GULF COUNCIL

SHRIMP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore Tampa, Florida & Virtual

June 1, 2026

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The Shrimp Management Committee of the Gulf Council convened at The Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore in Tampa, Florida on Monday morning, June 1, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Chris Schieble.

## ADOPTION OF AGENDA
## APPROVAL OF APRIL 2026 MINUTES
## ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

**CHAIRMAN CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** At this time, I would like to call the Shrimp Management Committee to order. Members of the committee and myself as the chair, Dr. Overton as the vice chair, Dr. Allen, Mr. Anson, Dr. Banks, Mr. Broussard, who is attending virtually, Mr. Donaldson, Mr. Frady, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Geeslin, Mr. Sanchez, and General Spraggins. All committee members are present.

The first item on the agenda is Adoption of the Agenda, Tab D, Number 1. Does anyone have any other business they would like to see added to the bottom of the agenda? Seeing none, can I get a motion to adopt the agenda? General Spraggins. A second? Mr. Osborne.

The next item on the agenda is Approval of the April 2026 Meeting Minutes, Tab D, Number 2. Are there any additions, deletions, or edits to those minutes? I went through all sixty-seven pages of those, and I couldn't find anything wrong either, and so can I get a motion to adopt the minutes as written? Mr. Osborne. A second? General Spraggins. The minutes are adopted as presented in the briefing book.

Next on the agenda is Tab D, number 3, and we're going to let Dr. Freeman introduce that and go through the action guide for it, please.

## PRESENTATION: UPDATE ON WORKING GROUP FOR SHRIMP BYCATCH METHODOLOGY FOR FINFISH SPECIES

**DR. MATT FREEMAN:** Thank you, sir. The first agenda item we have is a presentation from Dr. Simmons, or sorry, from Dr. Froeschke, giving an update on the Working Group for Shrimp Bycatch Methodology for Finfish Species. Staff will provide an update on that working group, and the committee should consider the information provided and ask questions.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** All right. Seeing no questions, we will move on to the first agenda item, Tab D, Number 4, which is an Update on the Working Group for Shrimp Bycatch Methodology for Finfish Species. Dr. Froeschke, I believe.

**DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Good morning. I don't know how I got volunteered to lead off here, but -- Okay, and so I'm going to give you a little overview presentation of the meeting, with some tidbits in the process, and what the goals and things are.

Just kind of give you this first slide here is the workgroup membership. We met again, and there's council staff, and many of the Science Center -- They were the bulk of the analysts producing work in the presentation, and so we really appreciate their work and contributions to this group. Then we had some SSC members and industry members as well that provided -- Contributed to the discussion and feedback from the meeting. I also want to thank Gregg Bray from the Gulf States, that I talked him into chairing this group, and he's been really helpful, and so much appreciated.

We met May 11th and 12th. This was -- We had two three-hour webinars. We previously -- Prior to the April council meeting, we had an initial meeting, and it was a three-hour webinar meeting. We went over some presentations and things, and identified some areas that the group wanted to learn more about, and so we use these two days to do that.

It was a series of webinar-based meetings. It was open to the public, just like an AP kind of a style, and so they were productive meetings. We looked at species-specific shrimp effort, and so these are the species of shrimp, the brown, white, and pink, and kind of how those are estimated.

We've had some discussion about that in prior AP meetings and things, and how that relates, or doesn't, to the bycatch of finfish, and so we talked about that. We went into detail about how the methods from the observer program, and the data collected in that are used to actually estimate bycatch for finfish, and so many of the stuff -- The workgroup, in a bigger sense, it wasn't to say you should do this or that differently, per se.

It was more to understand how this process works, from soup-to-nuts, from beginning to end, because it was very -- There is many steps in there, and, in order to contribute to the stock assessments, and understand how these data may be used, or could be interpreted, and those kinds of things, we really needed to do that, and it just -- It takes some time, and it takes some explanation from the Science Center, to explain their work and things and give them that opportunity, which we're really appreciative they did that. I mean, it just -- There's a lot that goes into this.

We also talked about some gear selectivity and the efficiency of the gears. Primarily, the things that we talked about are whether the vessels are two nets or four nets, or whether they are trawling in the day or the night, and then, more specifically, on red snapper and gray triggerfish, we talked some about the methods which vary between those two stocks on how those data are used in a stock assessment.

I'm just going to kind of go through some of the major bullets, and the highlights, and what the working group discussed, and recommended, if applicable, and, if you have questions, we can follow it up, but there's a lot to it. I don't want to take too much time, but there is -- It is interesting to see how much effort goes into this process.

This first slide here is based on a presentation. The graphic on the right is from the Science Center, and, essentially, what this shows is that, if you take a step back, the effort for the fleet is estimated from the cellular electronic logbook program, which we've talked about many times, and it's went through in many forms.

It used to be automatically transmitted over the cellular network, that's now mailed in, that we're now transitioning to a different program informed by the Early Adopter, and so there's many different changes in that, but the concept is the same.

What those data transmit are actually just timestamp location and speed data, primarily, and so it doesn't tell you what species, specific species, they are targeting in their effort, and so that's done on the back end, and the Science Center has a process based on the location, the depth, the area fished, and there are several different factors that they use to parse it out into the species that you see here. Pink off Florida, and inshore is white, brown, and pink, primarily white and brown, and then the farthest offshore is brown shrimp.

That being said, for the purposes of finfish estimation, it's not critical to know what species is being targeted, so long as you know the other things, the depth and the location, time, and all that, which we do have, and so, for the purposes of finfish stock assessments and estimating bycatch, the information are also presented by what we call the shrimp statistical grids, and you can see those numbers 1 through 21, and they're parsed out further into depth and other things.

We can use them that way, and so we have the information, and that's primarily how they're used, more so than just by the species, although we had discussed, either at the AP meetings or

the council meetings, how these species-specific estimates are produced, and so we did provide that. The workgroup didn't have any specific feedback on how this was done, and they really appreciated the explanation.

The next part of this was a follow-up. The first meeting, the working group had asked about the observer program, and to get a foundational understanding from -- Observers go on a small percentage of trips. On the trips, there are multiple tows, of which each tow has multiple nets, of which some nets are sampled, because there are too many nets, too much bycatch, perhaps, for an observer to work through all of those and not slow down the other operations.

If you break all that down in order to produce an estimate for the tow, and then the trip, and then expand it to what we'll call the strata, which you can cover in just a minute, all the way up to the stock, there's a lot of steps, and so we were trying to understand how that works, and so we had a presentation, and we just worked it through it step-by-step for some example species.

On the diagram on the right, there's kind two pathways, and I'll start on the top, but you start with a net, and so that's the finite unit, and there may be four nets on a vessel, but one net may be sampled.

The sample was broken down into what we would call buckets, or baskets, and then the species that are enumerated are calculated on there, and they're weighed, and then they're extrapolated up to the net, and then how many nets, and then the tow, and then, likewise, all the way up to the trip, et cetera.

That process, that's how it works for species that are characterized other than red snapper. Red snapper is a bit different, in that, for each net, all of the red snapper are counted, and enumerated in weight, and so that's specifically because we have management targets directly related to the bycatch of red snapper.

It is more work to do that, and so I'm not sure if that could be done for all species based on the workload, but it is a more precise method, but, again, the workgroup didn't really have any criticism, necessarily, or feedback specifically that you should do that differently on this part. It seemed very reasonable, but it takes some explanations to understand.

The part that is -- We also talked about, and it's not illustrated necessarily on here, but there are many what we're calling strata,

which strata are -- If you have the Gulf of America as your population, your sample area, and that is subdivided into smaller areas, either by geography or time, and so there can be combinations of time and area strata, and there are many of those.

To produce a population-wide estimate, you generally would want to produce an estimate for each individual strata, and then you would combine them. Well, each estimate comes with its own variance and is affected by the number of samples, and the nature of the data in each of the strata, et cetera.

That being said, there are, for example, different zones, and so the statistical grids, 1 through 21, are broken into four zones, roughly east to west, and then there are three depth zones, inshore, nearshore, and offshore. There are regions, and there are seasons, summer and fall, and there are time periods, among others.

There's essentially -- I think we calculated 112 strata, and, in a historical sense, there's also different time eras of 1980s, 1990s, that kind of thing, which adds up more, and so, when you combine that with the relatively sparse number of trips that have observer coverage, there are many of those that have very low or no sampling.

Then we did talk about, which was helpful, is some of those have no sampling, because they don't make sense, and like a strata -- If you just factorialize it, for example, pink shrimp in the day, or that West Florida Shelf in the day might be a strata, but, in reality, they don't really do that.

There was just a couple of edge cases where it was close to the day, and so there are some strata that will almost always be zero, which aren't really problematic, but it is helpful to know that those kinds of things exist, and so these are just some of the things that the Science Center addresses when compiling these estimates, and so, if it makes your head spin, it made our heads spin as well.

This is one of the other things we looked at, was this gear selectivity and efficiency. This was sort of a new wrinkle that the Science Center has been working on, and the reason that you want to incorporate these strata is that, as you add additional strata in them, you do have to provide more parameters to estimate.

That makes it more complicated, but you do potentially reduce the variance in your analysis by putting things like bins in like bins, and so what they did here is they looked at the composition of the

vessels, whether they be two-net vessels or four-net vessels, and most of the federal ones are four-net vessels.

The chart there kind of shows the composition of those over time, and then we looked at the -- Well, just, on that, in terms of the catch rates, it's not just a simple calculation that on a four net, you catch twice as many shrimp per unit time, or twice as many finfish per unit time, as the two nets. It's actually -- It's more -- The four nets are more than the two nets, but it's like a 1.23, and not a double.

All of those things, they looked into that, and tried to produce estimates of those, and, given the way that the estimates are expanded, it's important that you get those as correct as you can, and so those are useful efforts to make that, so we don't overestimate in that way.

Again, one of the things that we did talk about is that the observer coverage -- It is low, and so we're talking 2 or 3 percent, and that is not all of the strata are sampled evenly, because it's not necessarily -- Some are extraordinarily low. Some are never sampled, and some of it is because there's not enough -- There's not vessels operating that strata, or there's only one, and they don't want to just keep going on the same vessel again, and not burden the vessel.

In totality, the workgroup didn't have any specific recommendations on this. We did talk about it a lot, and it was very useful to understand this.

Okay, so we're going to go back just to red snapper and just kind of wrap up that thought a little bit. With red snapper, and the additional sampling, the way that was done, this was -- This presentation described the methods that was previously used in the SEDAR 98.

The workgroup didn't have any specific recommendations about that. It seems to be a fairly robust procedure, although it does take more work, and some additional discussion perhaps, on how this could be used, or not, for other species that are characterized. It's probably worth thinking about, and so let me just explain that really quick.

What's characterized -- So, in a shrimp trawl, you get many species, hundreds of species. Not every species is characterized, or that they would be there all day, or all night, and so there's a list of species, which does change, and it has been updated recently, and we'll talk about that in a minute, to include gray

triggerfish starting in 2025, and so they're intended to focus on the important-to-management species, but it's not every species, and so, of those, that's kind of what we're talking about here.

Gray triggerfish is a little bit different, in terms of estimating finfish bycatch for the purposes of a stock assessment. Red snapper was enumerated in its entirety. Gray triggerfish, until 2025, was not on what we're calling the characterized list. They were captured historically, but they were not characterized until 2025, and so, for the purposes of the stock assessment, a different method needed to be used to estimate the bycatch.

What the Science Center had done, given the lack of really options, given the data, is they considered using a proxy species, and so I'm going to say lane snapper, and there's a little detail we can talk about, but -- Essentially, what they did is they used SEAMAP data, which is a fishery-independent trawl. It's not -- In theory, it's close to what the industry does, and it’s, you know, essentially similar selectivities and things, and not exact, but all the species are enumerated, and counted, and it’s a scientific survey.

What they did -- If you look at the maps on your right, you'll see, on that upper-left, there's a map, and the orange dots for lane snapper are the tows where the lane snapper were encountered.

The panel to the right, in the purple, or -- Excuse me. Down below that, in the blue, are triggerfish, which roughly is similar in geographic range. You can kind of infer, from the blue, that there are not as many blue dots as there are orange dots, meaning that they're less common than lane snapper. Their geographic range is similar, although lane snapper are more common than triggerfish in the Keys, particularly that strata.

The purple dots, on the upper-right panel, are the samples in which both of them occur. You can see that was over 15,000 tows, and so what was done, essentially, was to use the proportion of lane snapper as a proxy to estimate gray triggerfish, also accounting for the differences in how common each of the species were, and so it was sort of use lane snapper to estimate triggerfish, but also account for that lane snapper are more common than triggerfish, and so it's not a direct -- Not every lane snapper means that we estimated a triggerfish was counted, and so there's an adjustment factor based on the data.

We went through that for a long time, and that was actually useful. In the northern Gulf, off of Alabama, lane snapper were not used there. They're not very common, and so red snapper was substituted

just in two strata, using the same procedure, but, in a nutshell, that was what was done.

The workgroup thought that it was a reasonable approach. There were some questions about the use of the proxy species. I mean, the way that we discussed it is that it's certainly not the ideal way, and, going forward, gray triggerfish is now being characterized.

The data in one year were not adequate to expand to the entirety of the time series, either because the spatial coverage in that was not adequate, just based on the time, and then, you know, there are just many of these strata that are just too sparsely estimated, and the Science Center didn't feel comfortable doing that, and so that was kind of where we left that. We didn't provide any specific recommendations on something to do different here.

Okay, and so a couple of just take-homes, and so we did talk a lot about the proxy species for gray triggerfish, and we discussed that this particular application was probably reasonable. It's not something that neither the Science Center nor the working group would advocate for doing routinely for other species, and so one of the -- We all agreed that this is something that's probably a one-off concept. It probably worked this time, but it's not something we would endorse for other things as it comes up, and so I think that that's a good place to be.

For triggerfish specifically, I would anticipate that, by the next stock assessment, that there would be enough data, now that it's being characterized, that wouldn't be a concern.

For red snapper, and we kind of touched on this, that the methodology used for red snapper specifically is pretty robust. For some of these other characterized species, we may need to think about that a little bit more, because they don't go through the red snapper track exactly. For example, king mackerel come up as sort of the other pathway, although it doesn't require a proxy species.

One of the things that the workgroup discussed is whether they should meet again to look over king mackerel, the methodology used for that, or shall we just defer and accept it as it is, and so that's something that this committee can kind of talk about and see if there's merit in convening that group again in the future.

Our plan going forward, we're going to present our findings and recommendations to the SSC at their July meeting. We're not exactly sure what the SSC will do with those, and they may have

some additional feedback, or they may not, and so we'll see.

Just a reminder, I appreciate the effort of the Science Center and Gregg Bray for all of their work on this, and then we would solicit some input from you all, if you think that the workgroup should meet again about king mackerel specifically, and so I'll stop there for questions.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. Do we have any questions, or comments, regarding the presentation? Mr. Sanchez.

**MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** A comment. Yes, I would support them looking deeper into working with king mackerel, and including that, taking a deeper dive, given everything going on in king mackerel, and I wanted to ask you. Was there any discussion of sawfish at this, and what we're going to do about that with, you know, possibly addressing ways to mitigate interaction?

**DR. FROESCHKE:** So, for sawfish specifically, we're going to be discussing today, or shortly, the composition of an additional workgroup to focus specifically on protected resources, and so the rationale is we wanted to look at it for finfish, and understand a lot of foundational information, which is similar for protected species, but it's -- It will be challenging, and so we were trying to build through that.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Captain Walker.

**MR. ED WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't think I'm on your committee, but just a general question. Are king mackerel a relatively common catch? It said -- It sounded like not really, but are they somewhat of a shrimp bycatch?

**DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, Dr. Walter can correct me if I'm wrong. They're not terribly abundant, but they're not zero. We do get them. I was -- I've always been surprised that they're more common than I would have intuitively thought, but, yes, and, I mean, they're not -- They're not -- It's a non-zero for sure. In terms of how it plays out in the whole assessment, I'm not sure.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr, Walter, to that point, and then we have Dr. Allen,

**DR. JOHN WALTER:** They're common enough that we do have to account for them in bycatch. You're not going to see them stand out, because they're kind of like little needles in a pile of other bycatch, but it's enough that, when we've done the calculations in

the past, it has definitely been something that has to be accounted for in the assessment.

Now, the methodology, I think one of the things we do need to -- We want to ensure that we note that the methodology is greatly improved recently, and so one of the things that the working group saw was how it's better using the effort data, better using and characterizing how that effort differs between two and four nets, night and day, and the primary thing that's different than how we've done bycatch in the past is that we're not using the SEAMAP catch rate data to inform that, and that was the concern, that we were using surveys to inform fishery bycatch.

In this case, I think that's the fundamental change in why a lot of these processes are greatly improved, why they passed the CIE review, and I think they're generally passing through each of the SEDAR stock assessments, and so one thing that this committee is going to have to consider is where staff and everyone's efforts are going to be.

I think, in terms of king mackerel, I would say that's less important than focusing on the protected species, smalltooth sawfish and giant manta, and so I would say I would really want to focus the effort there, and that may be that working group does not need to meet on king mackerel, because it's already going through the SEDAR process, and has been actually accepted, and so that would be what I would put out there. Thanks.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Walter. Dr. Allen.

**DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the work that the working group did on this. There was a good bit of discussion about the use of lane snapper as a proxy species for gray triggerfish, and gray triggerfish will be quantified from 2025 on, and so, in the future, we'll have some direct data from them, but I wonder -- Was there discussion about whether the use of lane snapper as a surrogate species is suitable for this current gray triggerfish? Is that a -- Was the group okay with doing that, or is that going to go to the SSC for more comments?

**DR. FROESCHKE:** I'll start, and Dr. Walter can jump in if he has additional thoughts. Yes, and we talked about it. I mean, what we looked at -- So there's sort of two questions. One, there really isn't a perfect option, because the approach where you have a lot of years of data is using a proxy, and there definitely are regional disparities.

You know, they're -- Probably the correlation, positive

correlation, is stronger in the western Gulf than the eastern Gulf, and it's problematic. In the eastern Gulf, there's not as many, and so the magnitude of that may not be as problematic, but, you know, as more data are available, that would probably be a better pathway, is to use the direct approach in the future. I think everyone agrees on that.

We did have some back and forth, I guess, about, you know, whether it was worth trying to think about making use of those 2025 observer data, and how they could be expanded, and I think the working group ultimately decided that there were just too many holes to fill at this time to be perhaps more confident in that than what we already have, but it's kind of a tough nut.

**DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I understand that, John. It's a data gap that you're trying to fill.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Walter.

**DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think, given that, and given that it's gone through a lot of scrutiny, and there's not a better option identified, then that basically says, okay, what does the stock assessment -- What is it going to do with that, and that's, I think, where going to the SSC will be helpful, and I think the assessment working group certainly knows that there's a lot of uncertainty there, and there's a couple of approaches they're using to adequately characterize that uncertainty in the stock assessment, and I think some context, and sort of scale, is important.

These estimates are much lower than they were previously, and so it's not going to be as influential in the stock assessment. It's also being super year-ed, so that the interannual variability is not being seen by the model as actually recruitments, and that's a key way of addressing this, because we know that there's substantial uncertainty in what we're doing here.

We're using a proxy, and we don't want lane snapper recruitment to be seen as gray trigger recruitment, and the way that the model is accounting for that is it’s going to basically diminish the impact of that, and I think the other way of dealing with it is, if the scale is of concern here, which I think it is, is sensitivity runs that increase or decrease the scale of those estimates, which would then increase or decrease its impact on the stock assessment, and I think those are probably the best course of action we've got right now. Thanks.

**DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. That makes sense to me.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Do we have any other comments, or questions, on the working group summary? I guess I have one additional question, Dr. Froeschke, and so what is the next step for this finfish bycatch working group? Do they put together a final report, or do we get something like that that is the end product?

**DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, my thoughts are that they would report out to the SSC this July, and then, if we need to meet again for king mackerel, we would do that. I don't know -- We'll produce a meeting summary for each of the meetings, but there wasn't a larger report or something that it was going to be compiled into. Primarily, it was input to the SSC.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so advice to the SSC for the next meeting? All right. Roger that. Any other questions? Then we'll move on to the next agenda item, which is the Discussion on the Workplan and Membership for the Working Group to Address Interactions and Bycatch of Protected Resources in Shrimp Trawls. Dr. Freeman, can you lead us through the action guide for that one, please?

## DISCUSS WORKPLAN AND MEMBERSHIP: WORKING GROUP TO ADDRESS INTERACTIONS AND BYCATCH OF PROTECTED SPECIES IN SHRIMP TRAWLS

**DR. FREEMAN:** Certainly, and so, for this agenda item, staff will provide an update on the working group to address interactions and bycatch of protected resources in shrimp trawls. The committee should consider the information provided, ask questions, and determine if they concur, via a motion, with the proposed working group approach.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Freeman. I think, Dr. Simmons, you're up.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, and so Bernie has got up Tab , Number 5. Our staff worked on this, as well as some Regional Office staff, and I believe the Science Center has maybe had a chance to take a peek at this, hopefully, and so this is our draft workplan and proposed membership for another working group to address protected resources interactions with the Gulf federal shrimp trawls.

The objective of this work group is to consider, as part of its deliberations, the status, behavior, and biology of giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish, look at the observer data and bycatch estimation processes, and the management, operation, and behavior

of the Gulf federal shrimp fleet.

The primary objective is to consider and identify workable solutions that aim to reduce interactions with smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray in the Gulf federal shrimp trawl fishery, and there's some very specific objectives that I assume would be put on, and we would have the materials for on the agendas, the way we would set these working group meetings up.

These are the things that the group would be presented with. They're going to get an overview of the Section 7 consultation process, and the requirements as it pertains to the shrimp fleet. They would review relevant data on the life history and ecology of these protected resources, being the giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish as the primary focus.

They would evaluate the seasonal and spatial overlap between the shrimp trawl effort and any hotspots that we have information on for these species, using the most recent terminal years for effort information, for example the NMFS observer data and the electronic logbook, and maybe even some information from the Early Adopter Program, as well as any new information we have on research about these animals.

They're going to potentially evaluate the gear and the operational tactics and other management measures used globally, or regionally, to mitigate large elasmobranch interactions and bycatch. Evaluate the technical feasibility, safety, and economic impact of potential modifications to the shrimp fishery operations, including gear alterations or updated safe handling and release protocols for protected resources.

They’re going to review and consider any improvements to safe handling and release management practices, and I think I said that one. Okay, and there's also a working group in the South Atlantic that's addressing this, and I think their primary effort is on the smalltooth sawfish. I don't believe giant manta ray is an issue over there, and so we're going to discuss the South Atlantic Council's working group recommendations on management measures proposed in that region, and if there's any applications that we might want to consider in the Gulf, and then we provide those recommendations to the Gulf Council for discussion, and consideration for a management document is the end goal here, I believe.

We put quite a bit of background in here for your information. This has been presented at various stages to the Shrimp AP, and then you'll recall, in August of 2025, and some phase-in also to

the SSC. In May of 2025, the SSC was presented with some information on the population viability analysis for smalltooth sawfish, and they provided several recommendations on that, and so there's some history and information there as part of the background.

Then, in August of 2025, the council received the presentation from Ms. Lee, who is also in the audience if I need some help answering questions, and she is from the Protected Resources Division at the Southeast Regional Office, and she came to you all, in August of 2025, and provided some information on the Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation, and she said that we needed to start working on this effort.

You'll see your motion that you passed there from August of 2025, which talks about populating this group, and so, just to remind everybody, that's what we said we would do, and this is the draft that you guys are looking at that's proposing this work, and so let's go down a little bit.

Okay, and let's skip to our draft working participants first, working group participants first, and then come back to the potential timeline.

What we have proposed here is thirteen members currently, made up of council staff, SSC representation, and we have one Special Shrimp SSC member on there, and Science Center staff, with various expertise from the gear research effort and observer program. Ms. Lee at the Regional Office, and Dr. Nathan Putman is a researcher with LGL who has been working closely with the industry on the Early Adopter program, and then, right now, we have three industry representatives that we've reached out to, and these folks have agreed to participate.

We've kind of tried to explain to them what we think the number of meetings and the commitment will be, although, you know, that can change, and we're asking people to be flexible. We have reached out to these folks, and they are willing to put in the work, and the time, as we think that it's going to play out.

Just a reminder, and so Ms. Leann Bosarge, and everyone is familiar with her, and she’s homeported in Mississippi. She and her family have a fleet of vessels. They fish both in the Gulf and the South Atlantic regions, and so we think she's a valuable contributor.

Ernie Aparicio is homeported in Texas. However, he fishes about 90 to 95 percent of his time in the pink shrimp fishery, and then Cheri Blanchard is home ported in Louisiana, and she operates in

the region where there is observed the giant manta ray interactions, and so we do have two additional slots here.

I don't know that we necessarily have to have five members on this group, because it can be quite cumbersome logistically to get everybody together, based on schedules, but we are thinking, and we've heard perhaps it might be useful, to have an additional pink shrimp shrimper from the industry that would be able to perhaps come from more of the Fort Myers region.

Staff is working on that, if that's the direction the committee might want to consider for Full Council, and we can bring some of that information back to you, so we can hopefully finalize that group.

Before we open up for questions, can we possibly go back to the timeline? All right, and so this is what we've proposed. Again, this is open for discussion. Maybe we want to start with an in-person meeting, but we weren't sure. Sometimes it takes us a while to get our ducks in a row, and figure out what all information is available, and so, right now, we're thinking virtual meetings starting in July, September, and October and then an in-person meeting in November.

Then those recommendations -- I mean, we would give the council updates along the way, as appropriate, but those would go to the Standing and Special Shrimp SSCs and the Shrimp Advisory Panel, and then all of that, as we work through the management process, the council would be briefed on.

Then, at some point, we've got to figure out how this is going to mesh with what the South Atlantic Council is doing, as far as what we need to do and the information we have in the Gulf versus the South Atlantic, as it pertains to smalltooth sawfish, and so, Mr. Chair, that's my overview, and hopefully you follow that.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and so I just -- Help me with the timeline here, and so we're looking at potentially getting this in front of the Shrimp AP for their next March 2027 meeting, would be the culmination of the results of the in-person meeting from November, correct, and then it goes to the SSC, and then the AP would receive it in March?

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I'm not exactly sure on the timing of when it will go to the SSCs and the Shrimp AP. I think we're going to have to kind of be a little flexible there, and see how much progress this working group makes, and when it's appropriate.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and I know -- Maybe Andy can help me with this a little bit, but, when we first received this back in August of last year, I remember that they made some statements about the clock is ticking at this point, and like we were on the clock, once it started the process, right, and help me out with that. I don't know where we are in that timeline. Mr. Strelcheck.

**MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Chris, and so there's no specific deadline, but, obviously, the sooner the better, and what we've been working toward is finalizing some data and information for the ESA consultation.

We do plan to initiate consultation likely by the end of the year, whether this workgroup has wrapped up its work or not. Obviously, right now, it seems like we're kind of on a good path, in terms of the workgroup finalizing their recommendations, and providing that, obviously, to the council, APs, and SSCs by year-end, which would mirror, obviously, kind of the timing for all of the data and information that we're gathering for the consultation.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Andy. That's helpful. Okay, do we have any other questions around the table? Dr. Sweetman.

**DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on your committee, but I was just going to speak to what Dr. Simmons was referencing relative to looking for someone in the shrimp fleet in the Fort Myers region. Just looking at kind of the industry reps there, I think what we might be missing are people that might interact with sawfish, and that seems to be more focused on kind of the manta interaction industry reps, because it's just very spatially limited for where the sawfish interactions occur, and so I think that's a good idea.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.

**MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, so I'm supportive of, obviously, an industry representative that would be involved in the pink shrimp fishery to be added. I guess the question, for Carrie and team, is so we have two council staff, and we've got four NMFS members. I was trying to be strategic with the Regional Office, only adding one person, and then we have these support staff.

We are kind of light on researchers that work directly on sawfish or manta rays, and I see an opportunity where we could actually add some people, but I don't want to make the committee too large, like Carrie was saying, and it seems like we would have to swap some people out if we were going to do that, and I know, for example, Dean Grubbs at FSU does a lot of sawfish research, and we

have FWC that does a lot of sawfish research, and we've got Jessica Pate that does manta ray research, right, and so do you see them providing more of a support staff role, or could those be added as work group members?

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Simmons.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think we see those folks as more being like presenters coming and participating in the meetings, but not necessarily on the workgroup, per se, and so they're not reviewing their own work. They're saying this is the work that we found, helping be involved in discussion, and answer questions to understand what's actually happening out there with those species, was my thought process on that.

As far as the pink shrimp industry representative, yes, we agree. Staff is suggesting one more, but, to be clear, Mr. Aparicio does operate in the pink shrimp fishery primarily, about 90 to 95 percent in Florida, even though he's homeported in Texas, yes, and he docks, I believe, in this Tampa area.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Any other further questions, or comments, regarding the list of working group membership? It looks like none, and so I guess we will strive -- Or our goal will be to try to finalize this when we get the Full Council, correct?

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Correct. Okay. Moving on to the last agenda item for the Shrimp Committee is the Status Determination Criteria for Penaeid Shrimp, Tab D, number 6. Dr. Freeman, can you run us through the action guide real quick on that?

**DRAFT OPTIONS: STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA FOR THE PENAEID SHRIMP**

**DR. FREEMAN:** Certainly, and so, for this item, the committee will be presented with a draft amendment to establish or modify status determination criteria for the penaeid shrimp. Staff will review the draft purpose and needs statements and draft alternatives. The committee should ask questions and provide staff with further direction of the draft amendment.

Just before I delve into the document itself, I did just want to remind the committee that, as part of the motion for staff to start work on this, there was a specific request that it include examining an adjustment to the minimum threshold number of federal

Gulf shrimp permits, which was set in Amendment 17B.

There is not an action in this document related to that for you all to review at this time, but I just wanted to give you all an update. We sent a request to Dr. Porch and Mr. Strelcheck on April 20 requesting that NMFS work on that updated analyses, and so certainly that will need to as well be reviewed by the SSC, and likely the Shrimp AP would also like to weigh in on it, but I just wanted to let the committee know we've not forgotten that part of the document. We just don't have the materials yet for that particular action.

A little bit -- Again, just as a reminder of the background, the materials in this stem from what came out of SEDAR 87, which addressed the three penaeid shrimp stocks, brown, white, and pink.

Previously, the status determination criteria for those species relied on Stock Synthesis, which is an age-structured model, and, through the SEDAR process, they determined that it was not necessarily well suited for an annual species like shrimp, and so where they moved to was an empirical dynamic model, or EDM, which they found was better suited for modeling annual environmentally-driven species like you would find with shrimp.

Bernie, if we could go ahead and move down to the purpose and need, and I will add, again, as an additional action is introduced potentially to deal with that minimum threshold number of permits, that as well would come into play in the purpose and need statements, and so this is addressing solely the four actions that are in the document in front of you right now.

The purpose of this action is to establish or modify MSYs, ABCs, overfishing thresholds, and overfished thresholds for the Gulf shrimp penaeid shrimps. The need is to have biological reference points that can be used for determining status of the Gulf shrimp penaeid shrimp, or sorry. The Gulf shrimp penaeid stocks.

Bernie, if we go ahead to Action 1, I'll note -- So there's four actions in front of you all. Actions 1 through 3 only have two alternatives, whereas Action 4 has four alternatives.

Action 1, and I will also -- I apologize, and I probably should have stated it upfront, when I was mentioning the empirical dynamic model. The values that you'll find in these actions, the empirical dynamic model was able to produce values for white and brown shrimp. Pink, however, has a shorter series of data, and so they found that the empirical dynamic model did not fit pink shrimp, because of that abbreviated time series, and that's -- Some more

background information is provided in the background on that particular issue. EDM can be revisited for pink shrimp as additional years of data are collected.

With Action 1, Alternative 2 is using the EDM results for both brown and white shrimp and adjusting, or revising, the MSY values. For pink shrimp though, again, there was a need to sort of find a proxy, or workaround, for that, since EDM cannot produce. at this time, a MSY value for that particular shrimp species, and so the recommendation, which the SSC agreed with, was using the third-highest catch of pink shrimp as the MSY value, and that occurred in 1986, and so that was the 19,300,000 pounds of tails.

The full time series of landings for brown, white, and pink shrimp are listed in Table 2.1 as well, and so I will pause there and see if there's any questions before we move on to the next section.

Okay, and so, Bernie, if we can move on to Action 2, and here we are looking at establishing an ABC for penaeid shrimp. Currently, there is not an ABC value for Gulf penaeid shrimp stocks. As part of MSA, even for an annual stock that is a requirement, and so Alternative 2 would establish that ABC for each Gulf penaeid shrimp stock, setting it equal to the MSY for that stock. Again, I will pause and see if there's any questions, and, if not, we will move forward.

All right, and so we'll move on to Action 3, Bernie, and so Action 3 modifies the overfishing threshold for penaeid shrimp. Alternative 1, our no action, those values are listed there. Alternative 2 revises the overfishing threshold values using the results of SEDAR 87, and so you'll see, again, for brown and white, EDM was able to produce values, setting those overfishing thresholds as defined as the MFMT.

For pink shrimp, again, looking for sort of a workaround until additional years of data are available to run EDM for that particular species, the suggestion there, which the SSC recommended, was to use a ratio basically of annual landings relative to the MSY proxy, and then, if that ratio were to exceed one, then it would be determined that the stock status of pink shrimp would be overfishing, and Dr. Froeschke is going to add on a little bit of the difference in the values between Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 for brown and white shrimp.

**DR. FROESCHKE:** Okay, and so just a little bit of background information, and so if you look at -- You can leave it on Alternative 1 and 2 there, Bernie.

If you look at Alternative 1, for example, brown shrimp, versus Alternative 2, you see that the magnitude of those values are totally different, and so we followed-up with the Science Center as to why, and to make sure we interpret that -- So I'll just say Alternative 1, for the purpose of this, is based on the previous stock assessment, and it's really not a viable alternative.

In the previous -- Part of the reason that all of this exploration of different models, and empirical dynamic models, and all this different stuff was done, is because, the way that was done before, they no longer considered that to be the best method moving forward, and so they have a whole new paradigm, but, in short, the way that it used to be done, and so it was done in a Stock Synthesis model, which is made for age-structured animals.

Shrimp are not age-structured, per se, and they're almost always age-one. but the way they did it is they essentially modeled each month as a year, and then, as a result of that, they multiplied the values by twelve to get annual estimates, and I think, after looking at that, they decided that's probably not the right way, and that was one of the many factors that contributed to doing something different.

Anyway, that multiplication scheme is why the Alternative 1 values are so different from Alternative 2, and so it isn't bearing on what we're going to do here, but just so, if you look at it, and you wonder why, that's the basis.

**DR. FREEMAN:** All right, and so we'll move to Action 4, and so Action 4 looks at modifying the overfished threshold for the penaeid shrimp. Here, with Alternative 2, again, it would be revising for brown and white, based off the results of SEDAR 87. For pink shrimp, there was no recommended workaround for that species, and so the MSY would be undefined for that species.

Alternatives 3 and 4 are related to Alternative 2, in the sense that MSST can be set below the MSY, but no lower than half of the MSY, and so Alternative 3 is taking 0.9 multiplied by the MSY for brown and white shrimp, and Alternative 4 is taking 0.8 multiplied by the MSY for brown and white shrimp.

Those alternatives are in consideration in part because it allows for environmentally-driven fluctuations in stock size, which would be very reasonable given the life history of our penaeid shrimp, and so Alternatives 3 and 4, as a result, reduce the likelihood that the overfished threshold may be met for brown or white shrimp, and so I will pause there and, again, see if there's any questions.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Chairman.

**MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Dr. Freeman, first, thank you for this document only being twenty-seven pages. Secondly, for the committee, are we looking to pick preferreds here?

**DR. FREEMAN:** So that's a good question. This is just the sort of first round of you all viewing this. I think it may be advantageous, one, to wait until we have the additional action related to adjusting that minimum threshold, and the other thing is the -- While the SSC was able to provide recommendations related to these values from SEDAR 87, the Shrimp AP has not had a chance.

This is the first preview of this document, and so the committee and council may wish to wait until the Shrimp AP can weigh-in, which, again, my hope is that, when we do bring it to the Shrimp AP, at that point, we would also have that updated analysis from NMFS, and so that, at the same time, they can weigh in on that potential change to the minimum threshold number of permits.

This is simply having it in front of you all, making sure that, what we do have presented, that there are no other suggestions, or recommendations at this point, but selecting a preferred is not necessarily needed just yet.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Froeschke.

**DR. FROESCHKE:** Just as a follow-up, I mean, if you do have feedback on the range of alternatives, and is there something that you don't see that you would like to see, or something that you see that you don't want to see again, and that would be helpful.

Specific to this action, the minimum stock size threshold is a little bit different with shrimp, as compared to what you're used to seeing with finfish, and so, with finfish, typically you'll see an MSY value, and then we have some value, some percent scale below that, and say, in many of our reef fish, you can set it as low as 50 percent of that.

More recently, we've been doing 75, or something, and what that does is it allows for some environmentally-driven variation in the stock size that allows that to occur without triggering overfished status, and rebuilding plans, but the idea is it doesn't -- You know, after you get below a certain amount, then you probably have a fishing problem as well, and so it tries to provide that.

With shrimp, being that it's an annual species, and we think that

most of the variance in population size is environmentally driven, rather than fishing mortality, historically it's been set at MSY, MSST, and what council staff tried to do here was to provide these 0.8 and 0.9 just for ideas. It does allow some of that environmentally-driven variation.

We think that would be reasonable, without getting this too far below MSY, and so those are kind of there, and, if that's not something that you want, or if it's something you want in a little bit different way, we're happy to entertain that, but I just wanted to provide that context.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Froeschke, and so, just for clarity, for my sake here, looking at Alternative 2 in Action 4, I have the February Standing SSC and Shrimp SSC meeting report up in front of me here, and we received this at the April council meeting, and the motion that came out of the SSC is essentially the equivalent of what Alternative 2 is in the document, and is that correct, Dr. Freeman?

**DR. FREEMAN:** That is correct, and there seemed to be -- When that was presented to the council, there did seem to be some interest, at the last council meeting, in exploring, again, a little bit of a range. Our Shrimp AP chair was also available, and she weighed-in on that, and made that suggestion as well, to consider a little bit larger range of alternatives in this document.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Froeschke.

**DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and, just as a reminder, the status determination criteria, for example the MSST, that's a council decision, and so it's certainly weighed-in on by the SSC and things, but you all do have some flexibility, I presume, within bounds on how to do that.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and that's understandable. I just want everyone to understand that 2 was the -- Alternative 2 was the direct motion that came from the SSC, and these are options that go with that, just at least for clarity sake. Okay, Dr. Freeman.

**DR. FREEMAN:** Okay, and so, in this case, we will -- If it suits the committee, we will wait to bring this back until we have additional information on that analysis from NMFS on the minimum threshold number of permits, and, ideally, we'll have presented that analysis, at a minimum, to the SSC, but, ideally, as well to the Shrimp AP, and so, following that, we will bring this document back for consideration with the committee.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so then we'll add an Action 5 to the document after that, and is that correct?

**DR. FREEMAN:** Yes, sir. That's the plan.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.

**MR. STRELCHECK:** The council shared with us a request to, obviously, evaluate the permit threshold. I believe you had requested a mid-July deadline. We are having some internal workgroup meetings over the course of the next few weeks, and I'll need to coordinate with Carrie and team, if we're going to be able to meet that deadline or not.

As we've been going through this, we were reviewing kind of the rationale for the previous permit threshold, and it was hinging on optimum yield, but also an effort threshold for sea turtles, which no longer is part of our biological opinion.

It was superseded by the 2020 biological opinion, and so that's out-of-date, in terms of a methodology and approach, and so this may be a little bit more complicated, with regard to kind of redetermining what the appropriate permit threshold is, but we have some ideas, and we're exploring some options, and they can bring that back to the council for consideration, and I'll talk to Carrie about timing of when we can have that analysis.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Simmons.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That sounds good. I think the reason we were shooting for July is we had planned that Special SSC meeting, with the Special Shrimp folks involved, because we were going to do the report-out from the finfish bycatch working group, and then hopefully start this discussion with the permit threshold, and so I think that was our thoughts, but we can regroup if we need to change that timeline.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Strelcheck.

**MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, at minimum, if we don't have any sort of analysis at that point, it would be at least good to maybe talk about some of the methodologies, things that we could be considering at that stage, and so we'll try to have as much available as possible.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. That sounds really helpful. That would be good. Dr. Freeman, do we have any more for this document? Dr. Simmons.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just a question, as we're, you know, planning and talking about stock assessments, and the next time this information may be updated, I guess, for the Science Center is, you know, this was a big undertaking.

It was a research track, and I think it involved two analysts. You guys did a lot of work to try to include some economic indicators in there.

We also tried to look at environmental indicators when we looked at this, and so I guess, just moving forward, what are you all envisioning as far as how often this is going to be updated, and how much resources are going to be involved in that? You don't have to answer right now, but I do think we need to talk about that at some point.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Dr. Walter.

**DR. WALTER:** I can briefly answer it. The primary thing that goes into it is going to be the SEAMAP indices, and so it's relatively straightforward, and quick to update, and I guess the question would be how often does the council need to update any management advice on this, and probably not that often here, and so unless -- - It's something that certainly we can update with the EDM process quickly, and it doesn't require all the other variables to do, and so we can probably update it faster than this council needs advice on it, and so I think that we talk about that maybe in the SEDAR Steering Committee, how often that advice changes may be desired. Thanks.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Walter. Dr. Simmons.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Thank you for that. Well, I was hoping we wouldn't have to put this back on the SEDAR Steering Committee request, but we can talk a little bit more about it offline. I mean, I think about every five years is what we've asked for historically, and so we can think about that some more.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Do we have any other further questions or discussion regarding this draft document? Seeing none, Dr. Freeman, that brings us to the end of the action guide, correct?

**DR. FREEMAN:** Yes, sir. It's been a while since this has happened, but I'm pleased to say I think we may be concluding early for the Shrimp Committee.

**CHAIRMAN SCHIEBLE:** Our minutes will not be sixty-seven pages. All right. Well, Mr. Chair, that concludes the Shrimp Committee report, and we have no other business scheduled, and so I'll turn it back over to you.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 1, 2026.)

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