regarding the exempted fishing permit (EFP) for Gulf gag  
32 grouper. The State of Florida will have a draft prepared for later  
33 in 2026 for council review, which will include modifications to  
34 the fishing season, along with other measures.

35  
36 The committee also heard a summary of a proposed EFP for state  
37 management of recreational greater amberjack. The State of  
38 Louisiana plans to modify its fishing season to start in June of  
39 2027, with the Secretary of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
40 Fisheries able to close fishing when the Louisiana-specific ACL is  
41 expected to be met.

42  
43 Louisiana plans to use increased dockside intercepts during that  
44 part of the year to measure landings more precisely through LA  
45 Creel, through its LA Creel survey, and to collect additional  
46 biological samples. NOAA General Counsel recalled the process by  
47 which EFPs are to be submitted and approved.

1 The committee noted an appreciation for hearing from the states  
2 about their intentions prior to the EFPs being considered for  
3 approval. Louisiana will submit their EFP for greater amberjack  
4 in the next couple of months to start in the summer of 2027.

5  
6 Other Business, discussion of sea turtle gear requirements for  
7 commercial and for-hire vessels, a committee member recalled the  
8 regulations applicable to commercial and federal for-hire vessels  
9 regarding special sea turtle release and handling gear.

10  
11 The committee member noted that private recreational anglers,  
12 often fishing in the same area with the same gears, are not  
13 beholden to the same requirements. Several committee members  
14 stated that, in their careers as for-hire captains, they have never  
15 hooked a sea turtle, and penalties for this requisite gear onboard  
16 are severe.

17  
18 SERO staff thought it was prudent to hear from a representative  
19 from the NMFS Protected Resources division and added that the  
20 requirements were to be periodically reviewed with subsequent  
21 revisions to the biological opinion relative to the council's Reef  
22 Fish Fishery Management Plan.

23  
24 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to request NMFS review**  
25 **and assess the efficacy and the need for the current sea turtle**  
26 **release gear requirements for federally-permitted charter-for-hire**  
27 **and commercial reef fish vessels. As part of this assessment,**  
28 **NMFS should consider streamlining the current regulatory burden on**  
29 **these fleets, including proposing a simplified gear that**  
30 **represents the most recent research on interactions with sea**  
31 **turtles when fishing for reef fish species. This motion carried**  
32 **without opposition. Mr. Chair.**

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee  
35 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? All  
36 right. **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion?**  
37 **Seeing none, the motion carries.**

38  
39 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Anything else that needs  
42 to come before Reef Fish? Mr. Strelcheck.

43  
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so there was a few things we mentioned  
45 that it may be beneficial to get law enforcement input on that we  
46 kind of breezed past. I'm just curious if there's an appetite for  
47 consideration of the crew size, as well as the hook restrictions  
48 that were mentioned during public testimony, and if we want law

1 enforcement input, and when the next advisory panel meeting might  
2 be for that input.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thanks for the reminder, Andy. Mr. Walker.

5  
6 **MR. WALKER:** I think that would be great. I'm not sure, and maybe  
7 just make a motion to request that enforcement give us a  
8 presentation on if the need for a crew restriction on dually-  
9 permitted vessels is still applicable, given the era of VMS and  
10 trip declarations, and do we need a motion, or can we just kind of  
11 ask staff to bring that up?

12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think  
14 what I understand you guys want us to consider is during the Law  
15 Enforcement Technical Committee meeting, we would -- I think the  
16 next one would be in October, unless we had a special one during  
17 the commission meeting right now, and so we would have to have a  
18 special meeting if we did it before then, but we could put that on  
19 their agenda to provide feedback on, if that's timely enough to  
20 wait until October.

21  
22 **MS. WALKER:** I think it is. It's not a super pressing issue.

23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** So it's the two items, and it's the  
25 hook limitation for rigged and ready, for the bottom longline  
26 fishery specifically?

27  
28 **MR. WALKER:** That one I'm not asking for. I'm more focused on the  
29 dually-permitted. If somebody else wants to ask for that one,  
30 they can.

31  
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Thank you.

33  
34 **MR. WALKER:** I think actually we had a little bit of discussion on  
35 that, or I guess we didn't. We heard from law enforcement about  
36 that, and learned a little bit, but, if somebody else wants to  
37 bring that up, they can, but my issue is more the dually-permitted  
38 issue.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, if we're going to convene the Law  
43 Enforcement Technical Committee, I would like to at least hear  
44 their perspective on both of those topics, and we can, obviously,  
45 consider that input, obviously, in terms of any future council  
46 action.

47  
48 **MR. WALKER:** We may as well put turtles in there too, if we're

1 going to -- If the group is already -- We may as well maybe add  
2 the turtle gear discussion, if the technical group is already put  
3 together, and ask them. It's my understanding, and I learned this  
4 last night from Ms. Lee, that the turtle gear, surprisingly,  
5 requirements did not come from endangered species.

6  
7 They came from the council, back in the day. I was not aware of  
8 that, but, according to her, that didn't come from her group, and  
9 it was a council thing, back in the day, and so, to me, that makes  
10 it seem like maybe it's not as set in stone as it would have been  
11 if it came from ESA.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

14  
15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess my  
16 suggestion on the sea turtle release gear requirements would be to  
17 have the motion you guys passed, I think, to have the agency take  
18 a look at that, and come back to us with something, because I feel  
19 like, right now, if we just ask law enforcement to weigh-in on it,  
20 they're just going to be weighing-in on what the current  
21 requirements are, and I think we're trying to see, from my  
22 understanding, if there's room for streamlining there, if it's not  
23 an ESA requirement or not, and, yes, the regulations went through  
24 the council process, but I think they were largely driven by  
25 interactions with protected resources.

26  
27 **MR. WALKER:** Right. All right. Well, I'm going to work with  
28 Captain Frady, and see if we can maybe draft some specific asks,  
29 and we'll review what we think maybe could be eased a little bit.  
30 Obviously, I'm not asking to just ditch all turtle gear or anything  
31 like that, and just some modification, and so maybe Captain Frady  
32 and I can bring together some asks, and then we can run that by  
33 and see if it's feasible, or practical, or not.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, and so that completes Reef Fish. Next  
36 up on our agenda is Mr. Helies, and he's not here, but Heather  
37 will. Okay. Updates on Documents Transmitted for Rulemaking, Tab  
38 R, Number 6.

39  
40 **UPDATE ON DOCUMENTS TRANSMITTED FOR RULEMAKING**

41  
42 **MS. HEATHER BLOUGH:** Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Heather Blough,  
43 with NOAA Fisheries, covering this for Frank. We have eight  
44 actions with us currently for implementation.

45  
46 I'll start with the shallow-water grouper framework. The final  
47 rule to implement that action is currently under review at  
48 Headquarters. In the middle of May, we released the IFQ allocation

1 that we had held back pending implementation of that action, when  
2 we realized that we weren't going to be able to implement the  
3 action by June 1. We now expect that rule to take effect at the  
4 beginning of 2027, for the 2027 fishing year.

5  
6 Last month, we published proposed rules to implement the commercial  
7 e-logbook amendment, and also Reef Fish Amendment 58B. The comment  
8 period on the e-logbook reporting amendment closes June 25<sup>th</sup>, and  
9 the comment period on the Amendment 58B proposed rule closes this  
10 Friday. We also just notified the council today that we approved  
11 Amendment 58B itself, and, that one, we also released the IFQ  
12 allocation that we had held back pending implementation of the  
13 action, and so that will also take effect for the 2027 fishing  
14 year.

15  
16 We have proposed rules to implement Reef Fish Amendment 62, Shrimp  
17 Amendment 19, and Spanish Mackerel Framework Amendment 14 under  
18 review at Headquarters. We noticed the availability of Amendment  
19 62 for public comment on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and we expect the notice of  
20 availability of Shrimp Amendment 19 to post for public comment  
21 very soon, probably by the end of the week.

22  
23 Then, currently at SERO, we're developing the proposed rule  
24 packages to implement the shrimp ELB and the lane snapper size  
25 limit framework actions. We intend to combine the lane snapper  
26 rulemaking and the recent abbreviated framework that proposes to  
27 increase catch limits for that stock into one rule. Any questions?

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank  
30 you. All right. Next up, we have Discussion of Council Planning  
31 and Primary Activities. Dr. Simmons.

#### 32 33 **DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES**

34  
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so Bernie  
36 has up Tab R, Number 6, and so, if you go to the top of the  
37 document, we were just taking a look at, this is what staff is  
38 anticipating to have ready for the August council meeting: a final  
39 action document for modifications to the Gulf for-hire data  
40 collection program and a revised draft of the framework action to  
41 modify the red snapper private recreational postseason  
42 accountability measures.

43  
44 For Reef Fish Amendment 59A permit requirements in the IFQ  
45 programs, the next phase of that document would normally be a  
46 public hearing draft, but, due to the nonprofit items, I think  
47 that the IPT and council still have to work through. We're not  
48 sure that we could have a public hearing draft in August. It will

1 likely be just a revised draft for the council to look at.

2  
3 For Items 4 and 5, we would like to get some feedback from the  
4 council on priority of these two amendments. They are basically  
5 different approaches to achieve additional management flexibility.

6  
7 Number 4, the Draft Amendment 64, would give the states the  
8 authority to manage red snapper for the federal for-hire, whereas  
9 draft amendment, and we haven't given it a number yet, would  
10 potentially look at allowing triggers and management flexibility  
11 of the federal for-hire component of the red snapper fishery by  
12 potentially the Regional Administrator, or setting up some type of  
13 automated measures, such as changing the season, start date, and  
14 those other items that were discussed.

15  
16 I can finish going through the list, Mr. Chair, but I do think it  
17 will be helpful if we have a little discussion about priority for  
18 those two, and so maybe I'll just stop there then and get a little  
19 feedback.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Sweetman.

22  
23 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So just a question. Yes, and I hear what you're  
24 saying, that those seem extremely similar. Can they not be the  
25 same document, and just different kind of options within them, and  
26 like one would be delegation to the state, and then another  
27 potentially be flexibility for Andy to -- I mean, I'm trying to  
28 see if that can be streamlined into one document there.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

31  
32 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, technically, probably yes, but, when you think  
33 about what we did when we did state management for private, all  
34 the little actions that went with it, it would be like a huge part  
35 if you were going to go down that, and, if that's a no, and you're  
36 going with the other one, then you've fleshed out the whole state  
37 management process in a document, and it would be a lot.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Do we have any other comments or  
40 discussion for Dr. Simmons? Mr. Strelcheck.

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I think we need to provide staff guidance  
43 on this one, and it's a tough one, right, because I've heard both  
44 sides, right, and there's certainly states, or stakeholders, that  
45 want for-hire state management, and those that oppose it want  
46 federal management, but I feel like we either need to give some  
47 direction that we're going to combine these into a single action,  
48 or we're going to put one as a priority over the other, and I don't



1 have a preference. I'm just asking for my staff's benefit, and  
2 Carrie's staff's benefit, as to how we want to proceed.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I was going to put Mr. Schieble on the spot, and  
5 Mr. Anson.

6  
7 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Well, I volunteered, and so my recommendation is  
8 since, in the order of operations in the action guide, that state  
9 management of the federal for-hire fleet is there in that order  
10 first, we should continue down that path.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, Chris. Thank you. Mr. Anson.

13  
14 **Mr. ANSON:** I mean, there's interest from different camps for both  
15 of these items, certainly, and so I guess, Dr. Simmons, when you  
16 ask the question for priority, you're talking about the August  
17 meeting, but I'm thinking beyond the August meeting. If we select  
18 one amendment over the other, does that mean that one that we  
19 select for the August meeting is going to basically go through,  
20 you know, and receive the most attention, and so it would then  
21 cause the second item we didn't select for August to show up six  
22 months later, or a year from now, or what does that mean?

23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** That is an excellent question that  
25 you guys are supposed to keep on track with us about. As Mr.  
26 Schieble said, the council did request the 64 first, and so it is  
27 a higher priority currently on the draft action schedule, but,  
28 again, that can always change.

29  
30 We have been spending some more time talking about 64, but it was  
31 brought to our attention, when we originally were thinking about  
32 having the flexibility measures for the Regional Administrator to  
33 consider to go to a contractor, which would be a little bit outside  
34 of the council process, to try to move things along, and that  
35 probably wasn't the best path forward, due to it not maybe being  
36 in front of the council as much.

37  
38 I really think it's up to you all to kind of help us think about  
39 not just August, like you're saying, but longer-term priority, but  
40 perhaps, in the short-term, if you could give us some feedback on  
41 what you really want to see in August and October, that could be  
42 most helpful.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

45  
46 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, from my perspective,  
47 and I understand that a vast majority of the work will probably be  
48 on the state management side of things relative to this, but I

1 view this as kind of a decision point where, if you combine these  
2 documents, you know, one doesn't necessarily supersede the other,  
3 and you're being considerate of both options within the same  
4 document.

5  
6 They're looking at how to structure the management of this  
7 component of the fishery differently, but it's literally like a  
8 decision point there that we can make. It's either we want the  
9 management flexibility or we move in the direction of for-hire,  
10 and, therefore, we're not just ignoring one that's already kind of  
11 in the docket there, but that's just -- It would allow for  
12 consideration of both, is what I'm saying, and I don't think it -  
13 - It will be a lot of work, but I think the bulk load of the work  
14 is in the state part of it.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

17  
18 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'm in somewhat agreement with Dr. Sweetman. I'm  
19 not opposed to Draft Amendment X, as it's labeled right now. I  
20 think there may be some management flexibility options, you know,  
21 that sort of are similar to what we already have in Draft Amendment  
22 64, right, and there could be potential things that are included  
23 in there, and so I don't want to just not have that simultaneously  
24 moving with the two.

25  
26 I think they could be in concert with each other, to some extent,  
27 but, at some point, we're going to have to prioritize one over the  
28 other, and that's essentially what we're doing here. I feel like  
29 the one that already has a number, 64, is further along in the  
30 queue in the development. We don't even have a presentation for  
31 Draft Amendment X.

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

34  
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Staff might wring my neck for this  
36 one, but we could try to bring something for each of them in  
37 August, and you all could give us a lot more clarity on combining  
38 them, or prioritizing them.

39  
40 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I'll just go.

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

43  
44 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I guess the one thing -- I think that's okay. Just  
45 like, in terms of a single document, I'm not sure how we would  
46 write a purpose and need that would satisfy both of those at the  
47 same time.

1 I think that's okay, but I'm just trying to think, if we were to  
2 go to a single action, eventually we would have to think about  
3 that. I'm not sure we want to do it, but it will be fun. We'll  
4 work it out.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I've got Mr. Strelcheck, then Dr. Allen.

7  
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I agree. I think it will complicate  
9 things that Mara is pointing out to me, and I agree with her,  
10 right, that we have this opt-in and opt-out provision for 64, and  
11 so it's not like they're mutually exclusive either, right, because,  
12 if you opt out, then you could provide additional federal  
13 flexibility, in terms of how the season is structured, or any other  
14 management measures, and so I think it may be good to try to keep  
15 them together, even if it's separate documents for now, or separate  
16 discussions.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Dr. Allen.

19  
20 **DR. ALLEN:** I had a similar thought to that, in that the Draft  
21 Amendment X, depending on what that looks like, and what the  
22 options might be there, which I don't understand what they might  
23 be, but, depending on what that looks like, that may influence,  
24 you know, how we consider the Draft 64, and so it would make sense  
25 to me to talk about both of them at the same time.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Simons.

28  
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. We'll see what we can do, and  
30 we'll keep the chair and vice chair apprised. All right, and so  
31 we're going to hopefully have a discussion on the five-year review  
32 of the standardized bycatch reporting. I believe that's a  
33 requirement that we need to do.

34  
35 Then we would like to start talking about part of our executive  
36 order workplan, which is that review of the low-priority species  
37 in our fishery management plans, to consider if they're in need of  
38 federal management, and then here's another easy one, this last  
39 one here, the discussion of the private angling red snapper  
40 allocations for the states.

41  
42 Staff has been discussing the timing of the red snapper assessment  
43 with the Regional Office and the Science Center, and thinking about  
44 mapping out all the things that will have to happen when we get  
45 that assessment, and so we were hoping -- We understood that the  
46 states have been getting together and discussing some of this, and  
47 if they would want to start bringing it to the council table or  
48 not, or if that's something we would move back to later in the

1 year, but to start that discussion, so we can get ahead of some of  
2 those decision points.

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

5  
6 **MR. ANSON:** I assume that you will, but you didn't mention it.  
7 The mapping exercise that you and staff have been working on, will  
8 that be part of the discussion for that topic?

9  
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** We can make it part of the discussion.  
11 We probably need to work closely with the state directors on that.

12  
13 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Dr. Simmons?

16  
17 **DR. ALLEN:** Is this about the bycatch, or Number 8? Okay. Thank  
18 you. Sorry. We were lost.

19  
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and then, for October, we have  
21 three documents that we're proposing to bring back right now,  
22 depending on what happens in August, and then just some items to  
23 keep you apprised of, as far as the amendments and the framework  
24 actions that still have to be finalized and transmitted, the lane  
25 snapper catch limit modifications, the document we just took final  
26 action on, 63, the Abbreviated Framework for the Red Grouper  
27 Commercial Quota Retention, the quota pool for 2027. Reef Fish  
28 Framework Action: Modifications of the Recreational For-Hire Red  
29 Snapper Fishing Season, and then the Abbreviated Framework on the  
30 Continuation of Management Measures to Reduce Reef Fish Release  
31 Mortality. Mr. Chair.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman had the question.

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** What is the holdup with that abbreviated framework  
36 right now? Can you articulate that to me?

37  
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** We are awaiting final review by  
39 pertinent specialists at the Regional Office on certain sections,  
40 and then we need a Science Center review, and then hopefully we  
41 will transmit it.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Dr. Simmons on priorities?  
44 Mr. Schieble, you have a question?

45  
46 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and it's not really a priority, but I would  
47 like to make a specific motion with relation to the upcoming SSC  
48 meeting in July, and so, yesterday, we all received the link to

1 the report for the Great Amberjack Count. It's quite interesting,  
2 if you read at least the first seven pages, which is the executive  
3 summary, and not all 671, and I haven't gotten the time to do that  
4 yet, but we will.

5  
6 I would like to request, or make a motion to request, that the PIs  
7 for the Great Amberjack Count make a presentation on the methods  
8 and results of the Great Amberjack Count itself to the July SSC  
9 meeting.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll let Bernie get your motion up on the  
12 board, Mr. Schieble.

13  
14 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I can give some rationale here while we're doing  
15 that, so you get a second from somebody.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have a second from Mr. Burris.

18  
19 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so, going back to the January meeting, we  
20 got basically an amberjack review, and it was a presentation that  
21 Dr. Hollensead gave us, and insider there was a Slide 8 that had  
22 an amberjack workplan, and it showed kind of a tentative schedule  
23 of how things were going to go, and it originally had that the SSC  
24 would get ahold of it in May, and they didn't, because it wasn't  
25 ready at that point, and now we have it.

26  
27 The Reef Fish AP is supposed to get ahold of that as well, and  
28 then it goes to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to get  
29 incorporated into the assessment. I think it would be good to at  
30 least have the advice of the SSC looking at this, as it goes  
31 simultaneously to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to go  
32 into the assessment as well.

33  
34 I'm not asking for some catch advice determination or anything  
35 like that to come out of it, but just to look at the methods and  
36 and give us their take on what the results are.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Chris, for that. Dr. Simmons.

39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we had  
41 about a four-and-a-half-day review of this work, and that included  
42 both, I think, the Gulf and South Atlantic work that was done, and  
43 there was a lot of really interesting information and material  
44 that's been produced from this study, but I assume you want the  
45 SSC to really focus on the absolute abundance estimates in there,  
46 correct.

47  
48 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** As well as the genetics. I think that's unique to

1 this study. We didn't really have that analysis with the Great  
2 Snapper Count, and so that makes it a special component, in my  
3 mind, and that's something that we haven't had a chance to look at  
4 as well.

5  
6 There's the tag recapture stuff in there, and marking movement,  
7 but also the genetic component, and the absolute abundance results,  
8 but the methodology is really what I would like the SSC to be able  
9 to see from the PIs.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson, and Dr. Walter.

12  
13 **MR. ANSON:** I'm just throwing this out here for other folks to  
14 answer the question in my mind, but, I mean, if this motion goes  
15 through, and they're able to do that, to provide a presentation at  
16 the SSC, certainly we would have a copy of the presentation, be  
17 able to listen to minutes, all of that, or listen to the actual  
18 meeting, but would there be a value for the --

19  
20 Because of the audience that we would have here that may not go  
21 through that and look at those notes, would there be a value to  
22 have them also provide the presentation, or the same presentation,  
23 to the council? It could be through webinar. They don't have to  
24 be in-person, but I'm just wondering if that's the desire amongst  
25 the other council members, and, if so, then we might want to modify  
26 the motion.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Rindone.

29  
30 **MR. RINDONE:** I have no idea. Mr. Rindone what? Chris pointed at  
31 me, and he pointed at a microphone, and so I turned it on.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** What I understand Mr. Anson is recommending is we  
34 may want a presentation as well, the same presentation, and, if  
35 so, maybe we change this motion now. Dr. Simmons.

36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, I haven't had a chance to read  
38 the report. I did sit at the review most of the time, but there  
39 was, like I said, a lot of material, and so we would have to really  
40 think about what we would want to focus on, I think, if it's  
41 different, or more concise, hopefully, than what the SSC is to  
42 get, and if they would be ready in August, and if we have agenda  
43 time for that, because it was -- There was a lot of discussion,  
44 and a lot of information that's involved in that study, just in  
45 the Gulf alone, and not to mention what was done in the South  
46 Atlantic.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. I'm going to go to Ryan. I still

1 have Dr. Walter in the queue.

2  
3 **MR. RINDONE:** So, Mr. Chair, I think, operationally, when we're  
4 thinking about what to present to who, I think, for the sake of  
5 the SSC, and I had spoke to Chris a little bit about this, but  
6 whatever material is presented to the SSC should probably be done  
7 through the lens of, you know, this is how it was done, and these  
8 are the results, and how might we best work to incorporate this  
9 into the stock assessment process in terms of like it being  
10 considered and evaluated through the SEDAR process, you know, based  
11 on its own merits and whatnot.

12  
13 Then, as far as it coming to the council, you know, you guys are  
14 the proverbial top of the totem pole. You don't need to see every  
15 nut and bolt of how the whole car was put together. You just want  
16 to know like, okay, does it run well, and like what does it look  
17 like, and so the level of detail involved in the presentations  
18 probably needs to be stepped, you know, with that in mind.

19  
20 Also, I think we need to be considerate of, at this point, the  
21 study is done. You're not going to go back and redo parts of it  
22 because someone had a different opinion after the fact, and like  
23 the it's completed at this point, and so I think, for the SSC, for  
24 that purpose, you know, the results need to be considered with  
25 that in mind, and see how it might best be considered by the  
26 scientific process that builds out the stock assessments.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We're good? Dr. Walter, and I do  
29 have Dr. Allen, too.

30  
31 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think that's a great point, and I'm  
32 wondering if we have -- I don't know if we have the terms of  
33 reference for the upcoming SEDAR process, and so maybe what would  
34 be valuable is to have the SSC think about how some of the  
35 information and products in there could be worked into the stock  
36 assessment process in advance of drafting terms of reference,  
37 saying there's this information that would be very valuable for  
38 this part of the assessment. I think that would be very useful  
39 guidance to get from the SSC. Thanks.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons, to that point, and then Dr. Allen.

42  
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes. Thank you. Sorry, Dr. Allen,  
44 but, just to that point, I think the steering committee recommended  
45 a workgroup to include the Science Center staff, and some of the  
46 council staff, to take a look at this with the PIs, to figure out  
47 what type of data and format could be most useful for the stock  
48 assessment, so we could start working on drafting the terms of

1 reference, and especially before the PIs move on to other projects.

2  
3 We have a short period of time for that, and so maybe that could  
4 go on simultaneously, and then we can see if the SSC has other  
5 recommendations, because I know that's in the works. Mississippi-  
6 Alabama Sea Grant staff have asked for that to be organized, and  
7 we're starting to work on that.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

10  
11 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you. I mean, I think it would be great for the  
12 SSC to get a presentation, and have a chance to comment, and have  
13 the PIs there. There was an extensive review of the Great Red  
14 Snapper -- The Greater Amberjack Count, and they -- So it would be  
15 good for the SSC to weigh-in on that with the principal  
16 investigators.

17  
18 I'm wondering if Trevor's summary of that might be adequate for us  
19 to -- You know, that he could summarize what the SSC, but I'm also  
20 okay to ask the principal investigators to give us a higher-level  
21 discussion of the study, and so I'm just wondered about the timing.  
22 I think that the most important thing for us is going to be how  
23 can this information be used in the assessment, and I don't know  
24 about the timing of that, you know, relative to the assessment,  
25 and so I don't know if -- Is it the time for the SSC to comment on  
26 that? I'm not sure.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Allen. Dr. Banks.

29  
30 **DR. BANKS:** So, just also noting that our August council meeting  
31 is in Biloxi, which would be a much shorter travel for the PIs,  
32 the lead PIs, to actually get there and come talk about it, and  
33 I'm pretty sure that's like a two-hour drive, if I remember  
34 correctly, and so it might be worth -- Even if we aren't  
35 necessarily ready to move forward with making any decisions, or  
36 the SSC is ready to give us any recommendations, at least for us  
37 to understand the results, rather than -- Because October is now  
38 Texas, and that's a much further drive for those PIs, that may  
39 have moved on to other projects by October.

40  
41 **DR. ALLEN:** Excellent point. That's a fair point.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I guess, just to sort of answer Dr.  
46 Allen's question about timing, I'm not sure that we would have  
47 like the draft terms of reference yet, but I think we at least  
48 have what that group is working on with the PIs and the Science



1 Center staff, to at least hopefully report some general information  
2 to the SSC at that time about how those terms of reference may be  
3 shaped, and what kind of data and format they need to have to make  
4 that happen, and maybe the SSC can weigh-in on a little bit of  
5 that, but that's still a pretty tight timeline.

6  
7 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and that was my concern, is it's a tight timeline,  
8 but that plan sounds good to me.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

11  
12 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Just a technical question, before we vote this up  
13 or down, and do we need to modify it to request also that the  
14 Biloxi Gulf Council meeting receives a report from the PIs, or can  
15 we just have that separate, or what do we need to do?

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

18  
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that  
20 I understand what you guys are asking for. I think the chair and  
21 vice chair do, and I think we'll do our best to figure out what is  
22 going to work, and what's going to be ready, if that's okay, for  
23 the August meeting. I mean, you'll definitely get what the SSC  
24 saw, and you'll get the report-out from that, and then, if we have  
25 time, and the PIs are able, we could try to schedule a short  
26 overview, but it will have to be much more abbreviated than what  
27 we received during the review.

28  
29 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I agree. I don't think we need to go back  
30 to the presentation we got on triggerfish a few years ago. That  
31 took a while, and so I just wanted the formality of this. I don't  
32 think we need to force something with a motion when it's not  
33 needed.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, and so any further discussion on the  
36 motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion?**  
37 **Seeing none, the motion carries.**

38  
39 All right. We're going to continue to Other Business, and I'm  
40 just going to go down the list I've got. I'm going to start off  
41 with Dr. Walter for Other Business for king mackerel landings in  
42 Mexico.

43  
44 **OTHER BUSINESS**  
45 **MEXICAN KING MACKEREL LANDINGS**  
46

47 **DR. WALTER:** All right, Chair. Thank you. I'm going to present  
48 on some recent data that we've acquired that's going to have

1 bearing on the ongoing SEDAR 99 king mackerel stock assessment,  
2 and I think it's going to probably shed light on some of the things  
3 that we've been really wrestling with these past couple of years  
4 with what might be going on with king mackerel, and so I found it  
5 really fascinating.

6  
7 One of the terms of reference for SEDAR 99, buried kind of deep,  
8 was explore available landings of king mackerel from Mexico, and  
9 I think, for many years, we've always thought that this is  
10 something that we should be doing, but we've never really gotten  
11 conclusive data from Mexico, and, when we have, and incorporated  
12 it into a sensitivity run in the assessment, it wasn't particularly  
13 impactful, and so the decision was to not include that data into  
14 any of the stock assessments historically.

15  
16 However, in the past couple of years, and I think it's about six  
17 or eight years that this project, which is funded by the UN  
18 Environmental Program and the Global Environmental Facility to do  
19 a joint project in the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem, and  
20 you'll note I said "Gulf of Mexico", because, in this case, it  
21 started as Gulf of Mexico, and, when we are working with  
22 international partners, we are allowed to use the term that they  
23 prefer here, so that we don't create an issue here, but, in this  
24 case, the project has three goals here.

25  
26 The main one, pertinent to this, is a joint stock assessment for  
27 king mackerel and Spanish mackerel, and so, recently, and,  
28 unfortunately, the project has kind of had fits and starts,  
29 depending on whether our partners in Mexico can participate in it  
30 or not, and so it was only recently, in the past couple of months,  
31 that we actually got really good data for king mackerel, and then  
32 that has basically spurred the potential for us to implement a  
33 joint stock assessment, which the timing is fortuitous with SEDAR  
34 99, and I'll go into how that might fit into the timing later on.

35  
36 The Mexican landings come from a series of ports in the Southern  
37 Gulf. They have fairly extensive fleets, and they're primarily  
38 trolling and gillnet fleets. They're labeled as artisanal  
39 commercial fleets, but the volume of landings you'll see in the  
40 other slides are pretty substantial, substantial enough that -- I  
41 guess a large enough number of artisanal boats add up to landings  
42 that surpass the United States total landings.

43  
44 They presented two working papers, one on landings and one on  
45 length comps, and so this slide on the left is the time series of  
46 landings for the United States, in blue, and this is total  
47 commercial and recreational combined, and then Mexico in red,  
48 Mexico being their commercial landings of their gillnet and their

1 trolling fleet.

2  
3 A couple of things stand out in the time series. One, the magnitude  
4 is higher for Mexican landings, which means that any assessment of  
5 just the U.S. stock really has to consider removals from the  
6 Mexican stock, based on what we think we know about movement and  
7 mixing.

8  
9 Second of all, the trends are different, and so it's not just the  
10 scaling issue. There's a pretty substantial difference in the  
11 trend, with, in the recent time period, actually substantial  
12 declines in the Mexican landings, and some concerns in Mexico on  
13 the status of the stock.

14  
15 When you look at that, those landings, and those are in millions  
16 of pounds on the left, and, on the right, there's a smaller inset  
17 slide, which is by commercial gear type, and those are,  
18 unfortunately, in metric tons, and what you see in the purple and  
19 green are the Mexican troll and gillnet.

20  
21 They both have fairly parallel time series, but they're also  
22 substantially higher than the commercial time series for the United  
23 States, which are vertical line and gillnet in red and blue, and  
24 then the thing that really stood out to me was the size  
25 composition, in particular the Mexican gillnet size composition,  
26 where they seem to have very, very small fish in those gillnets.

27  
28 We asked are those potentially Spanish mackerel or cero, and  
29 they've confirmed that they are indeed king mackerel, and so  
30 presumably they're catching large numbers of quite small king  
31 mackerel, and, given the magnitude of the gillnet fishery, and the  
32 size composition, that could certainly be affecting the stock, in  
33 terms of applying a lot of fishing mortality to very young fish,  
34 and so I think there's certainly enough information here that tells  
35 us that these have to be included and considered in the stock  
36 assessment in order to get a defensible scientific product.

37  
38 What we tend to think we know about the stock structure is,  
39 particularly in the western Gulf, there's a migratory pattern where  
40 fish move from Mexican into United States waters, moving then east  
41 along the United States coastline, and so presumably, if there are  
42 fish that are caught in Mexico before they reach the size that  
43 they might be able to migrate, you might reduce the supply of fish  
44 into the western Gulf through Texas and Louisiana.

45  
46 Those are the areas we've seen some of the biggest declines in the  
47 landings, where we have not caught the quotas for many, many years,  
48 and so there seems to be enough here that this is something worth

1 exploring, and, based on the recent, or fairly -- Not that recent  
2 genetic analysis, it appears that the two-stock Gulf hypothesis  
3 was refuted, indicating that there is a single Gulf stock.

4  
5 Probably there might be more to evaluate, based on more recent  
6 genetic analyses, and clearly tagging may also inform this movement  
7 and mixing, as it was brought up as potentially a priority.

8  
9 Most of the tagging that was done that informs this life history  
10 diagram was done many years ago, with conventional tagging, and so  
11 I think certainly, if there's concerns or an understanding that  
12 the stock distribution may have changed, redoing that tagging with  
13 more modern methodologies, based on acoustics that we now have,  
14 acoustic receivers, satellite tags, et cetera, and even more  
15 conventional tagging might be warranted.

16  
17 This is an overview of the historical conventional tagging from  
18 the Cooperative Tagging Center, showing fairly extensive tagging,  
19 and then recaptures in Mexican waters, which indicates that there  
20 certainly is connectivity between the southern Gulf and United  
21 States waters. There isn't a lot of connectivity between the Gulf  
22 and the South Atlantic, in terms of those stocks seem to be  
23 different, except for when they're in the winter mixing zone.

24  
25 There you see, in the Atlantic, a lot of fish that move north and  
26 south, but, in the Gulf, you certainly see fish that move between  
27 the United States and Mexico. Again, many of these tags were  
28 twenty or thirty years ago, when the tagging programs were much  
29 more substantial.

30  
31 The proposal we have is to basically integrate this joint work  
32 with Mexico into the SEDAR 99 stock assessment. It's going to  
33 require a six-month extension of SEDAR 99, but it generally, we  
34 hope, line up with the stock -- The joint assessment will then  
35 become work that goes into SEDAR 99.

36  
37 The proposal for the joint work is to have two virtual meetings  
38 with our Mexican colleagues to finish the data compilation and  
39 start the stock assessments, and then a virtual meeting in August,  
40 a technical workshop in-person in Mexico in early fall, and then  
41 further virtual meetings throughout the fall, with another  
42 technical workshop in November and December to finalize the model  
43 and documentation.

44  
45 This is a fairly tight timeline, but the nice thing is it matches  
46 up, and it doesn't substantially delay SEDAR 99, because we'll be  
47 able to get SEDAR 99 back online with this Mexican information, we  
48 hope, in early 2027, and so we'll have joint assessment results

1 that we think will better reflect the dynamics of the stock.

2  
3 With that, I wanted to just put this information before the council  
4 here. There are a number of other questions that this may bring  
5 up, in terms of international management, which we haven't gotten  
6 to here right now, and we're just trying to set the stage for a  
7 good scientific proposal. I think that there's going to need to  
8 be further conversations depending on what the science -- What  
9 bears out in science, but happy to take any questions. Thanks.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the presentation, Dr. Walter. Do  
12 we have any questions? I have a couple, but Mr. Sanchez, and then  
13 Mr. Anson.

14  
15 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, John, and I appreciate you sharing some  
16 of this with me, you know, early on knowing that I have a big  
17 interest in king mackerel, and it was a gift. We've been gifted  
18 with a huge, I think, missing piece of the puzzle, what happened  
19 to kingfish.

20  
21 That said, I don't know if this is a request, or it should be more  
22 formalized, in terms of a motion, but, being that it's been twelve  
23 years since we've done a full assessment on king mackerel, and I  
24 also want to thank Ryan. He kind of walked me off the ledge and  
25 said don't get hung up on, you know, the name benchmark or this or  
26 that, and we can fully run through all of the items that you would  
27 like to look at in the same level of detail under the current  
28 assessment approach, and so thank you for that.

29  
30 Clay had his hand in that too, but I would like, since it's been  
31 ten years, to follow up this gift of information that we have with  
32 some CIE review, post, you know, assessment, or during, or however  
33 that's conducted, and, if that gets expensive, it can be desktop.

34  
35 I just think this is a huge piece of the puzzle, and I would like  
36 to make sure it's just thoroughly vetted, maybe with some outside  
37 eyes looking at it. Should that be a motion, or a request? What  
38 carries more weight to get that over the finish line?

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

41  
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, this  
43 year, we recently encountered an issue with one of the assessments  
44 that Florida was doing, where we did not potentially have CIE  
45 reviewers, due to some funding issues, because that comes from  
46 Headquarters, and so I do think, if you would like a CIE review,  
47 it would probably be useful to have a motion, and we would write  
48 a letter to the Science Center and Headquarters.

1  
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would like to make that motion then, that we have  
3 a CIE review of the SEDAR 99 for king mackerel.  
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Let Bernie get the motion on the  
6 board. Do we have a second? Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Sanchez, is this  
7 how you want your motion to read?  
8

9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes. That looks fine.  
10

11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Do we have any discussion on the  
12 motion?  
13

14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** We need to request that National  
15 Marine Fisheries Service, NMFS.  
16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez, are you good with the changes?  
18

19 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and thank you for turning my microphone back  
20 on.  
21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** C.J., are you good with the changes?  
23

24 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, sir.  
25

26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any discussion? **Seeing none, any**  
27 **opposition? Seeing none, okay, Mr. Sanchez, and the motion passes.**  
28 I have a list of folks. Mr. Anson, and then Mr. Walter.  
29

30 **MR. ANSON:** I have three questions, if you allow me, Mr. Chair.  
31 Dr. Walter, what is -- Do you have an understanding as to how much  
32 recreational landings there are in Mexico, or do they have that  
33 data? Is there not much landings for king mackerel? That's  
34 several questions, and I have two more to follow that.  
35

36 **DR. WALTER:** That's a great question. I think we probably will -  
37 - I'll have our staff, who are working with them, kind of bring  
38 that one up and see if we get any answer to that.  
39

40 **MR. ANSON:** All right, and then my next question is, this meeting  
41 schedule that you provide here, I know this is outside of the  
42 federal government, and the purview of the council process, and  
43 are these going to be public, or will the public be able to listen  
44 in on these meetings, or, do you know anything about that?  
45

46 **DR. WALTER:** So I wanted that question, and I'm not 100 percent  
47 sure if it is public, or how the opportunity for integration there  
48 is, and so I'll have to get back to you on that process, but I

1 think what might be good is, if there is a desire to have some  
2 participation, like some of the panelists that were on SEDAR 99 to  
3 be part of that, I think it could be valuable to provide  
4 continuity.

5  
6 There's really two questions, and is it open to the public, or  
7 could some of the council panelists be part of it, and I think, at  
8 minimum, I think council some of the panelists might be valuable  
9 to have, and so let me inquire and get back to the council on that,  
10 if there's a desire for that, which I'm guessing -- I'm assuming  
11 there might be.

12  
13 **MR. ANSON:** All right. Thank you, and then my last question in  
14 this, and I would understand if you don't want to answer it, but  
15 so the graph that you provided there that showed the length  
16 frequency distribution by gear, I mean, unless the king mackerel  
17 that reside in Mexican waters are much different biologically than  
18 our king mackerel, that big spike there for the gillnet around 400  
19 -- I mean, that's right around, or just below, the sexual maturity  
20 of those fish, and so do you have a feeling, as they enter into  
21 this joint exercise, that they are willing to make some necessary  
22 changes along those kinds of fronts to affect their fishery to  
23 harvest in sizes that would be more appropriate to a sustainable  
24 fishery?

25  
26 **DR. WALTER:** A fascinating question. I think that's probably the  
27 key thing here, and it gets into the market that they have, and I  
28 was very curious of when David Krebs brought up a conversation  
29 about the Mexican fish, and I don't know where they go, and, at  
30 that size, how valuable they are to those fishermen, and I think  
31 you could easily, with some basic fisheries science, demonstrate  
32 that that's not a lot of yield per recruit on that, and that you  
33 would benefit from a larger mesh gillnet.

34  
35 I think that's where some of our expertise might be valuable, in  
36 terms of our relying on our fishermen, and even to be able to make  
37 the case that, hey, we get probably a better value for our product.  
38 We're using larger mesh, and, if those fish are available to that  
39 fishery, you could do better with less fishing mortality, and I  
40 think that's part of how these international projects can show  
41 mutual benefit, and so it's a great point. I think I would like  
42 us to be able to make that case, but you've got -- We've got to be  
43 kind of, shall we say, gentle in how one makes that.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you. To that point, Mr. Rindone?

46  
47 **MR. RINDONE:** When we had the webinar, Mr. Anson, talking with  
48 Mexican counterparts about this fleet specifically, one of the

1 questions that was brought up was what their mesh size was, and it  
2 doesn't seem as if it's consistent across the fleet.

3  
4 They said they're using -- John, I believe it was like a three to  
5 a four-inch mesh, and so they are catching fish that are around  
6 about, you know, fifteen to twenty-two inches, and they're the  
7 length at which 50 percent of kingfish are thought to be sexually  
8 mature, and it's, like you said, right at that minimum size of  
9 twenty-four inches.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ryan. All right. I have a list. I'm  
12 going to go to Captain Walker, and then C.J.

13  
14 **MR. WALKER:** Mr. Anson kind of touched on mine, but I was -- Am I  
15 right to assume there's not an annual catch limit in Mexico?

16  
17 **DR. WALTER:** I think you're right.

18  
19 **MR. WALKER:** I kind of figured, but I don't know if this is the  
20 place for it or not, but, when the time is right in this discussion,  
21 I would like to bring up the prospect of exploring a new tagging  
22 study for Gulf king mackerel.

23  
24 It can be a spaghetti tagging, being as how, nowadays, there's  
25 lots of questions about the kingfish are missing here, and there  
26 seems to be more kingfish over there, and there's a lot of  
27 disagreement between us fishermen.

28  
29 Where I live in west Florida, that we don't really have many  
30 kingfish anymore, and other people are saying they have kingfish  
31 where they are, and some guys say they're offshore and all this,  
32 and so it seems like it would be a good time for an updated, modern  
33 tagging study to see where these fish end up after they're tagged  
34 today, with climate change and all these other factors, and so,  
35 when the timing is right, I would like to suggest that, and I  
36 talked to Dr. Walter and Andy about, you know, potential funding  
37 and stuff, but we can finish this part, I think maybe, and then,  
38 when we're done with this, I can maybe make a motion to that  
39 effect.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. I'll go down the list to Dr. Sweetman,  
42 and then Chris.

43  
44 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yikes, John, and I don't  
45 necessarily think this is a gift. I think this is actually quite  
46 scary, what we're looking at here, but it is certainly informative.  
47 I guess I'm going to piggyback off of something Captain Walker was  
48 saying there, and so, Bernie, can you go down to a couple more



1 slides? Right there, actually, that slide.

2  
3 I've been in favor, you know, of trying to understand what is going  
4 on here, and trying to figure out some mechanism for a tagging  
5 study, right, and I have been primarily focused on what's going on  
6 in the winter mixing zone off of Florida, but this presentation  
7 now is making me guess where -- If we were to do a dedicated  
8 tagging study, John, where would you -- What would be the best  
9 area to target? Would it be both mixing zones off of the Mexican-  
10 Texas coast there, or as well as kind of where it splits across  
11 the South Atlantic? I'm curious your just kind of scientific  
12 thoughts there.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

15  
16 **DR. WALTER:** I think I would defer to other experts on this, but  
17 I think you would certainly have to focus on the western Gulf now,  
18 based on what we've got, and ensure that we get enough tagging  
19 that really fleshes out what that western Gulf circuit is.

20  
21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I agree with you. Thank you for saying  
22 that.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. So, next  
25 up, I have Mr. Schieble, and then Mr. Strelcheck.

26  
27 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you for this presentation, Dr. Walter. One  
28 technical question, I guess, and you may or may not be able to  
29 answer it, and I'm looking at the SEDAR schedule we got at the  
30 last council meeting, and I'm looking at cobia coming up in the  
31 schedule, with a terminal year on the data of 2027 for that  
32 assessment.

33  
34 Do you -- I would suspect that you would see a very similar trend  
35 in data for landings of cobia taking place between the United  
36 States and Mexico as well. Do you know if there's a similar study  
37 that's looking at data from cobia that we can get that could go  
38 into that assessment as well?

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

41  
42 **DR. WALTER:** I do not, but I think this raises all kinds of  
43 questions about what the amount of three-inch mesh gillnet that  
44 you would have to do to catch this much would do to everything  
45 else, and so I think we've just scratched the surface on something,  
46 honestly.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Next up is Mr. Strelcheck.

1  
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so this was late-breaking news prior to  
3 the council meeting, but I just wanted to also mention the  
4 management aspect of this, and, obviously, we're talking about the  
5 science here, and we don't know what the outcome of the science  
6 will be, but it's certainly an indication that this has a huge  
7 impact on our management of king mackerel in the Gulf, and what  
8 Mexico does is going to heavily impact, and influence, any  
9 management that we would do.

10  
11 With that said, I've started some conversations, just internally  
12 within NMFS, with International Affairs, with our Office of  
13 Sustainable Fisheries. As you're aware, I mean, we have everything  
14 from multilateral agreements like ICCAT, which does include tuna-  
15 like species, to bilateral agreements between countries that have  
16 non-binding agreements.

17  
18 What I'm trying to explore right now, and understand, is kind of  
19 the suite of options that we have for managing this, rather than  
20 just an ask that they change their gillnet size, right, or make  
21 modifications, and then what the implications are for this  
22 management body going forward, because, to me, in order to have  
23 successful management of mackerel, or any other of these  
24 transboundary species between Mexico and the U.S., it's going to  
25 require some sort of agreement and understanding between the two  
26 countries.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that, Andy. I have several hands.  
29 Mr. Walker, and then Mr. Sanchez.

30  
31 **MR. WALKER:** Can we go back to the slide that shows the landings  
32 graphs, please? I'm looking at -- The Mexican landings, according  
33 to this, have always been pretty high, right, and so -- At least  
34 on the left chart that I'm looking at there, and I don't know that  
35 they line up with this decline that we're experiencing here, you  
36 know, the years, and you would think, if this was really the key  
37 factor here, the smoking gun, then there would be big Mexican  
38 landings, and ours would tail off at the end. It's just a general  
39 observation, and I'm not trying to make any claims, but, to me,  
40 it's not an exact correlation on this graph.

41  
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Ed, sorry to jump in, but those do seem to match a  
43 little bit to me. I mean, in the early time period, you can see  
44 the increasing trend in the Mexican landings, higher than ours,  
45 and ours is not as significant, but then, when you see the Mexican  
46 landings start to drop off too, that's when we start, and it's a  
47 little bit of a lag there, but that actually does make sense.

1 **MR. WALKER:** Well, I mean, if you think of the life of a kingfish  
2 is about seven years, and I don't know that you need to go back to  
3 the 1980s looking for trends on what's happening now, if that's  
4 what you're saying.

5  
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm saying the Mexican -- What is happening in  
7 Mexico waters has a direct influence, based on that plot there,  
8 throughout that entire time series of what we're seeing.

9  
10 **MR. RINDONE:** Ed, I would add that, between the mid-1980s, all the  
11 way through the early 2000s, that lag that C.J. is talking about,  
12 when we remember that half the Mexican landings are coming from  
13 the gillnet fleet, and their gillnet fleet is targeting fish that  
14 are under our minimum size limit, and so, if they're seeing a large  
15 pulse of younger, smaller fish, and they're seeing those be  
16 selected by and harvested by their gillnets, we wouldn't see those  
17 fish show up in our landings until they reach our size at  
18 selectivity of twenty-four inches.

19  
20 That offset there, and the difference in magnitude, makes a little  
21 bit more sense when you factor that in, and it's not true for the  
22 entirety of the time series. Like you're right about that.  
23 There's some mismatch, once we get past the 2000s, but there's a  
24 great-looking relationship between the two data series there from  
25 the mid-1980s through the early 2000s.

26  
27 **MR. WALKER:** Right. I think my point was that an adult kingfish  
28 is not that old, and what's going on in the fishery now is a fairly  
29 recent thing, and so I don't know that what happened in 1990 has  
30 a whole lot of bearing on what's going on right now. I'm more  
31 focused on this end, where the U.S. landings that we have, which  
32 are -- On this graph, only go up to a long time ago anyway, but  
33 they were fairly static until then, but, anyway, I was just  
34 pointing out my --

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. A couple more people. Mr. Sanchez,  
37 and then Mr. Anson, and then we'll try to land this.

38  
39 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Originally, I had some of the same concerns that Ed  
40 had. A cursory review of this has been going on forever,  
41 and how does it explain something recent here, but then it occurred  
42 to me, and, in talking to some people that are a lot smarter than  
43 me, they said it might be the cumulative effect of years of  
44 catching undersized fish that are heading north in the summer to  
45 our backyard that aren't making it.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, John. Dr. Walter, to that?

1 **DR. WALTER:** I think one of the things we really need to partition  
2 is south by east-west, because we manage the eastern Gulf  
3 population, and we think mostly within U.S. waters, but it's that  
4 western Gulf component that goes into Mexico that might be the one  
5 that is more impacted, and so it might be that landings in the  
6 U.S. has been buoyed up by a managed eastern component, while the  
7 western might show these declines, which might bear out more of  
8 the kind of cause and effect.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Mr. Anson.

11  
12 **MR. ANSON:** I'm not -- This is a little bit in jest, Andy, but we  
13 do have a spot on our agenda that's for the State Department, and  
14 so maybe you can ask them, when you're reaching out, to ask them  
15 to come and visit us.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, and so I don't have anyone else in the  
18 queue, but I'm going to go back to Mr. Walker, who wanted to  
19 discuss a motion.

20  
21 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and so, based on so much conjecture, and the  
22 fact that it's been how long, John, since the last kingfish study?  
23 A while. I thought you said it just a minute ago.

24  
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** We broke out, you know, some different assessments.  
26 The benchmark has been twelve years, and then there were some  
27 subsequent assessments. John can probably tell you off the top of  
28 his head. There's been a few, but there hasn't been a CIE review  
29 in twelve years.

30  
31 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I was thinking more like studies. It seems  
32 to me, with all these inexplicable changes, it's a great time for  
33 a study on king mackerel movement in the Gulf of Mexico, and I'm  
34 not sure my position to ask for that, who I would be asking. I  
35 did speak with John Walter and Andy, and they had some possible  
36 avenues of funding for this, and maybe you could give me a little  
37 guidance on how to proceed.

38  
39 Can I just make a motion saying we would like to pursue a tagging  
40 study of king mackerel in the Gulf of Mexico, to fill in some  
41 holes, or do I need some funding advice before I can do that?

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

44  
45 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I see maybe a couple avenues, and so one is the  
46 same bucket that we talked about with Gregg Bray, right, where is  
47 there money available, through this \$5 million, if this was a  
48 research priority, to conduct a king mackerel tagging study, and

1 Gregg needs to get back to us to, obviously, determine whether or  
2 not that's even a possibility or not, and if it would be supported.

3  
4 Then the other is simply putting together a request like you would  
5 for the Science Center, you know, prioritizing this work, or  
6 prioritizing funding to support this work through academic  
7 partners and others.

8  
9 **MR. WALKER:** Okay. I'll try and put it together. Let's make a  
10 motion that we request the Science Center to pursue -- What's the  
11 word I'm looking for? Evaluate the possibility of a king mackerel,  
12 Gulf king mackerel, tagging study to get current information on  
13 king mackerel movements in the Gulf.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** How's that, Mr. Walker? Ed, are you good with  
16 your motion?

17  
18 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have a second for your motion? Do we have  
21 a second for Mr. Walker's motion? Dr. Allen seconded. I want to  
22 acknowledge Mr. Broussard has his hand up.

23  
24 **MR. BROUSSARD:** I'm sorry. I put it up, and I didn't mention to  
25 anybody, and I guess that's the price you pay for not showing up,  
26 but my question was -- We've kind of moved on, but it was for Dr.  
27 Walter, regarding how accurate do we feel this Mexican landing  
28 data is? I mean, I don't think they have a trip ticket program,  
29 or anything like that, and so is it possible that this is actually  
30 undervaluing the actual landings?

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

33  
34 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and it's possible that it's undercounting, but  
35 it's possible. We think that it's as accurate as our colleagues  
36 have been able to get so far, which is a lot more accurate than  
37 they've been able to get many years ago, since we asked for it,  
38 and so they've got a couple of papers that document their process  
39 for collecting the data, and so, unfortunately, we're relying on  
40 them vouching for it, and so that's about as good an answer as I  
41 can give to that. We think it's accurate, but, you know, we hope  
42 it's accurate.

43  
44 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Thank you.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Walter. Is there any  
47 discussion on Captain Walker's motion? Dr. Simmons.

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a quick  
2 question, hopefully. Did you want this to focus on the mixing  
3 areas between the western Gulf and Mexico?  
4

5 **MR. WALKER:** Yes. Thank you. I was just about to bring that up,  
6 and so the priority for me would be both of the mixing zones, if  
7 possible. I don't know how much we can ask a Mexican study. Do  
8 you think I should put that in the motion?  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes. Put them both in the motion, Ed.  
11

12 **MR. WALKER:** Evaluate the possibility of a king mackerel study  
13 focused on the winter mixing. Possibly both of them zones.  
14

15 **MR. RINDONE:** I would just say mixing zones, Ed. I wouldn't  
16 necessarily specify winter.  
17

18 **MR. WALKER:** Okay. **Mixing zones.** Should I identify the Keys and  
19 Mexico? No? Okay. No, and, yes, that was my priority, and I  
20 think this would be good for multiple reasons. One, when those  
21 fish are aggregated, you could tag a lot of them in a day, I think.  
22 If you had a dedicated boat, I think, even in a center console  
23 boat, you could tag sixty or eighty king mackerel in a day pretty  
24 easily, if you developed a system for it.  
25

26 Two, that's where the question-marks are, for me, is, okay, all  
27 these fish are here, and where do they go when they leave, and  
28 there's a lot of questions. Like a lot of the kingfish now in the  
29 southern mixing zone here are caught in what's known as the  
30 Atlantic Ocean. They're caught on the west side of the Marquesas,  
31 and where the map says it's the Atlantic Ocean.  
32

33 Those fish are counted as Gulf fish, because of the way the boxes  
34 are drawn, and they don't exactly correlate with what we're seeing  
35 in this part of the Gulf, and what is known as the Gulf down there,  
36 and so, if we were to tag a bunch of fish there, and, when they  
37 get recaptured somewhere, I think it would provide some very  
38 valuable information to us as we try and unravel the mysteries of  
39 what's going on with king mackerel right now.  
40

41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you for the information, Captain  
42 Walker. I'm going to ask Dr. Allen if he's okay with the changes  
43 to the motion, and he is. Okay. Dr. Walter.  
44

45 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and so I've already evaluated the possibility.  
46 However, the probability of it is probably more important, and I  
47 would say the probability -- It's certainly possible, because it  
48 was done about forty years ago. The probability of it happening

1 requires it to be prioritized in funding, and so I think that's  
2 the challenge here.

3  
4 If that's something the council wants to see move forward, and  
5 there's a large support for it, then identifying how and where it  
6 gets funded I think is the key there, and so I think that's where  
7 -- I think we brought up that there is now this series of grants  
8 for research on understudied species, and perhaps king mackerel  
9 has fallen down into that understudied level, after not a lot of  
10 attention over forty years, and so maybe that's a pool of money  
11 that could be motivated for this.

12  
13 I think, in terms of what Gregg had brought up, maybe that's  
14 something that could be considered, in terms of whether there's  
15 flexibility, and so certainly we can evaluate the possibility. I  
16 think we would simply, at this point, say yes, but it needs to  
17 find the funding.

18  
19 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Walter, and I'm hoping that staff wrote  
20 that down, this understudied species fund that I've never heard of  
21 before, but it sounds interesting to me. One thing I learned about  
22 this SEFHIER thing recently, or just a thought that I had, is that  
23 we shouldn't not do something because of funding. We make a  
24 motion, and we put it out there.

25  
26 If we can't get it funded, you know, it doesn't happen, but it  
27 shouldn't keep us from pursuing these avenues, and so that -- I'm  
28 going to stick with that on this, and then, like the SEFHIER thing,  
29 and they said there's no money for it, and now it looks like maybe  
30 there is some money, and so I think, going forward, for me, I'm  
31 going to -- I'm not going to accept that there's no money, and not  
32 that this is the case here, but that we might not have the money  
33 is not enough for me to not make motions that I think we need  
34 nowadays.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Captain Walker. I have a  
37 list of folks. First is Ms. Ballard.

38  
39 **MS. BALLARD:** Okay. I have a question. On the mixing zone for  
40 the Gulf Texas, it has -- The graph may not be as perfectly accurate  
41 as we would hope, but it has it a little further south in Mexico.  
42 We can't do necessarily a study there. Would the hope be that we  
43 just get as far south in Texas as we can, or can we go into those  
44 waters? Like what's the rules? What would be the goal of that?  
45 I don't know who would be a better --

46  
47 **DR. WALTER:** Well, one of the parts, the points, about the joint  
48 work with Mexico is to do joint work with them, and so it's not

1 out of the question that, if the biology requires that, that we  
2 approach our colleagues about actually doing that, or having them  
3 do the tagging there, and so I think that's fully within scope, if  
4 we're going to answer the biological question. How we practically  
5 achieve it, that's part of the mechanism of this joint large marine  
6 ecosystem work.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Dr. Sweetman, and Dr.  
9 Allen.

10  
11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks. I'll make this quick. I'll speak in  
12 support of the motion, and then, just relative to prioritization  
13 of this, all I'll say is -- I go back to the plot that Dr.  
14 Hollensead threw out there. This is one of the species that we  
15 have in the Gulf that has the highest catch limits, and we have no  
16 clue what's going on with it, and so I think that's a pretty darn  
17 high priority, from my perspective.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen.

20  
21 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I'll just follow that up. It's really good  
22 that we have this information now, and that there -- That you're  
23 moving forward on a joint assessment. That's all really good news,  
24 but this is going to be a key uncertainty in any of the assessments,  
25 is how are these fish moving, and the data that we have on that is  
26 all thirty years old, which is -- There's so much change with the  
27 climate and everything that we need -- We need new information on  
28 that, and so we're going to run into this, and I definitely think  
29 it should be a priority.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Allen. Are there any  
32 other comments, or questions, regarding the motion on the board?  
33 **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**  
34 **carries.** That will bring us to one more item that Mr. Strelcheck  
35 has.

#### 36 37 **DISCUSSION OF AQUACULTURE LIVE ROCK PERMITS**

38  
39 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'll keep this short, and so my  
40 aquaculture team updated me recently. We issue aquaculture live  
41 rock permits in the Southeast. We've been doing this in  
42 conjunction with the Army Corps Programmatic General Permit SAJ 71  
43 since 1995, and, recently, the Army Corps notified us that they  
44 would no longer be reissuing that general permit, citing, I guess,  
45 not having, in their view, jurisdictional authority.

46  
47 We have been kind of working through to understand the implications  
48 of this decision by the Corps. Regulations still remain in effect,



1 and continue to require a federal aquaculture live rock permit be  
2 issued for specific sites in the EEZ. We intend to continue to  
3 issue those permits, and allow for both the deposition of live  
4 rock material as well as harvest of live rock, and then the permit  
5 holders are required to comply with a whole suite of requirements.

6  
7 Although we haven't talked about this for quite some time around  
8 this table, I just wanted to let you know that we had been working  
9 with the Corps, obviously, and now had a situation before us that  
10 we needed to reconcile, and address, and we think we now, you know,  
11 have a path forward.

12  
13 There's really no action to be taken by the council at this time.  
14 We will have to, obviously, kind of work on re-initiation of our  
15 Section 7 consultation, but it's our understanding that, based on  
16 this live rock program, Florida already prohibits the landing of  
17 endangered and threatened corals, and so we don't see any major  
18 challenges or issues with it, and so I'll look to Mara. I don't  
19 know if, Mara, you want to add anything, or if I covered everything  
20 correctly.

21  
22 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and I think you've covered it. For your purposes,  
23 it's just informational, and just to know that there are -- Our  
24 regulations require certain things, like setback from hardbottom  
25 and things like that, and so losing the Corps permit that also  
26 required those things doesn't change a lot.

27  
28 The main thing is the ESA Section 7 consultation, because the Corps  
29 permit included a prohibition on harvesting live rock with listed  
30 corals, and then we also have to deal with queen conch from our  
31 side, because conch can be on these particular things, and so, if  
32 someone moves it, that's a take, and so we just have to cover our  
33 consultation obligations, but it shouldn't change the program.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you all for the update. Do we  
36 have any questions for Andy or Mara? Captain Walker.

37  
38 **MR. WALKER:** Is that in federal waters then? Does it take place  
39 in state waters?

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Ms. McCawley.

42  
43 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Yes, and it takes place in state waters as well,  
44 but they have to have a permit from the Department of Agriculture  
45 and Consumer Services, and I believe that those lease sites have  
46 to go before the Florida legislature, or the governor and cabinet,  
47 in order to be approved, but we also have regulations relative to  
48 marine life and aquarium trade that support the other species that

1 could be harvested off of the live rock lease as well, for both  
2 state and federal waters.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any other questions? Not seeing any,  
5 all right. Is there any other business to come before the council?  
6 No? Okay. Before we wrap it up, I want to thank the presenters  
7 for being here and presenting to us. FWC law enforcement, Captain  
8 Pearce and his team, for being here this week. Thank you. The  
9 staff for doing efficient, amazing, quick work for us, and to the  
10 council members for working through lunch today. Thank you, and  
11 we will see you at the next meeting in Biloxi in August. Safe  
12 travels.

13  
14 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 3, 2026.)

15 - - -  
16  
17