

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

**Westin Jekyll Island
Jekyll Island, Georgia**

March 7, 2018

SUMMARY MINUTES

Committee Members

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Ben Hartig

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Zack Bowen
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Dr. Marcel Reichert
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Other observers & participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Westin Jekyll Island, Jekyll Island, Georgia, Wednesday afternoon, March 7, 2018, and was called to order by Chairman Charlie Phillips.

MR. PHILLIPS: We will call the SEDAR Committee to order. The first order of business is Approval of the December 2017 Committee Minutes. Are there any changes? Seeing none, any objection to approval of the minutes? Seeing none, the minutes are approved.

Then I guess we'll turn it over to you, but, since we've got Cisco Werner here, he's going to come and give us a short presentation, and there has been some interest about getting a few more assessments and getting them a little faster, and I think Cisco is going to have some options on making that happen.

DR. WERNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It's in the late materials, I understand, Tab 7. It should be the only Tab 7 thing you see in the late materials. First, I will go through the assessment projects update, and you have the text in Attachment 1, which gives you an update on all the various things that are underway within SEDAR and the South Atlantic, and, as you can see, there is quite a few things going on.

I will highlight vermilion snapper and black sea bass, and these are scheduled to go to the SSC at their meeting the first week in May, and they will have recommendations for you guys in June. Cobia is going to kick off with the stock ID workshop coming up here in about a month. We're going to have that workshop, and then there will be a peer review of that right before the June council meeting, and we'll start having some sense of how that stock ID is falling out.

The MRIP revisions, we mentioned those earlier, and we're not exactly sure what those will consist of. It sounds like we're having some interest in maybe applying some of these interim analyses, which you'll hear more about later when Cisco gives the presentation on that, and so we'll hold that for then, but we'll let you know that the Steering Committee will need to talk, when it next meets, about what exactly these MRIP revision assessments will entail. Right now, our expectation, from the South Atlantic, is the request that, for the South Atlantic, red grouper be the first one that gets revised, because of the need to update the rebuilding schedule, as we discussed during the Snapper Grouper Committee.

Then the final highlight I want to give you is king mackerel, and so this was scheduled as a benchmark, and it has been for some while, because there was an intent to bring in Mexican data and have some Mexican scientists observe the process, and where we are now, based on the last Steering Committee, is that it will just include the U.S. data.

The thought that we have is that there is really no reason to do king mackerel as a benchmark and that in fact it should probably be done as a standard, and that will likely mean -- It will certainly increase the chances that we can get it started in 2018, as opposed to 2019, but, right now, the biggest impediment to really getting started on king mackerel will be whether or not we can get a data delivery in late 2018, considering all the other data deliveries that we have planned, and so, really, it's whenever we can get the data groups to be able to start providing the data will determine whether we start king mackerel late this year or early next year, and so we'll ask the Steering

Committee to consider doing that assessment as probably a standard, and the standard is based on the SSC's recommendations, both with us and the Gulf, of looking at standards when we have this new MRIP data coming into these assessments, just to give them some flexibility to deal with any model changes that may be necessitated. That is what is going on with SEDAR projects, and I think I will pause there to see if anybody has any specific questions about things that are underway.

MR. PHILLIPS: Any questions for John? Seeing none --

MR. CARMICHAEL: The next topic we have is Item 2, and this is Attachment 2, and I want to give an overview of this committee, this South Atlantic Council SEDAR Committee, within the context of SEDAR. Gregg and I were talking about this, and we thought, with a lot of new folks around the table since SEDAR has been started, and we haven't really talked about SEDAR in a general sense, and we seem to have a little time at this meeting, it might be good to just give a little bit of a refresher.

As it turns out, I think this fits very well in with the presentation that will be coming later, and so this actually working out is pretty good timing for this topic, and so what I'm going to get into is just a quick refresher on what SEDAR is all about, the what and the why, and then what the purpose of the South Atlantic SEDAR Committee is.

Really, the whole reason that SEDAR got started, nearly fifteen years ago, was to increase the participation in assessments, increase the transparency and the scientific rigor, and, for the most part, I would say we are achieving those goals. We have peer reviews of our assessments, and we have a multi-tiered peer review process. Changes in the Magnuson Act and the National Standards have required us to do that, and so it was very timely that we were putting that into place in SEDAR, and that is certainly not something that we had before SEDAR existed.

We have definitely increased participation across the board, and I am not just thinking of the fishermen that now are able to observe the workshops and the webinars and see what's going on, but also our state partners. Prior to SEDAR, you just didn't see a lot of state people really getting involved in assessments, and now we've got state biologists, and we've got the survey biologists, and we've got the data providers and the state analysts even, when the states have some stock assessment type people, and they're all contributing to this stock assessment process.

Certainly, if you have been to the benchmarks done for the South Atlantic stocks, you see that there is an awful lot of people in the room, and a good number of them are from the states, and they are critical in terms of providing data and conducting research and giving us the information that we need in assessments, and none of that was happening within assessments before SEDAR existed.

In addition to that, we do have the fishermen, and the fishermen have certainly become much more savvy in terms of their understanding of the assessments and their approach to assessments, and we always have challenges with buy-in when an assessment causes management to have to take more restrictive action, but I think, across-the-board, this participation has increased the buy-in of the assessment. Council members certainly, I would say, have a much deeper understanding of assessments today than what they did before SEDAR started, just from listening to the discussions. Every time, you pick up a little bit more, and so I think the increased participation has greatly paid off.

That ties into the transparency, and we also, through things like the SEDAR website, have a wealth of information that's available on all of the things that are discussed and the working papers that are prepared and all the documentation, and it's all available for someone to see, and that has paid off when there is a lawsuit that involves an assessment issue. We're able to provide that information quickly and easily without having to go back and dig it all up.

Across-the-board, we are meeting many of our goals. One of the things, and we'll talk about this in the later presentation about increasing productivity, but, when SEDAR started, that really wasn't one of the goals. It was about making the assessments better, and so it's not surprising that, as we have achieved those, now we're looking ahead to how do we start getting more assessments out of it.

In doing this, SEDAR created what we call a cooperative, council-run process for developing these assessments, and that's a little bit different from say the SAW/SARC in the Northeast, where that is run through the Science Center. We are a council process, and, as a result, we have a number of partners.

Within SEDAR, we call them cooperators, because we have the three councils which are in the Southeast Region, but we also have the Atlantic States and Gulf States Commissions, and we have the Science Center, represented by the Science Center Director on our Steering Committee, and we have Roy representing the Regional Office. We also have HMS involved, and people may be surprised by that, but SEDAR started doing assessments for sharks, the sharks that are primarily found within the U.S. and managed through HMS and assessed through the Southeast Center.

We deal with assessments prepared primarily by the Southeast Center, but, as you guys know, also by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, as well as ASMFC and the Gulf States, and, usually, with the commissions, we're providing a peer review, and so they have their own process for doing assessments, and one of the things they work on a lot is menhaden, and they work a lot with Erik's team at the Science Center to do the menhaden assessments, and they come to SEDAR so that we can provide them a peer review of those assessments. We are not as involved in the day-to-day of running those assessments as we are in the ones done by the Center.

Throughout all of this process, the oversight is provided by the Steering Committee, and we talk a lot about the Steering Committee around this table, and we make recommendations for the Steering Committee, and that's composed of the council chairs and EDs from the three councils, the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator, and Bonnie's position, the Science Center Director, which is called the Science and Research Director, a representative from HMS, and a representative from the two commissions. That is the group that balances the workload with the schedule and talks about the process and, in particular, things of that nature.

What does SEDAR do in addressing all of those things? The primary thing that SEDAR handles and the SEDAR coordinators, Julie and Julia, handle is meeting logistics and travel support. The travel support allows us to take funding that we receive through the National Marine Fisheries Service and really support that additional participation in the assessments.

You guys from the states certainly well know that it would be very hard to get the state people there if we weren't able to provide travel funding, and certainly getting our AP representatives and

fishermen and others there would not be as feasible either. We also help support the SSC attending these and our constituents, and so the coordinators make the meeting arrangements and let everybody know about it. They manage that process, so that all of these travelers have the information they need and know what they have to do to just get themselves to the meeting and be able to take part and know what's accepted.

Then we handle the administrative recordkeeping and distribution. This is a bit of the behind-the-scenes work that SEDAR does, but keeping administrative records on all of these decisions is very important. You have a process, which in the case of a benchmark, may play out over a couple of years, and there is a lot of records generated, and having all of that stuff available is important, both for the review, when you get to the end of our process, but, as I said, if there is issues within an action or something, or the council wants to know more of the details, or there is some legal actions taking place, then we have that information.

There is also an initiative within the federal government called PAR, which is intended to make all of the research and data and everything available to the general public, and SEDAR is able to fill that need on behalf of the Science Center, at least in terms of assessment documentation. We manage the peer review side of things, which is our SEDAR peer reviews, and there is a lot of federal requirements that go into that, kind of behind the scenes too, dealing with the Center for Independent Experts.

There has been a peer review bulletin, which lays out how peer reviews are handled, and there is actually a website, which few people are really aware of, that describes all the peer reviews that are being done and whether they are influential or highly influential and how they're being done and how reviewers are being selected, and so there is a wealth of information about all those peer reviews, and we provide that information and provide the content for that website.

Workload management is one of the big roles of the Steering Committee, in terms of dealing with what projects are we doing, and then that trickles down into the coordinators to manage across all the different teams within the Science Center, from the assessment teams to the data teams to the folks like Marcel with the MARMAP folks that are so important to our South Atlantic assessments for handling data deliveries and workshop timing and everything, to make sure that we can get all the key people there. Then the day-to-day managing, which is the most visible part of it all, of just seeing the assessment projects and running the webinars and sending out the information and keeping everybody up-to-date.

Then another thing, which isn't as obvious, is working on a lot of outreach and education, and one of the things we've done, since it started, is go to the Marine Resource Education Program here in the Southeast and tell them about the SEDAR process, but also take part in telling them about data in stock assessments and the linkage from a stock assessment to management and everything, and that's just been a great way to reach out to fishermen and be able to work on them on a smaller group type basis and fill them in what assessments are about. We see that the guys who have run through that program come to the assessments, and they are much more prepared to take part and contribute and really understand the kind of information that's useful to the assessment scientists.

What does our SEDAR Committee do, the South Atlantic Council SEDAR Committee? Primarily, it's developing the guidance on the process and procedures for those council representatives, which is Gregg and Charlie, currently, to go to the Steering Committee and put forth the projects that are

of concern and the priorities that this council would like to have addressed in the stock assessment scheduling as well as any procedural issues that might arise through APs or the SSC, or even around this table, and to take that message to the Steering Committee and discuss it and work to some solution that works for all the partners that are involved.

As you well know, and this is probably because you do it the most, of course, is you do the workshop appointments. When SEDAR was created as a council process, all of our workshops are officially treated as APs under the Magnuson Act and the Federal Advisory Committee Act, and that enables us to make those consensus recommendations, but it means we also have to have a process for appointing those individuals, and this committee is where we handle all of those appointments.

We also handle the approving of schedules and terms of reference, and the schedules and terms of reference really starts when we do the workload management with the assessment teams and the data providers. Then they go through the SSCs, and then they come to you. The terms of reference start with the Science Center and the analysts, as an initial draft, and we route those through the SSC of the South Atlantic, and they come to you also. At times, we will ask for input from advisory panels and others on terms of reference issues.

When SEDAR was created, each council, each cooperator, and so at least the South Atlantic, the Gulf, and the Caribbean, were asked to create a committee like this to handle the SEDAR business for that council, and so the way we do things here in the South Atlantic is not exactly the same as they do things in the Gulf, and it's considerably different from how they do things in the Caribbean, where they face an entirely different set of challenges, and that's fine. The process was never intended to dictate to each cooperator how they handle conducting the business, but just that they conduct the business in a way that's compatible with all the different federal regulations and they do what's necessary to meet those requirements.

Then the last part is what is the role of council members within the SEDAR process, and so the Council Chair, as I said, serves on the SEDAR Steering Committee, and council members of the South Atlantic Council serve on this committee, which is the South Atlantic Council's SEDAR Committee. Then, when you're appointed to a workshop process, you serve as observers to that process, and one of the things that's always been expected to be done by the council representative is you're the eyes and ears of the council during that, and one of the things you can do is ensure that policies and practices are being followed.

For example, SEDAR expects that the discussion is going to be about science and not about management, and we tell the participants that there are multiple opportunities where management concerns coming from an assessment are going to be discussed, and we have a process, through the SSC and primarily the APs and then the council, to deal with management issues, and we don't need to get into those at the assessment stage. In a way, the council representatives, you guys, are sort of the cops of that kind of stuff. You can help back up the coordinators when someone is maybe going into discussions that are really not relevant to what their charge is.

Then, of course, you are the support. You're the backup for those coordinators if someone were to, perhaps, get out of line or become disruptive, and you may think that that seems like, well, why are we even talking about this, but, actually, in the early years, there were some instances where

people were asked to step out of a workshop because they became disruptive or aggressive or potentially threatening to someone who just had a difference of opinion with them.

That has been very helpful from, in the days when I was the only staff of SEDAR and serving as the coordinator, to be able to go to the council member and say, you know, you need to see what this individual is doing, and that's sort of twofold. You are a higher level at those workshops than the other folks, and you represent the authority of the council, but you also make the appointments, and so, if you see someone is repetitively disruptive or a problem, then you can say, well, maybe this person isn't a good fit into the process and perhaps shouldn't be appointed in the future. That is something that we don't have to call on very often, thankfully, and we haven't to in many years, but it's nice to know that you're there, in case a situation arises.

The other great thing is I think, to really increase awareness of the assessment process and what goes into the assessments and when the assessment comes to you, those that have taken part at least have a pretty in-depth knowledge of how we got to where we ended up with, in terms of the recommendations, and, as you do it through multiple assessments, you become better versed in the overall assessment process, and I know certainly Ben is one that has always encouraged that of council members, to go to these workshops and serve on one of these things and be the observer to one, to see what's really going on.

I think it also increases your overall awareness of underlying issues within assessments. There are limitations within the assessment science and the data that we have and the uncertainties that the analysts face as they try to develop the models from the data that we have. Really, bringing the council members into SEDAR really achieves one of our goals that council members are better informed, that you're better able to provide guidance on the policies and practices and appointments when you come here to this committee and do your role as giving that guidance to the folks that are going to go back to the Steering Committee and deal with process and procedure and schedule planning. That was kind of a quick, nutshell role of what SEDAR is about and how this committee fits into it, and so I think I will -- If there is any questions, that's the end of the presentation.

MR. PHILLIPS: Do we have any questions for John? That was a very good presentation.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It must have been great then.

MR. PHILLIPS: All right. Then, after that, we'll bring Cisco up. I'm sure you all will have some for Cisco.

DR. WERNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Also, thanks for the opportunity to speak to you following John on the SEDAR process, and, in particular, I would like to speak to you about some ideas that we have on improving the SEDAR process, and I will go slow, but it's not many slides, but it's a conversation that I think has been underway for some time within the council and also within the general stock assessment science enterprise within the Southeast and in the Gulf and also in the Caribbean.

What I would like to talk to you about is some ideas that we would like to propose on perhaps increasing efficiency, and therefore greater throughput, and also then, ultimately, providing more timely management advice. I just want to recognize everybody who has contributed to these ideas,

at least the ones that are presented today, and so it's something that I will present with Roy Crabtree, but, really, the authorship, the full authorship, of the ideas here include Shannon Calay from the Southeast Center; Patrick Lynch from the Office of Science and Technology; Rick Methot, who is our Senior Scientist for Stock Assessments, who I think probably has spoken to you; Clay Porch and Kyle Shertzer, both from the Southeast; Andy Strelcheck from the Regional Office; and Erik Williams, also from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

As I said, we're at a point in time where this conversation has been had, in terms of ideas, in terms of how we can improve on a really very robust process, but there is a couple of points that perhaps we can take the opportunity to bring this to the floor, and one is Rick Methot and others, and Patrick Lynch, wrote the stock assessment improvement plan, which the council reviewed, and that offers, again, an idea of looking at where our stock assessment enterprise is nationally and, again, that invites a conversation of how stock assessments are conducted not just within SEDAR and the Southeast, but also at a national level. Also, as we talked, there will be new leadership in the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and, again, this opens the possibility of just revisiting how we do things and how we go forward, and so it's an opportune time to have this conversation.

The outline is pretty simple. I want to give you some rationale and targets about where we want to go and propose a solution, and then I will talk about recommendations on how to achieve that solution, and I think perhaps that example of this operational-interim cycle is a table that I will show you that is illustrative of how we can get to where we want to get, again, to achieve the increase in efficiency and timeliness and advice.

Then I will summarize, and there is a couple of definitions that I think bear spending a little bit of time on, and that's what do we mean by research assessments, operational assessments, and interim analyses, and, when I get to that point, I will actually just ask Erik to speak to that, Erik Williams to speak to that, and so I will go through the first points without actually getting into the definitions, but then we'll spend some time on the definitions themselves.

The rationale and targets, SEDAR, as John discussed in the previous presentation, is a very thorough and transparent process, and it's one that is very successful at that, but, at the same time, it is challenged in achieving timeliness and throughput, and so, in some sense, the attention to thoroughness and transparency, which is essential, sometimes causes these delays, and what we would like to propose is how do we find a way forward.

The reason there are these delays is it's high cost, in terms of human resources and money. There is a great bit of effort that goes into it, and we don't have a large number of stock assessments per year, as a result, and, also, we know that sometimes between assessments there can be a number of years, five to ten years sometimes, and assessments themselves can take a long time to complete, and so we estimate that, with the changes that we're going to propose, we could probably increase the throughput of SEDAR or SEDAR throughput could be increased by perhaps 50 percent or more. Also, the frequency of ABC advice could be increased by another 50 to 100 percent, and so it could even be up to doubled by the proper combination of interim analyses that I will talk to you about in a second.

What is the solution? Just starting at the very top, what we propose is a cycle of regularly-scheduled operational assessments and interim analyses, and, again, we'll get to the definitions in a second, that are supported by research assessments, and, again, so there is the research

assessments that are conducted, and then these are followed by the operational and interim analyses, and this would be similar to what's done in the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and so up in the Alaska region, as well as more recently in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Councils.

For SEDAR, what we would do is we would certainly keep consistency with National Guidelines. We would continue to have the high-quality assessments, and we would then have timely operational assessments that would also keep transparency while, at the same time, bringing in innovation that's required through the research assessments. What is new, and how do we bring that into the research assessments? Ultimately, we all then would wind up with a regular and predictable assessment cycle that would, again, allow us to conduct the assessments in this timely manner.

What are the recommended changes? We want to implement the research and operational assessments that we believe can increase the throughput by 10 to 20 percent. We want to conduct what are called interim analyses that will provide updated ABC advice based on regularly-updated indices of abundance and/or mortality, and this is a big one. This could actually increase the throughput by maybe 50 to 100 percent, in terms of the number of assessments that we provide.

We want to schedule the assessments in advance. This is something that's important in order to schedule the assessments, and then we can then plan how do we get the data, how do we schedule the assessor's time, et cetera. We also want to employ a decision making that follows the interdisciplinary plan team, the IPT, which then would potentially decrease the assessment duration by 10 to 20 percent and also reduce the chances of postponements in the assessment schedule.

Finally, with regard to data-limited species, research assessments are probably ones where we would use those, but, at the same time, once the research assessment is completed, there could be as many as say perhaps fifteen species addressed simultaneously in a single workshop, and that has to do with some of the data-limited species share a lot, in terms of what the data-limited assessment would do, and so those would be lumped, if you will, in terms of that one assessment, and then we could, in one assessment, or in one workshop, we could provide assessment for a host of species.

I am going to go slow on this one, because it's an example table. The color-codes refer to analysts, stock assessment analysts, and this example here is let's say you have three analysts, the blue, the purple, and the green. If you look on the left-hand side, you have a list of possible stocks to assess, and, on the top, you have years one through six.

Again, we will get into the definitions a little bit, but let's say you've done a research assessment, and so you have a model, a stock assessment model, that is robust and brings in the best understanding that is available about that particular species or stock. Then, if that's the case, then, if you look from red snapper down to red grouper, which, in this example, let's say we have a robust stock assessment approach, we could immediately begin to do what are called operational and interim analyses approaches. In the case of red snapper, we would, in this case, say that we will, every year, have at least an operational or an interim assessment.

For black sea bass, we might alternate. We might have a year where we don't do an assessment, but we would at least have an assessment every other year, and the same for red porgy and gag grouper and so on. You can also see then, in terms of what the analysts do, an analyst would then know that he or she would be doing one or two assessments in any one particular year and what they would be. The same with the red analyst for the vermilion, snowy grouper, tilefish, and red grouper, and I will jump quickly to the last three, which are the green ones, which indicate an example of what would happen when you have a research assessment.

The research assessment would probably take a full year to actually build the research assessment, but then, once a research assessment is completed, you wouldn't have to do another research assessment probably for another five or six years, or maybe even longer, depending on when there is enough information to say, hey, we need to revisit what the assessment model is, and so, once that investment in the research assessment is completed, then we can go into this cyclical, predictable schedule in terms of operational and interim assessments. If we could work towards something like this, this is the approach that we would like to suggest, and, again, I will get to the definitions of assessments in a second.

The summary is that we're proposing a process that can improve SEDAR and the stock assessment enterprise in the Southeast. Most stock assessments would be conducted through this operational and interim analyses, again, such that timely advice would be provided for the maximum number of stocks. The regular and, again, predictable operational-interim cycle will benefit data providers. They know what's coming, and they can prepare for it, as well as managers, because they will know when to expect the assessments. Additional assessments can be achieved by streamlining the operational assessments themselves.

The assessments, of course, would be received by the council's SSC, and the research assessments, when they are conducted for the first time, would also go through thorough review. Research assessments allow innovation and methodology and new ideas to be vetted through external review, as I said, CIE or otherwise, SEDAR reviews, and then the combination of research and operational assessments, together with the interim analyses, allows for not just innovation, but also then timely, efficient, and high-quality assessments to take place.

I think I am reflecting a conversation, or we're reflecting a conversation, and ideas that have been expressed before. We are beginning to formalize this, and it's something that we would like to take to the SEDAR SSC for consideration, and, if I could, I would like to very quickly, with the help of Erik, go through the three definitions of what I mean by research, operational, and interim analyses, and then maybe I'll go back to the table and then we can do that, and so, Erik, if you don't mind.

DR. WILLIAMS: Thank you, Cisco. As Cisco said, we're basically going to -- We are proposing to move to these three categories of assessment types, research, operational, and interim, and the research and operational are consistent with sort of the Headquarters thinking, too. It's sort of a national categorization of assessments that they are hoping to achieve nationwide, and, basically, what a research assessment is, it's most similar to what we currently do as benchmark assessments, and that's where we would take a species that hasn't been assessed before, or maybe even a new dataset that might be coming in that would affect multiple stock assessments, and we would run this either species or this new dataset through this research assessment process, which would be very similar to our benchmarks. We would have a data workshop and an assessment workshop

stage and then a review stage, and the review would include both CIE review, Center for Independent Expert review, as well as the SSC.

Then the operational assessment, this is probably most similar to what we currently do as updates, and it basically is, once we've got a model that probably came out of either a benchmark or the new research track assessment process, then we have an operational model, and we just want to basically keep running that model and updating information as we go along. It will provide routine ABC advice, hopefully, and I think probably the only difference to stress between this operational assessment and our current update process is that what we're hoping to -- We still have to work out the details, but to reduce a little bit the sort of number of webinars and notice to meetings that we have to go through to run these, and hopefully we can gain some efficiency that way.

The other efficiency will be that, when we schedule these in this regular schedule that Cisco mentioned, things become better and more predictable for the data providers as well as for the assessment analysts, and so they know what to expect, and we can get some efficiency that way, and so that's the hopes with the operational assessment.

Then the last category is this interim analysis, and this is the newer one. This is where we would hopefully take -- Basically, the best way to describe it is better projection analyses than what we've been providing up to this point, and so, when we provide projection analyses, usually all we're updating is the removals, or the landings and discards, and then we're projecting the stock forward.

What we're hoping to do with this interim analysis is actually fold in additional information beyond just the removals, and so that would include index information, if it's available, as well as even age information, and so, by including the most recent data and multiple data sources being updated, we're hoping that these analyses will provide updated ABC advice. They will include the most recent information, and hopefully, if the data providers can keep up with us, which will be one of the challenges here, we can really crank these things out.

These should be very efficient, and they should be -- We will have sort of a standardized report format for these, and we should be able to put these out pretty quickly, and, as you noticed the last bullet there, this is the one I think we will get the biggest bang for the buck, so to speak. This could, in theory, if we really get efficient at these, we could probably choke the council with ABC advice, which is our goal.

DR. WERNER: Thanks, Erik, and I think this last one is perhaps similar to the way that the North Pacific produces their assessments, and so not only is the assessment perhaps provided efficiently, but also the reporting is relatively straightforward, because there are not many changes, other than the updates in the abundance indices and so on, and is that fair?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, that's correct.

DR. WERNER: I am going back to the table, but, before I do that, if I may, Dr. Crabtree, I'm not sure if you have anything to add at this point, or should we just open it for questions? If not, thank you very much for the opportunity, and we'll take questions.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Cisco.

MR. BELL: Thanks so much. This is something we've been struggling with for years, and I really like that you've got a plan and some solutions. That's terrific. With the different -- For instance, like with the interim analyses and all, one of the things we have, of course, are constraints of the number of stock assessment scientists you have, which the other constraint on data providers and external folks, and does that fit in okay, in terms of -- Is that kind of factored in the workload on everybody in all of this? Have you thought that through?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, we've definitely thought about it, and it's a good question, Mel. I mean, you're hitting right at the core of the concern, is that we're -- At some point, there is always a bottleneck, and this perhaps will probably shift the bottleneck to the data providers. We don't know how bad that bottleneck will be until we really start to roll into it, but we hope that we can - - If the bottleneck shifts to that, we can make adjustments, and we'll find that right balance of balancing the workload with the data providers and all of that.

MR. BELL: I think the most encouraging thing is that you've got a plan. I mean, that's great. This is really encouraging.

DR. WERNER: Thank you very much, and I might also add, with regard to the data providers, I think, with them understanding what the schedule is, and if the schedule can be stabilized, I think that will also allow them, in turn, to figure out how best to have the data ready for the assessments, and, as a matter of a fact, their hope is, if this becomes regularized, that it will be the stock assessment that will be the bottleneck, as opposed to the data providers, and so this is an interesting one-upmanship internally, in terms of who is going to be the bottleneck, but the good news is that there is intent and hope on both sides to make this as efficient as possible.

MR. BREWER: Echoing what Mel said, thank you. Thank you. Really. Thank you. The interim thing, the new interim report, is what is of most interest to me, because apparently you're going to be reporting to us on essentially indices of abundance, and you'll be able to compare those on a fairly regular basis, from what I see right here, to what's been going on in the past, and I think that, with some of the changes that are anticipated in Magnuson, that will prove very, very valuable, and it's looking towards the future, and thank you very much.

DR. WERNER: Thank you for the comment, and, also, I think that some of the -- By the time some of the assessments are happening now, they're perhaps a little bit even delayed or -- I don't want to say obsolete, but they're not as fresh as they could be, and I think, to your point of being able to compare and understand how things are evolving, this also has that added benefit to it as well. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you to both Cisco and Erik for the presentation and for the recommended improvements. I am very excited about this, especially, I think, the interim approach that would get us to more annual, or at least every other year, updates to ABCs. I did have just a couple of questions, and it was on the recommended changes slide, I think, which is Slide 5, and I apologize if I missed this, but Number 4, employ the IPT style of decision to decrease the duration of assessments and reduce postponements in the assessment schedule, what does that mean?

DR. WILLIAMS: I alluded to that when I was describing the operational assessments, and this could apply to the interim analyses as well, though we're more or less envisioning the interim analyses as being just sort of letting the analysts just run the stuff, but, for the operational

assessments, you know, under the current update process, we have to Federal Register notice all the webinars and any meetings we have in that process, and what we're hoping to do is get away from that and use more of an IPT-type of process, where, when the analyst runs across points of decisions or points of where they need questions answered, then they can call on this IPT-type process to get their questions answered, rather than having to sit -- Which often happens, having to sit still and wait until the next webinar comes up on the schedule, or, worst-case scenario, not having a webinar on the schedule when they have an issue that needs to be addressed.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This isn't completely new. This has been in the SEDAR guidelines for quite a while. The Steering Committee talked about it, and the general idea was that this IPT would be the people that you have appointed as a panel, and so a standard assessment panel or an assessment panel that's going through a benchmark process, and the idea was that, if the analysts run across something that is potentially holding up progress, they could reach out to those folks themselves informally and say here's the issue and here's what we're thinking of doing and get some feedback.

It was written up as though you would still have to have the discussion of the issues on the webinar at some public point, publicly-accessible point, to satisfy the various requirements that we're under, but it was hoped to be a way to let them continue to make progress, and it's hard to implement, because there can be a hesitancy to go too far, in terms of making decisions, for fear that something gets overturned. Then it makes you go back and redo a lot of that work, and so it doesn't really happen, in practice, because of that concern that they may have something overturned and have to go back, and so we're going to have to deal with that to actually put this into practice, but it's not totally new. It's something we've discussed.

DR. DUVAL: Just a follow-up to that. Would this approach also include industry representatives, and could that be envisioned? I am just thinking about some of the recent SEDARs, I think, for black sea bass. The lead analysts, they did a lot of work. The lead analysts in Beaufort did a lot of work to answer questions from industry, which I think was much appreciated, and so I just want to make sure that it includes that type of input, or, if there are questions of that nature, the analysts have the ability to go to industry experts to try to get some of those questions answered, and that's why I'm just trying to wrap my head around exactly what it would mean and that's all.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, absolutely. It would basically be -- Basically, we would still have the same, more or less, panel members that we have on our webinars during updates, but it's just we wouldn't have this formal webinar time structure. We would have that same body, but we would call upon them as needed, essentially.

MR. HARTIG: I don't see many game-changers in the stock assessment process, and I haven't for quite some time, but this one is, and I appreciate the work that Erik has put in under Bonnie on this, and then to see your passion in your presentation and talking to you personally about moving this forward is very, very, very heartwarming for me, having participated in this process for quite some time.

The one thing that I don't see here, and that we might add, is what we're bringing to bear, possibly, that could be used in this is our fishery performance reports. If we get these fishery performance reports into this, where they can actually answer some of the assessment scientists' questions that

they have by the information that these fishermen provide, I think it would be helpful to this process as well.

DR. WERNER: First, thank you for the kind comments, and, as I said, it's a point that we've reached, perhaps because there has been a lot of conversations leading to this point, and we have an opportunity now, with your support, to go forward with these ideas. With regard to the fishery performance reports, I'm not sure if, John or Erik, you have anything to add.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, I think those would be extremely helpful in this process, and I think you can kind of get a sense of where we're headed. You've seen our headboat annual report, and we've got fishery performance reports, and I think we're getting to this overall process of where there is going to be these annual reports basically dumped in your lap, and you will get used to these, hopefully, and then there will be this nice flow of routine information, and that's really where we're headed, I hope.

MR. PHILLIPS: Any other questions? Then I have one. I am seeing, I think, eleven species up here, and you look like you're rolling them out, and so you've got operational like every five years or something, and how are you going to fit in the species that are difficult, like wreckfish and goliath grouper and some of these other -- Maybe speckled hind or warsaw, things that we don't even have any landings on, or how are we going to fit things like that in?

DR. WERNER: Thanks for your question, and, immediately, I am going to deflect it to Erik, but do some of these fall into the data-limited species, perhaps?

DR. WILLIAMS: I think it's a good question, Charlie, and we do have that list of unassessed species, or trouble species, and I think they would fall -- We would roll those into a research track, in some form or fashion, and, if they're the data-limited ones, that was one of the bullet points in the presentation, was that we hope that those data-limited, because they share similar properties, which is they lack other information and it's mostly landings information, we could hopefully address a bunch of those through one research track, maybe even get as many as a dozen done at once.

Then, once we get those done, we can figure out if there's enough information to then include them into an operational-interim cycle or do they just need to be revisited every five or six years, something like that, but the important thing here is to recognize that hopefully what we're setting up is a flexible system that we'll figure out the balance of these operational-interim assessments versus research track and how often we need to readdress them. It will take some tweaking over time, but hopefully it will work out.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and, obviously, we occasionally come up with fires that we have to put out, and so we're going to have to deal with those and fit those in, and I see wreckfish guys out there, and I know they've consistently aside when, and I know the difficulties of that, with the way the stocks are and stuff, and I'm sure there is some others, but, when you figure out how you think you might want to handle them, I know those stakeholders would like to hear that, or at least a plan.

DR. WILLIAMS: I would be remiss, because Rick Methot is chatting over my left shoulder right now about this would be a good opportunity to take advantage of the stock prioritization process

too, because, if we prioritize these things, then we know which ones we want to address more frequently and so on.

DR. DUVAL: I apologize, but I had just one more question, and it was prompted kind of by the chart, the example flow chart, of how things would move through the -- That one. Does it take into account the timing of when final harvest information is available? I think there is preliminary data, and I think most of the states have preliminary data that is complete by like the first quarter of the year, but those final QA/QC things are usually not until June, or sometimes even later. Similarly, MRIP final numbers aren't until later, and so Erik is smiling and nodding, and so I will shut up and let him answer.

DR. WILLIAMS: No, I appreciate how quickly you guys get right to the core of these issues. Yes, we've thought about that. If you look for one analyst, right now we have one analyst doing an operational and an interim in one year, and so the question then is the timing of those. Do you want your interim analysis to have the most recent data, or do you want your operational to have the most recent?

They both can't, because we've got to spread the workload out over the year, and so that's the decision that will have to be made and can be swapped. I would think you would probably want the most recent information in your interim analysis, and so I would envision that those interim analyses will roll out in the second-half of the year, and the operational will probably be in the first-half of the year.

MR. PHILLIPS: Okay. We've still got one more thing on our SEDAR agenda. Cisco, thank you very much, and you have no idea how much we appreciate you and Erik and your team's efforts to help us get to a much better place than we've been in the past. Thank you very, very much.

DR. WERNER: Thank you for the kind comments and, as I said, now we'll move to the next one with the SEDAR SSC and so on and keep everybody going, and thank you.

MR. PHILLIPS: Okay, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Our last bit is to get some guidance for the Steering Committee, and so this was, I think, a good lead-up into that. The Steering Committee will be looking at this, and, as you guys can tell, there is still quite a few details to be worked out in terms of these different types of analyses and how we transition from what we do now into what we're considering to do, and keep in mind what I talked about with the Steering Committee.

We have a lot of cooperators who are going to have to get their hands into this. The Gulf Council, obviously, is going to be very interested, and I'm sure their SSC, as well as our SSC, and key data providers. Kind of, as we've talked about the research track in the past, everybody really just wants to know what does it mean to me and what is expected of me, in terms of what I am going to need to do and how do I transition from what I expect now as a benchmark participant into this, and so that's what we'll be working on, I think, in the coming months to try and really put this into place.

The Steering Committee meeting, we're planning a meeting in the spring of 2018, in-person, hopefully to schedule it when the new Science Center Director will be onboard and can attend the

meeting, so that the Steering Committee folks can meet this person, whoever it shall be, and go into some of their SEDAR discussions.

A couple of things we'll need to talk about. Of course, top on this list, and this was prepared before the guidance from the Science Center that we've just seen had come forth to us, and we're talking about the scamp as a research track, and that's still planned as a research track. You remember we had a lot of discussion about that when this committee met and then the Steering Committee met in September, and we're going to need to provide guidance on the scamp assessment approach.

The Steering Committee instructed us to have a plan of work from the Science Center reviewed by representatives of the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs, in hopes of having them discuss it and come up with a group of terms of reference they both could approve, and we're still trying to get that information. I've seen a draft, but I'm not sure that it's ready to go out for our SSC reps to look at just yet, but we're really trying to get that information so that, when we come to the Steering Committee, we can say here's what the scamp research track is going to look like. That's really our goal.

Then the other item is to talk about our stock assessment priorities here within the South Atlantic Council, and, most particularly, thinking about -- We've got a schedule worked out pretty good, and, if you look actually at Attachment 1, what we've done on Attachment 1, as you see, all of our stocks, the South Atlantic stocks and what we have now scheduled, and we have stocks scheduled out through 2021. I think, here in the South Atlantic, we have really been doing a good job, and I would say on the Gulf as well, because the Gulf has had a list of stocks that they've worked on. In terms of having a schedule and looking out into the future, we are making a lot of progress, in terms of doing that, and so it's good to see that the importance of that is really recognized, and hopefully we can really stick with these schedules a little bit better.

There are a couple of things that we will need to talk about. For example, the tilefish assessment, we talked about that some earlier. Is that something that we want to try to get to you -- It's scheduled to start in 2019, and is this something that you would like to have done earlier in 2019, or we're looking some now where they're not -- Given that the commercial fishery gets 97 percent of the ACL, if we can't maybe do that in early 2019, because that commercial fishery typically closes by March of the year, and so we could do this in 2019. If the ages and such from that commercial sampling could be available, we may be able to accommodate having 95 percent of the 2018 data as well as giving it to the council in maybe June or certainly September of 2019, to help deal with that.

I think some guidance in terms of when you think you would like to have tilefish, if you think getting it early is important, and I think that's probably what I sense. Is there any objection to us trying to get that as early as we can? I see Michelle shaking her head, and so I think we'll say tilefish going early is good.

Then I said we'll look at the scamp and the research track and working out that. King mackerel, I mentioned earlier the considerations of doing that as a standard and trying to also get that rolling in 2018, if we could get a data delivery date, and is there any objection to requesting the Steering Committee to change king mackerel to a standard assessment? I see Ben and Michelle agree with that, and so I think that would be good.

Our next assessments that we have, and these would either be research tracks, say as scamp, going on or our next benchmark is gray triggerfish. Gray triggerfish has been through two attempts at benchmarks. One, I think it didn't get past data, and, with one, it got into the review workshop, and some issues were raised, and a lot of the challenge has been within ageing the critters and the age structures and age challenges in general, but we want a benchmark of gray triggerfish in 2021.

Then we want white grunt in 2022, and it would really be nice, at this point, if we could give some guidance on what the next benchmark might be for the South Atlantic, in terms of looking ahead to like 2023, and the reason for looking so far ahead is that, when there is cooperative research projects and MARFIN and other stuff, it takes a number of years to get a species on the priority list and get the RFP out and get a project funded and get the results in hand. You're talking a five to six-year lead, and so, if we could have a sense of what the council might like to do in 2023, that would be good, but I think that we're getting so deep within the data availability of these stocks that I'm not exactly sure which of the ones that are on the priority list are really ones that have enough data that they can actually be assessed.

The last time we applied the NMFS prioritization, we talked about breaking our list out for assessed stocks versus unassessed stocks, so we could kind of focus on these benchmark slots that we have, and we try to just do one benchmark a year, because of the burden and the workload of them, and separate that out from the stocks that we need to do the regular updates on.

Where we are now, in terms of the NMFS rankings and priorities, is shown in -- This is B on page 5, the last page, of Attachment 1, and this is that ranking that we've gone through a couple of times with this committee. You can see the Number 4 in the NMFS rankings was white grunt amongst unassessed, and we're doing that. Gray triggerfish, which we're doing, was Number 6, and scamp, which we're doing, was Number 8. Dolphin was Number 9, and we've discussed dolphin. It's got a highly-migratory behavior, and the Steering Committee has asked that the Science Center look into doing that through some sort of international venues, which would be far more appropriate than a regional program like SEDAR to look at dolphin.

We have done Georgia to North Carolina hogfish, and it was extremely data limited and didn't support a benchmark, and I doubt that has changed in the last couple of years, and so I think that brings us down to the other priorities, which are lane snapper, almaco, knobbed porgy, silk snapper, and red hind. I am not sure which of those is the most promising, but I was thinking perhaps we should ask the Science Center to look into these stocks and maybe give us a suggestion as to what they think would be a good stock to consider for 2023.

MR. PHILLIPS: When are we going to look at these rankings or re-rank them? When we will do that? The other question that's in my mind is I'm guessing, when the Steering Committee meets in the spring, then we'll talk about melding this along with what Cisco and Erik just described to us and how we're going to meld all of this stuff together, and I'm guessing that will be discussed in the spring meeting, and when will we -- I am guessing this needs to be reevaluated every so often, every year or whatever.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Maybe not every year, and it doesn't change that much, but I was thinking maybe along the lines of when we do our research recommendations document, which we do every other year, would probably be a good time to look at that, because, what I included here as the South Atlantic rankings, that's what we note in our plan, and we basically identified those as

priority stocks, where we're really looking at high-priority data collection targeting catch-age type models, and then we have our secondary stocks, where we're looking at maybe other models that could be considered. I think, when we go through and do that, and we would do that next year, we would probably ask the SSC to give us some guidance on these rankings and see if there is any changes.

MR. PHILLIPS: Does the amount of data that we have affect the rankings? I think they're doing some otoliths on wreckfish, for instance, and so does that help figure into the rankings, do we have the data to do what we want to do, and that kind of stuff?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't think that specifically figured in. It was more other factors that would contribute to how important it was to collect data and assess the stock, and so we may have things on here which are a priority that we don't have the data that's been mentioned.

MR. BELL: Help me out with hogfish again. There was one attempt and the data weren't sufficient enough?

MR. CARMICHAEL: There is a very big lack of data. They just didn't have enough to support a model.

MR. BELL: Which type of data?

MR. CARMICHAEL: As I recall, it was many things. I don't think they had a lot of fishery-dependent sampling, and they didn't have an index. There was a lot of uncertainty in the landings, and I don't think they had good age data. There was a whole litany of things, as I recall, from when they looked, and remember they didn't end up doing three stocks, and that was the one that was really very data-limited. It might have enough for some type of data-limited model or something, perhaps.

MR. BELL: Just my own personal opinion is I've always been worried about hogfish in our region a little bit, and I would think -- I mean, we certainly land a number of them, but I just have a concern about hogfish, I guess, and I'm expressing that.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, we have concerns.

DR. DUVAL: I definitely support asking for some Science Center input on those stocks that John identified, and I think it was lane, almaco, knobbed porgy, and silk snapper. I think taking a look at those to see how they might fall out or what the available information is for those, and then we did ask for input on wreckfish previously, and so what's the timeline for getting input back on that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We had asked the Science Center and sent a memo last fall asking the Science Center to tell us what the outlook was for updating wreckfish. The original benchmark was developed by an independent contractor hired through a group of fishermen. The best we understand, it was done through the South Atlantic's process and not through SEDAR, and so I guess I would turn to the Science Center and see if they have any feedback to give us here in terms of where wreckfish stands.

DR. WILLIAMS: If I recall, and I hopefully sent you guys a memo in response to that, but I think the issue was how we would go about doing an update for an assessment that we didn't do in the first place, and so that was the concern, is we don't have the model code, and we don't have the model to just simply update, and so I think that was the issue with that one.

DR. DUVAL: If we got the model code or requested that from the independent folks who did it, would that assist in maybe a better evaluation?

DR. WILLIAMS: I think the concern there is then you're asking us to update a model that we weren't involved in constructing or making decisions about the use of those data sources and whether it was appropriate, and so I would almost suggest that, if you want the Science Center to do it, it's going to have to go back to almost a research or benchmark type of process, because, again, without having reviewed that thoroughly myself, and not recalling exactly all the decisions that were made about that assessment, I don't know if it would be appropriate to dump the code and that model in our lap and expect us to update it, because, if we look into it and find that we don't agree with what may have been done in that assessment model, then we're kind of at an impasse.

DR. DUVAL: I guess I would put out wreckfish there for a benchmark slot. Perhaps some SSC members could provide some input to the Science Center in looking at that previously-conducted assessment, because it was reviewed by the SSC and approved. I know we're coming up on our time, and so the only other thing I just want to put in a plug for, and it's not -- This is a species that's already on the list, but Spanish mackerel. I mean, we definitely need to make sure that that stays on the schedule for a standard assessment.

I feel like those fish we're seeing -- We're seeing more and more of them, as the waters are staying warmer longer, at least off of North Carolina. Those fish are sticking around longer, and we were able to work with Florida to initiate a transfer for the last fishing year, which really -- The fishery still closed in the Northern Zone, but it at least was able to us through the primetime of the fishing year, and we are very grateful to the State of Florida for being willing to negotiate that transfer, but I do think that, with changing conditions in the environment, I have become more concerned about those migratory pelagic species that are probably finding more and more hospitable homes and expanded range as we move further north. Thanks.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thanks, Michelle, and we've got public comment in one minute, and so we're going to take a couple more questions, if we need to, and we're going to wind this up.

MR. HARTIG: Michelle, on Spanish, there is a couple of really good year classes, and so that's probably part of the problem that's occurring. As far as the assessment, it certainly would be helpful. On the 100,000 pounds that we were able to transfer this year, I don't know that it's going to happen next year, based on what we saw this year in our fishery, and so I'm just putting that upfront now.

MR. PHILLIPS: Leann, we'll let you get the last word.

MS. BOSARGE: Thank you, sir. I was just going to ask about cobia real quick, because we have the stock ID workshop that's going on right now, and I think we're going to have the final report from that in like November is the final report. The Gulf has cobia on their schedule for 2019, to

start in Quarter 2 of 2019. If that stock ID comes back and they say it's one stock in the Gulf and the Atlantic, do you all have it on your schedule, or are we going to end up in a pickle in the Gulf, where we're like, well, we can't do the assessment, and it's too late to put anything else in that slot?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We have it, but, yes, you're channeling that discussion last September with the Steering Committee and the analyst limitations and such and who does what, and so I think, if the stock ID -- We'll know the first week of June, the week before our council meeting, and I think you all meet after us. That will be the peer review, and so we should have a pretty good sense by the end of that peer review.

If it ends up being one stock, my understanding of where we left it at the Steering Committee is we would have to go back to the drawing board with regard to you guys. If that freed up a slot, I think they would like to try -- I know you guys would like to try to bring something else in there, and so we're waiting to see what the stock ID says. Probably at our June meetings, we'll know well enough to know if it would be one stock and affect your cobia plans. That's where it stands now.

There is one last question of Steering Committee guidance, and this was on the issue of red grouper. We've mentioned this a couple of times, but is there any objection to asking this to be the priority for our revision assessments?

MR. PHILLIPS: Thoughts? Thumbs-up by Michelle, and so, yes, we're good.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right. That was all of my items, Mr. Chairman.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, we do appreciate it. It's been a very enlightening committee meeting, and, again, I appreciate Cisco and Erik, and we will adjourn the SEDAR Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 7, 2018.)

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Amanda Thomas
March 27, 2018

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March Council Mtg 2018 - Day 4 - 3/8/18

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