

GULF COUNCIL

311TH MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Golden Nugget Biloxi

Biloxi, Mississippi & Virtual

August 24-27, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

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

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

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

STAFF

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

1
2 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**
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4 John Black.....Panama City, FL
5 Susan Boggs.....Orange Beach, AL
6 Eric Brazer.....Shareholders Alliance
7 James Bruce.....LA
8 B.J. Burkett.....Panama City, FL
9 Lt. Patrick Carron.....MS
10 Anthony Colletti.....LA
11 Scott Daggett.....Madeira Beach, FL
12 Joshua Ellender.....LA
13 Richard Fischer.....LA
14 Cole Ganey.....Biloxi, MS
15 Brad Gorst.....Clearwater, FL
16 Jim Green.....Destin, FL
17 Buddy Guindon.....Galveston, TX
18 Ken Haddad.....ASA, FL
19 Frank Helies.....NOAA
20 Judy Helmey.....SAFMC
21 Scott Hickman.....Galveston, TX
22 Rob Hilliard.....
23 Rachel Hisler.....Double Bayou, TX
24 Dylan Hubbard.....FL
25 David Johnson.....Madeira Beach, FL
26 Mark Kelley.....Panama City, FL
27 Trenton Knepp.....
28 Randy Lauser.....Madeira Beach, FL
29 Larry Lemieux.....
30 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
31 Tommy Loper.....Biloxi, MS
32 Lawrence Marino.....LA
33 Jerry McClure.....Biloxi, MS
34 Jack Melancon.....LA
35 Chris Niquet.....FL
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38 Kyle Powell.....
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41 Clay Shidler.....Crystal River, FL
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48 Mark Tryon.....Gulf Breeze, FL

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2	Matt Walia.....	NOAA OLE
3	John Walter.....	SEFSC
4	Johnny Williams.....	Galveston, TX
5	Dale Woodruff.....	AL
6	Bob Zales.....	Panama City, FL
7	Jim Zurbrick.....	Steinhatchee, FL

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TABLE OF MOTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1
2 [PAGE 122](#): Motion to form a small working group made up of staff
3 from the SEFSC, council, each Gulf state, SERO, and the Gulf States
4 Marine Fisheries Commission to understand data inputs and
5 methodologies applied to landings data for the red snapper stock
6 assessment (SEDAR 98). [The motion carried on page 125.](#)
7

8 [PAGE 125](#): Motion to move Action 2 to Considered but Rejected.
9 [The motion carried on page 126.](#)
10

11 [PAGE 126](#): Motion to include options for regional management
12 delegation. [The motion carried on page 126.](#)
13

14 [PAGE 126](#): Motion to add an alternative in Action 3 to use 50
15 percent of the average landings from 2014 through 2024 and 50
16 percent of the average landings from 2021 through 2024. [The motion](#)
17 [carried on page 127.](#)
18

19 [PAGE 127](#): Motion to add an alternative in Action 3 to use 50
20 percent of the average landings from 2003 through 2024 and 50
21 percent of the average landings from 2021 through 2024. [The motion](#)
22 [carried on page 129.](#)
23

24 [PAGE 139](#): Motion to make Alternative 2, Option 2c the preferred
25 alternative. [The motion carried on page 139.](#)
26

27 [PAGE 141](#): Motion to request NOAA Fisheries establish August 26,
28 2026, as the control date the Gulf Council may use if it decides
29 to recommend exemptions for non-profit organizations operating
30 quota pools or other similar quota distribution programs from
31 requirements to obtain or retain shares or allocation in the Gulf
32 Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota
33 programs. Non-profit organizations established after the control
34 date or those that opened an IFQ account with NOAA Fisheries after
35 the control date may not be eligible to apply for an exemption
36 from reef fish permit requirements or other requirements
37 recommended by the council in the future. [The motion carried on](#)
38 [page 148.](#)
39

40 [PAGE 148](#): Motion to add proposed Actions 5.1 and 5.2 to the
41 amendment. Also, to include a requirement that entities that
42 received exemptions must report yearly who applied, received, and
43 were denied allocation. Also, to include a requirement that NMFS
44 makes this report available to the Gulf Council. [The motion](#)
45 [carried on page 150.](#)
46

47 [PAGE 151](#): Motion to move Alternative 2, Alternative 5, and
48 Alternative 6 in Action 3 to Considered but Rejected. [The motion](#)

1 [carried on page 151.](#)

2
3 [PAGE 151:](#) Motion to make Alternative 1 in Action 3 the preferred
4 alternative. [The motion carried on page 151.](#)

5
6 [PAGE 151:](#) Motion to move Alternative 2, Alternative 5, and
7 Alternative 6 in Action 4 to Considered but Rejected. [The motion](#)
8 [carried on page 151.](#)

9
10 [PAGE 151:](#) Motion to make Alternative 1 in Action 4 the preferred
11 alternative. [The motion carried on page 152.](#)

12
13 [PAGE 152:](#) Motion to take Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper
14 Amendment 44: Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management
15 Measures out to virtual public hearings. [The motion carried on](#)
16 [page 152.](#)

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18
19

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

4
5 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Good morning. Welcome to Biloxi. Today
6 we're going to work down the agenda as it's printed on the
7 schedule. Before we get started, I'm going to turn it over to Mr.
8 Strelcheck to go through the induction of reappointed council
9 members. Mr. Strelcheck.

10
11 **INDUCTION OF REAPPOINTED COUNCIL MEMBERS**
12

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

17
18 (Whereupon, reappointed council members are inducted.)
19

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

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I echo
30 those comments. Welcome back, and thank you for your time here.
31 We'll move to the first agenda item, and it will be the Admin and
32 Budget Committee, and General Spraggins will take us through this
33 committee.

34
35 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 24, 2026.)
36

37 - - -

38
39 August 26, 2026
40

41 **WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION**
42

43 - - -
44

45 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Golden
46 Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday morning, August
47 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.
48

1 **CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS**
2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Welcome to the 311th meeting of the Gulf Council.
4 My name is J.D. Dugas, chair of the Gulf Council. Please place
5 your cell phone or similar device on silent or vibrating mode.
6 For the benefit of all, we ask that private conversations take
7 place outside the meeting room. Additionally, alcoholic beverages
8 are not permitted in the meeting room.
9

10 The Gulf Council is one of eight regional councils established in
11 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, now known as
12 the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Our purpose is to serve as a
13 deliberative body to advise the Secretary of Commerce on fishery
14 management measures in federal waters of the Gulf of America,
15 ensuring sustainable fisheries resources that benefit the nation.
16

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

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

34 This meeting is being digitally recorded for the public record.
35 As a courtesy, I ask that all participants seated at the table
36 introduce themselves, beginning on my left.
37

38 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Kesley Banks, Texas.
39

40 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas Parks and Wildlife
41 Department.
42

43 **MS. BRENDA BALLARD:** Brenda Ballard, Texas.
44

45 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana.
46

47 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Billy Broussard, Louisiana.
48

1 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Joe Spraggins, Mississippi.

2
3 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** Jason Osborne, Mississippi.

4
5 **MR. JOHNNY MARQUEZ:** Johnny Marquez, Mississippi.

6
7 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries
8 Commission.

9
10 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.

11
12 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional
13 Office.

14
15 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.

16
17 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center,
18 Deputy Director for Science and Council Services.

19
20 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Lt. Jackson Morton, United States Coast Guard.

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

23
24 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama.

25
26 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.

27
28 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida.

29
30 **MR. ED WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.

31
32 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Mike Allen, Florida.

33
34 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida Fish and Wildlife
35 Conservation Commission.

36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.

38
39 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, all. First up is the adoption
42 of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda?
43 Not seeing any, can I get a motion to approve the agenda as written?
44 Mr. Anson, and seconded by Dr. Overton.

45
46 Next up is approval of the minutes. Are there any edits, or
47 changes, to the minutes? Not seeing any, can I get a motion to
48 approve the minutes as written? Mr. Osborne, and seconded by

1 General Spraggins. Next up, we're going to go to supporting
2 agencies, and we're going to go down the list, and we're going to
3 go first to the South Atlantic, and I think it's Ms. Judy HelmeY.
4

5 **MS. JUDY HELMEY:** Yes, sir.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead. Thank you.
8

9
10 **SUPPORTING AGENCIES UPDATES**
11 **SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON**

12 **MS. HELMEY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The South Atlantic Fishery
13 Management Council met in St. Augustine, Florida, on June 8th
14 through the 12th, 2026.
15

16 Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation and Dolphin Wahoo
17 Regulatory Amendment 3, Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff
18 updated the council on progress of the dolphin MSE and the results
19 of recent modeling efforts. The MSE indicated that the dolphin
20 stock is in high abundance, with stock biomass two to three times
21 the SSB MSY level, and the fishing mortality is well below FMSY.
22

23 The MSE further indicated that the management actions proposed in
24 Regulatory Amendment 3 would not have a measurable impact on stock.
25 Based on the favorable stock indications from the MSE, the council
26 voted to discontinue work on the amendment. The Southeast
27 Fisheries Science Center will continue to develop and fine-tune
28 the MSE for the council to use in the future management of the
29 dolphin fishery. Can everybody hear me okay?
30

31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, ma'am. We have you.
32

33 **MS. HELMEY:** Thank you. New Comprehensive Amendment, the council
34 initiated a comprehensive amendment to clarify commercial trip
35 limit and possession requirement for the three finfish FMPs,
36 Snapper Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Dolphin Wahoo.
37 The amendment would also consider revising the framework procedure
38 under each of the FMPs to allow more timely modification to trip
39 limits and bag limits.
40

41 Under the Snapper Grouper commercial management measures,
42 Amendment 60 considers revisions to commercial snapper grouper
43 unlimited permits and changes to management measures intended to
44 increase commercial trip efficiency, such as eliminate the two-
45 for-one requirement for SG 1 permits and increasing trip limits
46 for several snapper grouper species.
47

48 The council also added an action to develop an amendment to

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

6
7 Then we're under the snapper grouper fisheries management. The
8 council is considering reducing the number of species in the FMU
9 to streamline management. The council will review this amendment
10 again in September and consider approving it for public hearings
11 in December.

12
13 Under headboat vessel limits, the council continued to discuss
14 measures to address the needs of the South Atlantic headboat fleet
15 by relaxing possession limits for vessels that carry many
16 passengers and collect a fee per passenger. The council will
17 discuss this amendment again at the September 2026 meeting, with
18 the intent to approve it for public hearings in December.

19
20 Sunsetting of spawning special management zones, the council
21 established five spawning special management zones in 2017 where
22 fishing for, harvest of, or possession of snapper grouper species
23 is prohibited. Three of these SSMZs are natural sites with a
24 sunset regulation after ten years. The council will consider
25 extending the sunset provision from seven to twenty years or
26 removing it.

27
28 Reopening of seasonal closure for on-demand black sea bass pots,
29 the closure protects North Atlantic right whales and other marine
30 mammals that can easily become entangled in rope fishing gear.
31 Fishing in these areas with black sea bass pots would be
32 conditional on pots being equipped with on-demand retrieval
33 systems, which significantly lower the chance of whales and other
34 mammals becoming entangled.

35
36 Mutton and yellowtail snapper assessment response, the joint
37 amendment is in response to the most recent stock assessment for
38 mutton and yellowtail snapper. The council plans to approve the
39 amendment for public hearings in September 2026. Thank you.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Helmey. We have a question from
42 Mr. Sanchez.

43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Not a question, but a comment. I just want to let
45 you know that Dewey has been in my thoughts and prayers, and I'm
46 praying every day for a quick and full recovery.

47
48 **MS. HELMEY:** Thank you very much, and I will pass that along.

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

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions or comments? No,
4 we do not. Thank you, Ms. HelmeY.

5
6 **MS. HELMEY:** Thank you.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll move on down to the Mississippi law
9 enforcement efforts. It's going to be Lt. Carron to give a
10 presentation, and, next up, we'll have Mr. Walia online line.

11
12 **MISSISSIPPI LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

13
14 **LT. PATRICK CARRON:** Mr. Dugas and council members, thank you for
15 having me this morning. I'm going to give you a brief update on
16 our enforcement efforts in Mississippi with our joint enforcement
17 agreement with NOAA.

18
19 For turtle excluder priority, we've had 476 hours of at-sea patrols
20 and sixty hours of dockside patrols. Reef fish enforcement, we've
21 worked 220 hours of at-sea patrols and eighty hours of dockside
22 patrols. Individual fishing quota enforcement, we've worked
23 ninety-five hours of dockside patrols, primarily performing
24 inspections at landings.

25
26 Lacey Act and IUU fishing, we've worked 150 hours dockside patrols,
27 and, general enforcement, we've worked a total of 492 at-sea patrol
28 hours and 120 dockside hours, and, so far, we have noticed a high
29 degree of compliance. We haven't had very many enforcement actions
30 taken, and so that is my report. Do I have any questions?

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Carron. Do we have any questions?
33 General Spraggins.

34
35 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Well, first off, I want to thank you all. You
36 know, I think we have the best marine patrol unit in the United
37 States. Of course, I know every other state might have the same
38 idea, but I do know that we have a great unit, and we appreciate
39 what they do, and, you know, I just wanted to give you a quick
40 thing, too.

41
42 With all the things that are, you know, going on with the islands
43 and stuff with the National Seashore, Marine Patrol has stepped
44 up, and, on Labor Day weekend, they're going to start patrolling
45 the islands with them, and so they're going to help National
46 Seashore to help out, to get more people on it, and so we appreciate
47 them, and this is something that we're helping our federal as well
48 to be able to do it, and it's not costing them a dime, and so thank

1 you all.

2
3 **LT. CARRON:** Thank you for the kind words, Director.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Any other questions
6 or comments? Not seeing any, thank you, Lt. Carron.

7
8 **LT. CARRON:** Thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Next up, we're going to go online,
11 virtual, to Mr. Walia with NOAA OLE.

12
13 **NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (OLE)**

14
15 **MR. MATT WALIA:** I appreciate it, Mr. Chair. I'll just stand by
16 and wait for the slides to come up, or I can wait. If you want
17 the Coast Guard to go, I can go after.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Give us a second, Mr. Walia. Okay, Mr. Walia.
20 We're ready.

21
22 **MR. WALIA:** All right. I appreciate it. Thanks for bearing with
23 me here and listening online. I'm going to give you a couple
24 highlights where we've been. It's been a pretty busy summer. The
25 council report I usually have should be ready come October, and so
26 we're in between reports right now.

27
28 I wanted to highlight here that the mini-season was a big effort
29 for us. It's not necessarily in the Gulf, but we're taking a lot
30 of our resources, a lot of our EOs from the Gulf going to this,
31 and so, obviously, this just happened here at the end of July, but
32 we had four boat crews in the Upper, Middle, and Lower Keys.

33
34 It was a real busy season. You see that picture down below, and
35 that's Alligator Reef. It's just stacked with boats, and so it
36 was very busy this season. We encountered a lot of boats, a lot
37 of compliance assistance, big boats and small boats that you see
38 there.

39
40 We encouraged people, when we came across folks fishing near SPAs,
41 or even in them, to download the sanctuary app, and make sure they
42 have them, so they're aware of boundaries of where they can go and
43 what they can do.

44
45 Our main -- Our big boat that we have there is our thirty-six that
46 you see there, and the Metal Shark above, but we came across a lot
47 of stuff, from lobster fishing in the SPAs, and that lower-left
48 picture is -- There's a whole bunch of mangroves that were speared

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

3
4 We had FWC with us on one of the boat crews in Marathon, and so we
5 were able to make a combination of state and federal cases, but
6 that was some big effort that we did recently, and I have a few
7 other cases I would like to highlight too, to show you what we're
8 up to.

9
10 This was off of Florida here. We had a case recently, and it was
11 a commercial longliner. They were fishing inside the twenty-
12 fathom line. They had multiple hauls inside. When we went down
13 and interviewed the captain at the dock, and did our investigation,
14 we had verbal and written admission that, hey, you know, I was in
15 that closed area.

16
17 On top of that, they also landed early. They didn't follow some
18 IFQ requirements. Their vessel ID requirements on the weather
19 deck were too small as well, and so they got cited for a slew of
20 things, and what we did ahead of the season, before this actually
21 happened -- That bottom-right picture, that's a compliance email
22 that our folks sent out to all reef permit holders, letting them
23 know where the closure areas are, and so this is a courtesy thing
24 that we did fleet-wide.

25
26 We're constantly giving calls and emails to industry as well, and
27 so we're doing what we can to let folks know, but it does happen,
28 and so this one ended up being a NOVA, working with our General
29 Counsel partners,

30
31 Another case we had deals with observer refusal, and so,
32 essentially, these are boats that are selected by the regional
33 observer program under their specific permit to call in and take
34 an observer. It is important for the council. The more coverage
35 there is, the better data there is for management decisions.

36
37 What happens is, if these boats don't call in, or they fail to
38 meet the observer requirements, they get referred over to us, and
39 so this particular one was referred over to us. There was a lot
40 of conflicting statements between the owner and the vessel operator
41 of what they received, what their communications were, versus what
42 we were able to show for the elements.

43
44 They ended up contesting the fine, which is fine. That's within
45 everyone's purview and right to do that, but sometimes -- That
46 usually has the potential to increase that fine if you're still
47 found liable afterwards, and that's what happened here.

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

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

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

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

30 The one on top was offshore Louisiana. This was an actual referral
31 from Louisiana, and so a boat was about seventy-five miles
32 offshore. When they came upon them, and started asking questions,
33 there was a lot of conflicting statements of who had a permit, and
34 the boat, and what they were doing. You see they had reef fish
35 cut as bait, and a couple other things as well, and so this one
36 was actually a combination of state and federal charges pursued,
37 and this ended up going to our General Counsel, who issued a
38 \$24,500 NOVA to this boat for that, and so that shows with that
39 coming across.

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

1
2 Then, lastly, below, there was one off the Galveston area that was
3 about forty miles offshore. The same deal. They held a lot of
4 other open access permits, but they failed to acquire the closed
5 one. You know, it's a lot more effort to get that closed access
6 permit. That was a \$19,800 NOVA, and so there's some good cases
7 we got out.

8
9 Like I said, we've got some more to report on in the future. These
10 cases take time to develop, but we still encourage any tips. Just
11 give us a name. You know, industry, get it our way, and we can
12 work on it, and, like I said, hopefully we have some more to report
13 on as this continues too, with the season still going on.

14
15 Just a couple of reminders, and recreational gag is right around
16 the corner. Once that does close at October, just a reminder that
17 the federally-permitted for-hire boats are not allowed to retain
18 any of that afterwards, and, just in general, just make sure
19 everyone knows what permits you need, what the bag limits are.
20 Ignorance isn't an excuse.

21
22 A lot of the cases I just highlighted to you, that was what we
23 heard from everyone, from fishing inside a closed area to not
24 having the correct permit, not knowing what they're doing, folks
25 down in the Keys in the mini-season, and so just being aware of
26 what you're doing before. You know, kind of know before you go
27 and you're good to go, and, finally, last slide.

28
29 Our contact info is here. Like I said, you can highlight anything
30 you have, tips, complaints, and get everything our way, and we can
31 look into it. What I did want to highlight here is that email
32 address. That's relatively new, and so that's a great way to get
33 in touch with us here divisionally. Whatever I get there, we can
34 farm out to the respective region of where the tip is, or what
35 activity is going on, and get it out more regionally, and so, with
36 that, that concludes my report, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walia. Do we have any questions
39 or comments for Mr. Walia? Not seeing any, Matt. Thank you for
40 your presentation. Next up is Mr. Donaldson, with Gulf States
41 Marine, and he'll be followed by Lt. Morton.

42
43 **GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**
44

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

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

3
4 The infrastructure improvement agreement, as John mentioned, we've
5 got an RFP out to do some analysis with the creel designs and the
6 State Reef Fish Survey in Florida. We are collecting proposals
7 until the end of this week, and then hopefully we'll select a
8 contractor and have that available within -- The results should be
9 ready within about a year.

10
11 With the red snapper research projects, all the projects are in
12 place, and we're working on them. They're off to a good start.
13 There hasn't been any unexpected issues, and the plan is to have
14 the results of those projects presented during our 2027 annual
15 meeting, somewhere in Texas, with the commission meeting, and then,
16 for the at-sea stuff in Louisiana and Texas, we're in the middle
17 of the final year of the field work.

18
19 You may recall that, last year, we had some issues with getting
20 observers on Louisiana charter boats, and it wasn't from lack of
21 unwillingness, but it was there just wasn't room, that they were
22 -- The boats were full, and didn't have places for the observers,
23 but we're doing much better this year, and things are going well,
24 and well in Texas as well.

25
26 Then, the last slide, our newest program is the Gulf
27 Interjurisdictional Fisheries Research Program. We awarded the
28 project to the South Alabama, and they're working with a consortium
29 of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and eight universities and
30 researchers. We're putting out the tags in cobia, and those include
31 both acoustic and satellite tags.

32
33 We have deployed satellite tags, but we have not deployed any --
34 Excuse me. We deployed acoustic tags, but haven't deployed any
35 satellite tags as of yet, but we're working with outreach to the
36 public to make them aware of these receivers, and trying to get to
37 try to get them aware of the tags.

38
39 Then, at the June council meeting, you'll recall that we talked
40 about -- You all talked about king mackerel, and possibly including
41 that in this work. We have been talking with the Dauphin Island
42 Sea Lab and NOAA Fisheries, and are currently looking at the
43 possibility of including king mackerel, to get some tags out, and
44 so we're -- There are, obviously, some logistics to be worked out,
45 but it appears that that's something that we will be able to
46 accommodate, and so that's some good news.

47
48 Trevor presented that information from the Mexican fishery, and

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

4
5 With that, lastly, our commission annual meeting is coming up in
6 October. It's scheduled for October 12th through the 15th in Destin.
7 As always, everyone is welcome to attend, and details are on our
8 website, and so, with that, I'll answer any questions.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Do we have any
11 questions, or comments, for Mr. Donaldson? Not seeing any, Dave,
12 thank you again, and so we'll move on to the U.S. Coast Guard, Lt.
13 Morton, and it's going to be followed by the Admin Budget
14 Committee.

15 16 **U.S. COAST GUARD**

17
18 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I begin with the
19 presentation, I would like to introduce and welcome some members
20 from our Gulf Fisheries Regional Training Center over in New
21 Orleans that made the drive up today. They run the training
22 program for all of our boarding officers. They do fisheries
23 throughout the entire Gulf, and so they're really great at what
24 they do, and they also can provide that same training to our state
25 agency partners, and so, if anyone has any questions, they'll be
26 in the back here today, sticking around for a while, and so thanks
27 for them for coming.

28
29 Okay, and so, for Exclusive Economic Zone enforcement, these stats
30 are good through July. We had twenty-one interdictions thus far
31 this year, and 1,813 pounds of red snapper seized, and, really,
32 to-date, you know, the big one for us is the Heartland District
33 has referred ten lancha cases for prosecution of the Lacey Act and
34 other criminal charges, and that doesn't include the OGAs. I know
35 there's been a couple of cases that they've taken on as well.

36
37 Of the thirty-four people, lancheros, that have been detained,
38 twenty-four have been sentenced, five have pled guilty, and five
39 are still pending, and, with that, through July 5th of Fiscal Year
40 2026, we detected 125 EEZ incursions, and that represents a 29
41 percent decrease from Fiscal Year 2025.

42
43 A couple of action shots from interdiction. We have one of the
44 lanchas out there taken from the aircraft, and so you can see
45 they're underway, making way, trying to get back to Mexico, and
46 Coast Guard Station South Padre Island was able to interdict them
47 there, and so a huge shoutout to them.

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

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton, for your presentation.
10 Any questions, or comments, for Lieutenant Morton? Not seeing
11 any, thanks again. All right. We're going to move to some
12 committee reports, and we're going to start with Admin and Budget,
13 and then next would be Gulf SEDAR. We'll give Bernie a moment to,
14 I guess, pull up the document, or the report. General Spraggins.

15
16 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**
17 **ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE REPORT**
18

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

25
26 The committee adopted the agenda, Tab G, Number 1, and the minutes,
27 Tab G, Number 2, of the January 2026 meeting were approved as
28 written. We reviewed the final 2026 funding budget and activities,
29 Tab G, Number 4. Staff presented the proposed final funded 2026
30 budget in Tab G, Number 4. The total funding received is
31 \$4,634,838. That includes \$323,650 in one-time funding.

32
33 Staff reviewed year-to-date expenditures and proposed budget
34 revisions to reflect planning activities throughout the remainder
35 of the year, including costs associated with the relocation of the
36 council office. Adjustments were made to the draft 2026 reviewed
37 in January to account for year-to-date activities and future
38 planned activities.

39
40 A member of the committee member asked about the reduction in the
41 Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) salary budget. Staff
42 explained that the budgetary reduction was to account for a lower-
43 than-scheduled meeting activity that has occurred to-date. The
44 reduced expenditures was largely attributable to the virtual SSC
45 meeting and shorter meetings scheduled while awaiting the results
46 of the recreational data collection system (MREP-FES) pilot
47 results.

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

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. We have a committee
11 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
12 **seeing any , is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
13 **motion carries.** General Spraggins.

14
15 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Thank you, sir. Discussion of Future Funding
16 Cycle Timing and Planning, Tab G, Number 5, staff provided a short
17 presentation of recent trends in the timing of federal funding
18 releases, the operational challenges associated with receiving
19 annual council funding after the beginning of the calendar year,
20 and a few potential strategies for future council consideration.

21
22 The shift to funding after January 1 has increased the council's
23 reliance on carryover funds and created challenges for meeting
24 planning, contract administration, and cash flow management.
25 Staff also noted that similar challenges are being experienced by
26 all regional fishery management councils.

27
28 The committee was asked to comment on the suggestions presented
29 and offer directions or thoughts. After the discussion, the
30 committee expressed support for splitting the initial state
31 liaison and commission contract advancements into two payments and
32 observed that states would continue to assist the council where
33 possible.

34
35 Committee members generally supported continued evaluation of the
36 proposed cost-saving measures and requested that the staff develop
37 additional information and recommendations for future
38 consideration, and, with that, sir, I would ask if there's any
39 questions for the committee, sir.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Do we have any
42 other questions or comments for Admin and Budget?

43
44 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I would like to thank the staff. You know, I
45 would like to thank Dr. Simmons and her staff. They have really
46 worked hard. They've worked hard to make sure that they can keep
47 this operational, and try to keep everything going, and I
48 appreciate all the states for helping as much as they possibly

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

3 4 **SEDAR COMMITTEE REPORT**

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, General Spraggins. Any
7 other business? Not seeing any, all right. Thank you, Dr.
8 Simmons, and Beth, and all the staff. We're going to move on to
9 the SEDAR Committee report, and next up will be Ecosystem.

10
11 The committee adopted the agenda, Tab I, Number 1, and approved
12 the minutes, Tab I, Number 2, of the April 2025 meeting as written.
13 SEDAR Steering Committee Assessment Schedule Updates and Meeting
14 Outcomes, Tab I, Number 4, council staff reviewed the outcomes
15 from the virtual Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR)
16 Steering Committee meeting held on July 20, 2026, Tab I, Number 4.
17 One of the items staff highlighted was concern regarding the
18 independence of cooperative review workshop appointees who
19 previously contributed to the data and assessment portions of the
20 same SEDAR assessment.

21
22 In discussing SEDAR review workshop participants, a committee
23 member agreed it was difficult to find enough Scientific and
24 Statistical Committee (SSC) members to review stock assessments at
25 times, but was more concerned with ensuring reviewers were
26 appropriately experienced and familiar with Gulf fisheries.

27
28 Another committee member agreed and thought those concerns should
29 take priority to be discussed by the SEDAR Steering Committee
30 regarding independence for reviewers who may have participated
31 elsewhere in the SEDAR process.

32
33 A council member recommended establishing recusal criteria for
34 reviewers and that, while they appreciated external reviewers,
35 they agreed with committee members that familiarity with Gulf
36 fisheries was critical.

37
38 Another council member asked whether the budget could accommodate
39 hiring independent contractors, and council staff said that was
40 unlikely. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center asked whether a
41 participant with conflict could participate in the review without
42 having a former role as an independent reviewer. Council staff
43 and committee members generally disagreed with this approach, as
44 it would incur additional participation costs without the added
45 benefit of that participant's contribution to the written review
46 report.

47
48 A committee member asked whether there were any data on cobia

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

5
6 Other Business, there was no other business discussed. This
7 concludes my report. Is there anything that needs to come before
8 SEDAR? No? All right. We're going to move on to Mr. Anson, with
9 Ecosystem, and then Dr. Banks for Sustainable Fisheries. Mr.
10 Anson.

11 **ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE REPORT**

12
13
14 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the
15 agenda, and the minutes from the November 2025 meeting were
16 approved as modified.

17
18 Identification of Stakeholder-Driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues,
19 Doctors Kelsey Furman, with the University of South Alabama, Nate
20 Brugnone, with Two Six Technologies, and Steve Kasperski, with
21 Kasperski Consulting, presented preliminary results for work
22 contracted by the council to identify fishery ecosystem issues of
23 concern to Gulf of America stakeholders using social science
24 approaches. The council funded this work to support the first
25 phase of operationalizing the Gulf fishery ecosystem plan.

26
27 The project team described their approaches, which included
28 stakeholder workshops held in each Gulf state, a Fisherman Feedback
29 survey, use of a large language model analysis to capture broader
30 ecosystem perspectives from online sources, and outlined
31 prospective fishery ecosystem issues they have identified thus
32 far.

33
34 The committee asked clarifying questions about the data sources
35 used for the large language model analysis and provided suggestions
36 for focusing the online data sources on ecosystem issues directly
37 impacting federal fishery species.

38
39 In addition, committee members discussed the broad scope of the
40 fishery ecosystem issues identified thus far and recommended that
41 future efforts focus on identifying tangible issues that are within
42 the council's jurisdiction and have potential management
43 solutions.

44
45 A committee member suggested that consideration of issues outside
46 of the council's jurisdiction was still an appropriate use of the
47 processes outlined in the fishery ecosystem plan and doing so would
48 acknowledge the concerns of stakeholders and communicate fisheries

1 impacts to partner agencies.

2
3 The committee member provided an example that mitigation of red
4 tide does not fall within the council's purview, yet red tide
5 impacts have been successfully integrated into stock assessments
6 for several species. Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff
7 suggested that work on fishery ecosystem issues should align with
8 ongoing Science Center efforts on similar topics, when possible.

9
10 Staff and the project team stated that the next phase of the
11 project would include working with the Ecosystem Technical
12 Committee to narrow the scope of the fishery ecosystem issues and
13 identify issues with management levers that could be prioritized
14 for council consideration.

15
16 **The committee recommends, and I so move, upon completion of**
17 **identifying a list of fishery ecosystem issues, send the list to**
18 **the Ecosystem Technical Committee to begin development of an action**
19 **item next steps for council review and consideration.**

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. We have a committee motion
22 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing**
23 **any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the**
24 **motion carries.**

25
26 **MR. ANSON:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Okay. Next up, we're going
29 to move to Sustainable Fisheries, with Dr. Banks, and we're going
30 to follow that with the Shrimp Committee report. Dr. Banks.

31 32 **SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE REPORT**

33
34 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the
35 agenda, Tab E, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab E, Number
36 2, of the January 2026 meeting.

37
38 Discussion of Five-Year Standardized Bycatch Reporting, Tab E,
39 Number 4, Frank Helies, with SERO, gave a presentation on
40 standardized bycatch reporting methodologies, SBRM. He discussed
41 elements to include in the review and noted that the five-year
42 SBRM review must be completed by January 2027.

43
44 Mr. Helies indicated that, once the review is drafted, next steps
45 will include SSC and council reviews and National Marine Fisheries
46 Service approval. He finally noted that the potential need for
47 management action would be considered after completion of the
48 review.

1
2 Council staff asked whether the SBRM review could be presented to
3 the SSC during its September 2026 meeting. Mr. Helies replied
4 that he will discuss the issue with the SBRM review team before
5 deciding. Mr. Chair, this concludes the report.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Is there any other business
8 to come before Sustainable Fisheries? Mr. Helies.
9

10 **MR HELIES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just speak to that last
11 point. After some deliberation, I think we can skip the SSC
12 meeting, and bring it directly to the council when we're ready.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Helies. Anything else?
15 Okay. We're going to move to the Shrimp Committee report and Mr.
16 Schieble.
17

18 **SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT**

19

20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Shrimp Management
21 Committee adopted the agenda, Tab D, Number 1, with updates on
22 Shrimp Amendment 19, the shrimp permit moratorium, the Shrimp
23 Futures Program, and the Early Adopter program added under Other
24 Business. The committee approved the June 2026 meeting minutes,
25 Tab D, Number 2.
26

27 July 2026 SSC Meeting Summary, Tab B, Number 7(a), and the
28 presentation, Tab B, Number 7(b), Mr. Moncrief, SSC chair,
29 presented on the SSC's discussion of the updates to red snapper
30 bycatch estimation in shrimp trawls and the SSC's motions.
31

32 He then presented on the SSC's discussion of the Southeast
33 Fisheries Science Center's proposed methodology for estimating
34 gray triggerfish bycatch in shrimp trawls through the use of a
35 proxy species.
36

37 A committee member expressed concern about the use of lane snapper
38 as a proxy species for gray triggerfish. The SSC chair responded
39 that they discussed further validation and noted one SSC member's
40 suggestion to use the same approach and apply it to a species that
41 is included in both the shrimp observer program and SEAMAP, to see
42 if it performs similarly. Another committee member commented that
43 the spatial overlap between lane snapper and gray triggerfish Gulf-
44 wide in SEAMAP trawls appeared to help convince the SSC to approve
45 this approach.
46

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

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

9
10 **The committee recommends, and I so move, that the methodology using**
11 **observer data that has been developed by the Southeast Fisheries**
12 **Science Center and being used to estimate red snapper bycatch in**
13 **the Gulf is acceptable for data input into the current red snapper**
14 **assessment model.** That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee
17 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr.
18 Strelcheck.

19
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to point
21 out, because I mentioned this in committee, that, you know, this
22 is a scientific recommendation. I don't necessarily view this as
23 something that council has to weigh in on, and, if you think of it
24 in the reverse, if we were opposing this, right, it's not
25 necessarily within our authority, or purview, to say this is not
26 an appropriate methodology, and so I just wanted to acknowledge
27 that.

28
29 I think we're fine to accept this in Full Council as a committee
30 motion, and recommend it move forward, but I think, going forward
31 with future motions, we need to consider the SSC advice, with
32 regard to their authority and responsibility, relative to the
33 council authority and responsibility, and things that focus on the
34 management and management authority are, obviously, within our
35 lane.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that's
40 a very fair point that you guys have brought up during the
41 committee. I think what we were trying to do is just bring this
42 full circle, since there were so many resources that were put
43 forward with the shrimp trawl bycatch for the finfish species,
44 that came from the center, and then with the SSC, and so I think
45 that's what we were trying to do here, and so I agree it is a
46 little awkward, and so thank you.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Is there any other discussion on the

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

3
4 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** The committee recommends, and I so move, to support
5 expanding the bycatch methodology to include additional finfish
6 species that are presently in the observer database. The SSC also
7 recommends that the results of these additional efforts be
8 presented to the shrimp bycatch working group and/or the
9 appropriate SEDAR workshop or topical working group. That motion
10 carried unanimously, and I have a suggestion, or discussion, on
11 this motion.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee
14 motion on the board. Any discussion on the motion? Mr. Schieble.

15
16 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, Mr. Chair, and I think it may be helpful if we
17 modify the wording in here to remove the words "SSC also" and
18 replace that with "council", since we've copied this verbatim from
19 the SSC report, right, and we just put it in here, and I think we
20 need to say -- It's a council motion at this point, and so we
21 would take the "SSC also" out and replace that with "the council
22 recommends that the results of these additional efforts be
23 presented to the shrimp bycatch working group and/or the
24 appropriate SEDAR workshop or topical working. I guess I need a
25 second.

26
27 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Second.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and so Mr. Schieble -- I have the substitute
30 motion on the board, and it's seconded by Mr. Broussard. Dr.
31 Simmons.

32
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** It's a substitute motion, Mr. Chair?

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.

36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I guess that would be cleaner. Thank
38 you.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Is there any discussion on the substitute
41 motion? Is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any,
42 the substitute motion carries. Mr. Schieble.

43
44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so we have a third motion here. The
45 committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council write
46 a letter to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center supporting
47 future investigations into improving the estimation of bycatch for
48 finfish species not characterized since 2025 in the observer

1 **program.** That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have another
4 committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the
5 motion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion?**
6 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

7
8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** The SSC chair then reviewed the discussion with
9 National Marine Fisheries Service on potential analyses for
10 updating the minimum threshold for federal Gulf shrimp permits. A
11 committee members stated that NMFS presented the SSC with initial
12 data and information, with updated catch per unit effort and
13 overall shrimp effort, and that bycatch information is being
14 updated.

15
16 He commented that there is also the complexity of poor economic
17 conditions that the industry is facing, which has led to a
18 declining effort that prevents achievement of optimal yield. He
19 added that the council may want to focus on the upcoming trigger
20 to establish a review panel for examining details of a permit pool.

21
22 Council staff noted that Shrimp Amendment 17B states that the
23 review panel would consist of shrimp AP members, SSC members,
24 National Marine Fisheries Service staff, and council staff.
25 Council staff added that, in July of 2026, the trigger for the
26 review panel was only ten permits away from being met, and so the
27 council may want to consider the panel's membership at its October
28 meeting. NMFS staff stated that they could bring an update to the
29 number of federal Gulf shrimp permits to that meeting.

30
31 Committee members stated that work should be postponed, rather
32 than ended, on updated analyses of the minimum threshold for
33 permits, as the more immediate need is for the council to consider
34 the review panel for a shrimp permit pool. Then, as more
35 information becomes available, the minimum threshold can be
36 evaluated more holistically with the shrimp industry, especially
37 in light of economic conditions.

38
39 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to postpone work on**
40 **updated analyses for the minimum threshold number of federal Gulf**
41 **shrimp commercial permits and continue work on Shrimp Amendment 20**
42 **to update status determination criteria.** The motion carried
43 unanimously. Mr. Chair.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Another committee motion
46 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing**
47 **any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the**
48 **motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

1
2 **MR. SCHEIBLE:** Okay. Status Update on Working Group to Address
3 Interactions and Bycatch of Protected Resources in Shrimp Trawls,
4 council staff provided the status update on the working group.
5 Council staff and NMFS staff met on August 5, 2026 to discuss a
6 data request for holding a working group meeting.

7
8 That data request included updating protected resources bycatch up
9 through 2025, updating smalltooth sawfish population viability
10 analysis based on the SSC's feedback from its May 2025 meeting,
11 information on active federal shrimp permits, and various economic
12 information on the federal Gulf shrimp industry. Council staff
13 expects to have an agenda prepared for the first meeting of the
14 working group in the week or two following the council meeting.

15
16 Dr. Walter notified the committee that the Southeast Fisheries
17 Science Center has secured funding for increased observer coverage
18 in the pink shrimp fishery, with the plan to double observer
19 coverage from about two-and-a-half percent to 5 percent by 2027,
20 which will provide better information in that area where smalltooth
21 sawfish interactions occur.

22
23 Council staff inquired why there would not also be increased
24 observer coverage in areas where giant manta ray interactions
25 occurred. Dr. Walter responded that it was due to concerns about
26 the status of smalltooth sawfish and that any mitigation efforts
27 would require good spatially explicit data.

28
29 Other Business, Update on Shrimp Amendment 19, the shrimp permit
30 moratorium, SERO staff responded that their public comment period
31 ended at the beginning of August 2026, and the decision must be
32 made by next week, at which point the amendment package will go to
33 Headquarters. The proposed rule will publish August 25, 2026,
34 with a thirty-day comment period. Comments will be due on
35 September 24, 2026.

36
37 Update on the Shrimp Futures Program, Dr. Walter stated that the
38 scenario planning workshop will have target dates of December 1st
39 through 3rd, 2026 and February 23rd through 25th, 2027, likely in
40 the Louisiana region, with stakeholders to develop scenario
41 planning for the future of the shrimp fishery. This will help
42 identify specific actions that can be taken to ensure the
43 sustainability of the shrimp fishery.

44
45 Update on the Early Adopter Program, Dr. Walter noted that four
46 years of data has been collected through the Early Adopter Program.
47 Devices have been installed on 312 vessels. Remaining funds should
48 allow for devices to be installed on a total of 884 vessels, which

1 may be above the current active fleet number.

2
3 Once the framework action is implemented, the sampling design for
4 vessels that are required to have a cellular electronic logbook
5 will be rolled out, and it will ensure representative coverage in
6 space and time, as well as particular areas of high interaction
7 with protected resources. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Is there any other
10 business to come before Shrimp? Dr. Walter.

11
12 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think I would like to just clarify the
13 comment about why we're focusing on the pink shrimp fishery added
14 observer coverage, and, as I think about it, you know, one of the
15 rationales that went into our decision process was the restricted
16 location for smalltooth sawfish, where they are actually
17 restricted to a much smaller spatial area, and so that's where
18 most of the population we think occurs, whereas the giant manta
19 have a much larger spatial distribution, which is why we would
20 say, yes, that's an area we need more, increased, observer
21 coverage, and I just wanted to get that on the record, as to the
22 rationale behind the agency's decision process there. Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Walter. Anything else?
25 All right. Not seeing any -- Dr. Simmons.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, on the
28 Early Adopter Program, and I could have missed this during the
29 committee, Dr. Walter, but are you -- Do you know, with the
30 contractors -- Are we having issues with getting the fleet to
31 continue to put those devices on, because you said the 884 may be
32 higher than the current active fleet number, and so are the
33 contractors having trouble getting the fleet to put those devices
34 on there, or are things still going very smoothly with that
35 process? Do you know?

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

38
39 **DR. WALTER:** You know, I think I would have to ask the contractors
40 how that's going. My understanding is it's going fairly well.
41 There's only just so much like manpower to be able to get to the
42 fleet, in terms of the fleet as a whole, who now could --
43 Potentially we could cover the entire active fleet.

44
45 I think that opens the door to vessels that might not previously
46 have considered that, and particularly with the pending amendment,
47 where there will be a requirement to have selected to have a
48 functioning unit, and I think that -- I hope that will be an

1 opportunity for those vessels to reach out to say, yes, we now see
2 that that would be beneficial, to get that free, but I think it's
3 just the manpower. You know, it's covering the whole Gulf, getting
4 vessels when they happen to be not fishing, and available, to put
5 those on. Thanks.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter Okay, and so we've
8 completed all the committee reports that we can at this moment,
9 and so we're going to move on a little bit differently in Other
10 Business. There is an extension of state cownose regulations into
11 federal waters, and it's Tab U, Number 1, and I'm going to turn it
12 over to Dr. Sweetman to lead us through that before lunch.
13

14 **OTHER BUSINESS**

15 **EXTENSION OF COWNOSE RAY REGULATIONS INTO FEDERAL WATERS**

16
17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just kind of
18 highlighting some things that FWC is considering here, and so FWC
19 is considering regulations for the harvest of cownose rays, because
20 the species is currently unregulated in Florida waters. Therefore,
21 recreational harvest falls under Florida's default bag limit of
22 two fish per person or 100 pounds, whichever is greater, while
23 there are currently no commercial harvest limits.
24

25 Establishing some specific regulations would create conservation
26 measures that would benefit for this late-maturing species that
27 has an extremely low capacity for population growth, due to their
28 life history characteristics.
29

30 FWC has recently learned about some unreported and illegal harvest,
31 and the commercial fishery is much larger than previously
32 understood, in part because some dealers have been unintentionally
33 reporting under some wrong trip ticket codes. FWC is currently
34 developing recreational and commercial management measures for
35 cownose rays and is working with stakeholders to establish
36 appropriate commercial vessel limits.
37

38 These rays apply site fidelity to bays in Florida, but they
39 routinely travel into federal waters. Thus, for the greatest
40 conservation benefit, we would like Florida's regulations to apply
41 consistently across state and federal waters of Florida, and, to
42 facilitate this, we're asking the council for a letter indicating
43 that the council does not intend to regulate cownose rays in Gulf
44 federal waters in the immediate future. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
45

46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Do we have any questions
47 for Dr. Sweetman? Captain Walker.
48

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

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Ms. Levy.

7
8 **MS. LEVY:** Just to clarify, for folks that are listening, so it's
9 not like an area extension, right? Under the Magnuson Act, a state
10 can regulate a state-registered vessel outside of its state waters
11 in federal waters if there's no fishery management plan, et cetera,
12 and so I just want it to be clear, for folks that are listening,
13 that it's not like it's extending to everybody who is in federal
14 waters. It's state-registered vessels that are then fishing in
15 the EEZ. Thanks.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Any other questions or
18 comments? Mr. Strelcheck.

19
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'll forward a letter that we've sent to
21 the Fish and Wildlife Commission for the council's awareness, and
22 it doesn't look like we copied you, but we were essentially
23 acknowledging that we didn't have any concerns, and that there
24 wasn't any imminent plans that we were aware of for the Gulf or
25 South Atlantic Councils to regulate cownose rays.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. So it would be helpful
28 to get a motion for staff to write a letter. Mr. Walker.

29
30 **MR. WALKER:** I'll go ahead and make that motion to recommend staff
31 -- There we go. Draft a letter to FWC recommending that there is
32 no immediate intent from the Gulf Council to manage cownose rays
33 in federal waters.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have Ms. Levy.

36
37 **MS. LEVY:** Just a suggestion, and so write a letter to FWC that
38 there is no immediate intent to recommend managing cownose rays,
39 and so to FWC that there is no immediate intent to recommending
40 management, or whatever it should be.

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Perhaps stating? Direct staff to
43 write a letter to FWC stating there's no immediate intent to manage
44 cownose rays in federal waters. Is that okay, Mr. Walker?

45
46 **MR. WALKER:** Direct staff to write a letter to FWC that there is
47 no immediate intent to manage cownose rays in federal waters of
48 the Gulf of America. Works for me.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Captain Walker has a motion on the board.
3 Is there a second? Mr. Broussard seconds. Is there any discussion
4 on the motion? Captain Walker.

5
6 **MR. WALKER:** Just to let everybody know what's going on, there's
7 been some issues with the species, and I've learned that they have
8 one baby every eighteen months, and so they're easily exploited,
9 and overexploited, and currently there's no regulation at all, and
10 some people have, you know, started to recognize an opportunity
11 there, and so this is good to hand it off to FWC. They've got
12 some things going on in state waters as well, and so that's the
13 issue here.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Any other discussion
16 on the motion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion?**
17 **Seeing none, the motion carries.**

18
19 We are ahead of schedule, and I think this is -- We're going to go
20 to lunch. This is going to take us to lunch. It's a stopping
21 point, and so we'll come back on schedule at 1:30, and we'll start
22 with Ms. Muehlstein, and then go into public comment. See you at
23 1:30.

24
25 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 26, 2026.)

26
27 - - -

28
29 August 26, 2026

30
31 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

32
33 - - -

34
35 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Golden
36 Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday afternoon,
37 August 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, folks. We're going to get started,
40 and so, before we get into public comment, our next agenda item is
41 going to be Ms. Muehlstein, and she's going to give us a
42 presentation about the fifty years of MSA.

43
44 Before Emily gets into that, I just wanted to make a comment, so
45 that everyone understands. I believe, over the last year, Emily
46 has been working on this, and it's not only for the Gulf Council,
47 but it's for all eight regional councils, and so I just wanted to
48 make everyone aware of that, that she's not only working for us,

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

3
4 **CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION**
5 **AND MANAGEMENT ACT IN THE GULF**
6

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

16
17 In addition to that, I have to thank Mr. Eguia and Ms. Muehlstein
18 for putting together the infographics and the photo contest, which
19 you're going to see the results of. That was a lot of extra work
20 on top of their normal day-to-day activities, and so I think you'll
21 really enjoy it, and so thank you, all.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and thank you, Emily. Go
24 ahead and take it away.

25
26 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Well, man, and I didn't know you were going
27 to set me up so I felt like I had to perform here. Good lord.
28 Okay, and so you may or may not know, at this point, that this
29 year actually marks fifty years of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
30 Conservation and Management Act.

31
32 It also marks fifty years of the regional fishery management
33 council system, including fifty years of this Gulf Council, and I
34 think it's really cool, and this milestone, to me, seems like it
35 will invite us all to kind of look back at our work and reflect on
36 how much the world around us has changed since 1976, and think
37 about how the council system has provided for a responsive,
38 innovative, and adaptive management system along the way.

39
40 Okay, and so let's put this in context, fifty years. Fifty years
41 ago, things looked a lot different than they do today, right? The
42 way that the Gulf Council operated was different, and the way that
43 fishermen fished was way different.

44
45 In 1976, there wasn't the internet. Most people had never touched
46 a personal computer. We sent information through the mail, with
47 stamps and envelopes, right? Collecting and analyzing, and even
48 sharing information, was a much slower process than it is today.

1
2
3 If you think about it, today, we literally carry more computing
4 process in our pockets than entire agencies had fifty years ago.
5 We have access to incredible amounts of data almost instantly, and
6 we can collaborate across the Gulf without being in the same room,
7 right? We take this stuff for granted, right?

8
9 We can communicate with our stakeholders in real time. We don't
10 have to send them letters, and we are using much more sophisticated
11 tools to support our fishery science, our management, and our
12 public engagement than we did when we got started fifty years ago.
13

14 In those same fifty years, fishermen went from operating without
15 publicly available satellite navigation, right, and I hear these
16 stories about fishermen putting a piece of soap on a rope to see
17 if they're on the right bottom, and like things have changed so
18 dramatically that I think it's really easy for us to forget how
19 big fifty years really is. Now, those same fishermen can access
20 GPS, radar, and the internet, like, literally at their fingertips
21 while they're offshore.
22

23 When we look back over those fifty years, where things have changed
24 so incredibly, what really stands out isn't how much we've
25 accomplished. It's how much the way that we manage our fisheries
26 have evolved alongside the evolving fisheries, and so, in 1976, we
27 started from scratch, right, and, over that first decade, we put
28 some of the foundations of our Gulf federal management in place,
29 but we didn't stop there.
30

31 As our understanding of ecosystems and fisheries and the people
32 who depend on them changed, our management tools have also changed.
33 We've moved to more sophisticated approaches. We identify
34 essential fish habitat. We protect spawning areas. We established
35 the IFQ program. We also began experimenting with new ways to
36 manage fishing opportunities, right?
37

38 Recreational red snapper sector separation and the delegation of
39 private recreational management to the states represents a
40 willingness for us to try something different when conventional
41 approaches aren't enough, and so this timeline doesn't simply show
42 you like a history of our regulations. It's showing a history of
43 adaptation.
44

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

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

3
4 Fifty years of fisheries, and so today we managed thirty-one reef
5 fish stocks, four shrimp stocks, three coastal migratory pelagics,
6 spiny lobster, red drum, and 140 species of coral, hard coral.

7
8 I think it's really important, first, to focus on the fact that
9 most of the stocks that we manage are healthy. They are producing
10 yield that feeds our nations, our economies, and our communities.
11 In those fifty years of management, only seven of our stocks have
12 ever been overfished at some point. Right now, three have been
13 rebuilt, and four are actively rebuilding.

14
15 In that same fifty years, twelve stocks have been experiencing
16 overfishing, and, currently, we have no stocks that are designated
17 as experiencing overfishing, and so, those successes in rebuilding
18 and stopping overfishing, they represent years of science and
19 management decisions.

20
21 They represent fishermen adapting to regulations, and stakeholders
22 working together to solve some really difficult problems, and, as
23 a result, the Gulf supports an enormous fishery. In fact, we lead
24 the nation in recreational landings, and we rank second nationally
25 for commercial landings.

26
27 When we look at fifty years of Gulf Council management, the story
28 isn't simply about the fish that we manage. We've helped build
29 and sustain fisheries that are productive and economically
30 important and capable of supporting generations of both commercial
31 and recreational fishermen.

32
33 Speaking of those generations of fishermen, these timelines and
34 milestones really do help tell the story of the council system,
35 but it's really -- What's really important is who the system exists
36 to serve.

37
38 Across every state, across our fishing communities, fishermen are
39 the heart of what we do, and one of the defining features of the
40 council system is that management decisions aren't made in
41 isolation, right? They're informed by people who enjoy and depend
42 on fisheries every single day.

43
44 This public involvement that we're about to have this afternoon
45 isn't incidental to this council system. It's foundational, and
46 it brings local knowledge and operational realities and human
47 impacts into this management process in a way that no scientific
48 dataset could ever do, and so I want to acknowledge that, this

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

6
7 Ultimately, successful fisheries management isn't just about
8 managing fish stocks and numbers. It's about sustaining people
9 who connect to our resources, and, behind every management
10 decision, there are real people whose lives and futures are
11 connected to the decisions that are made around this table.

12
13 Okay, and so you might wonder sort of what it is about the council
14 system that has made it endure for these fifty years. What do we
15 have to be proud of? What is the foundation of this system that
16 makes us all here and coming back and doing this hard work?

17
18 I think the answer takes us back to the original vision behind the
19 Magnuson-Stevens Act, which created the council system, and so
20 Senator Warren Magnuson really emphasized the importance of
21 regional management within a national framework, and so sometimes
22 we talk around this table, and we forget that we are a part of
23 like this bigger national machine, right? It's not just our
24 region, but we do get to tailor the decisions that we make to our
25 region. Then there was Senator Ted Stevens, and he really strongly
26 believed that people closest to the fisheries were in the best
27 position to manage them.

28
29 These ideas became the foundation of this system, and I would argue
30 that they are the reason that it has remained resilient through
31 decades of environmental change, technological advancement,
32 shifting economies, evolving public expectations, and even
33 changing politics.

34
35 This system endures, and so the council system wasn't intended to
36 be rigid. It was designed to bring together science and
37 stakeholders and regional expertise within this national
38 conservation framework. It was built to evolve over time as
39 fisheries and communities changed.

40
41 I know a lot of us sit here and think mostly about our Gulf stuff.
42 It's really easy to focus on your own backyard, but, you know,
43 this sort of national framework that we talk about -- Every region
44 is really unique, right, and I think we're all probably glad that
45 it's not, you know, suits in D.C. that are making our fishing
46 regulations. What works in Alaska might not work in the Gulf. It
47 might not work in New England, and the council system was set up
48 to recognize that reality by allowing management approaches to be

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

3
4 The Magnuson Act first provides a national framework for
5 sustainability, and it sets standards for rebuilding fisheries,
6 and reducing bycatch, and protecting habitat, but the councils are
7 where the rubber meets the road, right? We get to tailor
8 management measures to achieve national guidelines, in really
9 unique and responsive ways, to make sure that our local fisheries
10 are managed to their individual needs, and we've demonstrated a
11 true ability to adapt and develop innovative approaches.

12
13 Finally, our system is fundamentally science-based, right? We
14 rely upon collaborative science from the states, and from federal
15 agencies, and from universities to guide our decision-making, and
16 that foundation has really allowed the system to evolve as our
17 understanding of fisheries and ecosystems have improved over fifty
18 years.

19
20 This one is very close to my heart, because this idea that those
21 that are closest to the fisheries help shape the management
22 decisions remains sort of one of the defining strengths of the
23 council system. The councils create a forum where fishermen and
24 scientists and managers and industry representatives and the
25 public all get to participate directly in a process, and that
26 matters, because successful fisheries management can't rely on
27 science alone.

28
29 It requires integration of scientific knowledge with that on-the-
30 water experience and local understanding that we get from those of
31 you in the audience, those of you listening online, and even those
32 of you around this table.

33
34 In the past ten years, I am proud to say that 2,400 people have
35 stood at that podium at a council meeting and provided testimony,
36 and, over that same ten years, we have considered over 12,000
37 public comments gathered online, through letters and during public
38 hearings, and I think that that is something to be really, really
39 proud of, that we have successfully created a place where people
40 participate, and people believe that the opinions that they express
41 are considered, and are actually taken into account when our
42 management decisions are made.

43
44 I'll get off my high horse here, and we'll talk about what we did
45 in order to sort of mark this occasion. We really focused our
46 efforts on two major things. First, we developed a Gulf Council
47 by the number infographic, and, second, we hosted a photo contest
48 to showcase fifty years of Gulf fisheries.

1
2 Bernie, if you just want to jump in, we'll sort of go over by the
3 numbers first, and so this is a two-page infographic that we made,
4 and I first need to acknowledge that this was not a unique idea.
5 I would love to take credit for it, but it wasn't unique. It is
6 modeled very closely after a similar product made by the Mid-
7 Atlantic and also the South Atlantic Council.

8
9 Next, I want you to be aware that, with the exception of the
10 information in that bottom Involving Fishermen section, all the
11 data are from 2024, and they were reported by NOAA, and so I worked
12 really closely with some NOAA staff that were super helpful in
13 getting these numbers for me.

14
15 It's also important to understand that the values on this
16 infographic represent combined marine fisheries, and so it
17 includes both state and federal fisheries. It was really hard, or
18 impossible, to pull out some of the values on the next slide for
19 just our federal fisheries, and so they will -- They do combine
20 all marine fisheries, even the state ones.

21
22 The first thing I want to highlight on this page, and I've already
23 mentioned it, is we rank number one in the nation in volume of
24 recreational harvest. If we did have our South Atlantic liaison,
25 I would poke in, because they have the most recreational fishermen,
26 but we have the most recreational fish landed, and so I don't know
27 what that says about you guys, but I'll take the most fish.

28
29 Then we rank number two in the nation for volume of commercial
30 landings in the Gulf, and I think that's really significant. You
31 know, I know, at least for me, when I think of United States
32 fisheries, I think about like big boats up in the Northeast, you
33 know, making tons of fish at a time, and so I think that's a really
34 interesting thing, that we do produce so much fish commercially as
35 well. It's kind of a big deal, right?

36
37 Second, and I know I'm biased, but I'm really proud to highlight
38 our communication analytics. I mean, we've developed like this
39 incredible network of fishermen across the region, and we have
40 successfully considered public input into our management decisions
41 from a staggering number of comments, collected in so many
42 different ways.

43
44 I know that I don't even go to like my city council meetings,
45 right, like to -- You know, to vote on things that affect my
46 literal backyard, and I think fishermen who spend the time doing
47 this should be really proud of the effort that they make, because
48 it takes a special person to come stand behind a podium and give

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

4
5 On this slide, we highlight fisheries impacts by state. Now, I
6 need to be clear here because some of this, you know, might look
7 a little strange. Recreational effort and landings here are values
8 that are expressed in MRIP Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi, and
9 then the Louisiana values were provided by LA Creel, and the Texas
10 values were provided by TPWD, right, and so it's just sort of
11 important to recognize, and I think we all know it behind the
12 table, but that these numbers are reported by different data
13 collection programs, and so, you know, that's kind of -- It sort
14 of shows up here.

15
16 I will say that there is a direct link to this infographic in our
17 briefing book, and we are working to find a permanent home for it
18 on our website. We do plan to update this annually, or as new
19 data become available.

20
21 Next, we'll move on to the photo contest, Bernie, and so we did a
22 photo contest to celebrate fifty years of fisheries. We created
23 six different categories, and, as you can see from this slide show,
24 we got some incredible photos through this opportunity.

25
26 Of the five categories, or of the six categories we had, five of
27 them were judged internally by the entire council and council
28 staff, and then the best catch category was judged publicly through
29 a social media campaign. Overall, we had 181 photos submitted by
30 110 different people. As a condition of submission, we were given
31 permission to use those photos in our outreach materials moving
32 forward, and so that was really meaningful for us, to get sort of
33 more material to use.

34
35 As you guys know, our social media presence is sometimes met with
36 negativity. However, this campaign was different, and it really
37 stood out, and I do want to recognize Leo. He's our new outreach
38 specialist, and he came up with the idea of hosting this best catch
39 photo tournament on social media. I don't know if you guys saw
40 it.

41
42 I'm going to consider it to be our largest positive engagement
43 effort ever. The contest drove 92,000 social media views, 6,000
44 social media interactions, and we got 1,200 votes on the best catch
45 category. It also resulted in 134 new social media followers.

46
47 Without further ado, and I know you guys can't wait for the actual
48 winners, let's take a look at our winners, and we have some of

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

2
3 The first category, recreational, the best recreational photo,
4 this was submitted by Frank Hartwell. Frank, I know you're in the
5 audience, and can you stand up? Thank you. All right. Best
6 recreational photo.

7
8 Then we'll move on to the next one. All right. Best commercial
9 photo, and so this is Alicia Paul, and this is actually not a
10 picture of Alicia. It's a picture of Joe Harp. Alicia, I think
11 you're in the audience, and you're going to hate me, and can you
12 just raise your hand for me? Good job, Alicia. Next one, please.

13
14 Best historical photo, and so this was submitted by Wally Erickson.
15 This is somebody that I know Captain Ed Walker knows. He's out of
16 Tarpon Springs. He has been honored with his award, and he is
17 aware of it. He's a very sweet guy, who I think was very happy
18 that he got acknowledged for this one, and so thank you, Wally, if
19 you're out there in TV land. Next one, please.

20
21 This is the best marine life or habitat photo. Congratulations to
22 Robert Ellis on this one. I love this picture. That was a really
23 cool one, and so I don't know if he's listening, but thank you for
24 this submission, Robert. Next one, please.

25
26 This is the best coastal community photo, and this was submitted
27 by Barbara Hamlin, and so I like this one as well. Thank you,
28 Barbara. This one is awesome. I love the shrimp boats all in a
29 line.

30
31 Then, finally, our best catch, of 181 photos that were submitted,
32 and congratulations to both Lacey Hughes and Jamie Lee Wilson.
33 Lacey I believe took the photo, and Jamie is the star of the show
34 here. This was our photo tournament winner, 1,200 votes online,
35 which I think is pretty awesome. That is a unit of a fish right
36 there.

37
38 All right, and so let's think about the future. We've kind of
39 looked back fifty years, and what happens in the future? Our
40 oceans are changing, our technology is evolving, and new
41 stakeholder needs continue to emerge.

42
43 The next fifty years is going to bring us some challenges that we
44 can't fully predict today, but, if the history of our council
45 system tells us anything, it's that this endurance does not come
46 from resisting change. It comes from adapting to it, and that is
47 what the council system has done for the past five decades. It
48 has evolved alongside new science and technologies, and changing

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

4
5 Science-based management, regional stakeholder-driven decision-
6 making, and long-term stewardship, and that's why this system has
7 endured, because it was built with flexibility to evolve.

8
9 When we look ahead, the work is going to continue to change. We're
10 going to confront new challenges. We're going to use tools and
11 technologies that don't exist yet, and future leaders are going to
12 bring us new ideas and perspectives into our process, but the
13 foundation of this management system is going to remain strong,
14 and that should give us confidence that our council system is going
15 to continue to innovate, and to adapt, and to serve the fisheries
16 and the communities and the ecosystems that depend on it.

17
18 Before I end our fifty years, I would like to take a moment to
19 acknowledge the people who have lent their time and their knowledge
20 and their energy to getting fisheries management right in the Gulf.
21 To the council members, thank you for taking this responsibility.
22 Thank you for making difficult decisions and bringing diverse
23 perspectives to the table. Sometimes it's a thankless job, and
24 so, once in 50 years, we're going to ask the public to thank you
25 today.

26
27 To the staff, and to the supporting agencies, thank you for the
28 science, and for the data, and the administration. Thank you for
29 the countless hours of work that makes sound fisheries management
30 possible, and, of course, to the fishermen, to the fisheries
31 advocates, thank you guys for sharing your knowledge and your
32 experience.

33
34 I know it feels like banging your head against the wall sometimes.
35 We really do appreciate understanding your concerns, and hearing
36 your ideas, because your participation makes our management
37 better. It doesn't make it perfect always, but it makes it better,
38 and so as I've said, fisheries management isn't always easy, and
39 sometimes the decisions we make are controversial. Sometimes the
40 science is uncertain, believe it or not.

41
42 Sometimes there's competing interests, and strong opinions, and
43 there's oftentimes no solution that's going to make everybody
44 happy, but what matters is that the people continue to show up and
45 ask hard questions and challenge assumptions. We listen to one
46 another, and we work towards the best decision that can be made
47 with the information that we have available.

1 For fifty years, that's what has made our Gulf Council fisheries
2 management possible. This anniversary isn't a celebration of what
3 the council has accomplished. It's more than that, and I want to
4 just thank everyone who has cared enough to be a part of this
5 process, and who continues to do the hard work to get it right,
6 and so congratulations on fifty years, everyone. (Applause)
7

8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Emily. That was
9 impressive. We really appreciate it. Mr. Osborne.
10

11 **MR. OSBORNE:** Emily, as a former staffer of Senator Stevens, I
12 know that he would be incredibly happy with what you put together.
13 The only suggestion he would probably have made is that, if you
14 could put it to song, it would be even better, and so thank you
15 for that.
16

17 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** All right. For the hundred year, I've got you.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.
20

21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Emily, that was really great. I think we all needed
22 a little pick-me-up there, but I just want to say I think you
23 should be doing all the red snapper presentations, to really just
24 kind of help us get in the positive attitude.
25

26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
27

28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thank you for that, Emily. I have to just say
29 you nailed it, and I know everyone doesn't agree with the process,
30 and maybe didn't agree with every word that you said, but I think
31 you captured the spirit of the process, and all the great work,
32 and so I want to give you another round of applause. (Applause)
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** General Spraggins.
35

36 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I don't know what you all are going to do next
37 fifty, but I'll keep around for maybe ten or fifteen of them.
38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, all. Thank you, Emily.
40 We're going to move on to public comment, if there are no other
41 comments. All right.
42

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

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

4
5 Please give any written comments to Gulf Council staff, as all
6 written comments will be posted on the council's website for
7 viewing by council members and the public and will be maintained
8 by the council as part of the permanent record. Knowingly and
9 willfully submitting false information to the council is a
10 violation of federal law.

11
12 We welcome public comment from both in-person and virtual
13 attendees. Virtual participants who wish to speak should register
14 online. Registration for virtual testimony closes thirty minutes
15 after public testimony begins. In-person participants wishing to
16 speak must sign in at the registration kiosk located in the back
17 of the meeting room. Only one registration per person is
18 permitted.

19
20 Each speaker will have three minutes to deliver their testimony.
21 In-person participants should follow the timer lights on the
22 podium. The light will remain green for the first two minutes,
23 switching to a blinking yellow during the final minute, and turn
24 red when time has expired. Virtual participants should monitor
25 the on-screen three-minute countdown timer to track their
26 remaining time. Additional time for dignitaries may be granted at
27 the discretion of the chair.

28
29 If you have a cell phone or similar device, please place it on
30 silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. To ensure everyone
31 can hear the proceedings, we also ask that any private
32 conversations be conducted outside the meeting room. Please note
33 that public comment may conclude before the published agenda time
34 if all registered in-person and virtual participants finish their
35 remarks.

36
37 We'll go through as usual and rotate from online, or virtual, to
38 in the room, in-person, and we'll start with Mr. Lawrence Marino,
39 and it looks like Mr. Dale Woodruff is up next.

40 41 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

42
43 **MR. LAWRENCE MARINO:** Good afternoon. My name is Larry Marino,
44 and I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrell.
45 Regarding Amendment 64, state management has the inherent
46 advantage over Gulf-wide management, in that it can be tailored to
47 each state's specific needs.

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

5
6 In addition, the states have more timely data reporting than MRIP,
7 enabling in-season adjustments in real time. All this adds up to
8 a lot of flexibility in state management that just doesn't exist
9 in federal management. Plus, unified management of state and
10 federal waters simplifies the regulatory environment.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Larry, can I stop you for a second? Can we quiet
13 down in the back of the room, please, and take your conversations
14 outside? Thank you. Mr. Marino.

15
16 **MR. MARINO:** Thank you. Our experience with Amendment 50 for
17 private rec bears this out. The states have managed to their
18 quotas, while drastically extending the seasons. This would be
19 equally good -- State management would be equally good for the
20 for-hire sector too, for the same reasons, and, as a practical
21 matter, state agencies can more easily act on input for their for-
22 hire fishermen as circumstances change than federal Gulf-wide
23 management can.

24
25 For a business that depends on being able to serve customers where
26 and when they want to fish, state management seems tailor-made to
27 helping them, and so why is there such vocal dissent? The folks
28 who have testified in the past mostly just say the existing system
29 works for them. They're mostly from the eastern Gulf, but there
30 are folks that the system doesn't work for.

31
32 Louisiana has explained repeatedly why it doesn't work for the
33 western Gulf, due to the weather and fishing patterns. It's fair
34 and equitable to fix the system for them, for the western Gulf.

35
36 Now, to fix it for them shouldn't make it unfair to others, but
37 state management isn't. States that want to keep federal
38 regulation can do exactly that. Whether it's state or federal
39 management in Mississippi, for example, when you cross the line
40 from Louisiana waters into Mississippi waters, you just apply
41 whatever management regime Mississippi has selected.

42
43 It's no different from crossing from Louisiana inshore waters into
44 Mississippi inshore waters. The Mississippi rules apply, and so
45 giving state management to Louisiana doesn't take anything away
46 from Mississippi, or its fishermen, and, for the states that do
47 adopt state management, all of the benefits of the flexibility and
48 uniformity of management become available to them.

1
2 On top of that, under the existing system, the for-hire sector
3 simply isn't catching its quota, and so it doesn't seem accurate
4 to say that the system is working for everyone, when it doesn't
5 enable them to catch their full share of the fish.

6
7 All of this has been explained and discussed numerous times, and
8 so the continued opposition suggests two possibilities. One is
9 fear of uncertainty, which is entirely understandable. There's
10 always unknowns when things change, and even known changes can
11 take getting used to, and so we need to work through that and make
12 clear how state management would work, but that's an education
13 issue. Fear of change can't be a reason not to make beneficial
14 changes.

15
16 The other possibility is a vested interest in the unfairness of
17 the status quo. That's understandable, too. The system is, in
18 fact, working for some, at least in that sense, but preserving an
19 unfair advantage, or benefit, for only part of that sector isn't
20 an appropriate goal of fishery management.

21
22 For all of these reasons, Amendment 64 should go forward, and there
23 seems to be no reason for a federal endorsement, because that seems
24 duplicative of the state permitting requirements.

25
26 As to the alternative approach being suggested, establishing
27 flexible management in federal management, certainly more
28 flexibility is better, but the problem is federal management can't
29 be as flexible as state management, because MRIP isn't timely
30 enough to enable in-season corrections.

31
32 No matter how much flexibility they have to make changes for next
33 year, NMFS can't act in time to enable for-hire to catch its entire
34 quota this year, but states can, and, with state management, they
35 can do it for next year as well, and, again, states are inherently
36 more responsive to their own fishermen's needs and wants than a
37 Gulf-wide management authority that has to balance and respond to
38 all states' needs and wants, and so it's fine to continue looking
39 at this, but it should not be at the expense of state management.

40
41 Regarding the exempted fishing permit for greater amberjack,
42 Louisiana wants this for better data and in order to get started
43 on state management for greater amberjack.

44
45 Louisiana submitted the original EFP proposal to get the discussion
46 started. They want to, and will, work with NMFS and the other
47 states on this. NMFS has already pointed out some concerns based
48 on the recent South Atlantic red snapper decision, and so Louisiana

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

3
4 Louisiana continues to want to work with NMFS and the other states
5 to perfect it, and I urge the states to do that, to get together
6 and submit their own EFPs, along the same lines as was done with
7 Amendment 50 for red snapper. Working together, the states can
8 definitively overcome the concerns for overfishing that are the
9 big problem from the South Atlantic decision, and ultimately get
10 to state management for greater amberjack.

11
12 Finally, it's a good idea to set up that red snapper allocation
13 review working group that was suggested yesterday. As was
14 suggested, the FES pilot study will apparently show a reduction of
15 private fishing effort, but remember that's compared to the greatly
16 increased effort shown by the initial conversion. A small
17 reduction from a large increase is still an increase. That net
18 increase has to be taken into account just to keep things the way
19 they were, but, for any change beyond implementing the CHTS to FES
20 conversion, we need to move beyond just basing allocations on
21 historical catch.

22
23 Past catch data is getting to be very old. Things have changed a
24 lot, and we've just seen a whole presentation about it, in the
25 last decades. Technology, where the fishermen are, whatever, and
26 the new catch data is constrained, in many cases, by allocations
27 and catch limits that skew how much would or could be caught by
28 the various sectors, or states, if not for those constraints.

29
30 New bases are needed to make allocation decisions, and biomass
31 needs to be at least part of that. Where the fish actually are
32 needs to be considered when deciding who is entitled to catch them,
33 and many other factors are appropriate, all that economic and
34 social stuff, along with the science, but we've got to move beyond
35 this being just a defense for a decision made based on old catch
36 histories and have it become what drives that decision. Thank
37 you.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marino. Do we have any questions?
40 Mr. Marino? Not seeing any, thank you, Larry. Next up online is
41 Mr. Dale Woodruff, and then followed by Mr. Charlie Renier here in
42 the room.

43
44 **MR. DALE WOODRUFF:** This is Captain Dale Woodruff with the Charter
45 Boat Class Act. I'm also the president of the Alabama Charter
46 Fishing Association, and I'm not at the meeting today, but I could
47 close my eyes and picture the guy behind the podium has a suit and
48 a tie on, and he don't own any federal permits.

1
2 He has no skin in the game other than getting told what to do, and
3 he talks about Louisianians need, and it's not working for
4 Louisianians. Well, I would love for five of the federal-permitted
5 holders out of Louisiana to come to the meeting, or maybe to call
6 in, or maybe to do some public comment, and so I don't know where
7 we're going there, but, again, another guy stands up with no skin
8 in the game other than take it away from a working man.

9
10 By the way -- All right. As far as the four hire data collection,
11 SEFHIER, yes, we want it. Let's get it going. We've been trying
12 to listen in, but we're also out here fishing, or fixing to leave
13 to go fishing, and I see where we've got codified, and so let's
14 get it passed. Let's get it going, the charter-for-hire. That's
15 just another notch in the belt for the federal boats to be able to
16 report and take some of that, I guess, speculation, or uncertainty,
17 out of it.

18
19 Then, of course, no, we do not want states to manage our for-hire
20 business. We are good. We're fine. We have a 147-day season.
21 Talking about not catching our quota, you know, it's okay. We
22 don't have to catch our quota, because we're catching plenty of
23 fish, and things are good.

24
25 Business is good, and we need to wait for the stock assessment
26 before we go any further, which five of you guys, or state people
27 over there, or five states, are trying to take something away
28 that's working for the commonsense, hardworking man, and Lord I'm
29 tired of everybody up there talking about how they get calls, and
30 they get text messages, or they get emails, and I haven't seen
31 them. I guess you all shoot me one where somebody -- That a
32 federal for-hire is actually in favor of state management.
33 Anybody. Other than that, thank you all. You all have a good
34 day.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Woodruff. Do we have any
37 questions? Not seeing any, Dale, thank you again. Next up, in
38 the room, is going to be Mr. Charlie Renier, followed by Mr. Dylan
39 Hubbard in the room.

40
41 **MR. CHARLIE RENIER:** Hello. My name is Charlie Rainier. Most of
42 you all know me. I own several fish houses, and about sixteen
43 commercial boats, and a lot of quota.

44
45 I'm here today to talk about something different. I'm here today
46 to talk about the observer program that we've been dealing with.
47 All of our boats are in the forty-foot range. Most of them are
48 set up to hold three people on them, a captain and two crewmen.

1
2 When you all started the observer program and told us we needed to
3 have an extra person on the boat, we obliged doing so. We made an
4 extra bunk, put extra water on them, and extra food. They've told
5 us, at the observer program, they've put more observers on the
6 dock at my fish house than any other place.
7

8 In September of 2024, in Madeira Beach, we had a hurricane come
9 through. I had seven feet of water in my fish house. It flooded
10 it out. I lost everything there. Two weeks later, we had another
11 hurricane come through. We lost everything, and we had a big board
12 with all the observer stuff on it. Anything we need to do, we
13 keep track of it. It's right there. The whole roof caved in. We
14 lost all of that. We threw everything in the trash.
15

16 In December, I got containers and tractor trailers in there to run
17 my fish company, and we let boats go fishing, to try and get money
18 back in the community. Last year, I got a letter from the observer
19 program that was fining me \$2,500 for not having an observer on my
20 boat in late November and early December. I didn't even know we
21 had an issue.
22

23 I wrote them a letter saying, hey, we went through hurricanes. I
24 called them, and the guy says, Charlie, don't worry about it, and
25 the observer program is not going to force this. We're going to
26 see what we can do, and write us a letter. I wrote a letter to
27 him. Four months later, I got a letter back from the National
28 Marine Fisheries, or NOAA, and it says, Mr. Renier, you've got
29 thirty days to pay \$5,200, or we're taking your permits.
30

31 Now, this is the kind of pressure that we're getting put under,
32 and we're trying to help and do everything right that we can do,
33 and I don't think that's fair, and I think you all need to do
34 something about it.
35

36 We have no problem taking these people out there to gather
37 information, and help us fish longer, but for them to do stuff
38 like this -- I mean, when you all go through a government shutdown,
39 you let the permits ride, and everybody fish. Everything keeps
40 going.
41

42 We get two major hurricanes in two weeks, and they give us zero
43 consideration. All we were trying to do is get the fishermen back
44 fishing and get life back going. It took us four or five months
45 to get everything back to normal, and I'm still fighting for
46 insurance money two years later from the hurricane.
47

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

1 and think about us on the other side, because we're all fishermen,
2 and we're struggling day by day, and we're here to help you guys
3 do whatever you need to make sure we got fish going forward.
4

5 I'm very happy with this whole program with the quota system. I've
6 told you all numerous times. I own quota, I bought boats, and I'm
7 happy with it. I know there's little nuances that all of us don't
8 like, but my daughter is running my company now, and I want her to
9 be able to run that company for the next thirty or forty years,
10 and the only way we're going to have fish is to manage it, but we
11 got to manage it together.
12

13 We've got to survive to catch the fish, and so you all need to
14 think about helping us out, the most you can, so we can keep stuff
15 going. Thank you.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier. Do we have any questions?
18 Mr. Osborne.
19

20 **MR. OSBORNE:** What was the resolution on the issue with the
21 observers with you?
22

23 **MR. RENIER:** What's the resolution? I sent them a check for
24 \$5,200, because otherwise they were going to take my permits, and
25 so I'm here asking you all to help me.
26

27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier.
28

29 **MR. RENIER:** Thanks, guys.
30

31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Hold on, Charlie. We've got a couple of
32 questions. Mr. Anson.
33

34 **MR. ANSON:** Mr. Renier, thank you for being here, and so what was
35 the communication process before the hurricane, and what's the
36 communication process now, as far as notifying you when an observer
37 -- When it is to be at the dock?
38

39 **MR. RENIER:** We get a letter in the mail that says basically we
40 have ninety days to put an observer on our boats, which was
41 September, I think it was, or it might have been October, November,
42 December. The hurricane, the first hurricane, hit on September
43 24th, and the next one hit on October 10th.
44

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

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

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more, Charlie. Dr. Walter.

7
8 **DR. WALTER:** Thank you, Charlie, for coming before us. Maybe we'll
9 have my program staff follow up here on this, because we do
10 administer the observer program, but I wanted to ask a question,
11 and so we'll try to follow up on that, but another question about
12 electronic monitoring, because I know that is a challenge to get
13 observers on boats, and what's your view on whether that's a path
14 we should consider, whether that's going to work?

15
16 **MR. RENIER:** As far as the captains putting stuff in the computer?

17
18 **DR. WALTER:** Like cameras on -- Like cameras on boats. What's
19 your thought on that?

20
21 **MR. RENIER:** Well, here's my thought of that. We're already
22 monitored everywhere we go. We're tracked like criminals, and
23 we're not criminals. To me, if we're going to put cameras on the
24 boat, that's such a huge invasion of privacy.

25
26 That's like would you all want cameras in your houses, your cars?
27 I mean, we're already -- Basically, every time I climb on a boat,
28 I've got an ankle monitor on. Everywhere I go, I'm tracked. I
29 think it's all hogwash.

30
31 I think, if somebody is doing something wrong, you all catch them,
32 and you punish them. I mean, there's drones, and there's boats,
33 and there's planes, and there's everything out there. I think the
34 whole tracking system and camera system is hogwash. That's just
35 my example, and that's just me.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

38
39 **MR. WALKER:** I just want to mention that I feel exactly the same
40 way about cameras on commercial boats. I think they're tracked
41 enough, and I think that's too far for me. As a commercial
42 fishermen I say this, and so I'm glad you brought that up, Charlie.

43
44 **MR. RENIER:** Thank you.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier, and so we're going to go
47 to Captain Dylan Hubbard, and then Mike Sullivan online.

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

7
8 As far as SEFHIER is concerned, I would like to see this program
9 made final at this meeting, and back on the water implemented as
10 soon as possible. We do not want to continue to be a part of an
11 extrapolation from a small data sample. We want our federal
12 permits operating under the same data collection program.

13
14 Our industry deserves this data program so that we can help improve
15 recreational data and help this council to develop unique fishery
16 management plans based on real science and data provided through
17 a validated census-based approach and collection program. We now
18 have that codified text we were waiting for, and so there's no
19 reason to delay that final action at this meeting.

20
21 As far as delegation of the federal for-hire red snapper management
22 to the states, I would not support the idea of delegating any
23 federal for-hire red snapper management to any state. With FES
24 calibration coming, and being on the eve of a new red snapper stock
25 assessment, this is the wrong time to even consider changing the
26 management of our federal for-hire recreational fleet.

27
28 Also, SEFHIER solves the issues that are the root rationale for
29 even exploring this, and it's kind of ironic that the state pushing
30 this idea is the same state whose fleet is the one who killed
31 SEFHIER in the first place. We could have been using that data by
32 now, using it to explore management styles that solves this root
33 rationale for delegation.

34
35 I request immediate stopping work on, and tabling, Amendment 64
36 until these issues are resolved, with FES data calibration, the
37 stock assessment results are implemented, and the SEFHIER program
38 starts providing the data to properly evaluate this document.

39
40 The EFP for amberjack, personally, I'm a little concerned to see
41 the size of the quota requested, and I share C.J.'s trepidation
42 over its effect on the remaining Gulf states access. Also, this
43 is a species that has failed rebuilding, three rebuilding,
44 programs. We're finally starting to see some positive results out
45 there on the water, and I would hate to see us not remain
46 conservative and avoid fishing pressure around the time of year
47 that's historically closed for the commercial fleet to protect
48 this resource during its spawn.

1
2 As far as ecosystem, please continue work on the fishery ecosystem
3 plan, and support the work of the ETC. I think it's really cool
4 what they're doing, and I think it will really help.

5
6 Management flexibility for the federal for-hire fleet, I would
7 love to continue to explore this, and I think we need to consider
8 some guardrails here required to ensure we don't set precedent for
9 last minute unexpected changes. What Andy mentioned in committee
10 really resonated with me. He won't always be the person in that
11 chair, and that concerns me into the future.

12
13 As far as mutton snapper and yellowtail goes, the fishing is
14 getting better and better for both of these species. We're seeing
15 that biomass expand rapidly, and its range expand spatially
16 exponentially. It really concerns me that we're not being a little
17 bit more aggressive trying to hold as much of that quota in the
18 Gulf as we can as those catches come up.

19
20 Lastly, budget issues. If we're concerned about funding, and
21 timing of funding, I would support you guys in having more meetings
22 in Tampa. Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Hubbard. Do we have any
25 questions for Dylan? Not seeing any, Dylan, thank you. All right.
26 We're going to go online to Mr. Mike Sullivan, and then followed
27 by B.J. Burkett.

28
29 **MR. MIKE SULLIVAN:** Hello, Gulf Council. Thank you for letting us
30 do the virtual comments. I am a multiple boat owner, multiple
31 passenger boat, and also multiple commercial permits, IFQ holder.
32 I'm in all sides of the game.

33
34 I'm strongly against the states taking our management. The federal
35 -- I mean, you all have done a great job. I don't want to be
36 chopped up among the states. I'm heavily in favor of getting the
37 SEFHIER program going. You know, we've talked about it for a
38 while. I know you're reaching out to us, to try to get it as
39 streamlined as possible, and hopefully on the phones, to where we
40 can, you know, get the data correct, and to where it's real-time
41 data, where, as the fishing slows down, or the stock falls, like
42 you can see this, you know, live.

43
44 Like, for instance now, you know, the size of the average fish has
45 gotten smaller, and we definitely are catching less. You can see
46 it to help adjust the quotas faster, and it will be a great thing.
47 I definitely do not want any states managing our federal boats,
48 and that's pretty much it for me for now.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. Do we have any
3 questions? Not seeing any, Mike, thank you.
4

5 **MR. SULLIVAN:** All right. Thanks.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next, we'll go, in the room, to Mr. B.J. Burkett,
8 and then next, virtual, will be Harris Scruggs.
9

10 **MR. B.J. BURKETT:** Good afternoon. My name is B.J. Burkett, owner
11 and operator of four charter boats out of Panama City, and also
12 two which are dual-permitted commercial, and then also an IFQ
13 holder.
14

15 The main thing I want to start with today is I was thinking real
16 hard last night about what I think the council is. To me, it's
17 pretty much two things. The council should be fishery first, and
18 then stakeholders a very close second, and I feel like we're
19 getting away from that a lot. There's a lot of stuff that's trying
20 to make it way too complicated.
21

22 To start with here, the state management for the for-hire fleet,
23 I'm totally against it. Just like I said to start, there's no
24 benefit to the fishery here, and, when over 90 plus percent of the
25 stakeholders are involved are totally against it too, that should
26 tell you something.
27

28 There's one state, and that's Louisiana, that's pushing for it,
29 and I don't know many people over there. I know three for-hire
30 guys over there, and all three are also against it, and so I don't
31 even think you all have the majority of your state for-hire permit
32 holders that are for what you all are trying to do, and so why
33 such a push? Is it political?
34

35 I mean, we're here for the fishery, and we're here for all the
36 fishermen in federal waters. It shouldn't be about what the state
37 wants. It should be about federal, and I have a very hard time
38 seeing this go any further than it has. I mean, it needs to be
39 stopped. Maybe the politicians in these states -- Maybe you all
40 need to educate them a little more about what all the stakeholders
41 want. Is this a benefit to the fishery, because it's not.
42

43 I mean, I'm out there two-hundred-and-something days a year. I
44 fish all the way from 200 miles south of Panama City all the way
45 to 350 miles west of it, and we have a decline in red snapper in
46 the whole Gulf. You can't tell me any different. I've seen it.
47

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

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

6
7 Let's see. The EFP, I also don't agree with that for the amberjack.
8 The reason is we fought and fought trying to keep the amberjack
9 season in the late spring and early summer, and this was four or
10 five years ago, and you all told us absolutely not, because it was
11 a main spawning time, and now we're going to open an EFP in the
12 main spawn? It don't make no sense. We're going backwards. The
13 fishery is finally getting better, and we're wanting to change it.
14 Leave it alone for a little while, guys.

15
16 We do have a huge shark problem. I know that's HMS, but you all
17 could put pressure on them if you want. That's also helping
18 decline our red snapper fishery. When I lose a box of fifty hooks
19 in a day of fishing, because the sharks are eating the fish that
20 we hook, that's a big problem, and so it's your problem. It's not
21 just HMS.

22
23 Then the king mackerel, and we've been screaming at you all for
24 years about king mackerel. They're in horrible shape, but we're
25 not doing nothing about it, and I am for the SEFHIER requirements
26 for the logbooks, and that's all I have. Thank you.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burkett. Do we have any questions?
29 Not seeing any, thank you, B.J. Next up, we're going to go online
30 to Mr. Bob Hilliard.

31
32 **MR. BOB HILLIARD:** Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.

35
36 **MR. HILLIARD:** Okay. Just a few thoughts and observations from me
37 today. I'm taking the opportunity of the rain, and listening into
38 you guys, to go through all my grouper gear, which I haven't done
39 in a couple of years, because we've got a longer season.

40
41 Being a private recreational fisherman, and a spear fisherman,
42 I've seen more gags under the water, and so it seems like the
43 regulations have really helped the population's rebound in west-
44 central Florida, and so, on hogfish, overall, everything looks
45 good. Being a diver, I've seen more small, and also larger, fish
46 inshore than we've seen in quite a few years.

47
48 I'm just concerned about the increase in hook and line pressure,

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

9
10 Then, on kingfish, we know something is going on in the Gulf, and
11 I've seen the information on the Mexican issue, but I'm just
12 concerned about the very efficient gillnet methods using spotter
13 planes. You know, we've got warmer water in the Gulf, and I
14 haven't seen the bait schools like you used to see, and so maybe
15 there's not as much food, and so something needs to be done on
16 that. That's all I've got today. Appreciate your time.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hilliard. Do we have any
19 questions? Not seeing any, next up, we're going to go to Captain
20 Bob Zales, in the room, and behind Bob will be Clay Shidler.

21
22 **MR. BOB ZALES, II:** Thank you, all. Bob Zales, Southeastern
23 Fisheries. First off, General, thank you for the meal the other
24 night. It was great. Thank you, council, for what you all did
25 last night.

26
27 When it comes to SEFHIER, you all need to move that and get it
28 done. The for-hire sector has been begging for that, to have that
29 back again, for quite a while, and it will really help.

30
31 On the state takeover of federal permits, for over a year now, you
32 all have heard, from the vast majority of these people, that they
33 don't want it. You're trying to push something on an industry
34 that's working and working fine. The old adage of if it ain't
35 broke, don't fix it, and this system ain't broke. Leave it alone.
36 Eliminate that amendment. Be done with it.

37
38 Well, B.J. mentioned something about political. I'm going to give
39 you all just a brief history lesson, because most of you probably
40 don't know this. In Florida, years ago, we had a Marine Fisheries
41 Commission. The Marine Fisheries Commission, it was argued, had
42 political influence that affected their decisions.

43
44 Recreational associations, and the media, pushed hard for a
45 constitutional amendment to eliminate the MFC and put them in the
46 FWC, with the sole purpose of trying to eliminate political
47 influence on management decisions. This past May, we found that
48 that no longer exists.

1
2 Politics took over in the State of Florida. Because of that
3 process, I lost a very dear, long-term friendship with a staffer
4 with the FWC. She no longer talks to me, all because of that
5 political decisions.

6
7 You've heard from me in the past concern about politics playing
8 with any state management decision. It's likely that this is going
9 to come up again, maybe in Florida, or maybe in one of the other
10 states, but politics has no place, in my opinion, and a lot of
11 other people's opinion, with fishery management. You have to use
12 science, and you have to use the economic and social information
13 you have, and you have to use a management system that is based on
14 science and good information.

15
16 Politicians will destroy everything out there, and so that's where
17 I am on that. You need to eliminate any further discussion on
18 this move to move in the state waters and leave it alone. 65
19 percent of the permit holders live in Florida. Over 90 percent
20 have said they don't want this. I don't know of any for-hire
21 person in Florida that supports this move, and so please stop it,
22 be done with it, and quit wasting your time. You've got far more
23 stuff, that's far more important to deal with, that needs to be
24 worked on. Thank you very much.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Zales. Do we have any
27 questions? Not seeing any, Bob, thanks. Next up online, Harris
28 Scruggs, and, in the room, next up will be Richard Fischer.

29
30 **MR. HARRIS SCRUGGS:** This is Harris Scruggs. Can you hear me?

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Harris. Go ahead.

33
34 **MR. SCRUGGS:** Okay, and so, as a Gulf for-hire owner and operator,
35 I strongly oppose the continued work on Amendment 64. Our industry
36 has a proven management strategy with Amendment 40. Under
37 Amendment 40, the Gulf's federal for-hire industry has fished
38 accountably and sustainably for over a decade now, and the Gulf
39 Council must soon address this issue found in the FES pilot study.

40
41 Reporting, I feel our industry, first, does not need a new
42 management strategy, and it certainly does not -- Not one that
43 interjects uncertainty into a system that has a proven track
44 record, and so please stop the work and table Amendment 64. The
45 fishing is not as good as it used to be. The king mackerel fishing
46 is terrible. The sharks are terrible. Predation is terrible, and
47 so that's all I have.

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

3
4 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just one question. Harris, where are you located,
5 and how many permits do you have?

6
7 **MR. SCRUGGS:** I'm in Panama City, Florida. I've got a one boat
8 that's dually-permitted, commercial and charter-for-hire.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Harris? Not seeing any,
11 all right. Thank you, Harris. Next, in the room, is Mr. Richard
12 Fischer, and online is Clay Shidler.

13
14 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** All right, Thank you, Mr. Chair and members
15 of the council. Thank you all for allowing me to speak. Richard
16 Fischer, representing Louisiana Charter Boat Association, and so
17 I'm the guy representing the eighty-two, or most of the eighty-
18 two, because, of course, you're never going to get everybody to
19 agree on everything all the time.

20
21 Just to dispel a narrative that's been put out there in the last
22 few minutes, we, as the LCBA, have done multiple rounds of polling.
23 The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has done
24 multiple rounds of polling. There is overwhelming support in
25 Louisiana for state management, and so let's please kill that
26 narrative. It's just not based on any fact. Of course, everybody
27 knows a guy who has an opinion, and they could be in the extreme
28 minority, and that is the case right now.

29
30 Last time I came up and spoke, at the last meeting, I went through
31 all of the talking points that I've seen on Facebook, and the
32 public comments that are written on the internet, and I'm really
33 not going to have time to go through those again, but I would just
34 encourage people to go back and listen to what I said, and how I
35 addressed all those concerns, and I would like to ask everyone
36 here in attendance, that is going to speak against state
37 management, to please give us some reasons that it's going to make
38 it a little bit harder for me to combat.

39
40 I just would really appreciate the opportunity for us to continue
41 having that open dialogue, and for us to have conversations based
42 in fact, and what's actually real, and not a bunch of scare
43 tactics.

44
45 I will address a couple of things that I heard yesterday. One was
46 that, with state management, there's a concern that captains are
47 not going to know when seasons are going to open and end, and not
48 really have as much certainty, and I would say, certainly from

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

6
7 I've heard that this is a taking, that it's taking from other parts
8 of the Gulf. We're not trying to take anything. We're not trying
9 to force anything on anybody. If you want to opt out, opt out.
10 We don't want anyone to opt in who doesn't want to be part of it.
11 This is just Louisiana saying that we feel we can do this in a
12 better way.

13
14 The last thing that I would like to address is there was a council
15 member yesterday who maybe kind of said the quiet part out loud,
16 and I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but it was basically that
17 there's eighty-two-ish captains in Louisiana that want this, and
18 there's 1,300 Gulf-wide, and so why are we even talking about this,
19 and it's not a big enough group to talk about.

20
21 That was met with thunderous applause from back there, and I've
22 got to say that's what the tyranny of the majority sounds like,
23 and that's what Louisiana has dealt with for a very long time here
24 at the council, and all we're asking for is a fair percentage
25 allotment to be able to manage our own fish.

26
27 I will give credit to that same council member who then said let's
28 see if we can come up with a compromise that protects the rest of
29 the Gulf, but makes Louisiana happy, and I would like to work with
30 everyone in this room to work toward that compromise, and so thanks
31 everyone very much, and I'm here to answer any questions.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Do we have any questions?
34 Captain Walker.

35
36 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer, and so your -- If I'm not
37 mistaken, your charter fleet in Louisiana is currently allowed to
38 red snapper fish, right, while the recreational fishery is closed,
39 and is that correct?

40
41 **MR. FISCHER:** I'm sorry. Could you repeat that? I'm having
42 trouble hearing you.

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** Isn't the for-hire open in Louisiana right now and
45 closed to recreational?

46
47 **MR. FISCHER:** The state for-hire season, if you're referring to,
48 which federally-permitted captains cannot participate in, closed

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

7
8 **MR. WALKER:** Well, that's not what I meant. The for-hire season
9 is open through October, and am I wrong?

10
11 **MR. FISCHER:** That's the federal, yes.

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** So those guys can fish, and they didn't get closed
14 when the rec did, which was kind of the idea of the program from
15 the onset, is that the federal charter guys were not going to be
16 -- They had their own season, and so, if the rec closed, they could
17 keep fishing, and so I don't understand how that's not a good thing
18 for your for-hire guys. They can still fish. In fact, they're
19 the only ones that can still fish, and so this is working out good
20 for them, as best I can tell.

21
22 **MR. FISCHER:** In that small period of time, of course, I would
23 agree with you, but, from May 1 through the beginning of June, or
24 soon to be through the Friday before Memorial Day, that is not the
25 case, and it is only recently that the season has gone so many
26 days into October.

27
28 There have been many instances since state management came onboard
29 for private rec where the state season stayed open considerably
30 later than the federal season, and so, while I do agree with you
31 that, in the very specific instance you're bringing up, you are
32 correct, but that historically, in the past ten or so years, has
33 been a minority situation.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have one more, Richard. Mr. Strelcheck.

36
37 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Richard, thanks for being here. I don't really
38 know how to ask the question, but I think the challenge before the
39 council has been we're hearing this kind of overwhelming swell of
40 opposition, right? You come to the podium and say you represent
41 a majority of the eighty-two charter captains in Louisiana, but we
42 hear from less than a handful of them typically in the council
43 process, and so I guess I'm just maybe asking why aren't they
44 showing up? Why aren't they being more vocal?

45
46 I'm on your newsletter, and I get it every month. You're asking
47 them to show up, and comment, and I recognize you're here to
48 represent them, but, if they really want this, we need to hear

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

4
5 **MR. FISCHER:** Their license fees, and their customers' license
6 fees, go into a fund that pays for me to be able to be here, and
7 represent them, and be here on behalf of that. With that said, I
8 think I would say that -- This has been building for over a decade,
9 and so this is not a new revelation that I'm saying, but I think
10 there is a very low level of wanting to be involved in the process,
11 based off of just kind of getting hit over the head and hit over
12 the head and hit over the head for five, ten, twenty, thirty,
13 forty, fifty years, and they feel that if they -- Even if they
14 came in full force, that the process has shown that our side of
15 the Gulf doesn't typically get what we want.

16
17 I think they feel a little bit abandoned, and disenchanting, with
18 the process, and it's really just a matter of them wanting to not
19 set themselves up to feel like they're experiencing failure again.
20 I really think it's kind of almost like a protecting the way that
21 they feel, but I do want to say that we've got a Louisiana captain,
22 and I'm looking at him on the list right now, that's coming up
23 later, and so hopefully we will see, you know, some comments there,
24 some more comments later in the day, and some more comments in the
25 emails, but I will say that, in my conversations with federally-
26 permitted charter captains, there's just a lot of disenchantment
27 in the process, and I would say that throwing them this bone would
28 go a long way in building back a lot of that trust.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

31
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Not a question, but I'll just say thank you for
33 that. I appreciate, obviously, that explanation. I think you can
34 take back to them that the Regional Administrator is asking you to
35 show up and participate in the process, regardless of the past
36 history, and so we would love to hear from them, and I hope we can
37 hear from them.

38
39 **MR. FISCHER:** I agree. Thank you.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. One more, Richard. Mr. Geeslin.

42
43 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Richard, what exactly is it
44 about state management that your group finds so attractive? Is it
45 the in-season monitoring, the adaptive management, the season
46 structure, bag length, all the stuff that we've been able to
47 realize through state management, the private rec in the red
48 snapper? What exactly is it that your group is gravitating to?

1
2 **MR. FISCHER:** It's really all of the above, plus other things,
3 too. It's, you know, we believe in LA Creel in Louisiana, where
4 we believe we have the best fish counting system in the country.
5 Therefore, we don't feel that we need to be -- You know, like we're
6 still locked in an MRIP system.

7
8 We're locked in a one-size-fits-all for the Gulf system, and not
9 only for red snapper, but for other species as well, where, again,
10 and it gets back to kind of touching on my answer to Mr. Strelcheck
11 just now, that, when Louisiana captains have historically
12 participated in the process, they seem to have felt that it's been
13 for naught, that the wants and desires of other parts of the Gulf
14 have kind of gotten their way on the season management there.

15
16 This would be Louisiana being in control of our own fishery, and
17 our own fishermen, to be able to decide when seasons start, when
18 seasons finished, and, as has been mentioned, there's eighty-two
19 of these guys. We can fit all eighty-two in the Louisiana room at
20 Wildlife and Fisheries in Baton Rouge and hash out what the season
21 should be, whereas, through this process, there's 200 hours a year,
22 and there's five meetings in each of the five Gulf states to hash
23 this stuff out, and it's just not as easy to participate in this
24 much larger process.

25
26 It's saying we can do it, and it would be simpler, and easier, and
27 I've gone through all the other reasons too as it pertains to, you
28 know, what we've heard in the past, and maybe it's not so much
29 happening anymore, but, in the past, multiple trips per day, two
30 and three trips per day in other parts of the Gulf, you know, and
31 we can't do that in Louisiana.

32
33 Weather, certain times of the year, we can't go out there. Like,
34 of course, thank you to NOAA Fisheries for opening up the season
35 in December of last year, but there were probably zero landings in
36 Louisiana, because the weather is just not going to allow that to
37 be possible, and so it's like little things like that that our
38 fleet has noticed, that, if we were to be working with our state,
39 we just don't believe that it would happen.

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

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

3
4 These federal guys are like this isn't tenable for us, and there
5 is a growing resentment, I would say, in Louisiana between federal
6 guys and state guys, and a lot of that resentment is given to the
7 state red snapper seasons, the state charter boats, and what I
8 have repeatedly tried to get across to them is that you are
9 resenting the very thing that you want, and if you can unify, and
10 come to the Gulf Council, and come to NOAA Fisheries, and speak in
11 favor of this, and get it this way, you're not going to have that
12 concern anymore. You're going to get the same advantages that you
13 feel that they're having, and so that's a multifaceted answer.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Richard. All right. We don't have
16 any other questions. Thank you for your testimony. Next, online,
17 is Clay Shidler.

18
19 **MR. CLAY SHIDLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Clay Shidler.
20 I'm the owner of Hang 'Em High Sport Fishing and Shrimp Landing
21 out of Crystal River, Florida, and I own eleven federally-permitted
22 charter boats.

23
24 I would just like to start by saying that I would really like to
25 see the SEFHIER Program come to final action. That's been a big
26 thing. I was on the AP for the SEFHIER program rebuild, and I
27 really feel like we've got it going in the right direction, a
28 direction that is going to be found palatable by the vast majority
29 of our for-hire fishermen in the Gulf.

30
31 Secondly, I would like to say that I strongly oppose state
32 management of for-hire red snapper. I don't really -- Obviously,
33 we all know that we don't really need it, but, at the same time,
34 after reading through Amendment 64, it does seem to be a possible
35 allocation grab, and that's something that does scare me.

36
37 I respect Mr. Fischer and his opinion, and I do completely
38 understand that, maybe in that state, there is a discernible
39 difference between how the recreational sector and the for-hire
40 sector work, but, short of Mr. Fischer coming back and getting his
41 state management and then increasing the for-hire bag limit, he
42 will always see that his for-hire sector is at some sort of
43 disadvantage, based on the four-fish bag limit in state waters and
44 the two-fish bag limit in for-hire waters, and that seems to be,
45 you know, a crux of the issue for me on 64, and it is something
46 that Mr. Fischer did not address, as to what they would like to do
47 with that increased quota that they would like to see come out of
48 state management and go their direction.

1
2 All that being said, I've communicated with multiple people in the
3 for-hire sector in other states outside of Florida, and I have
4 found very few people that are interested in seeing it come to
5 pass. Thank you very much, and I'm happy to answer any questions
6 that the council may have.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Clay. We have a question from Dr.
9 Allen.

10
11 **DR. ALLEN:** Hi, Clay. I know I've asked you this before, but it's
12 been a little while. Can you give us an update on your observations
13 on gag grouper?

14
15 **MR. SHIDLER:** Yes, sir. Gag grouper are looking really good. I
16 think we finally started to see some of the fruits of the shorter
17 seasons. We're seeing a lot more small fish. I mean, obviously,
18 the first short season, where we went down to forty-five days, and
19 then fifteen, and we saw a lot of fish just in general, but we saw
20 a lot of quality fish, and, obviously, those fish were not spawned
21 in the closure, but, at this point in time, I would say we're
22 seeing a lot of fish that are, you know, twenty-four to twenty-
23 nine inches.

24
25 These are fish that have been spawned during the closure. They
26 are the direct fruit of what the council tried to do here in
27 shortening up the season, and rebuilding the stock, and I would
28 say that you guys have done a fine job.

29
30 Although I live in what you could call the Alamo of gag grouper,
31 maybe the last strong point of that species for the Gulf, we will
32 say we've seen some pretty impressive numbers of fish, you know,
33 in that twenty-four to thirty-inch class.

34
35 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Clay.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Clay? I'm not seeing
38 anything, Clay. Thank you.

39
40 **MR. SHIDLER:** Thank you, guys.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We're going to go, in the room, to Mr. Mark
43 Kelley, and next up, online, is going to be David Burlison.

44
45 **MR. MARK KELLEY:** So I wasn't going to spend no time on this state
46 management, but it's forced me to have to say something, and so
47 the fellow, Richard Fischer, he is the man, the representative, I
48 hate to even call somebody's name, but he is the head of their

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

3
4 I don't see anybody going to get up here and talk against their
5 state when that's where your paycheck is coming from. He also
6 made this statement about weather, and so, unfortunately, the rest
7 of us in the Gulf of Mexico have a weather issue too with our days,
8 and we've seen it big time this year in June and July and during
9 the snapper season. Saying all that, I'm dead set against this
10 state management.

11
12 I'm very concerned about the red snapper population. We're seeing
13 a drastic decline in Panama City, and I think -- It's not the whole
14 issue, but part of the issue is this shark situation has gotten
15 out of hand. I mean, we have areas, four or five-mile-square
16 areas, that you can't even fish, because you can't get nothing to
17 the boat. They eat everything. I mean, the tackle expense has
18 gotten crazy.

19
20 I want to talk a second or two about king mackerel. King mackerel
21 in the Panhandle has disappeared. We've fished -- Both my boats
22 have fished from the middle of May to now, pretty much every day
23 except for weather days, and one boat has caught eight king
24 mackerel, and one has caught six for the year.

25
26 Well, you can say we're not fishing for them. We drag lures coming
27 and going offshore. Sometimes that's half the trip. We're fly
28 fishing the whole time we're bottom fishing, and that's not many
29 fish, where, on some particular days, we was catching that amount
30 every day.

31
32 Also, in correlation to the king mackerel, that nobody is even
33 questioning about, is our Spanish sardines, our herring, has
34 disappeared, which has to be a reflection of what's happening to
35 the king.

36
37 I know that I'm getting the buzzer up here, but another thing with
38 the kings is I know we're talking about Mexico catching a big
39 percentage of them, but I have always been told that the two stocks
40 mix at the Mississippi River, and then our stock comes back down
41 through Florida, and so, if this is the case, our stock shouldn't
42 even have anything to do with the Mexico fishery.

43
44 I may be wrong on that, and I may be mistold, but, somewhere or
45 another, our fishery went from good to awful. It was not a gradual
46 decrease. It was an instant decrease. Lord, I'm for the SEFHIER
47 program, too. Get it in gear, but I guess I'm done.

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

3
4 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Mark. You're a veteran fisherman in your
5 area, and you know the other veteran fishermen, and I know there's
6 no way you can answer this, but, in your mind, do most of the
7 kingfish that come up the side of the Gulf go back down, in your
8 interpretation as a veteran fisherman? I know you don't have the
9 exact answer for that, but what would your read be on that?

10
11 **MR. KELLEY:** Is it happening? I mean --

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** No, and are the same fish coming and going on the
14 same side, and the Mexican fish are going down that side?

15
16 **MR. KELLEY:** So, from what I've been educated through this system,
17 was the two stocks met. The western stock and the eastern stock
18 met at the Mississippi River, or thereabouts, and let's just say
19 the Mississippi River, and they do co-mingle there, and then they
20 turn and return back.

21
22 We normally have a spring run. We catch them throughout the
23 summer, and we always have a real good fall fishery. Up until --
24 We've had this discussion this week, and actually the last couple
25 of days, somewhere around 2018 is where the turn started, and so,
26 where we're at, if we catch live -- We call them herring, but
27 they're Spanish sardines. If we catch live herring, that is a
28 guaranteed bite, but you can't even catch a herring now, and
29 haven't been able to catch a herring.

30
31 I'm not saying that our cigar minnows, which is something else we
32 catch, haven't declined, but we are catching that, but the herring
33 has disappeared, which to me seems to be an issue that -- It's not
34 being addressed, but now Raffield Fisheries, which is just in St.
35 Joe, they -- I think they have two purse seines that they're
36 allowed to use in Florida, and I would love to know how their catch
37 history has gone in the last ten years, if it's been a decline in
38 their catch.

39
40 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, sir.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Kelly. Any other questions? Mr.
43 Osborne.

44
45 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes, and I just want to -- For the record, I think
46 just to correct something you had said, Richard Fischer's
47 association is a nonprofit. It's not part of the Louisiana state
48 government, and so, I mean, you can differ on opinions. I just

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

2
3 **MR. KELLEY:** Well, I know he walked out before I could say anything
4 to him, but he -- So, saying that, okay, it's nonprofit, saying
5 that. His money comes from license sales, correct? His paycheck.
6 That's what he said up here just a minute ago.

7
8 **MR. OSBORNE:** His money, as I understand it, comes from the charter
9 boat captains, their licenses, and not the state government. I
10 mean, he can correct that.

11
12 **MR. KELLEY:** I don't know. I'm just going by what I thought I
13 heard. Now, I'm not saying I ain't wrong, because I've been wrong
14 once today, and so getting up here was the wrong thing to do, but
15 anyway --

16
17 **MR. OSBORNE:** You're fine. I just wanted to at least correct it.

18
19 **MR. KELLEY:** All right. We good? Ms. Ballard.

20
21 **MS. BALLARD:** This isn't necessarily to you, but, for the rest of
22 the people who are going to speak, let's stay professional. If
23 you talk about somebody who is not here to rebuttal, to be able to
24 come back with a comment to your comment, let's stay professional
25 and not throw people's names out. You can talk generally, and you
26 can give your opinion, but I think it's a little unprofessional to
27 call people out by their name.

28
29 **MR. KELLEY:** I think I was kind of professional. I didn't trash
30 the joker. I don't even know him, and so I wouldn't say nothing
31 bad about him. I'm just saying what I thought I heard. Thank
32 you. Have a good day.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, virtual, would be Trenton Knepp.

35
36 **MR. TRENTON KNEPP:** Can you hear me?

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Trenton. Go ahead.

39
40 **MR. KNEPP:** My name is Trenton Knepp. I'm a commercial rod-and-
41 reel fisherman and stone crabber. My parents have had longline
42 boats for forty-some years now. My dad passed away a couple of
43 weeks ago, and, every time I would see him, it seemed like he
44 always asked is the council doing anything with getting the shares
45 back into the hands of the fishermen.

46
47 He had -- One of his first boats he had, or his second boat
48 actually, would have been worth a fortune with the quota, and he

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

4
5 Right now, we've got 55.9 percent of the red groupers have been
6 caught for the year, and we're eight months into the year. There
7 should be red grouper everywhere for lease, and, everybody you
8 talk to, it's extremely difficult to find right now. We know
9 there's a huge increase coming, and what I'm hearing is in a month,
10 so if there's a massive increase coming in a month, and we're eight
11 months into the year, and only 55 percent has been caught. Like
12 who is hoarding it, and why?

13
14 We are once again being gate-kept by shareholders who are just
15 holding it just for greed, and it's hurting the working man. It's
16 hurting businesses. I just want to encourage whatever you guys
17 have got to do to -- You shouldn't be able to own a share if you're
18 not out there actively fishing. You are not a shareholder. You're
19 -- You know, you're a hoarder. It's wrong, and that's all I've
20 got for today.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Trenton. Do we have any questions?
23 Not seeing any, next up, in the room, Mr. Johnny Williams, and
24 then we'll go back online to Josh Ellender.

25
26 **MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS:** Johnny Williams, Williams Party Boats, third-
27 generation party boat operator out of Galveston, Texas. I also
28 have some red snapper IFQ that I've inherited.

29
30 Last year, the for-hire sector only caught about three-quarters of
31 their quota. The year before that, the for-hire sector only caught
32 about three-quarters of their quota. This year, I don't think
33 we're going to catch our quota either. As a matter of fact, we're
34 in a gambling town, and I would be willing to bet any of you all
35 voting members on the Gulf Council \$1,000 that we don't catch our
36 quota this year. Do I have any takers? What about if I give you
37 two-to-one odds? Any takers? I'm good for it. I guarantee it.
38 Exactly. We're not going to catch our quota this year.

39
40 Another council member -- At other council meetings, I've addressed
41 the council and asked you all to change the red snapper year from
42 January 1 to December 31 to April 1 to March 31. The commercial
43 guys are going to catch their fish. If they don't catch them
44 during the course of the year, they'll lease them, right at the
45 end of the year, to somebody that will catch them.

46
47 The states have the capability of calculating how many fish have
48 been caught in opening up their waters. Florida is going to open

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

5
6 All I'm asking for is give us a break. If we don't catch but
7 three-quarters of our quota this year, basically what you've done
8 is eliminated one season, one entire year, for our capability of
9 harvesting these fish, and so please do what I ask and change the
10 fishing year from April 1 to March 31. This is not unprecedented.
11 In mackerel, the season starts July 1, and so it wouldn't be a
12 hard lift to do this.

13
14 The second thing I want to point out is why we're not able to catch
15 our quota. It's the fish aren't there. We've had a couple of
16 things, I think, that are responsible for that. Number one was
17 state management for the recreational sector, and the second thing
18 was the increase in quota that everybody asked you not to do, which
19 you all did anyway. I think we need to reduce the quota and get
20 some sense back into the fishery.

21
22 Back in 2018, I addressed the issue with king mackerel. I said
23 king mackerel were in trouble. Instead of reducing the bag limit
24 to one, or maybe closing the season completely, you all increased
25 the bag limit to three. It didn't work, and you could have done
26 it again. The fish weren't there.

27
28 Now, on our twelve-hour trips out of Galveston, we caught our
29 quota, or our limit, on our twelve-hour trips and our thirty-six-
30 hour trips this year, and I think we'll probably continue to do
31 so, but we're having to go farther and farther out each year, and
32 the fish are getting smaller and smaller each year, and, like I
33 say, I attribute this to the fact that we've given state control
34 to the recreational sector, and we've increased the quota, and so
35 I ask you not to include the for-hire sector in state management.
36 Thank you.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williams. Do we have any
39 questions?

40
41 **MR. WILLIAMS:** No gamblers in the crowd, huh? Thank you.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Johnny. Next up, online, is Mr. Josh
44 Ellender.

45
46 **MR. JOSH ELLENDER:** Good afternoon, everybody, and so I'll let you
47 keep this short. I am in favor of state management for red snapper
48 and for amberjack, if we can get that. It's been a long time

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

3
4 I mean, it works for the people who benefit from it, who are
5 reaping the benefits from it, excuse me, but, for the people that
6 it takes away from, it just doesn't work, and Louisiana is that.
7 It doesn't work for us, and so I strongly recommend you all vote
8 in favor of anything to do with state management, or at least
9 giving us the option to opt in or opt out.

10
11 As far as SEFHIER goes, I'm in favor of reporting our catch, but
12 I am not in favor of any kind of invasion of privacy, and so
13 anything that tracks where exactly we're at, or any cameras
14 onboard, I'm not in favor of that.

15
16 You know, most of those guys are very honest, hardworking guys,
17 and, you know, they don't need to be tracked like a criminal, and
18 so there's no reason for that. If you have an issue with people,
19 you know, doing something illegal, then maybe beef up enforcement,
20 but that's about it. Any questions?

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Ellender. Do we have any
23 questions? We do from Mr. Sanchez.

24
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** What kind of vessel do you operate?

26
27 **MR. ELLENDER:** So I used to manage Coco Charters, and that was a
28 charter fleet of five Freemans that ran out of Cocodrie, Louisiana,
29 but I no longer do that, and so I'm just -- I switched to inshore
30 fishing now.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Josh. Any other questions? Not seeing
33 any, we'll move on, in the room, to Mr. Jim Zurbrick, and next,
34 online, is John Black.

35
36 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak.
37 Jim Zurbrick from Steinhatchee, Florida thirty-plus, almost forty,
38 years as a charter and dual-permitted vessel, and, in the last
39 twelve years, pretty much strictly commercial. I sold my boat
40 fifteen months ago, and so now I'm strictly a dealer. I had been
41 a dealer also, but I'm strictly a dealer.

42
43 The SEFHIER Program, quickly, I was at a council meeting when
44 things have happened over the years where people have passed on
45 because it never got done, and this is one thing that's been
46 sitting out there for a while.

47
48 I know we did have it in effect, and then the judge had overruled,

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

5
6 Amendment 59A, we've got to move this forward. We really do, so
7 if the 501(c)(3) can be moved quickly to where, in October, you
8 guys can address this and make a final decision of passing it or
9 not, and so I'm asking that staff, and I know it's probably a heavy
10 lift, and there's a lot of work that has been done already, if we
11 can get this thing moving and take it to final action in October.

12
13 Also, I know that the feds err on precaution. That's just the
14 nature of it. I like that, because I've seen this fishery, for so
15 long, have its ebbs and downs and whatnot, but still, under federal
16 management, I was in a better place in my time in this fishery.

17
18 If I'm purely a recreational person, I can see that the state might
19 be able to make me happier with some regulations on the
20 recreational side of it, but, with the federal for-hire guys,
21 they're looking to stay out of state management, and I support
22 that. Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. Do we have any
25 questions? Not seeing any, Jim, thank you. Next, online, is John
26 Black.

27
28 **MR. JOHN BLACK:** Are we here now?

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, John. We've got you.

31
32 **MR. BLACK:** Okay, there we go. I am not in favor of state
33 management. I think we need to continue to manage this fishery.
34 We don't have completely accurate data now. If we can get SEFHIER
35 back online, we can get good data directly from the people that
36 are out there fishing.

37
38 You don't get information from somebody that's not doing it, or
39 just a few, and try to figure everybody is doing the same thing,
40 because there are different talent levels out there, and there are
41 different people that fish different ways, and we need accurate
42 data, and, the more accurate it is, the better we can know how
43 many fish we have out there, what our stock actually is, and it
44 will go a long ways towards the goal of managing this stock, which
45 all of us in for-hire, and I don't care which side of the coin
46 you're on, we all want the stocks to be healthy, because this is
47 our livelihood.

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

6
7 We have too many days. We're fishing way too long. I know you
8 guys never thought you would hear our industry say, hey, you gave
9 us too many days, and you gave us too many days. If we don't catch
10 our quota -- If the numbers were correct, and we had all these
11 fish out here, and we just weren't good enough to catch them, and
12 we got more days, great, but I don't think that's the case.

13
14 I don't think the fish are there that we say are there, because we
15 don't have good data. We need the SEFHIER, and, if we don't catch
16 that, let's not get more days. Let's go the opposite direction a
17 little bit.

18
19 Let's not, you know, go crazy with it, but, all the way into
20 October, I'm sorry. If I had a switch, I would switch it off.
21 It's too much. We don't need that. It's not good for the stocks.
22 Please table the state management. Please get our SEFHIER back
23 online, and I'm going to give back the rest of my time. Thank you
24 for having me today.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Black. Do we have any questions?
27 Not seeing any, John, thank you. Next, we're going to go, in the
28 room, to Captain Scott Hickman, and next up is Brad Gorst, online.

29
30 **MR. SCOTT HICKMAN:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.
31 Honorable Chairman Dugas, esteemed members of the Gulf Council,
32 our amazing Executive Director, Dr. Simmons, and her really great
33 staff, and I want to say thank you to our Regional Administrator,
34 Andy Strelcheck, for getting our codified text out in time for a
35 final vote.

36
37 I was going to talk about that first, that my kids were just in
38 diapers, or getting out of diapers, and I was bringing them to
39 Gulf Council meetings, when we started working on the charter boat
40 electronic logbooks. One of them told us, here not too long ago,
41 she's going to make me a grandpa, which is a great thing, and I'm
42 really excited about it, but, thinking about the timeline of that,
43 we went from diapers to making me a grandpa to get an electronic
44 logbook. You know, we could probably do things a little faster
45 around here.

46
47 I wanted to thank the council for moving forward with the fishery
48 ecosystem plan and passing the FEI. That was a great piece of

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

4
5 I wanted to talk about what's going on with this taking over of
6 Amendment 40, which, in my eyes, I've listened fairly openly. I
7 don't see how it helps my fleet in Galveston, in Freeport, which
8 is the second largest concentration of charter-for-hire federal
9 permits in the Gulf. I don't -- I can't find anybody to give me
10 the reason why it's going to be better, and I don't really see how
11 it's going to help my state agency as well.

12
13 They're going to take more on, and it's going to be -- It's just
14 not a good thing, but, on the side of Louisiana, I'm going to say
15 that Andy said a few years ago, hey, you know, the state directors,
16 the folks on the council, need to be more innovative. They need
17 to be more flexible, and so I give Chris and his folks some kudos
18 for trying to do something different.

19
20 I wanted to float this out there, because I was thinking about
21 this in the back, is the idea of a community-based rights-based
22 management system, with a high level of accountability with an
23 exempted fishing permit, I think would be a good way to do this,
24 and something to look into. This blanket thing, it doesn't work.
25 There's too many people that are against it, but a community-based
26 rights-based management EFP would probably be a great idea.

27
28 Be innovative. I'm Mr. Innovation. I love thinking outside the
29 box, and I think you're going in the right direction, and you've
30 just got to be a little more innovative.

31
32 As far as the amberjack EFP, as Billy knows, I've spent a lot of
33 time in his part of the world doing research with Dr. Gallaway and
34 others, and you can walk across the Amberjacks over there. There's
35 so many, and some parts right off of the upper coast of Texas too,
36 and so you've just got to make sure that EFP is done right, and so
37 thank you, all.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Scott. We have a question from Mr.
40 Geeslin.

41
42 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes. Captain Innovation, Captain Hickman, I'm going
43 to ask you the reciprocal question, or the opposite of what I asked
44 Richard Fischer, and what is it about state management that your
45 group there in Galveston, and Freeport, and even extending on down
46 the coast to some extent, what is it about state management that
47 you all are adverse to?

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

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

13
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Not a question, and I just want to correct the
15 record, and so I've got a whole team of people that makes me look
16 good, and so really thank the two people sitting to my left, as
17 well as my reg riders and team at home that are working hard on
18 this rulemaking.

19
20 **MR. HICKMAN:** Thank you, all. I appreciate all the staff at SERO.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Captain Hickman? Seeing
23 none, thank you, Scott. Next up, online, is Brad Gorst.

24
25 **MR. BRAD GORST:** Hello. Can you hear me?

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Brad. Go ahead.

28
29 **MR. GORST:** My name is Brad Gorst. I run a charter operation here
30 in Clearwater, Florida. I guess we're -- Two permits, two boats
31 commercial, and two boats Gulf-permitted and South Atlantic-
32 permitted.

33
34 I've already been doing the SEFHIER Program under the South
35 Atlantic permits, even though I could have let my South Atlantic
36 permits go, but I felt that it was a viable thing to keep going
37 with the data collection, and I think it's very important, and I
38 hope that it can be used since the lawsuit and shutting down of
39 the Gulf program. With that being said, the one caveat that I --

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Brad, we lost you.

42
43 **MR. GORST:** Can you hear me? Hello, hello, hello?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead.

46
47 **MR. GORST:** Sorry, and I'm not in a good area here. All right,
48 and so, but, anyhow, I think that the Gulf reporting requirements

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

4
5 State management, I don't see any benefit to Aunt Mary from Toledo,
6 or Uncle Joe from New Mexico, because, ultimately, these fish do
7 not belong to the states. This is a federal resource. These fish
8 belong to the citizens of this country that are spending money.
9 That's why we fall under Department of Commerce.

10
11 Whether you're from England and you come here to spend money, and,
12 just because you go to whatever state it is you go to, I don't see
13 that it is a viable option to these people, and so it just doesn't
14 -- There's no -- The purpose of need has not been established, in
15 my outlook.

16
17 The other thing I wanted to comment on was the CPUE on the red
18 grouper stock. I think that it needs to be -- You know, first and
19 foremost with the stock, the rationale being is, during the 2013
20 red tide event here on the west coast of Florida, management did
21 not catch the decline in the stock as it was happening.

22
23 Thus, the effort shifting in geographically of the fishermen, and
24 they moved further south and caught those fish, hence the collapse
25 of the red grouper stock, and so, if we would had more real-time
26 data collection, or catch the unit effort tracking, we probably
27 wouldn't have got to that point where we beat the stock up, and we
28 wouldn't be where we got, and thank you for letting me have the
29 opportunity to speak, and thank you council staff and NOAA
30 administrators. Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Brad. Do we have any questions? Not
33 seeing any, thank you again. Next, we're going to, in the room,
34 to Mr. Buddy Guindon.

35
36 **MR. BUDDY GUINDON:** Good afternoon. Thanks for having me. Buddy
37 Guindon, and I'm a commercial fisherman from Galveston, Texas.
38 I'm also a charter boat owner, and a recreational fisherman, and
39 so Scott got up here and pretty eloquently answered a question,
40 but, for me, the reason I don't want state management is because
41 they have not been a good partner in dealing with any of the issues
42 that are important to the commercial side of our fishery.

43
44 We have had no collaboration. You get a three-minute period once
45 a year to speak to the commission about your problems, and so we
46 have no way to address problems with our state commission. We
47 have the ability to come before you, and at least plead our case,
48 and give you the information that we hold dear, and it's kind of

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

3
4 I wish that, honestly, a program could be laid out that shows what
5 you're trying to accomplish by bringing the charter boats into
6 state management. I've heard, since I've been here in Louisiana,
7 they've allowed the state guides to become federal water guides,
8 and there's really no control at that nine-mile border, and so
9 they're competing -- They're giving cheaper prices to the people,
10 and the charter boats are being affected by that, and I know that
11 takes place in Texas. They've caught a few of them, but there's
12 a lot more that could be done. It's probably resource dependent.

13
14 Fixing the IFQ system, I really think that we never reached the
15 point of consolidation on the original goals, and now we're trying
16 to morph this into somewhat of a socialist program, where we give
17 welfare to certain people that don't want to participate in the
18 current program that has helped rebuild the fishery.

19
20 In Magnuson, it spells out that the people that are there for that
21 rebuilding should be rewarded for that, and I think that some of
22 the things that we're moving forward with are counter to that
23 reward that was supposed to come with proper management and the
24 shift to a new system that helped rebuild our fisheries, and helped
25 build real viable fishing businesses in the Gulf, whereas, during
26 the derby, we didn't have that. We had ten-day-a-month jobs for
27 people, and we lived a life of risk.

28
29 Now that we have something, because I heard fifty years ago --
30 Fifty years ago, there was no one in this room arguing about a red
31 snapper, because there wasn't very many of them, and, now that we
32 have done a great job of rebuilding the fishery, we want to find
33 a way to redistribute them. Do what your heart says and not what
34 your state says. Thanks.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Guindon. Do we have any questions?
37 Not seeing anybody, thanks for coming. Next up, Alicia Paul.

38
39 **MS. ALICIA PAUL:** All right. Here we go. I'm trying to get
40 through this. Good afternoon. Alicia Paul, Panama City Beach. I
41 own two federally-permitted, dually-permitted vessels.

42
43 I've got a couple of hot topics I want to talk to you all about.
44 Amendment 64, Amendment 64 is about the federal for-hire permitted
45 vessels. It ain't got nothing to do with state management. You
46 all are already managing your states. You know, you heard
47 testimony from Louisiana, eighty-two operators, and how many of
48 those operators are federally-permitted? Are we going to hear

1 from one of them?

2
3 When asked by Mr. Sanchez what kind of vessel you're in, it wasn't
4 federally-permitted. Just how many of these permits are out there
5 in Louisiana that want this, because, from what I've heard, over
6 90 percent, and it's overwhelming that we do not want it. We don't
7 want to be dragged through the mud. It's a political fish grab.
8 We don't want to be dragged through it.

9
10 If it's about the fish, you all, bring back Amendment 52. You all
11 tabled it. Go back to working on it, the reallocation of red
12 snapper, and throw 64 out the window. We don't want it. We have
13 stability. We have transparency. We can come to these meetings.
14 We can talk to you all, and we can get it done. With the states,
15 we're not comfortable with that. We don't get that stability, and
16 we don't get that transparency. Keep it right here. It's where
17 it belongs.

18
19 SEFHIER, I've been a big advocate for it from the get-go. You
20 know, let's keep that working. I would like to see it go forward.
21 Pass it, please.

22
23 Louisiana EFP, I commend you all for wanting to get those jacks,
24 but you said it's about discard mortality, reducing discard
25 mortality. In my opinion, it's going to ramp up the effort. When
26 you ramp up the effort, you ramp up the discard mortality. In
27 June and July, the hottest months of the year, you're going to be
28 throwing the fish back, and your discard mortality is going to
29 increase. It doesn't make any sense, in the height of what we
30 have been told is the spawn. I don't get it. It don't work, in
31 my opinion.

32
33 You know, you've got some new data coming out with the red snapper
34 stock assessment. I've got a feeling we're going to see a decline,
35 and we're going to see some reallocation. You know, if you want
36 your fish, and you want more, and the for-hire guys don't want it,
37 take those numbers from the new FES data and you all work on 52.
38 Throw 64 out the window. That's all I'm asking. Leave us alone.
39 We don't want it. The majority of us, we don't want it. I haven't
40 heard any testimony that does, other than from state water guides.
41 That's really all I've got. Thank you, all.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Paul. Do we have any questions?
44 Not seeing any, Alicia, thank you. Next up is Chris Niquet. Okay.
45 What about Larry Lemieux?

46
47 **MR. LARRY LEMIEUX:** Good afternoon, Gulf Council. My name is
48 Captain Larry Lemieux. I own the charter boat Backlash, federally-

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

4
5 First and foremost, like Alicia just said to the state management,
6 we're federally for-hire, with a federal permit, and let's keep it
7 that way. You guys have done a great job so far.

8
9 The SEFHIER program, definitely bring it back. It gives you real-
10 time data from for-hire charter boats across the Gulf, from the
11 tip of Key West all the way to Brownsville, Texas. We definitely
12 need to keep that up.

13
14 My main concern today was two concerns. The first would be red
15 snapper. Like Mr. Williams said before, and I don't think any of
16 you took his bet, we have seen a decline in red snapper in the
17 past five years. I've stood at this podium in multiple cities and
18 said the same thing, as well as my constituents.

19
20 We're given a longer season, and we haven't met the quota in years.
21 We're not going to meet the quota this year, and we ain't going to
22 meet the quota next year. If the state goes in there, and the
23 state is allowed to fish snappers all the way to 2027, and me,
24 being a federal charter boat, I think I get to October 24th at
25 midnight, and I'll close. We won't be nowhere near the quota.

26
27 If we're not catching a quota, and you're giving us more time every
28 year, there is a problem. I mean, I'm a pretty well-educated
29 fellow, but I know every year it seems like we catch less and less
30 and less. Obviously, regional depletion, and, you know, I've seen
31 you guys draw lines yesterday trying to geofence, as one gentleman
32 said, and there's no geofences in the Gulf of Mexico.

33
34 You know, outside of nine miles, that's federal waters. That's
35 what we fish in every day. That's what I'm required to fish in,
36 unless I'm, you know, trolling for mackerel or something else, and
37 we need to worry about federal waters. Keep the federal federal,
38 and don't let the state be involved in anything, as far as I'm
39 concerned.

40
41 Another thing we haven't really talked a lot about, because of the
42 reef fish, is the king mackerel fishing. King mackerel fishing is
43 atrocious. It has been. I am a king mackerel permit holder. I've
44 held one since 2016, and I don't think I've sold a commercial
45 kingfish since Hurricane Michael, and that October 10, 2018 in
46 Panama City Beach, which wiped us out.

47
48 King mackerel, I don't know, and I've caught one keeper this year.

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

6
7 I don't know if it's pollution, if it's BP, if it's bait, if it's
8 the acceleration of Gulf temperature, and I don't know what the
9 answer is, but I'm seeing a decline in multiple species. Yes, the
10 gags are doing better, and, yes, the jacks are doing better, and
11 triggerfish is great.

12
13 King mackerel, red snapper, cobia, and cobia is another thing.
14 You know, I know this is a reef fish, kind of this week, and, you
15 know, I was on the cobia task force two years ago, and we barely
16 see very few cobia, especially no keepers. I've got friends on
17 the east coast, in the Carolinas, and they catch more ling than
18 they've ever seen up there. Why? I don't know. I think it's
19 food, cleaner water.

20
21 I think the Gulf, since the BP oil spill, has been polluted by BP,
22 and I think it's been overlooked. I think it's reoccurring every
23 time we get a hurricane, some major weather phenomenon that stirs
24 up the Gulf, and I think, you know, it's detrimental to everybody.

25
26 I just -- I don't know what the solutions are, but, as a unit of
27 all these guys and ladies back here, we've got to figure something
28 out, and so we've got to do it fast, because we are in major
29 decline.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Larry. Do we have any questions? Not
32 seeing any, thanks for coming. Next up is David Johnson.

33
34 **MR. DAVID JOHNSON:** Good afternoon. I'm David Johnson. I'm a
35 commercial reef fish longliner from Madeira Beach, Florida. I
36 just came to the meeting to weigh in on the Amendment 59A. The
37 exemption for non-profit and a shareholder, I really don't even
38 understand what this is. How can you charge me to lease quota and
39 you're a non-profit? That kind of is -- I mean, I'm just a dumb
40 fisherman, and so maybe somebody could explain that to me, but I
41 believe you should be a participant in the fishery, should have a
42 reef fish permit in order to own IFQs.

43
44 I mean, this was designed to keep fishermen fishing, and it has
45 spiraled into something completely different. It is what it is.
46 It's already been done, and you can't undo it, but, from here
47 forward, I think we should try and push it back in that direction.

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

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, David. Do we have any questions? Yes,
7 we have. Mr. Strelcheck.

8
9 **MR. STRELCHECK:** You said you're a longliner. I've been hearing
10 some improvements with red grouper catch over the summer. I know
11 you don't fish, obviously, during the summer, because of the turtle
12 closure, but, you know, what are you seeing in terms of red grouper
13 catches?

14
15 **MR. JOHNSON:** What am I seeing for catches in the summertime?
16 Well, red grouper in the summertime, I have fished a few trips
17 this summer. We are required to fish a little further offshore,
18 and the red grouper bottom is -- There's a lot less of it in the
19 depth that we're required to fish. We usually get a pretty good
20 trip out of June and then July, and then August, you know, it's
21 been fished by the entire fleet for a few months, and it gets a
22 little bit tougher this time of year. We're hoping to have a big
23 opening on September 1.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, David. Do we have any other questions?
26 I have one. I missed it. Where did you say you fish out of?

27
28 **MR. JOHNSON:** Madeira Beach.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** No other questions, next up is Ms. Kelia Paul.
31 I'm sorry. I skipped Scott. Scott Daggett.

32
33 **MR. SCOTT DAGGETT:** Good afternoon. My name is Scott Daggett, a
34 longliner from Madeira Beach, thirty-nine years, owner-operator,
35 and I know you guys aren't acting on it today, but I just wanted
36 to give my opinion on 59A.

37
38 Having loopholes, and everything else, that's how we got to this
39 point, and looking at your guys' graph on 59A, you can see where
40 -- I think the red grouper, 40 percent of the quota is owned by
41 eighteen or nineteen accounts, and I think, on the red snapper, 47
42 percent is by I think something like eighteen accounts, and so I
43 think that's -- You know, if you're going to leave loopholes, what
44 are we even doing here? We're just going to be back to the same
45 problem again.

46
47 I mean, if you're in the game, you're in the game. I bought quota
48 at the height that I lose on now, at \$20 a share, but it doesn't

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

5
6 About the summertime fishing, usually for us, you know, my boat
7 goes in the summer, but I don't run it. I've got a young kid that
8 runs it, just because it's brutal. You get one good trip out the
9 summer, maybe in June, and that's working from the edges down to
10 the Tortugas, all my good spots, and, other than that, it's
11 horrible, but, you know, that's -- We're out there for the turtles,
12 but that's that. All right. Thank you.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Scott. Do we have any questions? Not
15 seeing any, next up is Kelia Paul.

16
17 **MS. KELIA PAUL:** For real this time. Good afternoon. My name is
18 Kelia Paul. My family operates two dually-permitted charter
19 vessels out of Panama City Beach, Florida, and I'm also
20 representing the Panama City Boatman's Association, which I'm not
21 paid to do.

22
23 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I have been absent
24 for a while. I have been kindergartners, and raising one, and so,
25 if some of that carries over in my comments today, I'm going to
26 apologize in advance.

27
28 First, SEFHIER. We strongly support this program moving forward.
29 We supported the original program, and we're extremely frustrated
30 of the years of work lost through litigation. Move it forward.

31
32 Amendment 64, this is where the kindergarten teacher comes out a
33 little bit. Just because you don't like what's happening in your
34 sandbox, it doesn't mean you get to climb into your friend's
35 sandbox and start rearranging theirs. Amendment 40, being a
36 federal for-hire, we have our own quota and with that
37 predictability, sellable seasons.

38
39 We book red snapper trips months in advance, sometimes years. That
40 predictability and stability matter to our businesses. Our sandbox
41 is working. We want to stay federally managed, and you've heard
42 federal for-hire operators come before you again and again, asking
43 you not to do this. The fleet has not been asking for state
44 management. We're asking you to stop.

45
46 More importantly, I cannot understand why we would even consider
47 making this change right now. We're approaching a new red snapper
48 stock assessment, and we're dealing with major changes in

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

3
4 We don't know what this process is going to mean for this fishery
5 yet, and why would we fundamentally restructure who manages a
6 federal for-hire sector in the middle of all that, especially when
7 what we're seeing on the water should concern this council.

8
9 I've been in this industry for approximately two decades, but I
10 have somewhat of a unique perspective. Part of my job is being on
11 the dock every day, all day, booking trips, talking to people,
12 helping customers, supporting my business, my boats, but I don't
13 just see what my boats bring in.

14
15 I get to see the entire fleet, and what I see is concerning. I'm
16 seeing captains with thirty years of experience come back from all
17 day trips without limits. These people did not suddenly forget
18 how to catch red snapper. and it's not happening in isolation.
19 For the last few years, the federal for-hire fleet has left a
20 substantial portion of its annual catch target unharvested. We
21 watched the stock rebuild. We remember when you couldn't get away
22 from it. That's not what we're seeing today.

23
24 I don't know what this new assessment is going to tell us, and I'm
25 not going to pretend that I do, but I do know that this is a
26 terrible time to dismantle federal management structure that our
27 fleet wants to keep. Our state already manages the private
28 recreational component, and we want to remain federal, and so
29 apparently I'm going to finish my first council testimony after
30 teaching kindergarten the same way I spend a lot of my days.

31
32 Amendment 64 needs a red day. Stop. Go back to your seat, and
33 leave your friend alone. Please stop work on Amendment 64 and
34 keep the federal for-hire fleet under federal management. Thank
35 you.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kelia. Do we have any questions? Not
38 seeing any, thank you, Ms. Paul. Next up is Mark Tryon.

39
40 **MR. MARK TRYON:** Mark Tryon, a commercial fisherman, Gulf Breeze,
41 Florida, bay boat fishery and primarily red snapper. To start
42 with, I'm glad I came here today. If you remember early on in the
43 testimony, Captain Charlie was saying what happened to him
44 regarding the observer program, and being fined, and it just so
45 happens that, in this quarter, I was selected by the observer
46 program, and, for various reasons, I haven't run any trips yet. I
47 had some boat trouble, and then I've had a little medical issue
48 going on.

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

9
10 On to the 59A, and I am not opposed to this permit requirement by
11 any means. We used to have a permit requirement back in 2007,
12 when this went into being, okay, the IFQ system, and so just a few
13 things to consider though. You know, when you talk about
14 unintended consequences, and potential pitfalls and problems, I
15 think that requiring permits is going to increase the demand
16 somewhat for permits, which is going to increase the price, and
17 that could make things more difficult for the new entrants.

18
19 On to reclaim shares, and I haven't heard anyone talk of this yet,
20 but, if you reclaim the shares, first of all, is it legal? Second
21 of all, are you going to compensate shareholders? Third, what are
22 you going to do with the shares once you reclaim them? In other
23 words, are you going to retire the shares? Are you going to
24 auction them off? Are you going to redistribute them, or, similar
25 to the unclaimed shares, now are you going to do nothing, and they
26 just sit there?

27
28 Finally, kind of relating to this, I think that the loan program
29 needs to be reformed, and it would be nice if that could be moved
30 along, and expedited, and implemented, so, if there are these more
31 shares coming online to be sold, that the new entrants, and maybe
32 the smaller operators, can get a loan and afford to purchase some
33 equity into the fishery.

34
35 The last thing I want to say is if we could move the snapper stock
36 assessment along and expedite it, because, if you get in a
37 situation where you're trying to sell shares, or buy shares, you
38 need that information of where we're going to be in a couple of
39 years, as far as the stock, to determine the value of the shares,
40 and that's it. Thank you.

41
42 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you. Do we have any questions? Dr. Walter.

43
44 **DR. WALTER:** Mark, thanks. One thing you mentioned is your concern
45 about not running a trip for fear of a fine, and we don't want
46 anyone to not run a trip for fear. I mean, we want people to be
47 fishing, and so what I would like to do is make sure you talk to
48 our observer program people.

1
2 Really, I think all you need to do is call in, but I want to make
3 sure that, to confirm that, that, if you call in, even if you don't
4 meet the requirements, it's not going to be a violation, but I
5 don't want to quote that right now. I just want to make sure that
6 you're in conversation with the program, but that you're not
7 fearing running a trip.
8

9 **MR. TRYON:** Right. He didn't generate fines. He incurred, and
10 came from somewhere else, where they're just checking the records,
11 and, you know, he didn't run enough trips. He didn't run the three
12 trips, for whatever reason, and that was my understanding of
13 talking to him after he spoke, but, yes, and I'll be in touch.
14

15 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and make sure to reach out to Scott Leach in our
16 observer program, and just call in.
17

18 **MR. TRYON:** I've already talked to them a couple of weeks ago,
19 telling them where I'm at, you know, and I've got like a shoulder
20 trouble, and I've got an MRI that they're going to tell me where
21 I'm at on Monday, and so, based on what they tell me, then I'll
22 know if I'm good to go fishing or I've got to go under the knife.
23

24 **DR. WALTER:** Okay. Well, get better. Take the trip. You know,
25 just call in, and I think we can make sure you're in compliance,
26 and we want people to be fishing.
27

28 **MR. TRYON:** All right.
29

30 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks.
31

32 **DR. BANKS:** Any other questions? Thank you, Mark. Mr. Billy
33 Archer.
34

35 **MR. BILLY ARCHER:** Good afternoon, members of the Gulf Council.
36 My name is Captain Billy Archer. I'm a third-generation fisherman
37 from Panama City, Florida, a dual permit holder. I'm celebrating
38 my 51st year as a charter captain this year.
39

40 I would like to thank the Gulf Council for its efforts in getting
41 the SEFHIER program back online as soon as possible. I have no
42 problem if I were to be selected to provide economic data required
43 by the council for all alternatives concerning my fishing
44 activities while underway on a daily charter trip.
45

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

1 and our businesses. We want all the federal permits to operate
2 within the same data collection program. This will be paramount
3 in dealing with data uncertainty.
4

5 The ugly fish, Amendment 64, I strongly oppose the continued work
6 on this amendment. At the Reef Fish meeting yesterday morning,
7 Captain Ed Walker presented the best public testimony on why the
8 council shouldn't pursue it, and why our industry doesn't want it.
9

10 We currently have Amendment 40. Sector separation was passed over
11 a decade ago and has provided accountability and sustainability
12 for our fleet. How is that only eighty-two federally-permitted
13 operators out of Louisiana can totally torpedo a program that over
14 1,200 federally-permitted operators like and want to keep?
15

16 Please table Amendment 64 until you have the new red snapper stock
17 assessment in hand, along with the recalibrated FES for the Science
18 Center, and hopefully SEFHIER will be available to you as well,
19 giving the council another great tool to make better assessment
20 decisions concerning our industry.
21

22 All right, and so, concerning the Louisiana EFP concerning
23 amberjack, my question is to Captain Ed Walker and our Florida
24 council members. Can we request an amberjack EFP with gag grouper?
25 I mean, I would love to catch them and put them in the box. It
26 would make the box look great.
27

28 Then my last comment is it appears that Louisiana state guide boats
29 have created this problem with the federally-permitted boats, by
30 doubling the bag limits, and the federal boats have to -- Are held
31 to more restrictive bag limits, and so that's a no brainer right
32 there. Who are you going to go fishing with if you can catch four
33 or you catch two? Thank you for your time.
34

35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Billy. Do we have any questions? I
36 don't see any. Thank you. Mr. Clarence Seymour.
37

38 **MR. CLARENCE SEYMOUR:** Good afternoon. Captain Clarence Seymour,
39 charter boat SYL, twenty-nine years, federally-permitted, Biloxi,
40 Mississippi. I live in Ocean Springs, across the bridge.
41

42 Since Amendment 40 has brought my business back to numbers that -
43 - I was about to go under post-Katrina, which smacked us pretty
44 good, and so Amendment 40, under sector separation, has been
45 probably the biggest lifeline for my business, and our industry
46 here on the Gulf Coast, because I lived the nine-day season.
47

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

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

4
5 So, as far as Amendment 64, I oppose Amendment 64 for regional
6 management for federal for-hire charter boats. Well, number one,
7 the map they had out yesterday is the same thing that the private
8 angling sector had with Amendment 50. Here goes the line straight
9 down Chandelier, and we've got a line over here out of Alabama.

10
11 I don't think our coastline is, what, seventy miles or so, and so
12 I can go forty or fifty miles down, and I'm in Louisiana, and I
13 can go forty-four miles, and I'm fishing off of the farthest west
14 Alabama dumping grounds, and so here, where we're at, is we're
15 pretty well in the middle of this line, and so right there is a
16 downfall with Amendment 64, the way they've got this document.

17
18 The second thing is 0.07 percent was the Alternative 1 on
19 allocation. It's even worse than we got in Amendment 50 as a
20 private angler, and I just -- Then the other document, that was
21 pulled up from the last meeting, that showed that Mississippi's
22 historical catch, like in 2024 and 2025, was like a 20,000-pound
23 swing, and I don't know if that come from MRIP or telephone call-
24 ins or whatever, but I think I've been called twice on the new
25 Mississippi Creel.

26
27 I heard some of my captains back there say they've been called
28 pretty regular, but maybe I was offshore, and I don't know, but,
29 this telephone call-in, you have to go back, go back and look at
30 your weekly thing. I mean, I get them in the mail through the
31 wintertime also, but so I still have some doubts with the creel
32 deal, and so I'm just not too into that, but the Tails 'n Scales
33 that we're doing, we're doing a really good data collection with
34 Tails 'n Scales, and, you know, I stress to anybody and everybody,
35 private anglers and charter-for-hire, that it's very important
36 that we, you know, collect data correctly, and so I'm just against
37 regional management for federal for-hire. Any questions?

38
39 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you. Any questions?

40
41 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Thank you.

42
43 **DR. BANKS:** Hold on. We have one from Mr. Osborne.

44
45 **MR. OSBORNE:** Clarence, thanks for coming. I appreciate your
46 remarks on the amendment. I am -- As someone who sits on the
47 advisory commission for Mississippi Department of Marine
48 Resources, you know, we do meet monthly, every third Tuesday, and

1 we would like to hear from folks like you coming by that meeting
2 to talk about your issues with the state management, or any other
3 things, and are you aware that we do those meetings once a month?
4

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

10
11 I know we got a lot of stuff fixing to go out, and I also came, a
12 couple of years ago, over the cobia situation, while we're not
13 following the federal guidelines, and Trevor gave a great
14 presentation on cobia, and he kind of agreed with me that two cobia
15 a person is still extensive for a Mississippi angler under a three-
16 mile boundary.

17
18 There's a lot of enforcement problems too, with tournaments and et
19 cetera, that we have here in town, but I sure will make it a point
20 to start showing up on Tuesdays, and maybe speak out in public,
21 and let you all listen to some stuff that we've got going on in
22 that area.

23
24 **MR. OSBORNE:** In the future, when you give an attaboy, don't just
25 tell Rick, because Rick doesn't tell us how much you appreciate
26 the work that we're doing, and so --

27
28 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Yes. Thank you. Appreciate it.

29
30 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you. One more from Mr. Sanchez.

31
32 **MR. SANCHEZ:** It's seeing you again, Captain. I wanted to ask
33 you, and, in the past, you were involved when we were doing sector
34 separation, and you were heavily involved, and you were very
35 involved with the entire fleet here in Mississippi, and so my
36 question to you is how do the rest of your captains feel in your
37 fleet about Amendment 64? Do they want it or not?

38
39 **MR. SEYMOUR:** There's none in our fleet. The fleet shows twenty-
40 four permits on the paper for addresses to Mississippi, but I think
41 it's somewhere around fourteen or fifteen, and, my son, he's a new
42 participant. He just got a federal permit for his new boat, and
43 we really don't have an association anymore, any groups.

44
45 They have a group, but we're not involved in that, because you've
46 got to be in the random drug program to be in the Mississippi
47 Charterboat Association, and so we pretty well all dropped out of
48 that, but -- That's the truth.

1
2 That's the stipulation, but we're trying to get a group back
3 together called Mississippi Reef Fish Alliance, which is with the
4 fifteen charterboats here in town, which we're just off the ground
5 as a bunch of guys doing it, but, no, none of them has spoke that
6 they've said, oh, this sounds like it's a good idea, but I don't
7 believe so, none of them.

8
9 **DR. BANKS:** All right. We have --

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** So, based on what you just said, would it be relatively
12 safe to say that not a single Mississippi charter operator is
13 interested in this program, to your knowledge anyways, like none
14 of them?

15
16 **MR. SEYMOUR:** That's correct. None of them.

17
18 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you.

19
20 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Thank you.

21
22 **DR. BANKS:** All right. Thank you, sir. Hold on. General
23 Spraggins. Last one.

24
25 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Well, he just brought up something, and so
26 I've got to ask a question. If Mississippi opted out, and stayed
27 in the federal program, do you have a problem with Louisiana doing
28 what they would like?

29
30 **MR. SEYMOUR:** To speak truthful, yes, I do. Number one, the four-
31 fish bag limit, we could never -- Your staff knows that we could
32 never sustain that kind of fishery, no matter what. I was in --
33 I've had a federal permit since 1998, and it was all a fellow could
34 do, or lady, and we have women that is fish captains, that could
35 get a limit with captain and crew out here in Mississippi waters,
36 and we also had oil rigs back then.

37
38 As of now -- I just remember the day when four fish per person,
39 and I'm just saying that I was one that would -- We would have
40 three or four fellows on the boat, and we went to the market with
41 what we didn't want to eat, and we sold them, but you can't do
42 that no more, but that was back in the day. Anytime you get way
43 too much more limit than an individual needs, I think it can be
44 really troublesome for -- Any angler can actually try to become a
45 commercial fisherman, and pay for the gasoline.

46
47 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** One other question. You know, you do
48 commercial, and you do have a federal license, right?

1
2 **MR. SEYMOUR:** Yes, and I didn't -- We had the hook-and-line back
3 in the day.
4

5 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Do you still do federal today?
6

7 **MR. SEYMOUR:** No, and I'm just federally-permitted for-hire.
8

9 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Right, but are you having any trouble catching
10 your fish in Mississippi?
11

12 **MR. SEYMOUR:** I do -- No, and we're getting our twelve, if we've
13 got six people. Like Jay and them yesterday, they had -- They
14 needed forty fish, and Maddox said they only caught thirty, and so
15 they struggled a little bit yesterday, but, you know, every time
16 the water gets hot, and we fish the fish havens, it -- You're going
17 to have a struggle bus in that fishery, you know, but, if you've
18 got the dolphins on you, you're not going to get a bite, and so
19 it's always -- The water is calm, and so, as far as me so far,
20 yes, I've had a limit every time I've came back.
21

22 **DR. BANKS:** Okay. Thank you very much. Ms. Susan Boggs.
23

24 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Good afternoon. My name is Susan Boggs from
25 Orange Beach, Alabama. I am a recreational angler, president of
26 Real Surprise Charters and Marina, and the proud mother of Captain
27 Elizabeth Boggs. We own a six-passenger boat, Islander, and our
28 headboat is Reel Surprise. Each boat has a Gulf reef fish permit
29 and a Gulf coast migratory pelagic permit.
30

31 We are very familiar with the reporting of data. Since we
32 purchased Reel Surprise in 2002, we have had to report. Over the
33 past twenty-four years, we've had to report for five other
34 headboats that we have bought and sold. We are in support of the
35 Gulf for-hire data collection program. Reef Fish Amendment 64 is
36 not one that we support, and the EFP for amberjack that Louisiana
37 has applied for is not one we support.
38

39 The oath of office that each council member takes states in part,
40 quote, "promise to conserve and manage the living marine resources
41 of the United States of America for the greatest overall benefit
42 of the nation", end quote.
43

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

1
2 In the presentation that Emily gave celebrating fifty years of the
3 Magnuson-Stevens Act, Warren Magnuson emphasized regional
4 management within a national framework and Ted Stevens, quote,
5 "asserted those closest to the fisheries are in the best position
6 to make decisions", end quote.

7
8 Look behind me today. These men and women are closest to the
9 fisheries. These men and women, myself included, rely on the
10 health of the fish stocks for our livelihood.

11
12 I'm not out on the water every day, but I am on the dock every
13 day. I see the fish that come to the dock. I talk to the charter
14 boat captains and their crews, the captains, owners, and crews of
15 private recreational boats, and I hear what they have to say. I'm
16 not going to put words in their mouth, but I do encourage them to
17 come to the meetings or comment online. You can lead a horse to
18 water, but you certainly cannot make them drink.

19
20 In 2013 and 2014, sixteen boats in 2013 and eighteen boats in 2014,
21 participated in the Gulf Headboat Collaborative. It was a two-
22 year exempted fishing permit allowing these charter boats, or
23 headboats, excuse me, from all five Gulf states to participate and
24 catch red snapper and gag grouper 365 days of the year.

25
26 We had a quota, much like that of the IFQ, but we didn't own the
27 fish. Boats were threatened to be burned down. Tires were
28 threatened to be slashed. You couldn't imagine all of the things
29 that people threatened against us because we had something they
30 didn't, and what does that tell you? We had something they wanted.
31 Been there, done that. I understand change. Change is inevitable.
32 Change is hard. I know. Thank you.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Do we have any questions?
35 Not seeing any, thanks for being here, Susan. Next up is Mr. James
36 Bruce.

37
38 **MR. JAMES BRUCE:** Good afternoon, Council. James Bruce, commercial
39 snapper fisherman. I thought I would never have to come to a
40 meeting like this again. It all comes down to you all want a
41 permit to own an IFQ share.

42
43 With the executive order, I thought it would pass kind of quick,
44 and then, what I heard yesterday is you all wanted entities to
45 join this -- That non-whatever entities to join it, and that don't
46 have no sense.

47
48 The last executive order we had, you all know what happened? It

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

4
5 Okay, and we're going to go back in time. You can't fix something
6 unless you know what got wrong with it. We had two referendums
7 for the red snapper IFQs, two, one to allow us to have the IFQs
8 and the second one to approve it.

9
10 I voted for it, and I voted for an IFQ that was ran by Alaska from
11 2007 to 2010. It was called the fisherman assignee with a little
12 endorsement, which worked very well. In February of 2008, the
13 Alaska Wildlife and Fishery put them on notice, because they wanted
14 to know who was going over, and they wanted to know who owned the
15 shares, this and that.

16
17 Okay, and so the response to that was, in the October meeting of
18 2008, they changed everything. They took our endorsement away and
19 added a vessel account. You know how? By a referendum from the
20 grouper IFQs, and they changed our red snapper IFQs completely,
21 and they took the fishermen's away, and started with the vessel.

22
23 You know how I found out about that? I unloaded my fish, and, on
24 the way home, they called me. The fish buyer said, where's your
25 vessel account? I said, I don't know, and I've got three IFQ
26 accounts. They said, you need a vessel account, and no I don't.

27
28 I voted for something, and so, in other words, four years later,
29 they changed my IFQs completely, which it says in the regs that it
30 was supposed to be only -- It had to stay the same for five years.
31 That should have been a referendum on that. I did not get the
32 vote on that. They took it away from me, and that is not right,
33 period, and so, if you all want to put -- To listen to whoever you
34 all get you all's industry information from, go ahead. All you
35 all going to do is make me richer with my IFQ shares, and everybody
36 is in.

37
38 As far as the states taking over, I think Louisiana should take
39 the commercial over, if we're going to go like this and play games,
40 and that's all it is. They're coming off of Louisiana and catching
41 all our fish, period, from Texas. They come from Orange Beach.
42 They come off of Fourchon and catch our fish.

43
44 As far as the observer, unless that changes too -- We're supposed
45 to get a certified letter in the mail, and not somebody calling
46 you on the phone. It could be anybody on the other end of that
47 damn phone. You don't know who the hell it is. They called me
48 two times, and I asked them where's my certified letter, unless

1 that changed too.

2
3 You know, they had to get notarized, and everything I'm saying,
4 God, it's true. I will give y'all a copy of every CFR there is,
5 and the minutes of the damn meeting that it went down, and it was
6 done mostly internally, and so it could be fixed without all this
7 show, and you all could worry about taking care of our fish,
8 because, the trading, that's where it's at. It's internally. I
9 know I'm out of time. Thank you.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Bruce. Do we have any questions?
12 I don't see any. Thanks for coming, James.

13
14 **MR. BRUCE:** If you give me your email, I'll give you all all the
15 regs.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Our emails are online for the public, James.
18 Thank you. Next up is Mr. Ken Haddad.

19
20 **MR. KEN HADDAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ken Haddad with the American
21 Sportfishing Association. I'm out of Monticello, Florida. I'll
22 cover a few topics in the few minutes.

23
24 First, on the mutton and yellowtail snapper, we're good with the
25 preferred alternatives moving forward. We also support the
26 discussions going on with the modification to the red snapper
27 private accountability measures, and we are disappointed in the
28 MRIP-FES pilot study results, since we didn't get any results. It
29 seems to send a pretty interesting message, and I didn't quite get
30 it.

31
32 On the decision point discussions that you're starting for red
33 snapper coming up, as noted, the new stock assessment is expected
34 to alter estimates of participation between the commercial and
35 rec, between the private rec and for-hire, and between the private
36 rec at the state level, and that's a pretty big wow.

37
38 When the catch recommendations are released, if it goes as it has
39 with other species, we can expect a reduction in quota and changes
40 in allocation, which I think, as Dr. Froeschke was trying to point
41 out yesterday, is going to be a very fun task for the council. We
42 support you getting ahead of this by starting a working group to
43 really immediately begin tackling this upfront, and not waiting,
44 and so I think that's a good move, if you will go through with
45 that.

46
47 Then we would also like to see Emily begin providing a series of
48 council presentations that break Dr. Froeschke's presentation into

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

3
4 Then, finally, don't forget that there is an allocation policy. I
5 think Mr. Strelcheck was the only one who mentioned that yesterday,
6 that you have a policy, and process, that we hope you'll kind of
7 dig out of the records, and you may need to use that.

8
9 Then, finally, thanks for the last fifty years. You've come a
10 long way. I think I've almost been around that entire fifty years,
11 and so it's a little scary for me, and so thank you.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Haddad. Do we have any questions?
14 I don't see any. Thanks, Ken. Next up is Captain Jim Green.

15
16 **MR. JIM GREEN:** Hello, council. Captain Jim Green, president of
17 DCBA and CFA. Kesley, Ed, Anthony, congratulations on your
18 reappointment. We're glad you're back. We're lucky to have you.

19
20 SEFHIER, we've come a long way. The majority of our industry has
21 worked hard to get final action. Lots of discussion with our peers
22 and the APs around this table, and it's time. Please give us the
23 opportunity to provide not just data, but stewardship, and not
24 just be part of an extrapolation, but a provider. Please move
25 forward and pass the modifications document.

26
27 On the exempted jack permit, lots of concerns here. Harvesting
28 during the spawn, requesting double the average allocation
29 poundage in the last six years, requesting a season as long as the
30 longest in the last six years, and what are we testing? Double
31 the allocation in a two-month season, it would be hard to not call
32 it a success from the start, just by getting approval, and so lots
33 of concerns, biological and in precedence.

34
35 When it comes to state management, after watching yesterday the
36 council's discussion on 64, it's clear that this is truly -- What
37 this is truly about, it's about let us move fish, and let us get
38 the fish that we've caught, and turned in on our own data system,
39 and let us move fish over, because that wasn't enough.

40
41 It takes a tremendous amount of fish from a state that has a large
42 amount of anglers that utilize charter and headboats and moves it
43 away from that state. The numbers in the added alternatives
44 conveniently give the states west of the river a huge increase in
45 allocation, the two states in the middle a nominal increase, and
46 guts Florida.

47
48 You're essentially setting up a biomass-based fishery without

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

6
7 Whenever you begin to have different access levels because of
8 geographic locations, you're discriminating, and that violates the
9 National Standards and the very act we just celebrated before this
10 public comment.

11
12 The council has a lot of work to do. This council must deal with
13 the FES issues, a new stock assessment results, not to mention the
14 years of testimony by our industry saying that there's a decline
15 in red snappers, and now it wants to bring 64 in the mix, an
16 amendment that is not intended -- That, intended or not, will wreak
17 havoc on a management strategy that has worked for the federal
18 for-hire industry in the Gulf. It has provided sustainable access,
19 and it has kept our industry accountable.

20
21 Gulf for-hire fishermen from south Florida to Texas has shown up
22 to these council meetings in-person, virtually, and through emails
23 unequivocally opposed to the further development of this
24 amendment, and, to be honest, it may be something we want to
25 revisit after all the dust settles and we get through what this
26 council is facing the immediate future.

27
28 We as an industry have looked at things in the past I didn't think
29 that we would consider, but we did, and we have looked at this,
30 and we do not want it, and so we ask you to stop work, and I'm
31 closing up, Mr. Chairman. We ask you to stop work and table
32 Amendment 64 indefinitely, and, at a minimum, do it until the dust
33 settles and our industry has our own data to make highly-competent
34 decisions on the way we'll be managed in the future.

35
36 If I could just add one more thing, something got in my craw today
37 that I heard at this podium, and a lot of us devote a lot of time
38 and effort to educate ourselves within this process, and, to be
39 disenfranchised in the process, and not participate at all, and
40 expect to be rewarded with your wants, that sounds a little
41 childish to me. Put in the work if you want to be considered a
42 good partner in management, and so thank you.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. Do we have any
45 questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

46
47 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I just wanted to double check the record here,
48 that you support Anthony and Kesley being reappointed, but not Ed

1 Walker?

2
3 **MR. GREEN:** I said Ed. I wrote letters for all of them. I think
4 all of them do a great job. I think they're all very objectionable,
5 and I think that they all provide something great to this council.
6 I think everybody around this table does a real good job at being
7 partners in that, whether I like what they come to conclusions
8 with or not, and so thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. Mr. Osborne.

11
12 **MR. OSBORNE:** Just for the record, I did hear you say Kesley, Ed,
13 and Anthony, I think, and so --

14
15 **MR. GREEN:** I appreciate you having my back. I did ladies first,
16 and then "Ed" is just a two-letter word, and so, you know. Thank
17 you all.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Jim? Not seeing any,
20 thank you, Jim. Next up is Rachel Hisler.

21
22 **MS. RACHEL HISLER:** Good afternoon. Today, I would like to talk
23 about Amendment 59A permit requirements and also just comment
24 briefly on the SEFHIER program.

25
26 Today, I'm asking you to implement Action 5 from the presentation,
27 Tab B, Number 8(b), by Dr. Diagne. Baking this action into the
28 59A document is a wise decision, as it keeps the permit discussion
29 cohesive. Deferring this important work to Amendment 59B would
30 add even more pressure to an already complicated decision process.

31
32 Quota banks and co-ops offer fishermen flexibility, experience,
33 training, and mentorship. Fishermen can build authentic business
34 models utilizing these tools. Although there is currently only
35 one nonprofit organization operating an active and effective quota
36 bank in the Gulf, these practices could provide critical access
37 points for new entrants building their businesses.

38
39 Of course, transparency is key in this process, and I believe that
40 Dr. Diagne has built an objective roadmap in Action 5 to allow
41 good faith actors to come alongside fishermen and bolster their
42 ability to develop their business acumen as well as forge lasting
43 and meaningful relationships in the fishery. These guardrails can
44 and will work to keep those with ulterior motives out of the
45 equation.

46
47 I'm also requesting that you would please take action on SEFHIER
48 at this meeting. We are losing out on massive amounts of data

1 that can keep our fisheries healthy for everyone.

2
3 Looking forward to the next fifty years of the fisheries management
4 under the Magnuson-Stevens Act by this Gulf Council, let's give
5 new entrants to both commercial and for-hire charter fishermen
6 real tools to keep real and healthy food on American tables and
7 tight lines for all.

8
9 I also just wanted to quickly comment. You know, sitting here and
10 listening to other people come up and talk about how long they've
11 been in the business and all of that, and I just realized this is
12 twenty years that my husband and I have been in the fishery
13 business for ourselves, running our own boat, and I'm a few years
14 deep into this council management process, but we are definitely
15 still newbies compared to some of these men and women in this room,
16 and so I just want to say thank you to these guys for pouring into
17 new entrants like myself, and organizations like Shareholders
18 Alliance, who are willing to come alongside people like me and my
19 husband and help us build our business and the future of these
20 fisheries.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hisler. Do we have any questions?
23 Not seeing any, thank you, Rachel. Next up is Jack Melancon.

24
25 **MR. JACK MELANCON:** You guys be patient with me. I'm not a very
26 good public speaker, but I'm going to try to read this. Morning
27 council members, or good afternoon. My name is Captain Jack
28 Melanson.

29
30 I've been involved in the Gulf commercial fishing industry since
31 the mid-1990s. Over the years, I've worked on deck as co-captain,
32 and captain in different boats with different people, and I'm
33 currently running a fishing vessel for one of the original red
34 snapper IFQ shareholders, Mr. Underwood.

35
36 I've spent a large part of my working life on the water. I've
37 contributed to these fisheries, following the regulations, and
38 I've done my part to help conserve the resources, but, because
39 I've never personally owned a qualified permit or IFQ shares, I've
40 never received any IFQ red snapper quota.

41
42 This is something I hope that the council will consider when
43 looking at the future of these fisheries. There are fishermen
44 like me who have spent decades participating in this industry,
45 doing the actual work, catching the fish, running boats, and
46 contributing to these fisheries.

47
48 We have never given an opportunity to build a quota share of our

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

6
7 I understand that, originally, original shareholders were given
8 their allocation in the system that was established at that time,
9 which I was there when that was established. I've been in this
10 industry for 50 years. Let's see.

11
12 The council should also consider whether the system is currently
13 operational for the next generations of our active fishers.
14 Today, some people who hold large commercial quota no longer
15 actively fish. They can continue to benefit by releasing their
16 quota to working fishermen at extremely high prices, while
17 fishermen who actually want to own and operate their own boats
18 have little or no opportunity to obtain quota of their own.

19
20 I don't believe this additional quota should simply continue to go
21 to the same people who already control a large portion of it.
22 There should be a pathway for fishermen who have provided their
23 commitment to the fishery through years of actual participation.

24
25 I'm not asking for something that I haven't worked for. I've spent
26 decades working in these fisheries. I ask that the council realize
27 the value of that experience and consider creating opportunities
28 for fishermen who have contributed to this industry, but were never
29 given the shares. The shares are resources if more quota becomes
30 available again.

31
32 I hope the council will consider a system that gives fishermen,
33 especially those with long histories in the fisheries and no
34 existing quota, a real opportunity to participate as owners, rather
35 than being forced to lease quota from people who no longer fish.
36 Thank you for allowing me to speak, and I respectfully ask that
37 you consider it, consider giving working fishermen a chance to
38 build a future in these fisheries.

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

41
42 **MR. MELANCON:** I've got something else I want to say, if you don't
43 mind.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead.

46
47 **MR. MELANCON:** Let's see. I would like to address you guys about
48 this now, considering the stock assessments that are being

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

5
6 Commercial fisheries are required to operate under a tremendous
7 amount of accountability. We have permanent reporting required,
8 IFQ requirements, vessel monitoring, trip records, and other
9 methods of documentation.

10
11 What we catch, our fish actually can be tracked, and our landings
12 can be compared against what we report, but recreational fishing
13 is a different situation. Yes, the recreational bag limit for an
14 individual fisherman is relatively small, but there are enormous
15 numbers of recreational fishers participating in the Gulf
16 fisheries, where you multiply a small bag limit by thousands upon
17 thousands of fishermen. The fishing trip, the total, can't be
18 sustained.

19
20 Anyone who actually fishes these waters know what happens in an
21 area that are easily accessible to recreational boats. Inshore
22 and near offshore reefs can receive tremendous fishing pressure.
23 There are times when an area can be heavily fished over the course
24 of a single weekend, and large numbers of boats concentrating on
25 the same structure, where a fisherman can go out and see this
26 firsthand.

27
28 Like off of Galveston, and let's take -- Out of Galveston, Texas,
29 you catch 65 percent of the quota there. That's why these people
30 are having trouble making their trips, because they're beating up
31 the fish. You can't catch all the fish in one spot. Thank you,
32 and you all have a great day. Thank you for listening.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Jack. We don't have any questions.
35 Next up is Anthony Colletti.

36
37 **MR. ANTHONY COLLETTI:** Good afternoon, council. Anthony Colletti,
38 owner and operator and commercial fisherman of seventeen years.
39 I've fished around the Gulf coast, from Stock Island in the Keys
40 to the western Gulf, primarily out of Dulac, Louisiana.

41
42 The king mackerel fishing has been struggling. Our wintertime
43 fish, I did good up until the end of March. As the spring and
44 summer went on, our fish disappeared completely.

45
46 I would like to bring a few things to everybody's attention. All
47 of the oil rigs have been pulled out, and there's no habitat left
48 inshore. When those fish are supposed to pull back inshore,

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

7
8 Moving forward from the king mackerel, I want to move on to the
9 amberjacks. We all know we went from 2,000-pound trip limits to
10 1,500-pound trip limits to 1,000-pound trip limits to seven fish,
11 and we were supposed to be rebuilding that for the commercial
12 sector, and 80 percent of it got reallocated to the recreational
13 sector, along with our gags, and so how is that rebuilding the
14 amberjacks for the commercial sector?

15
16 Now we're discarding twenty-five head, or thirty head a day at
17 times, and we can't keep our fish. I believe that's more of a
18 problem that we're starting to face. The amberjacks have made a
19 good comeback in the western Gulf. I understand in different areas
20 it's not so much, but we're seeing a lot of amberjacks, and I would
21 like to see some of them come back to the commercial sector at
22 some point.

23
24 When we release those fish, there's a good chance they're not
25 making it back to the bottom. Between the porpoises and the
26 sharks, they're getting mauled. The porpoises have been a problem
27 through every fishery, along with the sharks, and they're out of
28 control. Everybody sees it, everybody knows it.

29
30 Then I know I'm almost out of time here, but I would like to touch
31 on the IFQ program just a little bit. It's really hard for me to
32 keep investing in my business when I don't know what's going to
33 happen later on down the road. I would really like a sense of
34 stability at some point, to where I can keep investing and know
35 it's going to be there, you know, for years to come.

36
37 We need more accountability on the recreational side when it comes
38 -- If you're going to manage the fisheries, we have to manage it
39 as a whole, on both sides, and, you know, there's -- Like Captain
40 Jack said, there's a lot of recreational fishing, a lot of
41 recreational pressure, especially on red snapper, and those fish
42 aren't counted for, and we're guessing at numbers. We need better
43 accountability.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Anthony. We have a question from
46 Captain Walker.

47
48 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Anthony. Sorry that I didn't get back with

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

6
7 **MR. COLLETTI:** I was hoping you were going to ask that question,
8 because absolutely. Absolutely. Their fish size is down to a
9 three to four-pound fish. They're using a very small mesh in their
10 nets. I know we just got a bunch of recent data, and I'm hoping
11 at some point that we can somehow work with the Mexico government
12 to somewhat regulate what they're taking out of the water.

13
14 It's the same body of water. We're on trip limits, hook-and-line
15 fish, and they're -- You know, from what I understand, from what
16 they've taken out of the water, it's more than all of our quotas
17 put together, and so that's a severe impact.

18
19 **MR. WALKER:** Right. That's accurate, and I had a conversation the
20 other day that said that king mackerel may fall under the ICCAT
21 international fisheries management, and that we may be able to
22 have some impact there, and so that's something we're talking
23 about.

24
25 **MR. COLLETTI:** I'm glad to hear it. Any other questions?

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Anthony? Not seeing any,
28 thank you.

29
30 **MR. COLLETTI:** Thank you, all.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Russell Underwood.

33
34 **MR. RUSSELL UNDERWOOD:** Thank you, council. I'm Russell Underwood.
35 I'm from Panama City, Florida. I fish off Louisiana, and I've
36 been fishing off Louisiana about forty-five years. I own three
37 boats. I used to own about seven or eight. I cut it down, and I
38 just lowered my fleet. I've got three boats, and they do pretty
39 good. They do real well. IFQs, to me, have been the best thing
40 ever come to this Gulf.

41
42 My guys, they fish for beeliners and snapper. I expect them to
43 catch what they can catch every trip, as far as beeliners, mixed-
44 up beeliners and grouper, and amberjack, whatever is biting, but
45 we still see a lot of snapper.

46
47 My best captain I got is right here behind me, Jack Melancon. He's
48 just a young captain. He catches a lot of fish. He works hard

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

5
6 I've got three boats, but one of them is small, a forty-footer,
7 and he does real well, too. He's got a three-man crew, and we
8 catch a lot of fish. I mean, he does well with that boat, but,
9 anyway, what I wanted to say is this.

10
11 We still see a lot of snapper in the middle of the Gulf, off Dulac,
12 and, further back east, I know you hear about -- Some people say
13 the western Gulf, that we've seen a slowdown in the western Gulf.
14 I fish in the middle of the Gulf, but, anyway, we still see a lot
15 of snapper.

16
17 As far as longlining, I've always bandit fished, and I never have
18 longlined, but we see a lot of -- My company I sell to, they buy
19 a lot of fish, longline fish, and they do pretty good over there,
20 from the river, and back west of the river, but, anyway, we just
21 -- We do well.

22
23 I run a tight business. I've been doing this all my life, and I
24 just -- We do good. We do good, and I run a tight ship, but, as
25 far as snapper, there's still quite a few fish out there. I know
26 there's -- You hear reports about off Florida, and probably less
27 fish off Florida, but you've got to think about this.

28
29 You know, when I got my captain's license, I was a 100-ton license.
30 I was a party boat captain for about seven or eight years, and, as
31 a young man, at nineteen years old, we seen a lot of fish caught
32 off Florida, but, as you see now, there's a lot of boats off
33 Louisiana, off Belle Pass, Louisiana, and it seemed like, to me,
34 the more boats there is, the less fish you catch in certain areas,
35 and so that's just, I guess, a give-and-take, having lots of boats,
36 and lots of pressure on a lot of fish, but, anyway, we do well on
37 that, but that's it.

38
39 I just want the council to know that IFQ has been a good program
40 for me and everybody out there, everybody else there. A lot of
41 people that are upset about the fishery is because they're not in
42 it. I helped develop the IFQ program, me and a bunch of four or
43 five guys, but, anyway, it's been a good program. It's been good
44 for the resource, and it's been good for me and my family. I've
45 raised a family with IFQs the last ten or twenty years, and they've
46 been good to me. That's about it, I guess.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Underwood, for coming to give

1 public testimony.
2
3 **MR. UNDERWOOD:** Thank you.
4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Mr. Underwood? I'm
6 not seeing any, Mr. Russell.
7
8 **MR. UNDERWOOD:** That's good. Thank you.
9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for coming.
11
12 **MR. UNDERWOOD:** Yes, sir.
13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Mr. Randy Lauser.
15
16 **MR. RANDY LAUSER:** Good afternoon, council. Randy Lauser, Southern
17 Offshore Fishing Association, fishing out of Madeira Beach,
18 Florida.
19
20 Just commenting on the IFQ system, and I was there from the
21 beginning. It was fantastic. It worked great, me and my buddies,
22 you know, but it was all owner-operators when the system first
23 come into effect, and, me and all the other fishermen, we could
24 trade fish, gags, blacks, or reds, this and that, and, for the
25 first five years, it was great, and then we all know what happened.
26 It went public.
27
28 Once it went public -- It was meant for the fishermen, to be for
29 the fishermen, and now it's so out of whack that it's crazy.
30 Everybody else has control. Us fishermen have zero control. The
31 fishermen pay for the cost recovery fee. The shareholders pay
32 absolutely zero, and they profit off of it, and so I'm all for
33 keeping it, and bringing it back to the fishermen, and you should
34 have to own a boat, a permit, catch most of your fish, or a
35 restaurant, or a fish house. Keep it in the industry, and get the
36 public out of it, and bring it back to normal.
37
38 On the sharks, sharks are just horrendous, sharks and porpoises.
39 We're losing so many fish. You get a herd of porpoises on you,
40 and they'll follow your boat. They'll pluck fifty fish off your
41 line, and you have to leave. You're lucky to get one fish, and,
42 the sharks, we don't know if they're eating our bait or the fish,
43 because you got bite-offs.
44
45 We've got to take a thousand hooks every trip, and so if you could
46 -- You know, there's plenty of sharks, you know, and you got
47 population control. You've got deer, pigs, gator, and everything
48 is controlled but sharks, and why did that happen? That's what I

1 want to know, because, during the qualifying for IFQs, you guys
2 encouraged us to do a lot of shark fishing.

3
4 I did a lot of shark fishing, and so I lost out on some of the IFQ
5 shares for qualifying, but we need your help on the sharks, the
6 porpoises, and we need to bring the fishery back to the fishermen.
7 Thank you.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Randy. Do we have any questions? We
10 do from Mr. Strelcheck.

11
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Hi, Randy. Thanks for being here. Two questions.
13 I didn't realize SOFA was still in existence. How many members do
14 you guys have? How many members do you have?

15
16 **MR. LAUSER:** The only fish house contributing now is Charlie at
17 Fish Busters. Every boat, they contribute to SOFA.

18
19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Great, and then a follow-on question. As far as
20 59A, we're also talking about an exemption for nonprofit
21 organizations that run photo banks. Does your organization have
22 a position on that?

23
24 **MR. LAUSER:** I think you should have to own a boat, a permit, a
25 fish house, or a restaurant. That's where I'm at. No other
26 exemptions. Thank you.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Randy? Seeing none, thank
29 you. Next up is Eric Brazer.

30
31 **MR. ERIC BRAZER:** All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Eric
32 Brazer, Deputy Director of Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders
33 Alliance. Welcome back, Dr. Banks, Dr. Overton, Captain Walker.

34
35 I'm going to dive right in with 59A, as you probably expected. If
36 you want additional information, please check out the letter that
37 we sent in, albeit late Sunday night, about how legitimate
38 nonprofits can achieve the goals and objectives of the IFQ program,
39 how they achieve the needs statement of 59A, how they can, and
40 should, be structured to provide safeguards against misuse, and
41 how they're consistent with and advance the President's executive
42 order. That one's for you, Andy.

43
44 I would like to spend the rest of my time talking far too quickly
45 about some of the specific concerns we've heard this week. We've
46 heard that there may not be enough time to analyze this. We agree
47 that this deserves careful review. There are legitimate questions
48 about eligibility, governance, reporting, and safeguards that need

1 to be evaluated.

2
3 Your amazing staff have already put together a great starting point
4 with Actions 5.1 and 5.2. We want the council and NMFS to take a
5 hard look at these, to refine these safeguards, and give the public
6 an opportunity to weigh-in through the public hearing process, and
7 including these in Amendment 59A is what allows this review to
8 happen.

9
10 We've also heard that this should be addressed in 59B instead of
11 59A. To that point, A and B address two different policy
12 questions. 59A asks who should be allowed to hold IFQ shares, and
13 59B asks whether an eligible shareholder must demonstrate landings
14 to continue to hold these shares. A nonprofit permit requirement
15 is fundamentally an ownership eligibility issue, which makes 59A
16 the logical place to address it, and it just doesn't make sense to
17 us to create this issue in 59A, and then wait for 59B to resolve
18 it.

19
20 We've heard the concerns that these programs may not actually help
21 new entrants, and I would say this is actually a primary purpose
22 of these programs. They lower financial barriers, by providing
23 access to allocation that's otherwise hard to get, something you
24 guys hear repeatedly.

25
26 They provide a bridge towards independence, giving active
27 fishermen opportunities to build relationships, diversify their
28 businesses, and develop financial capacity to eventually buy their
29 own shares. They provide opportunities for the next generation.
30 A quota bank maintains a pool of allocation that serves fishermen
31 as they enter, grow, and then ultimately graduate from that
32 program, and then make the available opportunity to the next new
33 entrant. I'm talking quickly now.

34
35 We've heard concerns about membership. To be clear, you do not
36 have to be a Shareholders Alliance member to apply to our quota
37 bank. The same application and selection process applies to
38 everyone. Membership has no bearing on selection. Applicants are
39 evaluated using established eligibility and selection criteria,
40 and I'm out of time, but I would love to make one more comment
41 about concerns about loopholes and potential misuse. Thank you,
42 Mr. Chair.

43
44 Strong safeguards are absolutely necessary in this process. We
45 are not spending this time, and devoting this much energy and
46 effort, only to have somebody take it and use it as a workaround,
47 and so the goal here should be to create a very narrow, carefully
48 defined pathway for legitimate mission-driven nonprofits to

1 support active fishery participation and improve opportunities for
2 new entrants.

3
4 When looking at 5.1 and 5.2, it's a great list. It goes a long
5 way towards addressing these loopholes, and, in addition to that,
6 we support regular reporting, annual NMFS review, and bring it
7 back to the council, and require a presentation, and then give
8 NMFS the authority to approve, and also revoke this, if it's being
9 used in a way that's not intended. Thank you for the extra time,
10 Mr. Chair. I'm happy to answer any questions.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Eric. Do we have any questions? Not
13 seeing any -- Mr. Sanchez.

14
15 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I was going to you about if you were in
16 support of NMFS having the authority to review your reporting,
17 which it, obviously, would establish something meaningful that
18 would identify you as legitimate, and then them having the
19 authority to, if they see something is inappropriate, to be able
20 to basically revoke your ability.

21
22 **MR. BRAZER:** Agree.

23
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Perfect.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, Eric, thank
27 you.

28
29 **MR. BRAZER:** Thank you.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Tommy Loper.

32
33 **MR. TOMMY LOPER:** I'm Captain Tommy Loper. I was born and raised
34 here in Biloxi. I'm here to protect my future. We wish to not
35 see our state management control federal for-hire. I'm here
36 protecting my future, because I will soon become a business owner,
37 or I would like to be, but that's all about it. I hope our
38 amberjack season stays true. Last year, it got cut short a couple
39 of weeks, and so this year we hope to get the full month.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Tommy. Do we have any questions? Not
42 seeing any, thank you for coming. Next up is Evan Tiblier.

43
44 **MR. EVAN TIBLIER:** Good afternoon. Captain Evan Tiblier out of
45 Biloxi, Mississippi with Fish Finder Charters. I have two charter
46 boats out of Biloxi, Mississippi. I feel like -- You know, I had
47 a whole speech wrote up, but there's so much people, and the
48 majority hit everything I was going to talk about, and so I'm just

1 up here, and, basically, I'm not for state representation. I want
2 to keep it the same. It seems to be working fine. It's been
3 working good for years and years, and hopefully it will extend me
4 in the future. I'm hoping to retire from this business. That's
5 about it.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Evan. Do we have any questions? Not
8 seeing any, and thank you for coming. Next up is Cole Ganey.

9
10 **MR. COLE GANEY:** My name is Cole Ganey, charter boat captain out
11 of Biloxi, Mississippi, Reel Therapy Charters, federally-
12 permitted. I'm just here to say that we're against the state
13 management. We want to leave it the way it is. It's not broke,
14 don't fix it, and so why would we change it all of a sudden?
15 That's pretty much everything I've got to say. Thank you all,
16 guys, for having us here, and listening to what we have to comment
17 on, and taking in our information that we see day in and day out.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Cole. Do we have any questions for
20 Cole? Not seeing any, next up is Jerry McClure.

21
22 **MR. JERRY MCCLURE:** Hello. How are you guys doing? I'm charter
23 boat captain. I've been a captain for quite a few years here out
24 of Biloxi. I own two charter boats. Basically, one is a state
25 boat, and one is a federal boat. I run all of the federal trips
26 myself here out of Biloxi.

27
28 I'm against sector -- Well, I'm for sector separation. I can't
29 hardly talk, but, anyway, guys, I'm against Amendment 64. I want
30 to say that I think the way it is is the way it ought to be, is
31 the way it ought to stay. I do have a state boat, and I do have
32 a federal boat, and I like to keep them separate.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jerry. Do we have any questions? Not
35 seeing any, thank you for coming. Next up is Ms. Ashford
36 Rosenberg.

37
38 **MS. ASHFORD ROSENBERG:** Good afternoon, council. I'll try and
39 keep this brief, since we're getting toward the end of the day.
40 I'm Ashford Rosenberg. I'm with the Gulf of America Reef Fish
41 Shareholders Alliance, and there were a couple of other agenda
42 items we wanted to comment on, and three minutes is not very long.

43
44 First, I want to thank the Science Center and Dr. Allen for your
45 presentation on catch per unit effort, and, while in some
46 circumstances CPUE for the commercial fishery may not be the best
47 data stream for estimating abundance, it's still a critical piece
48 of fishery-dependent information that's missing from stock

1 assessments for red grouper and other IFQ species.

2
3 IFQ programs have been around for decades at this point, and so
4 the justification that the IFQ programs change behavior so
5 drastically that you cannot really implement, or include, CPUE
6 data that's post-IFQ implementation really is outdated at this
7 point.

8
9 We would also argue that CPUE in IFQ fisheries actually provide a
10 more representative, and potentially more of a reliable fishery-
11 dependent data stream to help estimate abundance, or kind of be a
12 gut health check on the fishery than maybe for a fishery that's
13 managed by season or by a bag limit, and this is because the IFQ
14 program provides the flexibility for fishermen to spread their
15 effort out over the year, and over space as well, and so it
16 functions a little bit differently.

17
18 It's not influenced by seasons or regulatory changes like bag
19 limits, and so it would just be a bit more likely to reflect the
20 stock's abundance, and this is something that I think is really
21 important to look at further.

22
23 It is promising to hear that catch rates of red grouper are getting
24 better, but we still think this is a really critical piece that
25 needs to be considered more, and so, to that end, we ask that the
26 council and the SSC receive an annual presentation of commercial
27 catch per unit effort, alongside landings, to kind of provide that
28 additional source of information as, again, kind of a health check,
29 or a gut check, to see if catch per unit effort in those species
30 is aligning with the quota levels.

31
32 We also would love to see the SSC receive commercial CPUE
33 information during the stock assessment process. I know they're
34 not incorporated right now, but it's just another data stream that
35 can also look at the data from the terminal year of the assessment
36 to present day, and that time lag between science and assessment
37 is something that the public and the council has cited, multiple
38 times, to be frustrating and something that they want to address.

39
40 Also, we support the FEP process. Please keep that moving forward.
41 Use your ETC. They have a lot of expertise, and they can work on
42 those FEIs that you identified, and, lastly, data monetization is
43 huge, and really is growing, and so we anticipate data on the
44 commercial sector to be just getting better over time, and that's
45 also going to be soon applying to the charter sector.

46
47 Anything we can do to make data more accurate, and more timely, is
48 a good thing, and so please continue on with SEFHIER, take final

1 action at this meeting, and support the charter sector on that
2 one, and that's all I have for today.

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

5
6 **DR. ALLEN:** Thanks, Ashford. I was just going to make the point
7 that I completely agree with you that the CPUE data should be
8 looked at. I just think it's a -- You have to look at it with
9 caution, and not just assume that it reflects the abundance, but
10 I think its best utility is to look at it compared to the other
11 indices, and see if you get a different signal, and so I don't
12 think I was saying something different than your arguments.

13
14 **MS. ROSENBERG:** Yes, and, to be clear, we're not, you know, saying
15 that it should replace anything. It just needs to be looked at in
16 addition to all the other data streams that we have.

17
18 **DR. ALLEN:** I agree. Thank you for that.

19
20 **MS. ROSENBERG:** Thank you.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

23
24 **DR. WALTER:** Thank you, Ashford, and thanks for the suggestion for
25 that annual reporting. I'm just thinking about how that might be
26 best presented, and I'm thinking something like fishery status
27 reports, or something like that, where there's the -- Because
28 that's really measuring the status of the fishery, how well its
29 catch rates are going, versus necessarily the status of the
30 resource without a lot of work put into addressing catchability
31 and things we talked about, but I think reporting out, just as we
32 report landings, and we report the progress towards the ACL and
33 other metrics like that in our ecosystem status reports, which
34 albeit haven't been updated as often as some requests from the
35 council might have been, is something that I think we're going to
36 try to consider as we have the bandwidth to be able to do that.

37
38 I think right now, from the Science Center perspective, it's really
39 a bandwidth to do that on a routine basis, which is the limitation,
40 but now we are hearing the desire, and how this council might be
41 using that, and that's helpful to get that feedback on how it might
42 get used, and so I can tell staff that, no, the goal isn't
43 necessarily to replace a G-FISHER index in the stock assessment,
44 but it's really to provide added context that may be of value to
45 interpretation of fishery trends, and I think that's one reassuring
46 -- I do agree, and I think it's a very valuable piece of
47 information, and so thanks.

1 **MS. ROSENBERG:** If I could respond, if that's okay. Thank you,
2 Dr. Walter. I totally agree, and I think another -- I guess it's
3 more like a framing question, but, you know, you have G-FISHER,
4 and like your fishery-independent CPUE, right, and so I think it
5 would be really helpful, and I don't know if this is appropriate
6 to go through the commission, but for the states to also work
7 together to look at CPUE in kind of a different way than like G-
8 FISHER does, and, you know, looking at more like average trip
9 times, because that's kind of the constant thing you hear, is that
10 I'm going further, and I'm having to stay out longer.

11
12 Even at that kind of like high-level of does the average trip
13 length, based on the trip ticket and logbook data that the states
14 and NMFS are getting -- Is that getting longer in comparison to a
15 higher or a lower quota, and something as simple as that to kind
16 of look at, and think about, would be really valuable, I think,
17 and it would, you know, give fishermen even more pride in the data
18 that they provide.

19
20 We also have cameras and electronic monitoring, which are all
21 voluntary at this point, to be clear, and more and more boats are
22 getting interested in that, and so I think that's only going to
23 improve things down the line, and so thank you so much for that,
24 and I agree, and we want to help.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ashford. Do we have any other
27 questions? Not seeing any, thank you. Next up is Kyle Powell.
28 Thank you. Next up is Chance Seymour.

29
30 **MR. CHANCE SEYMOUR:** Hello, everybody. My name is Chance Seymour.
31 I own two federally-permitted charter boats. I strongly oppose
32 Amendment 64 and transferring red snapper management into the Gulf
33 states.

34
35 Amendment 40 has proven an accountable system for more than a
36 decade. The system is working, and it takes the uncertainty out
37 of my business. If everything in our fishery is federal, why
38 should it be handed over to an individual state? The current
39 federal system is working. A federal fishery should remain
40 federally managed.

41
42 This year, I've had a record year. I've caught three king mackerel
43 between both my boats, but a little under half of our federally-
44 permitted charter boats are here sitting in the back from
45 Mississippi. Almost all of us, or I'm pretty sure all of us, are
46 opposed to Amendment 64, but thank you all for listening.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chance. Do we have any questions?

1
2 **MR. C. SEYMOUR:** Thank you, all.
3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for coming. Next up is Addison Seymour.
5

6 **MS. ADDISON SEYMOUR:** Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the
7 council. This is my first time speaking, and so bear with me.
8 This is not my forte. My name is Addison Seymour. My husband
9 Chance and I own Mississippi Gulf Coast Fishing Charters in Biloxi,
10 Mississippi.
11

12 I'm here today to respectfully ask you to not support state
13 management of the federal for-hire red snapper fishery. My husband
14 and I are only twenty-nine and thirty years old, and we have
15 invested hundreds of thousands of dollars, and nearly every part
16 of ourselves, into our building our business.
17

18 We own two federally-permitted boats. We paid heavily for those
19 permits, because they are limited, valuable, and no longer being
20 issued. There are approximately 1,300 federal for-hire permits
21 across the entire Gulf, and the only way to obtain one is by
22 purchasing and transferring an existing permit.
23

24 Nearly ten years ago, we began sending monthly payments to a
25 captain, Steve, from Louisiana for our first federal permit. He
26 was proud and excited to hand it down to a fisherman from a younger
27 generation. He shared story after story with us about his years
28 in the fishery and what that permit had meant to him. He understood
29 that it was more than just a piece of paper. He knew what it
30 represented for our fishery and generations to come after him,
31 because he had lived it.
32

33 Today, that permit helps us provide for our very own three-year-
34 old daughter, Adeline. This is our livelihood. It is how we put
35 food on our table and build a future for our child. We are not a
36 large corporation with endless resources. We are a young family
37 that took a tremendous financial risk because we believed hard
38 work and responsible fishing could create something lasting.
39

40 Delegating the federal-for-hire fishery to individual states would
41 create uncertainty around everything we have built. A federal
42 permit should mean something. Its value, and the opportunity
43 attached to it, should not change simply because of the state where
44 the boat docks.
45

46 The Gulf is one shared resource, and the federal-for-hire fleet
47 should remain one federally-managed fleet. We have followed the
48 rules, made the required investments, and accepted the

1 responsibility that comes with operating federal-permitted
2 vessels.

3
4 We want to protect this fishery so red snapper and this way of
5 life we still have here for our daughter's generation. Please
6 remember behind every permit is a story. Behind every boat payment
7 is a family dependent on the next season.

8
9 These permits have been worked under, sacrificed for, and passed
10 from one generation of fishermen to the next. We are not asking
11 for special treatment. We are asking for fairness, consistency,
12 and the opportunity to earn an honest living under the system which
13 we invested in.

14
15 I respectfully ask you to choose the no action alternative in
16 Amendment 64, reject state management, and keep the federal for-
17 hire fleet federally managed. Please protect what the generation
18 before us entrusted to our care and give families like ours the
19 opportunity to preserve it for generations to come behind us.
20 Thank you for listening to our story.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Addison. We have a couple of questions
23 for you. Mr. Sanchez.

24
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** No, and it's not a question. I'm just happy to see
26 the next generation coming up. I encourage you to keep coming,
27 because, while this process can be intimidating and what have you,
28 it works if you work it.

29
30 **MS. SEYMOUR:** Yes, sir. Thank you so much.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more, Addison. General Spraggins.

33
34 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and it's not a question either, Addison.
35 I just wanted to tell everybody that, you know, a couple of weeks
36 ago, the federal-for-hire for Mississippi joined in together and
37 for our Gulf Banks fishing yacht to be able to go out and put some
38 new artificial reefs, and they donated their boats.

39
40 **MS. SEYMOUR:** We did.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that. Any other comments or
43 questions? Not seeing any, all right, and so thank you. That's
44 going to wrap up public comment for the day, and so I would like
45 to take a break until 8:30 in the morning. That will wrap up
46 today, and we'll reconvene at 8:30 in the morning with the Data
47 and Reef Fish Committee reports.

1
2 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 26, 2026.)
3

4 - - -

5
6 August 27, 2026

7
8 THURSDAY MORNING SESSION
9

10 - - -

11
12 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at The Golden
13 Nugget Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi on Thursday morning, August
14 27, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.
15

16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Welcome back from our break. We're
17 somewhat ahead of schedule, and I would prefer to stay ahead of
18 schedule if we can, and maybe get out a little earlier today.
19 We're going to start with Data Collection this morning, and then
20 I don't know if some folks need to check out of their room, and
21 we'll take a break after a while, but, other than that, I'll turn
22 it over to Captain Walker to take us through the Data Collection
23 Committee report.
24

25 **COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)**
26 **DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE REPORT**
27

28 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection Committee
29 adopted the agenda, Tab F, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab
30 F, Number 2, of the June 2026 meeting.
31

32 The first topic we went over was the Generic Amendment
33 Modifications for Gulf For-Hire Data Collection Program, Tab F,
34 Number 4(a) through (c), also known as SEFHIER. Council staff
35 reviewed a summary of public comments received in the final draft
36 document with all preferred alternatives.
37

38 When reviewing Action 4, a committee member asked for clarification
39 on what sampling strata would be used to select participants for
40 the economic survey. Staff responded that several factors could
41 be used to develop sampling strata, including state, area fished,
42 species target, and vessel size.
43

44 A committee member inquired if a, quote, sampling without
45 replacement, end quote, approach could be used while sampling 20
46 percent annually to get a comprehensive sample size for the entire
47 fleet every five years. Staff cautioned that applying a
48 prescriptive direction for a scientific sampling design could

1 reduce the flexibility of the program and make it difficult to
2 adapt the survey for industry needs.

3
4 A committee member noted that, for the purpose of distributing
5 disaster relief, that the 20 percent economic survey would provide
6 better information than what is currently available. Staff noted
7 that some revisions would be needed to the language in the various
8 actions to ensure consistency throughout. Staff was directed to
9 complete those changes and have them ready to review by Full
10 Council.

11
12 Additionally, SERO staff indicated that the codified text could be
13 ready for review by the Full Council, which I am told the codified
14 text is ready for Full Council, and so we'll pause there. Dr.
15 Hollensead.

16
17 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** What we're going to do is we're going to
18 pull up the codified text, so you all can review it. Also, offline,
19 as was mentioned in the summary, SERO staff and council staff have
20 been looking through the revisions to the document that were
21 required now that we've got the regulatory language such that that
22 language is also reflected in the document.

23
24 Once we go through the codified text, we'll pull up the revised
25 document that's got the highlights in yellow, just so you all can
26 see them, and so you don't have to make a comment or pass a motion
27 that, you know, this language is approved or not. It's just for
28 transparency's sake.

29
30 **MR. WALKER:** So is discussion at this point on the SEFHIER program?

31
32 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Well, Mr. Chair, we've got the codified text up,
33 and so Ms. Levy can go through that, and then I can go through the
34 document.

35
36 **MR. WALKER:** We're going to go through that now? Okay.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We'll turn it over to Ms. Levy.

39
40 **MS. LEVY:** Okay. Well, it's there for your review. I can point
41 out just a few things, if we scroll down to the next page, and so
42 go back up just a little bit.

43
44 This is just the general reporting requirement, and I'll just point
45 out that it does include the language, in that first sentence,
46 when operating as a charter vessel or headboat in marine or
47 estuarine waters, and so that's something we talked about, right?
48 We don't want reporting for freshwater trips, and we want to make

1 that clear, and so it says that you're required to report, and the
2 deadlines are below in the other paragraph, and it does have the
3 last sentence, which talks about vessels that are selected for the
4 Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, right, and they continue to be
5 selected.

6
7 Then, if you scroll down, the next paragraph is about the no
8 fishing activity, and it just says, if you don't have any fishing
9 during a week from Monday through Sunday, then you have to report
10 by the established deadline. It does not talk about, or codify,
11 the ninety days in advance.

12
13 We will talk about that in the preamble, based on what's in the
14 document, but, you know, there might come a time where it's
15 allowing people to have a little bit more time, and so we don't -
16 - If we put it in the regulations, it creates a lot of procedural
17 hurdles for slightly modifying that, but it will be in the
18 preamble, based on what's in the document, about the allowing
19 reports up to ninety days in advance, and you'll have a chance to
20 look at the proposal when it comes out.

21
22 The next Paragraph 2 is the reporting deadlines, and that just
23 indicates that you have to submit it before removing fish from the
24 vessel, or, if no fish were retained, within thirty minutes of the
25 trip ending, right, arrival at the dock.

26
27 The next paragraph talks about the no-fishing reports basically
28 being submitted no later than the Tuesday of the following week,
29 and, if you then decide to go fishing, right, after you've
30 submitted the do-not fish report, you need to report. That's
31 essentially what that is saying.

32
33 Paragraph 3, if you go down a little bit more, talks about the
34 catastrophic conditions, and just that NMFS can waive or modify
35 the reporting requirements based on catastrophic conditions, very
36 similar to what's in other reporting, and what was in the prior
37 program.

38
39 Then, if you go down to Paragraph 4, that's the compliance
40 requirement, and that just basically says that you have to follow
41 these reporting requirements, and, if you do not submit a report,
42 it's considered delinquent, and that delinquent report
43 automatically results in a prohibition from harvesting or
44 possessing reef fish until you actually come into compliance,
45 right, and so it's just an enforcement mechanism to say, if you're
46 not compliant, you don't get to fish until you actually submit the
47 report. That's consistent with what was in there before as well,
48 as well as the South Atlantic program.

1
2 Then Paragraph 5 is the trip declaration requirement, and so it
3 just basically says that a fishing trip in marine or estuarine
4 waters begins anytime you depart from the dock with a passenger
5 for-hire, which has a specific definition, and terminates when you
6 come back to the dock, and so, prior to departure on one of these
7 trips, that you have to notify NMFS and report your, basically,
8 Coast Guard documentation number, or state vessel registration,
9 the expected trip completion date and time, and the approved
10 landing location. Then the next part of the codified is for
11 coastal migratory pelagic, and so that was reef fish, and we've
12 mirrored what we've done in reef fish for CMP as well. Thanks.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Do we have any questions
15 for Ms. Levy on the codified text? Not seeing any, Dr. Hollensead,
16 do you have anything to add?

17
18 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, Mr. Chair. If we could pull up the document,
19 just so I can show those highlighted portions, just a few things
20 to see where it's reflected in there. Bernie, if you wouldn't
21 mind pulling up the revised document and going to Action 1, please.

22
23 So, in Action 1, as was brought up in committee and Ms. Levy just
24 mentioned, those Preferred Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 in
25 Action 1 have been updated to have the language for conducted in
26 marine or estuarine waters, which we talked about, and so that is
27 also now reflected within the regulations, or in the codified text,
28 excuse me, and then is now within the document, and so those are
29 aligned.

30
31 Then, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling down all the way to
32 the bottom of Action 1, and so that would be page 26, and there's
33 also a paragraph in there that talks about the conditions of
34 maintaining permit compliance, as Ms. Levy just went over in the
35 codified text, and so that wasn't in there originally, but now
36 this paragraph has been added. This is now a mandatory program,
37 and, as a result, to remain in compliance with the permits, that
38 reporting would be required, and so that is now in there.

39
40 Then Bernie, if you can go to Action 2, and the first paragraph of
41 the discussion makes some clarifying language, and so this action
42 has to deal with the boats that are reporting to the headboat
43 program, and that is to say that this action is only changing the
44 timing with which they put in the reports.

45
46 The did-not=fish reports, and the economic reporting of data that
47 they already have to do, is still something they have to do, right,
48 and so this -- There's nothing in this action that really changes

1 the headboat program, other than the timing of when they would
2 have to report, and so that's just to make it clear to the reader,
3 or somebody is now involved in the headboat -- They can pick up
4 this document and try to figure out, hey, what am I exactly going
5 to report, and so it clarifies it for the reader.

6
7 It's funny, because, when we were doing the public hearings, we
8 did mention that, but it wasn't in the document, and so now it is
9 explicitly written in the document, and so we've got that in there.

10
11 Then, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling down to Action 3, and
12 so this would put in some clarifying language for Alternatives 2
13 and 3, and so this is the trip notification, and so it's got in
14 there prior to departing for a trip, and so that is, you know,
15 what's in the regulatory language, and so, prior to departure, you
16 would have to have a trip notification, and so now it's explicit.
17 It was in the discussion, but now it's explicit within the
18 alternative language.

19
20 Those were the updates that we made sort of offline that we wanted
21 to bring back to Full Council, so you all could just review those,
22 and that's all I have, and I'll take any clarifying questions that
23 anybody might have.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Dr. Hollensead? Mr.
26 Strelcheck.

27
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No questions. I mean, if everyone is comfortable
29 with the changes, then I recommend, since this is final action, we
30 just like do a general motion to say we approve what staff has
31 proposed in Actions 1 through 3, but I'll wait for discussion, if
32 anyone has any questions first.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Sanchez.

35
36 **MR. SANCHEZ:** If there's no questions, I'll make the motion that
37 we approve this, and please tell me I don't have to read that
38 codified text.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, before we get there, Mr. Sanchez, I think Mr.
41 Strelcheck wanted to make a motion just to approve the changes in
42 the document first, and then we'll go to final action.

43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Okay.

45
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I'll make a motion, Bernie. **The**
47 **motion is to approve the changes recommended by council staff in**
48 **Actions 1 through 3.**

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, and we have a second by Dr. Sweetman,
3 and Dr. Simmons has her hand up.
4

5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I would just say "staff". It also
6 came from the Regional Office and NOAA GC.
7

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

10 **DR. ALLEN:** So there's four actions in here. Do we -- I guess do
11 we need to have it Actions 1 through 4, instead of 1 through 3?
12 There's four actions in here.
13

14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I don't think we made changes to Action 4,
15 correct?
16

17 **DR. ALLEN:** Only 1 through 3 had changes? Okay. Thank you.
18

19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** While I have the mic, and I think we've had plenty
20 of discussion of this during committee, and so the changes that
21 staff are recommending reflect, obviously, the conversations we
22 were having during the full committee discussion.
23

24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck's motion is on the board.
25 It's seconded by Dr. Sweetman. Is there any discussion on the
26 motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion?**
27 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Sanchez.
28

29 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes. Thank you. **Motion to approve the document, to**
30 **send it up the road.**
31

32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We'll give Bernie a moment. There you go, Mr.
33 Sanchez.
34

35 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. **Motion to approve Generic Amendment:**
36 **Modifications to Gulf For-Hire Data Collection Program and that it**
37 **be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and**
38 **implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and**
39 **appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary**
40 **changes in the document. The council chair has given the authority**
41 **to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and**
42 **appropriate.**
43

44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Do we have
45 a second to Mr. Sanchez's motion? Seconded by Captain Walker. Do
46 we have any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, is there any
47 -- Sorry. We have to do a roll call vote on the action. Dr.
48 Simmons.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Captain Walker.
3
4 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
7
8 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Allen.
11
12 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes.
13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.
15
16 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes.
17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
19
20 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
23
24 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Abstain.
25
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Ballard.
27
28 **MS. BALLARD:** Yes.
29
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
31
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.
33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.
35
36 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
37
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.
39
40 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.
41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
47
48 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.

3
4 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.

5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.

7
8 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes.

9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.

11
12 **MR. GEESLIN:** Abstain.

13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Marquez.

15
16 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Yes.

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.

21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carried fifteen to zero
23 with two abstentions.
24

Names	Vote		
Capt. Walker	yes	Row Labels	Count of Vote
Capt. Frady	yes	abstain	2
Dr. Allen	yes	yes	15
Gen. Spraggins	yes	Grand Total	17
Mr. Anson	yes		
Mr. Schieble	abstain		
Ms. Ballard	yes		
Mr. Strelcheck	yes		
Dr. Overton	yes		
Mr. Broussard	yes		
Mr. Sanchez	yes		
Dr. Sweetman	yes		
Dr. Banks	yes		
Mr. Osborne	yes		
Mr. Geeslin	abstain		
Mr. Marquez	yes		
Mr. Dugas	yes		

25
26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. The motion carries. Thank you, Dr.
28 Simmons, and so I'll turn it back over to Captain Walker to
29 complete the Data report.

1
2 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next thing Data Collection
3 Committee did was discuss the presentation on the MRIP-FES pilot
4 study results. Finalized results of the pilot study were not made
5 available in time through the presenting committee.
6

7 Broadly, revised effort estimates are substantially lower than the
8 current FES units, depending on species, state, and sampling
9 weight. Without having the finalized pilot study results, it is
10 difficult to determine how the new estimates will affect stock
11 assessments currently conducted, calibration with the state
12 private recreational data collection programs, and sector
13 allocations.
14

15 As a result, Dr. Simmons requested that staff from the Office of
16 Science and Technology, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and
17 SERO have a meeting to discuss what will be presented at the
18 September Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting and provide
19 the SSC direction on what is expected during their discussion of
20 the pilot study. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.
21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Is there any comments,
23 or conversation, due to MRIP-FES? Dr. Simmons.
24

25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to the
26 point in the committee summary, we are working on that, and we're
27 trying to get with Dr. Cody and figure out what we can do, but
28 we're under a tight timeline, because we have to submit the FRN
29 for the SSC meeting Friday, tomorrow, and so we're trying to do
30 the best we can right now with that.
31

32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons, I'm going to ask you, and are we
33 expecting to see this in October, or another update from Richard
34 Cody? Can we get that on the agenda?
35

36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, Mr. Chair. That would be a
37 report-out to the council, what the SSC discussed.
38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Okay, and so that concludes the Data
40 Collection Committee report. Give me a minute to figure out what's
41 next. I'll ask around the table, and do folks need to check out
42 of their room this morning? Do you want to take a little break
43 and check out? I mean, staff is working on completing the Reef
44 Fish Committee report, and so I'm just kind of looking around the
45 table. All right. Well, let's take a fifteen-minute break, and
46 check out if you need to, and we'll come back at 9:15.
47

48 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, all. Okay, and so we're
3 going to go straight to the Reef Fish Committee report, and I'm
4 going to give it to Dr. Sweetman.

5
6 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**
7

8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the
9 modified agenda, Tab B, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab B, Number
10 2, from the June 2026 meeting were approved.

11
12 Discussion: Decision Points for Red Snapper Catch Limits and
13 Allocations, Tab B, Number 9, the red snapper stock assessment,
14 SEDAR 98, is nearing completion, pending peer review and inclusion
15 of updated recreational landings and other data.

16
17 Council staff highlighted the decision points and timing for
18 consideration of revised sector component and state allocations
19 for red snapper. These decisions will need to begin with council
20 decisions related to catch limits for the entire Gulf red snapper
21 stock, followed by allocations between the commercial and
22 recreational fishing sectors, then between the federal for-hire
23 and private angling components of the recreational sector, and,
24 lastly, among the five Gulf states for the private angling
25 component.

26
27 Allocation decisions can be tailored to the division being
28 addressed, but should be consistent in the application and clear
29 in justification. Council staff noted that the council would
30 likely review the results of the SEDAR 98 at its April 2027
31 meeting.

32
33 A committee member supported moving additional allocation to
34 Mississippi, which has the lowest allocation of the private angling
35 component annual catch limits amongst the states. Another
36 committee member supported the idea of an allocation working group
37 to advance the development of necessary information for reviewing
38 sector and state allocations prior to the council reviewing the
39 results of SEDAR 98.

40
41 A committee member asked about the expected effects of the
42 reduction in the magnitude of recreational landings relative to
43 the current catch limits. Council staff replied that the revised
44 MRIP Fishing Effort Survey data for recreational landings is
45 expected to be somewhere between the current MRIP-FES data and the
46 legacy MRIP Coastal Household Telephone Survey data.

47
48 Further, SEDAR 98 will calibrate recreational landings from Texas

1 and LA Creel surveys to current MRIP data, which will need to be
2 updated prior to being considered for management purposes. It is
3 unclear if there will be a new calibration unit for Texas
4 recreational landings, since calibration efforts there only
5 occurred in 2016.

6
7 Council staff thought prioritizing and organizing of the data and
8 the necessary calibrations was key, followed by mapping out the
9 timing of implementation for proposed management changes. A
10 committee member thought it necessary to evaluate landings by
11 state, as opposed to what a state is allocated to catch.

12
13 Relative to the charge of the working group, a committee member
14 asked about the scope of materials and decisions that will be
15 provided and produced. Council staff replied that having all
16 historical landings by fleet and state and by data unit, with
17 calibration ratios, was paramount. These data are likely to appear
18 different from the current MRIP landings.

19
20 NOAA General Counsel added that the working group meetings would
21 need to be publicly noticed. Council staff thought participation
22 from the stock assessment data providers would be very helpful to
23 the working group, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center
24 agreed. The council should consider addressing a charge and move
25 forward with forming a working group. Mr. Chair, I think we might
26 want to have some discussion at this point.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I'll open the floor for
29 any discussions. Mr. Frady.

30
31 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this time, I think we
32 need to make a motion about the makeup of this group that we've
33 been talking about. Ms. Bernie, can you pull that motion up,
34 please, ma'am? Thank you. There we go. Thank you, ma'am.

35
36 **I'll make a motion to form a small working group made up of staff**
37 **from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, the council, each of**
38 **the Gulf states, the Southeast Regional Office, and the Gulf States**
39 **Marine Fisheries Commission to understand the data inputs and the**
40 **methodologies applied to the landings data for the red snapper**
41 **Stock Assessment, SEDAR 98.**

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Frady. We have a
44 motion on the board. Is there a second to the motion? It's
45 seconded by Dr. Overton. Any discussion on the motion? Mr. Anson.

46
47 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and so I'm reading the draft charge here, and so
48 I just want to make sure it's clear that there are still things

1 that are in the works that would need to be included in this, and
2 so it's not like it's a hindcast type thing, where you're just
3 compiling the landings and everything.

4
5 It does mention about the historical, or the participation, and so
6 just for the ratios for state surveys and such, just to make sure
7 that's ongoing with the Mississippi and AL Creel, and those things
8 are going to need to be calibrated too, more than likely, and those
9 have yet to be done, and so, you know, there's just some more work
10 to be done. It's not something that you can go back and look at
11 historically what those calibrations were, or historical landings
12 information was, and so that's all, and just to make sure it's
13 clear for the working group members.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Anson. Dr. Sweetman.

16
17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and just a question here, and so, even with
18 this working group -- I see that a lot of the charge is focused on
19 landings, but, obviously, there's other components where we can
20 decide allocations that are not specific to landings, and so just
21 making sure that the working group is going to just focus on the
22 landings component of this stuff, but that doesn't necessarily
23 dictate how the allocation scenario should go.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think the
28 intent of this group, is just to understand what's being used in
29 the assessment, how we'll be able to untangle that, just to try to
30 create a time series of landings, the caveats for those, and
31 provide that to the council, and you certainly can direct us when
32 we go from there, other things you want to look at to consider for
33 allocation.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

36
37 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and just a question to the group, I guess.
38 Would there be any benefit to include an SSC representative in
39 this also, or, I mean, probably Ryan Rindone, from council staff,
40 could substitute a lot for that, and that would potentially be a
41 question, I guess, and maybe Mike Allen I could ask, if there would
42 be any benefit for that either. Thoughts?

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons, to that?

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, I guess
47 we'll be writing a letter to the state directors, or we'll be
48 writing a letter to asking who they want to put on this working

1 group, and some of them may be on the SSC already. I'm not sure
2 there's overlap there or not, but I don't know that we need to
3 have a special SSC member on this.

4
5 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** I would strongly expect at least one of those
6 state reps will also be an SSC member, just by probability.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. I have Ed, Captain Walker, and then
9 Dr. Walter.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** I'm still kind of digesting what this is, but it
12 doesn't mention it. Would it go without saying here that this
13 would include the new FES recalibration stuff? It doesn't
14 specifically say that, but it says data, and so I guess that would
15 count, right?

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

18
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes. For clarification, it doesn't,
20 but that's our intent, yes.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Dr. Walter.

23
24 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks, and my staff is certainly willing to serve on
25 this. I just want to be clear that this is a very technical
26 working group, and my understanding is it's going to be very
27 technical, and it's really to develop the inputs, and then we're
28 also going to need to have the calibrations done between the state
29 surveys and the MRIP pilot, as part of it, as Kevin noted, and
30 that that's going to need technical expertise from each of the
31 states, and so it may or may not be the SSC member.

32
33 It probably is going to be more of a technical expert from the
34 state doing that, or some participation from Science and
35 Technology, when they've supported it, but I just want to narrow
36 -- Make sure that the goal here is that we just -- This council
37 just needs the numbers, and then, you know, after that, then all
38 of the other aspects of allocations get sorted out, but the focus
39 for this group is just getting the numbers, because I don't want
40 them to have too much on their plates, because it's enough already,
41 but I also want them to be able to work where it's not as pressured,
42 and they can just produce the numbers for this council. Thanks.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Any other questions or
45 discussion on the motion? Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.

46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, I didn't know if there was any
48 other questions on the charge, because I think the -- During the

1 Reef Fish committee, I think that's what the group wanted, and so
2 I didn't know if there was other clarification on the draft charge.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Anyone have anything on the draft charge? Not
5 seeing any. All right, and is there any other discussion? **Not**
6 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
7 **the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

8
9 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Draft Options: Reef Fish
10 Amendment 64: Delegate Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Management to
11 the Gulf States, Tab B, Number 4, council staff presented Reef
12 Fish Amendment 64, which considers the delegation of the federal
13 for-hire management authority for red snapper to the Gulf states.

14
15 The amendment includes management measures to delegate to states,
16 allocate the federal for-hire component annual catch target
17 amongst the states, sunset provisions, and accountability
18 measures. Staff discussed the purpose and need statement
19 previously approved by the council and presented a revised version
20 suggested by the interdisciplinary planning team.

21
22 Committee members supported the revision and suggested including
23 "fair and equitable access" in the revised need statement. NOAA
24 GC noted that fair and equitable access is not clearly defined and
25 indicated that the initial purpose and need is too broad. A
26 committee member highlighted that fairness and equitability can be
27 interpreted differently amongst the Gulf states.

28
29 A committee member suggested that the need statement could
30 emphasize maximizing economic benefits instead of minimizing
31 adverse economic impacts. Staff said an updated purpose and need
32 will be included in the amendment.

33
34 Staff discussed the delegation of management authority to the
35 states to set federal for-hire red snapper seasons and bag and
36 size limits and inquired whether state-specific endorsements would
37 be included in the amendment. Staff presented a map of the Gulf,
38 including boundaries between the states extending into federal
39 waters.

40
41 NOAA GC noted that, as in state management, Amendment 50A, boundary
42 lines would be needed if some states do not accept delegation.
43 Committee members indicated that the effects of different seasons
44 and bag limits could affect angler incentives to fish in certain
45 areas and should be considered. **Committee members stated they did**
46 **not support sunset provisions and recommended their removal from**
47 **the amendment, and we have a committee motion, Mr. Chair.**

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Is there any discussion
2 on the motion from the board? Okay. **Not seeing any, is there**
3 **any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, motion carries.** Dr.
4 Sweetman.

5
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A committee member said a
7 solution to allocating federal for-hire component red snapper
8 catch limit amongst states would be to keep the component as a
9 single unit. Another committee member said the allocation
10 percentages for Florida and Alabama were reversed in the
11 presentation. Staff replied that the data were inadvertently
12 transposed.

13
14 The committee suggested that management authority could also be
15 delegated into regions, e.g., two or more states, and recommended
16 the addition of options for regional delegation in the amendment.
17 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to include options for**
18 **regional management in Reef Fish Amendment 64.** That motion carried
19 with one in opposition, one absent, and one abstention. Mr. Chair.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion
22 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? All right.
23 Seeing none, let's try this. **Is there any opposition to the**
24 **motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

25
26 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'm going
27 to put up a couple of motions here, and so, Bernie, if you could
28 bring up the first one, please. Okay, so I'll go ahead and read
29 this, once we get it a little bit bigger.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, is this your motion?

32
33 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I will read it. **The motion is to add an**
34 **alternative in Action 3 to use 50 percent of the average landings**
35 **from 2016 to 2024 and 50 percent of the average landings from 2021**
36 **to 2024.** If I get a second, I can explain.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Dr. Sweetman has a motion on the
39 board. Is there a second? Mr. Sanchez seconded. Discussion on
40 the motion? Dr. Sweetman.

41
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I just wanted to put this motion out there.
43 The Bowtie Method, or the so-called Bowtie Method, that was done
44 in one of the, or in a couple of the actions here, is not relevant
45 to modern day here. Some of the data, the only time series that
46 they're using, goes back into the early 2000s. If anything, this
47 is more representative of the historical nature of this fishery,
48 as well as applying appropriately the more recent landings here

1 for the recent timeframe.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I'll open
4 the floor for discussion or questions on the motion. Mr. Schieble.

5
6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Essentially, this is combining Alternative 2 and 3
7 in the document, as far as allocation. I'm not opposed to adding
8 this. I think, as many options as we want to look at in here, I'm
9 open to, and so I'm not opposed to this motion.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Any other -- Mr.
12 Strelcheck.

13
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'll just voice support for adding it for at least
15 consideration. As I expressed in committee, I had some concerns
16 about looking at data that was forty years old, and so I think
17 this addresses at least one of my concerns with looking at least
18 at more recent time series that's relative to current conditions,
19 or closer to current conditions.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any other comments
22 regarding Dr. Sweetman's motion? Dr. Allen.

23
24 **DR. ALLEN:** I'll just note that this is very similar to what we
25 selected in the yellowtail snapper, and so there's consistency
26 there.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you for that, Dr. Allen. Any
29 other comments, or discussion? **Seeing none, is there any**
30 **opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr.
31 Sweetman, did you have --

32
33 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've got one more motion
34 that is very similar to this one, with a little bit longer time
35 series, if we can bring that one up, Bernie. Okay, and so the
36 only difference here in this motion is using a little bit longer
37 of a time series in the earlier phase here, going back to 2003
38 instead of stopping at 2016.

39
40 **The motion is to make an alternative in Action 3 to use 50 percent**
41 **of the average landings from 2003 to 2024 and then 50 percent of**
42 **the average landings from 2021 to 2024.**

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We have Dr. Sweetman's motion on the
45 board. Is there a second? Mr. Sanchez seconded. Any further
46 discussion on the motion? Captain Walker.

47
48 **MR. WALKER:** Just for my clarification, these are total

1 recreational landings, or these are just for-hire landings? Just
2 for-hire landings? Okay. Thank you.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

5
6 **MR. STRELCHECK:** C.J., I assume you're selecting 2003 because
7 that's the start of the permit moratorium?

8
9 **DR. SWEETMAN:** That's exactly correct.

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, once again, I'm supportive of
12 analyzing this. I think the other thing that relates back to the
13 charge we just discussed is not only looking at kind of years to
14 consider including or excluding, but we should be thinking about
15 this from the standpoint of the data itself and the changes that
16 have occurred to the data. I know for-hire has been much more
17 stable, but we've had, obviously, new surveys come online, and so
18 that I think will be important, to consider these various time
19 series for allocation.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Sweetman.

22
23 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, and this was intentionally, like Andy said,
24 to try and get at that permit moratorium. I mean, some of the
25 other alternatives that we've had in actions really -- It's a
26 completely different scenario after 2003, and this is just more
27 reflective of what the current situation is. You know, before
28 then, it was unlimited effort, unlimited vessels, and, I mean, so
29 I think this is an appropriate timeframe for us to evaluate.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

32
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, C.J., would you be
34 willing to consider adding an amendment to that motion, or amending
35 the motion, to exclude the year 2010? It's purposefully excluded
36 in the other motions because of what occurred in the Gulf, and so
37 I guess it would be 2003 to 2009 and then 2011 to 2024, and you
38 would just have to change the time series, if you're willing to do
39 that.

40
41 **DR. SWEETMAN:** You're thinking just relative to the BP oil spill?
42 Yes, and I think that's fine. I'm okay with that. **It can just be**
43 **2003 to 2024, excluding 2010.**

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll Bernie get that on the board. How
46 is that, Dr. Sweetman?

47
48 **DR. SWEETMAN:** There you go. I think that's good, Bernie. Thank

1 you.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I'm going to look at Mr. Sanchez.

4
5 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm okay.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** The seconder is okay with the changes. Any
8 further discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the**
9 **motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

10
11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. Moving on. Draft Options: Management
12 Flexibility for the Federal For-Hire component of the Red Snapper
13 Fishery, Tab B, Number 5, council staff presented options for
14 delegating authority for modifying specific management measures to
15 the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator for the federal for-hire
16 component for red snapper.

17
18 Council staff said the council would need ultimately to define
19 exactly what would happen in the following fishing year based on
20 what happened in the previous fishing year. Changes to management
21 measures within a fishing year cannot be projected because of a
22 lag in reporting. The Regional Administrator can already reopen
23 the fishing season later in the fishing year if there is enough of
24 the ACT remaining.

25
26 The Southeast Regional Office made clear that any approach being
27 discussed needs to be long lasting and durable to changes in the
28 regional administrators and fishery dynamics. SERO thought that
29 narrowing the scope of actions being considered, specifically
30 eliminating changes to minimum size limits, should be considered.

31
32 Other committee members echoed this reservation relative to the
33 effects such a change would have on the estimation of selectivity
34 and retention in the stock assessment. A committee member favored
35 preserving the summer fishing season and prioritizing harvesting
36 the ACT second to that.

37
38 Another committee member asked SERO about what flexibilities would
39 be helpful for federal for-hire fisheries management, and SERO
40 replied that it could provide some more ideas.

41
42 NOAA GC noted a previous action to modify the bag limit for red
43 grouper based on fishery performance, which was ultimately not
44 successful relative to its stated goal.

45
46 Committee members decided to wait for public comment to help orient
47 the council and staff on key goals for the proposed management
48 actions. SERO reiterated the importance of the assumption that

1 the stock is healthy when making management modifications.

2
3 Another committee member thought a fixed and predictable fishing
4 season was a key need for the federal for-hire fleet. Mr. Chair,
5 I think we probably want to have a little pause here, so we can
6 give Ryan a little bit direction to how to try to move some of
7 this forward.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Mr. Rindone.

10
11 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, sir. Yes, and we definitely need you
12 guys to give us a target to shoot for on this. We keep hearing
13 more, I think, and this is my personal opinion, that we keep
14 hearing more about having some sort of a predictable fishing
15 season, or some core period of time where the fishing season is
16 intended to be open as a need.

17
18 Some sort of affirmation from you guys of, you know, whether or
19 not that's true would be immensely helpful, because, when we're
20 talking about building out all these triggers and everything about
21 what we're going to do in the next fishing year based on what
22 happened in the previous one, I need to base it off of something.
23 Otherwise, you guys are going to get an action that's got forty-
24 seven alternatives in it, and we're going to get nowhere.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ryan. Dr. Sweetman.

27
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I would agree with that. I think what we
29 hear consistently from the public, and what we heard not just at
30 this meeting, but in the past, is the need for some of these
31 predictable fishing seasons, so they can set up their business
32 structure, book trips, and everything along those lines. I mean,
33 this is not just for red snapper that we hear this for. We hear
34 this for gag grouper. I mean, this is probably the number-one
35 thing that I think I hear from the charter sector there, and so I
36 would agree with that component for that.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead.

39
40 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, sir, and so, to that point, we have this
41 framework action that we've transmitted to the agency, and
42 hopefully will be able to be put in place for the next fishing
43 year, for 2027, that would open the fishing season Friday before
44 Memorial Day.

45
46 You guys went through considerable deliberation about choosing
47 that date specifically as the start date. Is it safe for staff,
48 and eventually, when we have one, the IPT, to assume that we still

1 want to use that as the start date, the Friday before Memorial Day
2 being the start date for the federal for-hire fleet?

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Schieble, and then Mr. Walker.

5
6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'll just bring up an example here. Yesterday, in
7 public comment, we heard a charter captain from Texas say that he
8 wanted the federal for-hire season to start in April, I believe it
9 was, right, and so, I mean, we have these differences on one side
10 of the Gulf versus the other.

11
12 Here we go back to talking about, you know, one-size-fits-all
13 doesn't really work, and we're asking for what flexibilities would
14 be helpful for federal for-hire fisheries management to tell in
15 this document. I think we add some regional component to this,
16 some regional flexibility, if that's a possibility for the Regional
17 Administrator to be allowed to have regional management within the
18 Gulf, and maybe that precludes what we're doing in the other
19 amendment a little bit.

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

22
23 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, and so, to that point, if it opened -- If a
24 fishing season, or, sorry, the fishing year begins April 1, that
25 does provide an opportunity for the for-hire fleet if the season
26 is extended, because the ACT wasn't meant for it to be open during
27 spring break, which I think is part of that recommendation that
28 was put forward.

29
30 Typically, or what we've seen anyway, is that the season reopens
31 now sometime in say November or December, or something like that,
32 for a period of weeks, to, you know, a little over a month or
33 something, and so, if we shift the start of the fishing year to
34 begin April 1, any tail-end portion of the fishing year that would
35 be subject to that reopening would likely also occur during spring
36 break months, which, from the perspective of being able to book
37 trips, would be advantageous for the for-hire fleet, regardless of
38 state.

39
40 That might be something that we could consider there, but it
41 wouldn't be -- It wouldn't have to be a regionally-specific thing.
42 It's something that, in my mind's eye anyway, would be advantageous
43 across-the-board.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** To that point, Mr. Schieble?

46
47 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I guess I would look to others around the
48 table here. Would we want to consider having some regional

1 component in this for management anyway, because of the other
2 action, Amendment 64, that we're going through right now? Is there
3 any benefit to that, do you see?
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker, and then Mr. Strelcheck.
6

7 **MR. WALKER:** So, in my view, the charter industry and us have
8 debated opening of red snapper for a couple of years, and we've
9 settled on a date, and we've heard that they like consistency in
10 that, and so I say, in my opinion, as a charter boat captain, no.
11 We've set the date, and we've put a lot of time and debate and
12 discussion and public input into it, and we should leave it where
13 it is now.
14

15 What Mr. Williams was talking about yesterday was not changing the
16 season date, but changing -- What do you call it, the fiscal date,
17 the fiscal year, like with king mackerel, and so things could be
18 adjusted on the tail-end, and I'm okay with that, allowing
19 flexibility toward the end of the season with -- You know, because
20 the end of the season just kind of fizzles out for a lot of charter
21 guides.
22

23 They're not that busy, and maybe it would be better if they had
24 some leftover dates, and they could use them at a later time or
25 something, and so I'm more in favor of that, but I'm -- I've heard
26 from a lot of other charter captains that, you know, give us a set
27 date, that we can plan our trips on and stuff, and they really
28 were -- They told me to express disappointment in not getting the
29 one week earlier this year when I came up here this year, and so
30 they're kind of -- The fleet that I know is planning on that hard
31 date and keeping it that way for, you know, management of their
32 business.
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.
35

36 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So, just wrap up the conversation of fishing
37 years, the way I look at this is we forego the first five months
38 of the fishing year before we start for-hire harvest, and so, by
39 the time you get to the fall, if we haven't caught our catch
40 target, you have a limited time to potentially fulfill your catch
41 target, and you can't wrap around, obviously, to that five months
42 that you've already foregone, and so that's the idea of the fishing
43 year.
44

45 I will say that I feel like Johnny was talking out of both sides
46 of his mouth there, because with one respect he was saying, well,
47 we're not catching the catch target, and give us more days, but
48 then he said, well, we're not catching the catch target because

1 there's not enough fish there to catch, right, and so that's the
2 conundrum I feel like I'm wrestling with, with both kind of how we
3 manage toward catch limits and the RA's authority, because, when
4 the fishery is not maybe as healthy, or there's localized depletion
5 occurring in certain areas, right, you can continually extend days
6 to try to catch the catch target, but ultimately not achieve that.

7
8 When the stock is really doing well, we tend to bust the catch
9 target, or run up right against it, and we can, obviously, have
10 the dials to control, obviously, harvest levels, and so, with that
11 said, Chris, your comment about regional component, I think I would
12 want to think about it.

13
14 I think, if it starts to involve allocations, it becomes a lot
15 more challenging, and I don't know -- I'm trying to think about
16 how you would do it without allocations, right, and then we shared
17 a number of ideas between committee and Full Council as staff
18 around the triggers, and I think, right now, I'm inclined to let's
19 keep season, bag limit, size limit changes as part of those
20 options.

21
22 I'm almost thinking, Ryan, that maybe we work together and come
23 back in October with a presentation on some concepts, to see what
24 resonates and what doesn't resonate with the council.

25
26 There's certainly, I think, pros and cons to a lot of these
27 options, but see if there's anything that can be workable, and so,
28 for example, we tossed out the concept of there's a core season
29 that we're going to focus on harvest for for-hire. It's going to
30 start at a certain time period and end at a certain time period.
31 If we project the catch target, it's going to not be met based on
32 that core season, and then we create triggers that decide how the
33 RA would add days to that season. Would it be before the season?
34 Would it be after the season? Would it be a split season with a
35 second season later in the year?

36
37 Those are the ideas that we've been kind of exploring, but I feel
38 like we need to kind of lay out those concepts to you in a
39 presentation, in order for you to see exactly what may be workable
40 or not.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Captain Frady, and
43 then Dr. Sweetman.

44
45 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Thank you all for chiming-
46 in on this right here. I see similarities in 64 to what we're
47 also proposing for the Regional Administrator's flexibility thing,
48 and so I like the idea of preserving the fishermen's access to the

1 fish, the charter-for-hire, during the Friday before Memorial Day.

2
3 That is something worth preserving, but the reason I'm looking at
4 this now a little bit differently is, if this set up an opportunity
5 to harvest red snapper during short periods in the spring that
6 were guaranteed in the spring to help set this process up, it would
7 reduce uncertainty on the back end of us trying to catch our ACT,
8 and end up having to open the season on a short notice through
9 like November or December or something like that, which nobody has
10 made plans to catch fish by then.

11
12 I would support setting this up similar to the flexibility of the
13 Regional Administrator that we've been talking about, having those
14 short periods of time in the spring, to make sure we hit our ACT,
15 or get close to our ACT, but I also support having -- On the back
16 end, having the built-in -- Like a couple of weeks in October as
17 a guaranteed open, and we may even look at closing the season mid-
18 August as an option, when kids go back to school for that short
19 period of time, to make sure we get our numbers in.

20
21 Then we can have a set season beginning October 1, and so I see -
22 - We're talking about flexibility, and we need to use it, and just
23 continue beating that, because everybody wants to maximize their
24 income. They want to maximize and make sure we hit our ACT, and
25 so, anything we can do to do that -- I mean, I would be in support
26 of, at least in theory, laying out the design of this to make sure
27 we hit our ACT, whether it begins in April, but it ends up in
28 October. Thank you.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Frady. Dr. Sweetman.

31
32 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, Andy, just a question
33 for you. When we were in committee, we really heard no appetite
34 about modifying size limits or anything like that, and the
35 challenges that are associated, you know, along those lines for
36 using that for a predictable fishing season, and so can you explain
37 to me why you want to keep that in there now for the future?

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

40
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, to clarify, just keeping it in for
42 consideration now, because we're so early in the process, but I
43 agree with you that I don't think there's probably a lot of viable
44 paths to include that as we work through this amendment.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

47
48 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I'm just trying to make sure -- To give

1 Ryan a little bit of help here, so we're not having to analyze
2 10,000 things and come back with a variety of options, and so, I
3 mean, my perspective, and I'm only speaking for myself here, but
4 I think the size limits -- Changing size limits on a year-to-year
5 basis is a bad idea, and so I would not be really in favor of even
6 having that consideration, but I'll see what Ryan has to say.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Rindone.

9
10 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, sir, and I'm looking over towards Dr.
11 Walter. All my experience in the stock assessment process leads
12 me to think that annual changes, or even biannual changes, to the
13 minimum size limit would wreak havoc on selectivity and retention
14 functions related to length composition data in the stock
15 assessment, and it would not be ideal, and so not from a
16 quantitative standpoint for our understanding of what's actually
17 going on with the species, and so I would strongly discourage you
18 guys, from a science perspective, from routine modifications to
19 the minimum size limit.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Strelcheck to that point.

22
23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm certainly not in opposition to what
24 C.J. is saying, and so, in terms of staff direction, I'm
25 comfortable with eliminating the size limit as a consideration,
26 and I can certainly speak to a few other ideas that we may want to
27 give staff direction on, but is that okay?

28
29 In terms of the bag limit, I guess I would be interested in hearing
30 from the council, and I don't recall the full range we have for
31 private, but I want to say it's two to four fish for private, and
32 I don't know if we can reduce it down to one. The question was,
33 you know, what would be the range to consider for increasing or
34 decreasing bag limits, and should we include one fish.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Dr. Froeschke, to that, and then we'll
37 go to Dr. Allen.

38
39 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** I guess what I would appreciate some guidance
40 is we've done this two times, to my knowledge, in the past, once
41 for red grouper and once for king mackerel. When the catch rates
42 were low, we increased the bag limits, which did not result in
43 anything noticeably positive, and, if the catch rates were low
44 because that assumption that the stock is healthy is violated,
45 then you're doing more harm than good.

46
47 Is there a way that this could be done where, if catch rates were
48 very low, that you actually reduce the bag limit? I don't see

1 that as an option, because the ACT is what it is, but that's my
2 conundrum with this, is that you're likely to double down on a
3 problem.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Andy.

6
7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Great point, right, and that's one of my concerns
8 about there's pros and cons to having this flexibility. I think
9 the best way we can address that is not having an eight or ten-
10 year time period between stock assessments, right, and having some
11 more interim analyses, which I hope we can get to with red snapper
12 going forward, right, because that, to me, is the best approach.

13
14 If things are not doing well, you adjust the ACT and ACLs based on
15 the latest information and science, but, like you're suggesting,
16 until that ACT guidance changes, the best scientific information
17 available, then we should be focusing on trying to optimize yield
18 to that target.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Allen, or go ahead, Ryan.

21
22 **MR. RINDONE:** Just thinking about our bag limit analyses, which
23 usually show that, more often than not, recreational anglers,
24 whether they're on a for-hire vessel or they're on the private
25 vessel, are not landing the vessel's worth of anglers, worth of
26 the daily bag, and so we see that across species, and that's pretty
27 regular.

28
29 Maybe we could have some discussion, when we're trying to put all
30 of this together, about looking at the bag limit analysis as a way
31 to determine whether it's appropriate or not to increase or
32 decrease the bag limit based on recent performance in the fishery,
33 on the angler's ability to catch the bag limit in the first place,
34 and so, if the ACL isn't being met, but the bag limit analysis is
35 telling us that, you know, say more than 90 percent of anglers
36 aren't catching it anyway, well, increasing it's not going to help
37 them catch what they're not catching already, and so that would be
38 informative to the Regional Administrator in terms of making that
39 decision.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ryan. I have Dr. Allen, and then
42 Captain Walker.

43
44 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and just a comment on the bag limit. I completely
45 agree. I think that's an important issue, and those bag limit
46 changes usually don't have a big effect in recreational fisheries.
47 I was just going to add, with regard to the minimum size limit,
48 when it comes to the stock assessment, changing the minimum size

1 limit through time is going to -- That's going to cause us to have
2 annual selectivity parameters changing, and I think it would
3 substantially complicate the stock assessment process, and so I
4 would be okay with taking the minimum size limits out of here.
5 I'm okay with Andy's suggestion to leave it in for now, but I
6 suspect that that's an area we don't want to go to.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Captain Walker.

9
10 **MR. WALKER:** Well, first off, I would agree with Dr. Allen on that.
11 I would be okay just removing that size limit, but my topic I
12 wanted to throw in the mix here is that I think I could speak for
13 a lot of our charter guys where we are that I don't know that
14 anybody where I live wants any more than a two-fish bag limit on
15 a charter.

16
17 I understand that's probably different in Louisiana, but our guys
18 are -- You know, it's easier to tell your clients they have a
19 limit, whether they get sixteen fish, or eight fish, or whatever,
20 and they're happy they hit their limit, and the guys don't feel
21 like they're smashing the resource to death out there. I can't
22 speak for everybody, but I have a pretty good idea that our guys
23 are okay with two, and I haven't heard anybody once ask for an
24 increase in bag limit for for-hire where we are in the Gulf.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr.
27 Strelcheck.

28
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I appreciate those comments, and I guess I go
30 back to I'm fine with, obviously, taking out the size limit, and
31 so I want to make sure we're on the same page for direction for
32 Ryan, right? In terms of the bag limit, I mean, I generally agree
33 that's kind of what I've heard from the charter community.

34
35 The condition of the stock is going to change over time, right?
36 Maybe for better, maybe for worse, and maybe there's opportunities
37 where we could increase the bag limit, and maybe there's need for
38 reducing the bag limit, and so that's, I guess, where I'm at right
39 now, is we're so early in the process of trying to figure things
40 out, and let's not take that as an option off the table quite yet.

41
42 If it's something that we ultimately say, hey, a two-fish bag
43 limit, and everyone is going to largely want that, and we're not
44 going to want to change it, and we can, obviously, make that
45 decision down the road.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. All right. I'm
48 looking around the table. Is there any more comments? Mr.

1 Rindone, do you have what you need?

2
3 **MR. RINDONE:** It's slightly less turbid than we started. We're
4 making progress.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I alluded to coming back, and I don't recall
9 what's on the October agenda, and if this would come back in
10 October or not. If it is, then certainly I think I'm open to
11 working with council staff on the presentation, fleshing out some
12 of these concepts, some of the things that have been suggested
13 around the table, and seeing, obviously, if there's more specific
14 direction we can provide Ryan and team based on those
15 presentations.

16
17 **MR. RINDONE:** My expectation would be the next pass would be a
18 better characterization of the ideas that, you know, we've talked
19 about here, and making sure that the things that we're going to be
20 considering are in line with what you guys want, and then, after
21 that, we would put forward an actual options draft.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other comments? Ryan, you good? All right.
24 We're going to move on. Dr. Sweetman.

25
26 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right. Moving on, we're
27 on Draft Options: Modifications to Red Snapper Private
28 Recreational Post-Season Accountability Measures, Tab B, Number 6.

29
30 Council staff presented a draft framework action to modify private
31 recreational accountability measures for red snapper and provided
32 historical examples of overages to demonstrate how the action could
33 be implemented.

34
35 After a presentation of the alternatives, a committee member asked
36 which options align with scientific uncertainty, and another
37 committee member from Louisiana replied that 6 percent would be
38 appropriate for their state data collection system, LA Creel.

39
40 A committee member asked to revisit carryover provisions. Council
41 staff and another committee member responded that carryovers are
42 not included in this action, but are on the action schedule to be
43 developed as a separate document. NOAA GC mentioned that carryover
44 is allowed in Amendment 50A, but it is contingent on the
45 implementation of a carryover amendment.

46
47 Some committee members supported both Alternative 2, Options 2b
48 and 2c. A committee member suggested that, as most overages have

1 been within 10 percent of a state's ACL, Option 2c would be
2 preferable.

3
4 In response to a question about the start date of the frequency
5 limitation, staff stated that the three-year rolling period would
6 begin with the first year after the effective date of this action.
7 NOAA GC reiterated that some flexibility would go away if there
8 were back-to-back overages. A committee member suggested
9 considering the number of pounds, instead of a percentage, to
10 accommodate states with comparatively small ACLs.

11
12 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1 to make**
13 **Alternative 2c the preferred alternative.** That motion carried
14 without opposition. Mr. Chair.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I have a committee
17 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion?
18 **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
19 **the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

20
21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on, July 2026 SSC
22 Meeting presentation and Meeting Summary, Tab B, Number 7, Mr.
23 Trevor Moncrief, Chair of the Scientific and Statistical
24 Committee, reviewed discussions from the July 2026 Gulf SSC
25 meeting.

26
27 Mr. Moncrief reviewed SSC discussions on new fisheries integrated
28 modeling system, Mexican king mackerel landings and their
29 consideration in the current Gulf SEDAR stock assessment for king
30 mackerel, and a data analysis examining Gulf tilefish species.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I'm not seeing any comments. Dr. Sweetman, before
33 we get to 59A, I'm going to look around the table and see if
34 there's an appetite for a break, or do you all want to get into
35 59A? A break? A fifteen-minute break, and then we'll reconvene.

36
37 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We're going to go ahead and pick up
40 where we left off, and we'll turn it back over to Dr. Sweetman.

41
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on to the next topic
43 here, Draft Options, Reef Fish Amendment 59A, Permit Requirements
44 and IFQ programs, Tab B, Number 8, council staff presented Reef
45 Fish Amendment 59A, which considers permit requirements in the red
46 snapper and grouper-tilefish IFQ programs. The committee reviewed
47 previously-selected preferred alternatives.

1 Staff presented Action 5.1, which considers criteria for granting
2 exemptions from the permit requirements to nonprofit
3 organizations. A committee member suggested they would like to
4 hear public comments from those involved in relevant nonprofits.

5
6 Staff discussed criteria for maintaining exemptions from permit
7 requirements, Action 5.2. A committee member requested further
8 criteria for maintaining a quota exemption, including details of
9 how many participants applied to the quota bank, how many were
10 awarded quota, and how many were not, which would be in an annual
11 report submitted to the council. SERO cautioned about the
12 administrative and scheduling burdens that could be experienced by
13 the council and NMFS.

14
15 A committee member suggested grandfathering existing relevant
16 nonprofits and capping the number of exemptions as a guard against
17 participants using nonprofit exemptions as a loophole. The
18 committee member also noted that there are a few participants with
19 loans from the Fisheries Finance Program who have accounts that
20 are not linked to permits. These participants would need
21 exemptions, or future loans should be tied to permit requirements.

22
23 Committee members expressed concern about the timeline of this
24 document and that a complex discussion on exemption criteria could
25 slow down this amendment. Staff discussed issues the committee
26 might consider for eligibility and challenges with exemptions,
27 such as fairness, loopholes, current applicability, and assessment
28 of the social, economic, and biological benefits expected from
29 nonprofit quota banks.

30
31 The committee member suggested that permit exemptions would be
32 more directly relevant in a discussion of the activity requirements
33 in Amendment 59B. Committee members suggested that there should
34 be continued discussion about this action during Full Council
35 following public comment, and I know we're going to have some
36 discussion here, and, Captain Walker, I know you've got your hand
37 up, so I'm going to queue it over to you.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Go ahead, Ed.

40
41 **MR. WALKER:** So I'm going to discuss the -- Well, I'm going to
42 support the concept of setting a control date for exemptions for
43 quota banks. Andy and I have talked about this, and he seems to
44 think it will work, and so I would kick it over to him to explain
45 it, but it would essentially allow those quota banks that are in
46 existence now to apply, and potentially get in, and close the door
47 behind that for now.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Bernie, if you could bring up the draft motion,
4 and then I'll walk through and kind of explain this, and, really,
5 this was born out of the committee discussion as an idea that I
6 wanted to float with the council, because the control date would
7 be something you'd request with NOAA Fisheries. I don't
8 necessarily feel like it's appropriate for me to make this motion,
9 but that's why I've talked to several council members about the
10 concept.

11
12 So just to kind of walk through, because we were talking about
13 this during committee, recommending a control date that would be
14 established for yesterday, and that control date would essentially
15 be used to decide if it -- Essentially, I'll read it.

16
17 **Request NOAA Fisheries establish August 26, 2026 as the control**
18 **date the Gulf Council may use if it decides to recommend exemptions**
19 **for non-profit organizations operating quota pools or other**
20 **similar quota distribution programs from requirements to obtain or**
21 **retain shares or allocation in the Gulf red snapper and grouper-**
22 **tilefish IFQ programs. Non-profit organizations established after**
23 **the control date, and those that open an IFQ account with NOAA**
24 **Fisheries after the control date, may not be eligible to apply for**
25 **an exemption from reef fish permit requirements or other**
26 **requirements recognized by the council in the future.**

27
28 What this does -- Essentially, it says it puts these organizations
29 on notice. It doesn't mean you can't apply for an account, or it
30 doesn't mean you can't establish yourself as a non-profit
31 organization operating with the IFQ program, but it's kind of at
32 your own risk at that point going forward, because we will make
33 decisions, whether it's 59A or B or C, that could affect that
34 particular entity.

35
36 At this point, it also doesn't say that we are allowing non-profit
37 organizations to continue operating in the system. That is a
38 decision that still has to be made, and determined, whether it's
39 through 59A or another mechanism, but it essentially gives a kind
40 of hard and fast date to let people know, obviously, that we are
41 considering this, and we're looking into this, and we will
42 ultimately make some decisions that could affect the operation of
43 that as non-profit quota banks.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck, for that explanation.
46 Mr. Sanchez.

47
48 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would be in support of this, because I think a lot

1 of the concerns focused on opening a door for nefarious actors to
2 enter this arena, and take advantage, and I think this would help
3 to close that, and so I would be totally in support of it.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I don't believe anyone has formally made a motion.
6 It's just a discussion at this point. Mr. Sanchez.

7
8 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would make that motion, so Andy does not have to.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Mr. Sanchez makes the motion. Do we
11 have a second? Mr. Anson seconds. Mr. Osborne, you had your hand
12 up?

13
14 **MR. OSBORNE:** The way that I'm reading this is that if -- When we
15 say may not, that doesn't mean that necessarily it's closing the
16 door completely, but it could eventually close the door to only
17 those that have a non-profit currently, and, as I understand,
18 there's only one quota bank right now.

19
20 I know there's other non-profits out there, but does that mean
21 those non-profits that aren't acting as a quota bank could --
22 Because they were before the control date, they could start
23 operating the quota bank?

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Anson.

26
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I'll say that there's certainly
28 clearly at least one or more that are operating within the system.
29 It's not fully clear to us, you know, how many, because they don't
30 necessarily have to report to us that they're operating with the
31 system as a non-profit, or they might have accounts set up in
32 different ways, and so that's one of the questions that I think
33 we're still trying to answer.

34
35 Then I think the other aspect of this is, because the decision to
36 provide an exemption or not in 59A is still pending, this isn't
37 saying that we will or will not provide that exemption. What it
38 is saying though is that, as this progresses, if that exemption is
39 considered, it may not be provided to those that establish a non-
40 profit, operate as a quota bank, and set up an account after August
41 26th, right, and it would only apply to those that were in the
42 system prior to that date, and so hopefully that answers your
43 question.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson, and then Mr. Walker.

46
47 **MR. ANSON:** Just following up on Andy's comment just then about
48 one or more, and so I'm thinking about the more at this point, and

1 you described them as some entities, or conglomeration, I guess,
2 of accounts maybe that might be operating as a de facto
3 organization to do some of the things that would be identified in
4 a quota pool, or a quota bank, and so I'm understanding then that
5 this motion -- The non-profit organization would be identified
6 explicitly in any future action that we would take, whether it be
7 59A, B, or C, to identify what a non-profit organization is.

8
9 They would have to meet those criteria that would be identified in
10 that, and so, even though there might be these entities that are
11 not officially known, they would have to then comply with all of
12 those elements, or requirements, in the future amendments,
13 correct?

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Andy, to that point.

16
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Correct, and then, as it was pointed out, I mean,
18 the term "may" is used there intentionally, because this is not
19 binding to the council's decision-making, and so you could, a year
20 from now, be working on this and say, no, we want to include new
21 entities that have set up accounts and that meet the non-profit
22 organization status since August 26th, but, right now, this is
23 essentially to address the concerns surrounding the potential for
24 a loophole to develop, and the potential for a run on these type
25 of accounts and quota banks, which may or may not transpire.

26
27 As I've told several people, right, it's been fifteen to eighteen
28 years since this program started, and it's not like there's people
29 that have been knocking down the door wanting to do this, and so
30 my concern would be, if we start seeing increased activity, that
31 sends a message that, yes, they're trying to exploit a potential
32 loophole that we've created with an exemption, and so this just
33 gives them notice that that might not be allowed.

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

36
37 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I appreciate the extra comments there, and,
38 you know, I'm in support of this motion as well, because it does
39 provide the flexibility, if you will, if we decide to not support
40 a non-profit organization, and it still allows us to do that and
41 take action to that effect, and so thank you.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kevin. Next up is Mr. Walker.

44
45 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, and I was kind of going
46 to say the same thing. I don't think that there's a lot of
47 legitimate non-profits that we're not aware of. As a shareholder
48 who is involved in the, you know, currency of allocation, there's

1 not a lot of legitimate entities that we might be missing with
2 this, to my knowledge.

3
4 The reason that we can't include entities that might be out there
5 that we don't know about is because that's exactly the same thing
6 that somebody looking to exploit the system is going to say they
7 are.

8
9 They're going to come in and say, oh, I've had this little quota
10 bank in my garage for a while, and so I should be qualified, and
11 so we have to draw the line somewhere, and we've done this with a
12 couple other things.

13
14 Charter permits, for one, when they announced the moratorium on
15 them, they had to set the control date like yesterday, or everybody
16 would run out and apply for a charter permit the next day, to
17 potentially score a valuable charter permit down the road, and so
18 you kind of have to set yourself up where, as Andy said, people
19 won't make a run on this to beat the deadline, and maybe open the
20 door for the kind of thing that we're trying to avoid here.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ed. Mr. Sanchez.

23
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I agree. We have a history of using control
25 dates, and so that shouldn't be something unfamiliar to this
26 process.

27
28 In addition to that, I think, as we get past this discussion on
29 this motion, we had a really good presentation yesterday on -- It
30 was presented by Assane, and Dr. Suitor had a lot of work in this
31 too, and I think they identified, in fantastic detail, and did a
32 great job, all of the things that would identify a legitimate
33 nonprofit, and distinguish them as such, from someone who would be
34 trying to -- Or is existing just doing that, to game the system.

35
36 As we get past this motion, which helps to close that door, I think
37 we can refine identifying the legitimates and distinguishing them
38 from the others that are up to more nefarious things.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Osborne.

41
42 **MR. OSBORNE:** I appreciate what you guys are saying on this, but
43 doesn't this open the door for -- We're creating an exemption for
44 like, at most, maybe four groups right now, and, in my mind, that
45 leaves -- Like how do we create a process, if we're going to go
46 with nonprofit organizations, but then we're going to have a
47 control date that says you can't create one, and then we're only
48 creating an exemption for those that are already in existence, and

1 are we having controls on how big they can get, right?

2
3 I just worry that, one, I don't know -- I'm not a lawyer, and maybe
4 it does meet, you know, legal challenges, but, I mean, I would ask
5 our attorney here at the table that, and maybe she could answer
6 it, but I would think that somebody that would want to come in and
7 do a nonprofit, and has all the best intentions, but isn't allowed
8 to, because we put in this control date, and seeing that we're
9 only providing an exemption for one that I know of for sure that
10 is doing a quota bank, and not that they're doing anything wrong,
11 but I'm just thinking that we're creating an exemption for one
12 group right now.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, to that point?

15
16 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, just in response to that, one, this
17 doesn't prohibit this at this point. It puts them on notice,
18 right, and it's still up to us to decide the path forward here.
19 Two, we're not saying that we have provided an exemption at this
20 point. That's still before the council as a decision that we have
21 to make, is do we want to provide that exemption or not.

22
23 If we're going to provide that exemption, then what this says is
24 we're going to potentially just provide it to those operating in
25 the system prior to this date, but it also isn't binding to that,
26 if we want to consider nonprofits that are in the system post this
27 date, but those are things that we would have to decide as we
28 progress.

29
30 As an example, for those maybe not familiar with control dates,
31 we've often used control dates when we're limiting access to a
32 fishery, and so, when we have an open access permit, and we
33 establish a control date, and it puts people on notice that, if
34 they decide to get an open access permit after that date, they may
35 not qualify for the limited access, right, and so we have used
36 these.

37
38 I don't recall any times where we've been sued, but certainly that
39 is a potential in the future, but we would essentially go out and
40 publish this as a notice, and let people, obviously, be aware of
41 the decision, if it's passed by the council.

42
43 **MR. OSBORNE:** I completely understand, and I agree. I don't --
44 I'm not questioning whether -- You know, the term "may not", you
45 know, is pretty clear, but, when we've used control dates in the
46 past, have we -- Have they been in an environment where it's only
47 maybe benefiting less than five people? I mean, when we're talking
48 about control dates for other issues, and it may be -- It could be

1 in the hundreds, or the thousands, that are affected, as opposed
2 to less than five.

3
4 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I don't know the answer to that. I mean,
5 we've used control dates all over the country for various fisheries
6 issues, and certainly some fisheries are far larger than others,
7 and so there might have been use of control dates for small
8 fisheries, but we would have to look into that.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Sanchez, but I'll let Mara respond.

11
12 **MS. LEVY:** Well, right, and so, when the council makes this type
13 of motion, what the Fisheries Service does is basically publish an
14 advanced notice of proposed rulemaking, which is not binding on
15 anyone.

16
17 It's not a proposed rule, but it's letting the public know that
18 we're considering this action, and we're considering limiting
19 access to something particular, in this case, limiting access to
20 quota banks who would not need a permit, right?

21
22 Where the legal responsibility, or more justification, comes in is
23 when you actually make the decision, right, and so, if you're going
24 down the road, and you're like only those people, or only those
25 nonprofits, that have been in since before August 26, 2026 can
26 actually apply for this exemption, we're going to have to justify
27 that, right? You're going to have to come up with the rationale
28 why you're doing that, and we're going to have to have a good
29 justification for it, and so that's where we start to get into the
30 meat of this. This is just a public notice that we're considering
31 this type of thing. Thanks.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thanks, Ms. Levy. Mr. Sanchez.

34
35 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I think this is a good step, and then what I would
36 suggest is that we flesh out the mechanism to identify the
37 legitimate nonprofits and hold them to account, where they have to
38 report to the staff things like the transactions they do, the
39 shares they dole out, the ones they deny, and make us privy to all
40 that, and we give National Marine Fisheries Service the authority
41 to deny or revoke them if they see any illegitimacy being conducted
42 in their business.

43
44 I'm thinking the problem we're trying to address is a possible
45 loophole. As far as being exclusive to people, there hasn't been
46 an abundance of people starting up nonprofits, and so I think what
47 we're addressing here is abuses of using a veneer of a nonprofit
48 to take advantage of the system.

1
2 I'm in support of this motion, and I am in support of continuing
3 the good work, where I heard people, during yesterday's public
4 testimony, thank the shareholders for getting them started and
5 fired up and helping them -- Kind of take them under their wing to
6 get started in the fishery, and so I think they're doing a
7 legitimate good, and I would, as you know, like to see them
8 continue to have that opportunity to do that.
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Captain Walker, you had
11 your hand up, and then Dr. Sweetman.
12

13 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair. I think what we've
14 been working on here for a while is trying to restrict shareholding
15 without permits. That's the whole idea here, and so we're going
16 to potentially grandfather -- Well, it's not exactly a grandfather,
17 but we're going to maybe keep a couple, as long as they meet the
18 requirements, but, beyond that, if we leave the door open, then
19 we're not restricting shareholding without permits, because, to
20 me, personally, the other alternative to this is just no quota
21 banks at all.
22

23 Either just let a few legitimate ones that are in operation
24 currently come in, that have already started, or just scratch them
25 all, but to leave the door open would be a failure to what we're
26 trying to do here, in my opinion.
27

28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.
29

30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just to talk about kind of Mr. Osborne's question
31 relative to the size of what we're doing here, I mean, one example
32 that I can automatically think of is relative to the wreckfish ITQ
33 in the South Atlantic there. That fishery is incredibly small,
34 and there is an effective control date that limits the amount of
35 people that are participating in that, and so that's just one
36 example off the top of my head.
37

38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks.
39

40 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and so, to Ed's point, I am also in favor of this
41 motion, and establishing a control date, because I don't actually
42 know where I would vote today on an exemption for quota banks. I
43 go back and forth on -- I understand what they're doing, but, at
44 the same time, how is it truly different than the guy sitting on
45 the couch giving out quota?
46

47 Then the activity requirement, and are you going to go through and
48 say how many pounds of allocation, or percent of allocation, goes

1 through as their activity requirement, because now you're tying to
2 what does the market look like, and does anybody need allocation
3 this year, and they could potentially be penalized for something
4 that's not their fault, and so I haven't figured out how, in my
5 mind, nonprofits fit here yet for quota banks.

6
7 I think this gives us time to still talk about it, and whether we
8 want to leave them in 59A, put them in a different document, move
9 it to B, whatever we're doing, and so I would speak in favor of
10 this.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Do we have any other
13 discussion on Mr. Sanchez's motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**
14 **opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr.
15 Sweetman.

16
17 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Following up on some of the concerns that stemmed
18 from this discussion, I had a motion I had sent to staff to address
19 some of the qualifying criteria to distinguish legitimate
20 nonprofits from potentially illegitimate nonprofits. If they
21 could put that up, I'll gladly read it and see if I can get a
22 second.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I will give Bernie a moment to get Mr. Sanchez's
25 motion on the board. Mr. Sanchez.

26
27 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. **The motion is to add proposed Actions**
28 **5.1 and 5.2 to the amendment. Also, in Action 5.1, to include a**
29 **requirement that entities that receive exemptions must report**
30 **yearly who applied, who received, and who were denied allocation.**
31 **In Action 5.2, to include requirements that NMFS make this report**
32 **available to the Gulf Council.**

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, we have a motion on the board by Mr. Sanchez.
35 Is there a second? There's a second by Captain Walker. Mr.
36 Sanchez.

37
38 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and, again, this is based on the presentation
39 we saw yesterday, which outlined pretty significant qualifiers for
40 you to qualify and be seen as a legitimate nonprofit, and, again,
41 we give the agency the ultimate authority to review this, and I
42 have, personally, the utmost faith in the agency and Jessica to be
43 able to determine who is legitimate and who isn't. They do a
44 fantastic job in looking at corporations and such and peeling the
45 layers off that.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. I'll open
48 the floor for discussion on Mr. Sanchez's motion. Ms. Levy.

1
2 **MS. LEVY:** So, just looking back at what the actions were, 5.1 was
3 to actually get the exemption from the permit requirement, right,
4 and 5.2 was to keep it, and so I'm wondering if all of that
5 information that you put in there is really to 5.2, meaning I'm
6 not sure how they provide -- Bernie, can you go back up?

7
8 Providing a yearly report about who applied, received, and was
9 denied allocation, and like you want that to actually give them
10 the exemption or to maintain the exemption, and we can work that
11 out, but I'm just curious what your thoughts were.

12
13 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would give you all the flexibility to work that
14 out.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussion? Mr. Strelcheck.

17
18 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, to that end, just maybe to be less
19 prescriptive, can we just take out, in the second sentence, "in
20 Action 5.1", and so just say "also to include a requirement", and
21 that way it gives flexibility for the IPT to work with it.

22
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm fine with that change.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll let Bernie edit the motion. You
26 good with that, Mr. Sanchez?

27
28 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes. Thank you.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker?

31
32 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I think it's just housekeeping there, and I
33 don't think you need "5.2" in the first sentence anymore then,
34 because it's all in 5.1, right?

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

37
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** The first sentence is fine. I think the second
39 sentence also we need to just take out "in Action 5.1", right, and
40 so we're adding proposed Actions 5.1 and 5.2 and then specifying
41 some additional requirements that the IPT will include, and so
42 take out after "also" in "Action 5.1".

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

45
46 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, and thank you for putting up with what I
47 handed you this morning, which looked like a doctor's prescription.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Is Captain Walker good with the
2 modifications?

3
4 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Any further discussion on the motion?
7 Dr. Froeschke.

8
9 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just to be a pain, oftentimes, when we get these
10 back to the IPT, it's almost invariable that we would -- You know,
11 ideas come up for minor edits and things, and sometimes, when the
12 actions are very prescriptive, we go around and around about can
13 we massage it a little bit, maintain the intent, or it's explicit
14 how it is, and so just a little clarification if we need to make
15 some discussions, or refinements, in the drafting that, and do we
16 have the flexibility to do that?

17
18 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm fine with that.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I would like to have like a blanket
23 waiver for that to be the case for all motions, and you just have
24 to come back and provide the recommendations you have. I mean,
25 that's the job of the IPT and the staff, right? They think of
26 things that we don't, because they're thinking about this all the
27 time, and so I said that jokingly, but, in all seriousness, yes,
28 I really do appreciate that comment, and we want you to bring back
29 those ideas.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussion on the motion? **Not**
32 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
33 **the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

34
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. Moving on here. Public Hearing Draft: Reef
36 Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment --

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman. Sorry. Mr. Strelcheck.

39
40 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Sorry, C.J. One other comment, and maybe a
41 question for Assane, and so we mentioned the loan requirements,
42 and that also being something we need to look at, and so I don't
43 think we need a motion, but I just wanted to flag that, that that's
44 going to be also something we're going to want IPT input on at the
45 October meeting.

46
47 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Strelcheck, and you are referring to
48 those that have loans and don't have permits? To the extent that

1 there's an understanding by the council, the IPT will definitely
2 bring input and offer you suggestions on how to address that.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Dr. Sweetman.

5
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Good point, Andy, and no worries. Public Hearing
7 Draft: Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44: Mutton
8 Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, Tab B, Number
9 10, Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 is a joint
10 amendment considering modification to Southeastern U.S. mutton
11 snapper and yellowtail snapper management between the Gulf and
12 South Atlantic Councils.

13
14 This amendment considers modification of the respective stock
15 catch limits, jurisdictional apportionment of the respective stock
16 ABCs, and setting of regional ACLs and South Atlantic sector
17 allocations within the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. All
18 right. Get ready for a lot of motions here, Mr. Chair.

19
20 The committee recommends, and I so move, to move Alternative 2,
21 Alternative 5, and Alternative 6 in Action 3 to Considered but
22 Rejected. This motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a committee
25 motion on the board. Is there any discussion? **Is there any**
26 **opposition? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

27
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. **The next motion is the**
29 **committee recommends, and I so move, to make Alternative 1 in**
30 **Action 3 the preferred alternative.** That motion carried without
31 opposition. Mr. Chair.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion
34 on the board. Any discussion? **Seeing none, is there**
35 **any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, motion the carries.**
36 Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. **The next motion is the**
39 **committee recommends, and I so move, to move Alternative 2,**
40 **Alternative 5, and Alternative 6 in Action 4 to Considered but**
41 **Rejected.** This motion also carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion
44 on the board. Any discussion? **Seeing none, is there any**
45 **opposition? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

46
47 **DR. SWEETMAN:** **The next motion is the committee recommends, and I**
48 **so move, to make Alternative 1 in Action 4 the preferred**

1 **alternative.** This motion carried without opposition. Mr. Chair.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Another committee motion on the board. Any
4 discussion? **Seeing none, is there any opposition to the motion?**
5 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman.

6
7 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Last one here. **The committee recommends, and I so**
8 **move, to take Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44,**
9 **Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, out to**
10 **virtual public hearings.** That motion carried without opposition.
11 Mr. Chair.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Another committee motion
14 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr. Anson.

15
16 **MR. ANSON:** Just to make that spelling correction.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Bernie got it fixed up. Any other
19 discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion?**
20 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Rindone.

21
22 **MR. RINDONE:** Just to congratulate Dr. Sweetman on very efficiently
23 moving through this. It was bang, bang, bang. For this document,
24 we're going to plan on bringing it back to you guys for final
25 action in October, and then the South Atlantic Council for final
26 action in December.

27
28 We had some conversations with the Regional Office, and that's
29 going to be what we're going to target for timeline, and we're
30 sensitive to the amount of time we have left in the projection
31 period that was agreed to by the SSC, and so trying to keep that
32 throttle all the way forward.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Ryan. Dr. Sweetman.

35
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Next item here is Overview:
37 Understanding Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) from Fishery-
38 Independent and Dependent Indices of Relative Abundance, Tab B,
39 Number 12(a) through (c), Dr. Mike Allen, council member, presented
40 an overview of CPUE, discussing benefits and limitations to its
41 use for fishery-independent and fishery-dependent indices.

42
43 A committee member asked if spatial information collected from
44 commercial vessel monitoring systems, VMS, could be used to inform
45 CPUE estimates generated from fishery-dependent sources. Dr.
46 Allen indicated that VMS data could be beneficial, but stated that
47 in some cases there may not be enough resolution in those data,
48 and so they should also be carefully examined when calculating

1 CPUE.

2
3 He continued that fishery-independent surveys also have sources of
4 error, such as water turbidity in camera surveys, and fishery
5 scientists try to mediate those factors as much as possible.

6
7 Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff reviewed CPUE estimates
8 for red grouper in the commercial longline and handline fleets.
9 These data were compared with those from two fishery-independent
10 surveys, the NMFS bottom longline survey and the G-FISHER video
11 survey.

12
13 A committee member asked why there was a general decline in CPUE
14 for the two commercial fleets beginning in 2014. Council staff
15 said that a number of management measures, including hook
16 limitations and spatial restrictions to avoid sea turtle
17 interactions seasonally, were also implemented during that time.
18 Several committee members stated an examination of how regulatory
19 changes affect CPUE trends in fishery-dependent data would be
20 informative.

21
22 Dr. Ted Switzer, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
23 Commission, provided an overview of the history and application of
24 the G-FISHER camera survey. The survey has been expanded to
25 include more Gulf offshore habitat, but observations can be limited
26 in certain areas due to water turbidity.

27
28 A committee member asked if there had been an effort to calibrate
29 the hydroacoustic approach used in the western Gulf to the video
30 method used in the eastern Gulf. Dr. Switzer responded that the
31 calibration work was being conducted to compare those two methods,
32 in order to make them directly comparable.

33
34 Another committee member asked if future work would include
35 increased sampling off Alabama, and Dr. Switzer indicated that, as
36 more habitat mapping from Alabama becomes available, that will
37 open up the sampling frame to that area. Southeast Fisheries
38 Science Center staff stated that SEAMAP could serve as a model for
39 G-FISHER as a collaborative Gulf-wide survey that can provide data
40 for scientific projects and inform management measures.

41
42 Next item is Discussion: Exempted Fishing Permits, Tab B, Number
43 11. SERO reviewed the process for submitting, reviewing, and
44 approving an exempted fishing permit, or EFP.

45
46 Louisiana then summarized its EFP for its management of
47 recreational greater amberjack. The proposal discussed how
48 Louisiana intends to manage recreational greater amberjack within

1 its jurisdictional boundary, including the fishing season, June
2 and July, minimum size limit, a thirty-four-inch fork length, a
3 daily bag limit of one fish per person, and catch limit, 68,060
4 pounds whole weight, and a payback provision. Louisiana also
5 proposed to perform biological sampling for age and growth of the
6 recreational and commercial fleets. Recreational landings will be
7 monitored under LA Creel.

8
9 SERO discussed recent litigation which reinforced the necessity
10 for public review and defining a catch limit for each EFP. A
11 committee member noted that the proposed catch limit for Louisiana
12 was approximately 17 percent of the recreational ACL for the Gulf,
13 and 20 percent of the recreational ACT, and, after accounting for
14 average Florida landings, would be less than 5 to 8 percent for
15 the remaining states.

16
17 A committee member also noted that the proposed EFP is in LA Creel
18 data units and that a common data unit amongst the Gulf states
19 would be needed. Another committee member expected that any EFPs
20 for greater amberjack would be subject to catch limit attenuation
21 relative to any changes in stock catch limits from a stock
22 assessment.

23
24 Louisiana will hold its fishing season during the period when its
25 recreational red snapper fishing season is open, which will
26 accomplish its goal of having a fishing opportunity for greater
27 amberjack while creating efficiencies for its biological sampling.

28
29 A committee member questioned whether allowing harvest in June and
30 July was the best for stock recovery, due to the timing of spawning
31 for stock and also noting that currently greater amberjack is not
32 targeted in June and July, and it can be avoided by using cut baits
33 for red snapper, instead of live bait, which will catch both
34 species. Louisiana predicts a reduction in discard mortality
35 around structure in its waters by allowing retention of greater
36 amberjack in June and July.

37
38 Another committee member asked about access to greater amberjack
39 for anglers in neighboring Mississippi. Louisiana replied that
40 anglers would need to be properly licensed to fish in Louisiana
41 waters and to land their catch in Louisiana, and I don't know if
42 there's any further discussion on this, Mr. Chair.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Anson.

45
46 **MR. ANSON:** Just to Andy about the timing of this relative to the
47 council to provide comment, and I thought you mentioned that this
48 would still be available for comment at the table for the October

1 meeting, or is this the only opportunity, and that potentially a
2 decision can be made -- Or the window for providing opportunity
3 will be closed before the October meeting?
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
6

7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Because they're requesting a season exemption
8 that goes in the middle of next year, I don't want to make a time
9 commitment quite yet as to whether we bring it back in October or
10 January. We have a lot on our plate, and I want to make sure we
11 talk to the team, and any changes that we work through, obviously,
12 with Louisiana.
13

14 I know their desire is to try to have the EFP comment period sooner
15 rather than later, and so we will work on that, but our goal,
16 obviously, is, when we do a public comment period, to time it where
17 it overlaps with a council meeting, to give you the opportunity to
18 also comment as a council during that same time period.
19

20 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.
21

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

24 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and all I'll say about this is just I would
25 recommend that Louisiana coordinate with the other Gulf states on
26 this. I think, when the numbers actually came out, there was a
27 little bit of eye opening for what might actually be available for
28 some of the other Gulf states, and that's going to be a very
29 important consideration of this process, to make it palatable for
30 everyone.
31

32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.
33

34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and, you know, we're not trying to operate
35 behind closed doors. This was a last-minute change that had to be
36 made here during the council meeting. We worked with Andy and
37 Frank to finalize this draft that you all have in your briefing
38 books to look at, and so, obviously, we've got a lot of time
39 between now and the October meeting for potential official public
40 comment by the council, at maybe the October meeting, or January,
41 whatever the timeline allows.
42

43 I think we have plenty of time between now and then to coordinate
44 with the individual states to discuss whatever allocation, or
45 whatever we need to go through forward, but, also, just a reminder
46 that we're requesting the fish on the back-end of the fishing year,
47 and so all the other states are going to have access to the fishery,
48 and that allocation, first. We're coming in on the very end of it

1 all.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble, for that information.
4 Anything else? Dr. Sweetman.

5
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Back to the report? I'm good. Okay. Other
7 Business, there was no other business brought before the committee.
8 Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. All right. Well, that
11 wraps up Reef Fish, and, moving on down the agenda, next up, we'll
12 have Mr. Helies give us an update on the documents transmitted for
13 rulemaking.

14
15 **UPDATE ON DOCUMENTS TRANSMITTED FOR RULEMAKING**

16
17 **MR. HELIES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have a lot, as you can see
18 from the sheet that John had sent out earlier on the priorities
19 listing. We've got a lot of things at the Regional Office, and so
20 I'm going to start with final rules.

21
22 We did finalize an action, and so we can all clap on that, and so
23 it's the framework action for reef fish, shallow-water grouper,
24 modifying catch levels and establishing the recreational closed
25 season. The final rule for that published on June 17th, and it has
26 a January 1, 2027 effective date.

27
28 The commercial electronic reporting amendment, we've been working
29 on that for quite some time. The amendment was approved on
30 February 17, 2026. The proposed rule published in May, and that
31 common period is over, and the final rule is in the region. We're
32 working on the final rule consultation with the Science Center.

33
34 Amendment 58B to the Reef Fish FMP, which is the deepwater grouper
35 catch levels, that amendment was approved on June 2nd. The proposed
36 rule published in May, and that common period is over. We're
37 working on the final rule, and we anticipate a January 1, 2027
38 effective date, and so the new catch levels will be effective next
39 year.

40
41 We've got some movement on Framework Amendment 14 under the CMP
42 FMP, which is Spanish mackerel catch levels. That proposed rule
43 published on July 22nd, and comments were due last Friday. We only
44 received three comments, and so we're working on the response to
45 comments, and we anticipate being able to send that final rule up
46 for headquarters review soon.

47
48 Finally, Amendment 62 to the Reef Fish FMP, and we've discussed

1 this a few times this week, and that's red grouper catch levels.
2 That amendment was approved on June 26, 2026, and the PR published
3 on July 7th. That comment period is over. We're working on
4 responding to the comments on the proposed rule and NOA, and we
5 hope to get that out of the region as quickly as we can. Questions
6 on those before I moved on to the next section?

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

9
10 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Frank. Maybe I should already know this,
11 but I get confused on the order of the process. You know, there's
12 comment periods, two comment periods really, I think, and then it
13 goes to D.C., and it publishes, final rule, cooling off period,
14 implementation, and could you just quickly give me a list of that
15 order, because, you know, I'm thinking -- Mostly, I've been trying
16 to explain what's going on with the red grouper allocation to the
17 fishermen, and I have difficulty explaining that, well, it was
18 approved, and, well, what do you mean it was approved, and, well,
19 then there's a sixty-day period that we have to get it approved
20 again, and can you just give me like a linear order of the process?

21
22 **MR. HELIES:** Sure. Fisheries 101. Okay, and so the council will
23 take final action, and then we'll work with council staff to get
24 the document ready for transmittal. Then the council chair will
25 submit it to us for review and implementation.

26
27 If it's a plan amendment -- For instance, Amendment 62, it's a
28 full plan amendment, and so we take a comment on the amendment
29 itself, which is the notice of availability, and that's a sixty-
30 day comment period. That tends to publish first. Our goal is
31 usually to have the NOA and proposed rule comment periods overlap
32 so we can take -- We can approve the amendment after we consider
33 all of the public comments.

34
35 Lately, that hasn't necessarily been happening, and so we're
36 publishing the proposed rules a little bit later, and so we're
37 making a decision on the amendment, but we still have to take
38 comments on the proposed rule, and then we need to respond to all
39 those received comments in the final rule. Once the final rule
40 publishes, it's a thirty-day cooling-off period before it is
41 officially effective.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** What is a cooling off period?

44
45 **MS. HELIES:** It's an APA requirement.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

1 **MS. LEVY:** So just a couple of things. The amendment itself, the
2 sixty-day comment period, then, in the statute, it requires a
3 decision to approve, disapprove, partially approve within thirty
4 days of the closing the comment period, and so that -- It's a
5 ninety-day period that happens, and like it has to happen that
6 way.

7
8 The proposed rule, especially if it doesn't publish with the NOA,
9 right, we have to then publish the proposed rule, take comments,
10 respond to all those comments, publish a final rule, and all of
11 that process also goes through more departmental review, right,
12 and so the rules undergo a lot more departmental review than the
13 notices of availability, and so the timelines tend to get stretched
14 out.

15
16 The cooling off period is a requirement under the APA, the
17 Administrative Procedure Act, like Frank said, and it's basically
18 to allow the public time to comply, right, because, a lot of times,
19 regulations are putting in restrictions, and we've got to give
20 people time to comply and get their stuff in order.

21
22 There are ways to waive the cooling off period in particular
23 circumstances, but you have to have a specific justification, and
24 so I think Andy mentioned, during the committee, that we're looking
25 at that, but it's not necessarily a given. We can't just always
26 waive the cooling off period.

27
28 **MR. WALKER:** Okay. Great. That's very helpful. Thank you.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Frank.

31
32 **MR. HELIES:** Thanks, Mara for that. That was an important piece
33 that I omitted. All right, and so things that are currently in
34 proposed rules that we're working on, Amendment 19 to the Shrimp
35 FMP, which is the permit moratorium extension. D-Day is September
36 3, 2026, and so we'll need to make a decision on that amendment.
37 That package is currently up at Headquarters. The proposed rule
38 just published this week, and so we'll take comments through
39 September 24th, and we'll work on that final package as quickly as
40 we can.

41
42 The other shrimp-related action is the ELB program, the framework
43 action, and that was transmitted by the council back in January,
44 and we're working on the proposed rule.

45
46 We have the two lane snapper framework actions. That rule, we
47 decided to combine those two actions into one rulemaking, and so
48 we're working on that. Let's see what else here.

1
2 Red grouper quota holdback was one that was recently transmitted
3 to us. That's the red grouper quota holdback so we can implement
4 Amendment 63 in 2027. That one is in Headquarters, currently being
5 reviewed. The DESCEND Act, continuation of the descending device
6 and venting tool requirements, that abbreviated framework action
7 is actually -- The proposed rule is actually on Andy's desk for
8 signature, and so we should be able to get that out very quickly
9 as well.

10
11 Then, finally, the framework action for the for-hire red snapper
12 season, that is in Headquarters being reviewed as well, and so
13 we're making progress, and I appreciate being able to update you
14 guys on some finally getting some stuff through.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the update, Mr. Helies. Do we have
17 any questions? Mr. Walker.

18
19 **MR. WALKER:** We've talked about this extensively, and I heard what
20 Andy said yesterday, but, just in case people missed it yesterday,
21 the -- Coming out of this meeting, we're saying that the red
22 grouper allocation should likely come out sometime September or
23 October, and is that the message?

24
25 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So the September timeframe is highly contingent
26 on Headquarters being able to clear this very quickly, and then us
27 having the waiver of the cooling off period, right, and so I will
28 lead with that caveat, but, yes, and, I mean, our goal is to try
29 to get this quote out as quickly as possible.

30
31 We are hearing that some people are running short of quota. We've
32 heard concerns about potentially people not transferring or
33 leasing quota, because they are looking at needing it between now
34 and the rest of the year, and so, the sooner we can get this quota
35 out for the fishery, the better, and we're, obviously, striving to
36 do that.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Frank? Not seeing any,
39 thank you, Mr. Helies. All right. The next agenda item is going
40 to be the discussion of council planning and primary activities.
41 Dr. Simmons.

42 43 **DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES**

44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If we could go
46 up, Bernie, and so a change since this was sent out is we are going
47 to try to bring back a final action on Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper
48 Amendment 44, and so if we could move that up to October, please,

1 Bernie.

2
3 Followed by final action on modifications to the red snapper
4 private recreational accountability measures, a revised draft of
5 Shrimp Amendment 20, the status determination criteria, and we're
6 anticipating a presentation on the amberjack count, I think, to
7 the council, and also a Draft Amendment 65, regional management
8 for amberjack.

9
10 A public hearing draft still for 59A, I believe, permit
11 requirements, and then, as requested, we will have the SSC report,
12 as well as we can think about a larger presentation maybe to the
13 council on the MRIP-FES survey pilot results.

14
15 We also have the working group we formed on the allocations for
16 red snapper that are coming out of the assessment. We also have
17 the working group for protected resources with shrimp trawl
18 bycatch, and so there's several items, and we'll have to see where
19 we are and what will be reported out to the council.

20
21 We also have some other activities with the Inflation Reduction
22 Act that we might be ready to start talking to the council about,
23 at least some preliminary discussions that the SSC might receive,
24 and so this is what we have for January right now.

25
26 It looks like final action on Reef Fish Amendment 59A, final action
27 on Generic Amendment 5 to modify essential fish habitat, and the
28 five-year review standardized bycatch reporting, and then we have
29 two documents we need to finalize and transmit, the one we just
30 took final action on, the generic amendment for the for-hire data
31 collection and reporting program and then Amendment 63. We need
32 to finish that up as well and get transmitted, and so I'll stop
33 there.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons for the update. Do we
36 have any questions? Not seeing any, all right, and thank you, Dr.
37 Simmons. We'll move over to Dr. Walter. Dr. Walter would like to
38 talk about the observer program.

39
40 **DR. WALTER:** Thank you, Chair. We heard a number of comments in
41 public comment about some questions that in the observer program,
42 and so I think it would be very useful to have, at the next October
43 meeting, probably a formally-announced side event where our
44 observer program staff would be available to meet with interested
45 parties, and fishermen, to discuss some of the questions people
46 may have, and just interact with the program staff.

47
48 I think we did that in Houston in 2024, where we had a side table

1 where people met, and we can flesh out whether that's going to --
2 How formal that might be, but I think our staff are certainly
3 interested in being available to meet and address questions as
4 they come up. They'll be there for public comment, but, since
5 many of them are local in Galveston, it would be a really good
6 opportunity, I think, for some interaction, and to get some better
7 feedback and better conversations between the fishermen and the
8 observer program, and so thanks.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. We have a couple of
11 questions. Mr. Geeslin, and then Mr. Walker.

12
13 **MR. GEESLIN:** Dr. Walter, I appreciate you getting ahead of that,
14 and kind of like E.F. Hutton. You somebody speaks, and you listen.
15 We certainly heard that yesterday. It was rather concerning from
16 one of the commenters yesterday, in the fact that he had undergone
17 some, you know, hurricane damage, and out of business, yet being
18 assessed fines for -- I don't know all the facts surrounding that,
19 but I think it would be helpful to enlist your team of observers,
20 and get them in touch with, you know, not only us, but those in
21 the regulated community.

22
23 I'm wondering if it would also be helpful to see kind of a summary
24 of those -- A summary of those violations, the nature of those
25 violations, and a sum and total of fines associated with those
26 violations, and just kind of a high-level, you know, state of the
27 state within the observer program within the Gulf, to give us a
28 picture of exactly what we're looking at, how many violations we're
29 seeing, what that has led to over time, and just something to think
30 about.

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

33
34 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think we'll have to coordinate with the
35 Office of Law Enforcement on what they can report on regarding
36 that over time, but I'll work with Matt Walia and ask about what
37 they might be able to report, because that's a little bit outside
38 of just simply our observer program administration, but noted.
39 Thanks.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you. I think that's a great idea. I had
44 actually pondered bringing it up at some point during this meeting,
45 and I have heard more and more disappointment in the observer
46 program from the reef fish people lately.

47
48 There's several folks that are just convinced that they're not

1 being randomly selected. They just keep getting pulled, and
2 they're suspicious that something is going on, that they're on a
3 list or something like that, and I don't even know if there is
4 such a thing, and so it would be great to have a discussion about
5 that and maybe -- I agree with Mr. Geeslin that it would be
6 interesting to see if there was a chart that showed fines, and
7 there was some big spike in the last few years when some of this
8 -- I started hearing some of these, and more than the usual
9 complaints about the observer program.

10
11 If we notice this for the next meeting, maybe people that have
12 issues with the observer program will come to the meeting, and we
13 can all communicate about it, and so I definitely support that
14 idea.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Walter.

17
18 **DR. WALTER:** Thank you, and so what I'm hearing is perhaps
19 something more than a side event, in terms of maybe a presentation
20 on some of the -- On the fines and some of the enforcement actions,
21 but also maybe some conversation with the council on the program,
22 the vessel selection, and maybe to allow for some feedback in
23 addition to the informal opportunity to engage with fishermen on
24 the side.

25
26 **MR. WALKER:** I would be very interested in your vessel selection
27 procedures.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Dr. Walter? Dr. Simmons.

30
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Dr. Walter,
32 I need to work with you pretty soon to figure out how much time,
33 and the scope of the presentation, and that kind of stuff, as soon
34 as possible, please.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Anything else for Dr. Walter? All right.
37 I'm going to move down the list to Other Business. Any other
38 business to come before the council? Not seeing any, all right,
39 and so that is the last item, is the election of the council chair
40 and vice chair.

41
42 Before I get there, a couple of things. I want to thank General
43 Spraggins for the social the first evening. Thank you, sir. Also,
44 Dr. Simmons and staff for always doing a great job, and Emily for
45 the fifty years of the MSA. That was great. Thank you. All the
46 presenters that were here this week and presented for us, thank
47 you. With that, I will turn it over to Mr. Donaldson.

ELECTION OF COUNCIL CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

MR. DONALDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will open the floor for nominations for chairman of the Gulf Council.

UNIDENTIFIED: I would like to nominate Dr. Banks.

UNIDENTIFIED: Second.

MR. DONALDSON: Any other nominations? If not, Dr. Banks, you are chairman of the Gulf Council by acclamation. Congratulations. (Applause) Now I will open the floor for nominations for vice chair.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I would like to nominate Chris Schieble.

MR. DONALDSON: Have I got a second for that? A second.

MR. STRELCHECK: I would like to nominate Dr. Mike Allen.

MR. DONALDSON: We have a second. Any other nominations? If not, I believe everyone has got a pad here. Just write your selection, and I will come and collect them, and the Coast Guard and I will tally them up and let you know.

MR. SCHIEBLE: So Mike and I don't vote for ourselves, right? Wouldn't we just cancel each other out?

DR. ALLEN: We'll vote for ourselves and just cancel each other out.

MR. DONALDSON: All right, Mr. Chair. In a close race, Chris Schieble has been elected the vice chair of the Gulf Council. Congratulations, Chris. (Applause) With that, I will turn it back to you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Chris.

MR. SCHIEBLE: I just want to say thank you all for who voted for me and your support. I encourage you to reach out to me with concerns anytime, even outside of meetings. You have my email, and let me know what you guys think, and we can work together on getting things done here. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Schieble, and so I just want to say a few things personally. I want to thank Dr. Simmons and the staff, Andy, NMFS, Dr. Banks. These two ladies kept me in line the last two years. I just want to thank everyone

1 for your support. It's fascinating to work with you all. Thank
2 you.

3
4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** You've been a great chair, J.D. I just wanted to
5 say that. Kudos to you, man.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Dr. Simmons.

8
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair, and so
10 I want to say that I really enjoyed working with you, Mr. Dugas.
11 I appreciate you supporting me, and providing the leadership you
12 did, and giving us a long leash to do what we like to do and get
13 things done, and your willingness to communicate and be so open,
14 and listen to me vent sometimes, so I didn't go off the deep end,
15 and so I really appreciate that.

16
17 On a personal note, 2025 was a really difficult year for me. I
18 lost my father, and I really appreciate your support, and I look
19 forward to working with Kesley in her new capacity and Mr.
20 Schieble. Thank you.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I will hand
23 it over to Madam Chair, and I'll see you all in Galveston. Dr.
24 Banks, the floor is yours if you want it.

25
26 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, guys. I appreciate the support, and we
27 will see you in Texas, where we will host you in the heat of
28 summer.

29
30 **MR. OSBORNE:** Do you need Mississippi to host a party for you guys
31 in Texas?

32
33 **DR. BANKS:** You get all the bills too though for every host social.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. We'll see you all in Texas.

36
37 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 27, 2026.)

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