GULF COUNCIL

311TH MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Golden Nugget Biloxi Biloxi, Mississippi & Virtual

August 24-27, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
Michael Allen.....Florida
Kevin Anson.....Alabama
Brenda Ballard.....Texas
Kesley Banks.....Texas
Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
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
Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
Ed Walker.....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG

STAFF

Alyssa Clift.....Administrative Assistant
Assane Diagne.....Economist
Leonardo "Leo" Egula.....Fishery Outreach Specialist
John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
Anabelle Suitor.....Social Scientist
Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

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John Black.....Panama City, FL
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Eric Brazer.....Shareholders Alliance
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B.J. Burkett.....Panama City, FL
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Matt Walia.....NOAA OLE
John Walter.....SEFSC
Johnny Williams.....Galveston, TX
Dale Woodruff.....AL
Bob Zales.....Panama City, FL
Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL

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TABLE OF MOTIONS

PAGE 21: Motion to approve the final 2026 budget. The motion carried on page 21.

PAGE 24: Motion that, upon completion of identifying the list of fishery ecosystem issues, send the list to the Ecosystem Technical Committee to begin development of action item next steps for council review and consideration. The motion carried on page 24.

PAGE 26: Motion that the methodology using observer data, which has been developed by the SEFSC and is being used to estimate red snapper bycatch in the Gulf, is acceptable for data input into the current red snapper assessment model. The motion carried on page 27.

PAGE 27: Motion to support expanding the bycatch methodology to include additional finfish species that are presently in the observer database and recommends that the results of these additional efforts be presented to the Shrimp Bycatch Working Group and/or the appropriate SEDAR workshop or topical working group. The motion carried on page 27.

PAGE 27: Motion to write a letter to SEFSC supporting future investigations into improving the estimation of bycatch for finfish species not characterized since 2025 in the observer program. The motion carried on page 28.

PAGE 28: Motion to postpone work on updated analyses for the minimum threshold number of federal Gulf shrimp commercial permits and continue work on Shrimp Amendment 20 to update status determination criteria. The motion carried on page 28.

PAGE 32: Motion to direct staff to write a letter to FWC that there is no immediate intent to recommend managing cownose rays in federal waters. The motion carried on page 33.

PAGE 116: Motion to approve the changes recommended by staff in Actions 1 through 3. The motion carried on page 117.

PAGE 117: Motion to approve Generic Amendment: Modifications to Gulf For-hire Data Collection Program and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate. The motion carried on page 119.

PAGE 122: Motion to form a small working group made up of staff from the SEFSC, council, each Gulf state, SERO, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to understand data inputs and methodologies applied to landings data for the red snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 98). The motion carried on page 125.

PAGE 125: Motion to move Action 2 to Considered but Rejected. The motion carried on page 126.

PAGE 126: Motion to include options for regional management delegation. The motion carried on page 126.

PAGE 126: Motion to add an alternative in Action 3 to use 50 percent of the average landings from 2014 through 2024 and 50 percent of the average landings from 2021 through 2024. The motion carried on page 127.

PAGE 127: Motion to add an alternative in Action 3 to use 50 percent of the average landings from 2003 through 2024 and 50 percent of the average landings from 2021 through 2024. The motion carried on page 129.

PAGE 139: Motion to make Alternative 2, Option 2c the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 139.

PAGE 141: Motion to request NOAA Fisheries establish August 26, 2026, as the control date the Gulf Council may use if it decides to recommend exemptions for non-profit organizations operating quota pools or other similar quota distribution programs from requirements to obtain or retain shares or allocation in the Gulf Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota programs. Non-profit organizations established after the control date or those that opened an IFQ account with NOAA Fisheries after the control date may not be eligible to apply for an exemption from reef fish permit requirements or other requirements recommended by the council in the future. The motion carried on page 148.

PAGE 148: Motion to add proposed Actions 5.1 and 5.2 to the amendment. Also, to include a requirement that entities that received exemptions must report yearly who applied, received, and were denied allocation. Also, to include a requirement that NMFS makes this report available to the Gulf Council. The motion carried on page 150.

PAGE 151: Motion to move Alternative 2, Alternative 5, and Alternative 6 in Action 3 to Considered but Rejected. The motion

carried on page 151.

PAGE 151: Motion to make Alternative 1 in Action 3 the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 151.

PAGE 151: Motion to move Alternative 2, Alternative 5, and Alternative 6 in Action 4 to Considered but Rejected. The motion carried on page 151.

PAGE 151: Motion to make Alternative 1 in Action 4 the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 152.

PAGE 152: Motion to take Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44: Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures out to virtual public hearings. The motion carried on page 152.

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The Full Council of the Gulf Council convened at The Golden Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Monday morning, August 24, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS: Good morning. Welcome to Biloxi. Today we're going to work down the agenda as it's printed on the schedule. Before we get started, I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Strelcheck to go through the induction of reappointed council members. Mr. Strelcheck.

INDUCTION OF REAPPOINTED COUNCIL MEMBERS

MR. ANDY STRELCHECK: It's exciting to have all three of you back with us. As part of your responsibilities as council members, you have to read an oath on behalf of the Secretary, and so I'll read the first two lines, and then let you read in unison the oath.

(Whereupon, reappointed council members are inducted.)

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, all, and I know it's a little bit awkward to read the oath, but I do want to thank Ed and Kesley and Anthony. This council process takes a huge commitment. It takes time away from your family, from your work, from your friends, and we're just grateful, from the government's standpoint, to have you involved in the process, and we're certainly excited to have all of you as returning members of the council, and so welcome back. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I echo those comments. Welcome back, and thank you for your time here. We'll move to the first agenda item, and it will be the Admin and Budget Committee, and General Spraggins will take us through this committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 24, 2026.)

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August 26, 2026

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday morning, August 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Welcome to the 311th meeting of the Gulf Council. My name is J.D. Dugas, chair of the Gulf Council. Please place your cell phone or similar device on silent or vibrating mode. For the benefit of all, we ask that private conversations take place outside the meeting room. Additionally, alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the meeting room.

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

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

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

This meeting is being digitally recorded for the public record. As a courtesy, I ask that all participants seated at the table introduce themselves, beginning on my left.

DR. KESLEY BANKS: Kesley Banks, Texas.

MR. DAKUS GEESLIN: Dakus Geeslin, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

MS. BRENDA BALLARD: Brenda Ballard, Texas.

MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE: Chris Schieble, Louisiana.

MR. BILLY BROUSSARD: Billy Broussard, Louisiana.

GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS: Joe Spraggins, Mississippi.

MR. JASON OSBORNE: Jason Osborne, Mississippi.

MR. JOHNNY MARQUEZ: Johnny Marquez, Mississippi.

MR. DAVE DONALDSON: Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

MR. ANDY STRELCHECK: Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.

MR. FRANK HELIES: Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office.

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

DR. JOHN WALTER: John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Deputy Director for Science and Council Services.

LT. JACKSON MORTON: Lt. Jackson Morton, United States Coast Guard.

DR. ANTHONY OVERTON: Anthony Overton, Alabama.

MR. KEVIN ANSON: Kevin Anson, Alabama.

MR. TROY FRADY: Troy Frady, Alabama.

MR. JOHN SANCHEZ: John Sanchez, Florida.

MR. ED WALKER: Ed Walker, Florida.

DR. MIKE ALLEN: Mike Allen, Florida.

DR. C.J. SWEETMAN: C.J. Sweetman, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS: Carrie Simmons, council staff.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Thank you, all. First up is the adoption of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda? Not seeing any, can I get a motion to approve the agenda as written? Mr. Anson, and seconded by Dr. Overton.

Next up is approval of the minutes. Are there any edits, or changes, to the minutes? Not seeing any, can I get a motion to approve the minutes as written? Mr. Osborne, and seconded by

General Spraggins. Next up, we're going to go to supporting agencies, and we're going to go down the list, and we're going to go first to the South Atlantic, and I think it's Ms. Judy Helmey.

MS. JUDY HELMEY: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead. Thank you.

SUPPORTING AGENCIES UPDATES
SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON

MS. HELMEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met in St. Augustine, Florida, on June 8th through the 12th, 2026.

Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation and Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 3, Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff updated the council on progress of the dolphin MSE and the results of recent modeling efforts. The MSE indicated that the dolphin stock is in high abundance, with stock biomass two to three times the SSB MSY level, and the fishing mortality is well below FMSY.

The MSE further indicated that the management actions proposed in Regulatory Amendment 3 would not have a measurable impact on stock. Based on the favorable stock indications from the MSE, the council voted to discontinue work on the amendment. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center will continue to develop and fine-tune the MSE for the council to use in the future management of the dolphin fishery. Can everybody hear me okay?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, ma'am. We have you.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you. New Comprehensive Amendment, the council initiated a comprehensive amendment to clarify commercial trip limit and possession requirement for the three finfish FMPs, Snapper Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Dolphin Wahoo. The amendment would also consider revising the framework procedure under each of the FMPs to allow more timely modification to trip limits and bag limits.

Under the Snapper Grouper commercial management measures, Amendment 60 considers revisions to commercial snapper grouper unlimited permits and changes to management measures intended to increase commercial trip efficiency, such as eliminate the two-for-one requirement for SG 1 permits and increasing trip limits for several snapper grouper species.

The council also added an action to develop an amendment to

consider requiring that all harvest of snapper grouper species on vessels with snapper grouper commercial permits be sold. Public hearings will be conducted in August 2026 at various locations along the South Atlantic coast and during the September 2026 council meeting in North Charleston.

Then we're under the snapper grouper fisheries management. The council is considering reducing the number of species in the FMU to streamline management. The council will review this amendment again in September and consider approving it for public hearings in December.

Under headboat vessel limits, the council continued to discuss measures to address the needs of the South Atlantic headboat fleet by relaxing possession limits for vessels that carry many passengers and collect a fee per passenger. The council will discuss this amendment again at the September 2026 meeting, with the intent to approve it for public hearings in December.

Sunsetting of spawning special management zones, the council established five spawning special management zones in 2017 where fishing for, harvest of, or possession of snapper grouper species is prohibited. Three of these SSMZs are natural sites with a sunset regulation after ten years. The council will consider extending the sunset provision from seven to twenty years or removing it.

Reopening of seasonal closure for on-demand black sea bass pots, the closure protects North Atlantic right whales and other marine mammals that can easily become entangled in rope fishing gear. Fishing in these areas with black sea bass pots would be conditional on pots being equipped with on-demand retrieval systems, which significantly lower the chance of whales and other mammals becoming entangled.

Mutton and yellowtail snapper assessment response, the joint amendment is in response to the most recent stock assessment for mutton and yellowtail snapper. The council plans to approve the amendment for public hearings in September 2026. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ms. Helmey. We have a question from Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Not a question, but a comment. I just want to let you know that Dewey has been in my thoughts and prayers, and I'm praying every day for a quick and full recovery.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you very much, and I will pass that along.

Thank you. Thank you for allowing me to be here. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Do we have any other questions or comments? No, we do not. Thank you, Ms. Helmey.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. We'll move on down to the Mississippi law enforcement efforts. It's going to be Lt. Carron to give a presentation, and, next up, we'll have Mr. Walia online line.

MISSISSIPPI LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

LT. PATRICK CARRON: Mr. Dugas and council members, thank you for having me this morning. I'm going to give you a brief update on our enforcement efforts in Mississippi with our joint enforcement agreement with NOAA.

For turtle excluder priority, we've had 476 hours of at-sea patrols and sixty hours of dockside patrols. Reef fish enforcement, we've worked 220 hours of at-sea patrols and eighty hours of dockside patrols. Individual fishing quota enforcement, we've worked ninety-five hours of dockside patrols, primarily performing inspections at landings.

Lacey Act and IUU fishing, we've worked 150 hours dockside patrols, and, general enforcement, we've worked a total of 492 at-sea patrol hours and 120 dockside hours, and, so far, we have noticed a high degree of compliance. We haven't had very many enforcement actions taken, and so that is my report. Do I have any questions?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Lt. Carron. Do we have any questions? General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Well, first off, I want to thank you all. You know, I think we have the best marine patrol unit in the United States. Of course, I know every other state might have the same idea, but I do know that we have a great unit, and we appreciate what they do, and, you know, I just wanted to give you a quick thing, too.

With all the things that are, you know, going on with the islands and stuff with the National Seashore, Marine Patrol has stepped up, and, on Labor Day weekend, they're going to start patrolling the islands with them, and so they're going to help National Seashore to help out, to get more people on it, and so we appreciate them, and this is something that we're helping our federal as well to be able to do it, and it’s not costing them a dime, and so thank

you all.

LT. CARRON: Thank you for the kind words, Director.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, General Spraggins. Any other questions or comments? Not seeing any, thank you, Lt. Carron.

LT. CARRON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Next up, we're going to go online, virtual, to Mr. Walia with NOAA OLE.

NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (OLE)

MR. MATT WALIA: I appreciate it, Mr. Chair. I'll just stand by and wait for the slides to come up, or I can wait. If you want the Coast Guard to go, I can go after.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Give us a second, Mr. Walia. Okay, Mr. Walia. We're ready.

MR. WALIA: All right. I appreciate it. Thanks for bearing with me here and listening online. I'm going to give you a couple highlights where we've been. It's been a pretty busy summer. The council report I usually have should be ready come October, and so we're in between reports right now.

I wanted to highlight here that the mini-season was a big effort for us. It's not necessarily in the Gulf, but we're taking a lot of our resources, a lot of our EOs from the Gulf going to this, and so, obviously, this just happened here at the end of July, but we had four boat crews in the Upper, Middle, and Lower Keys.

It was a real busy season. You see that picture down below, and that's Alligator Reef. It's just stacked with boats, and so it was very busy this season. We encountered a lot of boats, a lot of compliance assistance, big boats and small boats that you see there.

We encouraged people, when we came across folks fishing near SPAs, or even in them, to download the sanctuary app, and make sure they have them, so they're aware of boundaries of where they can go and what they can do.

Our main -- Our big boat that we have there is our thirty-six that you see there, and the Metal Shark above, but we came across a lot of stuff, from lobster fishing in the SPAs, and that lower-left picture is -- There's a whole bunch of mangroves that were speared

in ecological reserve and SPAs. Some were undersized, folks anchoring, not displaying dive flags, but it was a successful op.

We had FWC with us on one of the boat crews in Marathon, and so we were able to make a combination of state and federal cases, but that was some big effort that we did recently, and I have a few other cases I would like to highlight too, to show you what we're up to.

This was off of Florida here. We had a case recently, and it was a commercial longliner. They were fishing inside the twenty-fathom line. They had multiple hauls inside. When we went down and interviewed the captain at the dock, and did our investigation, we had verbal and written admission that, hey, you know, I was in that closed area.

On top of that, they also landed early. They didn't follow some IFQ requirements. Their vessel ID requirements on the weather deck were too small as well, and so they got cited for a slew of things, and what we did ahead of the season, before this actually happened -- That bottom-right picture, that's a compliance email that our folks sent out to all reef permit holders, letting them know where the closure areas are, and so this is a courtesy thing that we did fleet-wide.

We're constantly giving calls and emails to industry as well, and so we're doing what we can to let folks know, but it does happen, and so this one ended up being a NOVA, working with our General Counsel partners,

Another case we had deals with observer refusal, and so, essentially, these are boats that are selected by the regional observer program under their specific permit to call in and take an observer. It is important for the council. The more coverage there is, the better data there is for management decisions.

What happens is, if these boats don't call in, or they fail to meet the observer requirements, they get referred over to us, and so this particular one was referred over to us. There was a lot of conflicting statements between the owner and the vessel operator of what they received, what their communications were, versus what we were able to show for the elements.

They ended up contesting the fine, which is fine. That's within everyone's purview and right to do that, but sometimes -- That usually has the potential to increase that fine if you're still found liable afterwards, and that's what happened here.

The owner and operator were held jointly. Normally, it would be a $2,500 fine that they would receive for this observer refusal, and it increased up to $5,750, and so just something to be aware of, and I wanted to give some reminders on getting coverage, and make sure that you take it for industry, because we are seeing a lot of these referred over to us.

It's a lot of effort we put in the Southeast towards trying to help out the observer program. We're close to 40 percent of the cases referred to us we've been able to take this year, but it's still high numbers, and so we have to prove the elements. We have to have bandwidth, but, if a boat gets selected, the big thing is just call the program. Call them, and let them know beforehand what your plans are. They can work with you. Have a valid safety decal.

Once you take that observer, treat them well, provide reasonable accommodations, access to the catch logs, what they need to see for the catch coming onboard, lat and longs, all that stuff, and so, if we're able to do that, that will decrease the referrals coming to us, and there will be more coverage for that.

Charter enforcement, I want to highlight that it’s been a busy season with this. These are some recent results we’ve been able to report on. We still have quite a few cases in the hopper, and continued efforts that we are doing right now, all season, and so we’re hoping to have some more to report on afterwards as well, but this just shows some success we’ve had with our partners.

The one on top was offshore Louisiana. This was an actual referral from Louisiana, and so a boat was about seventy-five miles offshore. When they came upon them, and started asking questions, there was a lot of conflicting statements of who had a permit, and the boat, and what they were doing. You see they had reef fish cut as bait, and a couple other things as well, and so this one was actually a combination of state and federal charges pursued, and this ended up going to our General Counsel, who issued a $24,500 NOVA to this boat for that, and so that shows with that coming across.

Down below, we had another one with FWC. It was a joint patrol off of Pensacola. They had undersized triggerfish. They were cooperative when we were working with them. They were across the state line a little bit. They actually held a lot of other open access permits, and so they -- To us, it looked like they knew what they were fishing for, and they knew what they were doing, but they just didn't take that extra effort to get that closed moratorium permit, and that one ended up issuing a $6,250 NOVA.

Then, lastly, below, there was one off the Galveston area that was about forty miles offshore. The same deal. They held a lot of other open access permits, but they failed to acquire the closed one. You know, it's a lot more effort to get that closed access permit. That was a $19,800 NOVA, and so there's some good cases we got out.

Like I said, we've got some more to report on in the future. These cases take time to develop, but we still encourage any tips. Just give us a name. You know, industry, get it our way, and we can work on it, and, like I said, hopefully we have some more to report on as this continues too, with the season still going on.

Just a couple of reminders, and recreational gag is right around the corner. Once that does close at October, just a reminder that the federally-permitted for-hire boats are not allowed to retain any of that afterwards, and, just in general, just make sure everyone knows what permits you need, what the bag limits are. Ignorance isn't an excuse.

A lot of the cases I just highlighted to you, that was what we heard from everyone, from fishing inside a closed area to not having the correct permit, not knowing what they're doing, folks down in the Keys in the mini-season, and so just being aware of what you're doing before. You know, kind of know before you go and you're good to go, and, finally, last slide.

Our contact info is here. Like I said, you can highlight anything you have, tips, complaints, and get everything our way, and we can look into it. What I did want to highlight here is that email address. That's relatively new, and so that's a great way to get in touch with us here divisionally. Whatever I get there, we can farm out to the respective region of where the tip is, or what activity is going on, and get it out more regionally, and so, with that, that concludes my report, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Walia. Do we have any questions or comments for Mr. Walia? Not seeing any, Matt. Thank you for your presentation. Next up is Mr. Donaldson, with Gulf States Marine, and he'll be followed by Lt. Morton.

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

MR. DONALDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've just got a couple of brief slides, just to update you on what's going on with things. All the projects are running smoothly, but we continue with Return 'Em Right. We're working on the next five-year agreement, adding

some mark and recapture historical data and doing some software enhancements.

The infrastructure improvement agreement, as John mentioned, we've got an RFP out to do some analysis with the creel designs and the State Reef Fish Survey in Florida. We are collecting proposals until the end of this week, and then hopefully we'll select a contractor and have that available within -- The results should be ready within about a year.

With the red snapper research projects, all the projects are in place, and we're working on them. They're off to a good start. There hasn't been any unexpected issues, and the plan is to have the results of those projects presented during our 2027 annual meeting, somewhere in Texas, with the commission meeting, and then, for the at-sea stuff in Louisiana and Texas, we're in the middle of the final year of the field work.

You may recall that, last year, we had some issues with getting observers on Louisiana charter boats, and it wasn't from lack of unwillingness, but it was there just wasn't room, that they were -- The boats were full, and didn't have places for the observers, but we're doing much better this year, and things are going well, and well in Texas as well.

Then, the last slide, our newest program is the Gulf Interjurisdictional Fisheries Research Program. We awarded the project to the South Alabama, and they're working with a consortium of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and eight universities and researchers. We're putting out the tags in cobia, and those include both acoustic and satellite tags.

We have deployed satellite tags, but we have not deployed any -- Excuse me. We deployed acoustic tags, but haven't deployed any satellite tags as of yet, but we're working with outreach to the public to make them aware of these receivers, and trying to get to try to get them aware of the tags.

Then, at the June council meeting, you'll recall that we talked about -- You all talked about king mackerel, and possibly including that in this work. We have been talking with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and NOAA Fisheries, and are currently looking at the possibility of including king mackerel, to get some tags out, and so we’re -- There are, obviously, some logistics to be worked out, but it appears that that's something that we will be able to accommodate, and so that's some good news.

Trevor presented that information from the Mexican fishery, and

it's something that's needed, and it has been needed for a number of years, and so we will be, hopefully be, including that in the coming year for under this program.

With that, lastly, our commission annual meeting is coming up in October. It's scheduled for October 12th through the 15th in Destin. As always, everyone is welcome to attend, and details are on our website, and so, with that, I'll answer any questions.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Do we have any questions, or comments, for Mr. Donaldson? Not seeing any, Dave, thank you again, and so we'll move on to the U.S. Coast Guard, Lt. Morton, and it's going to be followed by the Admin Budget Committee.

U.S. COAST GUARD

LT. MORTON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I begin with the presentation, I would like to introduce and welcome some members from our Gulf Fisheries Regional Training Center over in New Orleans that made the drive up today. They run the training program for all of our boarding officers. They do fisheries throughout the entire Gulf, and so they're really great at what they do, and they also can provide that same training to our state agency partners, and so, if anyone has any questions, they'll be in the back here today, sticking around for a while, and so thanks for them for coming.

Okay, and so, for Exclusive Economic Zone enforcement, these stats are good through July. We had twenty-one interdictions thus far this year, and 1,813 pounds of red snapper seized, and, really, to-date, you know, the big one for us is the Heartland District has referred ten lancha cases for prosecution of the Lacey Act and other criminal charges, and that doesn't include the OGAs. I know there's been a couple of cases that they've taken on as well.

Of the thirty-four people, lancheros, that have been detained, twenty-four have been sentenced, five have pled guilty, and five are still pending, and, with that, through July 5th of Fiscal Year 2026, we detected 125 EEZ incursions, and that represents a 29 percent decrease from Fiscal Year 2025.

A couple of action shots from interdiction. We have one of the lanchas out there taken from the aircraft, and so you can see they're underway, making way, trying to get back to Mexico, and Coast Guard Station South Padre Island was able to interdict them there, and so a huge shoutout to them.

Domestic fisheries enforcement, so far this year, we've done 292 boardings on U.S. fishermen, resulting in eight cases where we found significant violations, and no update for the marine protected resources for the year. We're still at one request for assistance and one interaction. That concludes my presentation. No update on Starlink at this time, but we'll be open to any and all questions. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Lt. Morton, for your presentation. Any questions, or comments, for Lieutenant Morton? Not seeing any, thanks again. All right. We're going to move to some committee reports, and we're going to start with Admin and Budget, and then next would be Gulf SEDAR. We'll give Bernie a moment to, I guess, pull up the document, or the report. General Spraggins.

COMMITTEE REPORTS
ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE REPORT

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, yes, the Admin and Budget Committee report from August 24, 2026. The members of it are myself, Mr. Donaldson, Mr. Anson, Ms. Ballard, Mr. Frady, Mr. Marquez, Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Mr. Osborne, Dr. Overton, and Mr. Geeslin, and our staff members are Dr. Simmons and Ms. Hager.

The committee adopted the agenda, Tab G, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab G, Number 2, of the January 2026 meeting were approved as written. We reviewed the final 2026 funding budget and activities, Tab G, Number 4. Staff presented the proposed final funded 2026 budget in Tab G, Number 4. The total funding received is $4,634,838. That includes $323,650 in one-time funding.

Staff reviewed year-to-date expenditures and proposed budget revisions to reflect planning activities throughout the remainder of the year, including costs associated with the relocation of the council office. Adjustments were made to the draft 2026 reviewed in January to account for year-to-date activities and future planned activities.

A member of the committee member asked about the reduction in the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) salary budget. Staff explained that the budgetary reduction was to account for a lower-than-scheduled meeting activity that has occurred to-date. The reduced expenditures was largely attributable to the virtual SSC meeting and shorter meetings scheduled while awaiting the results of the recreational data collection system (MREP-FES) pilot results.

Members also asked about the outlook for future funding appropriations and whether delays experienced in the recent years were likely to continue. Staff indicated that funding timing is expected to remain uncertain and emphasized the importance of carefully managing expenditures and preserving available reserves to address potential delays in future funding releases. **The committee recommended, and I so move, that the council approve the final 2026 budget.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, General Spraggins. We have a committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any , is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, motion carries.** General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Thank you, sir. Discussion of Future Funding Cycle Timing and Planning, Tab G, Number 5, staff provided a short presentation of recent trends in the timing of federal funding releases, the operational challenges associated with receiving annual council funding after the beginning of the calendar year, and a few potential strategies for future council consideration.

The shift to funding after January 1 has increased the council's reliance on carryover funds and created challenges for meeting planning, contract administration, and cash flow management. Staff also noted that similar challenges are being experienced by all regional fishery management councils.

The committee was asked to comment on the suggestions presented and offer directions or thoughts. After the discussion, the committee expressed support for splitting the initial state liaison and commission contract advancements into two payments and observed that states would continue to assist the council where possible.

Committee members generally supported continued evaluation of the proposed cost-saving measures and requested that the staff develop additional information and recommendations for future consideration, and, with that, sir, I would ask if there's any questions for the committee, sir.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, General Spraggins. Do we have any other questions or comments for Admin and Budget?

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I would like to thank the staff. You know, I would like to thank Dr. Simmons and her staff. They have really worked hard. They've worked hard to make sure that they can keep this operational, and try to keep everything going, and I appreciate all the states for helping as much as they possibly

could too, and I just want to give the staff a round of applause. Mr. Chair, that concludes my report.

SEDAR COMMITTEE REPORT

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, General Spraggins. Any other business? Not seeing any, all right. Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and Beth, and all the staff. We're going to move on to the SEDAR Committee report, and next up will be Ecosystem.

The committee adopted the agenda, Tab I, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab I, Number 2, of the April 2025 meeting as written. SEDAR Steering Committee Assessment Schedule Updates and Meeting Outcomes, Tab I, Number 4, council staff reviewed the outcomes from the virtual Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) Steering Committee meeting held on July 20, 2026, Tab I, Number 4. One of the items staff highlighted was concern regarding the independence of cooperative review workshop appointees who previously contributed to the data and assessment portions of the same SEDAR assessment.

In discussing SEDAR review workshop participants, a committee member agreed it was difficult to find enough Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) members to review stock assessments at times, but was more concerned with ensuring reviewers were appropriately experienced and familiar with Gulf fisheries.

Another committee member agreed and thought those concerns should take priority to be discussed by the SEDAR Steering Committee regarding independence for reviewers who may have participated elsewhere in the SEDAR process.

A council member recommended establishing recusal criteria for reviewers and that, while they appreciated external reviewers, they agreed with committee members that familiarity with Gulf fisheries was critical.

Another council member asked whether the budget could accommodate hiring independent contractors, and council staff said that was unlikely. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center asked whether a participant with conflict could participate in the review without having a former role as an independent reviewer. Council staff and committee members generally disagreed with this approach, as it would incur additional participation costs without the added benefit of that participant's contribution to the written review report.

A committee member asked whether there were any data on cobia

coming from Mexico along with the previous discussed data on king mackerel. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center replied that it was not aware of any cobia data being shared, but it would investigate.

Other Business, there was no other business discussed. This concludes my report. Is there anything that needs to come before SEDAR? No? All right. We're going to move on to Mr. Anson, with Ecosystem, and then Dr. Banks for Sustainable Fisheries. Mr. Anson.

ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. ANSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the agenda, and the minutes from the November 2025 meeting were approved as modified.

Identification of Stakeholder-Driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues, Doctors Kelsey Furman, with the University of South Alabama, Nate Brugnone, with Two Six Technologies, and Steve Kasperski, with Kasperski Consulting, presented preliminary results for work contracted by the council to identify fishery ecosystem issues of concern to Gulf of America stakeholders using social science approaches. The council funded this work to support the first phase of operationalizing the Gulf fishery ecosystem plan.

The project team described their approaches, which included stakeholder workshops held in each Gulf state, a Fisherman Feedback survey, use of a large language model analysis to capture broader ecosystem perspectives from online sources, and outlined prospective fishery ecosystem issues they have identified thus far.

The committee asked clarifying questions about the data sources used for the large language model analysis and provided suggestions for focusing the online data sources on ecosystem issues directly impacting federal fishery species.

In addition, committee members discussed the broad scope of the fishery ecosystem issues identified thus far and recommended that future efforts focus on identifying tangible issues that are within the council's jurisdiction and have potential management solutions.

A committee member suggested that consideration of issues outside of the council's jurisdiction was still an appropriate use of the processes outlined in the fishery ecosystem plan and doing so would acknowledge the concerns of stakeholders and communicate fisheries

impacts to partner agencies.

The committee member provided an example that mitigation of red tide does not fall within the council's purview, yet red tide impacts have been successfully integrated into stock assessments for several species. Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff suggested that work on fishery ecosystem issues should align with ongoing Science Center efforts on similar topics, when possible.

Staff and the project team stated that the next phase of the project would include working with the Ecosystem Technical Committee to narrow the scope of the fishery ecosystem issues and identify issues with management levers that could be prioritized for council consideration.

The committee recommends, and I so move, upon completion of identifying a list of fishery ecosystem issues, send the list to the Ecosystem Technical Committee to begin development of an action item next steps for council review and consideration.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Anson. We have a committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.**

MR. ANSON: Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Anson. Okay. Next up, we're going to move to Sustainable Fisheries, with Dr. Banks, and we're going to follow that with the Shrimp Committee report. Dr. Banks.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE REPORT

DR. BANKS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab E, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab E, Number 2, of the January 2026 meeting.

Discussion of Five-Year Standardized Bycatch Reporting, Tab E, Number 4, Frank Helies, with SERO, gave a presentation on standardized bycatch reporting methodologies, SBRM. He discussed elements to include in the review and noted that the five-year SBRM review must be completed by January 2027.

Mr. Helies indicated that, once the review is drafted, next steps will include SSC and council reviews and National Marine Fisheries Service approval. He finally noted that the potential need for management action would be considered after completion of the review.

Council staff asked whether the SBRM review could be presented to the SSC during its September 2026 meeting. Mr. Helies replied that he will discuss the issue with the SBRM review team before deciding. Mr. Chair, this concludes the report.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Banks. Is there any other business to come before Sustainable Fisheries? Mr. Helies.

MR HELIES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just speak to that last point. After some deliberation, I think we can skip the SSC meeting, and bring it directly to the council when we're ready.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Helies. Anything else? Okay. We're going to move to the Shrimp Committee report and Mr. Schieble.

SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Shrimp Management Committee adopted the agenda, Tab D, Number 1, with updates on Shrimp Amendment 19, the shrimp permit moratorium, the Shrimp Futures Program, and the Early Adopter program added under Other Business. The committee approved the June 2026 meeting minutes, Tab D, Number 2.

July 2026 SSC Meeting Summary, Tab B, Number 7(a), and the presentation, Tab B, Number 7(b), Mr. Moncrief, SSC chair, presented on the SSC's discussion of the updates to red snapper bycatch estimation in shrimp trawls and the SSC's motions.

He then presented on the SSC's discussion of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's proposed methodology for estimating gray triggerfish bycatch in shrimp trawls through the use of a proxy species.

A committee member expressed concern about the use of lane snapper as a proxy species for gray triggerfish. The SSC chair responded that they discussed further validation and noted one SSC member's suggestion to use the same approach and apply it to a species that is included in both the shrimp observer program and SEAMAP, to see if it performs similarly. Another committee member commented that the spatial overlap between lane snapper and gray triggerfish Gulf-wide in SEAMAP trawls appeared to help convince the SSC to approve this approach.

A committee member inquired if the SSC had expressed interest in estimation of shrimp trawl bycatch of king mackerel, which are

characterized in the observer program via basket subsampling like lane snapper. Council staff noted that the shrimp trawl bycatch methodology for finfish workgroup had made that request, but additional time was needed for integration of Mexico landings, as well as time prioritization of the working group to address interactions and bycatch of protected resources in shrimp trawls. The committee then considered the SSC's motions and made the following committee motions.

The committee recommends, and I so move, that the methodology using observer data that has been developed by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and being used to estimate red snapper bycatch in the Gulf is acceptable for data input into the current red snapper assessment model. That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to point out, because I mentioned this in committee, that, you know, this is a scientific recommendation. I don't necessarily view this as something that council has to weigh in on, and, if you think of it in the reverse, if we were opposing this, right, it's not necessarily within our authority, or purview, to say this is not an appropriate methodology, and so I just wanted to acknowledge that.

I think we're fine to accept this in Full Council as a committee motion, and recommend it move forward, but I think, going forward with future motions, we need to consider the SSC advice, with regard to their authority and responsibility, relative to the council authority and responsibility, and things that focus on the management and management authority are, obviously, within our lane.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that's a very fair point that you guys have brought up during the committee. I think what we were trying to do is just bring this full circle, since there were so many resources that were put forward with the shrimp trawl bycatch for the finfish species, that came from the center, and then with the SSC, and so I think that's what we were trying to do here, and so I agree it is a little awkward, and so thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Is there any other discussion on the

committee motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: The committee recommends, and I so move, to support expanding the bycatch methodology to include additional finfish species that are presently in the observer database. The SSC also recommends that the results of these additional efforts be presented to the shrimp bycatch working group and/or the appropriate SEDAR workshop or topical working group. That motion carried unanimously, and I have a suggestion, or discussion, on this motion.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee motion on the board. Any discussion on the motion? Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes, Mr. Chair, and I think it may be helpful if we modify the wording in here to remove the words "SSC also" and replace that with "council", since we've copied this verbatim from the SSC report, right, and we just put it in here, and I think we need to say -- It's a council motion at this point, and so we would take the "SSC also" out and replace that with "the council recommends that the results of these additional efforts be presented to the shrimp bycatch working group and/or the appropriate SEDAR workshop or topical working. I guess I need a second.

MR. BROUSSARD: Second.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay, and so Mr. Schieble -- I have the substitute motion on the board, and it's seconded by Mr. Broussard. Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: It's a substitute motion, Mr. Chair?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: I guess that would be cleaner. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Is there any discussion on the substitute motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the substitute motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Okay, and so we have a third motion here. **The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council write a letter to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center supporting future investigations into improving the estimation of bycatch for finfish species not characterized since 2025 in the observer**

program. That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have another committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: The SSC chair then reviewed the discussion with National Marine Fisheries Service on potential analyses for updating the minimum threshold for federal Gulf shrimp permits. A committee members stated that NMFS presented the SSC with initial data and information, with updated catch per unit effort and overall shrimp effort, and that bycatch information is being updated.

He commented that there is also the complexity of poor economic conditions that the industry is facing, which has led to a declining effort that prevents achievement of optimal yield. He added that the council may want to focus on the upcoming trigger to establish a review panel for examining details of a permit pool.

Council staff noted that Shrimp Amendment 17B states that the review panel would consist of shrimp AP members, SSC members, National Marine Fisheries Service staff, and council staff. Council staff added that, in July of 2026, the trigger for the review panel was only ten permits away from being met, and so the council may want to consider the panel's membership at its October meeting. NMFS staff stated that they could bring an update to the number of federal Gulf shrimp permits to that meeting.

Committee members stated that work should be postponed, rather than ended, on updated analyses of the minimum threshold for permits, as the more immediate need is for the council to consider the review panel for a shrimp permit pool. Then, as more information becomes available, the minimum threshold can be evaluated more holistically with the shrimp industry, especially in light of economic conditions.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to postpone work on updated analyses for the minimum threshold number of federal Gulf shrimp commercial permits and continue work on Shrimp Amendment 20 to update status determination criteria. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Another committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHEIBLE: Okay. Status Update on Working Group to Address Interactions and Bycatch of Protected Resources in Shrimp Trawls, council staff provided the status update on the working group. Council staff and NMFS staff met on August 5, 2026 to discuss a data request for holding a working group meeting.

That data request included updating protected resources bycatch up through 2025, updating smalltooth sawfish population viability analysis based on the SSC's feedback from its May 2025 meeting, information on active federal shrimp permits, and various economic information on the federal Gulf shrimp industry. Council staff expects to have an agenda prepared for the first meeting of the working group in the week or two following the council meeting.

Dr. Walter notified the committee that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center has secured funding for increased observer coverage in the pink shrimp fishery, with the plan to double observer coverage from about two-and-a-half percent to 5 percent by 2027, which will provide better information in that area where smalltooth sawfish interactions occur.

Council staff inquired why there would not also be increased observer coverage in areas where giant manta ray interactions occurred. Dr. Walter responded that it was due to concerns about the status of smalltooth sawfish and that any mitigation efforts would require good spatially explicit data.

Other Business, Update on Shrimp Amendment 19, the shrimp permit moratorium, SERO staff responded that their public comment period ended at the beginning of August 2026, and the decision must be made by next week, at which point the amendment package will go to Headquarters. The proposed rule will publish August 25, 2026, with a thirty-day comment period. Comments will be due on September 24, 2026.

Update on the Shrimp Futures Program, Dr. Walter stated that the scenario planning workshop will have target dates of December 1st through 3rd, 2026 and February 23rd through 25th, 2027, likely in the Louisiana region, with stakeholders to develop scenario planning for the future of the shrimp fishery. This will help identify specific actions that can be taken to ensure the sustainability of the shrimp fishery.

Update on the Early Adopter Program, Dr. Walter noted that four years of data has been collected through the Early Adopter Program. Devices have been installed on 312 vessels. Remaining funds should allow for devices to be installed on a total of 884 vessels, which

may be above the current active fleet number.

Once the framework action is implemented, the sampling design for vessels that are required to have a cellular electronic logbook will be rolled out, and it will ensure representative coverage in space and time, as well as particular areas of high interaction with protected resources. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Is there any other business to come before Shrimp? Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Yes, and I think I would like to just clarify the comment about why we're focusing on the pink shrimp fishery added observer coverage, and, as I think about it, you know, one of the rationales that went into our decision process was the restricted location for smalltooth sawfish, where they are actually restricted to a much smaller spatial area, and so that's where most of the population we think occurs, whereas the giant manta have a much larger spatial distribution, which is why we would say, yes, that's an area we need more, increased, observer coverage, and I just wanted to get that on the record, as to the rationale behind the agency's decision process there. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Dr. Walter. Anything else? All right. Not seeing any -- Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, on the Early Adopter Program, and I could have missed this during the committee, Dr. Walter, but are you -- Do you know, with the contractors -- Are we having issues with getting the fleet to continue to put those devices on, because you said the 884 may be higher than the current active fleet number, and so are the contractors having trouble getting the fleet to put those devices on there, or are things still going very smoothly with that process? Do you know?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: You know, I think I would have to ask the contractors how that's going. My understanding is it's going fairly well. There's only just so much like manpower to be able to get to the fleet, in terms of the fleet as a whole, who now could -- Potentially we could cover the entire active fleet.

I think that opens the door to vessels that might not previously have considered that, and particularly with the pending amendment, where there will be a requirement to have selected to have a functioning unit, and I think that -- I hope that will be an

opportunity for those vessels to reach out to say, yes, we now see that that would be beneficial, to get that free, but I think it's just the manpower. You know, it's covering the whole Gulf, getting vessels when they happen to be not fishing, and available, to put those on. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Walter Okay, and so we've completed all the committee reports that we can at this moment, and so we're going to move on a little bit differently in Other Business. There is an extension of state cownose regulations into federal waters, and it’s Tab U, Number 1, and I’m going to turn it over to Dr. Sweetman to lead us through that before lunch.

OTHER BUSINESS
EXTENSION OF COWNOSE RAY REGULATIONS INTO FEDERAL WATERS

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just kind of highlighting some things that FWC is considering here, and so FWC is considering regulations for the harvest of cownose rays, because the species is currently unregulated in Florida waters. Therefore, recreational harvest falls under Florida's default bag limit of two fish per person or 100 pounds, whichever is greater, while there are currently no commercial harvest limits.

Establishing some specific regulations would create conservation measures that would benefit for this late-maturing species that has an extremely low capacity for population growth, due to their life history characteristics.

FWC has recently learned about some unreported and illegal harvest, and the commercial fishery is much larger than previously understood, in part because some dealers have been unintentionally reporting under some wrong trip ticket codes. FWC is currently developing recreational and commercial management measures for cownose rays and is working with stakeholders to establish appropriate commercial vessel limits.

These rays apply site fidelity to bays in Florida, but they routinely travel into federal waters. Thus, for the greatest conservation benefit, we would like Florida's regulations to apply consistently across state and federal waters of Florida, and, to facilitate this, we're asking the council for a letter indicating that the council does not intend to regulate cownose rays in Gulf federal waters in the immediate future. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Do we have any questions for Dr. Sweetman? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: I would speak in favor of the council submitting such a letter. I'm somewhat familiar with that issue, and there are some concerns going on there, and I think it would help to extend Florida regulations into federal waters on that species.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Walker. Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Just to clarify, for folks that are listening, so it's not like an area extension, right? Under the Magnuson Act, a state can regulate a state-registered vessel outside of its state waters in federal waters if there's no fishery management plan, et cetera, and so I just want it to be clear, for folks that are listening, that it's not like it's extending to everybody who is in federal waters. It's state-registered vessels that are then fishing in the EEZ. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ms. Levy. Any other questions or comments? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I'll forward a letter that we've sent to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for the council's awareness, and it doesn't look like we copied you, but we were essentially acknowledging that we didn't have any concerns, and that there wasn't any imminent plans that we were aware of for the Gulf or South Atlantic Councils to regulate cownose rays.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. So it would be helpful to get a motion for staff to write a letter. Mr. Walker.

MR. WALKER: I'll go ahead and make that motion to recommend staff -- There we go. Draft a letter to FWC recommending that there is no immediate intent from the Gulf Council to manage cownose rays in federal waters.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: We have Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Just a suggestion, and so write a letter to FWC that there is no immediate intent to recommend managing cownose rays, and so to FWC that there is no immediate intent to recommending management, or whatever it should be.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Perhaps stating? Direct staff to write a letter to FWC stating there's no immediate intent to manage cownose rays in federal waters. Is that okay, Mr. Walker?

MR. WALKER: Direct staff to write a letter to FWC that there is no immediate intent to manage cownose rays in federal waters of the Gulf of America. Works for me.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Captain Walker has a motion on the board. Is there a second? Mr. Broussard seconds. Is there any discussion on the motion? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Just to let everybody know what's going on, there's been some issues with the species, and I've learned that they have one baby every eighteen months, and so they're easily exploited, and overexploited, and currently there's no regulation at all, and some people have, you know, started to recognize an opportunity there, and so this is good to hand it off to FWC. They've got some things going on in state waters as well, and so that's the issue here.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Walker. Any other discussion on the motion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.**

We are ahead of schedule, and I think this is -- We're going to go to lunch. This is going to take us to lunch. It's a stopping point, and so we'll come back on schedule at 1:30, and we'll start with Ms. Muehlstein, and then go into public comment. See you at 1:30.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 26, 2026.)

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August 26, 2026

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

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The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday afternoon, August 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right, folks. We're going to get started, and so, before we get into public comment, our next agenda item is going to be Ms. Muehlstein, and she's going to give us a presentation about the fifty years of MSA.

Before Emily gets into that, I just wanted to make a comment, so that everyone understands. I believe, over the last year, Emily has been working on this, and it's not only for the Gulf Council, but it's for all eight regional councils, and so I just wanted to make everyone aware of that, that she's not only working for us,

but it's for the entire U.S., and so thank you, Emily, and I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Simmons first.

CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT IN THE GULF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, just to kind of add on to that, we do have to brag a little bit about staff. Ms. Muehlstein was selected from her peers of the Communications Working Group across the regional councils to present during the national meeting in the North Pacific, which we were not hosting, by the way, and so this slide shows tailored to the Gulf. That was more national level, looking at the successes of management and looking at the different photographs of the fisheries across the nation, but this one focuses on the Gulf.

In addition to that, I have to thank Mr. Eguia and Ms. Muehlstein for putting together the infographics and the photo contest, which you're going to see the results of. That was a lot of extra work on top of their normal day-to-day activities, and so I think you'll really enjoy it, and so thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and thank you, Emily. Go ahead and take it away.

MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN: Well, man, and I didn't know you were going to set me up so I felt like I had to perform here. Good lord. Okay, and so you may or may not know, at this point, that this year actually marks fifty years of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

It also marks fifty years of the regional fishery management council system, including fifty years of this Gulf Council, and I think it's really cool, and this milestone, to me, seems like it will invite us all to kind of look back at our work and reflect on how much the world around us has changed since 1976, and think about how the council system has provided for a responsive, innovative, and adaptive management system along the way.

Okay, and so let's put this in context, fifty years. Fifty years ago, things looked a lot different than they do today, right? The way that the Gulf Council operated was different, and the way that fishermen fished was way different.

In 1976, there wasn't the internet. Most people had never touched a personal computer. We sent information through the mail, with stamps and envelopes, right? Collecting and analyzing, and even sharing information, was a much slower process than it is today.

If you think about it, today, we literally carry more computing process in our pockets than entire agencies had fifty years ago. We have access to incredible amounts of data almost instantly, and we can collaborate across the Gulf without being in the same room, right? We take this stuff for granted, right?

We can communicate with our stakeholders in real time. We don't have to send them letters, and we are using much more sophisticated tools to support our fishery science, our management, and our public engagement than we did when we got started fifty years ago.

In those same fifty years, fishermen went from operating without publicly available satellite navigation, right, and I hear these stories about fishermen putting a piece of soap on a rope to see if they're on the right bottom, and like things have changed so dramatically that I think it's really easy for us to forget how big fifty years really is. Now, those same fishermen can access GPS, radar, and the internet, like, literally at their fingertips while they're offshore.

When we look back over those fifty years, where things have changed so incredibly, what really stands out isn't how much we've accomplished. It's how much the way that we manage our fisheries have evolved alongside the evolving fisheries, and so, in 1976, we started from scratch, right, and, over that first decade, we put some of the foundations of our Gulf federal management in place, but we didn't stop there.

As our understanding of ecosystems and fisheries and the people who depend on them changed, our management tools have also changed. We've moved to more sophisticated approaches. We identify essential fish habitat. We protect spawning areas. We established the IFQ program. We also began experimenting with new ways to manage fishing opportunities, right?

Recreational red snapper sector separation and the delegation of private recreational management to the states represents a willingness for us to try something different when conventional approaches aren't enough, and so this timeline doesn't simply show you like a history of our regulations. It's showing a history of adaptation.

For fifty years, we've been willing to learn, test new ideas, and evolve our management approaches to meet changing fisheries, changing science, and changing needs. That willingness to innovate, in my opinion, and that willingness to keep improving,

really is one of the things that has defined our management process for fifty years.

Fifty years of fisheries, and so today we managed thirty-one reef fish stocks, four shrimp stocks, three coastal migratory pelagics, spiny lobster, red drum, and 140 species of coral, hard coral.

I think it's really important, first, to focus on the fact that most of the stocks that we manage are healthy. They are producing yield that feeds our nations, our economies, and our communities. In those fifty years of management, only seven of our stocks have ever been overfished at some point. Right now, three have been rebuilt, and four are actively rebuilding.

In that same fifty years, twelve stocks have been experiencing overfishing, and, currently, we have no stocks that are designated as experiencing overfishing, and so, those successes in rebuilding and stopping overfishing, they represent years of science and management decisions.

They represent fishermen adapting to regulations, and stakeholders working together to solve some really difficult problems, and, as a result, the Gulf supports an enormous fishery. In fact, we lead the nation in recreational landings, and we rank second nationally for commercial landings.

When we look at fifty years of Gulf Council management, the story isn't simply about the fish that we manage. We've helped build and sustain fisheries that are productive and economically important and capable of supporting generations of both commercial and recreational fishermen.

Speaking of those generations of fishermen, these timelines and milestones really do help tell the story of the council system, but it's really -- What's really important is who the system exists to serve.

Across every state, across our fishing communities, fishermen are the heart of what we do, and one of the defining features of the council system is that management decisions aren't made in isolation, right? They're informed by people who enjoy and depend on fisheries every single day.

This public involvement that we're about to have this afternoon isn't incidental to this council system. It's foundational, and it brings local knowledge and operational realities and human impacts into this management process in a way that no scientific dataset could ever do, and so I want to acknowledge that, this

human part, it's often the most difficult part. We all know that when we sit around this table. We all know that when we talk to each other at the end of the day, and it's often really controversial. Sometimes it's uncomfortable, but it's always worthwhile.

Ultimately, successful fisheries management isn't just about managing fish stocks and numbers. It's about sustaining people who connect to our resources, and, behind every management decision, there are real people whose lives and futures are connected to the decisions that are made around this table.

Okay, and so you might wonder sort of what it is about the council system that has made it endure for these fifty years. What do we have to be proud of? What is the foundation of this system that makes us all here and coming back and doing this hard work?

I think the answer takes us back to the original vision behind the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which created the council system, and so Senator Warren Magnuson really emphasized the importance of regional management within a national framework, and so sometimes we talk around this table, and we forget that we are a part of like this bigger national machine, right? It's not just our region, but we do get to tailor the decisions that we make to our region. Then there was Senator Ted Stevens, and he really strongly believed that people closest to the fisheries were in the best position to manage them.

These ideas became the foundation of this system, and I would argue that they are the reason that it has remained resilient through decades of environmental change, technological advancement, shifting economies, evolving public expectations, and even changing politics.

This system endures, and so the council system wasn't intended to be rigid. It was designed to bring together science and stakeholders and regional expertise within this national conservation framework. It was built to evolve over time as fisheries and communities changed.

I know a lot of us sit here and think mostly about our Gulf stuff. It's really easy to focus on your own backyard, but, you know, this sort of national framework that we talk about -- Every region is really unique, right, and I think we're all probably glad that it's not, you know, suits in D.C. that are making our fishing regulations. What works in Alaska might not work in the Gulf. It might not work in New England, and the council system was set up to recognize that reality by allowing management approaches to be

tailored regionally, while still operating under those shared national conservation standards.

The Magnuson Act first provides a national framework for sustainability, and it sets standards for rebuilding fisheries, and reducing bycatch, and protecting habitat, but the councils are where the rubber meets the road, right? We get to tailor management measures to achieve national guidelines, in really unique and responsive ways, to make sure that our local fisheries are managed to their individual needs, and we've demonstrated a true ability to adapt and develop innovative approaches.

Finally, our system is fundamentally science-based, right? We rely upon collaborative science from the states, and from federal agencies, and from universities to guide our decision-making, and that foundation has really allowed the system to evolve as our understanding of fisheries and ecosystems have improved over fifty years.

This one is very close to my heart, because this idea that those that are closest to the fisheries help shape the management decisions remains sort of one of the defining strengths of the council system. The councils create a forum where fishermen and scientists and managers and industry representatives and the public all get to participate directly in a process, and that matters, because successful fisheries management can't rely on science alone.

It requires integration of scientific knowledge with that on-the-water experience and local understanding that we get from those of you in the audience, those of you listening online, and even those of you around this table.

In the past ten years, I am proud to say that 2,400 people have stood at that podium at a council meeting and provided testimony, and, over that same ten years, we have considered over 12,000 public comments gathered online, through letters and during public hearings, and I think that that is something to be really, really proud of, that we have successfully created a place where people participate, and people believe that the opinions that they express are considered, and are actually taken into account when our management decisions are made.

I'll get off my high horse here, and we'll talk about what we did in order to sort of mark this occasion. We really focused our efforts on two major things. First, we developed a Gulf Council by the number infographic, and, second, we hosted a photo contest to showcase fifty years of Gulf fisheries.

Bernie, if you just want to jump in, we'll sort of go over by the numbers first, and so this is a two-page infographic that we made, and I first need to acknowledge that this was not a unique idea. I would love to take credit for it, but it wasn't unique. It is modeled very closely after a similar product made by the Mid-Atlantic and also the South Atlantic Council.

Next, I want you to be aware that, with the exception of the information in that bottom Involving Fishermen section, all the data are from 2024, and they were reported by NOAA, and so I worked really closely with some NOAA staff that were super helpful in getting these numbers for me.

It's also important to understand that the values on this infographic represent combined marine fisheries, and so it includes both state and federal fisheries. It was really hard, or impossible, to pull out some of the values on the next slide for just our federal fisheries, and so they will -- They do combine all marine fisheries, even the state ones.

The first thing I want to highlight on this page, and I've already mentioned it, is we rank number one in the nation in volume of recreational harvest. If we did have our South Atlantic liaison, I would poke in, because they have the most recreational fishermen, but we have the most recreational fish landed, and so I don't know what that says about you guys, but I'll take the most fish.

Then we rank number two in the nation for volume of commercial landings in the Gulf, and I think that's really significant. You know, I know, at least for me, when I think of United States fisheries, I think about like big boats up in the Northeast, you know, making tons of fish at a time, and so I think that's a really interesting thing, that we do produce so much fish commercially as well. It's kind of a big deal, right?

Second, and I know I'm biased, but I'm really proud to highlight our communication analytics. I mean, we've developed like this incredible network of fishermen across the region, and we have successfully considered public input into our management decisions from a staggering number of comments, collected in so many different ways.

I know that I don't even go to like my city council meetings, right, like to -- You know, to vote on things that affect my literal backyard, and I think fishermen who spend the time doing this should be really proud of the effort that they make, because it takes a special person to come stand behind a podium and give

us testimony, and I think sometimes, because we do this so often, we forget how big of a deal that is that these people spend their time to do that for us.

On this slide, we highlight fisheries impacts by state. Now, I need to be clear here because some of this, you know, might look a little strange. Recreational effort and landings here are values that are expressed in MRIP Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi, and then the Louisiana values were provided by LA Creel, and the Texas values were provided by TPWD, right, and so it's just sort of important to recognize, and I think we all know it behind the table, but that these numbers are reported by different data collection programs, and so, you know, that's kind of -- It sort of shows up here.

I will say that there is a direct link to this infographic in our briefing book, and we are working to find a permanent home for it on our website. We do plan to update this annually, or as new data become available.

Next, we'll move on to the photo contest, Bernie, and so we did a photo contest to celebrate fifty years of fisheries. We created six different categories, and, as you can see from this slide show, we got some incredible photos through this opportunity.

Of the five categories, or of the six categories we had, five of them were judged internally by the entire council and council staff, and then the best catch category was judged publicly through a social media campaign. Overall, we had 181 photos submitted by 110 different people. As a condition of submission, we were given permission to use those photos in our outreach materials moving forward, and so that was really meaningful for us, to get sort of more material to use.

As you guys know, our social media presence is sometimes met with negativity. However, this campaign was different, and it really stood out, and I do want to recognize Leo. He's our new outreach specialist, and he came up with the idea of hosting this best catch photo tournament on social media. I don't know if you guys saw it.

I'm going to consider it to be our largest positive engagement effort ever. The contest drove 92,000 social media views, 6,000 social media interactions, and we got 1,200 votes on the best catch category. It also resulted in 134 new social media followers.

Without further ado, and I know you guys can't wait for the actual winners, let's take a look at our winners, and we have some of

them in the room today. All right, Bernie, and let's see.

The first category, recreational, the best recreational photo, this was submitted by Frank Hartwell. Frank, I know you're in the audience, and can you stand up? Thank you. All right. Best recreational photo.

Then we'll move on to the next one. All right. Best commercial photo, and so this is Alicia Paul, and this is actually not a picture of Alicia. It's a picture of Joe Harp. Alicia, I think you're in the audience, and you're going to hate me, and can you just raise your hand for me? Good job, Alicia. Next one, please.

Best historical photo, and so this was submitted by Wally Erickson. This is somebody that I know Captain Ed Walker knows. He's out of Tarpon Springs. He has been honored with his award, and he is aware of it. He's a very sweet guy, who I think was very happy that he got acknowledged for this one, and so thank you, Wally, if you're out there in TV land. Next one, please.

This is the best marine life or habitat photo. Congratulations to Robert Ellis on this one. I love this picture. That was a really cool one, and so I don't know if he's listening, but thank you for this submission, Robert. Next one, please.

This is the best coastal community photo, and this was submitted by Barbara Hamlin, and so I like this one as well. Thank you, Barbara. This one is awesome. I love the shrimp boats all in a line.

Then, finally, our best catch, of 181 photos that were submitted, and congratulations to both Lacey Hughes and Jamie Lee Wilson. Lacey I believe took the photo, and Jamie is the star of the show here. This was our photo tournament winner, 1,200 votes online, which I think is pretty awesome. That is a unit of a fish right there.

All right, and so let's think about the future. We've kind of looked back fifty years, and what happens in the future? Our oceans are changing, our technology is evolving, and new stakeholder needs continue to emerge.

The next fifty years is going to bring us some challenges that we can't fully predict today, but, if the history of our council system tells us anything, it's that this endurance does not come from resisting change. It comes from adapting to it, and that is what the council system has done for the past five decades. It has evolved alongside new science and technologies, and changing

fisheries and ecosystems, changing public expectations, but it has remained grounded in some core principles that were envisioned when the system was created.

Science-based management, regional stakeholder-driven decision-making, and long-term stewardship, and that's why this system has endured, because it was built with flexibility to evolve.

When we look ahead, the work is going to continue to change. We're going to confront new challenges. We're going to use tools and technologies that don't exist yet, and future leaders are going to bring us new ideas and perspectives into our process, but the foundation of this management system is going to remain strong, and that should give us confidence that our council system is going to continue to innovate, and to adapt, and to serve the fisheries and the communities and the ecosystems that depend on it.

Before I end our fifty years, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the people who have lent their time and their knowledge and their energy to getting fisheries management right in the Gulf. To the council members, thank you for taking this responsibility. Thank you for making difficult decisions and bringing diverse perspectives to the table. Sometimes it's a thankless job, and so, once in 50 years, we're going to ask the public to thank you today.

To the staff, and to the supporting agencies, thank you for the science, and for the data, and the administration. Thank you for the countless hours of work that makes sound fisheries management possible, and, of course, to the fishermen, to the fisheries advocates, thank you guys for sharing your knowledge and your experience.

I know it feels like banging your head against the wall sometimes. We really do appreciate understanding your concerns, and hearing your ideas, because your participation makes our management better. It doesn't make it perfect always, but it makes it better, and so as I've said, fisheries management isn't always easy, and sometimes the decisions we make are controversial. Sometimes the science is uncertain, believe it or not.

Sometimes there's competing interests, and strong opinions, and there's oftentimes no solution that's going to make everybody happy, but what matters is that the people continue to show up and ask hard questions and challenge assumptions. We listen to one another, and we work towards the best decision that can be made with the information that we have available.

For fifty years, that's what has made our Gulf Council fisheries management possible. This anniversary isn't a celebration of what the council has accomplished. It's more than that, and I want to just thank everyone who has cared enough to be a part of this process, and who continues to do the hard work to get it right, and so congratulations on fifty years, everyone. *(Applause)*

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Emily. That was impressive. We really appreciate it. Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: Emily, as a former staffer of Senator Stevens, I know that he would be incredibly happy with what you put together. The only suggestion he would probably have made is that, if you could put it to song, it would be even better, and so thank you for that.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: All right. For the hundred year, I've got you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Emily, that was really great. I think we all needed a little pick-me-up there, but I just want to say I think you should be doing all the red snapper presentations, to really just kind of help us get in the positive attitude.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thank you for that, Emily. I have to just say you nailed it, and I know everyone doesn't agree with the process, and maybe didn't agree with every word that you said, but I think you captured the spirit of the process, and all the great work, and so I want to give you another round of applause. *(Applause)*

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I don't know what you all are going to do next fifty, but I'll keep around for maybe ten or fifteen of them.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, all. Thank you, Emily. We're going to move on to public comment, if there are no other comments. All right.

Good afternoon. Public input is a vital part of the Gulf Council's deliberative process. Both oral and written comments are accepted and considered throughout. The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all statements include a brief description of the background and interest of the persons in the subject of the statement. All written information shall include a statement of the source and

date of such information. Oral or written communication provided to the council, its members, or its staff that relate to matters within the council's purview or public in nature.

Please give any written comments to Gulf Council staff, as all written comments will be posted on the council's website for viewing by council members and the public and will be maintained by the council as part of the permanent record. Knowingly and willfully submitting false information to the council is a violation of federal law.

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

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

If you have a cell phone or similar device, please place it on silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. To ensure everyone can hear the proceedings, we also ask that any private conversations be conducted outside the meeting room. Please note that public comment may conclude before the published agenda time if all registered in-person and virtual participants finish their remarks.

We'll go through as usual and rotate from online, or virtual, to in the room, in-person, and we'll start with Mr. Lawrence Marino, and it looks like Mr. Dale Woodruff is up next.

PUBLIC COMMENT

MR. LAWRENCE MARINO: Good afternoon. My name is Larry Marino, and I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrell. Regarding Amendment 64, state management has the inherent advantage over Gulf-wide management, in that it can be tailored to each state's specific needs.

Those needs do vary, because weather and effort patterns are different in different states, and, beyond needs, fishing preferences vary from state to state, bag limits versus days on the water, full weeks versus weekends only, and so on.

In addition, the states have more timely data reporting than MRIP, enabling in-season adjustments in real time. All this adds up to a lot of flexibility in state management that just doesn't exist in federal management. Plus, unified management of state and federal waters simplifies the regulatory environment.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Larry, can I stop you for a second? Can we quiet down in the back of the room, please, and take your conversations outside? Thank you. Mr. Marino.

MR. MARINO: Thank you. Our experience with Amendment 50 for private rec bears this out. The states have managed to their quotas, while drastically extending the seasons. This would be equally good -- State management would be equally good for the for-hire sector too, for the same reasons, and, as a practical matter, state agencies can more easily act on input for their for-hire fishermen as circumstances change than federal Gulf-wide management can.

For a business that depends on being able to serve customers where and when they want to fish, state management seems tailor-made to helping them, and so why is there such vocal dissent? The folks who have testified in the past mostly just say the existing system works for them. They're mostly from the eastern Gulf, but there are folks that the system doesn't work for.

Louisiana has explained repeatedly why it doesn't work for the western Gulf, due to the weather and fishing patterns. It's fair and equitable to fix the system for them, for the western Gulf.

Now, to fix it for them shouldn't make it unfair to others, but state management isn't. States that want to keep federal regulation can do exactly that. Whether it’s state or federal management in Mississippi, for example, when you cross the line from Louisiana waters into Mississippi waters, you just apply whatever management regime Mississippi has selected.

It's no different from crossing from Louisiana inshore waters into Mississippi inshore waters. The Mississippi rules apply, and so giving state management to Louisiana doesn't take anything away from Mississippi, or its fishermen, and, for the states that do adopt state management, all of the benefits of the flexibility and uniformity of management become available to them.

On top of that, under the existing system, the for-hire sector simply isn't catching its quota, and so it doesn't seem accurate to say that the system is working for everyone, when it doesn't enable them to catch their full share of the fish.

All of this has been explained and discussed numerous times, and so the continued opposition suggests two possibilities. One is fear of uncertainty, which is entirely understandable. There's always unknowns when things change, and even known changes can take getting used to, and so we need to work through that and make clear how state management would work, but that's an education issue. Fear of change can't be a reason not to make beneficial changes.

The other possibility is a vested interest in the unfairness of the status quo. That's understandable, too. The system is, in fact, working for some, at least in that sense, but preserving an unfair advantage, or benefit, for only part of that sector isn't an appropriate goal of fishery management.

For all of these reasons, Amendment 64 should go forward, and there seems to be no reason for a federal endorsement, because that seems duplicative of the state permitting requirements.

As to the alternative approach being suggested, establishing flexible management in federal management, certainly more flexibility is better, but the problem is federal management can't be as flexible as state management, because MRIP isn't timely enough to enable in-season corrections.

No matter how much flexibility they have to make changes for next year, NMFS can't act in time to enable for-hire to catch its entire quota this year, but states can, and, with state management, they can do it for next year as well, and, again, states are inherently more responsive to their own fishermen's needs and wants than a Gulf-wide management authority that has to balance and respond to all states' needs and wants, and so it's fine to continue looking at this, but it should not be at the expense of state management.

Regarding the exempted fishing permit for greater amberjack, Louisiana wants this for better data and in order to get started on state management for greater amberjack.

Louisiana submitted the original EFP proposal to get the discussion started. They want to, and will, work with NMFS and the other states on this. NMFS has already pointed out some concerns based on the recent South Atlantic red snapper decision, and so Louisiana

submitted the revised EFP proposal, I guess this morning, to address these issues.

Louisiana continues to want to work with NMFS and the other states to perfect it, and I urge the states to do that, to get together and submit their own EFPs, along the same lines as was done with Amendment 50 for red snapper. Working together, the states can definitively overcome the concerns for overfishing that are the big problem from the South Atlantic decision, and ultimately get to state management for greater amberjack.

Finally, it's a good idea to set up that red snapper allocation review working group that was suggested yesterday. As was suggested, the FES pilot study will apparently show a reduction of private fishing effort, but remember that's compared to the greatly increased effort shown by the initial conversion. A small reduction from a large increase is still an increase. That net increase has to be taken into account just to keep things the way they were, but, for any change beyond implementing the CHTS to FES conversion, we need to move beyond just basing allocations on historical catch.

Past catch data is getting to be very old. Things have changed a lot, and we've just seen a whole presentation about it, in the last decades. Technology, where the fishermen are, whatever, and the new catch data is constrained, in many cases, by allocations and catch limits that skew how much would or could be caught by the various sectors, or states, if not for those constraints.

New bases are needed to make allocation decisions, and biomass needs to be at least part of that. Where the fish actually are needs to be considered when deciding who is entitled to catch them, and many other factors are appropriate, all that economic and social stuff, along with the science, but we've got to move beyond this being just a defense for a decision made based on old catch histories and have it become what drives that decision. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Marino. Do we have any questions? Mr. Marino? Not seeing any, thank you, Larry. Next up online is Mr. Dale Woodruff, and then followed by Mr. Charlie Renier here in the room.

MR. DALE WOODRUFF: This is Captain Dale Woodruff with the Charter Boat Class Act. I'm also the president of the Alabama Charter Fishing Association, and I'm not at the meeting today, but I could close my eyes and picture the guy behind the podium has a suit and a tie on, and he don't own any federal permits.

He has no skin in the game other than getting told what to do, and he talks about Louisianians need, and it's not working for Louisianians. Well, I would love for five of the federal-permitted holders out of Louisiana to come to the meeting, or maybe to call in, or maybe to do some public comment, and so I don't know where we're going there, but, again, another guy stands up with no skin in the game other than take it away from a working man.

By the way -- All right. As far as the four hire data collection, SEFHIER, yes, we want it. Let's get it going. We've been trying to listen in, but we're also out here fishing, or fixing to leave to go fishing, and I see where we've got codified, and so let's get it passed. Let's get it going, the charter-for-hire. That's just another notch in the belt for the federal boats to be able to report and take some of that, I guess, speculation, or uncertainty, out of it.

Then, of course, no, we do not want states to manage our for-hire business. We are good. We're fine. We have a 147-day season. Talking about not catching our quota, you know, it's okay. We don't have to catch our quota, because we're catching plenty of fish, and things are good.

Business is good, and we need to wait for the stock assessment before we go any further, which five of you guys, or state people over there, or five states, are trying to take something away that's working for the commonsense, hardworking man, and Lord I'm tired of everybody up there talking about how they get calls, and they get text messages, or they get emails, and I haven't seen them. I guess you all shoot me one where somebody -- That a federal for-hire is actually in favor of state management. Anybody. Other than that, thank you all. You all have a good day.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Woodruff. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, Dale, thank you again. Next up, in the room, is going to be Mr. Charlie Renier, followed by Mr. Dylan Hubbard in the room.

MR. CHARLIE RENIER: Hello. My name is Charlie Rainier. Most of you all know me. I own several fish houses, and about sixteen commercial boats, and a lot of quota.

I'm here today to talk about something different. I'm here today to talk about the observer program that we've been dealing with. All of our boats are in the forty-foot range. Most of them are set up to hold three people on them, a captain and two crewmen.

When you all started the observer program and told us we needed to have an extra person on the boat, we obliged doing so. We made an extra bunk, put extra water on them, and extra food. They've told us, at the observer program, they've put more observers on the dock at my fish house than any other place.

In September of 2024, in Madeira Beach, we had a hurricane come through. I had seven feet of water in my fish house. It flooded it out. I lost everything there. Two weeks later, we had another hurricane come through. We lost everything, and we had a big board with all the observer stuff on it. Anything we need to do, we keep track of it. It's right there. The whole roof caved in. We lost all of that. We threw everything in the trash.

In December, I got containers and tractor trailers in there to run my fish company, and we let boats go fishing, to try and get money back in the community. Last year, I got a letter from the observer program that was fining me $2,500 for not having an observer on my boat in late November and early December. I didn't even know we had an issue.

I wrote them a letter saying, hey, we went through hurricanes. I called them, and the guy says, Charlie, don't worry about it, and the observer program is not going to force this. We're going to see what we can do, and write us a letter. I wrote a letter to him. Four months later, I got a letter back from the National Marine Fisheries, or NOAA, and it says, Mr. Renier, you've got thirty days to pay $5,200, or we're taking your permits.

Now, this is the kind of pressure that we're getting put under, and we're trying to help and do everything right that we can do, and I don't think that's fair, and I think you all need to do something about it.

We have no problem taking these people out there to gather information, and help us fish longer, but for them to do stuff like this -- I mean, when you all go through a government shutdown, you let the permits ride, and everybody fish. Everything keeps going.

We get two major hurricanes in two weeks, and they give us zero consideration. All we were trying to do is get the fishermen back fishing and get life back going. It took us four or five months to get everything back to normal, and I'm still fighting for insurance money two years later from the hurricane.

I'm just asking you all, you know, to at least talk to somebody,

and think about us on the other side, because we're all fishermen, and we're struggling day by day, and we're here to help you guys do whatever you need to make sure we got fish going forward.

I'm very happy with this whole program with the quota system. I've told you all numerous times. I own quota, I bought boats, and I'm happy with it. I know there's little nuances that all of us don't like, but my daughter is running my company now, and I want her to be able to run that company for the next thirty or forty years, and the only way we're going to have fish is to manage it, but we got to manage it together.

We’ve got to survive to catch the fish, and so you all need to think about helping us out, the most you can, so we can keep stuff going. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Renier. Do we have any questions? Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: What was the resolution on the issue with the observers with you?

MR. RENIER: What's the resolution? I sent them a check for $5,200, because otherwise they were going to take my permits, and so I'm here asking you all to help me.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Renier.

MR. RENIER: Thanks, guys.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Hold on, Charlie. We’ve got a couple of questions. Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Mr. Renier, thank you for being here, and so what was the communication process before the hurricane, and what's the communication process now, as far as notifying you when an observer -- When it is to be at the dock?

MR. RENIER: We get a letter in the mail that says basically we have ninety days to put an observer on our boats, which was September, I think it was, or it might have been October, November, December. The hurricane, the first hurricane, hit on September 24th, and the next one hit on October 10th.

We had all our letters up there on the board, and that one boat was able to go fishing, and, because he went fishing, I got fined, and I do not think that's right. I think they should have sent a letter and said, hey, because everything has been destroyed, we're

going to give you an extra ninety days, January, February, and March, and let's get it done, and the observer program thinks the same way. They said NOAA is the one that puts the fine. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: One more, Charlie. Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thank you, Charlie, for coming before us. Maybe we'll have my program staff follow up here on this, because we do administer the observer program, but I wanted to ask a question, and so we'll try to follow up on that, but another question about electronic monitoring, because I know that is a challenge to get observers on boats, and what's your view on whether that's a path we should consider, whether that's going to work?

MR. RENIER: As far as the captains putting stuff in the computer?

DR. WALTER: Like cameras on -- Like cameras on boats. What's your thought on that?

MR. RENIER: Well, here's my thought of that. We're already monitored everywhere we go. We're tracked like criminals, and we're not criminals. To me, if we're going to put cameras on the boat, that's such a huge invasion of privacy.

That's like would you all want cameras in your houses, your cars? I mean, we're already -- Basically, every time I climb on a boat, I’ve got an ankle monitor on. Everywhere I go, I'm tracked. I think it's all hogwash.

I think, if somebody is doing something wrong, you all catch them, and you punish them. I mean, there's drones, and there's boats, and there's planes, and there's everything out there. I think the whole tracking system and camera system is hogwash. That's just my example, and that's just me.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: I just want to mention that I feel exactly the same way about cameras on commercial boats. I think they're tracked enough, and I think that's too far for me. As a commercial fishermen I say this, and so I'm glad you brought that up, Charlie.

MR. RENIER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Renier, and so we’re going to go to Captain Dylan Hubbard, and then Mike Sullivan online.

MR. DYLAN HUBBARD: All right. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Captain Dylan Hubbard, central-west Florida, Tampa Bay area. I have multiple partyboats and multiple multi-passenger charter boats. I'm also here as a Tourist Development Council liaison for Pinellas County and the President of the Florida Guides Association.

As far as SEFHIER is concerned, I would like to see this program made final at this meeting, and back on the water implemented as soon as possible. We do not want to continue to be a part of an extrapolation from a small data sample. We want our federal permits operating under the same data collection program.

Our industry deserves this data program so that we can help improve recreational data and help this council to develop unique fishery management plans based on real science and data provided through a validated census-based approach and collection program. We now have that codified text we were waiting for, and so there's no reason to delay that final action at this meeting.

As far as delegation of the federal for-hire red snapper management to the states, I would not support the idea of delegating any federal for-hire red snapper management to any state. With FES calibration coming, and being on the eve of a new red snapper stock assessment, this is the wrong time to even consider changing the management of our federal for-hire recreational fleet.

Also, SEFHIER solves the issues that are the root rationale for even exploring this, and it's kind of ironic that the state pushing this idea is the same state whose fleet is the one who killed SEFHIER in the first place. We could have been using that data by now, using it to explore management styles that solves this root rationale for delegation.

I request immediate stopping work on, and tabling, Amendment 64 until these issues are resolved, with FES data calibration, the stock assessment results are implemented, and the SEFHIER program starts providing the data to properly evaluate this document.

The EFP for amberjack, personally, I'm a little concerned to see the size of the quota requested, and I share C.J.'s trepidation over its effect on the remaining Gulf states access. Also, this is a species that has failed rebuilding, three rebuilding, programs. We're finally starting to see some positive results out there on the water, and I would hate to see us not remain conservative and avoid fishing pressure around the time of year that's historically closed for the commercial fleet to protect this resource during its spawn.

As far as ecosystem, please continue work on the fishery ecosystem plan, and support the work of the ETC. I think it's really cool what they're doing, and I think it will really help.

Management flexibility for the federal for-hire fleet, I would love to continue to explore this, and I think we need to consider some guardrails here required to ensure we don't set precedent for last minute unexpected changes. What Andy mentioned in committee really resonated with me. He won't always be the person in that chair, and that concerns me into the future.

As far as mutton snapper and yellowtail goes, the fishing is getting better and better for both of these species. We're seeing that biomass expand rapidly, and its range expand spatially exponentially. It really concerns me that we're not being a little bit more aggressive trying to hold as much of that quota in the Gulf as we can as those catches come up.

Lastly, budget issues. If we're concerned about funding, and timing of funding, I would support you guys in having more meetings in Tampa. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Hubbard. Do we have any questions for Dylan? Not seeing any, Dylan, thank you. All right. We're going to go online to Mr. Mike Sullivan, and then followed by B.J. Burkett.

MR. MIKE SULLIVAN: Hello, Gulf Council. Thank you for letting us do the virtual comments. I am a multiple boat owner, multiple passenger boat, and also multiple commercial permits, IFQ holder. I'm in all sides of the game.

I'm strongly against the states taking our management. The federal -- I mean, you all have done a great job. I don't want to be chopped up among the states. I'm heavily in favor of getting the SEFHIER program going. You know, we've talked about it for a while. I know you're reaching out to us, to try to get it as streamlined as possible, and hopefully on the phones, to where we can, you know, get the data correct, and to where it's real-time data, where, as the fishing slows down, or the stock falls, like you can see this, you know, live.

Like, for instance now, you know, the size of the average fish has gotten smaller, and we definitely are catching less. You can see it to help adjust the quotas faster, and it will be a great thing. I definitely do not want any states managing our federal boats, and that's pretty much it for me for now.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, Mike, thank you.

MR. SULLIVAN: All right. Thanks.

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CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Next, we'll go, in the room, to Mr. B.J. Burkett, and then next, virtual, will be Harris Scruggs.

MR. B.J. BURKETT: Good afternoon. My name is B.J. Burkett, owner and operator of four charter boats out of Panama City, and also two which are dual-permitted commercial, and then also an IFQ holder.

The main thing I want to start with today is I was thinking real hard last night about what I think the council is. To me, it's pretty much two things. The council should be fishery first, and then stakeholders a very close second, and I feel like we're getting away from that a lot. There's a lot of stuff that's trying to make it way too complicated.

To start with here, the state management for the for-hire fleet, I'm totally against it. Just like I said to start, there's no benefit to the fishery here, and, when over 90 plus percent of the stakeholders are involved are totally against it too, that should tell you something.

There's one state, and that's Louisiana, that's pushing for it, and I don't know many people over there. I know three for-hire guys over there, and all three are also against it, and so I don't even think you all have the majority of your state for-hire permit holders that are for what you all are trying to do, and so why such a push? Is it political?

I mean, we're here for the fishery, and we're here for all the fishermen in federal waters. It shouldn't be about what the state wants. It should be about federal, and I have a very hard time seeing this go any further than it has. I mean, it needs to be stopped. Maybe the politicians in these states -- Maybe you all need to educate them a little more about what all the stakeholders want. Is this a benefit to the fishery, because it's not.

I mean, I'm out there two-hundred-and-something days a year. I fish all the way from 200 miles south of Panama City all the way to 350 miles west of it, and we have a decline in red snapper in the whole Gulf. You can't tell me any different. I've seen it.

The last six years, we've been fishing off Louisiana. Is the

fishing better over there than it is off of Florida? Absolutely it is, but it is still declining. The fish aren't as plentiful, and they're not as big, and it's just -- It's a declining fishery, and we really need you all to squash this whole idea, and I've wasted way too much time already on this.

Let's see. The EFP, I also don't agree with that for the amberjack. The reason is we fought and fought trying to keep the amberjack season in the late spring and early summer, and this was four or five years ago, and you all told us absolutely not, because it was a main spawning time, and now we're going to open an EFP in the main spawn? It don't make no sense. We're going backwards. The fishery is finally getting better, and we're wanting to change it. Leave it alone for a little while, guys.

We do have a huge shark problem. I know that's HMS, but you all could put pressure on them if you want. That's also helping decline our red snapper fishery. When I lose a box of fifty hooks in a day of fishing, because the sharks are eating the fish that we hook, that's a big problem, and so it's your problem. It's not just HMS.

Then the king mackerel, and we've been screaming at you all for years about king mackerel. They're in horrible shape, but we're not doing nothing about it, and I am for the SEFHIER requirements for the logbooks, and that's all I have. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Burkett. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you, B.J. Next up, we're going to go online to Mr. Bob Hilliard.

MR. BOB HILLIARD: Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, sir. Go ahead.

MR. HILLIARD: Okay. Just a few thoughts and observations from me today. I'm taking the opportunity of the rain, and listening into you guys, to go through all my grouper gear, which I haven't done in a couple of years, because we've got a longer season.

Being a private recreational fisherman, and a spear fisherman, I've seen more gags under the water, and so it seems like the regulations have really helped the population's rebound in west-central Florida, and so, on hogfish, overall, everything looks good. Being a diver, I've seen more small, and also larger, fish inshore than we've seen in quite a few years.

I'm just concerned about the increase in hook and line pressure,

since gags are just closed most of the year, and people have shifted to targeting hogfish in cooler months, and they do undergo high release mortality, and so I might suggest, just for your thoughts, of, for hook-and-line fishermen, decreasing the size limit to maybe twelve inches, since the fish don't survive typically. About half of them survive if they are released, even with descending devices or vented, and maybe make the take-home limit three inches instead of five, because three fish is plenty.

Then, on kingfish, we know something is going on in the Gulf, and I've seen the information on the Mexican issue, but I'm just concerned about the very efficient gillnet methods using spotter planes. You know, we've got warmer water in the Gulf, and I haven't seen the bait schools like you used to see, and so maybe there's not as much food, and so something needs to be done on that. That's all I've got today. Appreciate your time.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Hilliard. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, next up, we're going to go to Captain Bob Zales, in the room, and behind Bob will be Clay Shidler.

MR. BOB ZALES, II: Thank you, all. Bob Zales, Southeastern Fisheries. First off, General, thank you for the meal the other night. It was great. Thank you, council, for what you all did last night.

When it comes to SEFHIER, you all need to move that and get it done. The for-hire sector has been begging for that, to have that back again, for quite a while, and it will really help.

On the state takeover of federal permits, for over a year now, you all have heard, from the vast majority of these people, that they don't want it. You're trying to push something on an industry that's working and working fine. The old adage of if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and this system ain't broke. Leave it alone. Eliminate that amendment. Be done with it.

Well, B.J. mentioned something about political. I'm going to give you all just a brief history lesson, because most of you probably don't know this. In Florida, years ago, we had a Marine Fisheries Commission. The Marine Fisheries Commission, it was argued, had political influence that affected their decisions.

Recreational associations, and the media, pushed hard for a constitutional amendment to eliminate the MFC and put them in the FWC, with the sole purpose of trying to eliminate political influence on management decisions. This past May, we found that that no longer exists.

Politics took over in the State of Florida. Because of that process, I lost a very dear, long-term friendship with a staffer with the FWC. She no longer talks to me, all because of that political decisions.

You've heard from me in the past concern about politics playing with any state management decision. It's likely that this is going to come up again, maybe in Florida, or maybe in one of the other states, but politics has no place, in my opinion, and a lot of other people's opinion, with fishery management. You have to use science, and you have to use the economic and social information you have, and you have to use a management system that is based on science and good information.

Politicians will destroy everything out there, and so that's where I am on that. You need to eliminate any further discussion on this move to move in the state waters and leave it alone. 65 percent of the permit holders live in Florida. Over 90 percent have said they don't want this. I don't know of any for-hire person in Florida that supports this move, and so please stop it, be done with it, and quit wasting your time. You've got far more stuff, that's far more important to deal with, that needs to be worked on. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Zales. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, Bob, thanks. Next up online, Harris Scruggs, and, in the room, next up will be Richard Fischer.

MR. HARRIS SCRUGGS: This is Harris Scruggs. Can you hear me?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, Harris. Go ahead.

MR. SCRUGGS: Okay, and so, as a Gulf for-hire owner and operator, I strongly oppose the continued work on Amendment 64. Our industry has a proven management strategy with Amendment 40. Under Amendment 40, the Gulf's federal for-hire industry has fished accountably and sustainably for over a decade now, and the Gulf Council must soon address this issue found in the FES pilot study.

Reporting, I feel our industry, first, does not need a new management strategy, and it certainly does not -- Not one that interjects uncertainty into a system that has a proven track record, and so please stop the work and table Amendment 64. The fishing is not as good as it used to be. The king mackerel fishing is terrible. The sharks are terrible. Predation is terrible, and so that's all I have.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Harris. Do we have any questions? We do from Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Just one question. Harris, where are you located, and how many permits do you have?

MR. SCRUGGS: I'm in Panama City, Florida. I've got a one boat that's dually-permitted, commercial and charter-for-hire.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Harris? Not seeing any, all right. Thank you, Harris. Next, in the room, is Mr. Richard Fischer, and online is Clay Shidler.

MR. RICHARD FISCHER: All right, Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the council. Thank you all for allowing me to speak. Richard Fischer, representing Louisiana Charter Boat Association, and so I'm the guy representing the eighty-two, or most of the eighty-two, because, of course, you're never going to get everybody to agree on everything all the time.

Just to dispel a narrative that's been put out there in the last few minutes, we, as the LCBA, have done multiple rounds of polling. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has done multiple rounds of polling. There is overwhelming support in Louisiana for state management, and so let's please kill that narrative. It's just not based on any fact. Of course, everybody knows a guy who has an opinion, and they could be in the extreme minority, and that is the case right now.

Last time I came up and spoke, at the last meeting, I went through all of the talking points that I've seen on Facebook, and the public comments that are written on the internet, and I'm really not going to have time to go through those again, but I would just encourage people to go back and listen to what I said, and how I addressed all those concerns, and I would like to ask everyone here in attendance, that is going to speak against state management, to please give us some reasons that it's going to make it a little bit harder for me to combat.

I just would really appreciate the opportunity for us to continue having that open dialogue, and for us to have conversations based in fact, and what's actually real, and not a bunch of scare tactics.

I will address a couple of things that I heard yesterday. One was that, with state management, there's a concern that captains are not going to know when seasons are going to open and end, and not really have as much certainty, and I would say, certainly from

Louisiana's perspective, that we believe that our Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and our commission, would give our captains plenty of opportunity to not only comment on when the season should start and end, but let them know when it's going to start and end with plenty of other things.

I've heard that this is a taking, that it's taking from other parts of the Gulf. We're not trying to take anything. We're not trying to force anything on anybody. If you want to opt out, opt out. We don't want anyone to opt in who doesn't want to be part of it. This is just Louisiana saying that we feel we can do this in a better way.

The last thing that I would like to address is there was a council member yesterday who maybe kind of said the quiet part out loud, and I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but it was basically that there's eighty-two-ish captains in Louisiana that want this, and there's 1,300 Gulf-wide, and so why are we even talking about this, and it's not a big enough group to talk about.

That was met with thunderous applause from back there, and I've got to say that's what the tyranny of the majority sounds like, and that's what Louisiana has dealt with for a very long time here at the council, and all we're asking for is a fair percentage allotment to be able to manage our own fish.

I will give credit to that same council member who then said let's see if we can come up with a compromise that protects the rest of the Gulf, but makes Louisiana happy, and I would like to work with everyone in this room to work toward that compromise, and so thanks everyone very much, and I'm here to answer any questions.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Do we have any questions? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Fischer, and so your -- If I'm not mistaken, your charter fleet in Louisiana is currently allowed to red snapper fish, right, while the recreational fishery is closed, and is that correct?

MR. FISCHER: I'm sorry. Could you repeat that? I'm having trouble hearing you.

MR. WALKER: Isn't the for-hire open in Louisiana right now and closed to recreational?

MR. FISCHER: The state for-hire season, if you're referring to, which federally-permitted captains cannot participate in, closed

for a couple of weeks in August, and it's being reopened for Labor Day, but, as I mentioned, federally-permitted captains cannot participate in that. State charter boats, that do not have federal permits, can participate in that, and I've talked about this at this podium before, that that's a sticky wicket for us, because we represent both groups.

MR. WALKER: Well, that's not what I meant. The for-hire season is open through October, and am I wrong?

MR. FISCHER: That's the federal, yes.

MR. WALKER: So those guys can fish, and they didn't get closed when the rec did, which was kind of the idea of the program from the onset, is that the federal charter guys were not going to be -- They had their own season, and so, if the rec closed, they could keep fishing, and so I don't understand how that's not a good thing for your for-hire guys. They can still fish. In fact, they're the only ones that can still fish, and so this is working out good for them, as best I can tell.

MR. FISCHER: In that small period of time, of course, I would agree with you, but, from May 1 through the beginning of June, or soon to be through the Friday before Memorial Day, that is not the case, and it is only recently that the season has gone so many days into October.

There have been many instances since state management came onboard for private rec where the state season stayed open considerably later than the federal season, and so, while I do agree with you that, in the very specific instance you're bringing up, you are correct, but that historically, in the past ten or so years, has been a minority situation.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: We have one more, Richard. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Richard, thanks for being here. I don't really know how to ask the question, but I think the challenge before the council has been we're hearing this kind of overwhelming swell of opposition, right? You come to the podium and say you represent a majority of the eighty-two charter captains in Louisiana, but we hear from less than a handful of them typically in the council process, and so I guess I'm just maybe asking why aren't they showing up? Why aren't they being more vocal?

I'm on your newsletter, and I get it every month. You're asking them to show up, and comment, and I recognize you're here to represent them, but, if they really want this, we need to hear

from them, right? I feel like that's a really important, and I know you're here to represent them, but I just wanted to make that point and see if you had any thoughts on that.

MR. FISCHER: Their license fees, and their customers' license fees, go into a fund that pays for me to be able to be here, and represent them, and be here on behalf of that. With that said, I think I would say that -- This has been building for over a decade, and so this is not a new revelation that I'm saying, but I think there is a very low level of wanting to be involved in the process, based off of just kind of getting hit over the head and hit over the head and hit over the head for five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, and they feel that if they -- Even if they came in full force, that the process has shown that our side of the Gulf doesn't typically get what we want.

I think they feel a little bit abandoned, and disenchanted, with the process, and it's really just a matter of them wanting to not set themselves up to feel like they're experiencing failure again. I really think it's kind of almost like a protecting the way that they feel, but I do want to say that we've got a Louisiana captain, and I'm looking at him on the list right now, that's coming up later, and so hopefully we will see, you know, some comments there, some more comments later in the day, and some more comments in the emails, but I will say that, in my conversations with federally-permitted charter captains, there's just a lot of disenchantment in the process, and I would say that throwing them this bone would go a long way in building back a lot of that trust.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Not a question, but I'll just say thank you for that. I appreciate, obviously, that explanation. I think you can take back to them that the Regional Administrator is asking you to show up and participate in the process, regardless of the past history, and so we would love to hear from them, and I hope we can hear from them.

MR. FISCHER: I agree. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. One more, Richard. Mr. Geeslin.

MR. GEESLIN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Richard, what exactly is it about state management that your group finds so attractive? Is it the in-season monitoring, the adaptive management, the season structure, bag length, all the stuff that we've been able to realize through state management, the private rec in the red snapper? What exactly is it that your group is gravitating to?

MR. FISCHER: It's really all of the above, plus other things, too. It’s, you know, we believe in LA Creel in Louisiana, where we believe we have the best fish counting system in the country. Therefore, we don't feel that we need to be -- You know, like we're still locked in an MRIP system.

We're locked in a one-size-fits-all for the Gulf system, and not only for red snapper, but for other species as well, where, again, and it gets back to kind of touching on my answer to Mr. Strelcheck just now, that, when Louisiana captains have historically participated in the process, they seem to have felt that it's been for naught, that the wants and desires of other parts of the Gulf have kind of gotten their way on the season management there.

This would be Louisiana being in control of our own fishery, and our own fishermen, to be able to decide when seasons start, when seasons finished, and, as has been mentioned, there's eighty-two of these guys. We can fit all eighty-two in the Louisiana room at Wildlife and Fisheries in Baton Rouge and hash out what the season should be, whereas, through this process, there's 200 hours a year, and there's five meetings in each of the five Gulf states to hash this stuff out, and it's just not as easy to participate in this much larger process.

It's saying we can do it, and it would be simpler, and easier, and I've gone through all the other reasons too as it pertains to, you know, what we've heard in the past, and maybe it’s not so much happening anymore, but, in the past, multiple trips per day, two and three trips per day in other parts of the Gulf, you know, and we can't do that in Louisiana.

Weather, certain times of the year, we can't go out there. Like, of course, thank you to NOAA Fisheries for opening up the season in December of last year, but there were probably zero landings in Louisiana, because the weather is just not going to allow that to be possible, and so it's like little things like that that our fleet has noticed, that, if we were to be working with our state, we just don't believe that it would happen.

Kind of the match that has really set the fire in the last few years has been our federally-permitted guys who have this federal permit that's worth $30,000 or $40,000, whatever it is on the open market, and, of course, they all did not pay that, but that's what it's worth, and, because they possess that, when the state season is open, but the federal season is not open, they have to watch state charter boats catch more fish, have the season open earlier, and, in previous years, have the season open later, and, because

they're not burning as much fuel, they get to charge less, their customers.

These federal guys are like this isn't tenable for us, and there is a growing resentment, I would say, in Louisiana between federal guys and state guys, and a lot of that resentment is given to the state red snapper seasons, the state charter boats, and what I have repeatedly tried to get across to them is that you are resenting the very thing that you want, and if you can unify, and come to the Gulf Council, and come to NOAA Fisheries, and speak in favor of this, and get it this way, you're not going to have that concern anymore. You're going to get the same advantages that you feel that they're having, and so that's a multifaceted answer.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Richard. All right. We don't have any other questions. Thank you for your testimony. Next, online, is Clay Shidler.

MR. CLAY SHIDLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Clay Shidler. I'm the owner of Hang 'Em High Sport Fishing and Shrimp Landing out of Crystal River, Florida, and I own eleven federally-permitted charter boats.

I would just like to start by saying that I would really like to see the SEFHIER Program come to final action. That's been a big thing. I was on the AP for the SEFHIER program rebuild, and I really feel like we've got it going in the right direction, a direction that is going to be found palatable by the vast majority of our for-hire fishermen in the Gulf.

Secondly, I would like to say that I strongly oppose state management of for-hire red snapper. I don't really -- Obviously, we all know that we don't really need it, but, at the same time, after reading through Amendment 64, it does seem to be a possible allocation grab, and that's something that does scare me.

I respect Mr. Fischer and his opinion, and I do completely understand that, maybe in that state, there is a discernible difference between how the recreational sector and the for-hire sector work, but, short of Mr. Fischer coming back and getting his state management and then increasing the for-hire bag limit, he will always see that his for-hire sector is at some sort of disadvantage, based on the four-fish bag limit in state waters and the two-fish bag limit in for-hire waters, and that seems to be, you know, a crux of the issue for me on 64, and it is something that Mr. Fischer did not address, as to what they would like to do with that increased quota that they would like to see come out of state management and go their direction.

All that being said, I've communicated with multiple people in the for-hire sector in other states outside of Florida, and I have found very few people that are interested in seeing it come to pass. Thank you very much, and I'm happy to answer any questions that the council may have.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Clay. We have a question from Dr. Allen.

DR. ALLEN: Hi, Clay. I know I've asked you this before, but it's been a little while. Can you give us an update on your observations on gag grouper?

MR. SHIDLER: Yes, sir. Gag grouper are looking really good. I think we finally started to see some of the fruits of the shorter seasons. We're seeing a lot more small fish. I mean, obviously, the first short season, where we went down to forty-five days, and then fifteen, and we saw a lot of fish just in general, but we saw a lot of quality fish, and, obviously, those fish were not spawned in the closure, but, at this point in time, I would say we're seeing a lot of fish that are, you know, twenty-four to twenty-nine inches.

These are fish that have been spawned during the closure. They are the direct fruit of what the council tried to do here in shortening up the season, and rebuilding the stock, and I would say that you guys have done a fine job.

Although I live in what you could call the Alamo of gag grouper, maybe the last strong point of that species for the Gulf, we will say we've seen some pretty impressive numbers of fish, you know, in that twenty-four to thirty-inch class.

DR. ALLEN: Thank you, Clay.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Clay? I'm not seeing anything, Clay. Thank you.

MR. SHIDLER: Thank you, guys.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: We're going to go, in the room, to Mr. Mark Kelley, and next up, online, is going to be David Burlison.

MR. MARK KELLEY: So I wasn't going to spend no time on this state management, but it's forced me to have to say something, and so the fellow, Richard Fischer, he is the man, the representative, I hate to even call somebody's name, but he is the head of their

charter boat association, and so, under what he just said, he's a state employee paid by state funds.

I don't see anybody going to get up here and talk against their state when that's where your paycheck is coming from. He also made this statement about weather, and so, unfortunately, the rest of us in the Gulf of Mexico have a weather issue too with our days, and we've seen it big time this year in June and July and during the snapper season. Saying all that, I'm dead set against this state management.

I'm very concerned about the red sniper population. We're seeing a drastic decline in Panama City, and I think -- It's not the whole issue, but part of the issue is this shark situation has gotten out of hand. I mean, we have areas, four or five-mile-square areas, that you can't even fish, because you can't get nothing to the boat. They eat everything. I mean, the tackle expense has gotten crazy.

I want to talk a second or two about king mackerel. King mackerel in the Panhandle has disappeared. We've fished -- Both my boats have fished from the middle of May to now, pretty much every day except for weather days, and one boat has caught eight king mackerel, and one has caught six for the year.

Well, you can say we're not fishing for them. We drag lures coming and going offshore. Sometimes that's half the trip. We're fly fishing the whole time we're bottom fishing, and that's not many fish, where, on some particular days, we was catching that amount every day.

Also, in correlation to the king mackerel, that nobody is even questioning about, is our Spanish sardines, our herring, has disappeared, which has to be a reflection of what's happening to the king.

I know that I'm getting the buzzer up here, but another thing with the kings is I know we're talking about Mexico catching a big percentage of them, but I have always been told that the two stocks mix at the Mississippi River, and then our stock comes back down through Florida, and so, if this is the case, our stock shouldn't even have anything to do with the Mexico fishery.

I may be wrong on that, and I may be mistold, but, somewhere or another, our fishery went from good to awful. It was not a gradual decrease. It was an instant decrease. Lord, I'm for the SEFHIER program, too. Get it in gear, but I guess I'm done.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Kelley, we have a question from Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thanks, Mark. You're a veteran fisherman in your area, and you know the other veteran fishermen, and I know there's no way you can answer this, but, in your mind, do most of the kingfish that come up the side of the Gulf go back down, in your interpretation as a veteran fisherman? I know you don't have the exact answer for that, but what would your read be on that?

MR. KELLEY: Is it happening? I mean --

MR. WALKER: No, and are the same fish coming and going on the same side, and the Mexican fish are going down that side?

MR. KELLEY: So, from what I've been educated through this system, was the two stocks met. The western stock and the eastern stock met at the Mississippi River, or thereabouts, and let's just say the Mississippi River, and they do co-mingle there, and then they turn and return back.

We normally have a spring run. We catch them throughout the summer, and we always have a real good fall fishery. Up until -- We've had this discussion this week, and actually the last couple of days, somewhere around 2018 is where the turn started, and so, where we're at, if we catch live -- We call them herring, but they're Spanish sardines. If we catch live herring, that is a guaranteed bite, but you can't even catch a herring now, and haven't been able to catch a herring.

I'm not saying that our cigar minnows, which is something else we catch, haven't declined, but we are catching that, but the herring has disappeared, which to me seems to be an issue that -- It’s not being addressed, but now Raffield Fisheries, which is just in St. Joe, they -- I think they have two purse seines that they're allowed to use in Florida, and I would love to know how their catch history has gone in the last ten years, if it's been a decline in their catch.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Kelly. Any other questions? Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: Yes, and I just want to -- For the record, I think just to correct something you had said, Richard Fischer's association is a nonprofit. It's not part of the Louisiana state government, and so, I mean, you can differ on opinions. I just

want to be accurate. He's not up here to defend it, and so --

MR. KELLEY: Well, I know he walked out before I could say anything to him, but he -- So, saying that, okay, it's nonprofit, saying that. His money comes from license sales, correct? His paycheck. That's what he said up here just a minute ago.

MR. OSBORNE: His money, as I understand it, comes from the charter boat captains, their licenses, and not the state government. I mean, he can correct that.

MR. KELLEY: I don't know. I'm just going by what I thought I heard. Now, I'm not saying I ain't wrong, because I've been wrong once today, and so getting up here was the wrong thing to do, but anyway --

MR. OSBORNE: You're fine. I just wanted to at least correct it.

MR. KELLEY: All right. We good? Ms. Ballard.

MS. BALLARD: This isn't necessarily to you, but, for the rest of the people who are going to speak, let's stay professional. If you talk about somebody who is not here to rebuttal, to be able to come back with a comment to your comment, let's stay professional and not throw people's names out. You can talk generally, and you can give your opinion, but I think it's a little unprofessional to call people out by their name.

MR. KELLEY: I think I was kind of professional. I didn't trash the joker. I don't even know him, and so I wouldn't say nothing bad about him. I'm just saying what I thought I heard. Thank you. Have a good day.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Next up, virtual, would be Trenton Knepp.

MR. TRENTON KNEPP: Can you hear me?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, Trenton. Go ahead.

MR. KNEPP: My name is Trenton Knepp. I'm a commercial rod-and-reel fisherman and stone crabber. My parents have had longline boats for forty-some years now. My dad passed away a couple of weeks ago, and, every time I would see him, it seemed like he always asked is the council doing anything with getting the shares back into the hands of the fishermen.

He had -- One of his first boats he had, or his second boat actually, would have been worth a fortune with the quota, and he

sold it right before the IFQ system came into place, and it always kind of hurt him knowing that like he sold it not knowing what was coming.

Right now, we've got 55.9 percent of the red groupers have been caught for the year, and we're eight months into the year. There should be red grouper everywhere for lease, and, everybody you talk to, it's extremely difficult to find right now. We know there's a huge increase coming, and what I'm hearing is in a month, so if there's a massive increase coming in a month, and we're eight months into the year, and only 55 percent has been caught. Like who is hoarding it, and why?

We are once again being gate-kept by shareholders who are just holding it just for greed, and it's hurting the working man. It's hurting businesses. I just want to encourage whatever you guys have got to do to -- You shouldn't be able to own a share if you're not out there actively fishing. You are not a shareholder. You're -- You know, you're a hoarder. It's wrong, and that's all I've got for today.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Trenton. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, next up, in the room, Mr. Johnny Williams, and then we'll go back online to Josh Ellender.

MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS: Johnny Williams, Williams Party Boats, third-generation party boat operator out of Galveston, Texas. I also have some red snapper IFQ that I've inherited.

Last year, the for-hire sector only caught about three-quarters of their quota. The year before that, the for-hire sector only caught about three-quarters of their quota. This year, I don't think we're going to catch our quota either. As a matter of fact, we're in a gambling town, and I would be willing to bet any of you all voting members on the Gulf Council $1,000 that we don't catch our quota this year. Do I have any takers? What about if I give you two-to-one odds? Any takers? I'm good for it. I guarantee it. Exactly. We're not going to catch our quota this year.

Another council member -- At other council meetings, I've addressed the council and asked you all to change the red snapper year from January 1 to December 31 to April 1 to March 31. The commercial guys are going to catch their fish. If they don't catch them during the course of the year, they'll lease them, right at the end of the year, to somebody that will catch them.

The states have the capability of calculating how many fish have been caught in opening up their waters. Florida is going to open

up their waters again here soon. It's even going to extend into January. I'm not sure if that's going to go on this year's quota, or next year's quota, or whatever, but I understand they're going to have those state waters open until January 4.

All I'm asking for is give us a break. If we don't catch but three-quarters of our quota this year, basically what you've done is eliminated one season, one entire year, for our capability of harvesting these fish, and so please do what I ask and change the fishing year from April 1 to March 31. This is not unprecedented. In mackerel, the season starts July 1, and so it wouldn't be a hard lift to do this.

The second thing I want to point out is why we're not able to catch our quota. It's the fish aren't there. We've had a couple of things, I think, that are responsible for that. Number one was state management for the recreational sector, and the second thing was the increase in quota that everybody asked you not to do, which you all did anyway. I think we need to reduce the quota and get some sense back into the fishery.

Back in 2018, I addressed the issue with king mackerel. I said king mackerel were in trouble. Instead of reducing the bag limit to one, or maybe closing the season completely, you all increased the bag limit to three. It didn't work, and you could have done it again. The fish weren't there.

Now, on our twelve-hour trips out of Galveston, we caught our quota, or our limit, on our twelve-hour trips and our thirty-six-hour trips this year, and I think we'll probably continue to do so, but we're having to go farther and farther out each year, and the fish are getting smaller and smaller each year, and, like I say, I attribute this to the fact that we've given state control to the recreational sector, and we've increased the quota, and so I ask you not to include the for-hire sector in state management. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Williams. Do we have any questions?

MR. WILLIAMS: No gamblers in the crowd, huh? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Johnny. Next up, online, is Mr. Josh Ellender.

MR. JOSH ELLENDER: Good afternoon, everybody, and so I'll let you keep this short. I am in favor of state management for red snapper and for amberjack, if we can get that. It's been a long time

coming, and pretty much the socialistic program that we have in place now just doesn't work for everybody.

I mean, it works for the people who benefit from it, who are reaping the benefits from it, excuse me, but, for the people that it takes away from, it just doesn't work, and Louisiana is that. It doesn't work for us, and so I strongly recommend you all vote in favor of anything to do with state management, or at least giving us the option to opt in or opt out.

As far as SEFHIER goes, I'm in favor of reporting our catch, but I am not in favor of any kind of invasion of privacy, and so anything that tracks where exactly we're at, or any cameras onboard, I'm not in favor of that.

You know, most of those guys are very honest, hardworking guys, and, you know, they don't need to be tracked like a criminal, and so there's no reason for that. If you have an issue with people, you know, doing something illegal, then maybe beef up enforcement, but that's about it. Any questions?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Ellender. Do we have any questions? We do from Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: What kind of vessel do you operate?

MR. ELLENDER: So I used to manage Coco Charters, and that was a charter fleet of five Freemans that ran out of Cocodrie, Louisiana, but I no longer do that, and so I'm just -- I switched to inshore fishing now.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Josh. Any other questions? Not seeing any, we'll move on, in the room, to Mr. Jim Zurbrick, and next, online, is John Black.

MR. JIM ZURBRICK: Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak. Jim Zurbrick from Steinhatchee, Florida thirty-plus, almost forty, years as a charter and dual-permitted vessel, and, in the last twelve years, pretty much strictly commercial. I sold my boat fifteen months ago, and so now I'm strictly a dealer. I had been a dealer also, but I'm strictly a dealer.

The SEFHIER Program, quickly, I was at a council meeting when things have happened over the years where people have passed on because it never got done, and this is one thing that's been sitting out there for a while.

I know we did have it in effect, and then the judge had overruled,

you know, the SEFHIER Program, but this is a good time to get it going, and there's folks that would really like to see, that are older than me, that would like to see it get across the finish line again. We sure would.

Amendment 59A, we've got to move this forward. We really do, so if the 501(c)(3) can be moved quickly to where, in October, you guys can address this and make a final decision of passing it or not, and so I'm asking that staff, and I know it's probably a heavy lift, and there's a lot of work that has been done already, if we can get this thing moving and take it to final action in October.

Also, I know that the feds err on precaution. That's just the nature of it. I like that, because I've seen this fishery, for so long, have its ebbs and downs and whatnot, but still, under federal management, I was in a better place in my time in this fishery.

If I'm purely a recreational person, I can see that the state might be able to make me happier with some regulations on the recreational side of it, but, with the federal for-hire guys, they're looking to stay out of state management, and I support that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, Jim, thank you. Next, online, is John Black.

MR. JOHN BLACK: Are we here now?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, John. We’ve got you.

MR. BLACK: Okay, there we go. I am not in favor of state management. I think we need to continue to manage this fishery. We don't have completely accurate data now. If we can get SEFHIER back online, we can get good data directly from the people that are out there fishing.

You don't get information from somebody that's not doing it, or just a few, and try to figure everybody is doing the same thing, because there are different talent levels out there, and there are different people that fish different ways, and we need accurate data, and, the more accurate it is, the better we can know how many fish we have out there, what our stock actually is, and it will go a long ways towards the goal of managing this stock, which all of us in for-hire, and I don't care which side of the coin you're on, we all want the stocks to be healthy, because this is our livelihood.

I have a federally-permitted charter boat. I have two state charter boats, and I have definitely seen a decline in the red snapper fishing this year in Panama City Beach. It is not the same. The king mackerel fishing is not the same. We want good data. We really need good data.

We have too many days. We're fishing way too long. I know you guys never thought you would hear our industry say, hey, you gave us too many days, and you gave us too many days. If we don't catch our quota -- If the numbers were correct, and we had all these fish out here, and we just weren't good enough to catch them, and we got more days, great, but I don't think that's the case.

I don't think the fish are there that we say are there, because we don't have good data. We need the SEFHIER, and, if we don't catch that, let's not get more days. Let's go the opposite direction a little bit.

Let's not, you know, go crazy with it, but, all the way into October, I'm sorry. If I had a switch, I would switch it off. It's too much. We don't need that. It's not good for the stocks. Please table the state management. Please get our SEFHIER back online, and I'm going to give back the rest of my time. Thank you for having me today.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Black. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, John, thank you. Next, we're going to go, in the room, to Captain Scott Hickman, and next up is Brad Gorst, online.

MR. SCOTT HICKMAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Honorable Chairman Dugas, esteemed members of the Gulf Council, our amazing Executive Director, Dr. Simmons, and her really great staff, and I want to say thank you to our Regional Administrator, Andy Strelcheck, for getting our codified text out in time for a final vote.

I was going to talk about that first, that my kids were just in diapers, or getting out of diapers, and I was bringing them to Gulf Council meetings, when we started working on the charter boat electronic logbooks. One of them told us, here not too long ago, she's going to make me a grandpa, which is a great thing, and I'm really excited about it, but, thinking about the timeline of that, we went from diapers to making me a grandpa to get an electronic logbook. You know, we could probably do things a little faster around here.

I wanted to thank the council for moving forward with the fishery ecosystem plan and passing the FEI. That was a great piece of

work. It's going to be a big part of conservation moving forward, with all the water quality issues and all the environmental things we have going on in the Gulf.

I wanted to talk about what's going on with this taking over of Amendment 40, which, in my eyes, I've listened fairly openly. I don't see how it helps my fleet in Galveston, in Freeport, which is the second largest concentration of charter-for-hire federal permits in the Gulf. I don't -- I can't find anybody to give me the reason why it's going to be better, and I don't really see how it's going to help my state agency as well.

They're going to take more on, and it’s going to be -- It's just not a good thing, but, on the side of Louisiana, I'm going to say that Andy said a few years ago, hey, you know, the state directors, the folks on the council, need to be more innovative. They need to be more flexible, and so I give Chris and his folks some kudos for trying to do something different.

I wanted to float this out there, because I was thinking about this in the back, is the idea of a community-based rights-based management system, with a high level of accountability with an exempted fishing permit, I think would be a good way to do this, and something to look into. This blanket thing, it doesn't work. There's too many people that are against it, but a community-based rights-based management EFP would probably be a great idea.

Be innovative. I'm Mr. Innovation. I love thinking outside the box, and I think you're going in the right direction, and you’ve just got to be a little more innovative.

As far as the amberjack EFP, as Billy knows, I've spent a lot of time in his part of the world doing research with Dr. Gallaway and others, and you can walk across the Amberjacks over there. There's so many, and some parts right off of the upper coast of Texas too, and so you’ve just got to make sure that EFP is done right, and so thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Scott. We have a question from Mr. Geeslin.

MR. GEESLIN: Yes. Captain Innovation, Captain Hickman, I'm going to ask you the reciprocal question, or the opposite of what I asked Richard Fischer, and what is it about state management that your group there in Galveston, and Freeport, and even extending on down the coast to some extent, what is it about state management that you all are adverse to?

MR. HICKMAN: That we're adverse to? I could go into politics, and who I would like to see as governor that I could work with better, and some other folks at our state's DNR, but the Magnuson-Stevens Act gives us protections that we wouldn't get under a state management scheme that we have as federal permit holders, and the ability to come in front of this body and get our fisheries managed how we want, get our electronic logbooks, and, you know, the council process was set up, under the Magnuson Act, to protect the stakeholders that have federal permits like myself, and it works. I wouldn't have that under state management.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Not a question, and I just want to correct the record, and so I've got a whole team of people that makes me look good, and so really thank the two people sitting to my left, as well as my reg riders and team at home that are working hard on this rulemaking.

MR. HICKMAN: Thank you, all. I appreciate all the staff at SERO.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Captain Hickman? Seeing none, thank you, Scott. Next up, online, is Brad Gorst.

MR. BRAD GORST: Hello. Can you hear me?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, Brad. Go ahead.

MR. GORST: My name is Brad Gorst. I run a charter operation here in Clearwater, Florida. I guess we're -- Two permits, two boats commercial, and two boats Gulf-permitted and South Atlantic-permitted.

I've already been doing the SEFHIER Program under the South Atlantic permits, even though I could have let my South Atlantic permits go, but I felt that it was a viable thing to keep going with the data collection, and I think it's very important, and I hope that it can be used since the lawsuit and shutting down of the Gulf program. With that being said, the one caveat that I --

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Brad, we lost you.

MR. GORST: Can you hear me? Hello, hello, hello?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead.

MR. GORST: Sorry, and I'm not in a good area here. All right, and so, but, anyhow, I think that the Gulf reporting requirements

-- It would be a lot easier just to mirror what the South Atlantic is doing through the VESL app. It's very simple. That's kind of a no-brainer.

State management, I don't see any benefit to Aunt Mary from Toledo, or Uncle Joe from New Mexico, because, ultimately, these fish do not belong to the states. This is a federal resource These fish belong to the citizens of this country that are spending money. That's why we fall under Department of Commerce.

Whether you're from England and you come here to spend money, and, just because you go to whatever state it is you go to, I don't see that it is a viable option to these people, and so it just doesn't -- There's no -- The purpose of need has not been established, in my outlook.

The other thing I wanted to comment on was the CPUE on the red grouper stock. I think that it needs to be -- You know, first and foremost with the stock, the rationale being is, during the 2013 red tide event here on the west coast of Florida, management did not catch the decline in the stock as it was happening.

Thus, the effort shifting in geographically of the fishermen, and they moved further south and caught those fish, hence the collapse of the red grouper stock, and so, if we would had more real-time data collection, or catch the unit effort tracking, we probably wouldn't have got to that point where we beat the stock up, and we wouldn't be where we got, and thank you for letting me have the opportunity to speak, and thank you council staff and NOAA administrators. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Brad. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you again. Next, we're going to, in the room, to Mr. Buddy Guindon.

MR. BUDDY GUINDON: Good afternoon. Thanks for having me. Buddy Guindon, and I'm a commercial fisherman from Galveston, Texas. I'm also a charter boat owner, and a recreational fisherman, and so Scott got up here and pretty eloquently answered a question, but, for me, the reason I don't want state management is because they have not been a good partner in dealing with any of the issues that are important to the commercial side of our fishery.

We have had no collaboration. You get a three-minute period once a year to speak to the commission about your problems, and so we have no way to address problems with our state commission. We have the ability to come before you, and at least plead our case, and give you the information that we hold dear, and it's kind of

interesting how, at first, it was a couple of states that wanted state management, and now all of them.

I wish that, honestly, a program could be laid out that shows what you're trying to accomplish by bringing the charter boats into state management. I've heard, since I've been here in Louisiana, they've allowed the state guides to become federal water guides, and there's really no control at that nine-mile border, and so they're competing -- They're giving cheaper prices to the people, and the charter boats are being affected by that, and I know that takes place in Texas. They've caught a few of them, but there's a lot more that could be done. It's probably resource dependent.

Fixing the IFQ system, I really think that we never reached the point of consolidation on the original goals, and now we're trying to morph this into somewhat of a socialist program, where we give welfare to certain people that don't want to participate in the current program that has helped rebuild the fishery.

In Magnuson, it spells out that the people that are there for that rebuilding should be rewarded for that, and I think that some of the things that we're moving forward with are counter to that reward that was supposed to come with proper management and the shift to a new system that helped rebuild our fisheries, and helped build real viable fishing businesses in the Gulf, whereas, during the derby, we didn't have that. We had ten-day-a-month jobs for people, and we lived a life of risk.

Now that we have something, because I heard fifty years ago -- Fifty years ago, there was no one in this room arguing about a red snapper, because there wasn't very many of them, and, now that we have done a great job of rebuilding the fishery, we want to find a way to redistribute them. Do what your heart says and not what your state says. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Guindon. Do we have any questions? Not seeing anybody, thanks for coming. Next up, Alicia Paul.

MS. ALICIA PAUL: All right. Here we go. I'm trying to get through this. Good afternoon. Alicia Paul, Panama City Beach. I own two federally-permitted, dually-permitted vessels.

I’ve got a couple of hot topics I want to talk to you all about. Amendment 64, Amendment 64 is about the federal for-hire permitted vessels. It ain't got nothing to do with state management. You all are already managing your states. You know, you heard testimony from Louisiana, eighty-two operators, and how many of those operators are federally-permitted? Are we going to hear

from one of them?

When asked by Mr. Sanchez what kind of vessel you're in, it wasn't federally-permitted. Just how many of these permits are out there in Louisiana that want this, because, from what I've heard, over 90 percent, and it's overwhelming that we do not want it. We don't want to be dragged through the mud. It's a political fish grab. We don't want to be dragged through it.

If it's about the fish, you all, bring back Amendment 52. You all tabled it. Go back to working on it, the reallocation of red snapper, and throw 64 out the window. We don't want it. We have stability. We have transparency. We can come to these meetings. We can talk to you all, and we can get it done. With the states, we're not comfortable with that. We don't get that stability, and we don't get that transparency. Keep it right here. It's where it belongs.

SEFHIER, I've been a big advocate for it from the get-go. You know, let's keep that working. I would like to see it go forward. Pass it, please.

Louisiana EFP, I commend you all for wanting to get those jacks, but you said it's about discard mortality, reducing discard mortality. In my opinion, it's going to ramp up the effort. When you ramp up the effort, you ramp up the discard mortality. In June and July, the hottest months of the year, you're going to be throwing the fish back, and your discard mortality is going to increase. It doesn't make any sense, in the height of what we have been told is the spawn. I don't get it. It don't work, in my opinion.

You know, you've got some new data coming out with the red snapper stock assessment. I've got a feeling we're going to see a decline, and we're going to see some reallocation. You know, if you want your fish, and you want more, and the for-hire guys don't want it, take those numbers from the new FES data and you all work on 52. Throw 64 out the window. That's all I'm asking. Leave us alone. We don't want it. The majority of us, we don't want it. I haven't heard any testimony that does, other than from state water guides. That's really all I've got. Thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ms. Paul. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, Alicia, thank you. Next up is Chris Niquet. Okay. What about Larry Lemieux?

MR. LARRY LEMIEUX: Good afternoon, Gulf Council. My name is Captain Larry Lemieux. I own the charter boat Backlash, federally-

permitted out of Panama City Beach, Florida, a thirty-one-year veteran of charter fishing. I do own a state guide boat as well, to supplement my income.

First and foremost, like Alicia just said to the state management, we're federally for-hire, with a federal permit, and let's keep it that way. You guys have done a great job so far.

The SEFHIER program, definitely bring it back. It gives you real-time data from for-hire charter boats across the Gulf, from the tip of Key West all the way to Brownsville, Texas. We definitely need to keep that up.

My main concern today was two concerns. The first would be red snapper. Like Mr. Williams said before, and I don't think any of you took his bet, we have seen a decline in red snapper in the past five years. I've stood at this podium in multiple cities and said the same thing, as well as my constituents.

We're given a longer season, and we haven't met the quota in years. We're not going to meet the quota this year, and we ain't going to meet the quota next year. If the state goes in there, and the state is allowed to fish snappers all the way to 2027, and me, being a federal charter boat, I think I get to October 24th at midnight, and I'll close. We won't be nowhere near the quota.

If we're not catching a quota, and you're giving us more time every year, there is a problem. I mean, I'm a pretty well-educated fellow, but I know every year it seems like we catch less and less and less. Obviously, regional depletion, and, you know, I've seen you guys draw lines yesterday trying to geofence, as one gentleman said, and there's no geofences in the Gulf of Mexico.

You know, outside of nine miles, that's federal waters. That's what we fish in every day. That's what I'm required to fish in, unless I'm, you know, trolling for mackerel or something else, and we need to worry about federal waters. Keep the federal federal, and don't let the state be involved in anything, as far as I'm concerned.

Another thing we haven't really talked a lot about, because of the reef fish, is the king mackerel fishing. King mackerel fishing is atrocious. It has been. I am a king mackerel permit holder. I've held one since 2016, and I don't think I've sold a commercial kingfish since Hurricane Michael, and that October 10, 2018 in Panama City Beach, which wiped us out.

King mackerel, I don't know, and I've caught one keeper this year.

I'm going to say -- I wish I could say I fish 250 days a year, and I fish about 160 a year, and I've caught one legal king mackerel in the Panhandle of Florida this year, and I fish for them on a daily basis as well, commercially and charter, and I don't know what's wrong.

I don't know if it's pollution, if it's BP, if it's bait, if it's the acceleration of Gulf temperature, and I don't know what the answer is, but I'm seeing a decline in multiple species. Yes, the gags are doing better, and, yes, the jacks are doing better, and triggerfish is great.

King mackerel, red snapper, cobia, and cobia is another thing. You know, I know this is a reef fish, kind of this week, and, you know, I was on the cobia task force two years ago, and we barely see very few cobia, especially no keepers. I've got friends on the east coast, in the Carolinas, and they catch more ling than they've ever seen up there. Why? I don't know. I think it's food, cleaner water.

I think the Gulf, since the BP oil spill, has been polluted by BP, and I think it's been overlooked. I think it's reoccurring every time we get a hurricane, some major weather phenomenon that stirs up the Gulf, and I think, you know, it's detrimental to everybody.

I just -- I don't know what the solutions are, but, as a unit of all these guys and ladies back here, we've got to figure something out, and so we've got to do it fast, because we are in major decline.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Larry. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thanks for coming. Next up is David Johnson.

MR. DAVID JOHNSON: Good afternoon. I'm David Johnson. I'm a commercial reef fish longliner from Madeira Beach, Florida. I just came to the meeting to weigh in on the Amendment 59A. The exemption for non-profit and a shareholder, I really don't even understand what this is. How can you charge me to lease quota and you're a non-profit? That kind of is -- I mean, I'm just a dumb fisherman, and so maybe somebody could explain that to me, but I believe you should be a participant in the fishery, should have a reef fish permit in order to own IFQs.

I mean, this was designed to keep fishermen fishing, and it has spiraled into something completely different. It is what it is. It's already been done, and you can't undo it, but, from here forward, I think we should try and push it back in that direction.

On the Amendment 55, I have seen a lot more mutton snapper in places that I have not normally seen them, and so I think our mutton stocks are recovering pretty good. That's pretty much all I have to say. Anybody got any questions?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, David. Do we have any questions? Yes, we have. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: You said you're a longliner. I've been hearing some improvements with red grouper catch over the summer. I know you don't fish, obviously, during the summer, because of the turtle closure, but, you know, what are you seeing in terms of red grouper catches?

MR. JOHNSON: What am I seeing for catches in the summertime? Well, red grouper in the summertime, I have fished a few trips this summer. We are required to fish a little further offshore, and the red grouper bottom is -- There's a lot less of it in the depth that we're required to fish. We usually get a pretty good trip out of June and then July, and then August, you know, it's been fished by the entire fleet for a few months, and it gets a little bit tougher this time of year. We're hoping to have a big opening on September 1.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, David. Do we have any other questions? I have one. I missed it. Where did you say you fish out of?

MR. JOHNSON: Madeira Beach.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: No other questions, next up is Ms. Kelia Paul. I'm sorry. I skipped Scott. Scott Daggett.

MR. SCOTT DAGGETT: Good afternoon. My name is Scott Daggett, a longliner from Madeira Beach, thirty-nine years, owner-operator, and I know you guys aren't acting on it today, but I just wanted to give my opinion on 59A.

Having loopholes, and everything else, that's how we got to this point, and looking at your guys' graph on 59A, you can see where -- I think the red grouper, 40 percent of the quota is owned by eighteen or nineteen accounts, and I think, on the red snapper, 47 percent is by I think something like eighteen accounts, and so I think that's -- You know, if you're going to leave loopholes, what are we even doing here? We're just going to be back to the same problem again.

I mean, if you're in the game, you're in the game. I bought quota at the height that I lose on now, at $20 a share, but it doesn't

matter to me, because I'm going to be here. I fish my quota, but I lease seven-times more than what I own, you know, and I think, if you leave loopholes in this, you're just -- We're just wasting our time here.

About the summertime fishing, usually for us, you know, my boat goes in the summer, but I don't run it. I've got a young kid that runs it, just because it's brutal. You get one good trip out the summer, maybe in June, and that's working from the edges down to the Tortugas, all my good spots, and, other than that, it's horrible, but, you know, that's -- We're out there for the turtles, but that's that. All right. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Scott. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, next up is Kelia Paul.

MS. KELIA PAUL: For real this time. Good afternoon. My name is Kelia Paul. My family operates two dually-permitted charter vessels out of Panama City Beach, Florida, and I'm also representing the Panama City Boatman's Association, which I'm not paid to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I have been absent for a while. I have been kindergartners, and raising one, and so, if some of that carries over in my comments today, I'm going to apologize in advance.

First, SEFHIER. We strongly support this program moving forward. We supported the original program, and we're extremely frustrated of the years of work lost through litigation. Move it forward.

Amendment 64, this is where the kindergarten teacher comes out a little bit. Just because you don't like what's happening in your sandbox, it doesn't mean you get to climb into your friend's sandbox and start rearranging theirs. Amendment 40, being a federal for-hire, we have our own quota and with that predictability, sellable seasons.

We book red snapper trips months in advance, sometimes years. That predictability and stability matter to our businesses. Our sandbox is working. We want to stay federally managed, and you've heard federal for-hire operators come before you again and again, asking you not to do this. The fleet has not been asking for state management. We're asking you to stop.

More importantly, I cannot understand why we would even consider making this change right now. We're approaching a new red snapper stock assessment, and we're dealing with major changes in

recreational data, and this council is already discussing decision points for red snapper catch limits and allocations.

We don't know what this process is going to mean for this fishery yet, and why would we fundamentally restructure who manages a federal for-hire sector in the middle of all that, especially when what we're seeing on the water should concern this council.

I've been in this industry for approximately two decades, but I have somewhat of a unique perspective. Part of my job is being on the dock every day, all day, booking trips, talking to people, helping customers, supporting my business, my boats, but I don't just see what my boats bring in.

I get to see the entire fleet, and what I see is concerning. I'm seeing captains with thirty years of experience come back from all day trips without limits. These people did not suddenly forget how to catch red snapper. and it's not happening in isolation. For the last few years, the federal for-hire fleet has left a substantial portion of its annual catch target unharvested. We watched the stock rebuild. We remember when you couldn't get away from it. That's not what we're seeing today.

I don't know what this new assessment is going to tell us, and I'm not going to pretend that I do, but I do know that this is a terrible time to dismantle federal management structure that our fleet wants to keep. Our state already manages the private recreational component, and we want to remain federal, and so apparently I'm going to finish my first council testimony after teaching kindergarten the same way I spend a lot of my days.

Amendment 64 needs a red day. Stop. Go back to your seat, and leave your friend alone. Please stop work on Amendment 64 and keep the federal for-hire fleet under federal management. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Kelia. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you, Ms. Paul. Next up is Mark Tryon.

MR. MARK TRYON: Mark Tryon, a commercial fisherman, Gulf Breeze, Florida, bay boat fishery and primarily red snapper. To start with, I'm glad I came here today. If you remember early on in the testimony, Captain Charlie was saying what happened to him regarding the observer program, and being fined, and it just so happens that, in this quarter, I was selected by the observer program, and, for various reasons, I haven't run any trips yet. I had some boat trouble, and then I've had a little medical issue going on.

Basically, what he said is, if you run just one trip, or two trips, and you don't meet the qualification of the three trips, that they're going to automatically generate a fine being sent to you, and so, right now, I'm going to consider not running any trips until October 1, to be safe, and the fishing is not good anyway at the moment in my particular area, as I've discussed numerous times before.

On to the 59A, and I am not opposed to this permit requirement by any means. We used to have a permit requirement back in 2007, when this went into being, okay, the IFQ system, and so just a few things to consider though. You know, when you talk about unintended consequences, and potential pitfalls and problems, I think that requiring permits is going to increase the demand somewhat for permits, which is going to increase the price, and that could make things more difficult for the new entrants.

On to reclaim shares, and I haven't heard anyone talk of this yet, but, if you reclaim the shares, first of all, is it legal? Second of all, are you going to compensate shareholders? Third, what are you going to do with the shares once you reclaim them? In other words, are you going to retire the shares? Are you going to auction them off? Are you going to redistribute them, or, similar to the unclaimed shares, now are you going to do nothing, and they just sit there?

Finally, kind of relating to this, I think that the loan program needs to be reformed, and it would be nice if that could be moved along, and expedited, and implemented, so, if there are these more shares coming online to be sold, that the new entrants, and maybe the smaller operators, can get a loan and afford to purchase some equity into the fishery.

The last thing I want to say is if we could move the snapper stock assessment along and expedite it, because, if you get in a situation where you're trying to sell shares, or buy shares, you need that information of where we're going to be in a couple of years, as far as the stock, to determine the value of the shares, and that's it. Thank you.

DR. BANKS: Thank you. Do we have any questions? Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Mark, thanks. One thing you mentioned is your concern about not running a trip for fear of a fine, and we don't want anyone to not run a trip for fear. I mean, we want people to be fishing, and so what I would like to do is make sure you talk to our observer program people.

Really, I think all you need to do is call in, but I want to make sure that, to confirm that, that, if you call in, even if you don't meet the requirements, it's not going to be a violation, but I don't want to quote that right now. I just want to make sure that you're in conversation with the program, but that you're not fearing running a trip.

MR. TRYON: Right. He didn't generate fines. He incurred, and came from somewhere else, where they're just checking the records, and, you know, he didn't run enough trips. He didn't run the three trips, for whatever reason, and that was my understanding of talking to him after he spoke, but, yes, and I'll be in touch.

DR. WALTER: Yes, and make sure to reach out to Scott Leach in our observer program, and just call in.

MR. TRYON: I've already talked to them a couple of weeks ago, telling them where I'm at, you know, and I've got like a shoulder trouble, and I've got an MRI that they're going to tell me where I'm at on Monday, and so, based on what they tell me, then I'll know if I'm good to go fishing or I've got to go under the knife.

DR. WALTER: Okay. Well, get better. Take the trip. You know, just call in, and I think we can make sure you're in compliance, and we want people to be fishing.

MR. TRYON: All right.

DR. WALTER: Thanks.

DR. BANKS: Any other questions? Thank you, Mark. Mr. Billy Archer.

MR. BILLY ARCHER: Good afternoon, members of the Gulf Council. My name is Captain Billy Archer. I'm a third-generation fisherman from Panama City, Florida, a dual permit holder. I'm celebrating my 51st year as a charter captain this year.

I would like to thank the Gulf Council for its efforts in getting the SEFHIER program back online as soon as possible. I have no problem if I were to be selected to provide economic data required by the council for all alternatives concerning my fishing activities while underway on a daily charter trip.

With the current technology available, our industry deserves to have our own data program, so that we can work with the council to develop fishery management plans to suit the needs of our customers

and our businesses. We want all the federal permits to operate within the same data collection program. This will be paramount in dealing with data uncertainty.

The ugly fish, Amendment 64, I strongly oppose the continued work on this amendment. At the Reef Fish meeting yesterday morning, Captain Ed Walker presented the best public testimony on why the council shouldn't pursue it, and why our industry doesn't want it.

We currently have Amendment 40. Sector separation was passed over a decade ago and has provided accountability and sustainability for our fleet. How is that only eighty-two federally-permitted operators out of Louisiana can totally torpedo a program that over 1,200 federally-permitted operators like and want to keep?

Please table Amendment 64 until you have the new red snapper stock assessment in hand, along with the recalibrated FES for the Science Center, and hopefully SEFHIER will be available to you as well, giving the council another great tool to make better assessment decisions concerning our industry.

All right, and so, concerning the Louisiana EFP concerning amberjack, my question is to Captain Ed Walker and our Florida council members. Can we request an amberjack EFP with gag grouper? I mean, I would love to catch them and put them in the box. It would make the box look great.

Then my last comment is it appears that Louisiana state guide boats have created this problem with the federally-permitted boats, by doubling the bag limits, and the federal boats have to -- Are held to more restrictive bag limits, and so that's a no brainer right there. Who are you going to go fishing with if you can catch four or you catch two? Thank you for your time.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Billy. Do we have any questions? I don't see any. Thank you. Mr. Clarence Seymour.

MR. CLARENCE SEYMOUR: Good afternoon. Captain Clarence Seymour, charter boat SYL, twenty-nine years, federally-permitted, Biloxi, Mississippi. I live in Ocean Springs, across the bridge.

Since Amendment 40 has brought my business back to numbers that -- I was about to go under post-Katrina, which smacked us pretty good, and so Amendment 40, under sector separation, has been probably the biggest lifeline for my business, and our industry here on the Gulf Coast, because I lived the nine-day season.

We all went through that, and struggled through it, and now we've

got 149 days. I can't fish them all. We don't have really enough tourists to put that many people on our federally-permitted charter boats, here in Biloxi anyway.

So, as far as Amendment 64, I oppose Amendment 64 for regional management for federal for-hire charter boats. Well, number one, the map they had out yesterday is the same thing that the private angling sector had with Amendment 50. Here goes the line straight down Chandelier, and we’ve got a line over here out of Alabama.

I don't think our coastline is, what, seventy miles or so, and so I can go forty or fifty miles down, and I'm in Louisiana, and I can go forty-four miles, and I'm fishing off of the farthest west Alabama dumping grounds, and so here, where we're at, is we're pretty well in the middle of this line, and so right there is a downfall with Amendment 64, the way they’ve got this document.

The second thing is 0.07 percent was the Alternative 1 on allocation. It’s even worse than we got in Amendment 50 as a private angler, and I just -- Then the other document, that was pulled up from the last meeting, that showed that Mississippi's historical catch, like in 2024 and 2025, was like a 20,000-pound swing, and I don't know if that come from MRIP or telephone call-ins or whatever, but I think I've been called twice on the new Mississippi Creel.

I heard some of my captains back there say they've been called pretty regular, but maybe I was offshore, and I don't know, but, this telephone call-in, you have to go back, go back and look at your weekly thing. I mean, I get them in the mail through the wintertime also, but so I still have some doubts with the creel deal, and so I'm just not too into that, but the Tails ‘n Scales that we're doing, we're doing a really good data collection with Tails ‘n Scales, and, you know, I stress to anybody and everybody, private anglers and charter-for-hire, that it's very important that we, you know, collect data correctly, and so I’m just against regional management for federal for-hire. Any questions?

DR. BANKS: Thank you. Any questions?

MR. SEYMOUR: Thank you.

DR. BANKS: Hold on. We have one from Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: Clarence, thanks for coming. I appreciate your remarks on the amendment. I am -- As someone who sits on the advisory commission for Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, you know, we do meet monthly, every third Tuesday, and

we would like to hear from folks like you coming by that meeting to talk about your issues with the state management, or any other things, and are you aware that we do those meetings once a month?

MR. SEYMOUR: Oh yeah. I've been there several times. As a matter of a fact, I came in and give you all's team with the reef fish program a pretty good attaboy a couple months ago, when you all had the mold problem, and we were up at the Biloxi City Hall, which I highly applaud their work in our reef development.

I know we got a lot of stuff fixing to go out, and I also came, a couple of years ago, over the cobia situation, while we're not following the federal guidelines, and Trevor gave a great presentation on cobia, and he kind of agreed with me that two cobia a person is still extensive for a Mississippi angler under a three-mile boundary.

There's a lot of enforcement problems too, with tournaments and et cetera, that we have here in town, but I sure will make it a point to start showing up on Tuesdays, and maybe speak out in public, and let you all listen to some stuff that we’ve got going on in that area.

MR. OSBORNE: In the future, when you give an attaboy, don't just tell Rick, because Rick doesn't tell us how much you appreciate the work that we're doing, and so --

MR. SEYMOUR: Yes. Thank you. Appreciate it.

DR. BANKS: Thank you. One more from Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: It’s seeing you again, Captain. I wanted to ask you, and, in the past, you were involved when we were doing sector separation, and you were heavily involved, and you were very involved with the entire fleet here in Mississippi, and so my question to you is how do the rest of your captains feel in your fleet about Amendment 64? Do they want it or not?

MR. SEYMOUR: There's none in our fleet. The fleet shows twenty-four permits on the paper for addresses to Mississippi, but I think it's somewhere around fourteen or fifteen, and, my son, he’s a new participant. He just got a federal permit for his new boat, and we really don't have an association anymore, any groups.

They have a group, but we're not involved in that, because you’ve got to be in the random drug program to be in the Mississippi Charterboat Association, and so we pretty well all dropped out of that, but -- That's the truth.

That's the stipulation, but we're trying to get a group back together called Mississippi Reef Fish Alliance, which is with the fifteen charterboats here in town, which we're just off the ground as a bunch of guys doing it, but, no, none of them has spoke that they've said, oh, this sounds like it's a good idea, but I don't believe so, none of them.

DR. BANKS: All right. We have --

MR. WALKER: So, based on what you just said, would it be relatively safe to say that not a single Mississippi charter operator is interested in this program, to your knowledge anyways, like none of them?

MR. SEYMOUR: That's correct. None of them.

MR. WALKER: Thank you.

MR. SEYMOUR: Thank you.

DR. BANKS: All right. Thank you, sir. Hold on. General Spraggins. Last one.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Well, he just brought up something, and so I've got to ask a question. If Mississippi opted out, and stayed in the federal program, do you have a problem with Louisiana doing what they would like?

MR. SEYMOUR: To speak truthful, yes, I do. Number one, the four-fish bag limit, we could never -- Your staff knows that we could never sustain that kind of fishery, no matter what. I was in -- I've had a federal permit since 1998, and it was all a fellow could do, or lady, and we have women that is fish captains, that could get a limit with captain and crew out here in Mississippi waters, and we also had oil rigs back then.

As of now -- I just remember the day when four fish per person, and I'm just saying that I was one that would -- We would have three or four fellows on the boat, and we went to the market with what we didn't want to eat, and we sold them, but you can't do that no more, but that was back in the day. Anytime you get way too much more limit than an individual needs, I think it can be really troublesome for -- Any angler can actually try to become a commercial fisherman, and pay for the gasoline.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: One other question. You know, you do commercial, and you do have a federal license, right?

MR. SEYMOUR: Yes, and I didn't -- We had the hook-and-line back in the day.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Do you still do federal today?

MR. SEYMOUR: No, and I'm just federally-permitted for-hire.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Right, but are you having any trouble catching your fish in Mississippi?

MR. SEYMOUR: I do -- No, and we're getting our twelve, if we've got six people. Like Jay and them yesterday, they had -- They needed forty fish, and Maddox said they only caught thirty, and so they struggled a little bit yesterday, but, you know, every time the water gets hot, and we fish the fish havens, it -- You're going to have a struggle bus in that fishery, you know, but, if you've got the dolphins on you, you're not going to get a bite, and so it's always -- The water is calm, and so, as far as me so far, yes, I've had a limit every time I've came back.

DR. BANKS: Okay. Thank you very much. Ms. Susan Boggs.

MS. SUSAN BOGGS: Good afternoon. My name is Susan Boggs from Orange Beach, Alabama. I am a recreational angler, president of Real Surprise Charters and Marina, and the proud mother of Captain Elizabeth Boggs. We own a six-passenger boat, Islander, and our headboat is Reel Surprise. Each boat has a Gulf reef fish permit and a Gulf coast migratory pelagic permit.

We are very familiar with the reporting of data. Since we purchased Reel Surprise in 2002, we have had to report. Over the past twenty-four years, we've had to report for five other headboats that we have bought and sold. We are in support of the Gulf for-hire data collection program. Reef Fish Amendment 64 is not one that we support, and the EFP for amberjack that Louisiana has applied for is not one we support.

The oath of office that each council member takes states in part, quote, "promise to conserve and manage the living marine resources of the United States of America for the greatest overall benefit of the nation", end quote.

The charter-for-hire fleet and the commercial fleet provide access to not only the residents of our respective states, but also to those from other states who either vacation along the Gulf Coast and take a fishing trip or live outside the Gulf States and eat seafood in a restaurant.

In the presentation that Emily gave celebrating fifty years of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Warren Magnuson emphasized regional management within a national framework and Ted Stevens, quote, "asserted those closest to the fisheries are in the best position to make decisions", end quote.

Look behind me today. These men and women are closest to the fisheries. These men and women, myself included, rely on the health of the fish stocks for our livelihood.

I'm not out on the water every day, but I am on the dock every day. I see the fish that come to the dock. I talk to the charter boat captains and their crews, the captains, owners, and crews of private recreational boats, and I hear what they have to say. I'm not going to put words in their mouth, but I do encourage them to come to the meetings or comment online. You can lead a horse to water, but you certainly cannot make them drink.

In 2013 and 2014, sixteen boats in 2013 and eighteen boats in 2014, participated in the Gulf Headboat Collaborative. It was a two-year exempted fishing permit allowing these charter boats, or headboats, excuse me, from all five Gulf states to participate and catch red snapper and gag grouper 365 days of the year.

We had a quota, much like that of the IFQ, but we didn't own the fish. Boats were threatened to be burned down. Tires were threatened to be slashed. You couldn't imagine all of the things that people threatened against us because we had something they didn't, and what does that tell you? We had something they wanted. Been there, done that. I understand change. Change is inevitable. Change is hard. I know. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thanks for being here, Susan. Next up is Mr. James Bruce.

MR. JAMES BRUCE: Good afternoon, Council. James Bruce, commercial snapper fisherman. I thought I would never have to come to a meeting like this again. It all comes down to you all want a permit to own an IFQ share.

With the executive order, I thought it would pass kind of quick, and then, what I heard yesterday is you all wanted entities to join this -- That non-whatever entities to join it, and that don't have no sense.

The last executive order we had, you all know what happened? It

put us in this position we are in right now. It's twenty years next year we're in the IFQs, red snappers, and it's going to be, what, sixteen years we're in the grouper IFQ.

Okay, and we're going to go back in time. You can't fix something unless you know what got wrong with it. We had two referendums for the red snapper IFQs, two, one to allow us to have the IFQs and the second one to approve it.

I voted for it, and I voted for an IFQ that was ran by Alaska from 2007 to 2010. It was called the fisherman assignee with a little endorsement, which worked very well. In February of 2008, the Alaska Wildlife and Fishery put them on notice, because they wanted to know who was going over, and they wanted to know who owned the shares, this and that.

Okay, and so the response to that was, in the October meeting of 2008, they changed everything. They took our endorsement away and added a vessel account. You know how? By a referendum from the grouper IFQs, and they changed our red snapper IFQs completely, and they took the fishermen's away, and started with the vessel.

You know how I found out about that? I unloaded my fish, and, on the way home, they called me. The fish buyer said, where's your vessel account? I said, I don't know, and I've got three IFQ accounts. They said, you need a vessel account, and no I don't.

I voted for something, and so, in other words, four years later, they changed my IFQs completely, which it says in the regs that it was supposed to be only -- It had to stay the same for five years. That should have been a referendum on that. I did not get the vote on that. They took it away from me, and that is not right, period, and so, if you all want to put -- To listen to whoever you all get you all's industry information from, go ahead. All you all going to do is make me richer with my IFQ shares, and everybody is in.

As far as the states taking over, I think Louisiana should take the commercial over, if we're going to go like this and play games, and that's all it is. They're coming off of Louisiana and catching all our fish, period, from Texas. They come from Orange Beach. They come off of Fourchon and catch our fish.

As far as the observer, unless that changes too -- We're supposed to get a certified letter in the mail, and not somebody calling you on the phone. It could be anybody on the other end of that damn phone. You don't know who the hell it is. They called me two times, and I asked them where's my certified letter, unless

that changed too.

You know, they had to get notarized, and everything I'm saying, God, it's true. I will give y'all a copy of every CFR there is, and the minutes of the damn meeting that it went down, and it was done mostly internally, and so it could be fixed without all this show, and you all could worry about taking care of our fish, because, the trading, that's where it's at. It's internally. I know I'm out of time. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Bruce. Do we have any questions? I don't see any. Thanks for coming, James.

MR. BRUCE: If you give me your email, I'll give you all all the regs.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Our emails are online for the public, James. Thank you. Next up is Mr. Ken Haddad.

MR. KEN HADDAD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ken Haddad with the American Sportfishing Association. I'm out of Monticello, Florida. I'll cover a few topics in the few minutes.

First, on the mutton and yellowtail snapper, we're good with the preferred alternatives moving forward. We also support the discussions going on with the modification to the red snapper private accountability measures, and we are disappointed in the MRIP-FES pilot study results, since we didn't get any results. It seems to send a pretty interesting message, and I didn't quite get it.

On the decision point discussions that you're starting for red snapper coming up, as noted, the new stock assessment is expected to alter estimates of participation between the commercial and rec, between the private rec and for-hire, and between the private rec at the state level, and that's a pretty big wow.

When the catch recommendations are released, if it goes as it has with other species, we can expect a reduction in quota and changes in allocation, which I think, as Dr. Froeschke was trying to point out yesterday, is going to be a very fun task for the council. We support you getting ahead of this by starting a working group to really immediately begin tackling this upfront, and not waiting, and so I think that's a good move, if you will go through with that.

Then we would also like to see Emily begin providing a series of council presentations that break Dr. Froeschke's presentation into

parts and explains what to expect. Not that that was bad, and it was -- A couple of people understood it.

Then, finally, don't forget that there is an allocation policy. I think Mr. Strelcheck was the only one who mentioned that yesterday, that you have a policy, and process, that we hope you'll kind of dig out of the records, and you may need to use that.

Then, finally, thanks for the last fifty years. You've come a long way. I think I've almost been around that entire fifty years, and so it's a little scary for me, and so thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Haddad. Do we have any questions? I don't see any. Thanks, Ken. Next up is Captain Jim Green.

MR. JIM GREEN: Hello, council. Captain Jim Green, president of DCBA and CFA. Kesley, Ed, Anthony, congratulations on your reappointment. We're glad you're back. We're lucky to have you.

SEFHIER, we've come a long way. The majority of our industry has worked hard to get final action. Lots of discussion with our peers and the APs around this table, and it's time. Please give us the opportunity to provide not just data, but stewardship, and not just be part of an extrapolation, but a provider. Please move forward and pass the modifications document.

On the exempted jack permit, lots of concerns here. Harvesting during the spawn, requesting double the average allocation poundage in the last six years, requesting a season as long as the longest in the last six years, and what are we testing? Double the allocation in a two-month season, it would be hard to not call it a success from the start, just by getting approval, and so lots of concerns, biological and in precedence.

When it comes to state management, after watching yesterday the council's discussion on 64, it's clear that this is truly -- What this is truly about, it's about let us move fish, and let us get the fish that we've caught, and turned in on our own data system, and let us move fish over, because that wasn't enough.

It takes a tremendous amount of fish from a state that has a large amount of anglers that utilize charter and headboats and moves it away from that state. The numbers in the added alternatives conveniently give the states west of the river a huge increase in allocation, the two states in the middle a nominal increase, and guts Florida.

You're essentially setting up a biomass-based fishery without

saying the words. You're dangling carrots in front of the other states at the expense of three-quarters of the industry, not to mention everyone is kind of ignoring the fact that these anglers, and the mode they use to access the Gulf, are under federal permits, Gulf-wide permits.

Whenever you begin to have different access levels because of geographic locations, you're discriminating, and that violates the National Standards and the very act we just celebrated before this public comment.

The council has a lot of work to do. This council must deal with the FES issues, a new stock assessment results, not to mention the years of testimony by our industry saying that there's a decline in red snappers, and now it wants to bring 64 in the mix, an amendment that is not intended -- That, intended or not, will wreak havoc on a management strategy that has worked for the federal for-hire industry in the Gulf. It has provided sustainable access, and it has kept our industry accountable.

Gulf for-hire fishermen from south Florida to Texas has shown up to these council meetings in-person, virtually, and through emails unequivocally opposed to the further development of this amendment, and, to be honest, it may be something we want to revisit after all the dust settles and we get through what this council is facing the immediate future.

We as an industry have looked at things in the past I didn't think that we would consider, but we did, and we have looked at this, and we do not want it, and so we ask you to stop work, and I'm closing up, Mr. Chairman. We ask you to stop work and table Amendment 64 indefinitely, and, at a minimum, do it until the dust settles and our industry has our own data to make highly-competent decisions on the way we'll be managed in the future.

If I could just add one more thing, something got in my craw today that I heard at this podium, and a lot of us devote a lot of time and effort to educate ourselves within this process, and, to be disenfranchised in the process, and not participate at all, and expect to be rewarded with your wants, that sounds a little childish to me. Put in the work if you want to be considered a good partner in management, and so thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Green. Do we have any questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I just wanted to double check the record here, that you support Anthony and Kesley being reappointed, but not Ed

Walker?

MR. GREEN: I said Ed. I wrote letters for all of them. I think all of them do a great job. I think they're all very objectionable, and I think that they all provide something great to this council. I think everybody around this table does a real good job at being partners in that, whether I like what they come to conclusions with or not, and so thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Green. Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: Just for the record, I did hear you say Kesley, Ed, and Anthony, I think, and so --

MR. GREEN: I appreciate you having my back. I did ladies first, and then "Ed" is just a two-letter word, and so, you know. Thank you all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Jim? Not seeing any, thank you, Jim. Next up is Rachel Hisler.

MS. RACHEL HISLER: Good afternoon. Today, I would like to talk about Amendment 59A permit requirements and also just comment briefly on the SEFHIER program.

Today, I'm asking you to implement Action 5 from the presentation, Tab B, Number 8(b), by Dr. Diagne. Baking this action into the 59A document is a wise decision, as it keeps the permit discussion cohesive. Deferring this important work to Amendment 59B would add even more pressure to an already complicated decision process.

Quota banks and co-ops offer fishermen flexibility, experience, training, and mentorship. Fishermen can build authentic business models utilizing these tools. Although there is currently only one nonprofit organization operating an active and effective quota bank in the Gulf, these practices could provide critical access points for new entrants building their businesses.

Of course, transparency is key in this process, and I believe that Dr. Diagne has built an objective roadmap in Action 5 to allow good faith actors to come alongside fishermen and bolster their ability to develop their business acumen as well as forge lasting and meaningful relationships in the fishery. These guardrails can and will work to keep those with ulterior motives out of the equation.

I'm also requesting that you would please take action on SEFHIER at this meeting. We are losing out on massive amounts of data

that can keep our fisheries healthy for everyone.

Looking forward to the next fifty years of the fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act by this Gulf Council, let's give new entrants to both commercial and for-hire charter fishermen real tools to keep real and healthy food on American tables and tight lines for all.

I also just wanted to quickly comment. You know, sitting here and listening to other people come up and talk about how long they've been in the business and all of that, and I just realized this is twenty years that my husband and I have been in the fishery business for ourselves, running our own boat, and I'm a few years deep into this council management process, but we are definitely still newbies compared to some of these men and women in this room, and so I just want to say thank you to these guys for pouring into new entrants like myself, and organizations like Shareholders Alliance, who are willing to come alongside people like me and my husband and help us build our business and the future of these fisheries.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Hisler. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you, Rachel. Next up is Jack Melancon.

MR. JACK MELANCON: You guys be patient with me. I'm not a very good public speaker, but I'm going to try to read this. Morning council members, or good afternoon. My name is Captain Jack Melanson.

I've been involved in the Gulf commercial fishing industry since the mid-1990s. Over the years, I've worked on deck as co-captain, and captain in different boats with different people, and I'm currently running a fishing vessel for one of the original red snapper IFQ shareholders, Mr. Underwood.

I've spent a large part of my working life on the water. I've contributed to these fisheries, following the regulations, and I've done my part to help conserve the resources, but, because I've never personally owned a qualified permit or IFQ shares, I've never received any IFQ red snapper quota.

This is something I hope that the council will consider when looking at the future of these fisheries. There are fishermen like me who have spent decades participating in this industry, doing the actual work, catching the fish, running boats, and contributing to these fisheries.

We have never given an opportunity to build a quota share of our

own. If additional red snapper becomes available in the future, I would respectfully ask the council to consider using some of that opportunities to help the fishermen like me, who have demonstrated long-term commitment to the fisheries, but I have never received any allocation.

I understand that, originally, original shareholders were given their allocation in the system that was established at that time, which I was there when that was established. I've been in this industry for 50 years. Let's see.

The council should also consider whether the system is currently operational for the next generations of our active fishers. Today, some people who hold large commercial quota no longer actively fish. They can continue to benefit by releasing their quota to working fishermen at extremely high prices, while fishermen who actually want to own and operate their own boats have little or no opportunity to obtain quota of their own.

I don't believe this additional quota should simply continue to go to the same people who already control a large portion of it. There should be a pathway for fishermen who have provided their commitment to the fishery through years of actual participation.

I'm not asking for something that I haven't worked for. I've spent decades working in these fisheries. I ask that the council realize the value of that experience and consider creating opportunities for fishermen who have contributed to this industry, but were never given the shares. The shares are resources if more quota becomes available again.

I hope the council will consider a system that gives fishermen, especially those with long histories in the fisheries and no existing quota, a real opportunity to participate as owners, rather than being forced to lease quota from people who no longer fish. Thank you for allowing me to speak, and I respectfully ask that you consider it, consider giving working fishermen a chance to build a future in these fisheries.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Jack. Do we have any questions?

MR. MELANCON: I’ve got something else I want to say, if you don't mind.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead.

MR. MELANCON: Let's see. I would like to address you guys about this now, considering the stock assessments that are being

conducted for Gulf red snapper. How accurate can we -- Okay. Now I'm getting nervous, and I'm sorry. How accurate can an assessment really be if there are significant potentials of the fisheries where the catch is difficult to measure or verify?

Commercial fisheries are required to operate under a tremendous amount of accountability. We have permanent reporting required, IFQ requirements, vessel monitoring, trip records, and other methods of documentation.

What we catch, our fish actually can be tracked, and our landings can be compared against what we report, but recreational fishing is a different situation. Yes, the recreational bag limit for an individual fisherman is relatively small, but there are enormous numbers of recreational fishers participating in the Gulf fisheries, where you multiply a small bag limit by thousands upon thousands of fishermen. The fishing trip, the total, can’t be sustained.

Anyone who actually fishes these waters know what happens in an area that are easily accessible to recreational boats. Inshore and near offshore reefs can receive tremendous fishing pressure. There are times when an area can be heavily fished over the course of a single weekend, and large numbers of boats concentrating on the same structure, where a fisherman can go out and see this firsthand.

Like off of Galveston, and let's take -- Out of Galveston, Texas, you catch 65 percent of the quota there. That's why these people are having trouble making their trips, because they're beating up the fish. You can't catch all the fish in one spot. Thank you, and you all have a great day. Thank you for listening.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Jack. We don't have any questions. Next up is Anthony Colletti.

MR. ANTHONY COLLETTI: Good afternoon, council. Anthony Colletti, owner and operator and commercial fisherman of seventeen years. I’ve fished around the Gulf coast, from Stock Island in the Keys to the western Gulf, primarily out of Dulac, Louisiana.

The king mackerel fishing has been struggling. Our wintertime fish, I did good up until the end of March. As the spring and summer went on, our fish disappeared completely.

I would like to bring a few things to everybody's attention. All of the oil rigs have been pulled out, and there's no habitat left inshore. When those fish are supposed to pull back inshore,

there's no habitat, nowhere for them to find their food or to slow them down. One day we're fishing in one area, and the next day we're sixty miles down the road, and we can't keep up with them. I will say Alabama has a much better artificial reef program going on, and they're starting to see better catches in that area, which are still not all that great.

Moving forward from the king mackerel, I want to move on to the amberjacks. We all know we went from 2,000-pound trip limits to 1,500-pound trip limits to 1,000-pound trip limits to seven fish, and we were supposed to be rebuilding that for the commercial sector, and 80 percent of it got reallocated to the recreational sector, along with our gags, and so how is that rebuilding the amberjacks for the commercial sector?

Now we're discarding twenty-five head, or thirty head a day at times, and we can't keep our fish. I believe that's more of a problem that we're starting to face. The amberjacks have made a good comeback in the western Gulf. I understand in different areas it's not so much, but we're seeing a lot of amberjacks, and I would like to see some of them come back to the commercial sector at some point.

When we release those fish, there's a good chance they're not making it back to the bottom. Between the porpoises and the sharks, they're getting mauled. The porpoises have been a problem through every fishery, along with the sharks, and they're out of control. Everybody sees it, everybody knows it.

Then I know I'm almost out of time here, but I would like to touch on the IFQ program just a little bit. It's really hard for me to keep investing in my business when I don't know what's going to happen later on down the road. I would really like a sense of stability at some point, to where I can keep investing and know it's going to be there, you know, for years to come.

We need more accountability on the recreational side when it comes -- If you're going to manage the fisheries, we have to manage it as a whole, on both sides, and, you know, there's -- Like Captain Jack said, there's a lot of recreational fishing, a lot of recreational pressure, especially on red snapper, and those fish aren't counted for, and we're guessing at numbers. We need better accountability.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Anthony. We have a question from Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thanks, Anthony. Sorry that I didn't get back with

you. I got your call a little while back, but I just realized I didn't get back with you, but, as a western Gulf kingfish professional, what's your view on -- Do you think that you might be seeing an impact from fish that are being removed in Mexico in the fishery up your way?

MR. COLLETTI: I was hoping you were going to ask that question, because absolutely. Absolutely. Their fish size is down to a three to four-pound fish. They're using a very small mesh in their nets. I know we just got a bunch of recent data, and I'm hoping at some point that we can somehow work with the Mexico government to somewhat regulate what they're taking out of the water.

It's the same body of water. We're on trip limits, hook-and-line fish, and they're -- You know, from what I understand, from what they've taken out of the water, it's more than all of our quotas put together, and so that's a severe impact.

MR. WALKER: Right. That's accurate, and I had a conversation the other day that said that king mackerel may fall under the ICCAT international fisheries management, and that we may be able to have some impact there, and so that's something we're talking about.

MR. COLLETTI: I'm glad to hear it. Any other questions?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Anthony? Not seeing any, thank you.

MR. COLLETTI: Thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Next up is Russell Underwood.

MR. RUSSELL UNDERWOOD: Thank you, council. I'm Russell Underwood. I'm from Panama City, Florida. I fish off Louisiana, and I've been fishing off Louisiana about forty-five years. I own three boats. I used to own about seven or eight. I cut it down, and I just lowered my fleet. I've got three boats, and they do pretty good. They do real well. IFQs, to me, have been the best thing ever come to this Gulf.

My guys, they fish for beeliners and snapper. I expect them to catch what they can catch every trip, as far as beeliners, mixed-up beeliners and grouper, and amberjack, whatever is biting, but we still see a lot of snapper.

My best captain I got is right here behind me, Jack Melancon. He's just a young captain. He catches a lot of fish. He works hard

for me. Last trip, the last two trips, he caught about 13,000 pounds. The trip before that, he caught like 9,000 snapper at one trip, and normally my boats catch about 4,000 or 5,000 pounds of fish apiece, a trip.

I’ve got three boats, but one of them is small, a forty-footer, and he does real well, too. He's got a three-man crew, and we catch a lot of fish. I mean, he does well with that boat, but, anyway, what I wanted to say is this.

We still see a lot of snapper in the middle of the Gulf, off Dulac, and, further back east, I know you hear about -- Some people say the western Gulf, that we've seen a slowdown in the western Gulf. I fish in the middle of the Gulf, but, anyway, we still see a lot of snapper.

As far as longlining, I've always bandit fished, and I never have longlined, but we see a lot of -- My company I sell to, they buy a lot of fish, longline fish, and they do pretty good over there, from the river, and back west of the river, but, anyway, we just -- We do well.

I run a tight business. I've been doing this all my life, and I just -- We do good. We do good, and I run a tight ship, but, as far as snapper, there’s still quite a few fish out there. I know there's -- You hear reports about off Florida, and probably less fish off Florida, but you’ve got to think about this.

You know, when I got my captain's license, I was a 100-ton license. I was a party boat captain for about seven or eight years, and, as a young man, at nineteen years old, we seen a lot of fish caught off Florida, but, as you see now, there's a lot of boats off Louisiana, off Belle Pass, Louisiana, and it seemed like, to me, the more boats there is, the less fish you catch in certain areas, and so that's just, I guess, a give-and-take, having lots of boats, and lots of pressure on a lot of fish, but, anyway, we do well on that, but that's it.

I just want the council to know that IFQ has been a good program for me and everybody out there, everybody else there. A lot of people that are upset about the fishery is because they're not in it. I helped develop the IFQ program, me and a bunch of four or five guys, but, anyway, it's been a good program. It's been good for the resource, and it's been good for me and my family. I've raised a family with IFQs the last ten or twenty years, and they've been good to me. That's about it, I guess.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Underwood, for coming to give

public testimony.

MR. UNDERWOOD: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Do we have any questions for Mr. Underwood? I'm not seeing any, Mr. Russell.

MR. UNDERWOOD: That's good. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you for coming.

MR. UNDERWOOD: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Next up is Mr. Randy Lauser.

MR. RANDY LAUSER: Good afternoon, council. Randy Lauser, Southern Offshore Fishing Association, fishing out of Madeira Beach, Florida.

Just commenting on the IFQ system, and I was there from the beginning. It was fantastic. It worked great, me and my buddies, you know, but it was all owner-operators when the system first come into effect, and, me and all the other fishermen, we could trade fish, gags, blacks, or reds, this and that, and, for the first five years, it was great, and then we all know what happened. It went public.

Once it went public -- It was meant for the fishermen, to be for the fishermen, and now it's so out of whack that it's crazy. Everybody else has control. Us fishermen have zero control. The fishermen pay for the cost recovery fee. The shareholders pay absolutely zero, and they profit off of it, and so I'm all for keeping it, and bringing it back to the fishermen, and you should have to own a boat, a permit, catch most of your fish, or a restaurant, or a fish house. Keep it in the industry, and get the public out of it, and bring it back to normal.

On the sharks, sharks are just horrendous, sharks and porpoises. We're losing so many fish. You get a herd of porpoises on you, and they'll follow your boat. They'll pluck fifty fish off your line, and you have to leave. You're lucky to get one fish, and, the sharks, we don't know if they're eating our bait or the fish, because you got bite-offs.

We’ve got to take a thousand hooks every trip, and so if you could -- You know, there’s plenty of sharks, you know, and you got population control. You’ve got deer, pigs, gator, and everything is controlled but sharks, and why did that happen? That's what I

want to know, because, during the qualifying for IFQs, you guys encouraged us to do a lot of shark fishing.

I did a lot of shark fishing, and so I lost out on some of the IFQ shares for qualifying, but we need your help on the sharks, the porpoises, and we need to bring the fishery back to the fishermen. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Randy. Do we have any questions? We do from Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Hi, Randy. Thanks for being here. Two questions. I didn't realize SOFA was still in existence. How many members do you guys have? How many members do you have?

MR. LAUSER: The only fish house contributing now is Charlie at Fish Busters. Every boat, they contribute to SOFA.

MR. STRELCHECK: Great, and then a follow-on question. As far as 59A, we're also talking about an exemption for nonprofit organizations that run photo banks. Does your organization have a position on that?

MR. LAUSER: I think you should have to own a boat, a permit, a fish house, or a restaurant. That's where I'm at. No other exemptions. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Randy? Seeing none, thank you. Next up is Eric Brazer.

MR. ERIC BRAZER: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Eric Brazer, Deputy Director of Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance. Welcome back, Dr. Banks, Dr. Overton, Captain Walker.

I'm going to dive right in with 59A, as you probably expected. If you want additional information, please check out the letter that we sent in, albeit late Sunday night, about how legitimate nonprofits can achieve the goals and objectives of the IFQ program, how they achieve the needs statement of 59A, how they can, and should, be structured to provide safeguards against misuse, and how they're consistent with and advance the President's executive order. That one's for you, Andy.

I would like to spend the rest of my time talking far too quickly about some of the specific concerns we've heard this week. We've heard that there may not be enough time to analyze this. We agree that this deserves careful review. There are legitimate questions about eligibility, governance, reporting, and safeguards that need

to be evaluated.

Your amazing staff have already put together a great starting point with Actions 5.1 and 5.2. We want the council and NMFS to take a hard look at these, to refine these safeguards, and give the public an opportunity to weigh-in through the public hearing process, and including these in Amendment 59A is what allows this review to happen.

We've also heard that this should be addressed in 59B instead of 59A. To that point, A and B address two different policy questions. 59A asks who should be allowed to hold IFQ shares, and 59B asks whether an eligible shareholder must demonstrate landings to continue to hold these shares. A nonprofit permit requirement is fundamentally an ownership eligibility issue, which makes 59A the logical place to address it, and it just doesn't make sense to us to create this issue in 59A, and then wait for 59B to resolve it.

We've heard the concerns that these programs may not actually help new entrants, and I would say this is actually a primary purpose of these programs. They lower financial barriers, by providing access to allocation that's otherwise hard to get, something you guys hear repeatedly.

They provide a bridge towards independence, giving active fishermen opportunities to build relationships, diversify their businesses, and develop financial capacity to eventually buy their own shares. They provide opportunities for the next generation. A quota bank maintains a pool of allocation that serves fishermen as they enter, grow, and then ultimately graduate from that program, and then make the available opportunity to the next new entrant. I'm talking quickly now.

We've heard concerns about membership. To be clear, you do not have to be a Shareholders Alliance member to apply to our quota bank. The same application and selection process applies to everyone. Membership has no bearing on selection. Applicants are evaluated using established eligibility and selection criteria, and I'm out of time, but I would love to make one more comment about concerns about loopholes and potential misuse. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Strong safeguards are absolutely necessary in this process. We are not spending this time, and devoting this much energy and effort, only to have somebody take it and use it as a workaround, and so the goal here should be to create a very narrow, carefully defined pathway for legitimate mission-driven nonprofits to

support active fishery participation and improve opportunities for new entrants.

When looking at 5.1 and 5.2, it's a great list. It goes a long way towards addressing these loopholes, and, in addition to that, we support regular reporting, annual NMFS review, and bring it back to the council, and require a presentation, and then give NMFS the authority to approve, and also revoke this, if it's being used in a way that's not intended. Thank you for the extra time, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Eric. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any -- Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes, and I was going to you about if you were in support of NMFS having the authority to review your reporting, which it, obviously, would establish something meaningful that would identify you as legitimate, and then them having the authority to, if they see something is inappropriate, to be able to basically revoke your ability.

MR. BRAZER: Agree.

MR. SANCHEZ: Perfect.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions? Not seeing any, Eric, thank you.

MR. BRAZER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Next up is Tommy Loper.

MR. TOMMY LOPER: I'm Captain Tommy Loper. I was born and raised here in Biloxi. I'm here to protect my future. We wish to not see our state management control federal for-hire. I'm here protecting my future, because I will soon become a business owner, or I would like to be, but that's all about it. I hope our amberjack season stays true. Last year, it got cut short a couple of weeks, and so this year we hope to get the full month.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Tommy. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you for coming. Next up is Evan Tiblier.

MR. EVAN TIBLIER: Good afternoon. Captain Evan Tiblier out of Biloxi, Mississippi with Fish Finder Charters. I have two charter boats out of Biloxi, Mississippi. I feel like -- You know, I had a whole speech wrote up, but there's so much people, and the majority hit everything I was going to talk about, and so I'm just

up here, and, basically, I'm not for state representation. I want to keep it the same. It seems to be working fine. It's been working good for years and years, and hopefully it will extend me in the future. I'm hoping to retire from this business. That's about it.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Evan. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, and thank you for coming. Next up is Cole Ganey.

MR. COLE GANEY: My name is Cole Ganey, charter boat captain out of Biloxi, Mississippi, Reel Therapy Charters, federally-permitted. I'm just here to say that we're against the state management. We want to leave it the way it is. It's not broke, don't fix it, and so why would we change it all of a sudden? That's pretty much everything I've got to say. Thank you all, guys, for having us here, and listening to what we have to comment on, and taking in our information that we see day in and day out.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Cole. Do we have any questions for Cole? Not seeing any, next up is Jerry McClure.

MR. JERRY MCCLURE: Hello. How are you guys doing? I'm charter boat captain. I've been a captain for quite a few years here out of Biloxi. I own two charter boats. Basically, one is a state boat, and one is a federal boat. I run all of the federal trips myself here out of Biloxi.

I'm against sector -- Well, I'm for sector separation. I can't hardly talk, but, anyway, guys, I'm against Amendment 64. I want to say that I think the way it is is the way it ought to be, is the way it ought to stay. I do have a state boat, and I do have a federal boat, and I like to keep them separate.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Jerry. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you for coming. Next up is Ms. Ashford Rosenberg.

MS. ASHFORD ROSENBERG: Good afternoon, council. I'll try and keep this brief, since we're getting toward the end of the day. I'm Ashford Rosenberg. I'm with the Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance, and there were a couple of other agenda items we wanted to comment on, and three minutes is not very long.

First, I want to thank the Science Center and Dr. Allen for your presentation on catch per unit effort, and, while in some circumstances CPUE for the commercial fishery may not be the best data stream for estimating abundance, it's still a critical piece of fishery-dependent information that's missing from stock

assessments for red grouper and other IFQ species.

IFQ programs have been around for decades at this point, and so the justification that the IFQ programs change behavior so drastically that you cannot really implement, or include, CPUE data that's post-IFQ implementation really is outdated at this point.

We would also argue that CPUE in IFQ fisheries actually provide a more representative, and potentially more of a reliable fishery-dependent data stream to help estimate abundance, or kind of be a gut health check on the fishery than maybe for a fishery that's managed by season or by a bag limit, and this is because the IFQ program provides the flexibility for fishermen to spread their effort out over the year, and over space as well, and so it functions a little bit differently.

It's not influenced by seasons or regulatory changes like bag limits, and so it would just be a bit more likely to reflect the stock’s abundance, and this is something that I think is really important to look at further.

It is promising to hear that catch rates of red grouper are getting better, but we still think this is a really critical piece that needs to be considered more, and so, to that end, we ask that the council and the SSC receive an annual presentation of commercial catch per unit effort, alongside landings, to kind of provide that additional source of information as, again, kind of a health check, or a gut check, to see if catch per unit effort in those species is aligning with the quota levels.

We also would love to see the SSC receive commercial CPUE information during the stock assessment process. I know they're not incorporated right now, but it's just another data stream that can also look at the data from the terminal year of the assessment to present day, and that time lag between science and assessment is something that the public and the council has cited, multiple times, to be frustrating and something that they want to address.

Also, we support the FEP process. Please keep that moving forward. Use your ETC. They have a lot of expertise, and they can work on those FEIs that you identified, and, lastly, data monetization is huge, and really is growing, and so we anticipate data on the commercial sector to be just getting better over time, and that's also going to be soon applying to the charter sector.

Anything we can do to make data more accurate, and more timely, is a good thing, and so please continue on with SEFHIER, take final

action at this meeting, and support the charter sector on that one, and that's all I have for today.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Allen.

DR. ALLEN: Thanks, Ashford. I was just going to make the point that I completely agree with you that the CPUE data should be looked at. I just think it’s a -- You have to look at it with caution, and not just assume that it reflects the abundance, but I think its best utility is to look at it compared to the other indices, and see if you get a different signal, and so I don't think I was saying something different than your arguments.

MS. ROSENBERG: Yes, and, to be clear, we’re not, you know, saying that it should replace anything. It just needs to be looked at in addition to all the other data streams that we have.

DR. ALLEN: I agree. Thank you for that.

MS. ROSENBERG: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thank you, Ashford, and thanks for the suggestion for that annual reporting. I'm just thinking about how that might be best presented, and I'm thinking something like fishery status reports, or something like that, where there's the -- Because that's really measuring the status of the fishery, how well its catch rates are going, versus necessarily the status of the resource without a lot of work put into addressing catchability and things we talked about, but I think reporting out, just as we report landings, and we report the progress towards the ACL and other metrics like that in our ecosystem status reports, which albeit haven't been updated as often as some requests from the council might have been, is something that I think we're going to try to consider as we have the bandwidth to be able to do that.

I think right now, from the Science Center perspective, it's really a bandwidth to do that on a routine basis, which is the limitation, but now we are hearing the desire, and how this council might be using that, and that's helpful to get that feedback on how it might get used, and so I can tell staff that, no, the goal isn't necessarily to replace a G-FISHER index in the stock assessment, but it's really to provide added context that may be of value to interpretation of fishery trends, and I think that's one reassuring -- I do agree, and I think it's a very valuable piece of information, and so thanks.

MS. ROSENBERG: If I could respond, if that's okay. Thank you, Dr. Walter. I totally agree, and I think another -- I guess it's more like a framing question, but, you know, you have G-FISHER, and like your fishery-independent CPUE, right, and so I think it would be really helpful, and I don't know if this is appropriate to go through the commission, but for the states to also work together to look at CPUE in kind of a different way than like G-FISHER does, and, you know, looking at more like average trip times, because that's kind of the constant thing you hear, is that I'm going further, and I'm having to stay out longer.

Even at that kind of like high-level of does the average trip length, based on the trip ticket and logbook data that the states and NMFS are getting -- Is that getting longer in comparison to a higher or a lower quota, and something as simple as that to kind of look at, and think about, would be really valuable, I think, and it would, you know, give fishermen even more pride in the data that they provide.

We also have cameras and electronic monitoring, which are all voluntary at this point, to be clear, and more and more boats are getting interested in that, and so I think that's only going to improve things down the line, and so thank you so much for that, and I agree, and we want to help.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ashford. Do we have any other questions? Not seeing any, thank you. Next up is Kyle Powell. Thank you. Next up is Chance Seymour.

MR. CHANCE SEYMOUR: Hello, everybody. My name is Chance Seymour. I own two federally-permitted charter boats. I strongly oppose Amendment 64 and transferring red snapper management into the Gulf states.

Amendment 40 has proven an accountable system for more than a decade. The system is working, and it takes the uncertainty out of my business. If everything in our fishery is federal, why should it be handed over to an individual state? The current federal system is working. A federal fishery should remain federally managed.

This year, I've had a record year. I've caught three king mackerel between both my boats, but a little under half of our federally-permitted charter boats are here sitting in the back from Mississippi. Almost all of us, or I'm pretty sure all of us, are opposed to Amendment 64, but thank you all for listening.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Chance. Do we have any questions?

MR. C. SEYMOUR: Thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you for coming. Next up is Addison Seymour.

MS. ADDISON SEYMOUR: Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the council. This is my first time speaking, and so bear with me. This is not my forte. My name is Addison Seymour. My husband Chance and I own Mississippi Gulf Coast Fishing Charters in Biloxi, Mississippi.

I'm here today to respectfully ask you to not support state management of the federal for-hire red snapper fishery. My husband and I are only twenty-nine and thirty years old, and we have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars, and nearly every part of ourselves, into our building our business.

We own two federally-permitted boats. We paid heavily for those permits, because they are limited, valuable, and no longer being issued. There are approximately 1,300 federal for-hire permits across the entire Gulf, and the only way to obtain one is by purchasing and transferring an existing permit.

Nearly ten years ago, we began sending monthly payments to a captain, Steve, from Louisiana for our first federal permit. He was proud and excited to hand it down to a fisherman from a younger generation. He shared story after story with us about his years in the fishery and what that permit had meant to him. He understood that it was more than just a piece of paper. He knew what it represented for our fishery and generations to come after him, because he had lived it.

Today, that permit helps us provide for our very own three-year-old daughter, Adeline. This is our livelihood. It is how we put food on our table and build a future for our child. We are not a large corporation with endless resources. We are a young family that took a tremendous financial risk because we believed hard work and responsible fishing could create something lasting.

Delegating the federal-for-hire fishery to individual states would create uncertainty around everything we have built. A federal permit should mean something. Its value, and the opportunity attached to it, should not change simply because of the state where the boat docks.

The Gulf is one shared resource, and the federal-for-hire fleet should remain one federally-managed fleet. We have followed the rules, made the required investments, and accepted the

responsibility that comes with operating federal-permitted vessels.

We want to protect this fishery so red snapper and this way of life we still have here for our daughter's generation. Please remember behind every permit is a story. Behind every boat payment is a family dependent on the next season.

These permits have been worked under, sacrificed for, and passed from one generation of fishermen to the next. We are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for fairness, consistency, and the opportunity to earn an honest living under the system which we invested in.

I respectfully ask you to choose the no action alternative in Amendment 64, reject state management, and keep the federal for-hire fleet federally managed. Please protect what the generation before us entrusted to our care and give families like ours the opportunity to preserve it for generations to come behind us. Thank you for listening to our story.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Addison. We have a couple of questions for you. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: No, and it's not a question. I'm just happy to see the next generation coming up. I encourage you to keep coming, because, while this process can be intimidating and what have you, it works if you work it.

MS. SEYMOUR: Yes, sir. Thank you so much.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: One more, Addison. General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes, and it's not a question either, Addison. I just wanted to tell everybody that, you know, a couple of weeks ago, the federal-for-hire for Mississippi joined in together and for our Gulf Banks fishing yacht to be able to go out and put some new artificial reefs, and they donated their boats.

MS. SEYMOUR: We did.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you for that. Any other comments or questions? Not seeing any, all right, and so thank you. That’s going to wrap up public comment for the day, and so I would like to take a break until 8:30 in the morning. That will wrap up today, and we'll reconvene at 8:30 in the morning with the Data and Reef Fish Committee reports.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 26, 2026.)

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August 27, 2026

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Thursday morning, August 27, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Welcome back from our break. We're somewhat ahead of schedule, and I would prefer to stay ahead of schedule if we can, and maybe get out a little earlier today. We're going to start with Data Collection this morning, and then I don't know if some folks need to check out of their room, and we'll take a break after a while, but, other than that, I'll turn it over to Captain Walker to take us through the Data Collection Committee report.

COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)
DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection Committee adopted the agenda, Tab F, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab F, Number 2, of the June 2026 meeting.

The first topic we went over was the Generic Amendment Modifications for Gulf For-Hire Data Collection Program, Tab F, Number 4(a) through (c), also known as SEFHIER. Council staff reviewed a summary of public comments received in the final draft document with all preferred alternatives.

When reviewing Action 4, a committee member asked for clarification on what sampling strata would be used to select participants for the economic survey. Staff responded that several factors could be used to develop sampling strata, including state, area fished, species target, and vessel size.

A committee member inquired if a, quote, sampling without replacement, end quote, approach could be used while sampling 20 percent annually to get a comprehensive sample size for the entire fleet every five years. Staff cautioned that applying a prescriptive direction for a scientific sampling design could

reduce the flexibility of the program and make it difficult to adapt the survey for industry needs.

A committee member noted that, for the purpose of distributing disaster relief, that the 20 percent economic survey would provide better information than what is currently available. Staff noted that some revisions would be needed to the language in the various actions to ensure consistency throughout. Staff was directed to complete those changes and have them ready to review by Full Council.

Additionally, SERO staff indicated that the codified text could be ready for review by the Full Council, which I am told the codified text is ready for Full Council, and so we'll pause there. Dr. Hollensead.

DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD: What we're going to do is we're going to pull up the codified text, so you all can review it. Also, offline, as was mentioned in the summary, SERO staff and council staff have been looking through the revisions to the document that were required now that we've got the regulatory language such that that language is also reflected in the document.

Once we go through the codified text, we'll pull up the revised document that's got the highlights in yellow, just so you all can see them, and so you don't have to make a comment or pass a motion that, you know, this language is approved or not. It’s just for transparency's sake.

MR. WALKER: So is discussion at this point on the SEFHIER program?

DR. HOLLENSEAD: Well, Mr. Chair, we've got the codified text up, and so Ms. Levy can go through that, and then I can go through the document.

MR. WALKER: We're going to go through that now? Okay.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: We'll turn it over to Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Okay. Well, it’s there for your review. I can point out just a few things, if we scroll down to the next page, and so go back up just a little bit.

This is just the general reporting requirement, and I'll just point out that it does include the language, in that first sentence, when operating as a charter vessel or headboat in marine or estuarine waters, and so that's something we talked about, right? We don't want reporting for freshwater trips, and we want to make

that clear, and so it says that you're required to report, and the deadlines are below in the other paragraph, and it does have the last sentence, which talks about vessels that are selected for the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, right, and they continue to be selected.

Then, if you scroll down, the next paragraph is about the no fishing activity, and it just says, if you don't have any fishing during a week from Monday through Sunday, then you have to report by the established deadline. It does not talk about, or codify, the ninety days in advance.

We will talk about that in the preamble, based on what's in the document, but, you know, there might come a time where it's allowing people to have a little bit more time, and so we don't -- If we put it in the regulations, it creates a lot of procedural hurdles for slightly modifying that, but it will be in the preamble, based on what's in the document, about the allowing reports up to ninety days in advance, and you'll have a chance to look at the proposal when it comes out.

The next Paragraph 2 is the reporting deadlines, and that just indicates that you have to submit it before removing fish from the vessel, or, if no fish were retained, within thirty minutes of the trip ending, right, arrival at the dock.

The next paragraph talks about the no-fishing reports basically being submitted no later than the Tuesday of the following week, and, if you then decide to go fishing, right, after you've submitted the do-not fish report, you need to report. That's essentially what that is saying.

Paragraph 3, if you go down a little bit more, talks about the catastrophic conditions, and just that NMFS can waive or modify the reporting requirements based on catastrophic conditions, very similar to what's in other reporting, and what was in the prior program.

Then, if you go down to Paragraph 4, that's the compliance requirement, and that just basically says that you have to follow these reporting requirements, and, if you do not submit a report, it's considered delinquent, and that delinquent report automatically results in a prohibition from harvesting or possessing reef fish until you actually come into compliance, right, and so it's just an enforcement mechanism to say, if you're not compliant, you don't get to fish until you actually submit the report. That's consistent with what was in there before as well, as well as the South Atlantic program.

Then Paragraph 5 is the trip declaration requirement, and so it just basically says that a fishing trip in marine or estuarine waters begins anytime you depart from the dock with a passenger for-hire, which has a specific definition, and terminates when you come back to the dock, and so, prior to departure on one of these trips, that you have to notify NMFS and report your, basically, Coast Guard documentation number, or state vessel registration, the expected trip completion date and time, and the approved landing location. Then the next part of the codified is for coastal migratory pelagic, and so that was reef fish, and we've mirrored what we've done in reef fish for CMP as well. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ms. Levy. Do we have any questions for Ms. Levy on the codified text? Not seeing any, Dr. Hollensead, do you have anything to add?

DR. HOLLENSEAD: Yes, Mr. Chair. If we could pull up the document, just so I can show those highlighted portions, just a few things to see where it's reflected in there. Bernie, if you wouldn't mind pulling up the revised document and going to Action 1, please.

So, in Action 1, as was brought up in committee and Ms. Levy just mentioned, those Preferred Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 in Action 1 have been updated to have the language for conducted in marine or estuarine waters, which we talked about, and so that is also now reflected within the regulations, or in the codified text, excuse me, and then is now within the document, and so those are aligned.

Then, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling down all the way to the bottom of Action 1, and so that would be page 26, and there's also a paragraph in there that talks about the conditions of maintaining permit compliance, as Ms. Levy just went over in the codified text, and so that wasn't in there originally, but now this paragraph has been added. This is now a mandatory program, and, as a result, to remain in compliance with the permits, that reporting would be required, and so that is now in there.

Then Bernie, if you can go to Action 2, and the first paragraph of the discussion makes some clarifying language, and so this action has to deal with the boats that are reporting to the headboat program, and that is to say that this action is only changing the timing with which they put in the reports.

The did-not=fish reports, and the economic reporting of data that they already have to do, is still something they have to do, right, and so this -- There's nothing in this action that really changes

the headboat program, other than the timing of when they would have to report, and so that's just to make it clear to the reader, or somebody is now involved in the headboat -- They can pick up this document and try to figure out, hey, what am I exactly going to report, and so it clarifies it for the reader.

It's funny, because, when we were doing the public hearings, we did mention that, but it wasn't in the document, and so now it is explicitly written in the document, and so we've got that in there.

Then, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling down to Action 3, and so this would put in some clarifying language for Alternatives 2 and 3, and so this is the trip notification, and so it's got in there prior to departing for a trip, and so that is, you know, what's in the regulatory language, and so, prior to departure, you would have to have a trip notification, and so now it's explicit. It was in the discussion, but now it's explicit within the alternative language.

Those were the updates that we made sort of offline that we wanted to bring back to Full Council, so you all could just review those, and that’s all I have, and I’ll take any clarifying questions that anybody might have.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Do we have any questions for Dr. Hollensead? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: No questions. I mean, if everyone is comfortable with the changes, then I recommend, since this is final action, we just like do a general motion to say we approve what staff has proposed in Actions 1 through 3, but I'll wait for discussion, if anyone has any questions first.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: If there's no questions, I'll make the motion that we approve this, and please tell me I don't have to read that codified text.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: So, before we get there, Mr. Sanchez, I think Mr. Strelcheck wanted to make a motion just to approve the changes in the document first, and then we'll go to final action.

MR. SANCHEZ: Okay.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so I'll make a motion, Bernie. **The motion is to approve the changes recommended by council staff in Actions 1 through 3.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right, and we have a second by Dr. Sweetman, and Dr. Simmons has her hand up.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: I would just say "staff". It also came from the Regional Office and NOAA GC.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Allen.

DR. ALLEN: So there's four actions in here. Do we -- I guess do we need to have it Actions 1 through 4, instead of 1 through 3? There's four actions in here.

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't think we made changes to Action 4, correct?

DR. ALLEN: Only 1 through 3 had changes? Okay. Thank you.

MR. STRELCHECK: While I have the mic, and I think we've had plenty of discussion of this during committee, and so the changes that staff are recommending reflect, obviously, the conversations we were having during the full committee discussion.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Mr. Strelcheck's motion is on the board. It's seconded by Dr. Sweetman. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes. Thank you. **Motion to approve the document, to send it up the road.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: We'll give Bernie a moment. There you go, Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you. **Motion to approve Generic Amendment: Modifications to Gulf For-Hire Data Collection Program and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The council chair has given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Do we have a second to Mr. Sanchez's motion? Seconded by Captain Walker. Do we have any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, is there any -- Sorry. We have to do a roll call vote on the action. Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Frady.

MR. FRADY: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Allen.

DR. ALLEN: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Abstain.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Ms. Ballard.

MS. BALLARD: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Overton.

DR. OVERTON: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Broussard.

MR. BROUSSARD: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Geeslin.

MR. GEESLIN: Abstain.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.

MR. MARQUEZ: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Dugas.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: The motion carried fifteen to zero with two abstentions.

Names	Vote
Capt. Walker	yes
Capt. Frady	yes
Dr. Allen	yes
Gen. Spraggins	yes
Mr. Anson	yes
Mr. Schieble	abstain
Ms. Ballard	yes
Mr. Strelcheck	yes
Dr. Overton	yes
Mr. Broussard	yes
Mr. Sanchez	yes
Dr. Sweetman	yes
Dr. Banks	yes
Mr. Osborne	yes
Mr. Geeslin	abstain
Mr. Marquez	yes
Mr. Dugas	yes

Row Labels	Count of Vote
abstain	2
yes	15
Grand Total	**17**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. **The motion carries.** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and so I'll turn it back over to Captain Walker to complete the Data report.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next thing Data Collection Committee did was discuss the presentation on the MRIP-FES pilot study results. Finalized results of the pilot study were not made available in time through the presenting committee.

Broadly, revised effort estimates are substantially lower than the current FES units, depending on species, state, and sampling weight. Without having the finalized pilot study results, it is difficult to determine how the new estimates will affect stock assessments currently conducted, calibration with the state private recreational data collection programs, and sector allocations.

As a result, Dr. Simmons requested that staff from the Office of Science and Technology, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and SERO have a meeting to discuss what will be presented at the September Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting and provide the SSC direction on what is expected during their discussion of the pilot study. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Walker. Is there any comments, or conversation, due to MRIP-FES? Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to the point in the committee summary, we are working on that, and we're trying to get with Dr. Cody and figure out what we can do, but we're under a tight timeline, because we have to submit the FRN for the SSC meeting Friday, tomorrow, and so we're trying to do the best we can right now with that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Simmons, I'm going to ask you, and are we expecting to see this in October, or another update from Richard Cody? Can we get that on the agenda?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Yes, Mr. Chair. That would be a report-out to the council, what the SSC discussed.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you. Okay, and so that concludes the Data Collection Committee report. Give me a minute to figure out what's next. I'll ask around the table, and do folks need to check out of their room this morning? Do you want to take a little break and check out? I mean, staff is working on completing the Reef Fish Committee report, and so I'm just kind of looking around the table. All right. Well, let's take a fifteen-minute break, and check out if you need to, and we'll come back at 9:15.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, all. Okay, and so we're going to go straight to the Reef Fish Committee report, and I'm going to give it to Dr. Sweetman.

REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the modified agenda, Tab B, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab B, Number 2, from the June 2026 meeting were approved.

Discussion: Decision Points for Red Snapper Catch Limits and Allocations, Tab B, Number 9, the red snapper stock assessment, SEDAR 98, is nearing completion, pending peer review and inclusion of updated recreational landings and other data.

Council staff highlighted the decision points and timing for consideration of revised sector component and state allocations for red snapper. These decisions will need to begin with council decisions related to catch limits for the entire Gulf red snapper stock, followed by allocations between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors, then between the federal for-hire and private angling components of the recreational sector, and, lastly, among the five Gulf states for the private angling component.

Allocation decisions can be tailored to the division being addressed, but should be consistent in the application and clear in justification. Council staff noted that the council would likely review the results of the SEDAR 98 at its April 2027 meeting.

A committee member supported moving additional allocation to Mississippi, which has the lowest allocation of the private angling component annual catch limits amongst the states. Another committee member supported the idea of an allocation working group to advance the development of necessary information for reviewing sector and state allocations prior to the council reviewing the results of SEDAR 98.

A committee member asked about the expected effects of the reduction in the magnitude of recreational landings relative to the current catch limits. Council staff replied that the revised MRIP Fishing Effort Survey data for recreational landings is expected to be somewhere between the current MRIP-FES data and the legacy MRIP Coastal Household Telephone Survey data.

Further, SEDAR 98 will calibrate recreational landings from Texas

and LA Creel surveys to current MRIP data, which will need to be updated prior to being considered for management purposes. It is unclear if there will be a new calibration unit for Texas recreational landings, since calibration efforts there only occurred in 2016.

Council staff thought prioritizing and organizing of the data and the necessary calibrations was key, followed by mapping out the timing of implementation for proposed management changes. A committee member thought it necessary to evaluate landings by state, as opposed to what a state is allocated to catch.

Relative to the charge of the working group, a committee member asked about the scope of materials and decisions that will be provided and produced. Council staff replied that having all historical landings by fleet and state and by data unit, with calibration ratios, was paramount. These data are likely to appear different from the current MRIP landings.

NOAA General Counsel added that the working group meetings would need to be publicly noticed. Council staff thought participation from the stock assessment data providers would be very helpful to the working group, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center agreed. The council should consider addressing a charge and move forward with forming a working group. Mr. Chair, I think we might want to have some discussion at this point.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I'll open the floor for any discussions. Mr. Frady.

MR. FRADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this time, I think we need to make a motion about the makeup of this group that we've been talking about. Ms. Bernie, can you pull that motion up, please, ma'am? Thank you. There we go. Thank you, ma'am.

I'll make a motion to form a small working group made up of staff from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, the council, each of the Gulf states, the Southeast Regional Office, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to understand the data inputs and the methodologies applied to the landings data for the red snapper Stock Assessment, SEDAR 98.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Frady. We have a motion on the board. Is there a second to the motion? It's seconded by Dr. Overton. Any discussion on the motion? Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Yes, and so I'm reading the draft charge here, and so I just want to make sure it's clear that there are still things

that are in the works that would need to be included in this, and so it's not like it's a hindcast type thing, where you're just compiling the landings and everything.

It does mention about the historical, or the participation, and so just for the ratios for state surveys and such, just to make sure that's ongoing with the Mississippi and AL Creel, and those things are going to need to be calibrated too, more than likely, and those have yet to be done, and so, you know, there's just some more work to be done. It's not something that you can go back and look at historically what those calibrations were, or historical landings information was, and so that's all, and just to make sure it's clear for the working group members.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Anson. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and just a question here, and so, even with this working group -- I see that a lot of the charge is focused on landings, but, obviously, there's other components where we can decide allocations that are not specific to landings, and so just making sure that the working group is going to just focus on the landings component of this stuff, but that doesn't necessarily dictate how the allocation scenario should go.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think the intent of this group, is just to understand what's being used in the assessment, how we'll be able to untangle that, just to try to create a time series of landings, the caveats for those, and provide that to the council, and you certainly can direct us when we go from there, other things you want to look at to consider for allocation.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes, and just a question to the group, I guess. Would there be any benefit to include an SSC representative in this also, or, I mean, probably Ryan Rindone, from council staff, could substitute a lot for that, and that would potentially be a question, I guess, and maybe Mike Allen I could ask, if there would be any benefit for that either. Thoughts?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Simmons, to that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, I guess we'll be writing a letter to the state directors, or we'll be writing a letter to asking who they want to put on this working

group, and some of them may be on the SSC already. I'm not sure there's overlap there or not, but I don't know that we need to have a special SSC member on this.

MR. RYAN RINDONE: I would strongly expect at least one of those state reps will also be an SSC member, just by probability.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. I have Ed, Captain Walker, and then Dr. Walter.

MR. WALKER: I'm still kind of digesting what this is, but it doesn't mention it. Would it go without saying here that this would include the new FES recalibration stuff? It doesn't specifically say that, but it says data, and so I guess that would count, right?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Yes. For clarification, it doesn't, but that's our intent, yes.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Thank you. Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thanks, and my staff is certainly willing to serve on this. I just want to be clear that this is a very technical working group, and my understanding is it's going to be very technical, and it's really to develop the inputs, and then we're also going to need to have the calibrations done between the state surveys and the MRIP pilot, as part of it, as Kevin noted, and that that's going to need technical expertise from each of the states, and so it may or may not be the SSC member.

It probably is going to be more of a technical expert from the state doing that, or some participation from Science and Technology, when they've supported it, but I just want to narrow -- Make sure that the goal here is that we just -- This council just needs the numbers, and then, you know, after that, then all of the other aspects of allocations get sorted out, but the focus for this group is just getting the numbers, because I don't want them to have too much on their plates, because it's enough already, but I also want them to be able to work where it's not as pressured, and they can just produce the numbers for this council. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Walter. Any other questions or discussion on the motion? Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Well, I didn't know if there was any other questions on the charge, because I think the -- During the

Reef Fish committee, I think that's what the group wanted, and so I didn't know if there was other clarification on the draft charge.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Anyone have anything on the draft charge? Not seeing any. All right, and is there any other discussion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 64: Delegate Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Management to the Gulf States, Tab B, Number 4, council staff presented Reef Fish Amendment 64, which considers the delegation of the federal for-hire management authority for red snapper to the Gulf states.

The amendment includes management measures to delegate to states, allocate the federal for-hire component annual catch target amongst the states, sunset provisions, and accountability measures. Staff discussed the purpose and need statement previously approved by the council and presented a revised version suggested by the interdisciplinary planning team.

Committee members supported the revision and suggested including "fair and equitable access" in the revised need statement. NOAA GC noted that fair and equitable access is not clearly defined and indicated that the initial purpose and need is too broad. A committee member highlighted that fairness and equitability can be interpreted differently amongst the Gulf states.

A committee member suggested that the need statement could emphasize maximizing economic benefits instead of minimizing adverse economic impacts. Staff said an updated purpose and need will be included in the amendment.

Staff discussed the delegation of management authority to the states to set federal for-hire red snapper seasons and bag and size limits and inquired whether state-specific endorsements would be included in the amendment. Staff presented a map of the Gulf, including boundaries between the states extending into federal waters.

NOAA GC noted that, as in state management, Amendment 50A, boundary lines would be needed if some states do not accept delegation. Committee members indicated that the effects of different seasons and bag limits could affect angler incentives to fish in certain areas and should be considered. **Committee members stated they did not support sunset provisions and recommended their removal from the amendment, and we have a committee motion, Mr. Chair.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Is there any discussion on the motion from the board? Okay. **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A committee member said a solution to allocating federal for-hire component red snapper catch limit amongst states would be to keep the component as a single unit. Another committee member said the allocation percentages for Florida and Alabama were reversed in the presentation. Staff replied that the data were inadvertently transposed.

The committee suggested that management authority could also be delegated into regions, e.g., two or more states, and recommended the addition of options for regional delegation in the amendment. **The committee recommends, and I so move, to include options for regional management in Reef Fish Amendment 64.** That motion carried with one in opposition, one absent, and one abstention. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? All right. Seeing none, let's try this. **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'm going to put up a couple of motions here, and so, Bernie, if you could bring up the first one, please. Okay, so I'll go ahead and read this, once we get it a little bit bigger.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Sweetman, is this your motion?

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and I will read it. **The motion is to add an alternative in Action 3 to use 50 percent of the average landings from 2016 to 2024 and 50 percent of the average landings from 2021 to 2024.** If I get a second, I can explain.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Dr. Sweetman has a motion on the board. Is there a second? Mr. Sanchez seconded. Discussion on the motion? Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and I just wanted to put this motion out there. The Bowtie Method, or the so-called Bowtie Method, that was done in one of the, or in a couple of the actions here, is not relevant to modern day here. Some of the data, the only time series that they're using, goes back into the early 2000s. If anything, this is more representative of the historical nature of this fishery, as well as applying appropriately the more recent landings here

for the recent timeframe.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I'll open the floor for discussion or questions on the motion. Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Essentially, this is combining Alternative 2 and 3 in the document, as far as allocation. I'm not opposed to adding this. I think, as many options as we want to look at in here, I'm open to, and so I'm not opposed to this motion.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Any other -- Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'll just voice support for adding it for at least consideration. As I expressed in committee, I had some concerns about looking at data that was forty years old, and so I think this addresses at least one of my concerns with looking at least at more recent time series that's relative to current conditions, or closer to current conditions.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any other comments regarding Dr. Sweetman's motion? Dr. Allen.

DR. ALLEN: I'll just note that this is very similar to what we selected in the yellowtail snapper, and so there's consistency there.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you for that, Dr. Allen. Any other comments, or discussion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman, did you have --

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’ve got one more motion that is very similar to this one, with a little bit longer time series, if we can bring that one up, Bernie. Okay, and so the only difference here in this motion is using a little bit longer of a time series in the earlier phase here, going back to 2003 instead of stopping at 2016.

The motion is to make an alternative in Action 3 to use 50 percent of the average landings from 2003 to 2024 and then 50 percent of the average landings from 2021 to 2024.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. We have Dr. Sweetman's motion on the board. Is there a second? Mr. Sanchez seconded. Any further discussion on the motion? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Just for my clarification, these are total

recreational landings, or these are just for-hire landings? Just for-hire landings? Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: C.J., I assume you're selecting 2003 because that's the start of the permit moratorium?

DR. SWEETMAN: That's exactly correct.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, once again, I'm supportive of analyzing this. I think the other thing that relates back to the charge we just discussed is not only looking at kind of years to consider including or excluding, but we should be thinking about this from the standpoint of the data itself and the changes that have occurred to the data. I know for-hire has been much more stable, but we've had, obviously, new surveys come online, and so that I think will be important, to consider these various time series for allocation.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thanks, and this was intentionally, like Andy said, to try and get at that permit moratorium. I mean, some of the other alternatives that we've had in actions really -- It's a completely different scenario after 2003, and this is just more reflective of what the current situation is. You know, before then, it was unlimited effort, unlimited vessels, and, I mean, so I think this is an appropriate timeframe for us to evaluate.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, C.J., would you be willing to consider adding an amendment to that motion, or amending the motion, to exclude the year 2010? It's purposefully excluded in the other motions because of what occurred in the Gulf, and so I guess it would be 2003 to 2009 and then 2011 to 2024, and you would just have to change the time series, if you're willing to do that.

DR. SWEETMAN: You're thinking just relative to the BP oil spill? Yes, and I think that's fine. I'm okay with that. **It can just be 2003 to 2024, excluding 2010.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. We'll Bernie get that on the board. How is that, Dr. Sweetman?

DR. SWEETMAN: There you go. I think that's good, Bernie. Thank

you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. I'm going to look at Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I'm okay.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: The seconder is okay with the changes. Any further discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Okay. Moving on. Draft Options: Management Flexibility for the Federal For-Hire component of the Red Snapper Fishery, Tab B, Number 5, council staff presented options for delegating authority for modifying specific management measures to the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator for the federal for-hire component for red snapper.

Council staff said the council would need ultimately to define exactly what would happen in the following fishing year based on what happened in the previous fishing year. Changes to management measures within a fishing year cannot be projected because of a lag in reporting. The Regional Administrator can already reopen the fishing season later in the fishing year if there is enough of the ACT remaining.

The Southeast Regional Office made clear that any approach being discussed needs to be long lasting and durable to changes in the regional administrators and fishery dynamics. SERO thought that narrowing the scope of actions being considered, specifically eliminating changes to minimum size limits, should be considered.

Other committee members echoed this reservation relative to the effects such a change would have on the estimation of selectivity and retention in the stock assessment. A committee member favored preserving the summer fishing season and prioritizing harvesting the ACT second to that.

Another committee member asked SERO about what flexibilities would be helpful for federal for-hire fisheries management, and SERO replied that it could provide some more ideas.

NOAA GC noted a previous action to modify the bag limit for red grouper based on fishery performance, which was ultimately not successful relative to its stated goal.

Committee members decided to wait for public comment to help orient the council and staff on key goals for the proposed management actions. SERO reiterated the importance of the assumption that

the stock is healthy when making management modifications.

Another committee member thought a fixed and predictable fishing season was a key need for the federal for-hire fleet. Mr. Chair, I think we probably want to have a little pause here, so we can give Ryan a little bit direction to how to try to move some of this forward.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes, sir. Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, sir. Yes, and we definitely need you guys to give us a target to shoot for on this. We keep hearing more, I think, and this is my personal opinion, that we keep hearing more about having some sort of a predictable fishing season, or some core period of time where the fishing season is intended to be open as a need.

Some sort of affirmation from you guys of, you know, whether or not that's true would be immensely helpful, because, when we're talking about building out all these triggers and everything about what we're going to do in the next fishing year based on what happened in the previous one, I need to base it off of something. Otherwise, you guys are going to get an action that's got forty-seven alternatives in it, and we're going to get nowhere.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ryan. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and I would agree with that. I think what we hear consistently from the public, and what we heard not just at this meeting, but in the past, is the need for some of these predictable fishing seasons, so they can set up their business structure, book trips, and everything along those lines. I mean, this is not just for red snapper that we hear this for. We hear this for gag grouper. I mean, this is probably the number-one thing that I think I hear from the charter sector there, and so I would agree with that component for that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, sir, and so, to that point, we have this framework action that we've transmitted to the agency, and hopefully will be able to be put in place for the next fishing year, for 2027, that would open the fishing season Friday before Memorial Day.

You guys went through considerable deliberation about choosing that date specifically as the start date. Is it safe for staff, and eventually, when we have one, the IPT, to assume that we still

want to use that as the start date, the Friday before Memorial Day being the start date for the federal for-hire fleet?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I have Mr. Schieble, and then Mr. Walker.

MR. SCHIEBLE: I'll just bring up an example here. Yesterday, in public comment, we heard a charter captain from Texas say that he wanted the federal for-hire season to start in April, I believe it was, right, and so, I mean, we have these differences on one side of the Gulf versus the other.

Here we go back to talking about, you know, one-size-fits-all doesn't really work, and we're asking for what flexibilities would be helpful for federal for-hire fisheries management to tell in this document. I think we add some regional component to this, some regional flexibility, if that's a possibility for the Regional Administrator to be allowed to have regional management within the Gulf, and maybe that precludes what we're doing in the other amendment a little bit.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Yes, and so, to that point, if it opened -- If a fishing season, or, sorry, the fishing year begins April 1, that does provide an opportunity for the for-hire fleet if the season is extended, because the ACT wasn't meant for it to be open during spring break, which I think is part of that recommendation that was put forward.

Typically, or what we've seen anyway, is that the season reopens now sometime in say November or December, or something like that, for a period of weeks, to, you know, a little over a month or something, and so, if we shift the start of the fishing year to begin April 1, any tail-end portion of the fishing year that would be subject to that reopening would likely also occur during spring break months, which, from the perspective of being able to book trips, would be advantageous for the for-hire fleet, regardless of state.

That might be something that we could consider there, but it wouldn't be -- It wouldn’t have to be a regionally-specific thing. It's something that, in my mind's eye anyway, would be advantageous across-the-board.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: To that point, Mr. Schieble?

MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes, and I guess I would look to others around the table here. Would we want to consider having some regional

component in this for management anyway, because of the other action, Amendment 64, that we're going through right now? Is there any benefit to that, do you see?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Walker, and then Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. WALKER: So, in my view, the charter industry and us have debated opening of red snapper for a couple of years, and we've settled on a date, and we've heard that they like consistency in that, and so I say, in my opinion, as a charter boat captain, no. We've set the date, and we've put a lot of time and debate and discussion and public input into it, and we should leave it where it is now.

What Mr. Williams was talking about yesterday was not changing the season date, but changing -- What do you call it, the fiscal date, the fiscal year, like with king mackerel, and so things could be adjusted on the tail-end, and I'm okay with that, allowing flexibility toward the end of the season with -- You know, because the end of the season just kind of fizzles out for a lot of charter guides.

They're not that busy, and maybe it would be better if they had some leftover dates, and they could use them at a later time or something, and so I'm more in favor of that, but I'm -- I've heard from a lot of other charter captains that, you know, give us a set date, that we can plan our trips on and stuff, and they really were -- They told me to express disappointment in not getting the one week earlier this year when I came up here this year, and so they're kind of -- The fleet that I know is planning on that hard date and keeping it that way for, you know, management of their business.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, just wrap up the conversation of fishing years, the way I look at this is we forego the first five months of the fishing year before we start for-hire harvest, and so, by the time you get to the fall, if we haven't caught our catch target, you have a limited time to potentially fulfill your catch target, and you can't wrap around, obviously, to that five months that you've already foregone, and so that's the idea of the fishing year.

I will say that I feel like Johnny was talking out of both sides of his mouth there, because with one respect he was saying, well, we're not catching the catch target, and give us more days, but then he said, well, we're not catching the catch target because

there's not enough fish there to catch, right, and so that's the conundrum I feel like I'm wrestling with, with both kind of how we manage toward catch limits and the RA's authority, because, when the fishery is not maybe as healthy, or there's localized depletion occurring in certain areas, right, you can continually extend days to try to catch the catch target, but ultimately not achieve that.

When the stock is really doing well, we tend to bust the catch target, or run up right against it, and we can, obviously, have the dials to control, obviously, harvest levels, and so, with that said, Chris, your comment about regional component, I think I would want to think about it.

I think, if it starts to involve allocations, it becomes a lot more challenging, and I don't know -- I'm trying to think about how you would do it without allocations, right, and then we shared a number of ideas between committee and Full Council as staff around the triggers, and I think, right now, I'm inclined to let's keep season, bag limit, size limit changes as part of those options.

I'm almost thinking, Ryan, that maybe we work together and come back in October with a presentation on some concepts, to see what resonates and what doesn't resonate with the council.

There's certainly, I think, pros and cons to a lot of these options, but see if there's anything that can be workable, and so, for example, we tossed out the concept of there's a core season that we're going to focus on harvest for for-hire. It's going to start at a certain time period and end at a certain time period. If we project the catch target, it's going to not be met based on that core season, and then we create triggers that decide how the RA would add days to that season. Would it be before the season? Would it be after the season? Would it be a split season with a second season later in the year?

Those are the ideas that we've been kind of exploring, but I feel like we need to kind of lay out those concepts to you in a presentation, in order for you to see exactly what may be workable or not.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Captain Frady, and then Dr. Sweetman.

MR. FRADY: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Thank you all for chiming-in on this right here. I see similarities in 64 to what we're also proposing for the Regional Administrator's flexibility thing, and so I like the idea of preserving the fishermen's access to the

fish, the charter-for-hire, during the Friday before Memorial Day.

That is something worth preserving, but the reason I'm looking at this now a little bit differently is, if this set up an opportunity to harvest red snapper during short periods in the spring that were guaranteed in the spring to help set this process up, it would reduce uncertainty on the back end of us trying to catch our ACT, and end up having to open the season on a short notice through like November or December or something like that, which nobody has made plans to catch fish by then.

I would support setting this up similar to the flexibility of the Regional Administrator that we've been talking about, having those short periods of time in the spring, to make sure we hit our ACT, or get close to our ACT, but I also support having -- On the back end, having the built-in -- Like a couple of weeks in October as a guaranteed open, and we may even look at closing the season mid-August as an option, when kids go back to school for that short period of time, to make sure we get our numbers in.

Then we can have a set season beginning October 1, and so I see -- We're talking about flexibility, and we need to use it, and just continue beating that, because everybody wants to maximize their income. They want to maximize and make sure we hit our ACT, and so, anything we can do to do that -- I mean, I would be in support of, at least in theory, laying out the design of this to make sure we hit our ACT, whether it begins in April, but it ends up in October. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Frady. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, Andy, just a question for you. When we were in committee, we really heard no appetite about modifying size limits or anything like that, and the challenges that are associated, you know, along those lines for using that for a predictable fishing season, and so can you explain to me why you want to keep that in there now for the future?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, to clarify, just keeping it in for consideration now, because we're so early in the process, but I agree with you that I don't think there's probably a lot of viable paths to include that as we work through this amendment.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and I'm just trying to make sure -- To give

Ryan a little bit of help here, so we're not having to analyze 10,000 things and come back with a variety of options, and so, I mean, my perspective, and I'm only speaking for myself here, but I think the size limits -- Changing size limits on a year-to-year basis is a bad idea, and so I would not be really in favor of even having that consideration, but I'll see what Ryan has to say.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, sir, and I'm looking over towards Dr. Walter. All my experience in the stock assessment process leads me to think that annual changes, or even biannual changes, to the minimum size limit would wreak havoc on selectivity and retention functions related to length composition data in the stock assessment, and it would not be ideal, and so not from a quantitative standpoint for our understanding of what's actually going on with the species, and so I would strongly discourage you guys, from a science perspective, from routine modifications to the minimum size limit.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I have Mr. Strelcheck to that point.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I'm certainly not in opposition to what C.J. is saying, and so, in terms of staff direction, I'm comfortable with eliminating the size limit as a consideration, and I can certainly speak to a few other ideas that we may want to give staff direction on, but is that okay?

In terms of the bag limit, I guess I would be interested in hearing from the council, and I don't recall the full range we have for private, but I want to say it's two to four fish for private, and I don't know if we can reduce it down to one. The question was, you know, what would be the range to consider for increasing or decreasing bag limits, and should we include one fish.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Dr. Froeschke, to that, and then we'll go to Dr. Allen.

DR. JOHN FROESCHKE: I guess what I would appreciate some guidance is we've done this two times, to my knowledge, in the past, once for red grouper and once for king mackerel. When the catch rates were low, we increased the bag limits, which did not result in anything noticeably positive, and, if the catch rates were low because that assumption that the stock is healthy is violated, then you're doing more harm than good.

Is there a way that this could be done where, if catch rates were very low, that you actually reduce the bag limit? I don't see

that as an option, because the ACT is what it is, but that's my conundrum with this, is that you're likely to double down on a problem.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Great point, right, and that's one of my concerns about there's pros and cons to having this flexibility. I think the best way we can address that is not having an eight or ten-year time period between stock assessments, right, and having some more interim analyses, which I hope we can get to with red snapper going forward, right, because that, to me, is the best approach.

If things are not doing well, you adjust the ACT and ACLs based on the latest information and science, but, like you're suggesting, until that ACT guidance changes, the best scientific information available, then we should be focusing on trying to optimize yield to that target.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Allen, or go ahead, Ryan.

MR. RINDONE: Just thinking about our bag limit analyses, which usually show that, more often than not, recreational anglers, whether they're on a for-hire vessel or they're on the private vessel, are not landing the vessel's worth of anglers, worth of the daily bag, and so we see that across species, and that's pretty regular.

Maybe we could have some discussion, when we're trying to put all of this together, about looking at the bag limit analysis as a way to determine whether it's appropriate or not to increase or decrease the bag limit based on recent performance in the fishery, on the angler's ability to catch the bag limit in the first place, and so, if the ACL isn't being met, but the bag limit analysis is telling us that, you know, say more than 90 percent of anglers aren't catching it anyway, well, increasing it's not going to help them catch what they're not catching already, and so that would be informative to the Regional Administrator in terms of making that decision.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ryan. I have Dr. Allen, and then Captain Walker.

DR. ALLEN: Yes, and just a comment on the bag limit. I completely agree. I think that's an important issue, and those bag limit changes usually don't have a big effect in recreational fisheries. I was just going to add, with regard to the minimum size limit, when it comes to the stock assessment, changing the minimum size

limit through time is going to -- That's going to cause us to have annual selectivity parameters changing, and I think it would substantially complicate the stock assessment process, and so I would be okay with taking the minimum size limits out of here. I'm okay with Andy's suggestion to leave it in for now, but I suspect that that's an area we don't want to go to.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Allen. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Well, first off, I would agree with Dr. Allen on that. I would be okay just removing that size limit, but my topic I wanted to throw in the mix here is that I think I could speak for a lot of our charter guys where we are that I don't know that anybody where I live wants any more than a two-fish bag limit on a charter.

I understand that's probably different in Louisiana, but our guys are -- You know, it's easier to tell your clients they have a limit, whether they get sixteen fish, or eight fish, or whatever, and they're happy they hit their limit, and the guys don't feel like they're smashing the resource to death out there. I can't speak for everybody, but I have a pretty good idea that our guys are okay with two, and I haven't heard anybody once ask for an increase in bag limit for for-hire where we are in the Gulf.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I appreciate those comments, and I guess I go back to I'm fine with, obviously, taking out the size limit, and so I want to make sure we're on the same page for direction for Ryan, right? In terms of the bag limit, I mean, I generally agree that's kind of what I've heard from the charter community.

The condition of the stock is going to change over time, right? Maybe for better, maybe for worse, and maybe there's opportunities where we could increase the bag limit, and maybe there's need for reducing the bag limit, and so that's, I guess, where I'm at right now, is we're so early in the process of trying to figure things out, and let's not take that as an option off the table quite yet.

If it's something that we ultimately say, hey, a two-fish bag limit, and everyone is going to largely want that, and we're not going to want to change it, and we can, obviously, make that decision down the road.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. All right. I'm looking around the table. Is there any more comments? Mr.

Rindone, do you have what you need?

MR. RINDONE: It’s slightly less turbid than we started. We're making progress.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I alluded to coming back, and I don't recall what's on the October agenda, and if this would come back in October or not. If it is, then certainly I think I'm open to working with council staff on the presentation, fleshing out some of these concepts, some of the things that have been suggested around the table, and seeing, obviously, if there's more specific direction we can provide Ryan and team based on those presentations.

MR. RINDONE: My expectation would be the next pass would be a better characterization of the ideas that, you know, we've talked about here, and making sure that the things that we're going to be considering are in line with what you guys want, and then, after that, we would put forward an actual options draft.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other comments? Ryan, you good? All right. We're going to move on. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right. Moving on, we're on Draft Options: Modifications to Red Snapper Private Recreational Post-Season Accountability Measures, Tab B, Number 6.

Council staff presented a draft framework action to modify private recreational accountability measures for red snapper and provided historical examples of overages to demonstrate how the action could be implemented.

After a presentation of the alternatives, a committee member asked which options align with scientific uncertainty, and another committee member from Louisiana replied that 6 percent would be appropriate for their state data collection system, LA Creel.

A committee member asked to revisit carryover provisions. Council staff and another committee member responded that carryovers are not included in this action, but are on the action schedule to be developed as a separate document. NOAA GC mentioned that carryover is allowed in Amendment 50A, but it is contingent on the implementation of a carryover amendment.

Some committee members supported both Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2c. A committee member suggested that, as most overages have

been within 10 percent of a state's ACL, Option 2c would be preferable.

In response to a question about the start date of the frequency limitation, staff stated that the three-year rolling period would begin with the first year after the effective date of this action. NOAA GC reiterated that some flexibility would go away if there were back-to-back overages. A committee member suggested considering the number of pounds, instead of a percentage, to accommodate states with comparatively small ACLs.

The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1 to make Alternative 2c the preferred alternative. That motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I have a committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on, July 2026 SSC Meeting presentation and Meeting Summary, Tab B, Number 7, Mr. Trevor Moncrief, Chair of the Scientific and Statistical Committee, reviewed discussions from the July 2026 Gulf SSC meeting.

Mr. Moncrief reviewed SSC discussions on new fisheries integrated modeling system, Mexican king mackerel landings and their consideration in the current Gulf SEDAR stock assessment for king mackerel, and a data analysis examining Gulf tilefish species.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I'm not seeing any comments. Dr. Sweetman, before we get to 59A, I'm going to look around the table and see if there's an appetite for a break, or do you all want to get into 59A? A break? A fifteen-minute break, and then we'll reconvene.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. We're going to go ahead and pick up where we left off, and we'll turn it back over to Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on to the next topic here, Draft Options, Reef Fish Amendment 59A, Permit Requirements and IFQ programs, Tab B, Number 8, council staff presented Reef Fish Amendment 59A, which considers permit requirements in the red snapper and grouper-tilefish IFQ programs. The committee reviewed previously-selected preferred alternatives.

Staff presented Action 5.1, which considers criteria for granting exemptions from the permit requirements to nonprofit organizations. A committee member suggested they would like to hear public comments from those involved in relevant nonprofits.

Staff discussed criteria for maintaining exemptions from permit requirements, Action 5.2. A committee member requested further criteria for maintaining a quota exemption, including details of how many participants applied to the quota bank, how many were awarded quota, and how many were not, which would be in an annual report submitted to the council. SERO cautioned about the administrative and scheduling burdens that could be experienced by the council and NMFS.

A committee member suggested grandfathering existing relevant nonprofits and capping the number of exemptions as a guard against participants using nonprofit exemptions as a loophole. The committee member also noted that there are a few participants with loans from the Fisheries Finance Program who have accounts that are not linked to permits. These participants would need exemptions, or future loans should be tied to permit requirements.

Committee members expressed concern about the timeline of this document and that a complex discussion on exemption criteria could slow down this amendment. Staff discussed issues the committee might consider for eligibility and challenges with exemptions, such as fairness, loopholes, current applicability, and assessment of the social, economic, and biological benefits expected from nonprofit quota banks.

The committee member suggested that permit exemptions would be more directly relevant in a discussion of the activity requirements in Amendment 59B. Committee members suggested that there should be continued discussion about this action during Full Council following public comment, and I know we're going to have some discussion here, and, Captain Walker, I know you've got your hand up, so I'm going to queue it over to you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Go ahead, Ed.

MR. WALKER: So I'm going to discuss the -- Well, I'm going to support the concept of setting a control date for exemptions for quota banks. Andy and I have talked about this, and he seems to think it will work, and so I would kick it over to him to explain it, but it would essentially allow those quota banks that are in existence now to apply, and potentially get in, and close the door behind that for now.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Bernie, if you could bring up the draft motion, and then I'll walk through and kind of explain this, and, really, this was born out of the committee discussion as an idea that I wanted to float with the council, because the control date would be something you'd request with NOAA Fisheries. I don't necessarily feel like it's appropriate for me to make this motion, but that's why I've talked to several council members about the concept.

So just to kind of walk through, because we were talking about this during committee, recommending a control date that would be established for yesterday, and that control date would essentially be used to decide if it -- Essentially, I'll read it.

Request NOAA Fisheries establish August 26, 2026 as the control date the Gulf Council may use if it decides to recommend exemptions for non-profit organizations operating quota pools or other similar quota distribution programs from requirements to obtain or retain shares or allocation in the Gulf red snapper and grouper-tilefish IFQ programs. Non-profit organizations established after the control date, and those that open an IFQ account with NOAA Fisheries after the control date, may not be eligible to apply for an exemption from reef fish permit requirements or other requirements recognized by the council in the future.

What this does -- Essentially, it says it puts these organizations on notice. It doesn't mean you can't apply for an account, or it doesn't mean you can't establish yourself as a non-profit organization operating with the IFQ program, but it's kind of at your own risk at that point going forward, because we will make decisions, whether it's 59A or B or C, that could affect that particular entity.

At this point, it also doesn't say that we are allowing non-profit organizations to continue operating in the system. That is a decision that still has to be made, and determined, whether it's through 59A or another mechanism, but it essentially gives a kind of hard and fast date to let people know, obviously, that we are considering this, and we're looking into this, and we will ultimately make some decisions that could affect the operation of that as non-profit quota banks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck, for that explanation. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I would be in support of this, because I think a lot

of the concerns focused on opening a door for nefarious actors to enter this arena, and take advantage, and I think this would help to close that, and so I would be totally in support of it.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I don't believe anyone has formally made a motion. It's just a discussion at this point. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I would make that motion, so Andy does not have to.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Mr. Sanchez makes the motion. Do we have a second? Mr. Anson seconds. Mr. Osborne, you had your hand up?

MR. OSBORNE: The way that I'm reading this is that if -- When we say may not, that doesn't mean that necessarily it's closing the door completely, but it could eventually close the door to only those that have a non-profit currently, and, as I understand, there's only one quota bank right now.

I know there's other non-profits out there, but does that mean those non-profits that aren't acting as a quota bank could -- Because they were before the control date, they could start operating the quota bank?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Anson.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so I'll say that there's certainly clearly at least one or more that are operating within the system. It's not fully clear to us, you know, how many, because they don't necessarily have to report to us that they're operating with the system as a non-profit, or they might have accounts set up in different ways, and so that's one of the questions that I think we're still trying to answer.

Then I think the other aspect of this is, because the decision to provide an exemption or not in 59A is still pending, this isn't saying that we will or will not provide that exemption. What it is saying though is that, as this progresses, if that exemption is considered, it may not be provided to those that establish a non-profit, operate as a quota bank, and set up an account after August 26th, right, and it would only apply to those that were in the system prior to that date, and so hopefully that answers your question.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Anson, and then Mr. Walker.

MR. ANSON: Just following up on Andy's comment just then about one or more, and so I'm thinking about the more at this point, and

you described them as some entities, or conglomeration, I guess, of accounts maybe that might be operating as a de facto organization to do some of the things that would be identified in a quota pool, or a quota bank, and so I'm understanding then that this motion -- The non-profit organization would be identified explicitly in any future action that we would take, whether it be 59A, B, or C, to identify what a non-profit organization is.

They would have to meet those criteria that would be identified in that, and so, even though there might be these entities that are not officially known, they would have to then comply with all of those elements, or requirements, in the future amendments, correct?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead, Andy, to that point.

MR. STRELCHECK: Correct, and then, as it was pointed out, I mean, the term "may" is used there intentionally, because this is not binding to the council's decision-making, and so you could, a year from now, be working on this and say, no, we want to include new entities that have set up accounts and that meet the non-profit organization status since August 26th, but, right now, this is essentially to address the concerns surrounding the potential for a loophole to develop, and the potential for a run on these type of accounts and quota banks, which may or may not transpire.

As I've told several people, right, it's been fifteen to eighteen years since this program started, and it's not like there's people that have been knocking down the door wanting to do this, and so my concern would be, if we start seeing increased activity, that sends a message that, yes, they're trying to exploit a potential loophole that we've created with an exemption, and so this just gives them notice that that might not be allowed.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Yes, and I appreciate the extra comments there, and, you know, I'm in support of this motion as well, because it does provide the flexibility, if you will, if we decide to not support a non-profit organization, and it still allows us to do that and take action to that effect, and so thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Kevin. Next up is Mr. Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, and I was kind of going to say the same thing. I don't think that there's a lot of legitimate non-profits that we're not aware of. As a shareholder who is involved in the, you know, currency of allocation, there's

not a lot of legitimate entities that we might be missing with this, to my knowledge.

The reason that we can't include entities that might be out there that we don't know about is because that's exactly the same thing that somebody looking to exploit the system is going to say they are.

They're going to come in and say, oh, I've had this little quota bank in my garage for a while, and so I should be qualified, and so we have to draw the line somewhere, and we've done this with a couple other things.

Charter permits, for one, when they announced the moratorium on them, they had to set the control date like yesterday, or everybody would run out and apply for a charter permit the next day, to potentially score a valuable charter permit down the road, and so you kind of have to set yourself up where, as Andy said, people won't make a run on this to beat the deadline, and maybe open the door for the kind of thing that we're trying to avoid here.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ed. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes, and I agree. We have a history of using control dates, and so that shouldn't be something unfamiliar to this process.

In addition to that, I think, as we get past this discussion on this motion, we had a really good presentation yesterday on -- It was presented by Assane, and Dr. Suitor had a lot of work in this too, and I think they identified, in fantastic detail, and did a great job, all of the things that would identify a legitimate nonprofit, and distinguish them as such, from someone who would be trying to -- Or is existing just doing that, to game the system.

As we get past this motion, which helps to close that door, I think we can refine identifying the legitimates and distinguishing them from the others that are up to more nefarious things.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: I appreciate what you guys are saying on this, but doesn't this open the door for -- We’re creating an exemption for like, at most, maybe four groups right now, and, in my mind, that leaves -- Like how do we create a process, if we're going to go with nonprofit organizations, but then we're going to have a control date that says you can't create one, and then we're only creating an exemption for those that are already in existence, and

are we having controls on how big they can get, right?

I just worry that, one, I don't know -- I'm not a lawyer, and maybe it does meet, you know, legal challenges, but, I mean, I would ask our attorney here at the table that, and maybe she could answer it, but I would think that somebody that would want to come in and do a nonprofit, and has all the best intentions, but isn't allowed to, because we put in this control date, and seeing that we're only providing an exemption for one that I know of for sure that is doing a quota bank, and not that they're doing anything wrong, but I'm just thinking that we're creating an exemption for one group right now.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck, to that point?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, just in response to that, one, this doesn't prohibit this at this point. It puts them on notice, right, and it's still up to us to decide the path forward here. Two, we're not saying that we have provided an exemption at this point. That's still before the council as a decision that we have to make, is do we want to provide that exemption or not.

If we're going to provide that exemption, then what this says is we're going to potentially just provide it to those operating in the system prior to this date, but it also isn't binding to that, if we want to consider nonprofits that are in the system post this date, but those are things that we would have to decide as we progress.

As an example, for those maybe not familiar with control dates, we've often used control dates when we're limiting access to a fishery, and so, when we have an open access permit, and we establish a control date, and it puts people on notice that, if they decide to get an open access permit after that date, they may not qualify for the limited access, right, and so we have used these.

I don't recall any times where we've been sued, but certainly that is a potential in the future, but we would essentially go out and publish this as a notice, and let people, obviously, be aware of the decision, if it's passed by the council.

MR. OSBORNE: I completely understand, and I agree. I don't -- I'm not questioning whether -- You know, the term "may not", you know, is pretty clear, but, when we've used control dates in the past, have we -- Have they been in an environment where it's only maybe benefiting less than five people? I mean, when we're talking about control dates for other issues, and it may be -- It could be

in the hundreds, or the thousands, that are affected, as opposed to less than five.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I don't know the answer to that. I mean, we've used control dates all over the country for various fisheries issues, and certainly some fisheries are far larger than others, and so there might have been use of control dates for small fisheries, but we would have to look into that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I have Mr. Sanchez, but I'll let Mara respond.

MS. LEVY: Well, right, and so, when the council makes this type of motion, what the Fisheries Service does is basically publish an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking, which is not binding on anyone.

It's not a proposed rule, but it's letting the public know that we're considering this action, and we're considering limiting access to something particular, in this case, limiting access to quota banks who would not need a permit, right?

Where the legal responsibility, or more justification, comes in is when you actually make the decision, right, and so, if you're going down the road, and you're like only those people, or only those nonprofits, that have been in since before August 26, 2026 can actually apply for this exemption, we're going to have to justify that, right? You're going to have to come up with the rationale why you're doing that, and we're going to have to have a good justification for it, and so that's where we start to get into the meat of this. This is just a public notice that we're considering this type of thing. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thanks, Ms. Levy. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I think this is a good step, and then what I would suggest is that we flesh out the mechanism to identify the legitimate nonprofits and hold them to account, where they have to report to the staff things like the transactions they do, the shares they dole out, the ones they deny, and make us privy to all that, and we give National Marine Fisheries Service the authority to deny or revoke them if they see any illegitimacy being conducted in their business.

I'm thinking the problem we're trying to address is a possible loophole. As far as being exclusive to people, there hasn't been an abundance of people starting up nonprofits, and so I think what we're addressing here is abuses of using a veneer of a nonprofit to take advantage of the system.

I'm in support of this motion, and I am in support of continuing the good work, where I heard people, during yesterday's public testimony, thank the shareholders for getting them started and fired up and helping them -- Kind of take them under their wing to get started in the fishery, and so I think they're doing a legitimate good, and I would, as you know, like to see them continue to have that opportunity to do that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Captain Walker, you had your hand up, and then Dr. Sweetman.

MR. WALKER: Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair. I think what we've been working on here for a while is trying to restrict shareholding without permits. That's the whole idea here, and so we're going to potentially grandfather -- Well, it's not exactly a grandfather, but we're going to maybe keep a couple, as long as they meet the requirements, but, beyond that, if we leave the door open, then we're not restricting shareholding without permits, because, to me, personally, the other alternative to this is just no quota banks at all.

Either just let a few legitimate ones that are in operation currently come in, that have already started, or just scratch them all, but to leave the door open would be a failure to what we're trying to do here, in my opinion.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Just to talk about kind of Mr. Osborne's question relative to the size of what we're doing here, I mean, one example that I can automatically think of is relative to the wreckfish ITQ in the South Atlantic there. That fishery is incredibly small, and there is an effective control date that limits the amount of people that are participating in that, and so that's just one example off the top of my head.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: Yes, and so, to Ed's point, I am also in favor of this motion, and establishing a control date, because I don't actually know where I would vote today on an exemption for quota banks. I go back and forth on -- I understand what they're doing, but, at the same time, how is it truly different than the guy sitting on the couch giving out quota?

Then the activity requirement, and are you going to go through and say how many pounds of allocation, or percent of allocation, goes

through as their activity requirement, because now you're tying to what does the market look like, and does anybody need allocation this year, and they could potentially be penalized for something that's not their fault, and so I haven't figured out how, in my mind, nonprofits fit here yet for quota banks.

I think this gives us time to still talk about it, and whether we want to leave them in 59A, put them in a different document, move it to B, whatever we're doing, and so I would speak in favor of this.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Banks. Do we have any other discussion on Mr. Sanchez's motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

MR. SANCHEZ: Following up on some of the concerns that stemmed from this discussion, I had a motion I had sent to staff to address some of the qualifying criteria to distinguish legitimate nonprofits from potentially illegitimate nonprofits. If they could put that up, I'll gladly read it and see if I can get a second.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I will give Bernie a moment to get Mr. Sanchez's motion on the board. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you. **The motion is to add proposed Actions 5.1 and 5.2 to the amendment. Also, in Action 5.1, to include a requirement that entities that receive exemptions must report yearly who applied, who received, and who were denied allocation. In Action 5.2, to include requirements that NMFS make this report available to the Gulf Council.**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay, we have a motion on the board by Mr. Sanchez. Is there a second? There's a second by Captain Walker. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes, and, again, this is based on the presentation we saw yesterday, which outlined pretty significant qualifiers for you to qualify and be seen as a legitimate nonprofit, and, again, we give the agency the ultimate authority to review this, and I have, personally, the utmost faith in the agency and Jessica to be able to determine who is legitimate and who isn't. They do a fantastic job in looking at corporations and such and peeling the layers off that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I'll open the floor for discussion on Mr. Sanchez's motion. Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: So, just looking back at what the actions were, 5.1 was to actually get the exemption from the permit requirement, right, and 5.2 was to keep it, and so I'm wondering if all of that information that you put in there is really to 5.2, meaning I'm not sure how they provide -- Bernie, can you go back up?

Providing a yearly report about who applied, received, and was denied allocation, and like you want that to actually give them the exemption or to maintain the exemption, and we can work that out, but I'm just curious what your thoughts were.

MR. SANCHEZ: I would give you all the flexibility to work that out.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Any other discussion? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, to that end, just maybe to be less prescriptive, can we just take out, in the second sentence, "in Action 5.1", and so just say "also to include a requirement", and that way it gives flexibility for the IPT to work with it.

MR. SANCHEZ: I'm fine with that change.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. We'll let Bernie edit the motion. You good with that, Mr. Sanchez?

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Captain Walker?

MR. WALKER: Yes, and I think it's just housekeeping there, and I don't think you need "5.2" in the first sentence anymore then, because it's all in 5.1, right?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: The first sentence is fine. **I think the second sentence also we need to just take out "in Action 5.1", right, and so we're adding proposed Actions 5.1 and 5.2 and then specifying some additional requirements that the IPT will include, and so take out after "also" in "Action 5.1".**

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you, and thank you for putting up with what I handed you this morning, which looked like a doctor's prescription.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Is Captain Walker good with the modifications?

MR. WALKER: Yes.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Any further discussion on the motion? Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: Just to be a pain, oftentimes, when we get these back to the IPT, it's almost invariable that we would -- You know, ideas come up for minor edits and things, and sometimes, when the actions are very prescriptive, we go around and around about can we massage it a little bit, maintain the intent, or it's explicit how it is, and so just a little clarification if we need to make some discussions, or refinements, in the drafting that, and do we have the flexibility to do that?

MR. SANCHEZ: I'm fine with that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I would like to have like a blanket waiver for that to be the case for all motions, and you just have to come back and provide the recommendations you have. I mean, that's the job of the IPT and the staff, right? They think of things that we don't, because they're thinking about this all the time, and so I said that jokingly, but, in all seriousness, yes, I really do appreciate that comment, and we want you to bring back those ideas.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Any other discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Okay. Moving on here. Public Hearing Draft: Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment --

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Sweetman. Sorry. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Sorry, C.J. One other comment, and maybe a question for Assane, and so we mentioned the loan requirements, and that also being something we need to look at, and so I don't think we need a motion, but I just wanted to flag that, that that's going to be also something we're going to want IPT input on at the October meeting.

DR. ASSANE DIAGNE: Yes, Mr. Strelcheck, and you are referring to those that have loans and don't have permits? To the extent that

there's an understanding by the council, the IPT will definitely bring input and offer you suggestions on how to address that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Good point, Andy, and no worries. Public Hearing Draft: Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44: Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, Tab B, Number 10, Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 is a joint amendment considering modification to Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper management between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

This amendment considers modification of the respective stock catch limits, jurisdictional apportionment of the respective stock ABCs, and setting of regional ACLs and South Atlantic sector allocations within the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. All right. Get ready for a lot of motions here, Mr. Chair.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to move Alternative 2, Alternative 5, and Alternative 6 in Action 3 to Considered but Rejected. This motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion? **Is there any opposition? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. **The next motion is the committee recommends, and I so move, to make Alternative 1 in Action 3 the preferred alternative.** That motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion on the board. Any discussion on the motion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, motion the carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. **The next motion is the committee recommends, and I so move, to move Alternative 2, Alternative 5, and Alternative 6 in Action 4 to Considered but Rejected.** This motion also carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion on the board. Any discussion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: The next motion is the committee recommends, and I so move, to make Alternative 1 in Action 4 the preferred

alternative. This motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Another committee motion on the board. Any discussion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Last one here. **The committee recommends, and I so move, to take Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, out to virtual public hearings.** That motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Just to make that spelling correction.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Bernie got it fixed up. Any other discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Just to congratulate Dr. Sweetman on very efficiently moving through this. It was bang, bang, bang. For this document, we're going to plan on bringing it back to you guys for final action in October, and then the South Atlantic Council for final action in December.

We had some conversations with the Regional Office, and that's going to be what we're going to target for timeline, and we’re sensitive to the amount of time we have left in the projection period that was agreed to by the SSC, and so trying to keep that throttle all the way forward.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Ryan. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Next item here is Overview: Understanding Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) from Fishery-Independent and Dependent Indices of Relative Abundance, Tab B, Number 12(a) through (c), Dr. Mike Allen, council member, presented an overview of CPUE, discussing benefits and limitations to its use for fishery-independent and fishery-dependent indices.

A committee member asked if spatial information collected from commercial vessel monitoring systems, VMS, could be used to inform CPUE estimates generated from fishery-dependent sources. Dr. Allen indicated that VMS data could be beneficial, but stated that in some cases there may not be enough resolution in those data, and so they should also be carefully examined when calculating

CPUE.

He continued that fishery-independent surveys also have sources of error, such as water turbidity in camera surveys, and fishery scientists try to mediate those factors as much as possible.

Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff reviewed CPUE estimates for red grouper in the commercial longline and handline fleets. These data were compared with those from two fishery-independent surveys, the NMFS bottom longline survey and the G-FISHER video survey.

A committee member asked why there was a general decline in CPUE for the two commercial fleets beginning in 2014. Council staff said that a number of management measures, including hook limitations and spatial restrictions to avoid sea turtle interactions seasonally, were also implemented during that time. Several committee members stated an examination of how regulatory changes affect CPUE trends in fishery-dependent data would be informative.

Dr. Ted Switzer, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, provided an overview of the history and application of the G-FISHER camera survey. The survey has been expanded to include more Gulf offshore habitat, but observations can be limited in certain areas due to water turbidity.

A committee member asked if there had been an effort to calibrate the hydroacoustic approach used in the western Gulf to the video method used in the eastern Gulf. Dr. Switzer responded that the calibration work was being conducted to compare those two methods, in order to make them directly comparable.

Another committee member asked if future work would include increased sampling off Alabama, and Dr. Switzer indicated that, as more habitat mapping from Alabama becomes available, that will open up the sampling frame to that area. Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff stated that SEAMAP could serve as a model for G-FISHER as a collaborative Gulf-wide survey that can provide data for scientific projects and inform management measures.

Next item is Discussion: Exempted Fishing Permits, Tab B, Number 11. SERO reviewed the process for submitting, reviewing, and approving an exempted fishing permit, or EFP.

Louisiana then summarized its EFP for its management of recreational greater amberjack. The proposal discussed how Louisiana intends to manage recreational greater amberjack within

its jurisdictional boundary, including the fishing season, June and July, minimum size limit, a thirty-four-inch fork length, a daily bag limit of one fish per person, and catch limit, 68,060 pounds whole weight, and a payback provision. Louisiana also proposed to perform biological sampling for age and growth of the recreational and commercial fleets. Recreational landings will be monitored under LA Creel.

SERO discussed recent litigation which reinforced the necessity for public review and defining a catch limit for each EFP. A committee member noted that the proposed catch limit for Louisiana was approximately 17 percent of the recreational ACL for the Gulf, and 20 percent of the recreational ACT, and, after accounting for average Florida landings, would be less than 5 to 8 percent for the remaining states.

A committee member also noted that the proposed EFP is in LA Creel data units and that a common data unit amongst the Gulf states would be needed. Another committee member expected that any EFPs for greater amberjack would be subject to catch limit attenuation relative to any changes in stock catch limits from a stock assessment.

Louisiana will hold its fishing season during the period when its recreational red snapper fishing season is open, which will accomplish its goal of having a fishing opportunity for greater amberjack while creating efficiencies for its biological sampling.

A committee member questioned whether allowing harvest in June and July was the best for stock recovery, due to the timing of spawning for stock and also noting that currently greater amberjack is not targeted in June and July, and it can be avoided by using cut baits for red snapper, instead of live bait, which will catch both species. Louisiana predicts a reduction in discard mortality around structure in its waters by allowing retention of greater amberjack in June and July.

Another committee member asked about access to greater amberjack for anglers in neighboring Mississippi. Louisiana replied that anglers would need to be properly licensed to fish in Louisiana waters and to land their catch in Louisiana, and I don't know if there's any further discussion on this, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Just to Andy about the timing of this relative to the council to provide comment, and I thought you mentioned that this would still be available for comment at the table for the October

meeting, or is this the only opportunity, and that potentially a decision can be made -- Or the window for providing opportunity will be closed before the October meeting?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Because they're requesting a season exemption that goes in the middle of next year, I don't want to make a time commitment quite yet as to whether we bring it back in October or January. We have a lot on our plate, and I want to make sure we talk to the team, and any changes that we work through, obviously, with Louisiana.

I know their desire is to try to have the EFP comment period sooner rather than later, and so we will work on that, but our goal, obviously, is, when we do a public comment period, to time it where it overlaps with a council meeting, to give you the opportunity to also comment as a council during that same time period.

MR. ANSON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and all I'll say about this is just I would recommend that Louisiana coordinate with the other Gulf states on this. I think, when the numbers actually came out, there was a little bit of eye opening for what might actually be available for some of the other Gulf states, and that's going to be a very important consideration of this process, to make it palatable for everyone.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes, and, you know, we're not trying to operate behind closed doors. This was a last-minute change that had to be made here during the council meeting. We worked with Andy and Frank to finalize this draft that you all have in your briefing books to look at, and so, obviously, we've got a lot of time between now and the October meeting for potential official public comment by the council, at maybe the October meeting, or January, whatever the timeline allows.

I think we have plenty of time between now and then to coordinate with the individual states to discuss whatever allocation, or whatever we need to go through forward, but, also, just a reminder that we're requesting the fish on the back-end of the fishing year, and so all the other states are going to have access to the fishery, and that allocation, first. We're coming in on the very end of it

all.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Schieble, for that information. Anything else? Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Back to the report? I'm good. Okay. Other Business, there was no other business brought before the committee. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. All right. Well, that wraps up Reef Fish, and, moving on down the agenda, next up, we'll have Mr. Helies give us an update on the documents transmitted for rulemaking.

UPDATE ON DOCUMENTS TRANSMITTED FOR RULEMAKING

MR. HELIES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have a lot, as you can see from the sheet that John had sent out earlier on the priorities listing. We've got a lot of things at the Regional Office, and so I'm going to start with final rules.

We did finalize an action, and so we can all clap on that, and so it's the framework action for reef fish, shallow-water grouper, modifying catch levels and establishing the recreational closed season. The final rule for that published on June 17th, and it has a January 1, 2027 effective date.

The commercial electronic reporting amendment, we've been working on that for quite some time. The amendment was approved on February 17, 2026. The proposed rule published in May, and that common period is over, and the final rule is in the region. We're working on the final rule consultation with the Science Center.

Amendment 58B to the Reef Fish FMP, which is the deepwater grouper catch levels, that amendment was approved on June 2nd. The proposed rule published in May, and that common period is over. We're working on the final rule, and we anticipate a January 1, 2027 effective date, and so the new catch levels will be effective next year.

We've got some movement on Framework Amendment 14 under the CMP FMP, which is Spanish mackerel catch levels. That proposed rule published on July 22nd, and comments were due last Friday. We only received three comments, and so we're working on the response to comments, and we anticipate being able to send that final rule up for headquarters review soon.

Finally, Amendment 62 to the Reef Fish FMP, and we've discussed

this a few times this week, and that's red grouper catch levels. That amendment was approved on June 26, 2026, and the PR published on July 7th. That comment period is over. We're working on responding to the comments on the proposed rule and NOA, and we hope to get that out of the region as quickly as we can. Questions on those before I moved on to the next section?

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Frank. Maybe I should already know this, but I get confused on the order of the process. You know, there's comment periods, two comment periods really, I think, and then it goes to D.C., and it publishes, final rule, cooling off period, implementation, and could you just quickly give me a list of that order, because, you know, I'm thinking -- Mostly, I've been trying to explain what's going on with the red grouper allocation to the fishermen, and I have difficulty explaining that, well, it was approved, and, well, what do you mean it was approved, and, well, then there's a sixty-day period that we have to get it approved again, and can you just give me like a linear order of the process?

MR. HELIES: Sure. Fisheries 101. Okay, and so the council will take final action, and then we'll work with council staff to get the document ready for transmittal. Then the council chair will submit it to us for review and implementation.

If it's a plan amendment -- For instance, Amendment 62, it's a full plan amendment, and so we take a comment on the amendment itself, which is the notice of availability, and that's a sixty-day comment period. That tends to publish first. Our goal is usually to have the NOA and proposed rule comment periods overlap so we can take -- We can approve the amendment after we consider all of the public comments.

Lately, that hasn't necessarily been happening, and so we're publishing the proposed rules a little bit later, and so we're making a decision on the amendment, but we still have to take comments on the proposed rule, and then we need to respond to all those received comments in the final rule. Once the final rule publishes, it's a thirty-day cooling-off period before it is officially effective.

MR. WALKER: What is a cooling off period?

MS. HELIES: It's an APA requirement.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: So just a couple of things. The amendment itself, the sixty-day comment period, then, in the statute, it requires a decision to approve, disapprove, partially approve within thirty days of the closing the comment period, and so that -- It's a ninety-day period that happens, and like it has to happen that way.

The proposed rule, especially if it doesn't publish with the NOA, right, we have to then publish the proposed rule, take comments, respond to all those comments, publish a final rule, and all of that process also goes through more departmental review, right, and so the rules undergo a lot more departmental review than the notices of availability, and so the timelines tend to get stretched out.

The cooling off period is a requirement under the APA, the Administrative Procedure Act, like Frank said, and it's basically to allow the public time to comply, right, because, a lot of times, regulations are putting in restrictions, and we've got to give people time to comply and get their stuff in order.

There are ways to waive the cooling off period in particular circumstances, but you have to have a specific justification, and so I think Andy mentioned, during the committee, that we're looking at that, but it's not necessarily a given. We can't just always waive the cooling off period.

MR. WALKER: Okay. Great. That's very helpful. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Ms. Levy. Frank.

MR. HELIES: Thanks, Mara for that. That was an important piece that I omitted. All right, and so things that are currently in proposed rules that we're working on, Amendment 19 to the Shrimp FMP, which is the permit moratorium extension. D-Day is September 3, 2026, and so we'll need to make a decision on that amendment. That package is currently up at Headquarters. The proposed rule just published this week, and so we'll take comments through September 24th, and we'll work on that final package as quickly as we can.

The other shrimp-related action is the ELB program, the framework action, and that was transmitted by the council back in January, and we're working on the proposed rule.

We have the two lane snapper framework actions. That rule, we decided to combine those two actions into one rulemaking, and so we're working on that. Let's see what else here.

Red grouper quota holdback was one that was recently transmitted to us. That's the red grouper quota holdback so we can implement Amendment 63 in 2027. That one is in Headquarters, currently being reviewed. The DESCEND Act, continuation of the descending device and venting tool requirements, that abbreviated framework action is actually -- The proposed rule is actually on Andy's desk for signature, and so we should be able to get that out very quickly as well.

Then, finally, the framework action for the for-hire red snapper season, that is in Headquarters being reviewed as well, and so we're making progress, and I appreciate being able to update you guys on some finally getting some stuff through.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you for the update, Mr. Helies. Do we have any questions? Mr. Walker.

MR. WALKER: We've talked about this extensively, and I heard what Andy said yesterday, but, just in case people missed it yesterday, the -- Coming out of this meeting, we're saying that the red grouper allocation should likely come out sometime September or October, and is that the message?

MR. STRELCHECK: So the September timeframe is highly contingent on Headquarters being able to clear this very quickly, and then us having the waiver of the cooling off period, right, and so I will lead with that caveat, but, yes, and, I mean, our goal is to try to get this quote out as quickly as possible.

We are hearing that some people are running short of quota. We've heard concerns about potentially people not transferring or leasing quota, because they are looking at needing it between now and the rest of the year, and so, the sooner we can get this quota out for the fishery, the better, and we're, obviously, striving to do that.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Frank? Not seeing any, thank you, Mr. Helies. All right. The next agenda item is going to be the discussion of council planning and primary activities. Dr. Simmons.

DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If we could go up, Bernie, and so a change since this was sent out is we are going to try to bring back a final action on Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, and so if we could move that up to October, please,

Bernie.

Followed by final action on modifications to the red snapper private recreational accountability measures, a revised draft of Shrimp Amendment 20, the status determination criteria, and we're anticipating a presentation on the amberjack count, I think, to the council, and also a Draft Amendment 65, regional management for amberjack.

A public hearing draft still for 59A, I believe, permit requirements, and then, as requested, we will have the SSC report, as well as we can think about a larger presentation maybe to the council on the MRIP-FES survey pilot results.

We also have the working group we formed on the allocations for red snapper that are coming out of the assessment. We also have the working group for protected resources with shrimp trawl bycatch, and so there's several items, and we'll have to see where we are and what will be reported out to the council.

We also have some other activities with the Inflation Reduction Act that we might be ready to start talking to the council about, at least some preliminary discussions that the SSC might receive, and so this is what we have for January right now.

It looks like final action on Reef Fish Amendment 59A, final action on Generic Amendment 5 to modify essential fish habitat, and the five-year review standardized bycatch reporting, and then we have two documents we need to finalize and transmit, the one we just took final action on, the generic amendment for the for-hire data collection and reporting program and then Amendment 63. We need to finish that up as well and get transmitted, and so I'll stop there.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Simmons for the update. Do we have any questions? Not seeing any, all right, and thank you, Dr. Simmons. We'll move over to Dr. Walter. Dr. Walter would like to talk about the observer program.

DR. WALTER: Thank you, Chair. We heard a number of comments in public comment about some questions that in the observer program, and so I think it would be very useful to have, at the next October meeting, probably a formally-announced side event where our observer program staff would be available to meet with interested parties, and fishermen, to discuss some of the questions people may have, and just interact with the program staff.

I think we did that in Houston in 2024, where we had a side table

where people met, and we can flesh out whether that's going to -- How formal that might be, but I think our staff are certainly interested in being available to meet and address questions as they come up. They'll be there for public comment, but, since many of them are local in Galveston, it would be a really good opportunity, I think, for some interaction, and to get some better feedback and better conversations between the fishermen and the observer program, and so thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Dr. Walter. We have a couple of questions. Mr. Geeslin, and then Mr. Walker.

MR. GEESLIN: Dr. Walter, I appreciate you getting ahead of that, and kind of like E.F. Hutton. You somebody speaks, and you listen. We certainly heard that yesterday. It was rather concerning from one of the commenters yesterday, in the fact that he had undergone some, you know, hurricane damage, and out of business, yet being assessed fines for -- I don't know all the facts surrounding that, but I think it would be helpful to enlist your team of observers, and get them in touch with, you know, not only us, but those in the regulated community.

I'm wondering if it would also be helpful to see kind of a summary of those -- A summary of those violations, the nature of those violations, and a sum and total of fines associated with those violations, and just kind of a high-level, you know, state of the state within the observer program within the Gulf, to give us a picture of exactly what we're looking at, how many violations we're seeing, what that has led to over time, and just something to think about.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Yes, and I think we'll have to coordinate with the Office of Law Enforcement on what they can report on regarding that over time, but I'll work with Matt Walia and ask about what they might be able to report, because that's a little bit outside of just simply our observer program administration, but noted. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you. I think that's a great idea. I had actually pondered bringing it up at some point during this meeting, and I have heard more and more disappointment in the observer program from the reef fish people lately.

There's several folks that are just convinced that they're not

being randomly selected. They just keep getting pulled, and they're suspicious that something is going on, that they're on a list or something like that, and I don't even know if there is such a thing, and so it would be great to have a discussion about that and maybe -- I agree with Mr. Geeslin that it would be interesting to see if there was a chart that showed fines, and there was some big spike in the last few years when some of this -- I started hearing some of these, and more than the usual complaints about the observer program.

If we notice this for the next meeting, maybe people that have issues with the observer program will come to the meeting, and we can all communicate about it, and so I definitely support that idea.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Go ahead, Dr. Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thank you, and so what I'm hearing is perhaps something more than a side event, in terms of maybe a presentation on some of the -- On the fines and some of the enforcement actions, but also maybe some conversation with the council on the program, the vessel selection, and maybe to allow for some feedback in addition to the informal opportunity to engage with fishermen on the side.

MR. WALKER: I would be very interested in your vessel selection procedures.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Any other questions for Dr. Walter? Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Dr. Walter, I need to work with you pretty soon to figure out how much time, and the scope of the presentation, and that kind of stuff, as soon as possible, please.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. Anything else for Dr. Walter? All right. I'm going to move down the list to Other Business. Any other business to come before the council? Not seeing any, all right, and so that is the last item, is the election of the council chair and vice chair.

Before I get there, a couple of things. I want to thank General Spraggins for the social the first evening. Thank you, sir. Also, Dr. Simmons and staff for always doing a great job, and Emily for the fifty years of the MSA. That was great. Thank you. All the presenters that were here this week and presented for us, thank you. With that, I will turn it over to Mr. Donaldson.

ELECTION OF COUNCIL CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

MR. DONALDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will open the floor for nominations for chairman of the Gulf Council.

UNIDENTIFIED: I would like to nominate Dr. Banks.

UNIDENTIFIED: Second.

MR. DONALDSON: Any other nominations? If not, Dr. Banks, you are chairman of the Gulf Council by acclamation. Congratulations. *(Applause)* Now I will open the floor for nominations for vice chair.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I would like to nominate Chris Schieble.

MR. DONALDSON: Have I got a second for that? A second.

MR. STRELCHECK: I would like to nominate Dr. Mike Allen.

MR. DONALDSON: We have a second. Any other nominations? If not, I believe everyone has got a pad here. Just write your selection, and I will come and collect them, and the Coast Guard and I will tally them up and let you know.

MR. SCHIEBLE: So Mike and I don't vote for ourselves, right? Wouldn’t we just cancel each other out?

DR. ALLEN: We'll vote for ourselves and just cancel each other out.

MR. DONALDSON: All right, Mr. Chair. In a close race, Chris Schieble has been elected the vice chair of the Gulf Council. Congratulations, Chris. *(Applause)* With that, I will turn it back to you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Chris.

MR. SCHIEBLE: I just want to say thank you all for who voted for me and your support. I encourage you to reach out to me with concerns anytime, even outside of meetings. You have my email, and let me know what you guys think, and we can work together on getting things done here. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Schieble, and so I just want to say a few things personally. I want to thank Dr. Simmons and the staff, Andy, NMFS, Dr. Banks. These two ladies kept me in line the last two years. I just want to thank everyone

for your support. It's fascinating to work with you all. Thank you.

DR. SWEETMAN: You've been a great chair, J.D. I just wanted to say that. Kudos to you, man.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you. Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I want to say that I really enjoyed working with you, Mr. Dugas. I appreciate you supporting me, and providing the leadership you did, and giving us a long leash to do what we like to do and get things done, and your willingness to communicate and be so open, and listen to me vent sometimes, so I didn't go off the deep end, and so I really appreciate that.

On a personal note, 2025 was a really difficult year for me. I lost my father, and I really appreciate your support, and I look forward to working with Kesley in her new capacity and Mr. Schieble. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I will hand it over to Madam Chair, and I'll see you all in Galveston. Dr. Banks, the floor is yours if you want it.

DR. BANKS: Thank you, guys. I appreciate the support, and we will see you in Texas, where we will host you in the heat of summer.

MR. OSBORNE: Do you need Mississippi to host a party for you guys in Texas?

DR. BANKS: You get all the bills too though for every host social.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. We'll see you all in Texas.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 27, 2026.)

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