

GULF COUNCIL

REEF FISH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Golden Nugget

Biloxi, Mississippi & Virtual

August 25-26, 2026

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PAGE 43: Motion to direct staff to discontinue working on Reef Fish Amendment 64. The motion failed on page 47.

PAGE 53: Motion to include options for regional management delegation in Reef Fish Amendment 64. The motion carried on page 54.

PAGE 80: Motion in Action 1 to make Alternative 2, Option 2c the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 80.

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PAGE 97: Motion to make Alternative 1 in Action 3 the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 98.

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PAGE 99: 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 99.

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1 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf Council convened at
2 the Golden Nugget in Biloxi, Mississippi on Tuesday morning, August
3 25, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman C.J. Sweetman.

4
5 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Good morning. All right, and so first up on the
6 agenda this morning is Ms. Levy's litigation update. Ms. Levy.

7
8 **LITIGATION UPDATE**
9

10 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Thank you. I don't really have an update. There
11 haven't been any decisions on the two pending Appointments Clause
12 cases. The 11th Circuit did hear argument on the case back at the
13 end of July, and so that case is just waiting for their decision,
14 and we still have the motions for re-hearing pending in the 5th
15 Circuit. There hasn't been a decision on that either, and so
16 that's it. Thanks.

17
18 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Do we have any questions from
19 Ms. Levy? No? Okay. All right. The next agenda item is going
20 to be the Reef Fish Committee, and Dr. Sweetman is going to lead
21 us through that. Dr. Sweetman.

22
23 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
24 **APPROVAL OF JUNE 2026 MINUTES**
25 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
26

27 **CHAIRMAN C.J. SWEETMAN:** All right. Good morning, everyone. We
28 have a quite an agenda for Reef Fish, and so I'm calling the Reef
29 Fish Committee to order. This committee is the entire council
30 here, with myself as the chair, and Mr. Schieble as the vice chair.
31 It is my understanding that we are going to have some modifications
32 to the agenda, and so can we bring those forward at this moment?
33 Dr. Simmons.

34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Staff
36 was suggesting I think that Item Number IX, I believe, the
37 discussion on the decision points for red snapper catch limits and
38 allocations, be moved before we discuss Amendment 64 and the draft
39 options management flexibility.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and I had
42 heard, before, a discussion about moving the management
43 flexibility before Reef Fish Amendment 64. Is that still something
44 that's wanted?

45
46 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Not necessarily. I think we can leave it. I
47 thought about it again, and I don't think it makes a difference,
48 after reviewing it. This was before the document was actually

1 posted, and so I'm good with it.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay, and so, basically, the only thing that
4 seems to be moving is the red snapper allocation and catch limit
5 decision points there. Okay, and so, with that modified agenda,
6 can I get a motion to approve? Motion by the General, and a second
7 by Mr. Anson. The agenda is adopted as modified.

8
9 All right. The next action item we have here is Approval of the
10 June 2026 Meeting Minutes. Is there any modifications that are
11 needed? If not, can I get a motion to approve those minutes? Mr.
12 Anson, and a second by Dr. Allen. All right. Moving on, we'll
13 move right into the Action Guide and Next Steps, and I'll pass it
14 over to Mr. Rindone.

15
16 **DISCUSSION: DECISION POINTS FOR RED SNAPPER CATCH LIMITS AND**
17 **ALLOCATIONS**
18

19 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** All right. Well, we are going to lead off with
20 Item Number IX today, and so the red snapper stock assessment,
21 SEDAR 98, is nearing completion, pending its peer review which
22 will happen the week of September 21st in Tampa, and inclusion of
23 updated recreational landings and other data.

24
25 In preparation for receiving this updated catch advice for red
26 snapper, council staff are going to review a presentation with you
27 guys highlighting decision points and timing for consideration of
28 revised sector component and state allocations for red snapper.

29
30 These decisions will need to begin with allocations between the
31 largest components, i.e., the commercial and recreational fishing
32 sectors, and then move down to the successively smaller divisions,
33 and so between the federal for-hire and private vessel modes in
34 the recreational sector, and then, lastly, between five Gulf states
35 from the private vessels.

36
37 Allocation decisions can be tailored to the division being
38 addressed, but should be considered -- Or it should be consistent
39 in application and clear in justification, and so you guys should
40 review the information that's being presented, ask questions, and
41 make recommendations to council staff, as appropriate.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Rindone. It looks
44 like you're up, Dr. Froeschke.

45
46 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Good morning, everyone. A little light
47 reading here this morning, and so we put this together in
48 preparation for the red snapper stock assessment that's likely to

1 finalize next year, or early next year sometime, and we just wanted
2 to give some background that there's going to be some prep work to
3 get the results of that into the management, and we kind of just
4 wanted to start that conversation now, and let everyone contribute
5 to the discussion.

6
7 Just a little background, and the SEDAR 98 is in progress. We're
8 awaiting the results of the MRIP calibration effort that we heard
9 a presentation on yesterday. That's going to revise the data, and
10 so, currently, the data were done in the FES currency, which we
11 know is going to be modified. Once that's done, we'll have the
12 results of the SEDAR 98, present that to the SSC, and we'll have
13 new catch limits, at least the OFL and ABC.

14
15 Some things to think about is we haven't had a stock assessment in
16 more than a decade, and many things have changed. This red snapper
17 assessment made historical adjustments, or calibrations, to the
18 Texas and Louisiana data that we have not done before, and so,
19 when we get new FES data, those are going to change again. I don't
20 know what those will be, but they'll be different than they are
21 today.

22
23 I guess the big picture of this, in terms of calibrations and data
24 units and things, is that the catch limits, when they are presented
25 to you, whatever they are are going to be different data units
26 than what we're managing in today, and so, in terms of how we've
27 looked at things, and the historical participation among sectors,
28 or between sectors, and the various components of that is likely
29 to change based on the new information. The new SEDAR is a three-
30 region stock assessment model, and so that will be a new bonus
31 feature for us.

32
33 Okay, and so just some things to think about. I kind of mentioned
34 that the new data, or the results, are not going to be directly
35 comparable to what we have now. I don't know, in terms of
36 magnitude, how different they would be. You know, we just have to
37 wait and see what the data come.

38
39 In the past, when we've done this for data migration from data
40 different data units for other stocks, we have re-evaluated the
41 allocations as appropriate. This is the most complex management
42 for any of the stocks we manage, and so there's essentially three
43 tiers, the commercial and recreational, and there's the for-hire
44 and private angler, known as sector separation, and the state
45 allocations that were originally agreed upon in Amendment 50.

46
47 To make use of the stock assessment, it's likely that we're going
48 to have to revisit all of those components, and, if you're keeping

1 score, last time, those were fairly non-trivial documents when we
2 worked through them, and so, you know, just sort of stepping back,
3 the whole purpose of this is to start this conversation now, such
4 that we don't delay making use of the new information whenever we
5 get it, and so realizing that it will be difficult no matter what.

6
7 I've just got a couple slides on where we are on the allocations
8 now, just for historical context. The commercial and recreational
9 sector separation, or allocations, were established all the way
10 back in Amendment 1. It's 51 percent commercial and 49 percent
11 recreational. This is based on a historical time series of
12 landings by both sectors, and it was fairly old information.
13 That's what it was.

14
15 Amendment 28, we worked on this for many years. It revised the
16 allocation to 48.5 commercial and 51.5 recreational. That was in
17 place for a short time, and then it was set aside by the U.S.
18 District Court, and it has since reverted back to the 51/49, which
19 is where it's at today. Again this is based on CHTS, which is no
20 longer used, which was replaced by FES, which is now going to be
21 modified by a new FES.

22
23 The recreational allocation, there are two parts. The first was
24 done in Amendment 40, and it established what we call sector
25 separation, where the federal for-hire component was allocated
26 42.3 percent and the private angling 57.7 percent. This was
27 informed by historical landings, and, again, the information that
28 led to -- That informed this decision will be updated, and so
29 things to think about is is this something that the council is
30 going to be interested in revisiting based on the new information,
31 when it's available.

32
33 Then this one is a little more complicated, Amendment 50, and so
34 it established allocations among the states. At the time, it was
35 -- There was still this CHTS, and then the states, as part of their
36 programs, established five different data collection programs,
37 and, at that time they were all treated essentially analogous to
38 CHTS, and then, through time, we learned that they weren't
39 equivalent, necessarily, and so there was a series of calibrations
40 that were made. There was an initial one, and then a secondary
41 one that updated Mississippi and Alabama and Florida.

42
43 Those are likely to change in some way. I don't know the
44 directionality, or how that will work, but, at some point, the
45 stock assessment will come in a common data unit, and then it will
46 need to be decided on some basis of splitting that among the states
47 in a comparable way, and so TBD on that.

1 This is a slide graph that Ryan put together, if you don't like
2 it. It's just sort of an overview of how the current catch limits
3 are parsed up. We start with the OFL. That comes from the SSC.
4 There's the reduction for the acceptable biological catch, the
5 ABC, based on scientific uncertainty, and that would be the point
6 where the council receives an ABC, which it cannot exceed, and
7 then the council is responsible for everything below the purple
8 there.

9
10 The way it currently is the ACL is set equal to the ABC, and then
11 the allocations are applied, and so 51 percent and 49 for the
12 commercial and rec, and then the for-hire private, and then the
13 individual states, and so what you can see there is there's a
14 hierarchy of how this stuff -- But, given the magnitude of the
15 problem, and the challenges with all these calibrations, we're
16 probably going to try to have to work on all of these
17 simultaneously as well, and so it will be tricky.

18
19 Part of this, the timing works, and so the council has an
20 allocation review schedule, which is due for red snapper in 2027.
21 The amendment that will be necessary to implement these essentially
22 would suffice for that, because we're likely to revisit all of
23 these. I think that's all I need to say there.

24
25 In terms of the allocation reviews, we have several guiding
26 documents. As far as the allocation policy, the review schedule
27 policy, I'm not going to go through those, but they are on our
28 website, if you're interested, but, in general, this these are
29 some of the guiding documents that are available to help the
30 process, if you will, and follow established practices, to ensure
31 we're doing things based on the most current information.

32
33 More changes are Alabama and Mississippi Creel are in the process
34 of transitioning to new data programs, and so we haven't directly
35 tested these, to my knowledge. If they're not identical to the
36 calibrations that are in place now, that that may require some
37 further modification to how we're monitoring these, and so I'm not
38 -- I'm not sure how that will work.

39
40 The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission is -- They're providing
41 an RFP to explore how the Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and
42 Louisiana, how those state data collections could be homogenized,
43 so to speak, and for one data unit perhaps for all of those states,
44 and so that's in progress. I don't know how that will -- What the
45 results of that process will be, or when, but, if that's available,
46 that may help this process.

47
48 One thing that's not on our plate today, but will be at some point,

1 the SEFHIER program we hope comes online, and that may be another
2 source of changes into how the catches are estimated, and that may
3 require additional modifications, and so just thinking ahead of
4 some of the challenges.

5
6 There are a number of decision points. Some of these are you're
7 going to have to be worked through, but just to kind of recap, and
8 so, at some point, the SSC will review the stock assessment. They
9 will provide an OFL and an ABC for you all to consider. That will
10 be the basis of your catch limits, of which cannot be exceeded.

11
12 It seems likely, to me, that we would want to work through the
13 allocations in order, from top to bottom, and so the commercial
14 and rec would be first, and then the for-hire private angling, and
15 then the private -- The state allocations, and that's how we
16 currently do it. It would be difficult to do them out of sequence,
17 I think, but once -- The data units are going to come to you.

18
19 Once we have sort of that framework, then it would result in
20 specific catch limits for each individual mode within the whole
21 structure, and so, just thinking about it, kind of the takeaway
22 there, you can kind of see how we would go from the ABC from the
23 SSC all the way to the final catch limits, and we've just got to
24 fill in those gaps, so to speak.

25
26 We, the council staff, were kind of trying to think about what
27 it's going to take to get going on this. We know we need to look
28 at the calibration factors for the private angling component. One
29 of the things that we're suggesting is we may need a small working
30 group of council and NOAA staff and Gulf States to kind of work
31 through this and try to figure out what things we can start getting
32 ahead of, whether it be data requests or what the pain points are,
33 and those kinds of things.

34
35 It really isn't anything that you all need to decide today, and I
36 just kind of wanted to put this out there, such that, as we get
37 closer to the assessment and when this comes, that we have some
38 concept of what's before us, because these assessments can get old
39 quickly if we don't make progress, and so that was sort of the
40 impetus of the conversation. I think that's the last slide.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. I could
43 really hear the enthusiasm in your voice as you were going through
44 that presentation there. No, but this is a major -- Obviously, I
45 appreciate council staff putting this together, because this is
46 going to be a huge lift, that will impact probably every single
47 person in this room here, and so I appreciate just at least kind
48 of highlighting what the decision points will be, and that we're

1 going to have some challenges ahead of us, but, as John said, no
2 real action items today, but certainly this is a good point for
3 discussion, and I see Mr. Rindone has got a comment.

4
5 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a note on timing, and so
6 the -- As I mentioned during the action guide, the review workshop
7 for SEDAR 98 is going to be in Tampa the week of September 21st,
8 and then, after that, NMFS, or the Southeast Fisheries Science
9 Center, will go through the MRIP update lite process for updating
10 the recreational statistics for that stock assessment, as well as
11 the rest of the data through 2025, and that will ultimately be
12 what comes before the SSC for review, probably in February, if
13 current timing for everything else holds.

14
15 The first time you guys would be seeing the complete results from
16 the stock assessment, and any catch limit recommendations from the
17 SSC, would be most likely the April council meeting.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** General Spraggins.

20
21 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and I appreciate everything that you
22 all are looking at, and, obviously, you know, we've been looking
23 over and over, for the last several years, of ways of being able
24 to bring Mississippi back up to where it should be with an
25 allocation.

26
27 You know, the states have discussed it. We've talked to each
28 other, and we've had some meetings together and talked about the
29 possibility of looking at the states that are not harvesting as
30 much as the ACL is, and the possibility of where that's at, and
31 probably, you know, could we move some allocation around.

32
33 We're talking, you know, small percentages. I think the one state
34 that's hurting the most is Mississippi, and, you know, because of
35 where we're at, but I know that Alabama took a cut, and that they
36 were sent back some with the MRIP, and with the calibration. The
37 whole point I'm getting at is maybe we need to look at it, because,
38 you know, you know some states aren't reaching their ACL.
39 Mississippi has the smallest of all, and we have usually the
40 smallest amount of fishing time, and that's because of our ACL.

41
42 In this study that we're going to do, Dr. Sweetman, and what you
43 all are talking about, is there, you know, a way to put something
44 in there to say that we want to also look at -- There's like 3.8
45 percent, I think, that was there whenever we did this in 2017. It
46 was like 3.8 percent that we had just kind of sitting out here.
47 That was after every state got their allocation, and then we turned
48 around, and we gave Alabama like 1 percent, and I think Florida

1 two-point-something percent. I think the numbers might be off
2 just a hair, but that was kind of gratis out there.

3
4 You know, is there a way to look at this, and could we possibly -
5 - I mean, I don't think making a motion or anything, and that's
6 not what I'm after here. I think what I would ask is could we put
7 an action item to be able to look at this, to where that when the
8 -- I know you all are looking after the assessment in April, and
9 I would like to keep this on the register, and keep it going, but
10 is there a way that we can put something in there to basically say
11 that we're going to look at the states, and we're going to talk
12 about the ACL, and we're going to talk about the allocation
13 according to how much each state is catching right now of their
14 ACL, and does that make good sense, or am I out in just --

15
16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** General, I certainly -- This is going to be
17 part of that standard process when we're looking at the state-by-
18 state allocations, when we're revisiting that, and so, yes, I
19 envision, if that's something that you're interested in
20 evaluating, that is certainly something that can be discussed at
21 that time.

22
23 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I just want to keep it on the register. You
24 know, a lot of things are happening. I know that the SSC is
25 looking at everything in the world, trying to, you know, decide
26 different things, and we don't -- You know, I'm not trying to
27 circumvent anything, but, you know, it's getting to a point that,
28 you know, here we are at 82,000 pounds in Mississippi, and,
29 obviously, there's, you know, over half-a-million pounds or more
30 left on the table every year, and it's all Gulf-wide.

31
32 You know, I don't think those fish have a boundary, but, you know,
33 we may have that geofence in Mississippi that they can't come
34 across, and I don't know. I don't know what it is, but we need to
35 figure out what's happening there, because, you know, the Gulf is
36 there, and we're just not catching our allocation for the Gulf,
37 and anything that we can do to keep this moving forward. I'm not
38 trying to push the button here at the last second, but, anything
39 that we can do to keep this going forward, I would appreciate it.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I agree, General, and certainly -- I
42 mean, I don't want to get out in front of the assessment,
43 obviously, until we see what the actual numbers are like there,
44 but, yes, that is absolutely going to be a standard part of the
45 conversation for how we navigate this process here, and what Dr.
46 Froeschke kind of laid out here for what we've got in the future.
47 Any other comments, or questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

1 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, first, I wanted to thank staff
2 for putting this presentation together. I mean, I think there's
3 a lot of good information here. I just wanted to put my two-cents
4 behind the working group. I think that's a really good idea, to
5 try to get out in front of some of this and have some internal
6 work that's happening that can be brought back to the council as
7 the stock assessment and other results emerge.

8
9 Like the General was talking about, there's a lot of factors here
10 that are going to affect decisions about allocation, and we have
11 to, obviously, look very carefully at the allocation policy. Will
12 the quota be going up or down, based on the stock assessment, and
13 how much will the catch limits be changing, or the calibrations be
14 changing, based on the new science and information, utilization
15 rates, and you name it, right?

16
17 There's lots of factors here, and so being able to lay all that
18 information out, recompute some of these allocations based on at
19 least historically how they were calculated, but with the new data
20 and information, is going to be a good starting point, obviously,
21 to kind of see where things stand, and then, more importantly, how
22 do we then adapt and change, obviously, our management going
23 forward, but in light of, obviously, the new science and
24 information, and so I'm fully onboard with, obviously, standing up
25 this working group in the meantime.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Strelcheck. Captain Walker.

28
29 **MR. ED WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm kind of rethinking my
30 question now, but what I generally wanted to get at, John and Ryan,
31 is not to put you on the spot, but, if there's a 20 percent
32 overstatement of recreational landings, hypothetically if we must,
33 can you say what that would do to the different sectors?

34
35 I mean, obviously, there's a new stock assessment, which changes
36 everything, but say we just plug that into the old one, and is
37 there any way -- I can't really process how it would affect all
38 the different sectors, and then all the states.

39
40 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, I'll give it a go. I don't have a definitive
41 answer, but the thing that's complicated about this one is that
42 we're talking about FES, and then the reduction from FES to the
43 new FES because of that, and that's all true. In practice today,
44 red snapper has made -- Is monitored, and managed, on the CHTS
45 system, which is likely -- I think it's below, based on the
46 preliminary information, what the catch rates of the new FES, and
47 so sort of -- If I were to guess, there's sort of the middle-of-
48 the-road -- The CHTS, and then there's the FES old, and then the

1 new FES is going to be in between those.

2
3 **MR. RINDONE:** That's correct.

4
5 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Where that is, I don't know, but it's so -- It's
6 just going to -- It's kind of going to be some mental gymnastics,
7 because you're going to have a stock assessment that's in the --
8 Originally, there's going to be one in FES, which is a much higher
9 catch rate than what we are managing today, and it's going to be
10 reduced down. Both of those are likely higher than what's there.

11
12 If I were -- You know, so that's -- It's almost -- It's difficult
13 to even suggest to say, well, is the historical participation of
14 the recreational, relative to the commercial fleets, going to go
15 up, and maybe compared to the CHTS, but less compared to the FES.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons.

18
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, on top
20 of that though, for the last two assessments, triggerfish and red
21 snapper now, we're calibrating the western Gulf landings also to
22 MRIP-FES, and so I'm not sure there's going to be a calibration
23 from Texas for that, and so that's another reason I think the
24 working group should look at that.

25
26 The other issue we have is the assessment is going to be in numbers
27 of fish, and so we have a lot of recent landings information from
28 the states on size of those fish, and so we're going to have to
29 figure that out as well.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Just I think
32 I'm in -- I like the idea of a working group here, and just my
33 personal perspective, just to kind of get out in front of some of
34 these challenges, so we can minimize kind of some of the back-and-
35 forth, and maybe some of this can be ironed out before it gets to
36 the table, but I guess, from that perspective, Dr. Froeschke, or
37 Mr. Rindone, what were you guys thinking kind of the charge of
38 this group would be? I mean, is it just dealing with problems
39 before they become bigger problems? Did you hear my question?

40
41 **MR. RINDONE:** No.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** What were you thinking the charge of this
44 working group would be?

45
46 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, that's what I was just sort of asking with
47 Dr. Simmons. I think it would be to try to understand where the
48 decision points and what are the gaps -- Or what kind of

1 information we would need to write an amendment, and so that's the
2 thing that I'm thinking of. I discussed with Dr. Walter that, I
3 mean, the one thing that I think we're going to need is we're going
4 to need historical landings in all the currencies.

5
6 We're going to need that the CHTS, because we're going to need
7 that to write the document, and for the bridging, or however we do
8 that, and we're going to need the FES, because it just seems like
9 we're going to need that, and that should be available, and then
10 we're going to need, obviously, the new one, if we're going to get
11 there.

12
13 I think we're going to need those by all the different pieces of
14 this, and then we're going to need to look at the average weights.
15 Sometimes in these assessments, because the numbers -- The
16 assessments are done in numbers on the recreational side, and then
17 the weights are estimated through the model to get pounds, but
18 then the monitoring is done differently, because you're actually
19 estimating the weights, but, if those don't align closely, then
20 you have problems, and so just trying to think about --

21
22 To me, we should figure out how to get the data together on the
23 landings, as best as we can, and then, when the new data come in,
24 I think that would be helpful, and then, given the state's
25 programs, I think we need the individual -- The analysts from those
26 states to say these are the things that we get, and these are the
27 timing, and these are the problems, and these are -- Whatever that
28 is.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I agree with that. Okay. Captain
31 Frady.

32
33 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Listening to everyone talk
34 about the calibrations from FES to Coastal Household, being the
35 telephone survey, one thing that I'm noticing right here, that we
36 may be missing that needs to come into consideration, is what I
37 call, in the banking world, actuals.

38
39 When I talk about actuals, actuals are what the Gulf can produce,
40 and we're sitting here going over things that we're hoping that
41 we're going to get out of an assessment, and getting these new
42 calibrations, but I would love to see, in this working group,
43 discussions about what we're actually catching, because each
44 state, whether you like it or not, is catching what the Gulf is
45 allowing it to catch.

46
47 If it could catch any more than what it's catching, we would have
48 already caught it, and so, when we start considering, you know,

1 all these different calibrations, that get complex, why don't we
2 look at what each state is actually catching, but that will give
3 you an accurate count of the size of the fish you're catching, and
4 you can break it down even further and determine if those fish
5 that we're catching -- Or how many -- What percentage of each one
6 of those fish are in each year class that we're missing, because
7 there's a big picture right here, and it's a big gap of data that
8 we're missing, but actuals is the first place I would look, instead
9 of worrying about what the calibration is going to be.

10
11 I would look and see what each state is producing, what each angler
12 group is producing, and go forward from there, and that just needs
13 to be another part of the calibration, is look what each state can
14 actually produce during their seasons.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Captain Frady. Any other
17 comments, or questions, here? General Spraggins.

18
19 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Not to dispute what you're saying, but
20 Mississippi could catch a whole lot more if we had the allocation.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Anson.

23
24 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Yes, and so, relative to the charge of the
25 working group, I didn't hear anything about how they might want to
26 weigh-in, and get ahead of the curve at least, of allocation
27 between the sectors and that type of thing, and so is that -- Do
28 you envision that, or do you feel like that's too sensitive of an
29 issue to -- Again, just to try to compile the allocation policy,
30 look at previous historical documents, where we looked at red
31 snapper allocations specifically, but anything else that may have
32 occurred since that time, with another species potentially, that
33 could be thrown in the mix, that could be used as a precursor to
34 document development, is kind of what I'm thinking, and so I'm
35 just kind of trying to figure out how broad of a scope this working
36 group is going to have.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that's a fair question Mr.
39 Anson. I mean, allocations are probably one of the more
40 challenging things that we have to deal with, and so understanding
41 kind of the options that are on the table, that could be decided,
42 I think that could be a useful exercise, but I will go to Dr.
43 Froeschke.

44
45 **DR. FROESCHKE:** One of the things I think I was hoping is, if we
46 can get the data together of the historical landings, that will
47 help us understand what we don't understand.

1 I think, in an easy world, you could start and say, okay, well, we
2 have this, and, based on how we've done things in the past, if we
3 were to do those same processes, it would result in some different
4 allocation. We can start working on that.

5
6 What's going to be hard, in terms of developing a range of
7 alternatives, is it's just -- It's hard to know what even the
8 bounds might be, because, for example, if we were to get the data
9 in FES, or even the new FES today, you could compute percentages,
10 but, if you then have to go back and say, okay, State X gets
11 percentage Y, but then you have to calibrate that based on their
12 own state data collection, I mean, it could be very different
13 perceptions of what the allocation is.

14
15 Right now, for example, Texas, on the private side, is the
16 smallest, at two-and-a-half percent something like that. Well, in
17 the allocated, or the calibrated stock assessment, those landings
18 were elevated quite a bit, and so, if you were to look at it in
19 that way, Texas's participation would be much higher, and so, you
20 know, you really have to think about -- For us to think about how
21 we would communicate that to the public, and to you all, about
22 what numbers, and how they're interpreted, and that kind of thing.

23
24 I don't even know what that is, but I think we're going to have to
25 stare at it a while, and maybe put something together in a
26 dashboard or something, so that people can see it.

27
28 **MR. ANSON:** To that point, because this is going to be a sensitive
29 subject for lots of folks and so I wasn't looking, based on the
30 presentation, based on the work that's, you know coming towards
31 the council, I wasn't looking toward the working group to be kind
32 of necessarily developing an outcome, other than just to get all
33 of the information that's needed compiled, or at least ready at-
34 hand, so, when the actual assessment is completed, and that final
35 number is provided, we have all the information we think we have,
36 or would need, to go through that, the machinations, of, okay,
37 what is State A going to get, and what is State B going to get,
38 down to those private angling components, but, you know, before
39 that, you would have to go through all of the other ones, too.

40
41 That's all I was envisioning, is, you know, just having the data
42 together, and not really thinking about how we're going to
43 calculate and such, because that could change, you know, as we
44 want to try to look at what the final outcome is going to be, and
45 so my question, specific question, was just trying to get some
46 background of whether or not the working group is going to get
47 background related to the actual, you know, whether we need to
48 revisit allocation, particularly at the sector level, and what is

1 that going to look like, what new information is at-hand, whether
2 it's just the biological information, or the catch histories, or
3 it's economic information that might be available that we could
4 add to this go-around which we didn't have last go-around, and,
5 again, how did that compare with other species, you know, as to
6 what kind of flavor that a new allocation would look like.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think that makes a lot of sense, Mr. Anson.
9 Dr. Simmons.

10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and so I think --
12 I'll look at Ms. Levy, but I believe this kind of working group
13 would have to be publicly noticed, if we have state folks on there,
14 and is that -- Is that what we're thinking right now?

15
16 **MS. LEVY:** Yes.

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** So I think it might be helpful to
19 have the Science Center analysts that provided the working papers
20 in the data and the assessment provide a summary of what was done
21 to this working group, and maybe start there for the assessment,
22 and we can kind of work on a charge, maybe for you guys to look at
23 a Full Council, but some of the policy stuff -- I mean, my thoughts
24 are that's more in the council's purview.

25
26 I think, for this group, I envision just trying to understand
27 what's being used in the assessment, and to Mr. Frady's point,
28 we're using MRIP-FES units, because that's the common currency,
29 and so how do we untangle that from what we're managing in, and so
30 I think, if we start there, and we have the appropriate people
31 involved, and we get the results from the pilot, and then maybe
32 we'll have a better understanding of where to go from there, and
33 have an update, but we can work on a charge.

34
35 I mean, to me, the allocation policy stuff is more the council's
36 job, once we start moving it through the FMP process, but that's
37 just my thoughts.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that makes sense. I mean, I don't
40 want to get the working group charged to basically try and do
41 everything and anything, you know, within this complicated process
42 that we've got, but I'm certainly in favor of kind of looking more
43 specifically at what that charge would be, but, to Mr. Anson's
44 point, you know, it's like almost going to be like a stepwise
45 process for this working group, right, you know, dealing with some
46 of the, as kind of John laid out, the particular decision points
47 there, and I just think that what Mr. Anson was talking about
48 relative to the allocations is just listing out a variety of, you

1 know, what new data do we have available.

2
3 We, obviously, had a litany of allocation options on the state
4 components there in 50A, and so just kind of compiling all that
5 stuff, and are there any additional options that we could have
6 available to us, and not necessarily doing the calculations, but
7 am I interpreting what you're saying Mr. Anson?

8
9 Yes, and so I just think there's going to be -- Because there's so
10 many steps to this, in what we're going to have to do for decision
11 points, I guess I would advocate to kind of think along those lines
12 for the charge for this working group, and how all of those steps
13 could interplay with that, and does that make sense, Dr. Simmons?

14
15 I think you're talking the bigger picture one, right off the bat,
16 right, and that's what you're thinking about, which is appropriate,
17 but then, as we kind of get into the weeds a little bit more, this
18 might evolve a little bit, and I guess I'll put it that way.

19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and I was -- I thought maybe the
21 working group would be done by the time they hand it off to the
22 council, but fair enough. Fair point.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Any other questions or comments?
25 Captain Walker.

26
27 **MR. ED WALKER:** If we go back to slide 7 on the presentation, the
28 current catch limits and allocations, and so I'm not positive, but
29 would -- When we refigure this new FES recalibration, would we be
30 going back to the very left side here, where it says "overfishing
31 limit", or is it going to go all the way back to the very beginning,
32 and, therefore, it will trickle all the way across this chart?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes.

35
36 **MR. WALKER:** So it will impact the commercial sector as well?

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes. Every person in this room, the
39 commercial, recreational, for-hire, everyone, because it initially
40 will give us -- The stock assessment will give us a new overfishing
41 limit, and then it all goes downstream from there.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** That's what I was afraid of.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That's why John was so enthusiastic giving
46 this presentation. Okay. Dr. Walter.

47
48 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I'm talking with our staff, and we're happy

1 to help with this untangling the -- Basically the quilt, to get
2 back to what they each of the ACLs are, and one thing to add here
3 is we're going to need to work with the states to do another MRIP
4 new to state currency calibration, because that's essential to
5 taking each of those state ACLs into state units, and so as they're
6 monitored, and so that's going to be an added step, just to get on
7 people's radar. Thanks.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and more fun. Okay, but good point.
10 That's going to be another decision point there. All right. We've
11 had -- Mr. Anson.

12
13 **MR. ANSON:** Can you clarify what you just said on that last part,
14 Dr. Walter?

15
16 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and so let's take Alabama, that go back to slide
17 7, and you've got Alabama there at 1.212 million. When it's
18 measured in -- There's a calibration ratio of 0.4875, and so what
19 Alabama's actual, as it's measured, is like 0.591185, in I think
20 Snapper Check, and so each one of those need to get converted into
21 the state currency that they're measured in. That calibration of
22 0.4875 came from calibrating to the old MRIP and Snapper Check,
23 and now we'll need to do a new calibration to do that conversion.

24
25 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Geeslin.

28
29 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dr. Walter, I hate to ask, but can you go
30 through an example on the record for the Texas calibration?

31
32 **DR. WALTER:** I'm not entirely familiar with how that was done for
33 Texas, and we'll have to talk about how that was done, because I
34 don't think it -- Last time it wasn't was done, and so, if we do
35 something new this time, we're going to have to figure that out
36 that one out.

37
38 **MR. GEESLIN:** Appreciate it.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Go ahead, Ryan.

41
42 **MR. RINDONE:** The calibration for Texas used one year of overlap
43 in 2016 between the Texas sportfish creel survey and MRIP, and so
44 it's based on one year of data, and I think the calibration factor
45 that was used in SEDAR 74 was a factor of 10.71, the multiplier.
46 Obviously, if we're revising the FES data to some new unit, then
47 that 10.71 won't apply anymore, and it would have to be revised
48 also. Dr. Froeschke said this, but, the numbers that you see on

1 the screen right now, this is assuming a one-to-one, like without
2 any correction or anything. This is based on the Coastal Household
3 Telephone Survey data unit that was used to establish the current
4 catch limits, and so, as has been discussed all of this will
5 change.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. General Spraggins.

8
9 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Well, you know, I can't let this go, and I've
10 got to bring it out. I understand how you all are rating
11 everything, and I understand that you're looking at it at that
12 one-to-one, but one thing I really want this committee to look at,
13 and I want the SSC to look at, and some others, is that deciding
14 how it works, and MRIP does not work for Mississippi, and I don't
15 think there's a single person in this room that would disagree
16 with that. It does not work for us, and it does not give us fair
17 capability to be able to do what we need to do. We need to look
18 at that, and we need to be, you know, careful.

19
20 We beat this for five years, I know, and probably longer than that,
21 but we need to look at that, and understand, and maybe there's an
22 outlier out there, to where you say that, hey, Mississippi and
23 Alabama would be another one that MRIP just doesn't work for, and
24 we need to look at it, the way we're doing it, and we doing the
25 new program right now, with MS Creel and AL Creel, but you can't
26 make it work if you're going to bring it back to the MRIP. If
27 you're going to bring it back to what caused it to be bad to start
28 with, it's never going to work, and so I got my two-cents' worth
29 in.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, General. Mr. Rindone.

32
33 **MR. RINDONE:** This is just a point of clarification about the
34 calibration ratio for Alabama. It's 0.548.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Any further comments, or questions,
37 here? We're going to have a busy next year. Captain Walker.

38
39 **MR. WALKER:** John or Ryan, is there any way you could kind of guess
40 what would happen to the federal for-hire ACL? Would that be
41 expected to go up or down, or it's just --

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Go ahead, Ryan.

44
45 **MR. RINDONE:** I mean, whether -- The way any of these change is
46 going to be predicated on a few different things, right, and so
47 you're going to have the revised MRIP-FES data that are going to
48 be put into the stock assessment through 2025, and then you guys

1 are going to have to make a cascade of decisions, and that starts
2 with whether you want to decrement the stock ACL from the ABC, and
3 then what you're going to do as far as the split between the
4 commercial and the recreational sectors.

5
6 Once you've done that, you know what the slice is of the
7 recreational pie, and then you can decide what you want to do as
8 far as private vessels versus for-hire, and so like the decision
9 that you're asking about is one that's - It's the third step in
10 the line, essentially, and so there's really no way to know how
11 that's going to change.

12
13 Even if we were to assume that everything stayed -- All the
14 percentages anyway stayed exactly as they are, and we just put new
15 numbers in there, without knowing what the new MRIP data actually
16 look like, we can't tell you that answer, but, just so that you
17 guys are understanding the order of operations, in order to get to
18 the end, and get everything worked out, we do have to start on the
19 left, and then chip away at it and work all the way over to the
20 right.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Any further questions
23 or comments? All right. I'm going to try and move us along to
24 the next item here, and I know we'll be talking maybe a little bit
25 more about this, about potentially what the working group charge
26 will be, and so we can have some further discussion at that time.

27
28 All right. I'm going to move on to the next item here, which is
29 going to be Tab B, Number 4(a), Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment
30 64: Delegate Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Management to Gulf
31 States, and I'll turn it over to Dr. Diagne, if you want to read
32 through the action guide, please, sir.

33
34 **DRAFT OPTIONS - REEF FISH AMENDMENT 64: DELEGATE FEDERAL FOR-**
35 **HIRE RED SNAPPER MANAGEMENT TO GULF STATES**
36

37 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, and so
38 on with the action guide for Reef Fish Amendment 64. We are going
39 to give a presentation on this amendment, which addresses the
40 delegation of the federal for-hire management authority for red
41 snapper to Gulf states.

42
43 The management measures that are included in the amendment are, so
44 far, the delegation itself of season and bag limits as well as
45 size limits. Before the delegation actually could be practical,
46 I guess you need to allocate the resources amongst the five states,
47 and so there's going to be some actions dealing with that. Based
48 on previous motions, some actions will deal with the sunset

1 provisions, as well as accountability measures.

2
3 The committee should review the purpose and need for action as
4 well as the management measures included in the amendment, and the
5 committee should also suggest the revisions, provide
6 recommendations, including feedback on the list of actions that we
7 are going to discuss today, and recommend next steps, as needed,
8 and that's it for the action guide, Mr. Chair.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I think we're ready to roll into it,
11 Dr. Diagne.

12
13 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and we'll switch to the presentation. As you
14 recall, I mean, the council did approve a motion, with a purpose
15 and need statement, and that is the first slide here, and so the
16 purpose of this action is to establish a program structure through
17 which a Gulf state may establish a management program that would
18 provide flexibility in the management of the federally-permitted
19 vessels' harvest of red snapper for their anglers. There is also
20 a need statement that follows, and this was the original purpose
21 and need approved by this council.

22
23 During the IPT meeting, the IPT went ahead and reviewed this and
24 suggested an alternative purpose and need for your consideration.
25 Bernie, let's go to the next slide, please, and so this is the
26 purpose and need as suggested by the IPT.

27
28 I'm concentrating more on the purpose of the action really, and
29 the purpose of this action is to delegate authority to Gulf states
30 to set specific management measures for the federal red snapper
31 charter vessel/headboat component of the Gulf of America reef fish
32 fishery to provide regional flexibility in managing federally-
33 permitted for-hire vessels to take anglers fishing for red snapper.

34
35 Essentially, in this revised purpose, emphasis is placed on the
36 delegation of authority, which is essentially what the title of
37 the action says of the amendment, and so this is just for your
38 consideration, should the council prefer to keep the initial
39 purpose and need statement, we would continue with that, but,
40 should the council want to entertain perhaps this revised version
41 going forward, that is the revised version that will be included
42 in the amendment. The need also has been modified to reflect, you
43 know, the changes in the purpose.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We have a hand. Ms. Levy.

46
47 **MS. LEVY:** Just a little more on that, and so, when you first came
48 up with the purpose and need statement, it kind of just got pulled

1 in from the Amendment 50 documents, but that considered more than
2 delegation, right, and we had like a conservation equivalency
3 alternative, and so, that purpose and need, it was broader, right,
4 and so, for this specific document, you're specifically looking at
5 a delegation, which is what the purpose is reflecting.

6
7 If you keep the broader purpose and need, you're telling folks
8 that you should really be considering things maybe beyond
9 delegation, and so I guess I would ask you to consider that, and
10 you don't have to do it now, but look over this revised purpose
11 and need and see if it better reflects what the intent is for this
12 particular document.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.

15
16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so do you prefer to go
17 through this step-by-step or see the whole presentation and come
18 back and talk about things as we go?

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I'm hearing, around the table, maybe step-by-
21 step, but -- Yes. Okay, and we'll do step-by-step. Sure.

22
23 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I'll comment on this, while I have the hot mic
24 here, and so I like these the revised purpose. I think it does a
25 better job than what we originally had in there, with the caveats
26 of what Ms. Levy said as well.

27
28 I think I would like to see some slight modification to the need,
29 and so, in the original need statement, which is the previous
30 slide, we had, towards the end, providing fair and equitable access
31 for the sustained participation of fishing communities of the Gulf,
32 and I would like to see some of that language retained in the
33 modified need statement, because that's sort of the purpose of
34 this, is that one-size-fits-all fisheries management across the
35 Gulf is not working, and the fair and equitable access is the main
36 component of this. I can make a motion later on, as we get further
37 through this, if needed, but just to put that out there.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.

40
41 **MS. LEVY:** So, just with respect to that, we didn't include it
42 because it's not clear what it means, right, and like, fair and
43 equitable access to fishing communities, we don't -- We don't have
44 defined fishing communities, right, and so it's not clear exactly
45 what that means, and I know that it was in the Amendment 50 stuff.

46
47 The other thing is it does talk about needing variations and
48 contingencies, right, and so variations and contingencies in the

1 fisheries, which kind of gets at the different regional needs, and
2 that comes directly from one of the National Standards, and so I'm
3 not saying you can't put it in there. It's just fairly vague, and
4 it's not clearly defined, and so whether you're actually meeting
5 that need is not clear, and so I would just say consider that.
6 Thanks.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Mr. Schieble.

9
10 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, to that statement, I'm not quite sure I follow
11 that, because the revised version also includes economic impacts
12 on those communities, and so it mentions fishing communities in
13 the original and the revised.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I mean, there's part of me that kind of agrees
16 with Ms. Levy here. I mean, fair and equitable access can be
17 defined very differently between what you think is fair and
18 equitable access for Louisiana versus what I think is fair and
19 equitable access to Florida, and so there's part of me that's
20 onboard with that. Mr. Strelcheck.

21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I don't necessarily have the words for
23 this now, and I'm wondering if -- Two things. I don't like the
24 "minimize adverse economic impacts", and I think that could be
25 flipped on its head and say "maximize economic benefits to fishing
26 communities", right, and that's really what we're trying to
27 achieve.

28
29 The other aspect of this, in terms of the fair and equitable, I
30 agree with Mara's comments. I think that's really in the eye of
31 the beholder, and the eye of the state, in terms of whether or not
32 that's being achieved or not, but I think there may be some
33 wordsmithing that we could maybe incorporate some of that language
34 in a different way, potentially up in the purpose, to address the
35 at least community aspect.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Dr. Diagne.

38
39 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, and so, essentially, for the revised
40 purpose and need, to be continued, in terms of discussion. I mean,
41 picking some of the ideas here, and so then we'll propose a re-
42 revised version in the next iteration of this document for your
43 consideration.

44
45 Okay, and so let's move on then to the next slide, Bernie, please.
46 Thank you, and so one of the things we want to do today is look at
47 the structure of this amendment, the list of actions that should
48 be included here, and the first one would be the delegation action

1 proper, and so delegation of federal for-hire management authority
2 for red snapper to Gulf states.

3
4 Essentially, you would have a no-action alternative, which would
5 maintain federal management for red snapper for the federal for-
6 hire component, which is status quo right now. Alternative 2, for
7 the federal for-hire red snapper component, delegate the
8 management authority to set state-specific federal for-hire red
9 snapper seasons, bag limits, and size limit to the state of, and
10 then you would have five options, one for each state, for each one
11 of the five states.

12
13 Alternative 3 would essentially delegate, but in one, I guess,
14 fell swoop delegate to all the Gulf states, and no options, and
15 so, if it were understood around the table that everybody wanted
16 to do this, then Alternative 2 would be the one that would be
17 picked, because it would delegate the management to all Gulf
18 states, rather than going step-by-step, state-by-state, because
19 presumably there are going to be some implications whether all the
20 states participate or just the selected few, because, if you have
21 only a couple of states that participate, the remaining state would
22 fall into the default federal management, if you would.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** It looks like we have hand. Dr. Overton.

25
26 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Just a quick question for a clarification.
27 In Alternative 3, it's essentially similar to Alternative 1, but
28 with the caveat that some states may decide to participate, and
29 some may not, and is that the point you're trying to make?

30
31 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes. Exactly.

32
33 **DR. OVERTON:** Okay.

34
35 **DR. DIAGNE:** Some states may participate, and some may not, and
36 that's Alternative 2. Let's say, you know, Alabama and Mississippi
37 said, yes, we want delegation, but the remaining three states
38 don't, and those would fall -- Would default back to federal
39 management, if you would.

40
41 **DR. OVERTON:** Okay. Thank you.

42
43 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes. Thank you. Next slide, please, Bernie. Thank
44 you, and this is just a quick -- Was a quick look, and reminder,
45 that all these five states really have some sort of permit, or
46 license, required for the charter vessels.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We've got a hand. Mr. Anson.

1
2 **MR. ANSON:** Just an addition, potential addition, for Alabama is,
3 since we're dealing with red snapper, is our -- We require a reef
4 fish endorsement, which red snapper is part of the reef fish
5 designation, or class, and so I don't know if that needs to be
6 added here. You, obviously, have to have the -- It's a partyboat
7 license too, technically, and not a charter license, but I didn't
8 know if you needed to add that in there. In order to land, possess
9 and land, fish in Alabama, you need the reef fish endorsement too,
10 and so resident or non-resident.

11
12 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you. Next slide, please, Bernie, or --

13
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Sorry, and I'll just jump in. Can you back to
15 the last slide? So I get why we're sharing this information, but
16 the federal for-hire is defined by permits that are issued by NMFS,
17 right, and as established by the council, and so I guess I'm
18 curious as to the intersection between any sort of state
19 permitting, and is this to validate the homeport, or location, or
20 why are we sharing this, because why would this be relevant at
21 that point? We would use it, obviously, based on the federal
22 permit data we have available for the for-hire sector.

23
24 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and we would come to that. Part of the reason
25 why this is shared would essentially be a lead-up to discussing
26 whether an endorsement proper would or would not be required when
27 you have delegation with a subset of the states participating.
28 The argument could be made by a particular state that, well, we do
29 have X, Y, or Z types of permitting, or licensing, and so, even if
30 we move to this, we wouldn't necessarily require a new type of
31 endorsement to address this new issue, or this new management
32 aspect. Next slide, please.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** No. Ms. Levy.

35
36 **MS. LEVY:** Well, that kind of goes to my question, and so I was
37 just wondering. For each state, and maybe it just goes without
38 saying that all the for-hire vessels that have federal permits
39 would always have a state permit, but I guess that's what I'm
40 wondering, and is that how it works? You have a federal for-hire
41 permit, but then you would -- You would still require the state
42 permit, or they would just normally have it, because, of course,
43 you would want both?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I mean, was that a question to all the
46 individual states here?

47
48 **MS. LEVY:** Yes.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We've got a separate -- In Florida at least,
3 you know, we've got a state for-hire one too, where like, you know,
4 people that are permitted on state charter vessels, but not are
5 federally-permitted right now, during red snapper season they can
6 only fish in state waters, and so it's different.

7
8 **MS. LEVY:** I know that. What I'm trying to figure out is, for
9 every vessel that has a federal permit, would they also, most
10 likely, 99.9 percent, have a state permit, have one of these?

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks, then Mr. Anson.

13
14 **DR. BANKS:** So, in Texas, yes. You still have to have a guide's
15 license, even though you are federally-permitted to land fish in
16 Texas. Headboat, federal for-hire, it doesn't matter. You still
17 have to have the Texas guide's license.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Alabama.

20
21 **MR. ANSON:** Essentially the same thing. I mean, it's really
22 splitting hairs here, but you could, I think, have your federal
23 permit, and not take a paying party, or passengers, and then land
24 your fish in Alabama, but each of those individuals would have to
25 have a private angling fishing license, and so there is a
26 distinction there, but, if you're engaged in charter activities,
27 then you would need to have a charter license if you're landing or
28 in possession of fish in Alabama waters, yes.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** In Florida, yes, they would need that, too.
31 Louisiana.

32
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and it would be the same thing for the ROLP,
34 right, and so, hypothetically, let's say, in the scenario,
35 Louisiana would be the only one that would opt into this, and
36 vessels from Florida, federal for-hire boats, decide they want to
37 come over and fish during whatever the season structure would be
38 in Louisiana, and they would have to have the ROLP, which is
39 required of any federally-permitted boat in Louisiana, and so the
40 same principle here, and I think that's why we're talking about
41 this.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Last, but not least, Mississippi.

44
45 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and we have to have the -- They have to
46 have a license here.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thumbs-up from Mara. Dr. Diagne, continue,

1 please.

2
3 **DR. DIAGNE:** All right, and so I think we can move to the next
4 slide safely here, and one of the things about, I mean, the permits
5 and licenses, I mean, on top of the federal permit, but here what
6 we are talking about is going to be red snapper specific, and so
7 then, I guess, let's keep that in mind while we are looking at
8 some of these questions.

9
10 Related issues to this action, and some of them are essentially
11 being brought up by the comments we heard, and so would a red
12 snapper endorsement to the federal permit be required. If, as a
13 committee, after discussions, the answer is yes, we would have to
14 add an action to establish such an endorsement.

15
16 If we were to consider establishing an endorsement, would a vessel
17 be allowed to get multiple endorsements, meaning being allowed to
18 fish across states during one fishing year, or would a vessel be
19 allowed to fish essentially in one specific state during a fishing
20 year, and maybe next year change their endorsement?

21
22 Would these endorsements be transferable, and here the question as
23 to what would happen if one sold their vessel in middle of the
24 year, and so on and so forth, would have to be considered, and
25 some of these were discussed, you know, during the sector
26 separation, Amendment 50, and so forth discussion.

27
28 To set the endorsement question aside for just a minute, because
29 specific management authority would have to be delegated, are there
30 minimum and maximum values that this committee would want to
31 recommend for us to write in the amendment? For example, is there
32 a maximum bag limit that would be practicable? This is just an
33 example, but a bag limit of no more than four fish per person
34 should be mentioned in this amendment. If there are size limit
35 considerations to be added, we also would like to hear from the
36 committee as we develop this amendment.

37
38 I guess two questions now, and I'll pause here, and do we think
39 that an endorsement would be needed, yes or no, and why not, and
40 under what condition and what type of endorsement, and, even before
41 we go there, Bernie, let's go to the next slide, please.

42
43 Okay, and the next couple of slides would show language from
44 Amendment 50, and, of course, if we were to go down this path,
45 this would have to be modified to reflect the delegation specific
46 to this case, and so we have the no action alternative as well as
47 the alternative that established to the endorsement in Amendment
48 50A, and so we can go back one slide, please, Bernie.

1
2 Just to add a little more context, Bernie, go forward one slide,
3 or another one, and another one, and this is what we wanted to
4 show, and, essentially, should some states want to participate, I
5 mean, in the delegation, and some others won't, wouldn't, would we
6 need to go back to consider the lines, I mean the famous lines,
7 that extend in federal waters of a particular state, should, for
8 example, at-sea enforcement be needed, because, if someone is
9 fishing in Louisiana's waters, I mean federal waters off of
10 Louisiana, while the season is supposed to be closed in Louisiana,
11 if they argue that, well, I am going to go to Texas to land the
12 fish, and if, essentially, the emphasis is enforcement based on
13 your landing points, technically that person is not in violation
14 of anything as long as they don't go to their landing points.

15
16 Even if I'm fishing in Florida, although I cannot get to Texas,
17 and all the other states in between are closed, I can say that,
18 well, I'm landing my fish in Texas, which is unrealistic, but, on
19 paper, I wouldn't be in violation of anything, and so those are
20 some of the things that, I guess, are for your consideration.

21
22 One way to perhaps address those would be through an endorsement
23 that would be state-specific, meaning, if your state is closed,
24 that's the only place where you are allowed to fish, and you cannot
25 be moving around let's say in the waters of some other states, and
26 so I'm going to pause now and get your feedback.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.

29
30 **MS. LEVY:** So just a couple more things on the line, and so it's
31 not just about the states, right, and it's about the fact that, if
32 not all states are participating, we need a federal season that
33 applies in federal waters in a particular area. The agency has to
34 be able to say that fishing is open or closed in that area, and
35 so, if not all states participate, we're going to have to have
36 lines, and the Fisheries Service is going to have to determine the
37 season in the EEZ in those areas, and that was the issue with
38 Amendment 50, that there was going to be that problem if not all
39 states had the active delegation, and it's the same issue here.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.

42
43 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I think, with regards to what Dr. Assane was just
44 saying, it's that you have the ability within each state to land
45 those fish, and so let's say, hypothetically, Louisiana was under
46 the delegated authority, and they're open before the federal season
47 were to open, and boats from Texas, for example, want to fish
48 during that opening, and they would have to land those fish in

1 Louisiana, and not in Texas, and so it's no different than
2 Amendment 50 state management.

3
4 Certain states, under Amendment 50, have the ability to close their
5 federal waters off their state if they so choose, and not all
6 states have that. We delegated that authority to some states, but
7 not all of them, when we went through that process, and I see it
8 no differently here than that.

9
10 If you're going to fish Louisiana's open season, you would launch
11 your federal for-hire boat out of Louisiana, have an ROLP, fish
12 off Louisiana, and land those fish in Louisiana, and you would be
13 compliant with the delegated authority that's taking place in
14 Louisiana. Even if you're a boat from Texas, and you get that
15 ROLP, you could still fish that.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Ballard, did you have your hand up?

18
19 **MS. BRENDA BALLARD:** So we're talking about federal for-hire, and
20 I'm kind of confused. If I get on a boat in Texas, and they want
21 to go land in Louisiana, what happens to my car back in Texas if
22 I'm on a federal for-hire?

23
24 I just don't see that as a true plausible issue if we're talking
25 about this, that they're going to get on a boat, go to Louisiana,
26 and then have to land in Louisiana, and what do they do? Then get
27 back in the water and go back to Texas? I just think that we're
28 trying to make it harder than it is, and I really -- Those
29 possibilities aren't really going to happen that much.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

32
33 **MR. WALKER:** So I think this is maybe the number two reason why
34 this whole thing is a bad idea. Mississippi fishermen won't be
35 allowed to fish in Louisiana waters, as best I can tell, and so I
36 think Mississippi would be doing a great disservice to their
37 charter fishermen by eliminating the places they probably fish a
38 lot, and I don't know, and I haven't been there, but the issue of
39 having one state open and one state not in between all these lines
40 seems absurd to me, and I have a lot of other things to say, but
41 I'll leave that out there for discussion first.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Anson.

44
45 **MR. ANSON:** I'll pass for now. Thanks.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Lt.

1 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just think, whatever
2 the final decision ends up being, from an enforcement perspective,
3 it makes it a lot easier if it's tied to possession of those fish
4 in that certain area that's open. I can foresee an issue with
5 landing in one state, and then transiting back to the other, and
6 so whether the rule is, you know, you have to land in the state
7 that's open, where it's allowed, or possession is not allowed of
8 those fish in an area that's closed just to simplify everything
9 for an enforcement perspective, doing at-sea inspections and
10 boardings and things like that. It would make it much easier if
11 the regs were to reflect that. Thank you.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Lt. Morton. Mr. Sanchez, and then Mr.
14 Schieble.

15
16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Then, we're approaching this subject, as complex as
17 it's getting, we're not even yet considering different state
18 seasons, different state bag limits, which might prompt people to
19 cross these boundaries for more favorable fishing opportunities
20 and conditions.

21
22 This is -- I mean, this is absolutely -- Given the presentation we
23 had earlier this morning, and all of the things we have yet to do
24 with these stock assessments, figuring out allocations, and then
25 to be looking at this at the same time, without the benefit of
26 that, I mean, we're really putting the cart before the horse here.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.

29
30 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So not picking on Lt. Morton here, but,
31 hypothetically, we are going to reopen snapper season for the
32 private recreational sector coming up this weekend, and so off of
33 Louisiana, right, and on the 28th it will reopen.

34
35 If you were to encounter a boat off of Mississippi fishing, while
36 Mississippi is currently closed, and they are possessing snapper
37 on the water, but they're going to land back in Louisiana with
38 those fish, that's legal under Amendment 50, and that's no
39 different here. It's the same situation.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.

42
43 **MS. LEVY:** Right, and it's legal because we don't have a closure
44 in the EEZ, because all of the states are participating, right,
45 and so we don't have a federal season, and so there's no -- There's
46 nothing we have to set and close in the EEZ, and it only works
47 that way because all of the states have the delegation.

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Lt. Morton.

2
3 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I didn't mean to offer an
4 opinion one way or the other. I just wanted to clarify that as
5 long as the regs are written in a way that makes it very clear
6 where you can or cannot possess, and where you have to, you know,
7 land in -- That was the point I was trying to make, and I didn't
8 want to make an opinion either way.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** No, and you're good. I didn't take it as an
11 opinion. I appreciated your perspective there. Captain Walker.

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** So the way around all this dividing up the states,
14 and where you can land and park your car and everything else, is
15 to just leave it as a unified system, as it stands now, and you
16 can fish the whole federal for-hire quota, and land wherever you
17 want, and you're not crossing any lines, and you're not piecing
18 out of anybody else's quota, and you don't have to have an
19 allocation battle over who gets how much. It works as-is, and to
20 -- With all due respect, to go through all of this at the request
21 of a state with eighty-two charter boats, out of 1,250, to me is
22 unjustified.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. All right. All right. We still
25 have more actions to go through here, and I would like to continue
26 on with this, but Mr. Strelcheck.

27
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Before we leave this, I guess I wanted to talk a
29 little bit about the endorsement as well, and I guess a few
30 thoughts here on the endorsement, and so, with the state licensing,
31 which it sounds like all the states do have a state charter
32 license, and a requirement to land, it seems like that would
33 provide us the ability for boats to move from state to state,
34 depending on what is open or not, but they would be required to
35 then possess the state licensing, in addition to their federal
36 permit, in order to land.

37
38 My concern with an endorsement is, if we're going to be issuing
39 federal endorsements, and this is decisions that are being made
40 during the year, and states are deciding to open or close, or
41 change regulations, can we come up with a dynamic enough
42 endorsement system for people to be able to obtain those
43 endorsements that they're going to want to fish in different
44 states, and what's the timeliness of actually being able to do
45 that?

46
47 I don't know the likelihood of a lot of boats jumping, obviously,
48 amongst states, and I expect that the likelihood will be greater

1 for those that are closer to the boundary lines, and not
2 necessarily in Tampa or Corpus Christi, right, but I just wanted
3 to think about that as well from a dynamic standpoint, because I
4 think that could be an added challenge, if we require an
5 endorsement, to move between states.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.

8
9 **MS. LEVY:** I think the council is going to -- I mean, part of the
10 reason for considering the endorsement in Amendment 50 was to say
11 you have to pick one state, right, and like you're not going to be
12 allowed to like switch around, and so like goes to Andy's point
13 and the policy of, you know, if the states do this, do you want
14 people to be able to be like I'm going to go there, and then I'm
15 going to go there, and switch.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Captain Frady.

18
19 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, looking at the purpose
20 of me, and reading through this, you know, if the flexibility is
21 the problem that we're trying to solve, why don't we solve the
22 flexibility problem that the fleets have, instead of creating five
23 different management systems for one federally-permitted fleet?
24 Why don't we solve the flexibility problem, instead of going down
25 this road? That's just my thoughts.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Captain Frady. Do I have any more
28 comments or questions? We've still got a couple more actions.
29 Mr. Sanchez.

30
31 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Just one more. The whole reason why we started
32 sector separation was so that an industry of working watermen could
33 plan their season, know what they had, and start booking in
34 advance. It seems, to me, the moving target of different seasons,
35 again, in different states, potentially, for a federal fleet
36 completely undermines their business model. That is why I just
37 don't see the need to do this without tremendous impacts to that
38 entire industry. What we're doing now is working for them, and so
39 I don't see why we're trying to undermine that.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I'm looking around.
42 All right, Dr. Diagne, and I think maybe we can continue on with
43 the discussion here, and I'm sure there's going to be more to be
44 had.

45
46 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Chair, and I guess one of the take-homes,
47 quote-unquote, would be that, as we further develop this, perhaps
48 we'll consider options that would include endorsements, and, as

1 Ms. Levy mentioned, that would be to essentially have vessels pick,
2 at the beginning of the year, where is it that they want to fish,
3 and that would be one option, and options that would allow also
4 vessels to get two or three endorsements, if they so chose, and so
5 take away, you know, that need for a dynamic adjustment as we go,
6 and to be set beginning of the year.

7
8 One of the issues that this committee and council discussed, last
9 time we saw this document, and had a motion for it, was that the
10 delegation should be sunset, and so, essentially, to include an
11 action specific to dealing with sunset provisions, and that would
12 be this action, the Action 2. The no action alternative is then
13 no sunset provisions. If you implement delegation, I mean, that
14 would be on the books until the council, you know, initiates and
15 finalizes another management action to take it away.

16
17 Alternative 2 here, the delegation of the federal for-hire
18 management authority for red snapper to Gulf states, states that
19 it will sunset after a certain number of years, and the options
20 included here for considerations would go from two to five years.
21 Those were included in the motion approved by the council, and so,
22 essentially, this action here is the result of a motion the council
23 passed to include a sunset provision to this, and so that's here
24 for your consideration.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

27
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm not a big fan of sunset provisions.
29 I recognize, obviously, there's interest in including a sunset
30 provision. I think Options a and b should be eliminated, primarily
31 because, especially with Option a, we would have to start working
32 on an amendment immediately after we passed and implemented this
33 amendment, and we won't have a lot of data to actually gauge how
34 successful state management is at that point for Options a or b,
35 and so I think a longer period of time for the sunset provision is
36 certainly better, but my preference is Alternative 1.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Do I hear a motion there Mr. Strelcheck, or do
39 you want to keep having the discussion?

40
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I would like to hear other input first.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Sanchez.

44
45 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and, as a practical matter, can't this body
46 bring up just about any topic at any time and change it? I mean,
47 what's the need for sunset provisions? I don't understand that.
48 We can change course on just about anything we're doing at any

1 time, collectively, and so, if you like sunsets, go to Key West.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, John. Mr. Schieble.

4
5 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Well, I agree with both Mr. Strelcheck and Mr.
6 Sanchez. I think we put this in here sort of as a safety gate, in
7 order to look at how this goes over the first year or two, if it
8 does pass, and have a failsafe for that. If we feel that it's not
9 going the way we thought it was, there's a way out of it, right,
10 and I'm not necessarily in favor of sunsets either. I agree with
11 Andy, and also the fact I think two or three years is too short.

12
13 We won't have enough data to make a decision on this, but, however,
14 some folks around the table here felt like there should be a way
15 out of this. If you recall, there was a sunset on Amendment 40,
16 and then we voted to remove that, and so it's no different, but I
17 would be in favor of what Mr. Sanchez just said, and get rid of
18 this, if we were to so choose to do that. We could approach at
19 any time.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I appreciate that perspective. I do
22 believe you were the one that put this action in here, but I kind
23 of agree with the discussion around the table as it relates to
24 this here. Any other questions, or comments? J.D.

25
26 **MR. DUGAS:** Just to clarify, talking to Dr. Diagne, we made this
27 motion in the April meeting, and approved it, and just putting
28 that out there.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Any others? Mr. Strelcheck, and then
31 Captain Walker.

32
33 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think, for the sake of continuing discussion on
34 this, as the amendment develops, I'll recommend we include Action
35 2, but I'm going to make a motion to remove, from Alternative 2,
36 Options and b, and if I have a second --

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We have a second for Mr. Schieble, and we'll
39 wait until Bernie gets it on the board.

40
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** While that's getting on the board, obviously, I
42 can explain, you know, my concerns with just having too short of
43 a time period to be able to evaluate the success or failure of
44 state management and the need for, obviously, us to develop an
45 amendment in a very short period of time, and so a longer period
46 of time for a sunset provision should be considered.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

1
2 **MR. WALKER:** I would be in favor of substitute motion to say we
3 remove it altogether, or at least let the council vote on it, and
4 take it from there, because I don't hear a lot of support, and I
5 don't necessarily support it. Mr. Sanchez is right. If we change
6 our minds down the road, we can do that, and so I don't think this
7 is necessary, but, if I get a second, we can vote on it.
8

9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** So is that a formal motion, a formal substitute
10 motion?
11

12 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Can you please repeat that for Bernie, and we
15 have a second from Mr. Sanchez.
16

17 **MR. WALKER:** A substitute motion in Action 2 to remove -- No, and
18 that's not it. Remove the whole -- I have the wrong page up in
19 front of me, and I don't have the numbers here. Action 2, and is
20 that where it is? To Considered but Rejected, yes. Thank you.
21

22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay, and so we have a substitute motion on
23 the table by Captain Walker. That was seconded by Mr. Sanchez,
24 and this would move Action 2, the sunset, to Considered but
25 Rejected. Any discussion around the table? Let's try it this
26 way. **Is there any opposition to the substitute motion? Seeing**
27 **none, the motion carries.** Back to you, Dr. Diagne.
28

29 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you. Bernie, let's move to the next slide,
30 please. Thank you, and so we had a wonderful introduction on
31 allocation this morning by Dr. Froeschke, and so Action 3 here
32 would deal with the allocation of the federal for-hire component,
33 I mean the red snapper ACL, amongst the five states.
34

35 Alternative 1, no action, would not allocate the federal for-hire
36 red snapper quota amongst the states. Obviously, this wouldn't be
37 feasible, should you want to delegate authority. Alternative 2
38 would allocate amongst the states based on the average red snapper
39 landings between 2016 and 2024.
40

41 Alternative 3 would use a shorter historical, I guess, landings,
42 coming closer to the present, and would use 2021 to 2024, and, as
43 we further develop this, I mean, 2024 will probably become 2025,
44 as we get more data included in this, and so for Alternatives 2
45 and 3, the table below would show the percentages that would be
46 allocated to each one of the five states.
47

48 For example, if we took Alternative 2 from the State of Florida,

1 a 53, or 48.8, excuse me, for 2, and Alternative 3, 53.1 percent.
2 To let's say the State of Mississippi, for Alternative 2, it would
3 be 0.7 percent or 0.5 percent for Alternative 3, and, you know,
4 that would be maximum and minimum, and we have the other states
5 falling in between those.

6
7 The last time we discussed this amendment, the council also made
8 two motions, or one motion, to add Alternatives 4 and 5, and was,
9 I guess, very specific in the formulas to be used, as well as in
10 the percentages, resulting percentages, in terms of allocation.

11
12 Alternative 4 would allocate based on, you know, 50 percent between
13 1986 to 2005, 2007 to 2009, and 2011 to 2013, and so, essentially,
14 you know, the series from 1986 to 2013, skipping certain years,
15 meaning 2006, as well as 2010, those would be the two years omitted
16 there, plus another 50 percent of the landings between 2007 and
17 2009 and 2011 and 2013.

18
19 Alternative 5 uses some type of also allocation, 50 percent of
20 that long time series, excluding certain years, 50 percent of 2007
21 to 2009, as well as 2011 and 2013, and 50 percent of each state's
22 average between 2021 and 2024, plus another 50 percent joining
23 2021 to 2024 in Alternative 3.

24
25 That makes really for a mouthful, in terms of time series, but, at
26 the end of the day, the resulting percentages that came with that
27 motion were given below here. Alabama, for example, 36.73, 38.96,
28 and, on the other end, Texas, 25.09, and the 24.32 for Alternative
29 5, and, again, this was a council motion approved in April, and
30 I'll stop here.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and we already have some hands. Captain
33 Walker, and then Mr. Schieble.

34
35 **MR. WALKER:** So, as you can see, this is a complicated issue of
36 reallocation, essentially, but there's one simple solution that
37 answers all these difficult allocation questions, and that's to
38 not do this.

39
40 All these people can fish as-is. The majority of the fleet has
41 come here and stood at that podium and told us they're happy with
42 the program, and that they don't want to reallocate, and we won't
43 have to go through this my state gets more than your state stuff
44 if we leave the system alone, as it is, as it was negotiated and
45 hammered out over many years of for-hire Gulf-wide participation
46 to hammer this program out, and so I see no reason.

47
48 Even, at this time, can we even have this conversation, with the

1 FES coming out, and a new stock assessment coming out, and how can
2 we even consider intrastate allocation on a program that the
3 majority of the fleet says they're happy with anyways?
4

5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Schieble, and
6 then Mr. Sanchez.
7

8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, looking at this, I'm not sure why we aren't
9 looking at the document itself, Amendment 64, at the same time
10 that we're going through this, because all of these allocations
11 are derived from the Table 1.1.2 that was the document that we
12 looked at during the April meeting, two meetings ago, and, in the
13 original briefing book that came out on August 6th, there actually
14 was a line in there for where the document was supposed to be
15 underneath the presentation.
16

17 That agenda for the Reef Fish Committee got revised, and I don't
18 know why we don't have the document at the same time. I feel like
19 we're sort of handicapped here looking at these percentages, but
20 not being able to look at the table that has all the historical
21 charter for-hire landings all at the same time, and I'll explain
22 why here.
23

24 It's because I'm pretty sure the numbers for Alabama and Florida
25 are reversed in this table. If you had the landings table in front
26 of you, you could go down and do the math, and I think Florida
27 should be 36.73 percent, and not Alabama. Those two numbers are
28 reversed in this table.
29

30 The other factor is I don't understand why, in the prior table for
31 Alternatives 2 and 3, all the numbers, percentages, end in zero.
32 They're all rounded down, where, in this table, we're carrying
33 them out to two significant digits in the percentages, and so
34 things aren't consistent here either.
35

36 Before we even start to pick some of these, I feel like we need to
37 get things straight in what we are looking at here to begin with,
38 and, if you want to look at the table, I sent it to Bernie, and so
39 the document from the April meeting, which is the original
40 Amendment 64 that we looked at at that time, I sent. You could
41 pull it up and see the landings table.
42

43 Along the lines of what Captain Walker just said, I tend to agree.
44 I feel like that landings table may need to be recalibrated based
45 on what's going to happen with the updated MRIP-FES estimates,
46 that we just heard Dr. Cody tell us yesterday will be modified,
47 and what we looked at a minute ago with the allocation, or
48 reallocation, I guess, of red snapper for all the sectors across-

1 the-board, and so the table is 1.1.2 in there. I don't know what
2 page it is, but --

3
4 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Diagne, to that point?

5
6 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, on the previous slides between the two
7 states, yes, absolutely. That's a typo from my part, by putting
8 that table and inverting the landings between the two states, but,
9 on the next table for Alternatives 4 and 5, those numbers are
10 correct, and they are carried to the second decimal point, because
11 that is the motion that you passed as the council, and you brought
12 it to us very specifically. I'm looking at the motion.

13
14 Once the motion was made, it had a table with the percentages that
15 we put back on the presentation. I'm looking at the motion for
16 for-hire landings, and let's say Florida, in Alternative 4, 36.73,
17 and so, when the motion was made, and approved, it came with the
18 percentages carried to the second decimal point, exactly like that.
19 That is why we replicated here, to be consistent with your motion,
20 but when we go ahead and compute percentages, then, for
21 presentation, we can round them up, that we have that, I guess,
22 prerogative, and so, to show you what we computed with the previous
23 slides, that's that, but, here, your motion had these specific
24 percentages with them, and so we felt that we are going to maintain
25 them as-is.

26
27 As for the document not being in the briefing book, because, at
28 the IPT level, we felt that we needed to discuss with the council
29 the structure of the amendment itself, and change the structure of
30 the amendment by looking at what options should or should not be
31 in this amendment, and so the previous document that we have is
32 essentially no longer relevant.

33
34 After we finish here, you are going to decide the structure,
35 meaning what management actions you want to see in the amendment,
36 and what you don't want to see, and so, on that basis, we can write
37 a document.

38
39 I mean, case in point, there was a motion made for a sunset
40 provision that you approved last time we talked about it. Today,
41 after consideration, well, that will not be part of the amendment,
42 and so the document that we are going to write is not going to
43 have a sunset provision, given that the council will, of course,
44 follow through on the committee motion, and so, I mean, the short
45 of it is that today's discussion will set the structure of the
46 amendment that we are going to develop. What we had before is
47 preliminary discussions with some landings. Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** To that point, Mr. Schieble?

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I respect, you know, your logic as to why we
4 didn't get the document in this, but, again, I feel it handicaps
5 us not having that table in front of us at the same time we're
6 looking at these percentages and potentially trying to pick
7 preferred alternatives here.

8
9 The table will illustrate that those percentages are reversed in
10 that. Alternative 4 and 5 between Alabama and Florida are not
11 correct, and you can look at that table, and you can see that those
12 are reversed, when we have that Table 1.1.2 up there, and it also
13 further exemplifies, potentially, if Bernie could pull that table
14 back up in the document, looking, for example, at 2018.

15
16 Let's take the landings across-the-board starting in 2018. What
17 happened in 2018? How did Florida's federal for-hire landings go
18 from 796,000 to 1.1 million in a year? What happened in 2018 was
19 the implementation of FES from CHTS. That's the difference, and
20 so I can't believe that 330,000 extra pounds occurred when the
21 rest of the states didn't see that difference.

22
23 You can't tell me that there was that big of a difference in
24 landings in one state versus the other, and so I really believe
25 that we need to evaluate these landings after the MRIP-FES
26 recalibration takes place, and then decide upon these percentages,
27 because they're not going to be the same across-the-board for each
28 of these states if we decide upon percentages now.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. We've got a lot of hands going up
31 here. I'm going to go to Assane first, to respond to that.

32
33 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, to Mr. Schieble, point taken. Yes, and,
34 when I put the presentation together, a typo, and I switched the
35 colors, but, in the grand scheme of things, if we stop really and
36 think about it, for today's discussion, I don't really see the
37 point. We are not picking preferreds. I mean, by we, I mean you
38 guys are not picking preferred.

39
40 Again, what we are interested in is to have a clear view on the
41 structure of the amendment. What actions and alternatives should
42 we keep going forward to develop an amendment, and so, I mean,
43 part of your prerogative is you may have a discussion and pick a
44 preferred allocation if you think so. On what basis, with what
45 analysis, is not certainly something that we have provided.

46
47 Again, what we are looking for is information, and suggestions, to
48 have the structure of the amendment. One delegation is should we

1 have an endorsement or not? How many alternatives for allocation?
2 Should we have a sunset provision of not, and that has been
3 discussed. What accountability measures? Who is going to have
4 authority, or request authority, to close federal waters?

5
6 If we get all of that, we write the amendment according to your
7 specifications. That's what we are doing, and so, if you want
8 this table, we have it, of course. It could be put here.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** This back and forth I don't feel is necessarily
11 being productive here. I feel like you guys are just arguing about
12 whether the document, and all this stuff moving forward, but,
13 Chris, one last point, and then I'm going to move on.

14
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I agree with everything he just said, but we
16 just picked a preferred in one of the actions in the document, and
17 so I just want to specify we're not -- We're doing that. We
18 removed an action.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That's not a preferred though. We didn't
21 select a preferred.

22
23 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, but we removed one, and so I just want to
24 make it, on the record, understood that, in picking preferreds, we
25 need to have accurate information to do it, and this is not
26 included.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** To this point, Andy?

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so we're a long ways from picking
31 preferreds, in my view, right, and so I appreciated Assane's
32 comments, because I think, right now, what we need to be thinking
33 about is what range of alternatives do we want to look at for these
34 allegations, and, if you go back and look at Amendment 50, which
35 isn't necessarily the same model we have to use for this, right,
36 we looked at a whole range of things, from landings data to what
37 the states came up with under the exempted fishing permit, the
38 biomass estimates, to fishing effort, trip information, right, and
39 so I think there's a wide variety of ways that we could, obviously,
40 address allocation.

41
42 My specific comments regarding the alternatives, and I recognize
43 that sector separation, Amendment 40, used data going back to 1986,
44 but I think we should have a conversation around Alternatives 4
45 and 5, because that's landings data that's forty years old at this
46 point.

47
48 The fishery has entirely changed in four decades, right, and,

1 although it's not, obviously, only data from forty years ago, I
2 think it's really important that we look at what is the fishery
3 today, especially what is the fishery post-permit moratorium,
4 because that started in the early 2000s, and how do we want to,
5 obviously, manage this fishery, and we need to look at it from a
6 standpoint of what's fair and equitable, and I'm really struggling
7 with Alternatives 4 and 5, just because they're so heavily weighted
8 on going back in history and not the more recent time period.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I would tend to
11 agree, and I would also say that this specific -- You know, how
12 this was done for sector separation was for all Gulf private and
13 federally-permitted vessels. It was not meant at all for state
14 allocations here, but I'm going to move on. Mr. Sanchez, Captain
15 Walker, Mr. Anson.

16
17 **MR. SANCHEZ:** As we look at different percentages, the one
18 percentage I can't get past is that, upwards of 90 percent of the
19 charter captains landing fish in certain states, they're
20 overwhelmingly opposed to this. I don't know why we're trying to
21 do this. The industry is overwhelmingly opposed to it, where all
22 of -- 90 percent of the landings come from.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

25
26 **MR. WALKER:** I would like to make a motion that Action 3,
27 Alternative 1, we do not allocate the federal red snapper quota
28 among states, the for-hire red snapper quota among states, and I
29 will explain why if I get a second.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We've got a second from Captain Frady.

32
33 **MR. WALKER:** So I really don't -- Can you wait until Mara just
34 gets it on the board, please? Sorry. Not Mara. Thank you,
35 Bernie. All right, Ed.

36
37 **MR. WALKER:** My rationale for this is this is a reallocation, which
38 is certainly difficult. As the conversation has been, the majority
39 of the fleet doesn't want it. We have a new stock assessment,
40 which is going to have to be reevaluated, and the simple solution
41 to all this is just don't do this, and let the happy for-hire
42 component carry on with the current program, and that's what
43 they've told us they want, and it makes all these problems go away.
44 This is unnecessary, in my opinion, but I appreciate discussion on
45 it.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** So just -- We had just talked about not making
48 preferreds here, and so there's that, right? There is a motion on

1 the board, and I'm talking about the motion, and I would also
2 advocate that, if this is what you want to do, you just stop
3 working on this action altogether, just the entire amendment, and
4 not just allocation, and so that's some of my points here, but I'm
5 going to look around the table for some discussion. J.D.

6
7 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Just for Carrie, who seconded
8 the motion?

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Frady.

11
12 **MR. DUGAS:** Echoing Dr. Sweetman's points, we just had a
13 conversation that we were not picking preferreds at this time. We
14 just said that less than five minutes ago, and so a little
15 confused.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Anson, you had your hand raised before
18 this motion went up. Do you want to --

19
20 **MR. ANSON:** No, and it was separate from this motion.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

23
24 **MR. WALKER:** The point here is, if this passes, we don't need to
25 go through all the rest of this conversation. This kind of does,
26 but, if there's an easier way to do it -- I mean, if we're not
27 going to reallocate among states, that erases all the other issues.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I'm going to go to Ms. Levy.

30
31 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and so picking a preferred in one action is not
32 going to stop the discussion of the whole document, because you
33 can always come back at the council and change your preferred, and
34 so, I mean, to C.J.'s point, if the purpose is to stop working on
35 the document, that's the motion to make, if that's what you want
36 to have happen.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. I'll adjust my motion. Do I
39 withdraw that? Okay. **I'll withdraw that motion.**

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. **The motion is withdrawn.**

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** So where do I start?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Hold on. Okay.

46
47 **MR. WALKER:** So, to do what I'm seeking to do, I would have to go
48 back to the very beginning here, and is there an action -- Action

1 1, and is that where it would need to be? All right. The motion
2 would be to stop work, discussion, on federal for-hire management
3 of red snapper. Is that what I'm trying to say?
4

5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** On Reef Fish Amendment 64.
6

7 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, on Reef Fish Amendment 64. That clarifies it.
8 Yes, that is my motion.
9

10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Motion on the table from Captain Walker. Do
11 we have a second? Seconded by Mr. Sanchez. Any further
12 discussion? Dr. Allen.
13

14 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I'll add some comments, and so this is the
15 first time I've been at this seat for discussions about red snapper
16 and all the issues that we're dealing with, and just a few
17 comments.
18

19 One is that this pending red snapper stock assessment is one of
20 the most complicated assessments in the United States. This is a
21 very complicated assessment, with a lot of intricacies, multiple
22 sectors, and we've already discussed that the recreational
23 landings calibration issues are going to be substantial. Those
24 are things that the council is going to have to deal with.
25

26 We've got final action at this meeting on a program similar to
27 SEFHIER, to restart a reporting program for the charter-for-hire,
28 and we've already discussed, this morning, that we're going to
29 have to start discussions of reallocation, starting back on the
30 far left-hand of that plot, and moving forward to the right.
31

32 Now we're talking about splitting up the bottom-right-hand part of
33 that figure, and making that part of it much more complex, and it
34 seems, to me, that that discussion -- I would be game to have that
35 discussion down the road, but, with what's facing this council
36 coming up, I think that we should -- I support this motion. I
37 think we should table this for now.
38

39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.
40

41 **MR. WALKER:** I would like to just throw in here that I'm happy to
42 entertain other ways to address some of the issues that Louisiana
43 feels they need to do this for. Maybe there's an easier way to go
44 about it without changing everything, and I would be fully
45 supportive of that. I just think -- I think applying it to
46 everybody Gulf-wide is not necessary at this time.
47

48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any further comments? Not seeing any, all

1 right. J.D.
2
3 **MR. DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin requests a roll call vote.
4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We have a request for a roll call vote. Okay.
6 Dr. Simmons.
7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
9 Thank you, Bernie. Captain Walker.
10
11 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
12
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
14
15 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
16
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Allen.
18
19 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes.
20
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.
22
23 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** No.
24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
26
27 **MR. ANSON:** No.
28
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
30
31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** No.
32
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Ballard.
34
35 **MS. BALLARD:** No.
36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
38
39 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Abstain.
40
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.
42
43 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard is absent, I believe.
46 Mr. Sanchez.
47
48 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
3
4 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes.
5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
7
8 **DR. BANKS:** No.
9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.
11
12 **MR. OSBORNE:** No.
13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
15
16 **MR. GEESLIN:** No.
17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Marquez.
19
20 **MR. MARQUEZ:** No.
21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
23
24 **MR. DUGAS:** No.
25
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion failed nine to eight with
27 one absent and one abstention. Sorry. Nine to six.
28
29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. That motion failed. Mr. Strelcheck.
30
31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** It seems like a great time to take a break. What
32 do you think?
33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I would concur. We are a few minutes over our
35 schedule, but, yes, and we don't have a resolution in sight, and
36 maybe a break.
37
38 **MR. DUGAS:** Yes, and thank you, Andy. Let's take a break for
39 fifteen minutes, and we'll come back.
40
41 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)
42
43 **MR. DUGAS:** All right. We're going to go ahead and get started,
44 and I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Sweetman.
45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just some general
47 housekeeping, and, as you can see on this slide here, just kind of
48 -- This isn't updated, but I think it was incorrectly announced

1 there, but the motion failed, in the last one, six to nine with
2 one absent and one abstention, and so I just wanted to point that
3 out there. Okay. Bernie, if we could move back to the
4 presentation, but, before we do that, I did have an outstanding
5 hand in Mr. Anson.

6
7 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a point of clarification
8 on that comment that Mr. Schieble had made relative to the table
9 that was referred to in the document, and that 2018 number for
10 Florida, and I don't believe that's -- That FES impacted, and FES
11 deals with private angling, and the State of Florida, and you can
12 confirm too, Dr. Sweetman, but the State of Florida contacts the
13 charter boat owners directly, via a separate telephone survey from
14 the FES survey, and so those estimates for charter, albeit it --
15 Although there is state charter in there, I think, for red snapper,
16 probably the majority of that information is coming from a for-
17 hire telephone survey, which had been conducted prior to 2018 and
18 post-2018.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes. Florida, in the charter, is on the MRIP
21 for-hire survey. Okay. We have a couple more actions to get
22 through in 64, and so I'm going to pass it over to you, Dr. Diagne.

23
24 **DR. DIAGNE:** All right. Thank you. A potential, I guess, Action
25 4, and these numbers are going to change, in light of decisions
26 you have already made, but there is an action here for post-season
27 accountability measures, and this is included here as a result of
28 a motion you approved in April, when we last discussed this.

29
30 The action would have a no action alternative, essentially no post-
31 season accountability measures, and Alternative 2 would read as
32 follows: If a state's red snapper federal for-hire component
33 landings exceed the applicable state's component annual catch
34 limit, the National Marine Fisheries Service will file a
35 notification with the Federal Register at or near the beginning of
36 the following fishing year reducing the state's federal for-hire
37 ACL by the amount of the ACL overage in the prior fishing year.
38 Again, this was a result of your motion for full payback in case
39 of overages.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any discussion on this action here? It seems
42 pretty straightforward. Dr. Diagne, maybe keep moving?

43
44 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and so this action here is included for your
45 consideration, and it would be the procedure to request the closure
46 to federal for-hire red snapper fishing of areas of federal waters
47 adjacent to state waters.

1 In the event of, you know, different statuses, some states
2 participating and other not participating and so forth, a
3 particular state may want to request the closure of federal waters
4 off of their state.

5
6 Alternative 1 would be a no action alternative. Essentially, the
7 state wouldn't be able to request from NMFS the closure of federal
8 waters adjacent to state water off of their state, and this is for
9 the purpose of red snapper for-hire fishing.

10
11 Alternative 2 is establish a procedure to allow a state to request
12 NMFS close areas of federal waters adjacent to state waters to red
13 snapper for-hire fishing. The state would request the closure by
14 letter, providing dates and coordinates for the closure, and,
15 should the request be within the scope of analysis provided in the
16 amendment, then NMFS will file a notification with the Federal
17 Register to implement the closure, and so this was considered in
18 a previous amendment, I believe 50, and so the language is carried
19 here for your consideration, and this is the last action that we
20 have so far, I mean, to develop the amendment further.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Last action. Ms. Levy.

23
24 **MS. LEVY:** Just for folks that may have not been around when
25 Amendment 50 was done, this action is in there, but it did require
26 the states to identify what they may want to do in terms of a
27 closure, and so that we could do the analysis in the document that
28 would allow for the closure to just happen via temporary rule.
29 You know, Texas and Florida and Alabama identified potential
30 closures that they might request, and so we analyzed those, and so
31 those are available, but a couple of the states did not, and so,
32 if there's no identification of that, and no analysis, there would
33 be no ability to actually do the closure.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Any further comments, or
36 questions? Captain Walker.

37
38 **MR. WALKER:** Just to be clear, a federal charter boat can fish any
39 of that now. We're not going to break it up into closed areas and
40 not closed areas and potentially exclude one state from fishing
41 off another state. To me, that's simpler. Just a comment.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

44
45 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and not a comment on Action 5, but I did
46 have a couple of things I wanted to cover if we can go back to
47 Action 4, the previous slide, and apologies, Assane, if you said
48 this, and I was distracted by an email, but we're working on

1 adjustments to the private accountability measures, and I see that
2 as also being applicable here for charter if all states opt-in,
3 right, and I think that's the -- So I would recommend that we
4 include that as part of the accountability measures here in this
5 amendment.

6
7 Then my other comment is, if we can go to slide 9, which is the
8 map of the regions, and so, given the vote we just had, you know,
9 my main concern is what does the path forward look like on this
10 amendment right now, and we have a very clear divide amongst the
11 council members, right, and I'm stating the obvious.

12
13 In looking at these lines on the map, I think there's potential
14 here to simplify this as we move forward and consider this
15 amendment into three regions, right? You could have a Texas
16 region, and you could have a combined Louisiana and Mississippi
17 region, and I suggest that just because that line off of
18 Mississippi really doesn't make a whole lot of sense for those
19 Mississippi charter captains who might be running around the delta,
20 and then you have an eastern Gulf region.

21
22 I know, Kevin, you didn't vote in favor of stopping this amendment,
23 and I don't know where the state is at for Alabama, but, if the
24 eastern Gulf drops out, and you have these other two regions, it
25 might make sense to kind of look at it in that manner, and so I
26 just wanted to mention that, and we're, obviously, early in the
27 process, and see if there's an appetite to explore that and what
28 that can look like.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

31
32 **MR. WALKER:** So, if you're going to combine states, they would
33 have to both be states that opted in, and what if one didn't and
34 one did? Can you still make that a zone? I think there's a big
35 issue for Mississippi and their charter boat guys here. I think
36 it's a primary issue, because I'm certain a lot of them fish off
37 Louisiana, and I'm not sure what Mississippi is going to do, but
38 I've heard that they might pass this, but not opt-in, which would
39 make what you just said not function, and likely exclude their
40 charter boat fishermen from fishing in the, you know, bountiful
41 Louisiana waters, if you will.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

44
45 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, to that point, right now, I don't know
46 where anyone is going to stand with regard to opting in or opting
47 out. I'm just trying to think of how we could frame potentially
48 other alternatives, especially this early in the process, and if,

1 you know, all the states want to just go it alone individually,
2 right, then we'll continue down this path.

3
4 If there's some value in combining states into more of a regional
5 approach with, to me, Mississippi and Louisiana making the most
6 sense, just because of the geographic boundaries, then I wanted
7 to, obviously, just toss that out for consideration by the council
8 now, and we could work to analyze that going forward.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.

11
12 **MS. LEVY:** So, just for your information, so we did have -- In the
13 original Amendment 39, there was an action that considered regions
14 or state-by-state, and so, if you're interested in that, we have
15 some history that we could pull over that considered that.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Ms. Levy. Just relative to Andy's
18 other point there about the accountability measures, I do think
19 that makes sense and so, obviously, our next topic that we'll be
20 talking about is that exact thing for private recreational, and so
21 just throwing that out there. Mr. Geeslin.

22
23 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Andy, my default question,
24 and I like where you're going with this, the regional approach,
25 whether we split it east-west or three different regions, my
26 default question was going to be is this supported and backed by
27 science?

28
29 There certainly seems to be compelling evidence to indicate that,
30 yes, it is supported by science, and I'm looking at a paper just
31 recently published in the Fisheries Bulletin. Many of the authors
32 from your very own team there at NOAA, "Adult Red Snapper in the
33 North Gulf of America: Variation and Distribution Abundance in
34 Biology from 2001 through 2023", and the lead author was Joseph E.
35 Serafy out of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

36
37 Reading through that, and my colleague to the right, Dr. Banks,
38 shared this with me, and it certainly does seem that that notion
39 is supported by science, with the biomass over in the west, and,
40 again, I'm not certain where the lines would be, but I think your
41 notion of a regionalized approach certainly has merit and is worthy
42 of continued discussion and investigation.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Dugas, or to that point, Andy?

45
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, just to be clear, I wasn't making the
47 suggestion based on a scientific or biomass approach. It was more
48 from a regulatory administrative approach, right, that -- As well

1 as the divide that I'm seeing right now amongst the council
2 members, in terms of how we move forward and whether or not states
3 are going to opt-in or opt-out, right, and so you have the
4 political divide, but you also have this regulatory conundrum for
5 charter vessels that would be operating off the Mississippi and
6 Louisiana coast, where it could logically make sense to combine
7 that into one geographic area.

8
9 I'm not saying that has to be done. Obviously, General Spraggins
10 and Chris and others would have to decide whether that would be a
11 viable alternative, but it does at least then break down that, you
12 know, line on the map that comes right out of the Louisiana delta
13 to allow for that one regional approach.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Also to that point, Mr. Anson?

16
17 **MR. ANSON:** Yes. To Mr. Geeslin's comment, I'm not opposed to
18 looking at, you know, different rationale for establishing a
19 region, but, just specific to the paper that he referenced, if I'm
20 thinking of the same one, that eastern boundary is a little fuzzy
21 as to whether or not it's actually at the Alabama-Mississippi line
22 or the Florida-Alabama line, depending upon which metric you're
23 looking at, and so it's not 100 percent as you get south of Alabama,
24 but, anyways, and, to Andy's point, as far as looking at additional
25 regions, I agree with him.

26
27 Mississippi is unique in this as you look at it, but, inasmuch as
28 that, or outside of that issue, I'm having a hard time
29 understanding if it still gets rid of the issues that are related
30 to an individual state region, and so I'm all for looking at it,
31 and possibly incorporating some of the language that's in Amendment
32 39, as Ms. Levy had suggested.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Now Mr. Dugas.

35
36 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, and so I had some questions,
37 but Andy answered them as he was speaking, and I appreciate Andy's
38 different approach here, and, you know, I'm asking the question,
39 and I don't know if it's for Andy or Dr. Assane, and is this
40 something that we want to add in this document to look at in the
41 future, or it's just a conversation around the table and that's
42 it?

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

45
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** That's why I was tossing it out for consideration,
47 right, and I didn't have a chance to talk to Louisiana or
48 Mississippi. We briefly had a conversation during the break with

1 the staff, and we want to give them some direction as to whether
2 we want to move forward or not, similar to what Mara said about
3 any sort of regional management components that aren't state-
4 based, right, and so, right now, I think staff is looking for
5 direction from us, and, if it's a viable path that we want to look
6 at, then let's recommend it, and, if not, then we continue on with
7 the amendment as it's designed.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks.

10
11 **DR. BANKS:** I think, at this stage, it's something to definitely
12 put into the document. We're having this philosophical discussion
13 about state management, and the next document is another way to
14 look at flexibility for that fleet, and so, at this point, I would
15 not rule out regional, and I should think it should still be in
16 the conversation, so I would support a motion to add it into the
17 document.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I'll just articulate that certainly
20 a lot of what -- The upcoming stock assessment is going to be very
21 informative for what we can and can't do here, and, also, there is
22 a three-regional component to that that could be useful here, but
23 Mr. Schieble.

24
25 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I just want to speak in support of -- If
26 we wanted to add an action to this document that would include a
27 regional component, I would not be opposed to that whatsoever. I
28 think any options, or ideas, at this point are worthy to be added
29 into this, and we can always choose to, you know, make preferred
30 options later.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any more discussion? This was the last action
33 on the table here for this item. Dr. Banks.

34
35 **DR. BANKS:** I'll take the hit. I'll make the motion, Bernie, on
36 the fly, and so, if anybody wants to help me wordsmith. **The motion**
37 **would be to, I guess, include whatever the action number is --**

38
39 **DR. DIAGNE:** 6.

40
41 **DR. BANKS:** 6. Looking at regional management scenarios. Carrie,
42 do you need more than that, or different wordsmithing for that?
43 Assane has got his hand --

44
45 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, I mean, to give us, I mean, at the IPT
46 level, the flexibility to just include this, and it may not
47 necessarily be a separate action, because the delegation action
48 now looks at state-by-state or all, but the regional aspects could

1 be included there, and so perhaps a motion to do something like
2 include, you know, regional delegations, or something to that
3 effect, without specifying an action, per se.

4
5 **DR. BANKS:** I would take that amendment.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** To include options for regional management.
8 Okay. Is that how your motion reads, Dr. Banks?

9
10 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We have a second from Dakus. Any further
13 discussion on the motion on the table? General Spraggins.

14
15 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** You know, I'll go ahead and, you know, support
16 this, but we're going to have some concerns. Obviously, you know,
17 where you draw the line is going to make a difference with us,
18 especially in the regional, and on the east side is what I'm --
19 You know, I'm looking at that, and I love the west side, but, you
20 know, I'm looking at the east side, and what that does to us, and
21 so we're going to have to talk to our captains, but we'll
22 definitely go along with you right now.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Any further
25 discussion? **Is there any opposition to the motion on the table?**
26 **One opposition. I'm going to abstain, as chair. The motion**
27 **carries with one in opposition and one abstention and one absent.**

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Is there any more on Amendment 64
30 to come forward for the Reef Fish Committee? Mr. Strelcheck.

31
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just a question for Assane and Carrie. Do you
33 want a motion with regard to the accountability measures, or are
34 you good with the direction from the council at this point to
35 include the additional accountability measures?

36
37 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** The question is, relative to the additional
38 options we're discussing for management flexibility on the private
39 recreational side, to include those also within the federal for-
40 hire conversation. All right. I think they're going to get back
41 to you at Full Council.

42
43 Okay, anything else for Amendment 64? All right. Seeing none,
44 maybe we can get back on track here and move into the next item.
45 I think we'll be able to at least get through part of it before
46 lunch, but I'm going to -- The next item that we do have on the
47 agenda -- Thank you, Assane, for walking through that, and for the
48 discussion, and the next item that we have is going to be Tab B,

1 Number 5, Management Flexibility for the Federal For-Hire
2 Component of the Red Snapper Fishery, Draft Options, and I'm going
3 to turn it over to Mr. Rindone.

4
5 **DRAFT OPTIONS: MANAGEMENT FLEXIBILITY FOR THE FEDERAL FOR-HIRE**
6 **COMPONENT OF THE RED SNAPPER FISHERY**
7

8 **MR. RINDONE:** All right, and so the other one, and so I'm going to
9 show you guys a presentation about options for delegating authority
10 to modifying specific management measures to Andy for the federal
11 for-hire component for red snapper.

12
13 The presentation reviews the current management structure and its
14 performance and proposes a purpose and need, while seeking
15 clarification from the council, and that's pretty key to this whole
16 presentation, because we need to have a target of what we're trying
17 to achieve here.

18
19 The committee should consider the information presented, ask
20 questions, and provide direction to staff, as appropriate, and
21 should also consider other actions that are likely to affect, or
22 be affected, by this proposed document, and, of course, the timing
23 of the current red snapper stock assessment, and so, Bernie, if we
24 could bring that up.

25
26 Establishing flexible management authority for the federal for-
27 hire component for red snapper fishing, how could it work? Despite
28 having longer fishing seasons, the for-hire component has not been
29 landing its ACT in recent years, and we've seen the fishing season
30 duration for the for-hire component extended over the last several
31 years.

32
33 We've had the current system in place for for-hire management for
34 multiple species, and specifically red snapper, and so what has
35 changed that is causing that particular fleet not to land its
36 annual catch target, and these questions are somewhat rhetorical,
37 because you guys know that some of these are, obviously, going to
38 be regionally varied, you know, things like weather, economic
39 conditions, catch composition, like mean length or mean weight.

40
41 One discussed goal, at a previous council meeting, was timely
42 management response to fishery performance, and so, as things
43 change in the fishery, pivoting management in such a way that
44 benefits the fleet that is being affected, but being able to target
45 exactly what we're trying to do here is critical, and so your input
46 is necessary, for sure.

47
48 The council's direction was to consider designation of authority

1 to the Regional Administrator to modify select federal for-hire
2 fishing regulations for red snapper based on some predetermined
3 criteria, and things that you guys proposed included bag limits,
4 minimum size limits, fishing season start dates, fishing season
5 structure, and some things there that you might think about, like
6 weekends only, continuous seasons, split seasons, some sort of
7 core season that you want to try to be able to ensure, and it's
8 important to note that Andy can already reopen the fishing season
9 prior to the end of the -- Or he can extend it prior to the end of
10 the fishing year, if the data support that.

11
12 He can reopen the fishing season after its projected closure, if
13 it turns out that there is still a sufficient amount of quota
14 available to be caught, and just some timing considerations here
15 that we've kind of talked about already in John's presentation.

16
17 The most recent stock assessment that we're working off of has a
18 2016 terminal year, and we're not going to have advice from the
19 current stock assessment until probably April of 2027, at the
20 earliest, and so just something to think about as far as what we're
21 doing with the fish we have versus what we expect to have to do in
22 the near term.

23
24 If this were to happen, it would require a plan amendment. It
25 would require a modification of the framework procedure to allow
26 the Regional Administrator to make these changes to the federal
27 for-hire regulations on an annual basis, or whenever, whatever
28 trigger mechanisms we determine or call for. The default, or
29 current regulations, have the fishing season set to open the Friday
30 before Memorial Day, which was transmitted to NMFS, and so that's
31 in Andy's shop now, and it will close the fishing season when the
32 for-hire ACT is projected to be met, which Andy already does every
33 year, and then we have a sixteen-inch total length minimum size
34 limit and a two-fish-per-person daily bag limit.

35
36 This shows you the landings versus the fishing season duration for
37 the for-hire component for red snapper, and we see a pretty
38 commensurate increase in both the landings and the fishing season
39 duration. Landings are in blue, and fishing season duration is in
40 red, all the way up until 2023, and then there's a bit of a flip-
41 flop here, where the fishing season duration is extended while the
42 landings start to decrease.

43
44 When we're talking about the timing of these regulatory changes -
45 - That's a good-looking fish, Carrie. Good-looking fish. When
46 we're talking about the timing of these regulatory changes, the
47 framework procedure would need to be very explicit about the
48 changes that were going to be made, so that it could be smoothly

1 implemented.

2
3 The idea would be that, with the appropriate setup of triggers,
4 basically like an if-then-else statement, and this could operate
5 through a closed framework process, and the scope of possible
6 effects would have been analyzed in advance, so that we know -- We
7 and the public would be able to predict what would happen, and so,
8 if this happens, then we do this, else we're going to stick with
9 whatever this default is. Else management changes would have to
10 occur through the normal amendment process, whether through a
11 framework or whatever was necessary.

12
13 We need to prioritize the goals. What is the thing that we're
14 most interested in trying to achieve? Is the primary objective
15 just simply management flexibility? Are we determined to try to
16 harvest the for-hire ACT? Are we determined to have a set fishing
17 season start date, or to maintain a mean harvest length? I had
18 mentioned earlier a core fishing season, and so is it most
19 important that the for-hire fishing season occur between date X
20 and date Y? Is there more than one goal?

21
22 A thing to remember is that, as we increase the flexibility, and
23 how malleable this entire system is, it does decrease its stability
24 and predictability, as far as like, okay, so what's the bag limit
25 going to be, and how long -- How many fishing days are we going to
26 have? Are we open this month, or are we not? When are things
27 going to close?

28
29 Classically, the target has been to harvest the ACT, and otherwise
30 to maximize access. Recently, when we were talking about the
31 change in the for-hire fishing season, when we did that framework
32 action, public comment seemed to prioritize the season that
33 occurred between roundabout May 1 through about the middle to maybe
34 the end of August, and that was talked about as being this is
35 really when we need to make sure that we're open.

36
37 Of course, we did hear comments from for-hire fishermen saying
38 that, oh, you know, if we're open before then, we can catch fish
39 then. If we're open after then, we can catch fish then too, and
40 we can sell those trips, but it seemed to be that like it was most
41 important that, between May and August, that like those months
42 were kept open.

43
44 The council did consider hindcasting the fishing season back from
45 August 15, and ultimately discarded that alternative in that
46 document, and, similarly, the council considered a May 1 open, and
47 also discarded that alternative, and so just for a little bit of
48 history there, as far as considering when a core season might

1 occur.

2
3 We have a purpose and need here. This is very draft. Please don't
4 be married to this. I'm just trying to put something up for you
5 guys to think about a little bit. The purpose being to develop
6 procedures that provide Andy with the authority to make management
7 modifications within a specified timeframe and pre-analyzed range
8 of alternatives for the federal for-hire fleet for red snapper in
9 the Gulf.

10
11 The need being to improve or -- Sorry. To provide management
12 flexibility, including improved access to red snapper for the
13 federal for-hire fleet, while preventing overfishing on a
14 continual basis, achieving the optimum yield from the harvest of
15 red snapper by the federal for-hire fleet in the Gulf.

16
17 When we're talking about possible actions to consider, modifying
18 the fishing season was one thing that was talked about, and, you
19 know, we already have a framework action that's been put forward
20 that modifies the start date for the for-hire fleet fishing season
21 to be the Friday before the federal Memorial Day holiday.

22
23 The Regional Administrator can already modify the duration of the
24 fishing season, based on landings that are coming in, based on the
25 projections, and reopen the fishing season if it's closed and
26 there's a bunch of fish left to be caught.

27
28 Changing the opening date may affect planning certainty though,
29 especially if it changes on an annual basis, and that's why we
30 have a set opening date in the first place, is so that the for-
31 hire fleet knows when it can start selling trips.

32
33 Modifying the fishing season may also change the mean size that's
34 retained, and so, if the fishing season is opening earlier in the
35 year, as opposed to later, that may have minor effects, as far as
36 like the mean length that's able to be retained at the beginning
37 of the year versus the end of the year. If the season is open
38 longer in some areas of the Gulf, it may make it harder to find
39 keeper fish as the season wears on.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We've got a hand raised.

42
43 **MR. RINDONE:** Interrupt me whenever, and I'll stop talking.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you. Mr. Sanchez.

46
47 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Is that you holding Carrie's fish?
48

1 **MR. RINDONE:** That's my fish. Thank you very much. Talking about
2 the bag limit, and, when we talk about changes to the bag limit,
3 that will result in changes to CPUE relative to how that bag limit
4 changes, and so, if we increase it to from two fish to three fish,
5 or something like that, or decrease it from two fish to one fish,
6 you guys can imagine, in your mind's eye, about how that might
7 affect things, including the fishing season duration.

8
9 Again, if the goal is to have a fishing season that occurs within
10 a certain window, and let's say that, you know, a certain
11 percentage of the ACL is being left over, despite fishing within
12 that window, and a secondary goal is to harvest the ACT, you might
13 be able to achieve that by a modification to the bag limit, or you
14 might be able -- If you're not able to be open for the entirety of
15 the window that you want to be open, again a modification to the
16 bag limit might allow you to extend the fishing season to
17 accomplish being able to sell trips within that time horizon that
18 you've determined you need.

19
20 For modifying the minimum size limit, this one I have to caution
21 you guys on, because this can change the length at which the
22 selectivity and retention functions in the stock assessment are
23 operating, and so, if you change the minimum size limit, that's
24 going to result in changes in the stock assessment that complicate
25 our understanding of the stock, especially if they're happening on
26 an annual basis, and so I would encourage consideration of other
27 measures before this one, just from a fisheries science standpoint.

28
29 All of these things are assuming a healthy stock, and so we always
30 have to kind of think about what if that's not true, and what if
31 the reason that we're not catching the fish is because there's
32 some issue with the stock, and this would apply to, obviously,
33 more than red snapper.

34
35 This would apply to any species that we're talking about. If we're
36 not catching them, is it because we don't have enough people
37 trying, or is it because the fish aren't there, and so this would
38 be something that would need to be thought about in developing
39 this, and, if it is implemented, in maintaining it over time and
40 monitoring what happens.

41
42 Don't be married to these actions either. These are just spaghetti
43 thrown at the wall for you guys to think about a little bit, but,
44 you know, you know an action might be establish flexibility
45 authority for the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator to
46 annually modify the fishing season for the for-hire folks, with
47 Option 1, obviously, being don't do it, and that shows you what
48 the current regulations are, and Option 2 basically being a revisit

1 of what we just did in the other framework action about modifying
2 the fishing season, but, in this case, it would allow the Regional
3 Administrator the flexibility to set the season between certain
4 dates.

5
6 The Regional Administrator would determine the opening and closing
7 date between the dates that are listed, and, if it's possible for
8 it to be open that entire time, then it would be. If it's not,
9 then, based on whatever setup is within the document, the opening
10 date might be prioritized over the closing date, or vice versa.

11
12 Then the idea would be that NMFS would notify the public, via the
13 Federal Register and through its rulemaking process, by some date,
14 and, obviously, that would need to be discussed with the Regional
15 Office, and it would need to be based on when the data are available
16 to actually be able to do that.

17
18 Another one might be to modify the bag limit, and the current bag
19 limit is two fish per person per day. The other option might be
20 to allow the bag limit to be set in between some value, say between
21 one and three fish, or one and four fish, again with the goal being
22 to -- Let's say the goal is primarily to achieve having the season
23 open during date X and date Y, and, if there's more fishing
24 pressure, and it's causing the season to close early, then maybe
25 the bag limit can be modified to ensure the season is open during
26 that window.

27
28 If there's less fishing pressure, and there's a lot of quota that's
29 being left over, then maybe the bag limit is modified to allow
30 those fish to be caught within that window of time that we're
31 trying to make sure the season is open. Of course, you guys can
32 always consider something like a vessel limit, where it's not to
33 exceed some amount, and harvest limits would, obviously, be, you
34 know, whichever is more or less, and we could have conversations
35 about the vessel limit, if that was something that you guys wanted
36 to entertain, and then the same point to be made about NMFS
37 notifying the public of what's going to happen.

38
39 Under both of these examples and alternatives, explicit triggers
40 for management action are going to be needed. It can't just be
41 left open-ended, where Andy gets to choose his own adventure about
42 what he wants to do every year, because that negates the whole
43 idea of being able to do this in a quick and efficient way on an
44 annual basis. That reintroduces our current rulemaking process.

45
46 NMFS would need to be able to make these changes based on fishery
47 performance, or some other metric relative to the triggers, that
48 you guys determine in this proposed amendment, and, if that fishery

1 performance trigger is not met, then nothing would happen. Default
2 management would be maintained. That's part of that.

3
4 If this happens, then we do this, else we do the default, whatever
5 the default is. Without these explicit triggers, management
6 changes, and, again, we have to follow our current amendment
7 process, and so what do you think?

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Rindone. I'm
10 looking around the table for any questions, or comments. Captain
11 Walker.

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** It makes sense to me, particularly what you said about
14 the triggers, that the council had set the triggers anyway, and it
15 seems like we could be more nimble making changes if they seemed
16 necessary to Andy, without having to go through a longer procedure,
17 and so, to me, it makes sense. I support it.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Anson.

20
21 **MR. ANSON:** Ryan, looking at your second-to-last slide, right
22 before the next steps slide, you have NMFS would make management
23 changes based on fishery performance relative to triggers, and so
24 I'm wondering if that statement applies to the examples that you
25 provided in slide 12, where you had the defined season in Option
26 2, for, you know, a defined open and a closing date, and so, if
27 the ACT wasn't met by the end date that's listed here, then the
28 Regional Administrator could come in and open a post-season, a
29 second season if you will, and is that what you mean by that?

30
31 **MR. RINDONE:** No, because he can do that now, and so that's already
32 something that's completely within his purview. This would be
33 more that -- Let's say you guys want the season open between May
34 1st and August 31st, and so the Option c, and let's say that, for
35 whatever reason it might be, the for-hire component only lands 68
36 percent of its ACT during that window.

37
38 Then, in that fishing year, Andy could reopen the fishing season
39 at some point later in the year, once it's been established and
40 they're confident that they can reopen it. In the following year,
41 because only 68 percent of the ACT was landed within that window,
42 and the goal, the primary goal, is to maintain fishing with between
43 May 1st and August 31st, okay, and so we've got that checked off.

44
45 Well, the second goal is to catch the ACT, and so, in the following
46 year, let's say it allows Andy to increase the daily bag limit
47 from two fish to three fish, and the catch projections for the
48 following year, when they're doing the fishing season projections,

1 say that, if we do that, we expect that 91 percent of the ACT is
2 going to be landed, and that has all been worked out in this plan
3 amendment within the framework procedure, and we've analyzed the
4 effects of that.

5
6 Then, in the following year the bag limit for the for-hire
7 component is three fish per person per day now, instead of two
8 fish, and let's say that that season progresses under this change,
9 and, you know, 89 percent of the ACT is landed, and our if-
10 statement is, if the fishing season is able to be open the entire
11 time, and at least some percentage of the ACT is caught, then we
12 do nothing.

13
14 If it's under this certain amount, then Andy has these tools
15 available to try to catch the ACT, and so you're basically tiering
16 your priorities, and then that's why I said your input is critical
17 here. Like what's the most important thing that you want? Is it
18 to be open between a certain window of time? Is it most important
19 no matter what, to harvest the ACT, because these priorities will
20 structure how we design these triggers, and how we set up what
21 Andy is and is not allowed to do under this change to the framework
22 procedure.

23
24 Anything that is outside of what we analyze in doing this, and
25 what we set up for triggers, wouldn't be able to happen, you know,
26 with that that snap for the following fishing year, because we
27 wouldn't have defined it, and we wouldn't necessarily have analyzed
28 it, and I see Mara's hand up. It would require our current process
29 for making these modifications.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Ms. Levy.

32
33 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, I wouldn't get too caught up in the examples
34 right now, because the action would have to be developed such that
35 the triggers are baked in, right, and so this is kind of showing
36 a range, but then what triggers the decision -- Is it April 1 or
37 May 1, and like that sort of thing, and so I don't -- We really
38 haven't talked about how the actions would look, and so it's more
39 like what would you want the Regional Administrator to be able to
40 change, and what trigger would prompt that change, and then we can
41 figure out how to put it in an action alternative.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks,, Ms. Levy. Mr. Dugas.

44
45 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. The way I understand this,
46 and the way I view it, is this is a maybe an over-a-long-period-
47 of-time approach. You know, Ryan said, you know, for next season,
48 the next year, and this will give Andy some flexibility. However,

1 I don't know how this helps us in the short term, when we're in
2 the middle of the season and we need to make an adjustment. It
3 doesn't?

4
5 **MR. RINDONE:** No. It doesn't help you within the current fishing
6 season, and that's in part because like, at this moment in time,
7 I can't tell you what the current for-hire landings are, as of
8 today, and neither can he, and neither can anybody around the
9 table. We need the data to be collected, and analyzed, and then,
10 you know, made available to the public before we can have any idea
11 at all, and, at that point, we're still looking at, even with the
12 updates to the MRIP program, at best, a month ago.

13
14 That's why you would be endeavoring to have -- At least in my mind,
15 you would be endeavoring to have some fishing season that you're
16 going to try to achieve if you have quota left over. After Andy's
17 shop has some idea of what was caught during that window, then he
18 can reopen it, if there's still fish available, and then, to the
19 point about -- Talking with Kevin, if the trigger is such that,
20 you know, if such and such amount of the ACT hasn't been landed,
21 then you do this. If it has, then you do nothing, or however the
22 trigger is structured, and that applies to the following fishing
23 season, and then you let that run.

24
25 Once you have the data from that, then you make the next decision,
26 and so there really isn't a way for us to make a decision today
27 based on what happened yesterday.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy, was it to that point?

30
31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, I mean, I have a number of points, and
32 so, first, I just want to be very clear, and my name keeps being
33 mentioned over and over again, but I will not always be sitting in
34 this seat, right, and so I just want to be clear, right, that any
35 approach like this needs to be long lasting with regard to the
36 Regional Administrator, the process, the triggers that would be
37 implemented, just like we've done with delegation of state
38 management, right, and that has lasted beyond governors, and state
39 directors, and changes that have taken place.

40
41 To me, this action is born less out of the fact that we weren't
42 catching the annual catch target and more out of the simple change
43 to the federal season that has taken us a much longer period of
44 time than it should have, right, and so the idea, obviously, is,
45 within these bounds, we can provide some greater flexibility and
46 be more nimble with regard to how we manage the federal season.

47
48 With that said, you know, I think there's some benefits to

1 potentially narrowing the scope, right, in terms of what do we
2 really want to look at. Ryan mentioned the size limits, and the
3 potential for, obviously, changes in selection and retention, and
4 that might be something that we would narrow the scope.

5
6 Then to, you know, the points made about kind of my current
7 authority, I see this as expanding flexibility, especially if you
8 start the season earlier during the fishing year, because, if you
9 also give the Regional Administrator authority to reopen and decide
10 season structure or other mechanisms, it provides that added
11 flexibility, in terms of what that reopening could look like, and
12 it's not just I open it on a certain date and continue to run until
13 the catch target is projected to be met.

14
15 Maybe it's desirable that the industry wants weekends only, or
16 some other flexibility, and so, to me, there's a lot that we'll
17 have to figure out, but I think this does provide a lot of benefits
18 to trying to optimize catch within the for-hire sector.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Andy. Captain Frady.

21
22 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do appreciate all the work
23 that the staff has put into laying this out there and asking
24 questions about the design of this program. I see this as an
25 opportunity to try and hit our ACT, and just to make sure,
26 economically speaking and biologically speaking, that charter
27 fishermen that are federally-permitted have an opportunity to
28 operate in a flexible system that doesn't hamstring them to just
29 a June 1 opening, or now it's going to be the Friday before Memorial
30 Day.

31
32 My vision was not to create something that's going to get wrapped
33 around the wagon wheel and become a 160-page document. The vision
34 is pure. I just want the Regional Administrator to have
35 flexibility to open the season when the fish are needed.

36
37 We're seeing, right now, where next year we'll probably open the
38 Friday before Memorial Day, and I would want to protect that,
39 because some of the guardrails is to protect that that summer
40 season. The other thing is there's opportunities in the spring,
41 when people could actually book a trip and have fish to catch, and
42 sometimes say there's a maybe a seven-day or ten-day period in
43 March, or maybe a seven or ten-day period in April, you know, right
44 before Easter or something like that, and I just see merit to this.

45
46 I never envisioned wanting to change bag limits or minimum sizes.
47 Let that alone. I've always seen this here just being strictly a
48 way to be flexible, so commerce can operate efficiently, and if we

1 have anything -- If we don't hit our ACT, then there's a
2 possibility of having that flexibility to open later in the fall,
3 but I do want to thank the staff for spending so much time on this
4 right here, and asking those hard questions, so that we could
5 simplify a document and get something everybody could agree on.
6 Thank you, sir.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Captain Frady. Any further discussion?
9 Captain Walker.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** So if we were to -- I'm okay with this, but could not
12 Andy, but NMFS, maybe give us a list of things that would make it
13 easier for you to be more nimble in these situations, and then we
14 could bat them around the room, or are you looking to us to come
15 up with these and hand them to you?

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Andy.

18
19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I would want to, obviously, kind of come
20 up with a comprehensive response. I don't want to just throw
21 things out on the fly, but certainly I think the main changes would
22 be flexibility with regard to when the season starts, and then
23 questions about triggers that would relate to reopening the season,
24 and the season structure.

25
26 As I mentioned, I mean, if there's input with regard to also
27 narrowing the scope of authority, and I know we've delegated
28 authority, for example, to the states to change the size limit,
29 but I don't think any of the states have considered that, right,
30 and is that something we want to consider or not as well? I know
31 bag limits have been changed by certain states, but we can give
32 some thought to it and provide some input back on triggers and
33 flexibility.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Andy. I would -- Just my personal
36 opinion is I would tend to agree, specifically on the size limit,
37 and I think that adds a lot of additional complications to this.
38 Bag limit, I'm on the fence about. Obviously, we don't change
39 ours in the State of Florida. I think that adds a little bit more
40 complexity there, but I fully understand and recognize that other
41 states do, and so certainly a point for discussion later on. Any
42 further comments here? Ms. Levy.

43
44 **MS. LEVY:** Just for your consideration with respect to the bag
45 limit, so, at one time, we had accountability measures for red
46 grouper, I believe red grouper, and maybe gag, that changed the
47 bag limit based on certain things that happened the year before,
48 and so it was kind of like this. Like there was a trigger, and

1 then NMFS would lower, and we did the bag limit up and down for a
2 couple of years, and people decided that that was not working, and
3 so I guess I would just -- Maybe we can look back and see what
4 happened with that. If you really think that bag limits are
5 something you want to change, we might want to see what we did
6 before, and what public comment, or what things happen with respect
7 to that.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that makes sense. Thanks,
10 Mara. Any further comments discussion on this? Mr. Rindone, do
11 you have what you need here, or do we want further discussion
12 before we break for lunch?

13
14 **MR. RINDONE:** I mean, based on the notes that I've taken, I mean,
15 I have some of what I can start using a little bit. I know that's
16 not -- That's not very glowing, but I think the key things that we
17 need from you guys are we need you to tell us what is the most
18 important thing.

19
20 We've heard from one of the committee members that preserving that
21 summer season is important to them, and then secondary to that
22 would be catching the ACT, and so explicit council direction on
23 that though is important, because it is going to determine how the
24 whole document is written, how all the triggers are oriented, and
25 every change that we might consider is going to be based around
26 this is most important, and then, second to that, this is the next
27 most important thing, but, without that information, I'm spinning
28 in a circle, and no matter of things that I put in front of you
29 guys is going to make this thing make any progress.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I look to the committee here to give a little
32 bit more direction for Mr. Rindone for what exactly we're looking
33 for. Mr. Rindone.

34
35 **MR. RINDONE:** I mean, very simply, right, it's just like what is
36 the most important thing that you want to have, and, after that,
37 what's the next most important thing, things to think about, and,
38 you know, when do you want the fishing season to open? Is that
39 most important? Is it most important just to catch the ACT? Is
40 it most important that the average length of fish that you guys
41 are bringing over the side is at least twenty inches total length?
42 What is it?

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks.

45
46 **DR. BANKS:** I don't think Ryan is going to like my answer. I would
47 like to hear from public comment about what they think is most
48 important to them. Is it having the flexibility to move the season

1 forward? Is it having the flexibility for the bag limit? I would
2 like to -- Before we give that list out, and maybe we can revisit
3 this in council, because I would like to chew over that, and think
4 about all the implications myself, but I would also like to hear
5 from the fleet, because I think the last document and this document
6 do approach the same problem, but at different angles, and I don't
7 know which way I lean at the moment, and so I would like to chew
8 all this before, and so I don't think Ryan likes my answer, because
9 you're not getting direction right now.

10
11 **MR. RINDONE:** That's fine. I mean, because that then provides
12 direction to the public to give you guys the information that
13 you're looking for, and so that's fine, but you guys just need to
14 have this front of mind when it comes time to discuss this. If
15 we're going to make meaningful progress on this, I at least have
16 to be pointed towards a target to try to hit.

17
18 **DR. BANKS:** Maybe, Mr. Chair, we could revisit in Full Council.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think that makes a lot of sense, Dr. Banks.
21 I certainly would want to hear from the public on this. Mr.
22 Sanchez.

23
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** While we're hitting up the public for comment, I
25 would like to hear from the public on size limits and bag limits
26 in this document, if that's one.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Sounds good. Mr. Strelcheck, and then
29 Dr. Banks.

30
31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I wanted to second what John was saying. I think
32 direct input on the suite of flexibility measures that would be
33 considered will be helpful from the public. I think I would also
34 be interested in the actual season itself, and so we've heard,
35 obviously, kind of this core period that the charter sector would
36 like to operate in, but we know that that is pretty variable across
37 the Gulf, and so hearing, obviously, those different perspectives
38 will be helpful.

39
40 I really do feel like this kind of comes back to the season itself,
41 and trying to optimize yield, and, you know, set the season in a
42 way that's going to be most beneficial for the for-hire sector.

43
44 With that said, I did appreciate the note, on I think it was slide
45 11, which is what Ryan was pointing to about assuming a healthy
46 stock. What if that assumption is not true, and I'm not saying
47 the stock is not healthy, but we usually, you know, are most
48 challenged when we're bumping up against the catch limit, or catch

1 target, and, in more recent years, not only has the ACT not been
2 met for the for-hire, but we haven't been catching the quotas for
3 a lot of the state-based quota systems, right, and so, to me,
4 that's a concern, and something that, obviously, we'll see what
5 bears out for the next stock assessment.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks. You're good? Captain Walker.

8
9 **MR. WALKER:** The season lengths and dates, we've spent a lot of
10 time narrowing that down, and coming up with what we came up with,
11 and I think, for for-hire guys, they probably don't want a big
12 flexibility, and they want predictable seasons, and I think what
13 we give them is what we give them, and, you know, I'm not opposed
14 to giving options to change things, but, you know, if you think
15 about it, if you're a charter boat captain setting your season for
16 next year with your best clients, you really don't want a sudden
17 change in the season length, and so just something to think about,
18 and we can hear from the public on that, but thinking out loud
19 here.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right, folks. Anything else? All right.
22 Mr. Chair, I think we are at our lunch break, and I'm going to
23 turn it back to you.

24
25 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We'll take our lunch break
26 and reconvene at 1:30. Thank you.

27
28 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 25, 2026.)

29
30 - - -

31
32 August 26, 2026

33
34 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

35
36 - - -

37
38 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf Council reconvened
39 at the Golden Nugget in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday morning,
40 August 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman C.J. Sweetman.

41
42 **MR. DUGAS:** All right. Before I turn it over to Dr. Sweetman,
43 just a reminder for folks in the room that there is a social
44 tonight that the council is putting on. There's a social tonight.
45 The council is going to be putting on the fifty-year anniversary
46 accomplishments by the MSA, and it's going to be on the first
47 floor, in the Rush Lounge, behind the bar, and it starts at 5:30,
48 and it ends at 6:30. It's one hour. Dr. Sweetman.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope
3 everyone had a good lunch. We're going to dive right back into
4 red snapper, and the next item that we have is Draft of the
5 Modifications to the Red Snapper Private Recreational Post-Season
6 Accountability Measures, and I'll turn it over to Dr. Suitor to
7 lead us through the action guide for us.
8

9 **DRAFT - MODIFICATIONS TO RED SNAPPER PRIVATE RECREATIONAL POST-**
10 **SEASON ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES**
11

12 **DR. ANABELLE SUITOR:** Council staff will present a draft framework
13 action to modify private recreational accountability measures for
14 red snapper. Presently, if a Gulf state's landings exceed the
15 state-specific annual catch limit in a fishing year, then, in the
16 following year, that state's annual catch limit will be reduced by
17 the amount of the overage in the previous year.
18

19 The presentation will review alternatives to the current
20 accountability measure. The committee should discuss the
21 alternatives and options presented, ask questions, make
22 recommendations, consider selecting preferred alternatives, and
23 discuss next steps as needed, and, Bernie, can you put on the
24 presentation?
25

26 Okay, and so today I'll provide a presentation on the red snapper
27 accountability measure document that we've been developing, and so
28 we're currently developing this document as a framework action.
29 In our last council meeting, we presented the purpose and need and
30 explained the alternatives, and the bulk of this presentation will
31 be showing how these would work, particularly with the limits that
32 we've introduced since our June council meeting.
33

34 What we would like to get out of this is for the council to consider
35 the alternatives and options, with the hopes to take final action
36 in a future council meeting.
37

38 As a reminder of the history of this document, it emerged out of
39 a longer discussion of accountability measures and carryover
40 provisions. A presentation was made to the council on flexibility
41 measures in April 2026, after which the council made a motion to
42 direct staff to develop a document to modify the private
43 recreational red snapper post-season accountability measures.
44

45 In June 2026, a presentation on these particular post-season
46 accountability measures was made to the council, along with an
47 options document, and, following that presentation, the council
48 suggested a limit on overage frequencies.

1
2 As a reminder -- I'll be discussing that further today, and we
3 further developed it as a framework action, and, as a reminder,
4 this document does not consider carryover or ACL sharing, but just
5 modifies the accountability measures for infrequent and nominal
6 overages.

7
8 The accountability measures that are currently in place were
9 established in Amendment 50A, where, currently, if a state exceeds
10 their state ACL, they will have a reduction of next year's state
11 ACL by the amount of their previous overage, and so this is a
12 payback mechanism, and this occurs even if the total private
13 recreational ACL is not exceeded, and so, in this document, we
14 will just be modifying this particular accountability measure.

15
16 This is the current red snapper catch limits, which we discussed
17 earlier in the day, and these were established in 2023, and so
18 I'll mention these briefly, to provide context.

19
20 The ABC is 86.25 percent of the OFL, which is a relatively small
21 buffer. The red snapper is then divided between commercial and
22 recreational. Recreational is divided between for-hire and
23 private rec, and private recreational is then divided among states.
24 The federal government manages the private recreational sector
25 through CHTS, and states manage through their own state-specific
26 units, and so, in this presentation, I'll have both units.

27
28 The purpose and need have largely not been modified since
29 previously. The purpose of -- I added "framework" before the
30 "action", and so the purpose of this framework action is to modify
31 it, and so, as a reminder, this is the same as it previously was,
32 and this mainly provides management flexibility while retaining
33 integrity and effectiveness of state management and allowing
34 sustained access for recreational participants across the Gulf.

35
36 The first alternative is the same, but we did modify the language.
37 The language was modified by the IPT for the sake of clarity, but
38 nothing substantially changed from that.

39
40 There are some developments in this Alternative 2, and so the
41 developments are that the language here was also changed by the
42 IPT, for the sake of clarity. There's also been a change in the
43 options, whereas previously there were four options, and now there
44 are three options, and so there's a 2a to 2c, instead of a 2a to
45 2d, and then the major change, which I'll be discussing today a
46 lot more, is the addition of a frequency limitation.

47
48 How this alternative plays out is that you can see each bullet

1 point as a condition where payback would occur, and so, previously,
2 we've discussed the first and second condition, and this is the
3 first time that the council is seeing the third condition, and so
4 the first condition is that a payback would be required if the
5 state exceeds its ACL by more than the percentages specified in
6 Options 2a to 2c.

7
8 The second condition would be that payback would be required if a
9 state exceeds its ACL by any amount and the total private
10 recreational ACL is exceeded.

11
12 The third condition is that a state would have to pay back if it
13 exceeds its ACL by any amount more than once in a three-year
14 rolling period, and so this rolling period is what we'll be
15 discussing today. It would start with any overage that occurs
16 after the effective date of this action.

17
18 A three-year rolling period means that, two years following any
19 overage, the state would be subject to payback if it goes over its
20 ACL by any amount. If a state goes over its ACL within this
21 period, the timeline of the rolling period would then be extended
22 to two years after the subsequent overage, and so, if a state meets
23 any of these conditions, payback would be required. If a state
24 meets none of these conditions, payback would not be required.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. I think we have a question from
27 Mr. Sanchez.

28
29 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. For my more academic colleagues on the
30 council, which percentage, from 2a 2b, 2c, would be more
31 commensurate with uncertainty in the data streams that we use?

32
33 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think that's going to be different from
34 survey to survey, John, to be perfectly honest with you, but I'm
35 not sure we could give an explicit answer at this time here, unless
36 -- I'm looking around the table at my state counterparts. Mr.
37 Schieble.

38
39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, over the course of an annual allocation, LA
40 Creel is typically within about 6 percent relative standard error,
41 plus or minus, and so, typically, if we have an overage, if it's
42 around that 6 percent, or a little bit less, we could equally,
43 probability-wise, have an underage equivalent to that. We
44 generally take a more conservative route and declare an overage,
45 because we feel it's the right thing to do if it's within that
46 standard error range.

47
48 **DR. SUITOR:** Okay, and so it should be mentioned that instances

1 where the total private recreational ACL had been exceeded is rare,
2 and overages are relatively infrequent, and so, as such states,
3 can benefit -- Even though it seems restrictive, perhaps, but
4 states can benefit from this alternative, and I'll discuss how it
5 plays out with examples of historic overages, and so, with that,
6 can I have the next slide, please?

7
8 This table, which you'll remember from the previous presentation,
9 displays the frequencies and percentages by which states have
10 exceeded their ACL, and the overages are listed, and the underages
11 are blank, and you can see this for individual states in Table
12 2.1.4 to 2.1.8 in our document, and so the examples I'll be
13 discussing will be 2021, 2023, 2024, and 2025.

14
15 Here are the overage overages are red. 2021 was before
16 calibration. In this case, the total private recreational ACL was
17 exceeded, which is the only time the total private recreational
18 ACL was exceeded in the time period listed previously.

19
20 Here, Florida and Louisiana both had overages, and so here payback
21 would be required. Even though Louisiana did not exceed the
22 threshold of 2a to 2c, because the total private recreational ACL
23 was exceeded, they will need to pay back the full amount of their
24 overage, and so Florida or Louisiana, you can see from the
25 timeline, would have to pay back any overage in the following two
26 years.

27
28 In 2023, this was the year that calibration started, and so here
29 a majority of the states went over. In this example, the total
30 private recreational ACL was not exceeded. Florida, Alabama, and
31 Mississippi all went over, and Alabama would be the only state
32 that would not be required to pay back their 2023 overage, and
33 this is due to the fact that their overage is under the triggers
34 of Options 2a to 2c.

35
36 The total private recreational ACL was not exceeded, and they had
37 not had any overages in three years, or two years, prior. Here,
38 Mississippi would have to pay back their overage, as they went
39 over in Options 2a to 2c, and Florida would have to pay back any
40 overage, as they had an overage in 2021, and, as you can see with
41 Florida, this would start over the rolling period again.

42
43 Here we'll focus on Louisiana in particular, as they were the only
44 state to go over in 2024 and 2025. This example also shows how a
45 back-to-back overage would look, and how the rolling period would
46 play out, and so, in both 2024 and 2025, the total private
47 recreational ACL was not exceeded.

1 In 2024, Louisiana went over their ACL, but under triggers
2 prescribed by 2a to 2c. They also did not have an overage in the
3 two years prior. As a result, they would not be required to pay
4 back their overage from 2024. However, this would start a three-
5 year rolling period, where they would have to pay back any overage
6 that would occur in 2025 and 2026, and so then they do have an
7 overage in 2025.

8
9 As they had this previous overage, they would then have to pay
10 back this overage in 2025. This would then restart the rolling
11 period, so that they would have to pay back any overage that could
12 occur again in 2026 and 2027, and so are there any questions about
13 this? If not, Bernie, next slide, please.

14
15 The IPT came to a consensus on how this frequency limitation would
16 work, and so, if there's any questions or concerns about how it
17 would work, now would be the time to discuss. If not, then next
18 slide, please, and we'll move into the next steps.

19
20 The council can -- If they want to take this document further,
21 they can identify a preferred alternative and option, and take
22 final action in our next council meeting, or they can suggest how
23 to further develop the alternatives and options, and then take
24 final action at a later date, and so, with that, should we open
25 up?

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Any comments, or questions, for Dr.
28 Suitor? Yes, General Spraggins.

29
30 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and I appreciate the presentation, but I
31 look at a lot of that, and, obviously, I've got some concerns with
32 some of the things, and I think it's already been brought up one
33 time. What about when you go under? If you go under, there's no
34 -- There's nothing there for you.

35
36 In other words, if this year, if you're 5 percent under, and next
37 year you're 5 percent over, the 5 percent over counts against you,
38 but the 5 percent under doesn't help you at all, and, you know, is
39 there a way to look at something different there, because, I mean,
40 obviously, a lot of it depends on what the weather is going to do
41 and everything else, as to whether it ends up or down up or down
42 up or down.

43
44 I don't partially like the three-year part of it. I don't like
45 that idea. I think it ought to be left up to the Gulf Council to
46 be able to determine whether that -- If somebody is abusing the
47 situation or not, and not put an automatic slam that this is where
48 we're at, and so I would rather see something that left the council

1 to be able to determine that, because there's too many variables.

2
3 If, you know, something happens, and the overage part of it -- You
4 know, if we go way under, we're just not getting anything. A
5 hurricane, and just take Florida, you know, with a hurricane, and
6 they were they were they didn't get anything for that, but, if
7 they had went over the next year, they would have got punished for
8 that, and I just think we need to look at it more. I think it
9 needs to have a little bit better tweaking.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** So what you're referring to, obviously, is a
12 carryover provision, which hasn't really been part of this document
13 right from the get-go. This has all been about paybacks, and
14 threading that needle for when people would need to pay that back,
15 when individual states would need to pay that back.

16
17 Part of me feels that goes beyond the scope of what we've been
18 talking about here, General, but I do certainly understand where
19 you're coming from. From my perspective, I mean -- So, I mean,
20 Florida has been under by like a million pounds in the last year.
21 You're saying carry over a million pounds?

22
23 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** No, and that's not what I'm saying. I'm just
24 saying that if, next year, if you go over 50,000, you probably
25 shouldn't be punished for it if it was two years in a row, because,
26 you know, you still hadn't caught the allocation. It hadn't never
27 been caught before, and it's still there, and I think that, you
28 know, and we didn't receive the ACL of the Gulf. That's what I'm
29 talking about.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I'm tracking you now. I guess my
32 personal perspective there is we've kind of thoroughly discussed
33 about not having consecutive overages, and setting those
34 guardrails, and, at least from Florida's perspective, that was an
35 important component of this, to try and help move this forward,
36 but I will look around the table to see if there's any further
37 discussion. Mr. Schieble.

38
39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, with regards to the carryover part, I thought
40 in the very beginning, when we started this, we had carryover, and
41 then we all decided to take it out, right, and then come at it
42 from a different separate action later on, right? Yes, and so
43 we're going to deal with that separately going forward. I don't
44 know what the timetable is, but it's in its own amendment, correct,
45 or no?

46
47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Banks.

1 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and it's in -- If you look at action guide, it's
2 on -- It's Number 14, document to consider changes to private
3 recreational red snapper management, such as carryover and
4 transfer provisions, and so it is split into its own. As of the
5 version I'm looking at, in April 2026, we got a presentation, and
6 there's nothing behind that on the document yet, but I don't know
7 if that's the most updated action schedule.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Have you got something, Dr. Simmons, or are
10 you good?

11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We can
13 certainly talk about this at the end of the council meeting, about
14 priorities, but it has been lower on the list thus far, trying to
15 move this action forward in a more expedient manner.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Ms. Levy.

18
19 **MS. LEVY:** The current post-season quota adjustment action and all
20 of the state amendments includes a carryover, and so the way it
21 reads now is, if you're over, you pay it back. If there's an
22 underage, you carry it over, but it was contingent on you moving
23 forward with the broader carryover document, because, if you're
24 going to carry something over and increase the total quota, you've
25 got to have a mechanism to adjust the ABC and all of that, and not
26 bump up against the OFL, and so it's in there. It's allowed, but
27 it was, again, contingent on -- At that time, you were working on
28 a broader carryover amendment, and it was contingent on that moving
29 forward.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Any further comments
32 here? Okay. Perhaps we move through the document next, and that
33 might give us some guidance for how to move forward on this.

34
35 **DR. SUITOR:** So what's in the document is the purpose and need was
36 already -- You've already viewed it in the presentation, as well
37 as the alternatives. I don't know what would help the council to
38 go over in particular, and should we go to the alternatives, in
39 order to decide -- To choose a preferred?

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Those would be the main decision points I think
42 you're looking for guidance for here, and so I think that's
43 appropriate.

44
45 **DR. SUITOR:** Should I read it?

46
47 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I'm looking around I'm looking around the table
48 here. We need to give some direction for Annie, and it's

1 relatively straightforward here, and there's only two
2 alternatives, and so I'm kind of looking for some input here around
3 the table.

4
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Can you scroll down a little bit
6 please, Bernie?

7
8 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** The main decision points here are, obviously,
9 do we do it or do we not, and then, if we do it, you need to choose
10 5, seven-and-a-half percent, or 10 percent, and those would be
11 kind of the decision points here, and so I'm going to look around
12 the table again for any input, please. Dr. Allen.

13
14 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I think it makes sense to do to go with
15 Alternative 2, and I was just -- With regard to the options at the
16 bottom there, I would just reiterate that these are always
17 estimates, and they've got uncertainty with them, and so I would
18 lobby towards like 2c more, 10 percent, just because of kind of
19 the discussion that Chris brought up earlier for Louisiana, and we
20 face with all of the landings estimates. They are not known with
21 certainty, and so there's error in those.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think that is a fair point, and so I've heard
24 one decision point here for Option 2c. Looking around the table
25 here, and I saw a hand, but I don't know who that was. Mr.
26 Schieble.

27
28 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I mean, I would speak in support of that, but I
29 don't want to be the driving decision maker in this percentage,
30 considering that we've had back-to-back overages, right, and it's
31 going to -- The perception could be, well, Louisiana is just
32 driving for the highest percentage here, but that's not what we're
33 doing.

34
35 As Dr. Allen stated, there's uncertainty around the estimates.
36 Ours is around 6, and so, obviously, 2b would be reasonable, I
37 think, based on what we see in that table of percentages of overage
38 that was shown in the presentation a minute ago, but I would not
39 be against 2c as an option either, as suggested, and I think that's
40 reasonable.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Sanchez.

43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I like that train of thought, something like seven-
45 and-a-half percent. I think that covers the numbers you, you know,
46 spoke about earlier, and it's not 10 percent, which could get into
47 some healthy overruns, and so I think that would be a good
48 compromise position.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** General Spraggins.
3

4 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I mean, obviously, with Mississippi, 5 percent
5 is 4,000 pounds, and 10 percent is 8,000 pounds. You know, it's
6 not anything, and it's not like with Florida, where 10 percent
7 270,000 pounds, and so, you know, it makes a lot of difference. I
8 mean, obviously, I realize that you can't just judge everything
9 off of one state, and so I understand that, right, but the point
10 is that, for Mississippi to have any leeway at all in it, we would
11 need to go to at least 2c.
12

13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I've heard some discussion about 2b and 2c.
14 I've got Dr. Banks, and then Mr. Dugas.
15

16 **DR. BANKS:** I think I'll speak up in favor of 2c. Just looking at
17 the historic overages, I mean, only two of them actually exceed 10
18 percent. Historically, we've not gotten close to that, but it
19 does give some of the states that have smaller allocations more of
20 a chance, and so I think that's fair, especially as we move forward
21 with like these carryover and transfer documents.
22

23 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Mr. Dugas.
24

25 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Two questions. How did we
26 get to these three percentages, and the second question is do we
27 have the option to add another option, a different percentage, and
28 maybe someone wants 8 or 9 percent.
29

30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** My thought is we would be able to add another
31 option here, but I'm going to go to Dr. Suitor for how those
32 numbers came up.
33

34 **DR. SUITOR:** It was from a motion I believe from the April council
35 meeting.
36

37 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, and so we came up with those
38 numbers. General Spraggins.
39

40 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and we can make one for Mississippi to 95
41 percent.
42

43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I mean, that's a perfectly valid point. We
44 can -- Maybe not the 29 percent, or 95 percent, but we can add
45 other options here, and so I'll put that out there, but so far
46 I've heard some people in favor of 2b, and some people in favor of
47 2c, but thoughts around the table? Mr. Osborne.
48

1 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** This is on the same topic, but not on the
2 percentages, and I'm just curious. Making sure that, if this is
3 enacted, then it's a clean slate for everybody at the point of
4 enactment, right, and so like, in the case of Louisiana, they
5 wouldn't be worried about the year before?
6

7 **DR. SUITOR:** Yes, that is correct. When it becomes effective.
8

9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. We have a hand up online. Ms. Zamboni,
10 it looks like we're working to unmute you. Hold on one second.
11

12 **MS. KATE ZAMBONI:** This is Kate Zamboni. Thanks for unmuting me.
13 Just in light of the discussion, I just wanted to highlight, again,
14 with the frequency limitation, regardless of what percentage you
15 choose, whichever option, if there is a really small overage in a
16 year following, the payback would apply, and so you might get a
17 benefit, you know, one year of, you know, 10 percent, or even if
18 you chose a higher percentage, but, if you're looking at overages
19 in back-to-back years, that flexibility is going to start to go
20 away.
21

22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you. Any further discussion here? I
23 haven't heard any other alternative options here, and it's just 2b
24 and 2c, and hearing more of a preference for 2c. Captain Frady.
25

26 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As a matter of kindness,
27 understanding that 10 percent of Florida's ACL would be a whole
28 lot more than 10 percent of Mississippi's, is there a way just to
29 throw Mississippi a bone, for any other state who has say an
30 allocation less than 100,000 pounds, to have them at least -- Let's
31 say a 10,000-pound minimum, instead of using a percentage, but, if
32 their minimum -- If their ACL is X number of pounds, would it be
33 kind, and would it be the right thing to do, to even consider
34 throwing them just say 10,000 pounds, instead of 8,000 pounds,
35 whatever the percentage is, instead of on people with low
36 percentages?
37

38 Now, I still -- I mean, because a percent is a percent, and I
39 understand that, but my thought is, on someone in Mississippi's
40 place, 10 percent of -- What is their ACL? 88,000 pounds? 82,000
41 pounds, and maybe 8,000 -- Be kind. If you're less than 100,000
42 pounds, make it 10,000 pounds as their as their payback, as their
43 reserve.
44

45 Now I'm just -- This is an act of kindness, out of principle,
46 because I know everybody is like we're sticking with these
47 percentages, but Mississippi's situation is not something we can't
48 say, General, here's your bone, and let's send it 10,000 pounds,

1 instead of 10 percent, and just -- It's just a kindness gesture
2 here, and can it work, and I understand if you say no, and a
3 percent is a percent, and you've got to stick to it.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

6
7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I don't know where I fall relative to everyone
8 else, but I feel like we're way over complicating this one, and
9 we're talking about new alternatives, and percentages that are in
10 the range of what we're considering here, and it's a small fraction
11 of the overall catch limit, and then potentially making adjustments
12 depending on the state catch level, which we just talked about
13 this morning is likely to change based on new stock assessments,

14
15 Keep in mind the current system is working very well. The states
16 have been very accountable, and there hasn't been that many
17 overages, and there's been fairly small paybacks, as Kesley just
18 pointed out, other than two that were greater than 10 percent, and
19 so I feel like Alternative 2, Option 2c, largely solves a lot of
20 these issues and would prevent some of these past overages from
21 being paid back.

22
23 Then, as Ms. Zamboni just shared, you still have the other
24 provision, which does not allow an overage in more than one of
25 every three years, so that you don't have states that potentially
26 are going over year after year, and so my recommendation is keep
27 this simple, and let's get it to final action in October and move
28 forward.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I agree, and that's exactly what I've been
31 looking for. All right. General Spraggins.

32
33 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and, Troy, thank you so much for the
34 offer, but that would help me one time, and, you know, that would
35 help me go one time, and it would make me want to do it. I'll be
36 honest with you, you know, but, if we passed it, I would look at
37 it next year and say, hey, I can get 10,000 more pounds, but then,
38 again, it really wouldn't correct the problem in the long run,
39 because, in the next two years, I couldn't do anything, and I would
40 be right back to where I was at, and so I do appreciate it though.
41 I thank you. I thank you for your kindness of it, but I think it
42 -- You know, a number is a number, and, you know, 2,000 pounds is
43 not going to make a whole lot of difference in us either, and so
44 I appreciate it.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay, and so further discussion around the
47 table, but I kind of agree with Andy that we're making this more
48 complicated than it needs to be, and I have heard a lot of people

1 in favor of the 10 percent, and so what I think Dr. Suitor is
2 looking for, potentially here, is a motion for a preferred option,
3 or we can continue this discussion. Dr. Banks.

4
5 **DR. BANKS:** I'm going to land this plane. Bernie, I'm going to
6 make a motion. **The motion is going to be to make Alternative 2,**
7 **Option c the preferred.**

8
9 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Motion on the table, and we have a
10 second from General Spraggins. It looks like Bernie has already
11 gotten that up. All right. Discussion? Mr. Sanchez.

12
13 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I'm fine with that, with that guardrail
14 that we put up, you know, with the three-year, and that's fine.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Any further discussion? All right.
17 Let's try this. **Any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, the**
18 **motion carries.** All right. Dr. Suitor, do you have what you need
19 here? Do you have what you need is my question.

20
21 **DR. SUITOR:** So we'll do a virtual hearing, or a video. We'll do
22 a video, and then get this ready for final action by October.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Sounds great. All right. Go team. Okay.
25 Thank you, Dr. Suitor. All right. Moving along here, and next up
26 is Dr. Diagne, or we have the SSC. Mr. Moncrief will be going
27 over the July 2026 SSC meeting summary and presentation.

28 29 **JULY 2026 SSC MEETING SUMMARY**

30
31 **MR. TREVOR MONCRIEF:** I'll keep it quick, and so we had a couple
32 more topics that we covered that were of interest to the council.
33 The first one is going to be -- I'm pretty sure it's FIMS. All
34 right, and so it's FIMS, Review of Fishery-Integrated Modeling
35 System, peer review. Dr. Cowell was the representative for the
36 SSC. It's a nationally-coordinated framework of models and tools
37 that is consistent, extensible, and transparent.

38
39 The peer review found the methods to be sound, but it's not quite
40 ready yet. There's a priority of robustness and long-term success
41 over rapid deployment, right, and so don't rush it. Get it right.
42 That way it's there. It has capability to not only do the full
43 range of stock assessments, but also data-limited stock
44 assessments.

45
46 We highlighted the importance of the side-by-side comparisons as
47 we move into the new model framework with the legacy models. There
48 was also the comment that the State of Florida will also be

1 conducting things with FIMS.

2
3 If I'm correct, the underlying AD model builder that is used by
4 Stock Synthesis -- That is getting ready to not continue, or it's
5 not going to be available. Therefore, this is going to lead to
6 essentially a viable product for the long-term, and it represents
7 that.

8
9 We were asked to review the king mackerel landings and length comps
10 data from Mexico. This was a pretty interesting one, I would say,
11 and so, as you all know, the Science Center obtained the detailed
12 Mexican king mackerel landings and length data all the way back to
13 the 1970s. The Science Center sought these data for a while, and
14 finally was able to get them, and so we took a look at them.

15
16 The commercial landings are substantial, and include many juvenile
17 fish, and I'll show that in a figure here on the next slide. It
18 represents an increase in undertaking by analysts for the
19 assessment. Therefore, it's likely going to be delayed for a
20 couple months, for good reason. This is, obviously, a big piece
21 of the puzzle.

22
23 There are two workshops currently planned, one in Mexico and Miami,
24 and, basically, it's meant to have some collaboration between the
25 U.S. and Mexican scientists, to align data and modeling approaches,
26 and it's important here to note that Mexico currently has no
27 management measures or stock status determination. The SSC
28 certainly flagged that as a complication, and also had, you know,
29 a pretty good discussion about how concerning the next slide is,
30 to a degree, and so let's go to that next one.

31
32 To put this in perspective, starting in the top-left, you have the
33 red line is the Mexican landings, and the blue line is the totality
34 of the U.S. landings, and that includes recreational and
35 commercial. Mexico is just commercial.

36
37 If you follow that, you can clearly see that the Mexican landings
38 are large, and in most years more substantial than the U.S.
39 landings, and, if you go to the figure on the top-right, it breaks
40 down the gear types, the commercial gear types, into the commercial
41 vertical line, commercial gillnet, the Mexican troll fleet, and
42 the Mexican gillnet, and you can see, there in the purple, that
43 essentially these landings are split in half, and a large portion
44 of them are in the Mexican gillnet category.

45
46 If you follow that to the lower figure, you can see then that
47 there's a distribution of length comps within each different fleet
48 that's accounted for, and you see one that sticks out to the left,

1 and that's the Mexican gillnet, and, at what most of you can
2 identify is the forty-inch-modal distribution, that is about
3 seventeen inches, and so it's a large proportion of harvest that
4 is higher, or at least comparable, to U.S. landings, and that is
5 made up of a gillnet fishery which is targeting immature
6 individuals, around seventeen inches, and so you can see where the
7 concern is there.

8
9 We had a discussion on Gulf tilefish, and this is a data review
10 and assessment options, and really just a what can we do with the
11 data that's available. The last full assessment for golden,
12 goldface, and blueline was 2009, SEDAR 22, and current data
13 limitations inhibit the assessment of individual species.

14
15 What we mainly looked at was commercial data, mainly from the
16 longline fleet, and they're considered reliable recreational data.
17 As you can expect, this is not a highly intercepted species at any
18 state, and a lot of these are returned to private docks, and
19 they're just not caught readily, and so they're highly uncertain.
20 I think, in there, there was a shore estimate of discards that was
21 like two-million for one species from the shore, and so that
22 doesn't quite make the cut.

23
24 Age data showed a healthy mix of older fish in the population, and
25 current catch limits not been exceeded since 2012, and so there's
26 really no risk that was observed in what we looked at, and the
27 general recommendation was to, you know, basically keep status quo
28 in the fishery, monitor the two fishery-independent indices that
29 cover these, which is the NMFS bottom longline and G-FISHER, and
30 then couple that with the fishery-based indices, the fleet's CPUE
31 and everything else, to be able to essentially keep tabs on the
32 fishery, to see if it goes in any one direction or the other, but
33 it represents a low risk and resource-efficient path for
34 management, which is generally what I think we all look for, and
35 I think that is it, and so I'll take any questions.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Moncrief. Discards
38 of tilefish, I would question that from shore, and I tend to agree
39 with the thought process of the Science Center thinking about
40 looking at a different way to assess some of these stocks here,
41 because of the data limitations there, but I saw some hands. Dr.
42 Allen.

43
44 **MR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Trevor. I was just going to add I really
45 appreciated the SSC discussion on this topic. You know, the data
46 for the Gulf tilefish are not great, but there was actually some
47 really good age composition data from the center that showed a
48 healthy stock, with a good mix of older fish in there, and I

1 thought this was a really commonsense conclusion from the SSC, to
2 not try to do an assessment, and just monitor it the way it is
3 now, and so thank you.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any other comments for Trevor? That Mexican
6 gill net was quite disturbing for how all this -- I mean, the fact
7 that it's undersized fish, and the just magnitude of that, and so
8 I appreciate you all kind of diving into that a little bit here,
9 and, as we move into the assessment, good lord. Thank you. Okay.
10 Thank you, Trevor. Moving right along here, I'll turn it over to
11 Dr. Diagne. We're going to move into Draft Reef Fish Amendment
12 59A: Permit Requirements in IFQ Programs.

13
14 **DRAFT - REEF FISH AMENDMENT 59A: PERMIT REQUIREMENTS IN IFQ**
15 **PROGRAMS**
16

17 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, and so we'll first go over the action guide
18 for this item, Reef Fish Amendment 59A: Permit Requirements in IFQ
19 Programs.

20
21 Staff will give a presentation on Amendment 59A, which addresses
22 permit requirements in the IFQ programs in the Gulf. The permit
23 requirements include the ownership of valid or renewable
24 commercial reef fish permits to open and/or maintain shareholder
25 accounts and own and maintain shares and annual allocation. The
26 amendment also includes divestment measures for non-compliant
27 accounts and measures to exempt non-profit organizations from
28 permit requirements.

29
30 The committee should review previously selected preferred
31 alternatives and discuss criteria for granting exemptions from the
32 permit requirements. The committee should evaluate the
33 information presented, make recommendations, and discuss next
34 steps.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Diagne. Do you
37 want to go through the draft document or the presentation first?
38 Dealer's choice.

39
40 **DR. DIAGNE:** The presentation. Thank you. The first couple of
41 slides are just reminders, if you would. This is the purpose and
42 need that has been in the document for a very long time. It was
43 seen and discussed by the committee and the council.

44
45 One note here is the purpose of this action also includes updating
46 the goals and objectives of the IFQ programs, given that we started
47 this amendment so long ago, and the goals and objectives are there,
48 and so, hopefully when we go final with this, those would be

1 approved finally.

2
3 For Actions 1 through 4, the slides here would be, if you would,
4 reminders of the preferred alternatives and options that you've
5 already selected. In Action 1, requirements to open and maintain
6 shareholders accounts, your preferred alternative reads as
7 follows: In addition to the U.S. citizenship or permanent residency
8 requirement, all applicants are required to possess a valid or
9 renewable commercial reef fish permit to obtain and maintain an
10 IFQ shareholder account. That's your preferred.

11
12 In Action 2, your Preferred Alternative 3 is only those who meet
13 the U.S. citizenship or permanent residency requirement and with
14 a valid or renewable commercial reef fish permit can obtain or
15 maintain IFQ shares.

16
17 In Action 3, requirements to obtain annual allocation, given that
18 these expire at the end of the year, and so there is really no
19 need to consider maintenance, if you would. Your preferred
20 Alternative 2 is only those who meet the U.S. citizenship or
21 permanent residency requirement and with a valid or renewable
22 commercial reef fish permit can obtain IFQ annual allocation.

23
24 In Action 4, which deals with divestment measures for non-compliant
25 entities, you have here two preferred alternatives. I will start
26 with Preferred Alternative 2. NMFS will reclaim shares from
27 shareholders accounts that are not compliant with requirements set
28 in the previous actions, and Preferred Option 2a is one year
29 following the effective date of the final rule implementing these
30 requirements. Preferred Alternative 2 deals with non-compliance
31 at the inception, once the amendment goes final.

32
33 Preferred Alternative 3 is, after the implementation of this
34 amendment, if a shareholder account is no longer in compliance
35 with the permit requirements, the owners of the shareholder account
36 must divest of their shares, or the shares will be reclaimed by
37 NMFS, and your preferred Option 3a one year following the non-
38 compliant status, and so 1 to 4 were a quick review of the preferred
39 alternatives that were already selected.

40
41 For Actions 5.1 and 5.2, essentially, we have a series of
42 questions, if you would, crafted somewhat in the form of
43 alternatives, and we are trying to get suggestions on a set of
44 practicable criteria to implement the exemptions as well as to
45 renew those exemptions.

46
47 Action 5.1 would deal with granting the exemption in the first
48 place. Alternative 1, no action, is do not provide exemptions

1 from permit requirements.

2
3 Alternative 2 provide exemptions from permit requirements to
4 eligible non-profit organizations that submit a completed and
5 signed exemption form to NMFS. To be eligible for an exemption,
6 an organization must also submit to NMFS some documentation, and
7 that would include an IRS sanctioned proof of their non-profit
8 status, a copy of the organization's bylaws, a list of the board
9 of directors, members, officers and general members, methods for
10 managing shares and allocation for fisheries participants the
11 organization seeks to serve, procedures to be used to solicit
12 requests from members of the organization to use annual allocation
13 held by the non-profit, and I think that should that should be cut
14 here, because the thought is not complete, and the criteria and
15 procedure to select IFQ allocation recipients.

16
17 Only the non-profit organizations approved by the agency will be
18 eligible for an exemption, and the list may be too long, or too
19 short, but these are some of some of the ideas, or criteria, that
20 were discussed and that need your feedback, if you would. What do
21 you think should be, at the minimum, requested to grant an
22 exemption?

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Sanchez.

25
26 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I like that list as a starting point. I would
27 encourage us to hear from the public. There's, obviously, some
28 groups out there that are non-profit in the audience, and they
29 could add to this, and maybe, you know, tighten it up with a little
30 more clarification on the periodic, maybe annual, reporting to
31 NMFS on maybe additional things here that would distinguish them
32 as a legitimate non-profit from somebody trying to game the system,
33 the non-profit system.

34
35 In closing, I would say the IRS is no joke when it comes to this,
36 and so there are some IRS safeguards already, you know, in this
37 program, but I would welcome the opportunity to hear from them and
38 see if we can't preserve those non-profits that are out there that
39 are doing some good.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Yes, and I certainly
42 would like to hear from the public on this too, but, Assane, to
43 your direct question, I think this list is a good starting point,
44 like Mr. Sanchez said, and so I think we're okay there. We might
45 need to modify, based on what we hear in public comment, but I
46 will also -- I know we have another component to this action here.
47 We've been working a long time on 59A, and I would like to
48 eventually bring this in for a landing here, but Dr. Banks.

1
2 **DR. BANKS:** I have a clarification question. Would this be a one-
3 time designation, or would it come back for periodic review, to
4 make sure they're meeting whatever the requirements we have set
5 forth?
6

7 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, if you would, we'll answer the question
8 with the next action, and so this is to grant the exemption in the
9 first place, but, Bernie, please go to the next slide. The next
10 action would be with the renewal, if you would, apply exemption,
11 and that's where your point comes in, and so it would be reviewed
12 periodically, and, depending on your suggestions, it could be on
13 a yearly basis, two years, or whatever timeframe you recommend,
14 and we also have here some requirement, which I will go to now.
15

16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that, Dr. Diagne. Any more
17 questions, or, Assane, did you want to just talk through Action
18 5.2 in a little more detail, or did we get that covered, basically,
19 in responding to Dr. Banks' question?
20

21 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, just very briefly, that's exactly a point
22 for here. To maintain an exemption from the permit requirements,
23 an organization must submit a report which includes any change to
24 the required submission material, meaning the list of items that
25 we would require in Action 1, a list of participants to whom
26 allocation was distributed, pounds received per recipient, and
27 price per pound of allocation received.
28

29 This would allow, presumably, to know that it is functioning as a
30 quota bank, and it has some impact, and, finally, the methods used
31 by the organization to determine allocation prices, and we would
32 compare those prices with the market price, if you would. If those
33 are the same, or higher, then perhaps that would question the
34 usefulness of the quota bank, and, as Dr. Banks mentioned, in terms
35 of the review, we'll need some indications when it comes to the
36 timeframe. Is it on an annual basis, two years, or, if you would
37 like a longer time period, please indicate that to us.
38

39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Osborne.
40

41 **MR. OSBORNE:** Are we able to add a bullet point on there?
42

43 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes.
44

45 **MR. OSBORNE:** In Alternative 2, I would be interested in seeing
46 another bullet point that the non-profit would provide us with
47 data on how many people applied for quota, and how many were
48 accepted, and how many were denied.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that's very doable.
3

4 **MR. OSBORNE:** Then are there -- Secondly, are there penalties for
5 not adhering to Alternative 2, if the organization does not submit
6 any of these?
7

8 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and then the exemption would essentially be
9 revoked, presumably, and that would be written in the discussion.
10 If you don't meet these requirements, you will not be able to
11 maintain your exemption. Essentially, your exemption would be
12 revoked. Following the review of the document, then, essentially,
13 your exemption would be, I guess, revoked, yes.
14

15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** So, Dr. Diagne, do you need a motion to add a
16 bullet under Alternative 2 there, or is direction good on this
17 draft document here?
18

19 **DR. DIAGNE:** I think, with the agreement from the committee, a
20 motion would not be necessary. We could just go ahead and add it,
21 if that's the way you so choose, and, also, I mean, are there other
22 intervals that you would want us to consider beyond the two years,
23 or is that sufficient?
24

25 **MR. OSBORNE:** I guess what I'm thinking of is, outside of what
26 they're required to do here, are we getting a yearly report from
27 each of the non-profits saying this is what we distributed, this
28 is, you know, the information on the percentages of applications,
29 or are you just getting, you know, the -- They're submitting all
30 these documents on a yearly basis to you, or not you, but NMFS,
31 and then we get a report, or is there a yearly report that has to
32 be given to the committee?
33

34 **DR. DIAGNE:** That would depend on your preference, really. I mean,
35 our emphasis here was on the set of criteria, one to grant the
36 exemption and two to review it periodically, and renew or terminate
37 the exemption, but should the committee require more, such as let's
38 say an annual report with these elements, and so either the
39 exemption status itself could be reviewed on an annual basis, to
40 make it mandatory, or you can have a more lenient, I guess,
41 provision saying that, in addition to the renewal material, on an
42 annual basis, the council would like to see a report including
43 these elements. It's really based on your appreciation of what
44 would you like to see as a committee.
45

46 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes, and I would like to see a yearly report, if
47 we're going to end up going down this path of just kind of all
48 this information, just so that we as a council are monitoring it

1 as well.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Before I go to Mr. Strelcheck, Mr.
4 Osborne, do you mind repeating kind of that additional bullet point
5 that you want to have on here, so just the entire committee can -
6 - It's just providing direction here.

7
8 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes, and, I mean -- Well, the first bullet point was
9 just, you know, the report back from each of the non-profits that
10 how many people applied, how much they were given, and how many
11 people were denied.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. Just looking around the table. If
14 anyone has an objection to that, just -- All right. Seeing none,
15 I think there's your direction there, Dr. Diagne.

16
17 **MR. OSBORNE:** Then the second one was just kind of an annual report
18 presented to the council, just basically on that information, as
19 well as anything else that's relevant activities that they took,
20 or, you know, standard non-profit reporting stuff.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Osborne. Before -- We've got
23 Mr. Strelcheck, and then Captain Walker.

24
25 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, with regard to the report, I kind of
26 see this like the delegation authority for state management, right,
27 where we provide delegation of authority, and the states report-
28 out during the council meetings.

29
30 I think I caution just piling up and telling us that, you know, we
31 are required to bring back a report to the council, especially
32 given conversations about the timing of council meetings, and how
33 much we have in terms of agenda space, but, regardless, obviously,
34 that would be something that NMFS would need, obviously, to make
35 these exemption determinations.

36
37 A few things I did want to mention, and so I think what Assane has
38 laid out really addresses a lot of my initial concerns about
39 potential for loopholes, because you're providing a fairly
40 rigorous process of reporting and requirements in order to meet
41 this exemption.

42
43 I'm trying to kind of look at it from the Fisheries Service's
44 standpoint of then balancing that administrative burden of how do
45 we not get overloaded by, obviously, a lot of paperwork review and
46 compliance with exemptions.

47
48 One of the things I guess I wanted to mention is, right now, this

1 isn't a frequent occurrence in the system, right, and I think we
2 may have a couple of non-profits, up to four, and only some of
3 those I think are operating as quota banks. I've thought of the
4 potential either for either grandfathering or capping, you know,
5 the participation, to avoid this becoming maybe a bigger potential
6 loophole, and so I just wanted to mention that.

7
8 Then, Assane, maybe a question for you. My team has brought to my
9 attention that we also have some loans through the Fisheries
10 Finance Program that are not linked to accounts with a permit, but
11 they do have associated accounts under the individual's name with
12 a permit, and so that would be something I think we would also
13 have to address as part of the exemption requirements, or tie those
14 loans going forward to a permit requirement.

15
16 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Strelcheck, and Dr. Stephen did mention what
17 it is that you just brought up about accounts with loans and not
18 tied to a permit. We are going to look at it with the IPT, and
19 see how to best address it, because, obviously, we cannot reclaim
20 their shares. They would not be in compliance with this, but those
21 would be, I guess -- I'm not quite sure how to best address it
22 without over-complicating the amendment at this point, but we
23 definitely have to find a way to have them keep on paying their
24 loans and keeping their shares.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Sanchez.

27
28 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and, based on Andy's comments, I just wanted to
29 volunteer that I would not be opposed to capping the number of
30 non-profits, so that, in addition to all the reporting requirements
31 annually that we're going to be reviewing to make sure they
32 continue with their legitimacy, that we're not opening it up to,
33 you know, potential abuse down the road. I would support that.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Captain Walker.

36
37 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair I agree with Mr. Sanchez. I'm
38 not opposed to the quota concept. I definitely do have concerns
39 about its abuse. I also -- One of my primary concerns here is to
40 not stall final action any longer than necessary, and so I'll just
41 put that out there, that it seems to me it would be possible, if
42 we did not even approve the quota bank, that a quota bank could go
43 get a boat and a permit and run it off of that, I think, as other
44 people will be forced to find ways to deal with this once we pass
45 it.

46
47 To Mr. Osborne's comment, you're right that the existing quota
48 bank will not be distributed to everybody. It is only distributed

1 to members, and members pay a fee to be a part of that, and so
2 this is not a public service, necessarily, quota bank. It's for
3 members only, and so something to think about there, which
4 sometimes, if you think about it, that's kind of what we're trying
5 to get away from here, is quota that only goes to certain people
6 and not to other people. It's not that different and so I'm in
7 favor.

8
9 I think I would be most in favor of something like Andy said, and
10 I'm not -- It's first I've heard it, and I didn't know it was a
11 concept, but maybe grandfathering in some of the existing ones,
12 but, you know, it just ends up with more things to think about
13 here, and I'm most concerned about finally taking final action on
14 this thing, and I would encourage everyone here to let us take
15 final action at this meeting, one way or the other, on any of these
16 decisions.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Appreciate those perspectives, Captain Walker.
19 Okay, and so we certainly want to hear from the public on this.
20 There's some part of me that also wants to further explore the
21 grandfathering in, potential aspects of that, because I feel that
22 resolves a lot of the concerns that have been talked about at the
23 table, but I certainly think we need some more discussion at Full
24 Council in order to move forward with yea or nay for what we're
25 going to be doing in Actions 5.1 and 5.2 here, but I'm going to
26 look around the table for -- I'm going to look around the table
27 for any more discussion on these points, and we do have a couple
28 more slides left in the presentation. Mr. Strelcheck.

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just one more point, and it kind of builds on
31 Ed's comment. I believe final action right now is scheduled for
32 January, correct, two meetings from now? Okay.

33
34 As you're aware, the NMFS Administrator, Assistant Administrator,
35 Genio, had written a letter back to the council focused on,
36 obviously, the seafood competitiveness executive order
37 recommendations that this council and other councils have
38 provided. This was a top priority, and so I would certainly
39 encourage us to continue moving this action forward.

40
41 I agree with Captain Walker that, if this is going to slow that
42 down, then we need to be very thoughtful and careful about how we
43 make adjustments to this amendment going forward, and I look
44 forward, obviously, to public input on this, because I think we're
45 honing-in on some really good alternatives that help to address
46 some of the kind of broader concerns with regard to the quota pool
47 and non-profits.

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for that, Andy. I agree. You have
2 something to that, Dr. Diagne?

3
4 **DR. DIAGNE:** That was the green light to continue? Okay. Thank
5 you. To finish off, I guess, the discussion on Action 5, some, I
6 guess, questions, or points, to bring to your attention, and so,
7 in terms of board participation and organization membership in the
8 fishery, should the permit ownership status be a consideration,
9 meaning that all board members, or at least some of them, should
10 have permits, meaning be fishermen in these IFQ programs?

11
12 What type of shareholders account status should or shouldn't be
13 considered for board members? Should the board members be all
14 located within the Gulf, meaning in one of the five states, because
15 it could be that, you know, you have board members in New York, or
16 in other places, and would that be a consideration?

17
18 Another set of questions would revolve around the minimum and
19 potentially maximum amount of shares held by a particular
20 organization, and here we can concentrate on the minimum, because,
21 if someone wanted to start let's say a quota bank, and get
22 exemptions, I don't think they are going to do this with 500
23 pounds, for example, and that wouldn't be a great service.

24
25 In terms of the number of recipients allocation recipients, do we
26 need to consider a minimum number of participants? Should someone
27 create a non-profit, get an exemption to serve, for example, three
28 entities, or four or five, whatever the number could be? The
29 permit ownership would presumably take care of itself, given the
30 requirements in this amendment, and, again, the location. Should
31 it be Gulf-wide, or are we looking at having fairly concentrated
32 non-profits that would just serve very small areas?

33
34 Shareholder account status, should the allocation recipient be
35 shareholders? Should they be large shareholders, or medium-size,
36 whatever that can mean?

37
38 In terms of allocation distribution, what percentage held by the
39 non-profit organization should be distributed? For example, if a
40 non-profit holds, in pound equivalent, 25,000 pounds let's say of
41 red snapper, and, come to find out, they've distributed 5,000, but
42 then the remaining 20,000 were traded, you know, through the
43 system, as we could say, and should there be a minimum amount
44 distributed per participant? These are just questions that may or
45 may not draw your, I guess, interest, in terms of things that we
46 should possibly further explore, and I think we have one more
47 slide.

1 Amongst the questions, it may be that there is a question in terms
2 of fairness. I mean, no exemptions are considered for other
3 entities, other entities that may supply allocation to IFQ
4 participants, and one of those would be dealers or, quote-unquote,
5 brokers.

6
7 Should granting exemptions -- Could that incentivize other
8 entities to pursue non-profit status for the sake of receiving an
9 exemption that could advance, you know, their particular agenda?

10
11 Okay, and so in terms of, I guess, current conditions, what we
12 know of is one functioning, I guess, quota bank. I mean, I should
13 say quota bank instead of non-profit, and evidently there are other
14 non-profits that may be tied to the same organization in some way.

15
16 Okay, and, finally, in terms of the assessment, we will need to
17 think, and discuss -- I mean, this is going to be for the IPT, and
18 brought back for your consideration, and think about the metrics
19 that would help us determine the social, economic, and biological
20 benefits that the non-profit quota banks would provide, and
21 something that Mr. Strelcheck did mention is we should also keep
22 in mind the potential administrative burden to the agency that
23 would come with granting and reviewing and renewing exemptions on,
24 I guess, predetermined intervals. These are just a list of
25 questions and issues that you may or may not want to consider or
26 ask us to include in the amendment.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. These are some important discussion
29 points here, and we've already talked about this a little bit here
30 for some of these here, but I'm looking around the table to see if
31 there's any appetite for -- Obviously, I think we're going to hear
32 in public comment, and so we might have a further discussion about
33 this in Full Council, but seeing if there's any appetite for
34 further discussion right now, giving Assane a little bit of
35 direction. These are some important points. Mr. Sanchez.

36
37 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would say let's wait for the public comment, and
38 then we can add to this in Full Council.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Any other comments?
41 All right. This is looking like it's going to be a homework
42 assignment. This is something we're going to need to give Assane
43 direction on, because I'm with Captain Walker that we need to not
44 delay this any further, and that requires -- We're not going final
45 at this meeting with this here, but that does require us to keep
46 moving in a positive direction here, in order for us to go final
47 at a future meeting. Dr. Banks.

1 **DR. BANKS:** Following up on that statement, I would pose to the
2 committee then that maybe not having the exemption here for quota
3 banks, purchasing a permit and the things that go with it, but
4 what we're really going to have to struggle with is what their
5 activity requirement looks like, and that's coming in the next
6 one, and I think that's where we'll actually get hung up.

7
8 At this stage, whether you give them a permit or not, they're still
9 going to have to meet an activity requirement, and we're not going
10 to know what that looks like until we move into that document, and
11 I think that's going to be more complicated than this, and so, if
12 you're not going to give dealers and others a break, then maybe
13 they don't get it here.

14
15 I don't know which way I would vote right now. I go back and
16 forth, because I see the merits of both, but I think we're going
17 to get hung up on the activity requirement before this.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I think that's spot-on. 59B is far more
20 complex, and far more challenging, and so I completely agree with
21 you, Dr. Banks. All right. Any other points? Okay. It looks
22 like we will have some discussion at Full Council, and get you
23 what you need here, Assane. Thank you, sir.

24
25 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** All right. We are ahead of schedule actually,
28 but I'm going to turn it back over to the chair here for a break.

29
30 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We are ahead of schedule.
31 Let's take our fifteen-minute break now, and we'll come back to
32 the next agenda item, Amendment 55.

33
34 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

35
36 **MR. DUGAS:** All right. Welcome back from the break. After speaking
37 with Dr. Simmons and Dr. Sweetman, we're going to change the
38 schedule up just a little bit, because we are ahead of schedule.
39 We will go to Item X with Mr. Rindone, and then, from there, we'll
40 move on to Item XII, and skip Item XI until tomorrow morning, and
41 we'll work through Item 12 the best we can up until five o'clock.
42 Dr. Sweetman.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. With that
45 adjusted schedule here -- Well, first, we're going to move into
46 Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44: Mutton
47 Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, Tab B, Number
48 10. Mr. Rindone, if you don't mind running through the action

1 guide, please, sir.

2
3 **PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT - REEF FISH AMENDMENT 55/SNAPPER GROUPER**
4 **AMENDMENT 44: MUTTON SNAPPER AND YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER MANAGEMENT**
5 **MEASURES**
6

7 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, sir, and so this is a joint amendment to consider
8 modifications to the southeastern U.S. mutton yellowtail snapper
9 management between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils. We did
10 some stock assessments recently, and they both estimated that their
11 respective subject species were healthy as of 2023, with northward
12 range expansion evident in both stocks in the Gulf, and, as it
13 turns out, also in the South Atlantic.
14

15 This amendment considers modifications to the respective stock
16 catch limits, jurisdictional apportionment of the respective stock
17 acceptable biological catch levels, and setting the regional
18 annual catch limits, and, also, Actions 3 and 4 are South Atlantic
19 sector allocation options for mutton and yellowtail snapper
20 respectively within the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. As
21 you guys know, we don't use sector allocations for mutton or
22 yellowtail in the Gulf, and, as such, we don't -- We don't have
23 any actions germane to that for us in this document.
24

25 The committee should review the actions and preferred
26 alternatives, and recommend any modifications to the council, as
27 appropriate. You guys are also going to need to consider
28 concurrence with the South Atlantic Council's preferred
29 alternatives in Actions 3 and 4 for their sector allocation
30 options, and, if you guys agree, you should recommend that the
31 Gulf Council approve the document for webinar public hearings in
32 the Gulf. We've gone ahead and listed webinar public hearings,
33 after some initial consultation with FWC about what their thoughts
34 were on the matter.
35

36 The South Atlantic Council will review all of these recommendations
37 at their meeting next month, and council staffs are currently
38 planning to bring the document back to you guys for consideration
39 for final action actually in December for the South Atlantic
40 Council and in January for the Gulf Council, to provide the
41 Southeast Regional Office with a little bit more time to work on
42 things like the bycatch practicability analysis and Regulatory
43 Flexibility Act Analysis.
44

45 That said, we'll go ahead and bring the document up, and we'll
46 start, Bernie, with the purpose of need, just to revisit that right
47 quick. All right, and so the purpose of these amendments, because,
48 again, this is technically two amendments rolled into one document.

1
2 The purpose of these amendments is to revise the southeastern U.S.
3 mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper stock overfishing limit and
4 stock acceptable biological catch based on the results of the SEDAR
5 79 and 96 stock assessments, respectively. The amendments would
6 also revise the jurisdictional apportionment between the South
7 Atlantic and Gulf Councils, the regional annual catch limits, and
8 South Atlantic sector allocations.

9
10 The need for these fishery management plan amendments is to update
11 existing catch limits, jurisdictional apportionments of the
12 acceptable biological catch for mutton and yellowtail, and South
13 Atlantic sector allocations for mutton and yellowtail to be
14 consistent with the best scientific information available, achieve
15 optimum yield, while minimizing, to the extent practicable,
16 adverse social and economic effects.

17
18 We can go straight to, in Chapter 2, to Action 1, and so Action 1
19 here modifies the southeastern U.S. mutton snapper overfishing
20 limit, acceptable biological catch, jurisdictional apportionment,
21 and regional catch limits, and, if we scroll on down, and keep
22 going, I'm going to highlight the preferred alternatives, since
23 you guys reaffirmed these last time. Keep going, Bernie.

24
25 Preferred Alternative 3 is the preferred alternative for both
26 councils, which would modify the OFL and ABC and jurisdictional
27 apportionment and the regional ACLs, using the average of historic
28 and recent landings, and the following reference period, based on
29 the recommendation from the councils' SSCs for the yield
30 projections for 2027 and 2028 and subsequent years.

31
32 Each region's ACL would be set equal to its apportionment of the
33 stock ABC, and monitoring of landings for mutton snapper would be
34 inclusive of State Reef Fish Survey units from the State of Florida
35 for the recreational and private vessel landings, the Marine
36 Recreational Information Program for-hire telephone survey for the
37 federal for-hire, and Marine Recreational Information Program
38 Fishing Effort Survey for recreational shore landings, and the
39 Southeast Region Headboat Survey for headboat landings, and so
40 kind of a crockpot of a lot of different surveys there.

41
42 Catch limits would be shown below, or catch limits are shown below,
43 and are in pounds whole weight, and rounded to the nearest whole
44 pound. Current Preferred Option 3b would use 50 percent of the
45 average landings from 2014 through 2023 and 50 of the average
46 landings from 2021 through 2023, and so a little bit of extra
47 weighting given to the recent time series there.

1 This apportions 15 percent of the stock ABC for mutton snapper to
2 the Gulf Council and 85 percent to the South Atlantic Council,
3 and, if we scroll down a little bit more, you guys can see those
4 catchments there, and, Mr. Chair, I will pause there, in case
5 anybody wants to talk about this preferred alternative.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** I'm looking around the table, and, seeing no
8 hands, back to you, Mr. Rindone.
9

10 **MR. RINDONE:** Great. Action 2, and so the same thing, but for
11 yellowtail, and so we'll scroll on down to the preferred
12 alternative, which is Preferred Alternative 4, which would modify
13 the OFL and ABC and the jurisdictional apportionment of the
14 yellowtail ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic
15 and recent landings based on the recommendations from councils'
16 SSCs for 2026 to 2028 and subsequent years. A note to myself is
17 I'm going to change that 2027 to 2028, since, obviously, we're not
18 going to get this done for 2026.
19

20 Use 50 percent of the average landings from 2014 to 2023 and 50
21 percent of the average landings from 2021 through 2023, and so the
22 same years as is being used for mutton, and this method would
23 apportion 17 percent of the yellowtail stock ABC to the Gulf
24 Council and 83 percent to the South Atlantic Council. The South
25 Atlantic Council's regional ACL would be set equal to its
26 apportionment, the stock ABC, and the catch limits are shown in
27 pounds whole weight below, and rounded to the nearest whole pound.
28

29 Currently, you guys prefer Option 4b, which would set the Gulf
30 regional ACL equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC, thereby
31 doing away with the current 11 percent buffer that's currently --
32 That's on the books right now and, if you guys look in that table
33 there, you can see what those catch limits would be, and so, Mr.
34 Chair, I'll pause for comment.
35

36 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any comments, questions, preferred options for
37 yellowtail? Seeing none, back to you, Mr. Rindone.
38

39 **MR. RINDONE:** Lean on the gas, and so Action 3 would modify the
40 southeastern U.S. mutton snapper sector allocations in the South
41 Atlantic. Presently, the South Atlantic Council prefers
42 Alternative 1, which will retain the current commercial and
43 recreational sector allocations in the South Atlantic region at
44 17.02 percent for the commercial sector and 82.98 percent for the
45 recreational sector, respectively, of the current South Atlantic
46 total annual catch limit for mutton snapper.
47

48 There's some -- You guys are reading that, and you can see there's

1 some shuffling of alternatives, and so the alternatives that have
2 been crossed out were moved to Considered but Rejected by the South
3 Atlantic Council, and so, for creating symmetry here between the
4 councils, as far as the decision making, Mr. Chair, I think what
5 would be appropriate would be consideration of a motion to concur
6 with the South Atlantic's decisions regarding alternatives in
7 Action 3 to move to Considered but Rejected, and then, after that,
8 consideration of the South Atlantic's preferred alternative.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you. Mr. Rindone.

11
12 **MR. RINDONE:** Two separate motions.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and we'll need two separate motions, the
15 first being approving the Considered but Rejected actions, or
16 alternatives, by the South Atlantic Council, and the second, as
17 Ryan said, choosing the preferred alternative. This has nothing
18 to do with us, and this is entirely South Atlantic, and how they
19 split this up amongst their sectors, and so I'm looking around the
20 table to see if someone would offer that motion. Mr. Osborne.

21
22 **MR. RINDONE:** So, essentially, what this would be to move
23 **Alternatives 2, 5, and 6 in Action 3 to Considered but Rejected.**

24
25 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Great motion, Mr. Osborne. Do we have a
26 second? Second from Dr. Allen. Let's wait until Bernie gets it on
27 the board, and then we can talk about it.

28
29 Okay. The motion on the floor was from Mr. Osborne, and second by
30 Dr. Allen. Is there any discussion of the motion on the table?
31 Captain Walker.

32
33 **MR. WALKER:** I would speak in favor of Mr. Osborne's motion.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Is there any
36 further discussion? **Any opposition to the motion? The motion**
37 **carries.** Thank you, committee.

38
39 Moving on, so then the next item here would be concurring with the
40 South Atlantic Council's preferred alternative, which is 1.

41
42 **MR. RINDONE:** That's correct.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** So if we could get a motion here to that
45 effect. Mr. Osborne, you're really good at these motions. Do you
46 want to go two-for-two? Just kidding. Does anyone else want to
47 make this motion? Dr. Allen is raising his hand. Okay. We have
48 a motion on the table. Do we have a second? Well, we'll wait

1 until it gets -- Okay. A second from Captain Walker. We'll wait
2 until Bernie writes it out here. Okay. Is there any further
3 discussion of this motion? **Any opposition? Seeing none, the**
4 **motion carries.** Mr. Rindone.

5
6 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay. Action 4 considers modification of
7 southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper sector allocations in the
8 South Atlantic region, and the South Atlantic Council's current
9 preferred alternative is Alternative 1, no action which would
10 retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations
11 as 52.56 percent for the commercial sector and 47.44 percent for
12 the recreational sector, respectively, of the current South
13 Atlantic total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper. The
14 South Atlantic Council, likewise in this action, also removed
15 Alternatives 2, 5, and 6 to Considered but Rejected. Mr. Chair.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone, and so looking for a
18 similar motion, just replacing the words "Action 3" with "Action
19 4" here for this Considered but Rejected. Okay. That motion is
20 made by Dr. Allen. Do we have a second? Mr. Anson. Is there any
21 discussion of the motion on the table? **Any objection? Seeing**
22 **none, the motion carries.**

23
24 Okay. Similarly, now we're looking for another motion here to
25 concur with the Preferred Alternative 1 from the South Atlantic.
26 Do we have anyone willing to make that motion? Mr. Anson. Do we
27 have a second? Dr. Allen. All right. We'll wait until Bernie
28 gets that on the board. Okay. This is relative to yellowtail.
29 **In Action 4, to make Alternative 1 the preferred.** Do we have any
30 discussion of the motion? **Any objections? Seeing none, the motion**
31 **carries.** Back to you, Mr. Rindone.

32
33 **MR. RINDONE:** Well, that's the document, sir. At this point, this
34 is a public hearing draft that's being brought to you guys for
35 consideration for going out to public hearings. Like I mentioned
36 in the action guide, we talked about doing virtual public hearings,
37 at the request of the State of Florida, and so the, you know, next
38 thing will be for the committee to recommend that the document go
39 out to public hearings.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Mr. Sanchez.

42
43 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Before we leave this document, I just wanted to say
44 if we could keep Dewey Hemilright in our prayers. He's recovering
45 from a medical condition, and couldn't be with us this week, and
46 so please keep him in our prayers.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you for saying that, John. Okay, and so

1 just some general discussion that, yes, this was batted around
2 with Florida. We figured that a virtual public hearing would be
3 totally fine for this. There's no really substantive management
4 actions here, and it's more or less catch limit changes and
5 jurisdictional allocation changes here.

6
7 The season supposed to be open year-round from for both of the
8 councils, and so that's what we're looking forward here, is for a
9 motion to approve the document for a virtual public hearing, and
10 if someone would be so kind to make that motion. Mr. Osborne. Do
11 we have a second? Dr. Overton.

12
13 Okay. **The motion is, and I'll read it into the record, to recommend**
14 **taking Public Hearing Draft - Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper**
15 **Grouper Amendment 44: Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper**
16 **Management Measures out for virtual public hearings.** Is there any
17 discussion of the motion on the table? **Any objections? Seeing**
18 **none, the motion carries.** Lovely.

19
20 **MR. RINDONE:** Well, put a pin in it. That was it.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Appreciate it. Okay.
23 Based on the change of agenda here, we're going to move the
24 exempted fishing permits until tomorrow, and we are going to move
25 into the first item that was previously scheduled for tomorrow,
26 which is about catch per unit effort, and a couple of different
27 presentations here. The very first one that we have is from Dr.
28 Allen, but I will turn it over to someone to read the action guide.

29
30 **OVERVIEW: UNDERSTANDING CATCH PER UNIT EFFORT FROM FISHERY-**
31 **INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT INDICES OF RELATIVE ABUNDANCE**
32

33 **MR. RINDONE:** I'm still here, and so Dr. Allen needed more work to
34 do, and so he's going to present an overview of catch per unit
35 effort, or CPUE, and benefits and limitations of its use for
36 fishery-independent and fishery-dependent indices to the
37 committee.

38
39 He's going to explain how CPUE can be used to infer stock abundance
40 and outline some cautions and considerations when being presented
41 CPUE information as an index of stock abundance. Recently, the
42 Reef Fish Advisory Panel had suggested calculating CPUE for several
43 reef fish species using fishery-dependent data to examine stock
44 condition.

45
46 Initially, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center -- Or,
47 additionally, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center has been
48 providing the SSC with health check updates for several assessed

1 stocks using fishery-independent, like the G-FISHER video,
2 composite video, index and the NMFS bottom longline survey-derived
3 CPUE estimates, as indices of relative abundance.

4
5 The committee should review the information presented and ask
6 questions, as appropriate, and so we will also have presentations
7 from Dr. Ted Switzer about the G-FISHER composite video index and
8 Dr. Walter about the NMFS bottom longline survey as it pertains to
9 red grouper.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. All right, and if we
12 could open up the document Understanding Catch Per Unit Effort
13 from Fishery-Independent and Dependent Indices of Relative
14 Abundance, and I'll turn it over to you, Dr. Allen,

15
16 **DR. ALLEN:** All right. Thank you, and I want to acknowledge Lisa
17 Hollensead with us, with the council staff, who also worked with
18 me on this, and this is just kind of a -- It's a very general
19 overview about considerations of catch per unit effort type data,
20 and how we interpret them, and some pitfalls that you can run into
21 with CPUE data.

22
23 This came up at our last meeting, and so this is kind of a -- This
24 is not intended to be a talk that's about any particular species,
25 or any particular sector necessarily, and it's just a general --
26 Some general considerations about interpretation of CPUE data.

27
28 Also, CPUE is -- I will say it's almost irresistible to use this
29 as an index of abundance. We do it all the time, and there's some
30 cautionary tales with that, which I'll highlight here, but, in
31 general, we expect that as some measure of catch per unit effort,
32 like catch per boat day, as that increases, we would infer that
33 that means that the stock abundance is increasing.

34
35 The degree to which that is true depends a lot of times on the
36 survey design, and how well the sampling, the actual fishing
37 activities, reflect the spatial distribution of the true abundance
38 of the stock, and I'll give some examples of that. The purpose of
39 this really is just to give kind of a general CPUE 101 kind of
40 talk about some of the caution and considerations for these data
41 types.

42
43 The basic assumption is something like this. This is what we hope
44 we can do, is that the catch per unit effort is linearly and
45 positively related to the true abundance of fish, and so it's --
46 You know, in an ideal situation, if the CPUE doubles, that means
47 that the true abundance of the stock has doubled, and so that's
48 what we hope for, but that may not always be the case.

1
2 First of all, there can be a whole lot of variability in the
3 relationship between those two, which I'm not depicting here, but
4 the other case is where you actually have a change in the
5 relationship between CPUE and the true abundance of fish, and those
6 are -- Many of you I'm sure have heard the terms hyperstability
7 and hyperdepletion, but I want to -- We're going to work through
8 this, just some examples of how these things can happen.

9
10 I'm going to do this with -- I picked some graphics, and we'll
11 talk about fishery-dependent data first, and so fishery-dependent
12 data are data that comes directly from the fishery, the process of
13 catching fish in the fishery, commercial or recreational, any kind
14 of fishery. These kind of things would be a consideration, and,
15 in this case, in this example, I'm using it as an example in a
16 very high abundance, and so a situation where the stock is at high
17 abundance.

18
19 In that case, there's fish pretty much on all available habitat,
20 and you find fish on all those habitats, whether it's a small
21 habitat or a big, high-relief habitat.

22
23 This presentation is mostly tailored to reef fish, but not specific
24 to any one species necessarily, but, a lot of times, the very best
25 habitat, and, in some cases, this can be artificial reefs, and it
26 can also be very well known high-relief sites, and those kind of
27 sites get the highest effort, right, and so that's one of the
28 considerations.

29
30 Little-known locations, like the single rock up at the top, would
31 be expected to have lower effort, because they're harder to find,
32 and maybe less anglers know about those spots, et cetera, but,
33 under high-abundance population, they would have fish on them as
34 well.

35
36 Okay, and so the idea here is that, when the fish abundance is
37 high, anglers can maintain high catch rates on a wide range of
38 habitat patches, and so you can catch good numbers of fish on the
39 low-relief sites, small habitat patches, and you can also catch
40 fish on the very best sites, because the fish are at high abundance
41 in all those places.

42
43 What can happen when the abundance declines, and I'm not going to
44 argue that this is universal, but it's pretty common, in that the
45 very best habitat out there tends to attract fish, regardless of
46 the of the population abundance, and so the best habitat may
47 attract fish, and, if that habitat is also very well known, and
48 retains high effort, you can see how anglers might be able to

1 maintain a high catch rate, even though the stock has declined
2 substantially, and so that's one of one of the issues with CPUE
3 data from fishery-dependent sources.

4
5 In that case, the catch per effort can remain strong on the very
6 best habitat, due to the fish behavior. Fish are aggregating to
7 those best habitat sites, and, although the population is much
8 reduced, anglers that fish those sites can maintain higher catch
9 rates than would be proportional in a relationship between the
10 true abundance and the CPUE.

11
12 This what we call hyperstability in fisheries. This is where CPUE
13 remains high despite relatively large population declines, and
14 this can happen due to a range of mechanisms, but one of the main
15 ones is that anglers don't fish randomly. Anglers are going to go
16 where they can maintain the highest catch rates.

17
18 A lot of times, in the best habitat, anglers are able to maintain
19 relatively high catch rates even if the stock has declined
20 substantially, and I've heard anglers over the years, you know,
21 say, golly, we're catching fish like crazy on these sites, you
22 know, and there has to be a lot of fish out there, which may be
23 true, but it also may not be true if hyperdepletion is happening,
24 or, I mean, hyperstability is happening, and those sites are
25 attracting fish, and so there's actually been a lot larger stock
26 decline than it would indicate just based on the on the CPUE data,
27 because they've maintained high catch rates.

28
29 The most famous example of this is probably the most significant
30 fishery disaster the world has seen, which is the collapse of the
31 Atlantic cod, and the problem with that stock was exactly this
32 problem, because the cod were aggregating, and the schools were
33 forming in a smaller and smaller area, but the stock assessment
34 didn't take that into consideration.

35
36 They were using CPUE from the fishery to say that, hey, we're
37 maintaining the same catch rates, and so everything is good, but,
38 in reality, what was happening is the stock was getting smaller
39 and smaller, and the fishermen, the trawlers in that case, knew
40 where those schools were, and they were maintaining very high catch
41 rates, and so, if you used fishery-dependent CPUE alone, it would
42 it would be very misleading, and that's what happened here until
43 the stocks were catastrophically overfished, and so that's the
44 most extreme example of a hyperstability kind of situation, and so
45 we've learned some lessons from that one, for sure.

46
47 What can cause this? Well, I already mentioned non-random fishing
48 patterns, right, and anglers are going to modify their behavior to

1 maximize catch rates. They're going to go where they can catch
2 fish, and, if fish are aggregating and schooling in known
3 locations, then they can maintain high catch rates even if the
4 stock has declined a lot.

5
6 Technological advances also allow anglers to find the best habitat,
7 and also find some of the smallest habitats as well, and that can
8 have an effect here. Information sharing with anglers is another
9 thing, that anglers are talking to each other, and they're not
10 fishing randomly. You know, they're not fishing in a way that you
11 could say is representative of the available habitat out there,
12 and they're going to areas where their catch rates can -- They can
13 maintain as high catch rates as they can, which is typical fisher
14 behavior.

15
16 Another issue is that, and this has been shown in quite a few
17 studies, is there can be some changes in the fleet dynamics, where
18 the very best anglers that are able to maintain high catch rates,
19 because they have lots of habitat to fish, and they know -- They
20 can use techniques where they're able to catch fish, even if the
21 fish abundance is relatively low.

22
23 The very best anglers can maintain high catch rates when the stocks
24 decline, whereas less-effective anglers will actually reduce their
25 effort, and so, if they're not catching fish, you actually lose
26 from the fishery some of the anglers that have low catch rates,
27 and what you're left with are the very best anglers that have high
28 catch rates, and so, if you use catch rate alone, it can be very
29 misleading, as far as what's happening in the act of --

30
31 Whether that catch rate -- That catch rate doesn't actually reflect
32 the amount of fish in the stock, because it's -- What is left are
33 the very best anglers that are maintaining high catch rates.
34 That's all -- Those are all examples of hyperstability, where the
35 catch rate can remain very high even if the stock has undergone a
36 large decline.

37
38 Okay, and now the opposite can also be true, where the CPUE
39 declines strongly, but it does not reflect a whole population level
40 decline, and we call that hyperdepletion, and so I'll go to the
41 next slide.

42
43 The next slide is a situation where we have distance from shore
44 along the bottom of this slide, and so sites that are close, five
45 miles within shore, and then sites that are further away, fifty-
46 plus miles away from shore, and this is called hyperdepletion,
47 where you basically get a local depletion of the fish stock that
48 is close to where the fishermen can access them, and so you get -

1 - You get reduced abundance on the nearshore sites, and you get a
2 higher abundance offshore, where those sites offshore, further
3 offshore, longer travel distances, get less fishing effort, and
4 so, if you use CPUE from this dataset, in this kind of situation,
5 it can actually say that the CPUE has declined more substantially
6 than the overall stock has, because there's a lot of fish out there
7 that anglers aren't able to access, or not as many anglers will
8 access, and so that's an example of hyperdepletion.

9
10 This just iterates that, if most of the fleet target sites that
11 are closer to shore, the average CPUE would decline substantially,
12 and so, if you just use the fishery-dependent data, you would say
13 that there's been a big decline in the stock, but, if a lot of the
14 fish are found offshore, and they're not as accessible to anglers,
15 then that decline in CPUE that you see may actually be a lot larger
16 decline than what the overall stock is.

17
18 This is what is complicated about fishery-dependent data, because
19 you can kind of have -- To some degree, you can have both these
20 things going on at once. You can have hyperdepletion and
21 hyperstability operating on different scales of the fishery, and
22 so this is a really a cautionary tale, just to say that this is
23 one of the flags that we've put up about using CPUE data in
24 fisheries and just assuming it's an index of abundance. It can
25 really steer you wrong sometimes, with catastrophic implications
26 of that.

27
28 For that reason, a lot of times what we prefer to use in stock
29 assessments is some type of a fishery-independent type of survey,
30 and those are not without their problems, of course. I mean, we
31 always have trouble sampling fish populations, because, you know,
32 fish are like trees in forests, but you can't see them, and they
33 move, and so it's a problem, and so we're never going to have
34 perfect data, and fishery-independent data also aren't perfect,
35 but at least, a lot of times, the fishery-independent data tries
36 to account for random sampling, and it doesn't fall into some of
37 the same pitfalls that you see with the fishery-dependent data.

38
39 Generally, fishery-independent samples attempt to sample randomly
40 with some type of design, and we would hope that that random
41 sampling is going to be better in indicating the true abundance of
42 the stock.

43
44 It's still not perfect. A lot of times, our fishery-independent
45 samples are limited on where they can sample, and we may have
46 really good -- We'll see this to some degree with the G-FISHER
47 presentation. Some areas may have really good spatial coverage,
48 and others don't. You know, if resources are limiting, we may not

1 be able to sample everywhere we want, and so we still have problems
2 with this, but it definitely, with regard to fisheries-independent
3 samples, reduces the problems of this non-random fishing by
4 anglers.

5
6 That's why, in fisheries science in general, we generally have
7 more confidence in fisheries-independent measures of CPUE compared
8 to fisheries-dependent data, and I'm not saying that -- I think
9 it's always a good idea to look at fishery-dependent CPUE data,
10 but there's caution in how you interpret those, and that's my main
11 point here.

12
13 Okay, and so just a few summaries here, and then we can have any
14 discussion about this, but it's usually a mistake to just assume
15 that CPUE from fishery-dependent data truly reflect the stock
16 abundance.

17
18 Usually there's some degree of hyperstability and/or
19 hyperdepletion going on from fishery-dependent data, and that
20 causes problems, and so it's a -- This is always a concern. These
21 factors are almost always at play.

22
23 Spatial data on the fishing fleet can help. If you have spatial
24 information on -- For example, if you've got a hyperdepletion
25 situation, where the local reefs are being depleted, the nearshore
26 reefs are being depleted, but there's abundant fish offshore, if
27 you have spatial information on the fleet, and you notice that the
28 fleet is actually moving further offshore to maintain higher catch
29 rates, that can be really insightful about to what degree these
30 kind of factors are going on.

31
32 I think this is a big need, and will always be a big need for
33 future research in any kind of fishery, commercial or recreational
34 or any of the sectors, but, all that being said, I'm not making
35 the argument here that we should ignore fishery-dependent CPUE
36 data.

37
38 In my view, I think the best way to look at fishery-dependent CPUE
39 is that they should be looked at, and the best use, unless you
40 have spatial information that you can really try to tease apart
41 the potential for hyperstability or hyperdepletion, is to look at
42 these trends relative to some of your other indices.

43
44 I think it gives a lot of credence if you've got a fishery-
45 dependent indices that's moving in one direction, and your
46 fisheries-independent estimates are showing the same trend, you
47 know, and so you've got kind of some validation that these things
48 are coming from more than one data source, and so I think there's

1 a lot of value in fishery-dependent CPUE data, but they just have
2 to be interpreted with caution, and so I wanted to summarize that,
3 and I welcome any questions, and I think we'll also have more
4 discussion with the presentations that follow this one as well,
5 and so thanks. John.

6
7 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. I wanted to ask, and, when we
8 get to CPUE in red grouper, is it possible, since we're required
9 to have VMS, to tease out some of the spatial distribution
10 information using the VMS, and then make this a little less
11 susceptible to hyperstability?

12
13 **DR. ALLEN:** I think it is. It's more steps, but I think that the
14 VMS data gives us the potential to look at those patterns, yes.
15 Absolutely. Ed.

16
17 **MR. WALKER:** Just to John's point, on the commercial trip ticket,
18 you have to mark down a zone, and they have the Gulf split into
19 zones, and we're like Zone 2673, is where I end up fishing a lot,
20 and so that's another spatial thing you could incorporate, but
21 this was a fantastic presentation, by the way. I learned a lot
22 from it. I didn't know a lot of those things, and I believe that
23 a lot of the impetus to get this CPUE information was also put
24 forward by people who didn't understand it as well, like myself,
25 and so I think this was great.

26
27 **DR. ALLEN:** Thanks for that, Ed. Just to follow-up, sometimes the
28 spatial data that you have from the fleet may not be of the
29 resolution that you need to be able to tease this stuff apart. It
30 can be such a coarse spatial that it doesn't really help, but,
31 other times, maybe with VMS, there's a way to use that information,
32 and, John, if you have something you want to add to that, I'm happy
33 to have any additions there, but there's cases where you may have
34 the spatial resolution needed to tease this apart, and others that
35 you may not, and so just FYI. John.

36
37 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I appreciate the balanced way you presented this,
38 and it was very informative, and, you know, I see the value in
39 using all data we can get, independent as well as fishery-
40 dependent, and I'll remind that it wouldn't be the first time that
41 we have the industry coming forward to this council and saying --
42 Before it catches up to our data, telling us that, hey, we've got
43 a problem, and the quota is too big, and these fish aren't out
44 there. I think, you know, let's use all the data that we can,
45 CPUE, and tease it out and make it the best that it can be, in
46 conjunction with fishery-independent.

47
48 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and I completely agree with that. Dakus.

1
2 **MR. GEESLIN:** Dr. Allen, thank you for taking me back to school.
3 It seems you're a natural fit for this, and so thanks for that.
4 Can you talk a little bit about -- You know, collecting and making
5 wise management resource decision using fishery-independent data
6 is highly variable in the given system, you're saying, right?

7
8 Small streams, you set up block nets, and you collect the fish,
9 and you can count and measure just about every critter, you know,
10 every small cold-water trout in a stream, but we're dealing with
11 an ocean here. Can you talk a little bit about -- This isn't a
12 closed system, and so, even when we have this very robust fishery-
13 independent -- Even in our nearshore, even in our bay systems --
14 In Texas, we like to say we've got a very robust, longest-standing
15 marine resource monitoring program in North America.

16
17 There's still a lot of variability, a lot of open systems, a lot
18 of inlets, passes, and can you speak a little bit about that, and
19 how that -- We just need to keep some realistic, you know,
20 expectations as we move through this, and I certainly appreciate,
21 you know, all the fishery-independent data streams we get, but I
22 do agree with John. You know, we look at the body of data we have,
23 and use the best available science we got, and I'll tee that up
24 for you.

25
26 **DR. ALLEN:** No, and I think that's a great point, and, you know,
27 there's a whole lot more that comes into this. What I really
28 focused on here is fishery-dependent data, and some of the issues
29 there with hyperdepletion and hyperstability, but, even with
30 fishery-independent data, we have lots of problems with that.

31
32 I mean, camera surveys, the visibility changes, turbidity changes,
33 and the wind causes, you know, daily changes in water clarity, and
34 fish movement patterns, and so, I mean, there's a ton of factors
35 that can contribute just to the noise that we see in these data,
36 and so that's not necessarily a systematic bias in the CPUE data,
37 but it just contributes to a lot of noise in it, and that's always
38 a concern.

39
40 One of the things that people have done over the years to try to
41 get around that is to try to standardize CPUE data for things like
42 tide movement, or water clarity, or factor in some of these other
43 variables that may affect the CPUE index that you get, and may not
44 truly affect how many animals were there, but I think it's a fair
45 point.

46
47 You know, in fisheries science, there's always -- If we want to
48 focus on the problems, we're always going to find many of them,

1 but I think the challenge here is to say under what conditions can
2 we see this as useful, realizing that it has always got
3 limitations, and I think that's a good cautionary tale, Dakus, and
4 so thank you.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any more questions for Dr. Allen? I echo the
7 thoughts around the table. Great presentation, Dr. Allen. I
8 really appreciate it. It's good information, for everyone around
9 here, to help us make our decisions here, and really looking at
10 the data for what the data are.

11
12 Okay, and we did previously have Dr. Switzer up next, but I we're
13 going to move over to Dr. Walter for his component of the
14 presentation, unless there's further questions for Dr. Allen. All
15 right, John. Over to you.

16
17 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks, and I think this follows along very well with
18 Mike's presentation, and, when we get Ted's presentation on G-
19 FISHER, I think it all really fits very well together, in terms of
20 the fishery-independent surveys and the fishery-dependent
21 information and how this council can use both to make decisions,
22 and so I'll try to highlight some of those themes.

23
24 I'll put a plug in for G-FISHER as really one of the most
25 comprehensive surveys we've ever had to-date, and I think, when
26 you see that presentation, you'll just see how much of the Gulf it
27 covers, and how we are looking at that as really one of our main
28 sources of information on trends in many of the species.

29
30 What I'll present on here is Gulf red grouper CPUE from commercial
31 handline and longline from logbook reports from 2010 to 2025, and
32 that's the time period after the implementation of the ITQ system,
33 and I think the caveat here is that the fishery-dependent trends
34 may be useful as additional qualitative information evaluating
35 fishery performance for informing council decisions, but our right
36 now general trend is to not use that in stock assessments when we
37 have solid fishery-independent surveys, and the reason is really
38 outlined by what Dr. Allen presented.

39
40 To answer the question of can we use it, there are times when we
41 have used it, and usually it requires a substantial amount of work
42 to try to de-trend from the things that could make the trends
43 biased, and one example would be to use spatial-explicit
44 information, VMS data linking it, and that can be done, and it
45 just takes an exceedingly long amount of time to get the signal,
46 and we try to lean on our fishery-independent surveys instead.

47
48 I just want to thank my two other co-authors, who really put

1 together most of this work, and I'm just presenting, but Micki
2 Pawluk and Kevin Thompson, and I'm just presenting it for them.

3
4 With the dataset, one of the first things we did with this was
5 apply what we call a Stevens and McCall approach to determine trips
6 that are targeting one group of species or another, and that uses
7 species associations, species that are caught in the same trip, to
8 then identify whether you're fishing on one species complex or
9 another, under the theory that the species composition reflects
10 where you're fishing.

11
12 This map, which comes from our bottom longline survey, really
13 highlights the difference in the species compositions as you move
14 across the West Florida Shelf. You'll see, in red, really the
15 spine in red on the West Florida Shelf in the shallow waters is
16 red grouper, and then, if you move offshore, you see a line of
17 yellow and blue blobs, and that is golden tile and blueline tile
18 and yellowedge grouper territory, and those are really the two
19 targets for the bottom longline fleet.

20
21 It's either red grouper or deepwater grouper, and those
22 differentiate most of the trips, and that is exactly what the
23 Stevens and McCall approach did in separating the trips between
24 deepwater or shallow-water grouper, and so we applied that to try
25 to extract the signal for trips that were targeting one or that
26 other species complex.

27
28 The CPUE, or catch per unit effort, was determined by the pounds
29 of red grouper, in handline, divided by the number of lines times
30 the number of hooks per line times the hours fished, and that's
31 all recorded by fishermen in the logbooks. Thank you for recording
32 that information. Hopefully it will get a lot easier when we get
33 to electronic reporting very soon, so that all of that will be
34 much quicker, and the paper logbooks will hopefully get phased
35 out.

36
37 For longlines, it's pounds of red grouper over number of sets and
38 hooks per set, and this is to try to extract a catch rate as best
39 as possible from that information, and we've used those same
40 metrics of CPUE when we've used these as fishery-dependent indices
41 in past assessments.

42
43 Here's a table of the nominal CPUE for both handline and longline,
44 and I won't go over the table, or the figure, but, in the report,
45 you can see the number of trips and the CPUE, the percentage of
46 positive trips. You can see the percentage positive is quite high.
47 When you commercial fish for these species, you're likely to catch
48 them, and you're unlikely to not, particularly with longlines,

1 because they're setting several hundred hooks over time.

2
3 Here's the nominal CPUE for both handline and longline. Starting
4 in 2010, you can see both of those trends are fairly similar for
5 both handline and longline. They show a decline to quite low
6 levels in 2018 and 2019, and then some slight increases after that.

7
8 Then, as the last bullet in Mike's presentation was compare these
9 to our surveys, here you have the comparison over time with the
10 NMFS bottom longline survey and the G-FISHER index, and both the
11 two indices, the fishery surveys, go through 2024, and you can see
12 there's general coherence in terms of showing a decline in that
13 2018-2019 time period, and then some indications of increases,
14 with the G-FISHER showing the most positive increase over that
15 time period.

16
17 There's general coherence, and probably what one would take away
18 from this is they're not showing dramatically different trends
19 over this time period, and so it's probably confirmation of the
20 trends that the stock assessment is using to determine stock status
21 and be able to provide catch advice, and so, with that, that's the
22 end of the presentation, and I'm happy to take any questions.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Mr. Sanchez.

25
26 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. Thank you for another good presentation.
27 If we could go back to Figure 5, standardized nominal CPUE handline
28 and longline, I have a question. I note that, while the trends
29 kind of seem to mimic each other, it seems like there was a lot
30 more activity in 2010, to about 2013-ish, in longline, and then,
31 more importantly, it seems like, about in 2014, the longline starts
32 to really decline, and, in 2013, handline starts to ratchet up.
33 What -- Is there any explanation for that? Any insight into what
34 may have occurred there?

35
36 **DR. WALTER:** I don't have a good explanation for why that steep
37 decline in the longline. There were a series of -- The 2018 red
38 tide certainly was one of -- A fairly substantial red tide, which
39 might explain that kind of nadir in the dataset, but, in terms of
40 the decline before that, I don't know. It would be, I think,
41 interesting to hear from the longliners, in terms of -- And the
42 hand-liners, in terms of what they might be seeing, because
43 presumably this is trends that they would also have seen on the
44 water, I'm assuming.

45
46 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would agree, and it would be good to hear from
47 them, because that's the kind of thing that I guess maybe they can
48 provide some insight.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons.
3

4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We definitely
5 should hear from the fishermen, but, in 2010, we made a lot of
6 changes to the bottom longline fishery. The endorsement went in
7 place, and you had to use -- Vessels were limited on the number of
8 hooks, and they had the 750 rule. You also had the restrictions
9 for sea turtles during the months of June, July, and August, the
10 thirty-five-fathom contour, and so it could be some of that going
11 on as well. During those months, you had to be outside of the
12 thirty-five-fathom contour, due to the sea turtle interactions,
13 whereas the other times it's twenty fathoms.
14

15 **MR. SANCHEZ:** It would interesting to see how our regulatory
16 changes impacted, and see if it lines up with the years and these
17 increases and decreases.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I agree. Any more questions for Dr
20 Walter? Okay. Seeing none, thank you, John. All right. That's
21 it. Okay. I think we're done for the day. I'm going to turn it
22 back over to you, Mr. Chair.
23

24 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, and so we'll wrap up,
25 tomorrow, the G-FISHER video index with Dr. Switzer, starting at
26 9:00, and, also, we'll come back to the exempted fishing permits
27 with Louisiana, and so we'll start a little later, because we're
28 ahead of schedule, and so we'll start at 9:00 a.m. in the morning.
29

30 Also, I would remind folks about the fifty-year anniversary of MSA
31 Fishery Conservation and Management Act in the Gulf, and it will
32 be at the Rush Lounge, the first floor behind the bar, from 5:30
33 to 6:30, and we'll see you at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Helies.
34

35 **MR. HELIES:** If I may, real quick, I just wanted to recognize one
36 of my dear friends and colleagues, Rich Malinowski, and this is
37 going to be his last Gulf Council meeting. He's retiring at the
38 end of September. Thank you. He was always willing to lend an
39 ear to the fishermen, and he's going to be sorely missed. Thanks.
40

41 **MR. DUGAS:** Congratulations, and we'll see you all at 9:00 a.m.
42

43 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 25, 2026.)
44

45 - - -
46

47 August 26, 2026
48

- - -

The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Golden Nugget in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday morning, August 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman C.J. Sweetman.

MR. DUGAS: All right. Before we dive back into Reef Fish, I would like to thank Dr. Simmons and staff for putting on the social yesterday evening, celebrating the fifty years of MSA, and we'll talk more about it later in Full Council, but thank you, Dr. Simmons and staff, for putting that social on. I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Sweetman to dive back into Reef Fish.

CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. Just a couple items left on Reef Fish here, and we're going to continue on first with a presentation from Dr. Ted Switzer. This is going to be Tab B, Number 12(b) and it's a presentation on the G-FISHER composite video index, and we have Ted. Okay. Ted, I'm going to kick it over to you, my friend.

DR. TED SWITZER: Awesome, Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to talk a little bit about the G-FISHER survey this morning. I definitely appreciate the presentations by Dr. Allen and Dr. Walter yesterday. I think they set the stage nicely for this morning's discussions.

I also want to acknowledge the co-authors here. This is definitely not an exhaustive list of literally the dozens of folks that have been involved in the survey through time, but these are the names you're most likely to come across if you either attend a SEDAR data workshop or review the materials that our project produces, and so these are definitely the key players analytically.

I thought a nice place to set the stage is really what the objectives of the survey are, and really what our target goals are, and that's to provide an annual estimate of relative abundance and size composition of the reef fishes that are managed by the Gulf Council.

This includes, at present, coverage of both natural and artificial habitats, and, again, immediately to talk about applications to assessment and management, but also providing data to assess emerging needs that you may have in the coming years.

The survey was developed in the 1980s by Dr. Chris Gledhill. It was initially developed as a trap survey, and, when he was fitting

1 the traps with cameras, to get a sense of behavior and whether he
2 could modify the traps to improve catch, he came across the notion
3 that the traps actually would provide maybe a better index of the
4 reef fish populations, the video would, than the traps, and so,
5 beginning in 1992, the survey was transitioned to primarily a video
6 survey.

7
8 It was focused largely on high-relief shelf-break habitats, those
9 that are well-known, because, at the time, there was little
10 information on habitat availability throughout the rest of the
11 Gulf.

12
13 In the very first assessment for red snapper, SEDAR 7, the index
14 that you see here on the upper-right was presented and accepted
15 for use. Following that assessment, there was a critical
16 evaluation of the survey, and the program, and, while it was found
17 to provide useful information, the peer review panel found that it
18 could be improved upon by increasing the coverage of the sampling
19 frame, particularly in the West Florida Shelf region, and, to do
20 so, we would require additional information on habitat at fine
21 spatial scales to inform sampling efforts.

22
23 Based on this advice, we've worked, over the past fifteen or so
24 years, to dramatically improve the survey, and so the upper-left
25 shows, again, what that first sampling year looked like. Through
26 time, as additional funding became available -- On the lower-left
27 panel, you see, again, the blue squares are the original SEAMAP
28 Reef Fish Survey sampling frame. We were able to expand efforts,
29 through the Panama City Lab survey in the northeastern Gulf of
30 Mexico, in the green shaded areas in 2006.

31
32 In 2010, FWRI was able to expand efforts on the West Florida Shelf,
33 in the shaded gray areas, and one of the outcomes from the
34 Deepwater Horizon oil spill was an influx of a lot of funding to
35 really ramp up these survey efforts, and so the State of Florida
36 expanded their work, in 2014, to cover the entire eastern Gulf,
37 and then, in 2020, through funding from the NOAA RESTORE Science
38 Program, we were able to transition to a new Gulf-wide design under
39 G-FISHER.

40
41 Historically, these surveys were conducted independently, with
42 close coordination between the parties. We used identical
43 technology, identical data processing protocols for the most part,
44 and so that allowed us to integrate data, but the transition to
45 2020 allowed us to fully integrate the survey under a single
46 unified design, and the lower-right shows a map of what 2026
47 selected sampling sites look like.

1 With this influx of funding, we've been able to increase annual
2 sampling effort from about 500 or 600 sites per year to just about
3 2,000, and so a dramatic increase in both intensity and coverage.

4
5 The first part of the survey was to develop a sampling frame of
6 selected sites, and, to do that, we implemented a mapping approach,
7 because most of the Gulf has not been mapped, at least by parties
8 who are willing to share the data. The oil industry may have
9 mapped this previously, but we don't have access to that, and we
10 don't have the resources to map the entire Gulf, and so what we
11 implemented was a randomized approach to habitat mapping, where
12 each year we would select a subset of stations to sample, in
13 approximately two to four-square-kilometer sampling blocks, and
14 this allows us to do two things.

15
16 One is to spread our spatial coverage of sampling effort throughout
17 the survey domain, and two is to provide estimates of both habitat
18 coverage and composition, that we can then use to extrapolate to
19 a Gulf-wide estimate of habitat availability. Some of these areas
20 may have higher intensity of sampling effort, based on the number
21 of years we've been mapping there, but all of this has been done
22 in a randomized and representative way.

23
24 We've done this with both side scan and multibeam sonar. Here in
25 the lower-right, you see an example of a side scan image, and the
26 colored polygons represent habitats that would have been
27 digitized, and the left table shows the variety of natural and
28 artificial habitats that we've identified to-date through these
29 habitat mapping efforts.

30
31 Once we conduct the mapping, the actual reef fish sampling effort
32 is through an underwater stereo camera. These are stationary
33 stereo cameras that are deployed on the seafloor. They're baited
34 with a combination of Atlantic mackerel and squid. We process
35 about twenty minutes of standardized video from the time the camera
36 hits the seafloor.

37
38 The abundance that we obtain from these video surveys is MaxN,
39 which is the maximum number of individuals for a given species on
40 a single screenshot, and that timing for MaxN may vary by species.
41 For some it may be early in the video, and some may be later.
42 These systems, at least from 2008 onwards, include stereo video.
43 In the lower-right, you see an example of what that looks like,
44 and that allows us, using paired video cameras of known distance
45 apart, to obtain measurements of the fish that we observe in many
46 instances.

47
48 This represents fork length, or midline length, of these species,

1 and we also quantify a variety of habitat metrics from the video,
2 including things like relief and the substrate and biotic
3 composition and coverage.

4
5 As I said, the transition to G-FISHER involved several different
6 components to this. One, notably, was the dramatic increase in
7 overall sampling intensity, and we've also included artificial
8 reef habitats throughout the survey domain. There was some
9 exploratory work in the eastern Gulf conducted earlier than that,
10 but, with G-FISHER, that's a fixed stratum in our sampling frame,
11 and we've transitioned to a stratified random sampling design that
12 includes two components, both spatial and habitat.

13
14 The upper-right panel shows the spatial delineation of the G-
15 FISHER sampling frame. It includes six broad regions and three
16 depth strata, ranging from ten meters to 180 meters. The ten-
17 meter boundary is essentially the minimum that we can effectively
18 map using side-scan and multibeam technology, and the deep bounds
19 are the deepest that we can obtain usable video without using
20 lights, because lights will affect fish behavior, and they're not
21 directly comparable to unlighted systems.

22
23 We've also included a habitat stratification scheme, and this
24 applies to both natural and artificial reef habitats, which is a
25 function of both relief, from low to high-relief habitats and size
26 of reef feature, from small, isolated reefs to large reef features,
27 and the imagery on the lower-right shows some natural reef habitat
28 variability that you would see in the G-FISHER survey.

29
30 In terms of data provision, the primary focus of our analyses are
31 to provide data for direct assessment and management needs, and so
32 that includes provisioning data for most reef fish stock
33 assessments conducted in the Gulf. More recently, we've been able
34 to apply these same analyses to provide interim analyses between
35 formal stock assessments, and we do, as requested, analyze data in
36 different ways for other council requests, and that's something I
37 definitely want to open up to you all. If there's anything we can
38 do to help analyze the data and inform your decisions, we're more
39 than open to that.

40
41 Predominantly, we provide time series, both of relative abundance,
42 and you see, on the upper panel, what some of those source indices
43 would look like, and, on the bottom panel, things like annual size
44 composition, especially for data like -- Species like red snapper,
45 where we have an abundance of length data.

46
47 To-date, data from G-FISHER and its parent surveys have been used
48 for thirty-eight-plus and counting assessments. This doesn't

1 include some of the interim analyses we've been providing data for
2 recently, and these analyses encompass twenty managed reef fish
3 species to-date.

4
5 I'm not going to go into a lot of details about the analyses, but
6 I wanted to circle back to Dr. Allen's presentation yesterday
7 afternoon, where he touched on, very importantly, the distinction
8 of hyperstability, and the fact that, if you rely on information
9 from just the best habitats, whether it's fishery-independent or
10 dependent, you may get misleading perspectives of the population
11 of the stock.

12
13 One of the first things we do in our analyses is to take the data
14 we've collected and partition it down to different groups based on
15 the likelihood of encountering the species that we're analyzing at
16 the time, and so the example there would be high proportion
17 positive, and so those are habitats that are highly likely to
18 contain a species of interest, and those would be, you know, the
19 best quality habitats that Dr. Allen talked about yesterday, all
20 the way to the lower quality habitats, that you see in red, and
21 so, once we partition the sampling into those habitats of differing
22 quality, we then examine the mapping data to estimate approximately
23 how much of the Gulf sampling frame that habitat represents.

24
25 With that piece of information, we then calculate annual average
26 abundances these species, for each of these groups, or strata, and
27 then we average those together by weighting each component based
28 on how much it contributes to the overall population, and so the
29 end result is something very similar to a design-based index, for
30 those of you that are familiar with those approaches.

31
32 Now, the approach that we've developed over the past decade or so
33 is fairly standardized, in terms of the general concept, but we
34 have to tailor it to each species, for a number of reasons. The
35 first is that what defines high quality habitat for one species,
36 say red snapper, is going to be very different than what you would
37 expect to see for mutton snapper, or yellowtail snapper, and so
38 the habitat associations that we see for each species will differ
39 dramatically.

40
41 In the Gulf, those stock identification boundaries that we use for
42 assessments are quite variable, ranging from large Gulf-wide
43 stocks to much more small, localized regions, and so that adds
44 some complexity to the way we approach this, and so does the
45 distribution of species.

46
47 Again, some, like I said, are Gulf-wide, and some are only found
48 in localized areas, and so, while the approach that we use is

1 standard, the actual data products produced, the length of the
2 time series, which data sources get incorporated, will vary species
3 by species, and so just something to be aware of you see these G-
4 FISHER indices coming across your desk.

5
6 Here's an example where you see the composite indices, at the
7 upper-right panel, and the resultant combined weighted index in
8 the lower panel. As we go through the peer review process for
9 each of these, we then are developing standardized code, so that,
10 as each new year of data become available, we can provision this
11 in a standardized way, and there's a SEAFish data visualization
12 tool that you can access on the web, and we can provide the links
13 to that, if you don't have that already, and I think, somewhere
14 around 2010 or 2011, the G-FISHER indices are already part of that
15 automatic data provision tool, and so those will be updated each
16 year as new data become available.

17
18 I wanted to just quickly walk through three species, three examples
19 of this, to kind of show the thought process that goes into these
20 and what the final products look like.

21
22 The simplest, and most straightforward, approach that you see here
23 is what we see for gray triggerfish, and so it's a standard single
24 Gulf-wide index, and the reason this is able to be analyzed this
25 way is that all survey components are able to capture, or observe,
26 gray triggerfish fairly consistently.

27
28 The size composition doesn't change dramatically from each
29 component to the others, and, because of that, we're able to do a
30 Gulf-wide index that extends back to the early 1990s, the origin
31 of the index. At present, it's a natural-reef-only index. There
32 are artificial reef data in both the east and western Gulf that
33 will eventually be folded into the gray triggerfish index, but, in
34 the western Gulf, the time series are short, only four years, and
35 so far are insufficient to incorporate into an analysis. Typically
36 about five years of data before we can actually explore
37 incorporating that, and so that's what we see for triggerfish for
38 the upcoming SEDAR 100.

39
40 Here's a second example for red snapper. As you're aware, red
41 snapper is somewhat complex, with three separate stocks, and I'm
42 showing here the representation of the central and the eastern
43 stocks. There's also a western stock. It was fairly
44 straightforward, and the two regions that I show here were treated
45 very differently based on how representative the historical time
46 series was.

47
48 The eastern Gulf time series was truncated to 2010 onwards, because

1 the data from the shelf break survey only had very low proportion
2 positive red snapper, and it was felt to not be representative, at
3 least in this region, and so, from when both FWRI and SEAMAP were
4 online, the 2010 onwards, was the time series of the index.

5
6 For the central index, there was a lot of sampling from the SEAMAP
7 survey, very similar size comp and proportion positive to the
8 Panama City survey, and so, because they both had similar coverage,
9 and similar observed catch, we were able to extend the time series
10 back to 1993.

11
12 This was the first species that we observed in an artificial reef
13 index. We developed that independently of the natural reef index.
14 The SEDAR review panel felt that that was an appropriate index,
15 but recommended that we don't treat those independently, but
16 instead incorporate those into the G-FISHER natural reef index as
17 a secondary strata, and so that wasn't conducted for SEDAR 98, but
18 something that we would explore for the next red snapper update.

19
20 Finally, hogfish. Hogfish have a very unique stock boundary. It's
21 not the actual Monroe County area proper. It's the northern
22 boundary of Florida Bay, and so, for this species, G-FISHER data
23 were able to be used to provide indices for both the Gulf and South
24 Atlantic assessments.

25
26 In the Gulf, we have an issue that also came up with gag grouper,
27 where you see the SEAMAP survey that was conducted in the shelf
28 break had fairly low occurrence, and largely observed very, very
29 large hogfish, whereas, when the Panama City survey comes online,
30 in the right map in the upper-left, you see their frequency of
31 occurrence is 32 percent, but they also observe much smaller
32 individuals, and so we have both differences in abundance as well
33 as the selectivity of the survey.

34
35 In those cases, the analytical approach we developed doesn't really
36 account for that, and so we typically would truncate the index,
37 and so, for the Gulf hogfish index, it was truncated 2006 onwards,
38 but we were able to incorporate the artificial reefs in that index
39 for the first time.

40
41 The South Atlantic index, because the core area of hogfish was
42 included in the early years, we were able to extend that index
43 back to the 1993 time period. We did not include artificial reefs,
44 because the sampling intensity in that small area was fairly low
45 for artificial reefs.

46
47 G-FISHER has been pretty successful at providing data for a number
48 of species, but, as Dr. Allen highlighted yesterday, no independent

1 survey is perfect, and G-FISHER is no exception to that. We've
2 identified several key limitations, and we're going to at least
3 briefly touch on how we're trying to address that.

4
5 One of those is the idea of sampling platforms. They're incredibly
6 important components, particularly in the western and central
7 Gulf. They are very unique, in that they provide structure all
8 the way to the surface of the water column, and what we see is
9 that, in many cases, the species composition differs dramatically.

10
11 I think maybe one of the clearest examples of that is gray snapper,
12 where, if you look at the standard western Gulf G-FISHER data from
13 natural reefs, they're very rare, and you wouldn't think they're
14 major components of the reef fish assemblage, but they're
15 incredibly common, particularly in the shallow areas of the
16 platforms, and so, for platform sampling, we developed a unique
17 approach to sample this very unique habitat, and, in doing so,
18 what we do is, instead of deploying a standard bottom camera
19 deployment, we have a standard deployment throughout the full water
20 column.

21
22 It's deployed and retrieved at a standard rate. We do use
23 identical cameras and bait to the G-FISHER survey, and so those
24 components are directly comparable, and we annotate these videos
25 very similarly, in terms of how we approach the habitat and the
26 MaxN, but, in this case, the MaxN could be at the surface for one
27 species and at the bottom for another species.

28
29 Again, as I mentioned earlier, it's a very short time series,
30 dating back to 2021, and so this has not been evaluated at a SEDAR
31 data workshop yet. We anticipate that will probably happen first
32 at the upcoming greater amberjack data workshop, and that should
33 occur, I think, mid to late 2027.

34
35 The other component about the platform sampling is how to
36 appropriately weight this when we incorporate this into the
37 analyses, and platforms are incredibly challenging, because we
38 know that they're being removed at a fairly significant rate, which
39 means the weighting component to this may actually vary by year,
40 but it's something that we're working on, and we anticipate, like
41 I said, presenting this to the SEDAR panel in 2027.

42
43 Another component that is difficult to deal with is regional
44 differences in optical survey efficiency. The upper-right shows
45 an interpolated map of transmissivity. What you need to know is
46 that red is bad, and blue is good.

47
48 Eastern Gulf, we very rarely have issues with visibility. Most of

1 our cameras provide usable data, whereas, in the western Gulf,
2 that's not always the case. Some of these areas are ephemeral,
3 and so one month of visibility may be great, and the next month it
4 might not be. Some of these are consistently poor, and how
5 important that is to the data kind of depends on exactly how bad
6 the conditions are.

7
8 If it just limits our field of view, and, you know, instead of
9 seeing ten meters, we only see a couple meters, that's something
10 we can address. We can include that relative visibility as a
11 metric in our statistical models, plus the fact that we use baited
12 systems, and most of the fish are probably within a couple meters
13 of the camera anyway, and so that might not have as strong of
14 implications, but, if we can't observe anything from the video,
15 because it's essentially chocolate milk, we're not adequately
16 characterizing populations in those regions.

17
18 We've been aware of this for some time, but there are several
19 initiatives that are ongoing to try to address this and provide
20 data in these regions. One that you see in the lower-right is the
21 use of acoustic cameras, and so they use acoustic technology to
22 provide something akin to an image of what the fish look like
23 swimming through the system.

24
25 This example was animated, and we can share that if folks are
26 interested, but targets that we observed on the acoustic camera on
27 the lower-right match those we saw in the video on the left. At
28 present, the ability to identify these individuals as species is
29 somewhat problematic, and so we're also folding in the use of
30 environmental DNA, or eDNA.

31
32 Now what this is, it's all fish swim through the water column.
33 They shed parts of themselves. It could be mucus, or it could be
34 scales, or it could be sperm or eggs, and it could be feces, and
35 those contain little bits of their DNA, and so what we can do is
36 we can filter that water, and run it through analyses, and figure
37 out what species are there.

38
39 There's two approaches we're exploring. One is the use of what's
40 called metabarcoding, eDNA, and that essentially is a multispecies
41 approach that gives you presence and absence of all species that
42 were within that general sampling area.

43
44 We're also exploring quantitative approaches, and this is
45 something you would apply to a smaller number of species, because
46 of the analyses required, but some results from trawling surveys
47 indicate that that might correlate fairly well with the abundance
48 you see in those actual fishery-dependent surveys, and so we've

1 got a lot of technology throwing at this.

2
3 The good news is we can develop and verify this in the eastern
4 Gulf, where we have the optical system to calibrate, and then the
5 hope is we'll be able to apply this in the western Gulf. This is
6 something that's still very much research and development. This
7 is not ready to roll out for assessment purposes in the next year
8 or two, but I would expect, somewhere in the next three to five
9 years, you might see some of these data be presented.

10
11 Probably one of the largest challenges we have with this survey is
12 the fact that the data are not nearly as timely as we would like
13 them to be to provide, you know, quick input on stock status. For
14 a sampling year, we collect about 2,000 videos. It's very labor
15 intensive. That takes at least 10,000 man hours to process, if
16 not more, depending on how busy those videos are, and so, in a
17 typical sampling year, if we finish collections in August or
18 September, it will be fifteen months, best case scenario, until
19 those data are ready for analysis, which is, obviously, something
20 we want to address.

21
22 We're in the process of developing this machine learning approach
23 to help reduce that somewhat, and it's something that's not quite
24 ready to be implemented, but we have processing pipelines that are
25 in place. We have reference material that we've developed over
26 the last several years that feeds into this machine learning
27 approach.

28
29 It will essentially run through a video, identify all the fish,
30 and give its most likely categorization, as well as estimate a
31 likelihood that that is correct, and so the hope is that we'll be
32 able to essentially run these through the video and then only go
33 back and look at a subset of the individuals that are identified.

34
35 At present, what we're really trying to do is evaluate whether
36 this approach will bias the results of these analyses at all, and
37 so, initially, these models were heavily skewed towards western
38 Gulf, with a lot of red snapper, and so they were overclassifying
39 red snapper in the eastern Gulf, and, obviously, we don't want any
40 bias, either high or low, to be determining the trends we see, but
41 the hope is that, within the next six months or so, we'll be able
42 to have some standardized protocols that we can evaluate and
43 determine exactly how much we'll be able to reduce the timeliness
44 of the data.

45
46 Inclusion of G-FISHER in its current iteration has been very
47 successful, largely due to the increased sampling intensity and
48 the robust design. It's incredibly flexible, and it allows us to

1 take data, for most species and most of these stock-delineated
2 boundaries, and provide some meaningful information.

3
4 Part of this is just due to the fact that we have a really strong
5 collaborative team. You know, one person is not doing all the
6 analyses, and, given the number of requests we're getting, that's
7 incredibly important for us to be able to meet the needs of the
8 council and other partners.

9
10 It's become a critical source of independent data for most species
11 in the Gulf, most of those that are assessed, at least. We know
12 we have limitations. There are some we can address, and we have
13 ideas in the works. There are some we can't.

14
15 Again, ideally, it would be nice to conduct this survey
16 synoptically within a one to two-week period, but that's physically
17 impossible, given the scale of what we're trying to accomplish,
18 but hopefully the limitations that we know exist will be addressed
19 in the coming years, and the utility of data can just be improved
20 further.

21
22 What does the future of G-FISHER look like? Well, we initially
23 had our first five-year funding by the NOAA RESTORE Science Program
24 in 2020. We were recently renewed for another five years, which
25 will cover us through 2028, and part of 2029, but, at present,
26 there is no long-term funding in place, and, if funding doesn't
27 materialize, we'll go back to about a third of the effort that we
28 currently have.

29
30 Now, we have had discussions with the SEAMAP group, which is
31 ultimately what we want to fund this through. Our SEAMAP state
32 partners have all taken on some involvement in the survey, as
33 current funding levels and manpower allow, and you can see up there
34 what the accomplished 2025 effort looks like.

35
36 Mississippi helped Alabama with the sampling, and is working on
37 the video processing, and so we have some requests that are going
38 through the pipeline to hopefully increase SEAMAP funding to
39 support the survey beyond 2028. No word as of yet on the success
40 of that, but something we're aware of, and at some point will
41 probably need support of the council to push this forward.

42
43 So, again, there's a lot more details to G-FISHER. That QR code
44 there provides a link to our story map that goes into a lot of
45 details on imagery and mapping, and all those types of things, and
46 I encourage you to check that out, but, if there's any questions,
47 I'm happy to answer those. Thanks.

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Switzer. That was a great
2 presentation. I mean, me personally, there's an incredible amount
3 of value here. I'm very pleased with the work that your group and
4 others have been doing on this, especially as we're having to move
5 towards some more index-based assessments relative to lack of data
6 or, as Clay calls it, the Cadillac of stock assessments, and so I
7 think there's a lot of utility here.

8
9 I certainly am a big advocate for this. We've already used it for
10 lane snapper, as an interim to bump up the quota there, and so I
11 just appreciate it, and certainly I think there's going to be a
12 lot of utility in this in the future here, but I'll look around
13 the table for any questions, or comments, for Dr. Switzer. Mr.
14 Schieble.

15
16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Dr. Switzer,
17 for your presentation. I think the imagery in there was very
18 illustrative of how this works. It's the first time I've seen
19 some of the hydroacoustic work. I had a couple questions for you.

20
21 First, with regards to the hydroacoustic work in the western Gulf,
22 do you also calibrate that to the actual video work that gets done
23 in the eastern Gulf, to come up with a baseline of what that
24 actually sees in the western Gulf, versus what the camera work
25 would have? The second question, with regards to the eDNA, is
26 there a mechanism to actually, I guess, benchmark what the eDNA
27 picks up that equals species abundance, and not just presence-
28 absence?

29
30 **DR. SWITZER:** Thanks for those questions. First, for the acoustic
31 camera calibration, that is something that is currently ongoing.
32 There are two funded projects that are exactly doing that, that
33 are comparing the optic counts for these species to what we're
34 seeing on acoustics.

35
36 We don't have preliminary data on that yet, but that's the primary
37 goal, is to make sure that those line up in the east, because, in
38 the west, like you said, we'll have to rely entirely on some sort
39 of acoustic estimate.

40
41 In terms of the eDNA, yes, the secondary approach that I mentioned,
42 the quantitative eDNA, it's something we just started in 2026, and
43 so we've collected samples, but we haven't processed those yet.
44 There's a different eDNA processing pipeline that amplifies data
45 for a specific species, and you can relate the strength of that
46 signal to the number of fish that we saw on the cameras.

47
48 I believe our initial approach is to test this for -- I think, the

1 five main species, that tend to get the most scrutiny, are red
2 snapper, red grouper, gray triggerfish, gag, and greater
3 amberjack. We'll probably see first cuts of those analyses here
4 sometime next spring.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any more questions for Ted? Mr. Anson.

7
8 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Dr. Switzer, for
9 the presentation. Yes, it did provide a little bit more detail,
10 and information, to me about the technology. It was a little
11 disheartening, I guess, relative to the coverage off of Alabama
12 and Mississippi, particularly for SEDAR 98.

13
14 You mentioned that natural reefs were only selected, or covered,
15 for the data that was provided to SEDAR 98, and, off of Alabama,
16 where most of the harvest occurs, and where most of the
17 conversations start relative to depletion or localized depletion,
18 there are very, very limited samples that were taken, and so it's
19 good to see that you're addressing some of the problems that were
20 related, or identified, with that technology relative to
21 visibility and such, but, going forward, on your last slide there,
22 I just want to confirm, for the future of G-FISHER, there appears
23 to be a few more sites that are selected off of Alabama. Are you
24 including artificial reefs in future selection of sites off of the
25 northern Gulf?

26
27 **DR. SWITZER:** Thanks for the question. The answer is definitely,
28 and I'll back up one second, and so, the fact that there's been so
29 much mapping coverage in the eastern Gulf largely is due to the
30 fact that, prior to the RESTORE Science Program, we had a six-year
31 NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit- funded project that funded a lot
32 of that mapping effort.

33
34 The randomized mapping approach that you see now is something
35 that's only been implemented with G-FISHER, and so we're a little
36 behind in the western Gulf, just based on we've only had four years
37 of mapping, instead of the decade-plus in the eastern Gulf. As we
38 have any information available to us from mapping sources, or from
39 published artificial reef programs, we definitely incorporate that
40 into our survey domain.

41
42 Part of the reason why there's not as much coverage in Alabama as,
43 for example, there is from Dr. Powers' survey, is the unwillingness
44 of them to share the mapping data, and I 100 percent understand
45 that, once data come to the State of Florida, sunshine laws require
46 that we turn it over, in case anybody requests that, and a lot of
47 the areas that Dr. Powers' group mapped are private reefs, that
48 would politically be a bad thing for that information to get out,

1 and so, as we map in that area, it will fold into our sampling
2 frame, but that's why we're a little behind there.

3
4 **MR. ANSON:** I appreciate that. You can go to outdooralabama.com,
5 and go to the artificial reef section there, and we have a list of
6 all of the publicly-deployed reefs there, and it's quite extensive,
7 and so you can go there as an alternative. Thank you.

8
9 **DR. SWITZER:** Yes, and I think most of those are part of our
10 sampling frame. Thanks.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. We've got another question from Captain
13 Walker.

14
15 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Dr. Switzer. Great work. I'm told, by my
16 scientist associates around here, that this is some of the best
17 population data available at this time, and so I want to say thanks
18 for that. I'm kind of fascinated with it. I love the presentation.

19
20 I didn't understand, or didn't know about, several of the things
21 you brought up here, and so I like it, and I would be happy to --
22 You know, I'm not familiar with the funding issues, but I would be
23 happy to, you know, consult with the council, if there's any way
24 we can -- Anything you need from us, or me, to kind of help you
25 keep the ball rolling on funding, and I would be happy to help you
26 out there.

27
28 **DR. SWITZER:** Thanks for that. I appreciate that.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We've got another question from Dr. Walter.

31
32 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks, Ted. This is really good to bring to the
33 council, and I think it's really excellent that, like all of us
34 involved in fisheries in the Gulf, we start to realize the value
35 of this survey.

36
37 I liked the mention of the SEAFish webpage, where we can all get
38 the most up-to-date indices at any time, which I think is maybe
39 not even enough of an appreciated opportunity, where, if you want
40 to see what is the current index for any species, it's there on
41 the SEAFish webpage, and we try to keep that up as up-to-date as
42 possible, and so, if you want to see where is the survey for gray
43 triggerfish, or where is the survey for vermilion, and so I think
44 that's really valuable here.

45
46 I think this is the right time to start talking about the future
47 here of this, and making this truly a Gulf-wide partnership,
48 probably using the SEAMAP model for individual states to start

1 picking up some of this methodology, and utilizing it too, as
2 SEAMAP has really effectively been a partnership where states pick
3 up their trawl samples, and they pick up their longline samples,
4 and I think that's probably the model we want to start thinking
5 about.

6
7 The more support that that can get from this council will be more
8 valuable, and I think that's going to be a conversation that's
9 going to be ongoing as we transition from what was largely RESTORE-
10 funded, or NFWF-funded projects, to thinking about how we make
11 this mainline advice that's really part of our essential survey
12 portfolio. Thanks.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** We have a comment, or a question, from Mr.
15 Donaldson.

16
17 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Regarding the funding,
18 obviously, this is an extremely important survey, and something
19 that we would like to see continue. We're working with our states
20 in the commission, talking with our congressional folks, and trying
21 to garner support for this, so we can get some long-term funding
22 for it, and so it's on our radar, and it's something that we're
23 working actively to get some funding for, and just FYI.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** That's great to hear, Dave. Appreciate that
26 update there, and, Ted, certainly keep us apprised for anything
27 you need from the council along those lines. I know you said that,
28 at some point, you'll need some council support, and just keep us
29 in the loop here, and, like Ed was talking about, and Dave, we'll
30 try and see what we can do here. Just keep us in the loop, okay,
31 my friend?

32
33 **DR. SWITZER:** Definitely. Appreciate that. Any other questions
34 for Dr. Switzer? All right. Seeing none, thanks a lot, Ted.
35 Appreciate it.

36
37 **DR. SWITZER:** Thanks, all. Have a good one.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Moving right along in the agenda, we've
40 got one other item in the Reef Fish Committee, and that is some
41 discussions of exempted fishing permits coming from Louisiana. We
42 have Tab B, Number 11(a) in your agenda, and I'm going to turn
43 this over to Mr. Schieble and Mr. Strelcheck.

44 45 **DISCUSSION OF EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS**

46
47 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Andy, do you prefer to go
48 first? Okay. I'll go first.

1
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Sorry, Chris. Do you want me to say a few words
3 first, just to -- Okay. Let me just talk a little bit about where
4 we're at in the process, so the council understands today kind of
5 what Chris and team are, obviously, trying to accomplish.

6
7 With the exempted fishing permit process that's codified in the
8 regulations, when an exempted fishing permit is submitted to the
9 Fisheries Service, we review it, and, at some point in time during
10 that review process, we determine whether it should move forward
11 or not, and so, if we deem it needs to move forward, or can move
12 forward, we'll say it warrants further consideration, and, at that
13 point, we go out for public comment.

14
15 We request public comment through a fifteen to forty-five-day
16 public comment period. It's an opportunity for us to share the
17 exempted fishing permit that has been submitted to us. We also
18 put a Federal Register notice out with the kind of high-level
19 summary and details of the exempted fishing permit.

20
21 I say all this because Chris and team from LDWF has been very
22 helpful in terms of working with the Fisheries Service. We're
23 kind of in the process of that review right now, and I know they
24 want to be open and transparent with sharing some of this
25 information with the council.

26
27 We've had some back-and-forth, and I think, as early as this
28 morning, you've actually received a modified exempted fishing
29 permit, based on some of the initial conversations we've been
30 having, but I wanted to emphasize that, right now, this is still
31 under review.

32
33 We still need our attorneys to look at. We still need other people
34 to, obviously, provide input, and so what I would expect is that
35 we'll continue to work with LDWF with regard to changes, updates,
36 revisions, and then, at some point, hopefully we deem it as ready
37 to move forward for public comment and bring this back to the
38 council for a more formal discussion of the EFP itself and the
39 recommendations that you could then provide.

40
41 The decision to approve or disapprove the exempted fishing permit
42 lies with the Fisheries Service, but certainly we take into
43 consideration your recommendations when we solicit public comment,
44 and so I just wanted to let you know where we're at in the process.
45 I'm happy to answer any questions, and then I know Chris and Ryan
46 are going to kind of go through at least their initial proposal
47 and where things stand today.

1 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Andy, and I just want to reiterate that
2 Louisiana has been working intensively with the Fisheries Service,
3 and I would like to thank Andy and Frank on their time they've
4 made available to us over the past two weeks.

5
6 We had a virtual meeting last week with them to go through some
7 details, and correct some things, and they met with us here during
8 the council meeting, and we made some modifications to the EFP
9 based on those two meetings, and your briefing book has been
10 updated to that version, which is what you're seeing on the screen
11 here. We that completed yesterday.

12
13 It's, obviously, a work in progress. It's listed as a draft
14 version of that, and so this is not the formal submission. It's
15 here to show you the changes that we've made, and to garner some
16 input from you, but, as Andy mentioned, it's not part of the formal
17 comment process yet.

18
19 We hope that that would be for the October meeting coming up, with
20 an official submission of the EFP, as well as start the comment
21 process once he says that that's taken place, and so, with that
22 said, I'll just go over a few generalized high-level changes that
23 we've made.

24
25 We don't need to go through this in extreme detail, I don't think,
26 but, if you have individual questions when we get to the end, then,
27 obviously, ask, or you can pull me aside and ask later, so we don't
28 take a ton of time for this, but mainly the original version that
29 we had posted in the briefing book was constrained by a two-month
30 season.

31
32 Our goal was to move the season structure to the spring months,
33 or, well, summer, June and July, to overlap with snapper season
34 for our anglers, to get an idea of what the harvest rate would be
35 for amberjack overlapping the snapper season, as opposed to in the
36 fall.

37
38 Upon consultation with the Fisheries Service, it was deemed that
39 it would help to have an allocation in here to better test LA Creel
40 up against an allocation, just like we do with red snapper, and so
41 we monitor with weekly landings updates that you all receive
42 through our email blasts, as well as our press releases during the
43 snapper season.

44
45 We monitor the exact same way on a weekly basis using LA Creel,
46 the allocation. We work through some effort formulas with LA Creel
47 data. It's been very difficult to come up with this, because of
48 the season structure over recent years.

1
2 If you just took a simple average of our landings from 2014 through
3 the last year, 2025, which wasn't even a full season, it would be
4 about 180,000 pounds, but that's not real, because the season
5 structure -- In previous years, we had a May season, and then we
6 had August, September, October, if you remember, and then we
7 switched to just September, October. It's been kind of all over
8 the place, right, with the season makeup.

9
10 We applied recent landings from a two-month season in 2024 to what
11 we see for the summer effort, basically during snapper season, and
12 so what would that summer effort look like in June and July, and
13 apply that to the harvest level, or landings that we have in the
14 fall, and come up with a generalized allocation number, which is
15 that 68,000 you'll see, and then not 180,000.

16
17 It may be low. I expect it possibly could be low or high, depending
18 on how that summer effort goes in any given year. You can see,
19 this year, for snapper season, we had actually closed, and we're
20 reopening this coming weekend, and so each year is different. It
21 won't exactly be the same, but that's the goal for that part of
22 it.

23
24 We've also added a commercial component to the EFP. It doesn't
25 work off of any exemption for the commercial fishery. It doesn't
26 have anything to do with allocation for the commercial fishery.
27 It simply has us having more intensified biological sampling of
28 the fish coming from the commercial fishery, and the reason for
29 that is because amberjack, in commercial fishery, have a larger
30 minimum size length of thirty-six-inch. The recreational fishery
31 is thirty-four, and so we're trying to get more age and growth
32 data along -- Side-by-side with the recreational data to see what
33 those seven fish coming off of the commercial fishery boats look
34 like in age comps, right, and length and weight data, of course,
35 as well.

36
37 Moving through that, it will still be constrained, like I said, to
38 the two-month season, June and July of 2027, and so, for this year,
39 we're fishing starting September 1 through October, just like
40 everybody else in the Gulf, because this has not been implemented
41 yet, but, the subsequent year, we would preclude the fall season.

42
43 The plan is that we would have the Secretary issue a declaration
44 of emergency. Louisiana would not fish the September-October
45 season in 2027, next year, and we would only fish the June-July
46 season, and that would make up the difference there, and then we're
47 asking for renewal in 2028, to do the same thing, hoping to get a
48 continuous time series of landings data using LA Creel over two-

1 month periods for a three-year duration.

2
3 I think that would set up at least a reasonable harvest estimate
4 that LA Creel can determine for Louisiana over that time period to
5 go forward.

6
7 A lot of this data, you can see how it was calculated, is in the
8 appendices of this, and so, maybe, Bernie, can you scroll down on
9 the screen to -- Let me tell you what page it starts at here. It's
10 page 7 down to the appendices. Keep going, and there should be
11 some tables. Go to page 8. There you go.

12
13 Okay, and so you can see how these things were calculated to come
14 up with the 68,060-pound allocation, and then the second table
15 down there shows the landing estimates in numbers of fish,
16 converted to pounds, and then the confidence interval for those,
17 and you can see how widely heteroscedastic the numbers would be,
18 statistically, because of the season structures of those given
19 years that we have, and it makes it very difficult to come up with
20 what we consider an average, right?

21
22 Scrolling further down to the next page, Bernie, you can see we
23 applied June and July effort to what we consider the projected
24 landings in pounds over each of those given years, if the season
25 were actually in June and July instead of the season structures
26 that we had, and it widely varies between 129,000 pounds and 51,000
27 pounds, and so that's the range, and that's pretty much it.

28
29 If you have any questions, I'll take them, feedback, but, again,
30 this is not the formal public comment process. This is simply
31 informative to show you where we're at, and we're continuing to
32 work with Andy and Frank on this.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Any comments, or questions, for Mr.
35 Schieble or Andy? Dr. Allen.

36
37 **DR. ALLEN:** Chris, thanks for this. Could we go up to that last
38 table? I'm just seeing this, and making sure I understand it.
39 One page up. Okay. I see. Okay, and so, the landings estimate,
40 that's the confidence interval around the landings estimate, and
41 so, in 2025, 534 fish landed, and the confidence interval is around
42 392, and so high variation. I've got you. Okay. All right,
43 thanks. I was misreading that when I first went by, and so thanks
44 for that.

45
46 I'll just add, while I've got the mic, that I think, you know, any
47 age composition type stuff would, obviously, be really useful for
48 this, to get good age data from -- You'll get age data only from

1 the commercial? Did I understand that, or it would be rec, too?

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so that's a great question, and I probably
4 missed that, or skipped over it, but all the fish that are
5 intercepted dockside are going to get handled for age and growth
6 data, as much as possible, from the recreational side as well as
7 the commercial side, because of that size difference between the
8 commercial minimum and the recreational.

9
10 Back to this, the confidence interval is an artifact of the season
11 structure, right? The rare dockside intercepts, as we talked about
12 when we gave those landing updates back in April that showed how
13 many amberjack come to the dock in a very truncated season, right,
14 that's what's generating this. It's not the confidence interval
15 from LA Creel.

16
17 **DR. ALLEN:** I got you. Thank you, Chris.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

20
21 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I just wanted to emphasize a couple of things
22 that Chris kind of touched upon, but make sure the council is
23 clearly aware of this, and so you received, obviously, an EFP
24 application in your briefing book initially. That's been modified.

25
26 When we started the conversation around this EFP way back in
27 January, when we were hearing from Louisiana, and, in the meantime,
28 South Atlantic has been proceeding with some red snapper EFPs, as
29 C.J. is well aware, and the Fisheries Service got sued, and a court
30 injunction was issued.

31
32 Essentially, the court decision laid out that the EFPs in the South
33 Atlantic, and similar for now Louisiana, while they're making
34 adjustments, needed to specify a catch level, or a catch limit
35 that they would be managing to, and then we need to make sure that
36 these EFPs clearly can show how overfishing is prevented.

37
38 I think, for amberjack, it's even more important, given that we've
39 been trying to rebuild this fishery for quite some time, that any
40 EFPs that come in, Louisiana or anyone else, obviously build that
41 record, have those catch levels, and document that information.

42
43 Part of our review really is now substantially, in light of those
44 court decisions in the South Atlantic, how they now relate to the
45 EFP here being submitted by Louisiana, and working very carefully
46 through the process, obviously, to address that court decision.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Schieble.

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** One thing I forgot to mention in here, as I was
3 trying to recap everything, and it's a lot, but we also have a
4 payback provision in here for us, and so we're going to monitor
5 this just like we do at snapper season with LA Creel on a weekly
6 basis. We'll have weekly landings. There's the week lag period
7 in there, as usual. If we exceed that allocation, then we would
8 subsequently pay that back the next year during the June and July
9 season, take it off the top.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. I have a question, real quick, and so,
12 these landings estimates that you have, I'm assuming these are in
13 LA Creel units? Okay.

14
15 This is the first time I'm seeing this quota requested here,
16 obviously, and I can't speak for the other states here, but, just
17 doing some rough math, I mean, the point why I asked whether this
18 is in LA Creel estimates or not is because, obviously, the quota
19 is monitored in a different data unit here, different data
20 currency, but, even taken at face value, this is roughly 17 to 20
21 percent of the ACT and the ACL.

22
23 Just looking at where Florida typically is, you know, we can be
24 upwards of 92 percent of the entire Gulf-wide harvest, or even
25 down to 50 percent, and typically, on average, about 75 across the
26 Gulf there, and so coordination with the states is going to be
27 important here, because, even just doing that rough math, that
28 leaves 8 percent of the total quota for Mississippi, Texas, and
29 Alabama, just doing rough math there.

30
31 Because these are in different data currencies here, I think that's
32 going to be more important, to make sure that we're in a common
33 currency, to ensure that that's not happening there, and so I'm
34 just going to throw that out there, but I am, obviously, supportive
35 of utilizing EFPs to evaluate a lot of these challenging management
36 topics that we have to go with, but I'm just emphasizing the
37 importance of coordinating with the states here, since this is the
38 first time that I've actually seen these numbers. Mr. Schieble.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, C.J., for that, and you're correct.
41 It's 16.8 percent of the 404,000, and the thing we don't have, and
42 you pointed out, is we don't have a calibration, right, for
43 amberjack from LA Creel to the FES, nor do we have it for any of
44 the other states, and so that's one thing for consideration.
45 However, we do have three states in a common currency in the
46 northern Gulf, and so I anticipate -- I don't think it's going to
47 be a huge problem.

1 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Pointing out that we're not in that same
2 currency, and we're a majority of the harvest in Florida there.
3 Mr. Anson.

4
5 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree with your comment. I
6 too am supportive of EFPs as a potential avenue for investigating
7 particular challenges, or problems, that we have in the fishery,
8 but, similar to that, I had the question that you brought up, but,
9 also, I guess looking beyond the what-ifs, is if we have to
10 implement a reduction in catch at some point as we look at a three-
11 year program.

12
13 I guess that percentage of reduction would then be at a percentage
14 reduction for an individual state, or states, if other states want
15 to apply the EFP, at least my thoughts, and then I had a question
16 for Andy.

17
18 Specific to the federal waters off of Louisiana, or any other
19 participating state, if they were to submit an EFP, and were
20 assigned one, will NOAA have to close the federal waters to
21 amberjack fishing for everyone off of the State of Louisiana when
22 they meet their -- At the end of their season, or meet their quota?

23
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I'll just say I think we're too early in the
25 process to really kind of weigh-in on those specific questions.
26 We really need to, you know, work with them with regard to
27 finalizing any sort of draft of the EFP for public comment, and
28 then we could be better positioned to answer it, based on that
29 design of the EFP.

30
31 While I have the mic, I just want to respond to C.J.'s comment
32 about comparable units, and so I, obviously, agree with that
33 comment. Obviously, that's been a challenge in other areas.

34
35 The SEDAR 70 I believe was the last assessment for amberjack, and
36 that was done in 2020, and so we would want to look back at that
37 to determine how data was used with regard to either LA Creel or
38 MRIP data for the State of Louisiana.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any more questions for Mr. Schieble or Mr.
41 Strelcheck? Dr. Simmons.

42
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had a quick
44 question, and I think I might have missed this. On the commercial
45 information that you guys are collecting, you're currently doing
46 that during the normal season with your state samplers, but,
47 because you have increased sampling during this EFP, you're saying
48 you want to capture that with the commercial fleet as well, and

1 did I understand that correctly?

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and you got it exactly right.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Dugas.

6
7 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Just real quick, I just want
8 to say thank you to Andy for working with the Department of
9 Wildlife and Fisheries to do this, and also Chris and Ryan, and
10 Patrick is here. I'm sure Jason has had his hand in it too, and
11 Tyler. From the recreational folks in Louisiana, I know it's much
12 appreciated, and so thank you.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Dr. Simmons.

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Sorry. One more question. I haven't
17 had a chance to review the updated EFP, but are you guys going to
18 require any additional type of endorsement, or add-on, during this
19 process to the offshore permit, to try to get at maybe a finite
20 number of anglers that are targeting these species?

21
22 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** No, because the goal would be to overlap with red
23 snapper season anyway, to increase the number of dockside
24 intercepts, and then the effort as well, and I think we'll be able
25 to better capture what a typical summer harvest rate would be
26 because of that. That's why we're trying to move the season for
27 that, and we don't want to modify the LA Creel protocol, because
28 it's certified in the current condition that's in.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Not seeing any other hands -- Captain
31 Frady.

32
33 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. I appreciate the
34 presentation, and I, for one, do support everybody trying to figure
35 out how to maximize their days on the water, and maximize their
36 catch, but I guess, for the past eight years, or nine years now,
37 we've been trying to rebuild the greater amberjack population.

38
39 My biggest concern is -- Because I remember sitting in the audience
40 and listening to the conversations, and the arguments about how to
41 rebuild it, and everybody would talk about the spawning, when the
42 greater amberjack starts spawning in like April or May, and now
43 we're talking about increasing harvest levels when the water is
44 hot, but, during June and July, those fish need to be spawning.

45
46 As fishermen, we see fish populations changing, either good or
47 bad, and my biggest concern is, if we turn everybody loose under
48 an EFP, or whatever reason, and we start hammering those fish, and

1 chipping away at that biomass while they're spawning during June
2 and July, I'm worried about everything we've been doing so far to
3 try to rebuild the fishery.

4
5 This is the first year that I go out there almost every day, and
6 I'm seeing signs of recovery, but we're not out of the woods yet.
7 I'm cautious, and I'm not against, but I'm just cautious, because
8 what I'm seeing is we've got a lot of twenty-eight-inch fish out
9 there, to about thirty-two inches. What we don't have is those
10 fish greater than thirty-two inches in abundance.

11
12 Now, Louisiana may be a little bit different than what we are,
13 because of all the structure you have, but, where I am, and the
14 number of days I spend on the water, I'm just concerned about
15 opening harvest in June and July and negating -- You know, we set
16 the allocation to begin August 1, and that was not going to work,
17 and so we changed it to September, when we started harvesting.

18
19 Last year, I was catching amberjack full of eggs in September, and
20 I don't want to do anything that would negate the rebuilding
21 process, and my number one goal is I want people to catch fish,
22 but is June and July the best option? Just to -- I've heard people
23 say that we're going to reduce the mortality, or the bycatch, of
24 catching fish in the summer.

25
26 Well, everybody who fishes for jacks knows it's a discretionary
27 fishery. You don't catch them while you're fishing for red snapper
28 using cut bait, hardly. You catch them because you're putting
29 down live baits, trying to catch a bigger snapper, and it's an
30 indirect harvest, but if it was legal to open, or target, those
31 fish during June and July, then all you've done is just take a
32 fishery that was, you know, primarily targeted for red snapper and
33 switched it over, just to increase more fish to the dock.

34
35 That's my biggest concern, is people are going to intentionally
36 switch their harvest, the way they fish, just to kill amberjack,
37 but there would be no amberjack floating off if they weren't
38 switching over and trying to catch a bigger snapper, and I
39 understand the frustration of seeing a twenty or thirty or forty-
40 pound jack swimming off behind the boat that can't get his breath,
41 and you see it going to go to waste. I do get that, but, as a
42 conservation-minded captain, I don't want to see us do anything
43 that reverses what we've been working for for the past eight years.
44 Thank you, sir.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Captain Frady. Mr. Schieble.

47
48 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Captain Frady, thank you for that, and I can

1 empathize with what you're saying there, and I think, you know,
2 for one, the fishery off Louisiana, like you said, is different
3 than other parts of the Gulf, because we're fishing, you know,
4 structure most of the time, right, and part of this is to look at
5 reducing that discard in the summer months.

6
7 You know, those guys are snapper fishing on those structures.
8 There's a discard mortality in amberjack, and the hope here is
9 that we could potentially reduce some of that by allowing the
10 harvest to take place there, but keep, again, in mind that we're
11 sticking with the current size and bag limit that we have in place.

12
13 It's still one fish per person, thirty-four inches, and so it
14 doesn't change any of that, as far as the retention part of it,
15 but, yes, and, I mean, those hot water months, that's -- You know,
16 the more amberjack that are not being discarded is going to benefit
17 us in the long run, hopefully.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Captain Walker.

20
21 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I just had a question. How would this affect the
22 Mississippi guys? They wouldn't be allowed to fish Louisiana
23 waters, because you're on your own state allocation?

24
25 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so it would be where you land the fish.
26 Just like if we had snapper season open in Louisiana, but it's
27 closed in Mississippi right now, the same situation. They can
28 come to Louisiana, launch, go out and fish and land in Louisiana,
29 but they can't land the fish back in Mississippi right now, right?
30 Same situation.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Any other questions? All right. This was
33 good discussion. Thank you, Mr. Schieble and Mr. Strelcheck. I
34 appreciate the work going into that. This is the last item that
35 we had on the Reef Fish Committee, unless there's some other
36 business that was not brought up earlier. Mr. Strelcheck.

37
38 **OTHER BUSINESS**
39 **AMENDMENT 62 UPDATE**
40

41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Real briefly, and we've gotten some questions
42 about Amendment 62, which is the red grouper catch limit increases,
43 and certainly Frank, or Mara, can correct me if I'm wrong, but we
44 had a public comment period that closed earlier this month. We
45 did get a good number of comments on the rule, and so it's taking
46 us a little bit longer to finalize that rule package and submit it
47 to our Headquarters office. The team has been working on that,
48 even this week, and are hopeful that we're going to be able to

1 clear that and move it to headquarters very soon.

2
3 We're also exploring the potential for waiving the cooling-off
4 period, which would allow the rule to go into effect as soon as
5 it's published, and we'll see, obviously, if that's successful,
6 but timing right now is likely to be sometime in October for
7 implementation. If we get the waiver of the cooling-off period,
8 it could be in September, but a lot of that depends on how quickly
9 it's cleared through Headquarters, and so I just wanted to share
10 that with you. Frank, anything else to add? Okay. Thanks.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thanks for that update, Andy. Anything else?
13 All right. This will conclude Reef Fish Committee, and I'll turn
14 it over to you, Mr. Chair.

15
16 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 26, 2026.)

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