

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

Webinar

September 5, 2017

SUMMARY MINUTES

SSC Committee

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Dr. Robert Ahrens
Dr. Carolyn Belcher
Dr. Scott Crosson
Anne Lange
Laura Lee
Dr. Fred Scharf
Dr. Fred Serchuk

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Dr. Luiz Barbieri
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Dr. Eric Johnson
Dr. Sherry Larkin
Dr. Genny Nessler
Dr. Amy Schueller
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Observers/Participants

Shepherd Grimes

Dr. Erik Williams

Other observers and participants attached.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on September 5, 2017, and was called to order by Dr. Marcel Reichert.

1. INTRODUCTION

DR. REICHERT: Welcome, everyone, and it's September 5, 2017, to the Scientific and Statistical Committee webinar. Before we start, I want to welcome Fred Scharf. This is his first meeting with us, and so welcome, Fred.

DR. SCHARF: Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: We have one agenda item, the research track, and, John, do we need to do a round of introductions for the voice recognition?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Let's see. No, I think, since we're on the webinar, just let people -- We'll call people before they speak, and if folks will raise their hand, I think that will handle it here, because we've gone through, and we have the list of who all is here.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thank you. Then what I would like to do is Approval of the Agenda. If anyone has any issues with the agenda, please raise your hand, and John will unmute you. No raised hands, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Then let's move to the --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, hold up. I think we've finally got Scott straight. Scott, I just unmuted you. Can you hear us?

DR. CROSSON: Yes, and I'm sorry about that. I seem to be having a little bit of computer problems this morning, but I think it's working now. Tracy Yandle is going to call in on the webinar. She just texted me a minute ago. She's in her car, but she will be calling in, and so just letting you know that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. Thanks.

DR. CROSSON: With the agenda, we have three hours to talk about the research track proposal, and so I guess one of the things that I was wondering is if the committee wanted to take any time left over from this to discuss or review what we had intended to do with developing a fishery-independent index for red snapper. I think we were a little unclear on that in the April meeting, and I understand -- From looking at our report and looking at our minutes, I still think I'm a little bit confused about what the track was moving forward with that, and so I was wondering if the committee wanted to spend any time discussing that.

DR. REICHERT: I guess we can do that under Other Business. John, at some point, I may need some guidance, in terms of what we can or cannot do, since that was not announced in the public register, but we can add that, Scott, under Other Business.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's right, Marcel. You have the items on the agenda that you can make recommendations on. You can talk some about other stuff, but you wouldn't be able to make specific recommendations to the council, but you could certainly have some discussion.

DR. CROSSON: Okay. That's my expectation. I understand, if it's not on the agenda, that we certainly can't make a new recommendation or anything like that, but I just wanted to clarify a little bit about what the steps were moving forward, in terms of our future meetings, with information provided by the Science Center.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Anyone else? Let's come back to that under Other Business. Agenda Item 2 is Review of the Proposed Research Track. I have not received any requests for public comment. Is there anyone from the public who wants to make a public comment? Please raise your hand, and John will unmute you. No hands raised, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, sir.

2. REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH TRACK

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thank you. Let's talk about the proposed research track. We have received the letter from the Science Center, which provided a little bit of clarification, although I do agree with John's remark where he said that the devil is in the details, and I still feel that there is not a lot of detail, and so I would like to open the discussion with a couple of questions that I have, and then we can take it from there, unless -- John, do you have any additional information or remarks that you want to make before we open the discussion?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Just a comment that, when you were referencing John's remark, to point out, for the record, that was an email that John Boreman shared with all the SSC members.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, that's right.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The research track, you guys talked about it in April. The Steering Committee has talked about it last fall, and it's going to talk about it again here in September, and you raised concerns about the details, things like the role of the SSC and clarification of the process, in April. The council asked that the Science Center provide greater detail for you to discuss here at this webinar, so they can have guidance, when they meet in September, to give guidance to our Steering Committee representatives when they go to the Steering Committee at the end of September.

The purpose here is to get your comments on the research track, particularly how it's going to be implemented. Right now, we're looking at a research track for scamp, which will start sometime in 2018, and we need to really figure out just what a research track is all about and how it fits into the SEDAR process.

DR. REICHERT: John, can you elaborate a little bit on the timeline for the council? You just mentioned they are discussing this, and what are the exact decisions that the council will have to make in the September and in the December meeting relative to this research track?

MR. CARMICHAEL: In September, the council as a whole will give recommendations to our Steering Committee representatives, which will be Gregg Waugh and potentially Charlie Phillips, who, as our Vice Chair, may rise into the Chair position, and thus represent the council at the Steering Committee meeting.

The Steering Committee has indicated their support for the research track process. They too have raised questions about just how it's going to operate and what the details are. Within SEDAR, we have terms of reference and schedules and a pretty rigorous, robust, intensive process by which all of that is approved and the series of workshops, and everyone kind of knows their role and expectations, and what we've been trying to work out, over the last year, is what does that mean under the research track and how does the research track change everyone's expectations, from data that people provide to their role within the different steps of the process. The Steering Committee really needs to talk about that and give the SEDAR staff, our plan coordinators, some guidance on what they need to do to get this scamp research track rolling next year.

DR. REICHERT: Just for people's information, the Steering Committee meets in October?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The Steering Committee meets the last of September, the 26th and 27th.

DR. SERCHUK: I have a couple of comments, Marcel, that I think are general and probably need -- It concerns me. One is I think I totally agree with you that the memo that we got, in terms of the research track information for the SSC review, is very terse and is not detail-laden. In this respect, I think we haven't been served as well as we could have, particularly given the action items that came out of the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting on May 5, where there were a number of actions that were listed with respect to topics to consider relative to the research track.

Perhaps people from the Center will be able to provide us more details as we proceed with our discussions, but I am concerned that we really don't have very much more than we really had at our previous SSC meeting, and I am also concerned that it looks like the council is recommending to go ahead with the research track without really understanding what the details are, and I would hope that, in our discussion today, we focus on several issues.

One of the issues is what benefit there would be by implementing a research track and what level of peer review would be involved and how long the process would take and the value added by going to a research track relative to a benchmark assessment and the benefits, in toto, for a research track versus any of the other assessment approaches, and that is the updates or the operational assessments or the benchmarks, and the costs involved.

One of the things that I am very much concerned about is the time lags for many of these processes. They seem to be very, very long, and I think they need to be adequate for the process to unfold successfully. On the other hand, many of the issues that the council is facing, in terms of assessments, are really governed by time issues.

Finally, I think it would be helpful, if we're going forth with discussing a research track implementation, to sort of compare and contrast what we hope to gain, or what anyone would hope to gain, from implementing a research track relative to the existing assessment approaches that already exist. I think if we can talk about our -- In our discussion, if we review the research track,

I think it would be good to compare and contrast this with the other approaches that already exist in terms of assessment reviews. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Fred. We did discuss some of that in our previous meeting, and I think, to go back to your earlier remark, I do agree, and I think answering those questions very much depends on the detail that I had expected that would be provided to us. In addition to that, I also had a couple of questions that relate, for instance, also to the specific roles, and I think that's, for us, very important, the specific roles of the SSC, SEDAR, and the Science Center. Where do the responsibilities of these three entities begin and end?

Also, something we discussed at the last meeting is how is the transition from the current system to the new system envisioned and whether or not this is a full replacement of the old system, and I know the council has discussed that, to a certain degree, also. The other thing, and you're absolutely right, is timing is important, and also one of the questions I had is, for instance, the data providers, because, lately, that has become an important issue, in terms of the timing of the completion of assessments, in particularly in the research track, but also in the operational assessment. How are the data providers involved and how does that affect the timing and the completion? Another question I had is, for instance, in the research track, what constitutes sufficient progress, and who determines that?

I don't necessarily mean to put Erik on the spot. Erik Williams is on the webinar, and I am wondering, Erik, if you can address some of these questions and if you may have some additional information that may answer the questions that we have that Fred brought up and that I just brought up, and there's a couple of other questions that I have that we can potentially address later.

DR. WILLIAMS: Sure, Marcel. I will do my best. In terms of more details, I don't think the Center has more to offer. I think there's been a lot of discussion internally about some of those details, but I think we have been hesitant to push those out, because, in many respects, you asked the pertinent question that we should all discuss, probably, before we dive into this particular topic, which is what is the role of the Center, the SSC, and the councils in this whole SEDAR process?

I think -- Again, I don't know if I'm speaking entirely for the Center, but I'm just sort of speaking from internal conversations that I have had with Center staff. The view is still that SEDAR is ultimately a council process, and obviously the Center is a major participant in that process, and the other part of that is the Center does ultimately -- It's ultimately responsible for the cost of SEDAR.

With that in mind, obviously we are a strong participant and should have some say in the whole process, but let me go back and just sort of step back and explain why the whole idea of the research track process came up in the first place, and maybe this will help put things in context, and that is that one of the problems we recognized, after running many SEDARs, is that, in a benchmark process, we have these deadlines in place that are kind of immovable, and what we've realized is, as we go through the data workshop, assessment workshop, and even the review workshop, things come up that we're unable to anticipate, and they're serious enough matters that they end up delaying the whole process, or they end up requiring a tremendous amount of work-around to continue the process.

That has caused many interruptions, and so this was an attempt to try and mitigate that risk of having those hiccups, let's say, and we'll call them hiccups, which have occurred at every stage of the process. We have had them occur at both the data workshop, the assessment workshop, and even we've had reviewers that have had strong enough statements that an assessment basically didn't pass review, but could have maybe passed review had we had time to make some corrections, and so this research track process was an attempt to try and allow for those -- Recognizing that those hiccups are likely to occur at any stage of the process and that it would give us the time to make the course correction and make the adjustments to the assessment, so that, in the end, we still end up with a good final reviewed product that this is what we're after.

That gets to why a lot of the details might be missing, because, going into any project, you're not even sure where the hiccups might occur, and, as I've said, we've had them occur at the data workshop level, at the assessment workshop level, and even at the review workshop level, and so, by necessity, we can't necessarily spell out some of those details, because it's going to depend -- It's probably going to be project-dependent as to what that schedule looks like, because of where and when those hiccups might occur.

I think that's -- I don't know if that helps. I mean, like I said, I don't think I can provide any more detail other than just sort of this background and sort of help to set the stage of where the Center is coming from with this whole idea.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Erik. Again, I'm sorry to put you on the spot here, and I understand that, but remind me. Wasn't part of this also, or an important part, to ultimately increase the output, in terms of assessments that could provide management recommendations? John or Erik or anyone else, remind me. I thought that was also an important part of why this process started.

DR. WILLIAMS: Right, and I think the increase in output was not going to come from the research track part of the process itself. It was going to come from this notion of switching the other assessments, the update assessments, to operational. The concept of research track is very much paired with this concept of operational assessments, and so that's where you're going to get all the gains, is by shifting more of the assessments to these operational assessments and pulling the trigger less frequently on research tracks, but then gaining the throughput by having more operational assessments.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, that was one of the things that compelled the Steering Committee to get behind this when they did last fall, was the promise of the greater throughput, and that's at the forefront of everybody's mind, of course, as Erik has said, and so that remains the challenge. What has sort of snarled this up is trying to figure out how do you get there and how do you map what we do now, in terms of benchmarks, standards, and updates, over to research track and operational.

What does an operational assessment look like relative to what we now consider a standard and an update, and is it something that research track exists parallel to benchmark, as was something mentioned at the SSC back in April, and the Northeast experience, that it didn't replace and that it supported, and those are the details we've been trying to get through to, and we have really struggled for quite a while.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I think that goes back to what Fred earlier said, in terms of the benefit and the value added, and that's a little bit of the detail that I have been missing, is it looks now, if you look at the plans that -- In almost every operational assessment, like for instance in scamp, and the same discussion was had with cobia, in terms of planning, but almost every operational assessment, unless there has been a successful benchmark assessment that's on the books, seems to be preceded by a research track.

In terms of speeding up the process and increasing output, that's where I am a little confused how that's going to work, if you have to wait with the operational assessments until you have completed these research tracks. Maybe I am misunderstanding the overall process.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think that's just a function, Marcel, of those early examples. At least scamp, it's the first-time assessment, and cobia was put in there because it was -- There is a lot of controversy about stock ID, and we knew that there needed to be some changes in that assessment, and so both of those were viewed as ones that essentially would have been done as benchmarks, and so, when the schedule was done up at that time, the idea was that to do research tracks instead of benchmarks, but the question is, in terms of stocks that have an accepted benchmark that are now in the standard update type of cycle, which is mostly what we're doing right now, do those just map over to become called operational? Perhaps. That's one of the details to talk about. That's the transition plan, I think, that you and Fred both mentioned.

DR. SERCHUK: First off, and Erik knows this, I'm not a big fan of the research track proposal approach, and it's not because it doesn't convey lots of benefits, but I think there are a number of issues that are being confused, and I know in the Northeast, and, again, I'm just using this because of some experience there and not to say that they do it any better or any worse than any other place.

The process in the Northeast is, if there's a benchmark assessment that has already been agreed to and been through the peer review, then the operational assessments follow right on from that. You don't need a research track to be implemented if you have had a benchmark assessment and you're not going to deviate significantly from the model or from the datasets.

That's the beauty of the operational assessments. They can be done in a very short amount of time, and they can provide an updated status of the resource in a timely fashion. It doesn't cost a lot, in terms of the assessment scientists' resources, because generally, as John Boreman pointed out in his memo to the SSC, generally a lead assessment scientist prepares the operational assessment update, and it undergoes some sort of evaluation by a small committee, composed of the SSC Chairs and the lead assessment supervisor at the Center and the assessment scientist. They review what the operational assessment -- How it might deviate from the benchmark, if at all, and then they give their blessing. Then there is a small peer review done at the time the operational assessment is actually vetted.

I don't see really any difference. From my own perspective, I don't see a research track as needed to move to operational assessments. You can do that already. What I am concerned about is the additional labor that may be incurred by the Center in trying to maintain updates, operational assessments, benchmarks, and a research track. That seems to be a very large amount of activity that we expect the Center resources to be devoted to, and I am concerned about diluting those resources at a time when, unfortunately, federal resources are being constrained, either by hiring

or just a lack of appreciation that their dinner plates are already filled. Now, I know that Erik can't really speak to it, but I know, from experience in the Northeast, that this is a real concern.

DR. REICHERT: Fred, one of the questions that I had, and I think John just mentioned it, is that -- Unless I misunderstand you, you assume that this research track and operational system will be in place in addition or parallel to the current benchmark and updates and standards, and I still have that question of how that is envisioned by the Center or by the council, because I think, personally, if those two systems are in place simultaneously, I think we are defeating the purpose of going to a research track and operational assessment, and so I understand your concern, but I'm not sure if we're there yet.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, to that, if I could clarify, I don't think it was ever the intent that we would have all five things running at one time. The discussions initially were what we do as benchmarks now to do as first-time assessments and to address controversial issues in assessments would become the research track and then what we do now as standards and updates would become under this idea of operational assessments.

DR. SERCHUK: That's why I am concerned, because the research track procedure, as pointed out, doesn't allow for using the most recent data, and so, after the research track is done, and one of the benefits of a research track is you're not encumbered by coming up with a status of the stock based on the most recent data, and, in that sense, it's insulated from the management process, but the experience in the Northeast has been that, as soon as a new modeling approach, or as soon as a new view on the dynamics of the stock comes out of the research track, there will be large pressure put on by the councils, particularly if those new model configurations or new evaluations show things to be improved, in terms of stock status, to then implement the most recent fisheries data and research survey data, fishery-independent and fishery-dependent data, so that that information can go into the management process as quickly as possible.

That is one of the reasons that the research track has not met with great success in the Northeast, because there's a lot of time put into it, and rightly so, and it does protect the researchers from being on the management bandwagon, but the fact is the council often needs information very quickly, and one of the things that I am seeing in the Southeast is that there is a great lag between the data that are used in the process and, by the time process unfolds, you're one or two years later, and so you really can't implement the most recent data. I don't mean to sidetrack it, but these are just observations that I am putting forth and one reason why the research track has not been embraced in the Northeast.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Fred. I would like to hear from some other SSC members relative to the discussions we had and also relative to some of the questions that others may have in terms of what was provided either earlier to us or in the letter from the Science Center.

DR. BARBIERI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a little bit of a different perspective. I think that a lot of the discussion thus far has been helpful, but just a bit of a different perspective here, just some points for us to think about, and I think we need to recognize one point that needs to be added to this discussion, and that is the idea that sometimes we do not have enough information, and we don't have enough resolution of issues, data issues, model configuration issues, in place to have the number and the speed of assessments that are expected by the council and by stakeholders.

I think that this research track allows us to address some of those issues. I mean, if we think back as the South Atlantic SSC, and we think about blueline tilefish and we think about gray triggerfish and we think about where we ended up eventually, and even with South Atlantic red snapper, we see a number of issues that are very, very complicated. There are non-standard issues to be dealt with and challenges that we face in the Southeast, primarily with data limitations and complications.

I, despite all the reservations that Fred brought up and other folks have brought up, and I see your points, Fred, but I think that this is the Center making a deliberate recognition, and I think rightly so, that some of those issues need to be looked at more carefully. Let me bring up another one, the black grouper, that we discussed at our April meeting and all the complications and our inability to complete that assessment and how we have data issues that have not been resolved.

It's one of those things that sometimes, in the interest -- Just a perspective here, but, in the interest of speed and turning that crank and getting one more assessment out and another one and another one, we are forgetting about getting some of these long-standing issues resolved, so that we can actually move forward, and perhaps not at the same speed, but in a better, resolved, more resolute way going forward.

I see an advantage of having the research track in place for addressing those issues. I think, as John Boreman pointed out in his email, the devil is in the details, and I think the species that are chosen for the research track are critical and how we make an allotment there of which species go into the other tracks versus the research track, but I think, especially for our Center, given the data limitations that we face in the Southeast U.S., the research track would be really beneficial, and so I will stop there, Mr. Chairman, but that's just a perspective a bit different from what has been discussed.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks, Luiz.

MS. LANGE: I think I have similar concerns to what Fred had expressed, that this is -- To me, having a research program or a subset of -- Not to actually do a full assessment, but, if there are issues associated with a particular stock or similar stocks that research will address, to me, that's a little bit separate than actually conducting the assessment. Once the research track assessment is completed, there is going to be an immediate expectation, I believe, from the council, and certainly from the public, that an actual assessment will come out of that and answers will be provided, and so, to me, there either should be, or potentially be, a complete separation and not actually call it a research assessment, or a research track, but just basic research on assessments in general, with a particular stock being used as an example, but not necessarily to be called the assessment.

I am not sure if I am making this clear, but, again, I believe the expectation would be that an assessment would be done immediately and that there should be better or further separation from that type of research than just calling it a research assessment. I hope that wasn't too confusing.

DR. REICHERT: Anne, I had a similar thought, and one of the questions that I had is I know the various Science Centers are conducting research relative to stock assessments and model approaches and how to approach the data currently, and one of the questions I have is how the research track either augments that, and, again, that goes back to the value added, or whether this

is viewed within the Science Centers as a replacement of some of that research and making the link to the operational assessments.

Even now, within the standard assessments and with the updates, more often than not, after the fact, there is a lot of questions about what should have been done in terms of applying the most up-to-date methodologies, et cetera. These are two questions, and I'm not sure if anyone else has any thoughts or can provide a clarification. Again, one is the current research that's done within the Science Centers and how does that relate to what will be done within the research track, and then the other thing is relative to the operational assessments. Is it realistic that it is basically going to be a crank the crank, because of developments in the research arena?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, I think Erik can probably talk about how the research track compares to the research that the Science Center already does. In terms of the operational and how much of it is a, quote, turn of the crank, as much as we hate that language, we didn't really get to that level of detail in laying out what that is.

When it was discussed initially, and coming fast on the heels of the research track assessment, the idea was that it would be putting in the new data and then being able to take advantage of what was learned through the research track process, through the peer review and through the SSC's recommendations, and I think certainly, from the SEDAR perspective, given that the SSCs are the ones who provide guidance on saying when an update is okay and when a standard is okay and what the flexibility is within a standard, and you guys shine the light on that gray area, that it would be the SSCs that would have some role in saying, okay, these are the changes that we think should be done and we'll accept these changes going through the operational and this is the type of peer review that would go in there.

Again, that's some details that weren't worked out. I think one of the issues, sort of a bigger view here, is, as Erik mentioned, SEDAR is a council process, and research, and particularly developing new assessments, as Erik and Luiz mentioned, doesn't always follow the best laid plans of anybody, and the council process, on the other hand, doesn't work well with unknowns and unclear process and lack of clarity on schedules and everything else.

The councils are all very much strongly deadline-driven, and so we kind of have oil and water coming here together, which is creating part of the challenge, and that's why I think the idea that you guys threw out in April that, well, maybe the research track doesn't just replace everything else and maybe it's something that is done off to the side to develop new models and deal with the future first-time assessments that are going to be challenging, because of their data limitations, and that's why they haven't been done yet, maybe that is a way to do it.

Perhaps that comes out of SEDAR as a source of conducting stock assessments, or maybe SEDAR's focus changes. When SEDAR began, it wasn't the sole source of assessment information, or it wasn't its intent, at least. When it was developed, it was to deal with the controversial-type things, and so there could be a different focus in SEDAR, and there could be some other ways of doing that. I think any ideas that folks have about the information we need is worth putting on the table and talking about.

DR. REICHERT: Exactly, and, unfortunately, that's what I had hoped would be some of the details that would be provided. Erik, do you have anything that you want to add or clarify? Again, sorry to put you on the spot here.

DR. WILLIAMS: No, that's fine, Marcel. I think John actually had a good summary there, but I think, in terms of -- Ideally, if we had a nice stock assessment enterprise for the South Atlantic, we would have enough assessment scientists that we could keep up with the demands of the council and have the luxury of the research wing, where we could have people that are spending the majority of their time researching these models and data issues that are common to the South Atlantic, but we don't have those luxuries, and so I think that's the other crunch to recognize that we're under.

I mean, we're dealing with limited resources, very limited resources, and we're trying to parse them out into research as well as providing constant advice to the councils, and that's a tough thing to decide how to divvy up, and that's what we're constantly battling, and so I think John was sort of hitting on the same idea. It is an oil-and-water problem, because you don't want to give up the research completely, because then you sort of start to fall behind, and then your methods start to fall under criticism, because you're not keeping up with the latest and greatest techniques, but, at the same time, there is this tremendous demand to just keep cranking out advice.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you. Anyone else have thoughts about what has been discussed?

DR. BARBIERI: To Erik's point there, and John's nice summary before that, to some extent, here is an idea. I wonder whether it might be better for the Center to actually not have this research track be part of the SEDAR process. I mean, this could be a decision that's made within the Science Center and being handled as needed to address issues, science-related issues, that need to be resolved before assessments, or the intention for assessments, enters the SEDAR process.

This might help handle expectations. As Erik pointed out at the beginning, since SEDAR is really a council process and there are expectations coming out of the public of what's going to happen with those assessments, one way of handling this is to say, okay, the Science Center would be participating in those discussions with the SEDAR Steering Committee to decide which assessments should be benchmark and which assessments would be operational, but when it plans its calendar of activities and the assignments of the different scientists within the Center, it takes into account already that, in the background, there are some processes taking place that would be equivalent to the research track assessment that is trying to resolve some of those issues that are not ready for primetime yet, so to speak.

DR. REICHERT: But, Luiz, how is that different from how things are operating right now? I understand the dilemmas that Erik just mentioned, in terms of time, but that's not -- Unless that is going to change, that is not going to change the output or the -- In other words, what is the value added there unless there is more resources available?

DR. BARBIERI: Well, to me, the value added, Marcel, is not necessarily quantity, but it would be quality. By the time that we engage resources to actually have an assessment that will be providing catch advice, that we have those issues resolved. It's not ideal. Ideally, we would have all sorts of resources available and be able to do everything really, really well, but that's not reality, and so something has to give, and I think we need to articulate to the council that, at times, slowing

down might be actually more productive than trying to get another one going that may not be getting where it needs to be.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. I thought I heard someone else chime in.

DR. SERCHUK: You did, Marcel. A couple of comments. It seems to me that, based on our discussions and based on the discussions that took place at the previous SEDAR Steering Committee and the lack of full details here, that it would, from my perspective, be premature to give imprimatur to say a research track should be implemented.

On the other hand, because the research track proposal came from the Center, my feeling is that, before it's full implemented, we ought to allow the research track to be done on an experimental basis to see how it would play out with any one particular stock. We can take a particular stock, and, only after going through this experimental research track process, will we be able to appreciate and evaluate whether the benefits of implementing this as a formal procedure within the council process and the SEDAR process is really worthwhile, and so I don't think we're going to be able to answer that question without going through the process, because the Center has indicated that they thought this might be a worthwhile endeavor.

Irrespective of the concerns that we've raised, none of us are going to be able to assess the utility of the process without having it play out, at least on a trial basis, and so my feeling is we're unsure what the benefits are. We think there are some, as Luiz pointed out, by focusing on the research that needs to be done to improve our understanding of the stock dynamics and to evaluate the utility and efficacy of any of the models.

I think we should give it a chance, but I'm not willing to, at this point in time, say that we ought to implement the process as a full other leg, in terms of the updates, the operational assessments, and the benchmarks, but I am willing to say, well, if the Center thinks it's a way forward, and we agree that there are many aspects of it that seem to be beneficial, that, on an experimental basis, it ought to be tried and a stock should be designated for the first research track and we can learn from that. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: To that point, anyone else?

DR. SHAROV: I was trying to follow the discussion, and it was kind of difficult to understand some concepts that are presented here, but I think obvious to everybody is the fact that, at certain times, we accumulate a sufficient number of issues within the stock assessment for a certain species or groups that meet the wall of the issue or the problem of failure, clear failure, of the models to appropriately describe the population dynamics or clear issues with the data and the apparent need to improve the assessment becomes absolutely clear.

Whether this should be done as an internal process within the Center or through the SEDAR process, it's hard to decide. It could be done both ways, but I think that there is obviously a benefit for the council and the SSC and the SEDAR process to be part of it, because this is an opportunity for the SSC to participate together with the Science Center scientists in defining what are those critical moments, what are those critical needs, and whether we want to develop a structure where you want to try the multiple-model application to a particular species or a separate or specific treatment of the input data, et cetera, et cetera.

I think having this as a part of the SEDAR process probably would have more benefits and, clearly, for each species, for each problem, we'll have unique situations, and so we will not work out all the details until we try, and so I completely agree with Fred on this point, that we need to have it tried. I am not as strong as Fred in saying that this shouldn't be a formal process at the moment and it should be only in the experimental stage. That's up to the group to decide, but I think we definitely need to go ahead and do it.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Alexei.

DR. BUCKEL: Thanks, Marcel. The issue that Fred brought up of what's happening in the Northeast with the research tracks and the desire to use the information for management worries me, and so I guess, if things do go down a research track approach, that I would suggest that the language in the Attachment 1 document -- That there be something in there that it's not -- We don't go through all the normal data updates like we did for a benchmark, which is in there right now for the research track, and so you have an older termination date, based on older data, or, if there's a known problem with more recent data, then the analysts would simulate data with that known problem and then do that new research assessment approach.

That way, whatever results come out aren't up-to-date, and there wouldn't be the pressure to use those for management, and so that's, I guess, just one logistical detail maybe to add to this research approach. I do think it's beneficial to have it go through the SEDAR process. To me, I would like to see it as an addition, and so we would still have the benchmarks, but then there would be this research whatever it's called, research track, and, that way, folks would know that there is a certain amount of analysts' time that's being devoted to that, and then there's not the expectation for more benchmarks or more operational assessments.

Also the point brought up, I think by Erik, about the benchmarks, that there are these hard deadlines, and so maybe one solution is, if we keep benchmarks, which it sounds like folks are, at least for the short-term, in favor of that, and I'm in favor of that, where there could be some flexibility with those deadlines in the benchmark.

It may not need twelve months of research to solve the problem, but just an added month, to give the analysts some time to work through a problem that arises within a benchmark would be helpful, and so those are -- Two points there. One logistical detail on the research track and not using up-to-date data, and then the other one is having some flexibility with those benchmark deadlines, to solve that issue that Erik brought up. Thanks.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks, Jeff. Can you elaborate a little bit more on that benchmark idea, because I think we all realize that, once that process is in place, the council is awaiting the results of that benchmark, and so how do you foresee handling the time crunch or the expectation that something will come out of that benchmark that will provide the council with some recommendations? Of course, they always want it sooner rather than later.

DR. BUCKEL: That's a tough one, Marcel. I don't have a good answer for you other than you either get a wrong answer today or you could wait a month to get a better answer, and so the correct answer, or something that's closer to the truth, and so I don't have the answer to that question. Sorry.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, but what you are proposing is to keep the current format in place in addition to a research track or a research process that is a little more formalized and perhaps coordinated by SEDAR, and is that what you said earlier? I just wanted to clarify that.

DR. BUCKEL: Yes, Marcel. That would be -- To Erik's point about the not having enough people to do the benchmarks and the operational assessments as well as having a research wing, and so the expectation is this certain amount of benchmarks have been done recently and updates, and so that level would be reduced to a certain point, because now there is the research. There is time spent by the analysts on these research questions. That way, the SEDAR Committee is aware of what the analysts are working on on the research side of things.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, one of the things that has been talked about, as the thing has played out, is that there are -- The current benchmark process gets challenging, because, as Erik mentioned, it's very deadline-driven. When data get behind, the whole process gets behind, but there is a schedule that has been set, and there is a hard-and-fast deadline out there.

There is a deadline, where things are supposed to be done. You've got that endpoint, and you've got to reach it, and some sort of hybrid system may be where we end up, that is this kind of parallel idea, and SEDAR's role could be to take advantage of its strengths really, which are the data and review phases. The data is bringing in more people and helping find all the data that are out there and getting the people who know that data together in one place and then handling the peer review.

Where SEDAR always struggles is within the assessment phase, because you just don't know what time is going to be required, and you don't know what the challenges are going to be, as you guys all know. It could be something that SEDAR coordinates that side of it, but without the hard-and-fast deadline, and that's what a research track is really about.

The question then becomes, of course, is there a need for a benchmark as we know it now within SEDAR, or under that type of process, or is the peer review handled through that, and you go into either what we call operational, which combines today's updates and standards, or we keep some kind of multiple categories within those classes of assessments which give us the information for you all to make recommendations. Then I think, as Fred said, there are a lot of details still that we don't know, and we're not going to answer them today, and so we need to figure out what we tell the council, in terms of moving forward.

DR. REICHERT: That's where I was going, in terms of our current recommendations, in addition to the fact that, ultimately, there's a lot more detail that we need to discuss before we can finalize a final recommendation. One of the things that I have been thinking of is you've got -- On a number of occasions, for instance with the video index for the fishery-independent survey, and this method was developed to combine the trap index and the video index, and that creates a new data stream that may affect the outcome of an assessment.

A similar example was, for instance, the likelihood estimator. That had some significant effects, and, now, that's where I have a little difficulty understanding how that would fall in this new process, because would that be big enough to do a research track, and how would that affect then the operational assessments?

What you were possibly proposing is to have maybe, or maybe I am proposing, to kind of have a hybrid system, where you may have, for instance, the standard assessment and the updates, which would be the equivalent of the operational. Then, in addition to that, not a benchmark assessment, but like a research track, and was that kind of the direction you were thinking, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that is kind of what we've been thinking.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, and I actually like that idea, because I think that provides a little more flexibility, and it also is important that -- For instance, again, the video trap index or the new likelihood estimator, I think those would be topics that would fall between an operational and a research track, and so that may address that. I want to see if anyone else has any thoughts relative to this. We heard from a few, and is anyone raising a hand or wanted to make a remark?

DR. SERCHUK: I think we've got to be careful now with our language, whether we're talking about a research track or a research track assessment, because clearly, if we're talking about a process that will foster the development of better data or better models by themselves that could lead to better assessments, that is purely a research endeavor, and I think we all agree that we need more of that, because, as Luiz pointed out, many of the issues that we're dealing with are either data-limited or model-limited.

If we're talking about a process that will lead to a better assessment, because we now have gone through the elements that will go into that assessment, the savings, whether you talk about a benchmark assessment or whether you talk about a research track assessment, the savings are in the operational assessments.

DR. REICHERT: Can I interrupt you real quick, Fred?

DR. SERCHUK: Yes.

DR. REICHERT: If I said research track assessment, then I misspoke. I never meant for the research track to end up in something that provides management recommendations.

DR. SERCHUK: I didn't mention that you said it, but, if you look at Bonnie's memo, she talks about research track assessment, on Point 5, post-SEDAR. The other difference that I see possibly could exist is I think it would be useful to compare the time duration for a benchmark assessment and what we consider the proposed time duration for a research track endeavor and then add to that research track endeavor the operational assessment, which Bonnie has done at the end of her memo.

My feeling is that one of the ways the research track could be made more efficient is, instead of having the research track having a post-peer review, one could use an integrated peer review. That is, you bring in experts that work with the data people, that work with the model people, and, as part of the process, they provide their insights, they provide their views, they provide their peer review, as part of the process.

We seldom see this integrated peer review, but it's a model that has been used in other places over the world, and, in fact, there have been many stock assessment workshop peer reviews that I am familiar with, which basically is the sequential peer review, where the peer reviewers have told the

individuals involved in the process that it's too bad that I can only give a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down or make recommendations at this time, and, had I been involved with the process at an earlier stage, when you were developing the techniques or when you were considering the tools or when you were looking at changes to the data streams, and, at that point in time, I think my input would have been much more valuable than having it at the end of the process.

I raise this as a possibility, that, if we're talking about a research endeavor here, that we might want to think about, yes, we want the peer review, but we don't necessarily have to have it as a sequential peer review. It could be an integrated peer review, bringing experts and peer reviewers into the process, so that the final product would not only reflect the data people and the modeling people, but it would also reflect the views and input from the peer reviewers themselves, and I think that could save a considerable amount of time, and I think comparing the benchmark assessment to the research procedure or research approach that we're talking about, I think a comparison of timelines is an important element for the council to consider. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Fred. A real quick clarification. One of the questions I had, and I think that speaks to what you just said, is the role of the SSC in the various steps in this process. Now, when you're talking about review, are you talking both SSC review -- Because that's easier to organize than, for instance, the CIE review.

To that last point, and, John, you may be able to chime in, and, Erik, I haven't forgotten about you. I will get to you in just a second. In terms of CIE review, didn't we try that process, to involve the CIE reviewers in the assessment workshop, and did we collectively conclude that that really wasn't very helpful?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Actually, Marcel, yes, we have tried that. We've tried a couple of different approaches to get CIE-level experts involved more within the process throughout. I think, in general, people thought it was helpful, particularly when their hands were more tied to be involved, but it created a number of logistical issues within the CIE process and what they see as being their appropriate role within this kind of work. It's kind of a long, drawn-out thing, and probably a discussion for another time, but suffice it to say that we have tried it, and it has not provided the benefits that we had hoped, for reasons far beyond our control.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thank you for that. Fred, real brief, to that, before I go to Erik.

DR. SERCHUK: That doesn't necessarily -- You're talking about using CIE reviewers, and they are almost all used in a sequential peer review. I am talking about not using a particular institution. I am talking about bringing peer reviewers in in an integrated process, and if they're from academia or they're from a different Center or they're from a research facility.

I understand what John is saying, but let's not confuse an institution like the CIE that generally comes in and does end-of-process, sequential peer reviews with the benefits that could be gained, in terms of timing, with an integrated peer review, and that's all.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, and that's why I asked that question as a clarification.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I actually agree with that, in concept. The value of the CIE, of course, is they provide the people, and they pay the expenses for them. We have a bit of what we

consider to be the integrated level of peer review. We rely on you guys, the SSC, for that. Tapping into other Centers has certainly been a desire, and it's been done in some cases, but, due to the workload that all the other Centers fall under, it doesn't work out as well as we had wished, and kind of the same with outside researchers.

It's hard to get people to come in and volunteer their time and put the level into it that these kinds of projects require, and so, yes, we have just kind of run into a lot of dead-ends, but I think, conceptually, that would be the way to go. I would love to find someone that could actually make it work.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and, if I remember correctly, we actually discussed that, in terms of that research track, that allows for external experts, whether they are contributing to the process or whether they are contributing as a reviewer, to allow for that.

DR. WILLIAMS: Thanks, Marcel. I appreciate the opportunity to provide some more input on this discussion. Let me just give you another perspective to sort of consider in this whole debate, and that is the way -- Again, I am speaking more for myself and my experience as an assessment scientist.

The issue isn't necessarily review here. The issue is really time, and what we're trying to mitigate with this research track is the deadlines that are put in. The benchmark process, as it is now, is set up with a deadline in mind, as we've talked about. It's usually set up actually, often, with a council meeting in mind of when the advice would come forward to, and then we sort of back away from that and fill in the time.

Unfortunately, the way we have filled in the time has been more or less under the idea that everything goes smoothly. We have increased some buffers over the course of the years a little bit, but obviously not enough, because we've had still enough cycles that have gotten to these points where they've run into serious issues and we've had to either halt the process, delay the process, or we try to carry through and we end up with a negative review in the end.

Really, the issue here is time, and how are we going to mitigate these hiccups or try to minimize the risk of problems occurring in the process, and, really, the only way to do that is through adding time to the process. The question is how far do we swing that pendulum of time to mitigate this risk? Do we go to something like we're proposing here, which is a research track process, and that is a lengthy process, kind of nebulous and undefined, but we're setting it up that way on purpose, so that, in the end, we avoid all of those potential hiccups, or we can at least address them and correct them.

Again, I just offer this as another way to think about this. Really, time is the critical element here, and that's what we have a shortage of, unfortunately. We have a shortage of assessment scientists and a shortage of amount of time that we can devote to these assessments. We don't want them to become research projects that go on and on for years. At some point, we do have to just provide that management advice, and so that's my perspective of what the tradeoff here is.

DR. REICHERT: Erik, a question for you. Some of that is going on right now. I mean, you provided an update on some of the research that you guys have done recently at the last SSC meeting, and so how is that integrated in, for instance, that research track, or do you foresee that

that research track is very specifically focused on either a particular species or a particular topic to specifically improve the stock assessment or the outcome of that species or the outcome of stock assessments of multiple species, and how does that relate to what you guys are currently doing?

DR. WILLIAMS: Excellent question. I think the answer is all of the above. I mean, I think it's meant to focus on the issues specific to that species, but, to the degree that that topic carries over to other species in our region, then, yes, that's the spinoff or benefit of the research track, is that, if we address an issue for that particular species that also happens to be an issue that carries over to other species, then, in theory, we have hopefully resolved that in a way that then, when we get to that other species, we have a method in place to resolve that issue.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thank you. Anyone else to this point or other points? I would like to see if we can start formulating some recommendations that we are distilling out of these discussions. John, any hands up?

MR. CARMICHAEL: There are not, and I do have some bulleted notes. If you would like to see them, just say the word.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, please.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. Marcel, I just took down some notes, as folks were discussing. We started out talking about the response being brief and it really didn't have additional details on the research track. Then the list of questions were thrown out there of the things that need to be addressed, such as the benefits of the research track, the level of peer review expected, how long the process could take, what's the value added, what are the costs, how do you transition, what are the roles of the different players.

There was discussion of comparing and contrasting the research track and, in addition, processes on key points, which is largely the questions that are above. It was noted that there is pressure on the council to use the research track results, even with the most recent data being included, per the plans, and it will create an urgency to develop the operational assessment, and I will throw in here that that was specifically discussed by the Steering Committee last September, and they made it clear that they would get these assessments and they would have to have patience and accept that it's not going to be something that the SSC would be in a position to give fishing level recommendations from.

Now, conceptually, that was accepted, but I think we all know, kind of like in assessment project plans, that things tend to change sometimes when you have results before you, and so I think there is some hesitancy on a lot of people's behalf to think that that will actually be as accepted as maybe it seems to be on paper, but that's that. It has been talked about.

It was noted that the future first-time assessments are going to be analytically challenging and influenced by the data limitations developed. It's difficult to develop on a strict schedule, and I think that's a function of where we are within SEDAR. We have assessed the easy things, the things with the most data. The most straightforward assessments we can do have been done, and I think we know, looking ahead to the species that remain, they are going to be challenging.

A thought I had when Erik was talking along these lines too is that we have built-in buffers, and I almost think that the buffers that we build are good for the problems we face today, but then they have to be applied to the problems we face two years from now, and, as we keep going down the list of stocks, the challenges get bigger, and our buffers just aren't adequate. It's kind of like we're chasing our tail in that regard, and he made a good point about that.

We really are kind of getting into some recommendations by this point. It was stated that, based on the general kind of discussions we're having on this call, and the ongoing lack of details on the process and the inability to define real benefits of the research track, it could be premature to recommend the process as a replacement to existing procedures at this time. You discussed a pilot to be conducted and evaluated to see how it works and the benefits and how it fits into the process, really, I think, addressing the list of questions that were above.

It was noted that keeping the process within SEDAR has benefits, such as participation by the SSC and others, and I filled in there others, and one of the big ones is the state data providers. Consider a parallel process research track and the current SEDAR that we have. I think one thing, to be clear, is that SEDAR was created by the groups of people who are looking at the research track, and they can change SEDAR, and we don't have to be bound just by what SEDAR has done.

All of this stuff can change, and should change, if it's not meeting our needs any longer. Importantly, time is the critical element. Assessment development is not always going to proceed as planned. Challenges are going to be difficult to impossible to foresee and difficult to establish strict timelines with various phases of the processes. That's where I was so far.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Can you scroll back up a little bit? I think the questions that need to be addressed, I think they are very useful, and one of them that I would like to add is, in the current process, it's a little unclear how the data providers are involved, both in the research track and -- There is a data stage, but it's not entirely clear, and then, even more importantly, in the operational assessments, there is very little information on the data stage, and, increasingly, we have noticed and discussed the fact that providing the data is a very critical step, and so I think it would be really good to have a little bit more clarification or a little more information on how that is envisioned. For instance, does the three months of the original stage, that is on the second page with the operational assessments, does that include gathering all the data? What are the responsibilities for that process?

We talked extensively at the SEDAR Best Practices Workshop on the timeline of providing data for an assessment, and that is -- There is very little information there, and I believe that's a critical point, and then also, in the operational assessment, that kind of goes back to the discussions that we've had relative to updates and standards. It may be good to have a little more thought on what changes can be made to the model to keep the assessment operational assessments and at what point, or by what entity, is that discussed.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes.

DR. REICHERT: Then, of course, for the SSC, what is the expected involvement of the SSC in the various stages? I think that is still -- There is a little clarification there, but I think, in terms of the SSC's workload, I think it's important that we get a little more clarification. I know that we discussed involvement of individual SSC members in the entire process.

For instance, if we're, again, talking about the research track, or even with operational assessments, does the SSC get an update? What, for instance, is -- I am wondering what the role of the SSC is in some of these intermediate stages, both in the research track and the operational assessment, but, in particular, for the research track. Those are some of the questions that I have that I would like to see addressed next time we discuss this, irrespective of how we as an SSC see this entire process to look like eventually, and, with that, I would like to open the floor for others who may have some specific questions that we would like to see addressed.

DR. SERCHUK: I think what's missing for me, in any of the documents, is the thoughts that Luiz expressed that the current process of the benchmarks are having problems, and I think it would be helpful, in terms of the need for reflection on the value of the research track, to have some postmortem, to have some evaluation of what happened with black grouper, what happened with a number of the other stocks that have gone through the traditional benchmark assessment and have come out the other end or were stopped in the middle because there were either data problems or because, even after the process was completed, the reviewers didn't accept the assessment.

In most cases, those were either for data -- They were mostly for data problems, but perhaps they were also for modeling problems as well, and I think that needs to be as a preface, quite frankly, and I think we need to either have someone from the staff or someone that's familiar with enough of the processes that have had some quirks and some shortcomings to review those as a rationale for saying, well, we have a process, but quite frankly, recently, we've seen some bobbles in that process, and things haven't worked out, and they have caused delays. Even though we set deadlines, we had to stop the process in midstream or the process went through and still didn't give a satisfactory response in the peer review, and we are concerned about those sort of things, and we think a different way forward is necessary.

DR. REICHERT: I agree, and I know, Fred, that we have discussed this at various SSC meetings, especially when we were reviewing the assessments, and I think that is -- That is part of the role of the SSC, but, also, I would like to add to that that perhaps how could a research track -- How could these issues be avoided or addressed using a research track? In other words, could we have done, collectively we, have done a better job if and at what point some of these issues were addressed?

For instance, to go back to Erik and I think it was Jeff who said, okay, at that point, we would have said let's deliberately delay the completion of this assessment so we can address this particular issue and would that have then resulted in a better assessment? I think that would be -- I would argue that would be an important part of that analysis also. Anyone else?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Luiz, but he has lost his phone.

DR. REICHERT: Luiz emailed me. He said that he had to step out for about ten minutes and that he would be back in a little bit, and so I'm not sure if Luiz is back on or whether he is still --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Then no further hands at this time.

DR. REICHERT: Then I propose that this is kind of a consensus statement of the SSC currently, in terms of the questions that we would like to be addressed next time we discuss this further, to

help us formulate more detailed recommendations to the council. In terms of where we go from here, we discussed -- There were a couple of recommendations below, in terms of the process. For instance, the parallel process and not implementing the process right now, and so I would like to propose to the SSC that, unless you disagree -- Fred recommended to recommend to the council not to implement the process, but have a first research track kind of on an experimental basis.

I don't necessarily want to use that language, but go through one research track and evaluate the process and see whether that was giving us what we expected before we make further recommendations, in terms of implementing this new process. I would open the floor to discuss this recommendation.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That would be this.

DR. REICHERT: Yes. Seeing none, I assume that this is the SSC's consensus statement. Okay. One of the other -- I think I skipped some bullet points, didn't I, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: You did. We're kind of, I guess, here, at various general statements.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and, the need to compare and contrast, I would like to make that a recommendation to the council also. Does anyone want to add to or disagree with that statement? Seeing none --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Do you think that fits in with the list above, really?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, I think it is, although I think that's a more general recommendation, and I would like to make that a separate recommendation, to be honest, because I think the previous ones are more clarification of the proposed process, and this is more to help us look at where we can make those improvements. Again, anyone speak up if you disagree or want to discuss this further.

DR. SERCHUK: One comment, Marcel. Where are we in the process with regard to operational assessments, because, no matter what we talk about in terms of the research track or the benchmark, it seems to me that the timing elements require a fully fleshed out operational assessment process.

DR. REICHERT: I agree, and that's a question I would like to ask John or Erik. It's my understanding that, right now, unless we have the first research track assessment done, we will continue with our current system of standard and update assessments, and so I'm not sure how to answer that question, to be honest. I do believe that we need to have that better fleshed out, and I think that's reflected in some of the questions that we have in the beginning of our notes. Yes, that needs to be fleshed out a lot better.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, Marcel. As it's been presented so far, the change to operational and research track, they're both tied together. There hasn't been discussion of maybe taking standards and updates and becoming operational assessments, in a way.

DR. REICHERT: Exactly.

DR. SERCHUK: One of the reasons I sent out the page on operational assessments to the SSC members is that, the way it's -- Again, just by comparing it, the way they handle it in the Northeast, updates are done by a single stock assessment scientist, and they are presented to the SSC and that's it. The SSC does the review, and it's basically to see whether the specification process is on track, if you have multiyear specifications relative to an annual update of a survey index or an annual update of fishery performance.

Then the operational assessments are basically done relative to the specification process. You're coming to the end or the need to reexamine the specifications, because the specifications are two-year or three-year specification process, and they're ending, and so you do an operational assessment using the framework model, and perhaps some small changes, and John sent us a list of the changes that would be acceptable, and it has a minor amount of peer review.

There is no peer review in the updates, by the way. The updates, in the Northeast, have no peer review, other than going to the SSC for consideration. The operational assessments have some small amount of external peer review, but I'm thinking in terms of the timelines, either in a research track process or in the standard benchmark process, but the time saving is in operational assessments, on both sides, because you use the peer-reviewed results from both processes to update those model formulations with some new data and provide that to the council in time for their specification process, and so I think the time saving is in the operational assessments.

As John pointed out, the Northeast is going through twenty operational assessments this fall in a matter of a week. They do this every two years for groundfish, because that's what the specification process calls for, and so I think that, right now, it's sort of in between things. It exists, but it doesn't exist, and my feeling is that it should exist. It's a great timesaver, and it will meet council deadlines, but I think it needs to be fleshed out a little bit more than it has already. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: I agree, and, the way I have looked at this, is an operational assessment is very similar to what we currently have as updates, but, again, there is very little detail so far.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, I think, given what Fred said, our updates sound exactly the same as their updates. They are done by a single analyst, and they are reviewed by the SSC. The operational may be a little closer to our standard, where there is more allowance for things to be changed, but, in the case of our standard, the peer review is also provided by the SSC. There is an option for a bit of that integrated peer review, because we have SSC members who will sit on the standard panel.

DR. REICHERT: That goes to one of my other points. I believe that one of the recommendations, or one of the thoughts, was to perhaps have a research track, an operational assessment that looks kind of like our current standard, and then we have an update, which is basically what Fred referred to as an assessment with very minimal review, and that can be done relatively quickly.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Luiz is back on, too.

DR. SERCHUK: I am just saying, Chairman, that we need to clarify our language here. If we're really thinking that operational assessments and standard assessments are the same thing, it's confusing to use different terms if the essence of both things are the same, and so --

DR. REICHERT: I am not saying that they are the same. What I am saying is, in terms of comparison to what we are currently doing, one may look like what we currently call a standard assessment. It allows a little more flexibility than simply adding new data to an existing model, and so it's not an equivalent, is what I am saying.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay. Then I guess we need to weigh in, or should we weigh in? Again, I think John, in his email, John Boreman in his email, provided a list of things that, in the current operational assessments in the Northeast, are allowed, the changes that are allowed, but I think we have to comment one way or another on it, because these terms are now being used. They are used in Bonnie's letter, and we have used them in our discussions previously as well.

MR. CARMICHAEL: They are not in use officially within SEDAR, in terms of assessment planning. I think they're in use in Bonnie's letter and you all's discussion, because we're talking about the process. Something we can do as an interim, transitional step is to pull the operational concept and put that in play in lieu of our standard assessment, and that's something that you could recommend.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay. For example, one of the sentences in the SEDAR Committee report from May says the committee directed staff to develop detailed guidelines and consider how to address the research track and operational assessment processes within the SEDAR guidelines. I think that statement is okay as it is. It may mean that we'll look at the existing processes and see how they fit into this or whether they're the same or whether they're different, but the term "operational assessments" is now, I see, in place in many documents.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It's not in place in the SEDAR guidelines, and it's only in place in terms of materials talking about this process, and it's still in a conceptual form. We haven't gotten to that point of starting to roll that into the guidelines, because of the difficulty in addressing a lot of these specifics, which we kind of started off talking about, and so it's not real pervasive within anything you're going to see in terms of SEDAR and planning and the guidelines for how we operate.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay, but would it be useful for the SSC to take note of the sentence and say that, at the SEDAR Steering Committee, the staff was directed to develop detailed guidance and consider how to address the research track and operational assessment processes within the SEDAR guidelines process?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Since they already were, I'm not sure what the SSC would say about that, other than to point out that that's still a work in progress.

DR. REICHERT: That goes back to the fact that there is -- For a lot of these issues, there is currently very little guidance to go by in terms of how we can formulate our recommendations. What is the vision of how this is all going to look like, once everything is said and done?

DR. BARBIERI: To that point, Mr. Chairman, I just want to -- Looking at the consensus recommendations there, I think it might be helpful, and I ask others to consider this, to have something there also, perhaps at the beginning of the recommendation, to the effect of the SSC

recognizes the value or the need to have some process in place that is similar to or provides the products and outcomes of a research track.

I think this is something that, for us, regionally, that we have been struggling with. I mean, obviously, we are dealing with limited resources, and there are tradeoffs that we need to take into account. We don't have resources to do everything ideally, and so I think it would be valuable to express to the SEDAR Steering Committee that the SSC, at this point, is not giving this process a complete thumbs-down. Of course, we have questions, and we have made recommendations, and we have voiced our concerns, but I think it is also important for us to point out that we recognize that something like this is needed.

I mean, we have practical examples for several assessments in the Southeast U.S. that could have benefited over the last ten years or so. They could have benefited by a process like this, and so that would go then, based on the general nature of the discussion on this call, that it would point out what our concerns are and that we don't feel that this is ready for primetime, as yet, but I personally feel, and I wanted to express this to the committee, that something akin to a research track would be a benefit to the assessment process in our region, and I think it would be important for us to articulate that point to the SEDAR Steering Committee.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Luiz, and I think that's consistent with what we have said before as an SSC.

DR. SERCHUK: Luiz, you were out of the room when we discussed this, and we all agree with that, and, in fact, we all thought it would be useful to review some of the recent trials and tribulations that have come up through the assessment benchmark process as a reason for needing a research track.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, and I appreciate that. It's just something that, looking at our draft consensus statement, I just feel that it would be positive to be more explicit about how we express that sentiment, because this is going to be presented to the council and to the SEDAR Steering Committee, who may not be privy to the discussions that we are having here in full. That's my point.

MR. CARMICHAEL: So you're saying it's worth the continued effort to try and solve these challenges and figure out how to make this thing work.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes. I mean, that's the way I feel, and I mentioned some of the assessments that have been interrupted or processes that have been interrupted or that have produced outcomes that all of us, as an SSC, have felt were insufficient, I guess, or inadequate to address the issues. I mean, we were aware of them, but we just didn't know how to get them resolved, because they would have required a process, a bit different perhaps, more extended, than the process that they were handled through.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Anyone else to that point? I appreciate that clear statement, and I just looked up some of the notes and reports from earlier meetings, and I think this is very consistent with what we have discussed in the past, but I agree that it would be good for us to lay that out as John just put it on the screen. Anyone else to that point? Does anyone disagree with that?

MS. LANGE: I'm not sure that it's exactly to your point on this, and I'm not exactly sure right now, but what I wanted to comment on was an earlier discussion that Fred and Marcel were having relative to the operational versus standard assessments. I think that this new process seems to completely eliminate updates, and, again, we used to call them turn-the-crank assessments, and I think it's important to maintain a separate category for those where everything has been approved and there is no issues with the model and the datasets are tried and true and it's just a matter of adding the next couple of years, and those are ones that I believe that the Center is able to put together fairly quickly, and so I think eliminating that, or merging it with the updates, complicates things more than it should be. You've got to find a way to identify what exactly is an update compared to a standard assessment, as we called it. I don't see the need to pool those together, and that's what I've been trying to get through here.

DR. REICHERT: Sorry for that, Anne, and I agree with you, and that's why I brought that suggestion up earlier, in terms of having an operational and an update and then an additional research track that does not result in research recommendations. Does anyone disagree with making the recommendation to maintain a strict update assessment where it is, where basically there is no new data streams and no new model configurations and it's basically updating years of data and do the assessment? To that point, anyone? John, any hands up?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, I don't, and I am taking this as saying as a specific category, explicit category, because, in the initial operational discussions, it was kind of defined as it could range from a strict update to something like a standard, or maybe something even with more flexibility than our existing standard, and so I am taking this, in a sense, to say you should have that strictly-defined update, to make it clear, exactly clear, just what that is.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I like that, because, if it is part of that range, I think it will be very easy to start making changes, and that would delay the completion of a strict update assessment, but I would like to hear from other members whether or not we feel that this should be a separate category or whether we are comfortable just making that part of the operational. Hearing none, then we will leave this as a recommendation.

DR. BARBIERI: Marcel, can you repeat the question? I don't think I got specifically what the point here was that you were asking for input on.

DR. REICHERT: The question was the one that Anne brought up, and I agreed, that there are situations where we can do a strict update. It's basically adding years of data and nothing other than adding years of data. Nothing else changes in the assessment, and that is a process that could be done relatively -- That is an assessment that could be done relatively quickly.

Currently, that is, as John pointed out, is part of the description of an operational assessment, where there is a whole range of what can be done during that operational assessment. Anne suggested to make this a separate category, to make it very clear that there are strict updates, and so that was the question, whether to lift that out of the operational assessment or whether to keep it in there as a category of an operational assessment.

DR. BARBIERI: Okay. Just real quickly, I see what happens, and we have seen this happen time and again with a lot of our assessments in the southeast U.S., is it has been difficult to apply that turn-of-the-crank policy, just because there are so many data issues and changes in data quality or

characteristics of data streams during the time series that turn-the-crank hasn't been very practical, and we end up having -- My recollection is seeing SEDAR coordinators having to kind of hit us over the side of the head to say, okay, no more changes here. Now you guys are proposing changes, when this assessment is supposed to be just a turn of the crank, but we find it difficult to apply that straight-up turn of the crank, because so many things need to be changed that were learned from the last benchmark.

DR. SERCHUK: In practice, Luiz may be right that very few assessments fall into the update category, but we're not here talking about changing the three categories, as I understand it, in the SEDAR process. We are talking about whether adding a research track type of approach would be beneficial and how that would fit in with the other categories. Luiz may have a good point, but I don't think this is the right forum for it.

DR. REICHERT: Also, the point I was going to make is, because we haven't been there yet, it doesn't mean that, at some point, we shouldn't be having -- That we shouldn't be getting to the point where we can actually have those update assessments, and so my question to the SSC is what's the pleasure of the group? Should we request to maintain the strict update category, or can that be part of the proposed operational assessment? As it is now, the recommended text is there should be a strict update category. Does anyone disagree with that?

MS. LANGE: I still agree with that, and, to Fred's point, the reason I raised it is because I was concerned, based on both the agenda for here and also from the memo, and it appeared to me as though the recommendation from the Center was to create just two categories, an operational and the research track, which, to me, does suggest that they would be eliminating a separate category of updates, of just updates. Anyway, that's why I brought it up, because I thought that was their intent.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Anne, and I agree with you, because it still is my understanding that, ultimately, this is going to replace the current benchmark, standard, and update assessments once this is in place, but, again, that is not clear in the language in any of the documents.

DR. SCHUELLER: My view on it was that the operational and research track assessments would replace the update, standard, and benchmark, but, if that's not clear in the documentation, rather than saying they should maintain a strict update category, I feel like we should say that they should clarify their intentions, and I'm not so sure that I agree either, I guess, with the strict update category.

I don't understand why it can't be in the continuum of operational assessments, and I do like the document that John sent around that went through basically the committee document, where they went through the pieces of the assessments and said, yes, it's okay to change this and, no, it's not okay to change that.

It seems like that might be a good thing for the Steering Committee to look at and consider as part of the operational assessments, and then, if it is a strict update, then that whole sheet would just be don't change anything, but then everyone would be aware and informed of that, because it would have gone through a committee. That's my two-cents.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks, Amy. Anne, you were the one that brought this up. Would you be comfortable with that right now, making that part of the range of operational assessments, but make sure that that language is clarified?

MS. LANGE: Actually, Marcel, once an assessment is assigned to a category, a timeframe is allotted for it, and, again, we're looking at trying to increase efficiency with the staff that's available at the Center to do the assessments. To me, an operational assessment would be assigned a longer timeframe than would be a strict update assessment, and so, when they're trying to do planning in the future, if they have two or three stocks that it's clear there are no changes in the model, and it's clear there are no new data streams and that only a year or two of additional information or data needs to be added, then planning can be set up more in tune with trying to be efficient, I think. Now, fewer months would be required for that than would be required for any of the other operational ones that were comparable to our standard assessments, and that's just my point, but whatever the committee decides.

DR. REICHERT: Well, these are consensus statements, and so, looking at the current text, does that address your point, and we can potentially -- Once we send a report out, people can clarify their intentions, although obviously we have a very short turnaround.

DR. SERCHUK: I have another comment, Marcel, about this, if I may. If you look at the link that I sent out to people, which listed the three categories in the Northeast, it's not only the provisions for the how an assessment is viewed relative to the data sources and the modeling framework that separate out an operational assessment from an update in the Northeast, but it's also the subsequent peer review that those assessments have.

Operational assessments in the Northeast have a different peer review process than the updates do, and I don't know whether that's the same here between a standard assessment and an update assessment, but, if they are exactly identical here, they are not in the Northeast, but, if you're going to keep this sentence, you might clarify the scope of operational assessments and the concomitant peer review.

DR. REICHERT: Okay.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay, because they are different, and the reason they're different is the update assessments have very limited peer review, because the modeling framework and the data streams are exactly as those that were previously peer reviewed, and so they don't need very much of a peer review, other than a cursory peer review by the SSC.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Within SEDAR now, as I said earlier, the update assessments are peer reviewed by the SSC, just like those in the Northeast. Our standard assessments are also peer reviewed by the SSC, and so the difference, in our case, is not in the level of peer review. It's not amongst the different -- However, our standard assessments also have a panel, and so we have a bit of that ongoing through the process type of peer review with SSC members, who participate on that panel. Being a council process, it's open to the public, and there is usually some state data providers and other folks. Our main difference is we have a panel that kind of goes through that assessment and goes through any new data that are being considered to provide recommendations to the analysts, and then all of that is taken to the SSC also for peer review.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay, and so there are differences then.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, John. That was a clarification that I was going to make, in terms of the review process, but it would be good to clarify that whole review process a little further. That goes back to one of the first points, in terms of clarifying the process a little bit further. I would say the role of peer review and the role of the SSC. Are there any other comments? I will give people a little bit of time to go through that and make sure that this is what people understand the essence of our discussions were, including our recommendations. Any hands up, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, there are not.

DR. REICHERT: I just noticed that the control view changed. I am not sure if you changed something on your end that --

MR. CARMICHAEL: What I did was I had a momentary lapse of internet connection there, when Luiz was wrapping up his comments, and so we may have actually lost a bit of that on our actual recordings, or there may be a gap in the minutes, but what I did to try and stop things was I made you an organizer. That way, if I were to have dropped off of the call, the whole thing would have ended, but, with you as an organizer, that means you could stay on, and so just don't exit and end the webinar for everybody and you will be good.

DR. REICHERT: Sorry, guys, for the technical details here, but I don't have to hit the "start recording"?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No. We're still recording.

DR. REICHERT: All right, and so no hands up, and so this is basically what we as an SSC recommend to the council for their meeting. John and I may fix up the text a little bit. We obviously have a very quick turnaround, and so I hope to send this out to the committee later today, and I hope you can -- If you have any comments, that you can send that to John and myself relatively quickly. Of course, I am not sure what's going to happen next week with Hurricane Irma, but I would like to send this out to the council probably by Friday. John, what is the procedure here?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, as soon as we can. The sooner we can get it to the council, the better.

DR. REICHERT: All right. Any other comments relative to this agenda item or recommendations or clarifications?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I see no hands, Mr. Chair.

DR. REICHERT: All right. That brings us to Agenda Item 3, Other Business. Scott, you mentioned something earlier, and would you like to remind the committee what you said at the beginning of our meeting?

3. OTHER BUSINESS

DR. CROSSON: Yes, and I was just -- I had a few questions, maybe for council staff, on this, and perhaps the rest of the SSC. I'm just trying to recall everything that happened back in April with our discussion of the ABC, setting an ABC recommendation, for red snapper. Since the council has been moving forward with this with Amendment 43, when we originally -- I looked back at our report in April, and we had talked about the possibility of deriving an estimate of SSB from the fisheries-independent index, and we also mentioned that that was going to require a lot of cooperation between the council and the SSC and the Center and that it would need some sort of peer review. I guess I'm curious as to what steps are being taken to move forward with that, so that we can ensure that the scientific review process is intact.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Are you asking what steps are being done to develop the index method that was discussed?

DR. CROSSON: Yes, pretty much. We don't have it obviously in front of us at this meeting, and so are we going to be looking at that in October, or is that something that we will be looking at? Obviously, at this point, the emergency action that the council is discussing, it's not going to be in place for that, but are we going to be looking at it either in October or April, before the Amendment 43 proposal goes forward?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We do expect you guys to be looking at some of this in April, and the development of the index approach for an ABC is looking like a bit longer timeframe, I think, than what the council is doing on the amendment.

DR. REICHERT: John, can I interrupt you real quick? I've got two questions relative to what you just said. You said we expect you to look at some of this in April. What do you mean by some of this, and do you mean to say April or our October meeting?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I guess I mean the October meeting, and we expect you to be looking at the amendment and be briefed on what the council has been doing, and I am not sure what's going on in terms of the efforts that Erik detailed about working on the index evaluations for monitoring a stock. It's probably better if he were to speak about that.

DR. REICHERT: Erik, do you think you may have something in October?

DR. WILLIAMS: Honestly, no, because we sort of stopped progress on some of that, in part because we've been tasked with other things for SEDAR, and also in part because it appears that management was moving forward irrespective of that particular topic.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Chip, I will unmute you, just in case you have anything to add.

DR. COLLIER: Can you hear me?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, we can hear you, Chip. Thanks, and, again, sorry to put you on the spot here.

DR. COLLIER: What we've done for the council is we have essentially taken Amendment 43 and we've separated it into several different pieces. Primarily what we're going forward with in

Amendment 43 is establishing an ACL, and that ACL is based on landings that occurred in 2012 to 2014, with some of the alternatives increased based on the observations from the fishery-independent index.

The other parts of Amendment 43 are going to be pushed into Amendment 46, and so some of those would include establishing the ABC as well as different methods for reporting, any size limit considerations, and any best fishing practices. All of those would be pushed back into a separate amendment.

Some of the reason for that is because it would take a lot longer to develop some of those items. Best fishing practices would probably take about a year in order to establish how much some of those things would cost. Recreational reporting is going to take much longer and actually might get pushed into a separate amendment from Amendment 46, if the council decides to go forward with that. Let's see some of the other things that have been going on. Some of the information was --

DR. REICHERT: Chip, the --

DR. COLLIER: Go ahead.

DR. REICHERT: I didn't mean to interrupt you. Go ahead, and I will hold off with my questions.

DR. COLLIER: Okay. Well, go ahead and ask questions.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. There is actually now three things going on. You've got the emergency rule, you've got Amendment 43, and then some of that was moved over to -- Some of the discussions that we had earlier are now moved over to Amendment 46, and so in terms of a couple of questions I had that weren't clear in what I read. The proposed measure in Amendment 43 is scheduled to begin in 2018, and this is no longer an interim measure, and is that correct?

DR. COLLIER: There is two different ways to look at that. Yes, Amendment 43 would go forward, and it would be there for 2018, and it would be there until changed, and so, in essence, all of it is interim until they're changed, and so there is no need in putting that language in there, or at least that's the discussions we had at the IPT level, and, therefore, that's why that language was taken out.

DR. REICHERT: So the red snapper assessment in the current schedule is not scheduled for 2020, right?

DR. COLLIER: I think John would have to mention on that. I can't remember when the next assessment for red snapper is.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We have a request to consider one in 2020, but it has not been finalized at this point.

DR. REICHERT: If that's going to be finalized, the management -- I reckon management is not going to be expected to be in place until the year after, possibly in 2022, and so is the expectation that this ACL will remain in place until that time?

DR. COLLIER: No, we're hoping different methods are developed to work on an ABC for red snapper.

DR. REICHERT: But Erik just mentioned that that is currently on hold, correct, or am I talking about two different things?

DR. COLLIER: No, I think you're talking about the same thing. Yes, Erik did mention that's on hold, and so there is the potential for this to be in place until 2022.

DR. SERCHUK: Marcel, I think I would like to make a recommendation for the SSC's consideration along the lines of this. This may not be the wording, but the SSC was informed that the research activity that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center was to undertake regarding linking an approach to the survey has been suspended. We regret hearing this, because we felt that this was a necessary activity to produce ACLs in the future or something like that.

I mean, the point is I am a little bit outraged to hear this, quite frankly. I am outraged for two reasons. One is the current methods that are included in the emergency action, and I won't get into whether it's an emergency or not, are all ad hoc. There is no scientific basis other than recent landing levels and how they're done. It doesn't have any direct relationship to the abundance of the resource other than to look at the trend in the survey index.

I thought Erik and his group were going to be looking at something a little bit more sophisticated than that and test it, and I thought that's what we had recommended at our last meeting, and to hear that that has been suspended for a resource that really needs some way of tracking, I find that unacceptable, and I'm sorry if I'm a little bit on a stump on this, but my feeling is that we were led to believe that this was going to happen. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Fred. I would like to hear from some other SSC members relative to the proposal that Fred just put out. Before I do that, I want to make sure that we all understood that correctly, that that research currently is on hold or whether that's just temporarily, because other things have gotten a higher priority.

DR. WILLIAMS: It's been temporarily put on hold, and one point of clarification is the method we've been looking into was never intended to provide an ABC. We have never stated that and never expected that. It was a method for monitoring the performance of the fishery, because that was the issue. It was not that we needed to establish an ABC, because it appeared, at the time, that the course of action was going to be continue with the moratorium and that what we needed to do was monitor the recovery of the stock and to see if it was in alignment with our expectations with rebuilding. That's where that research was headed towards.

It is just temporarily suspended, and I say it's temporarily suspended, partly because of resources, but we're also trying to figure out where are we going with this if -- If the management is going ahead with ABCs, then is this method even needed at this point for monitoring? That's why we're trying to assess where to best spend our resources, because I don't want to waste time on a research topic that then isn't going to get used. I mean, we're sort of in a holding pattern.

DR. REICHERT: I had a hard time hearing you when you were talking about ABC. You said you were awaiting -- Again, I lost you there for a couple of seconds.

DR. WILLIAMS: Just to reiterate, yes, the method was never meant to provide ABCs. It was meant to monitor the performance of the fishery into the future, using the fishery-independent index as the monitoring tool. We are currently thinking about methods that could serve us in the interim to provide ABC advice that would be just short of a full-blown update assessment, and that is why I say we have suspended the current research, because we're actually trying to figure out if we should proceed with a different track of trying to come up with something that can provide interim ABC advice between assessments or not, but the method that I talked about and was presented to you guys at your last meeting never had the intention of providing ABCs. It was only a monitoring tool.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks for that clarification.

DR. SERCHUK: Erik, we know that, because there was no need for an ABC at the time, because there was no fishery allowed. Now the situation has changed, and what I'm concerned about is there is no technical basis for the ABC or ACLs that have been proposed other than ad hoc. From a scientific point of view, I am concerned about it, and I would assume so are you.

DR. REICHERT: Anyone else?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I tried to capture the comments of Fred initially and then Erik's clarification, and so they're up here on the screen highlighted in yellow, and I think it's important to get the right wording on this, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Exactly. That is very important. My question is consider these useful for supporting ABC recommendations or is that rather, because, as Erik said, that was never meant to be in support of ABC recommendations.

DR. SERCHUK: Chairman, I understand that, but the fact is there was no need to have an ABC recommendation at the time. There was no removals allowed. No landings were allowed, and that has now changed.

DR. REICHERT: I understand that, Fred, and I am just asking whether or not this is the language that needs to be -- That we want to have in there.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay, but you understand my point. I would hope that, as a science committee, we would say that it would be useful to have some linkage between allowable harvest and a survey index, for example, and I think I made the point, at our last meeting, that there are a number of stocks in the Northeast that we use an empirical basis. We look at the trends in the survey indices and the removals and try to develop a way to come up with ABC and ACL recommendations, and I thought that's what -- I am thinking that, although the Southeast Fisheries Center was not going into that, that that wasn't the reason for developing their index-based approach, it could be used for that purpose, and it may have more scientific merit than the ad hoc methods that are currently or will be used under the emergency action and any subsequent action taken after that. That's my only point.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Anyone else? I would like to hear from some other SSC members.

DR. CROSSON: This is, I guess, kind of a continuation and thinking about this in terms of what Fred just brought up. When I look at the emergency measure for the council, they indicate, in I think it's on page 10 of it, but they basically state that -- They're basically saying that the inability to monitor the quota was one of the deficiencies or one of the difficulties with us making an ABC recommendation, and I guess what I don't see is the clarification.

I understand the problems with the bycatch fishery and the uncertainties that surround that with red snapper, because it's been closed, mostly, for the past number of years, but I'm not sure that the inability to monitor a directed fishery is an issue for this, either for the recreational or the commercial component, and so I'm a little confused about that also with the council's language there.

DR. REICHERT: Anyone else?

DR. AHRENS: Just given the discussion I've heard, it would seem reasonable to change, in that first little bullet, indicating that we thought that there was a potential to kind of enhance the harvest control rules.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Something like that? Is that what you were thinking?

DR. AHRENS: Yes, and just not combining that notion that it wasn't picked up as -- That wasn't its original purpose, and it was picked up as perhaps an additional tool to monitor the population, but, as the SSC, we feel that there may be a potential to integrate some type of index like that into any sort of harvest control rule that's being used.

DR. SERCHUK: Marcel, can we take that last sentence in that first paragraph, and, instead of the first thing being "useful for supporting ABC recommendations", "useful for monitoring the stock and also the potential to enhance harvest control rules". That's fine, I think.

DR. REICHERT: I would like to hear from some of the other folks. Thanks for that clarification, but I would like to hear from some of the other folks. Does anyone have a hand up, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Chip has his hand back up, but that may be from before.

DR. REICHERT: Then, Chip, go ahead.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. There were a couple of things. We have to remember that MRIP is a long-term program, and it samples over multiple months, and so, if we are going to be using MRIP for any landings program for something like red snapper that could potentially last us two weekends, it's probably not a valuable tool to estimate landings, and, therefore, different methods will need to be used to kind of track landings, in that sense, and so the methods that were developed were using information outside of the new MRIP program. Yes, it's very limited in what we had, but that is the information that was available to us, and that's the information that was used to establish these ACLs that the council is considering. I actually lost my train of thought. Sorry.

DR. REICHERT: That's okay. Can I ask you a question relative to that?

DR. COLLIER: Sure.

DR. REICHERT: This goes more to the -- What happens if we stay way under or go way over these ACLs? Is there accountability in place, in terms of a next season or reopening the season later in the year?

DR. COLLIER: For 2018, the year would start in July, and, in Amendment 26, when that's going to be developed, that will be looking at -- That could be looking at additional accountability measures for the future as well as changing the season. In Amendment 43, which is setting the ACLs, what's going to happen is there is no true accountability measures in that, but, when you calculate the season length for the following year, it would use the catch rates from the previous year in order to estimate how long the season is going to be, and so, in a sense, that is kind of an accountability measure, which it would change the season length depending on the catch rates, and so the season for the recreational fishery is calculated prior to opening.

One of the reasons that we're focusing so much effort on the recreational fishery is, if you guys remember, over 70 percent of the allocation is given to the recreational sector. Just 30 percent goes to the commercial sector, which has better reporting. The headboat fishery also has really good reporting, with the weekly reporting, but that's just a small component of the overall recreational sector.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thanks for that clarification. Did you pick up your train of thought, or it's still gone?

DR. COLLIER: It's still gone.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Then I would like to go back to the text that we have on the screen here.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, you have a number of hands raised.

DR. REICHERT: Sorry. Go ahead.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think I had Anne, and then we also have Luiz and Rob again, and so let's start with Anne.

MS. LANGE: I think this language is sufficient, but I also think it's important that we at least comment on this as an SSC, since we have the opportunity to, with this meeting prior to the council. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Sorry, but can you repeat that? I didn't hear your last sentence.

MS. LANGE: I said I think it's important that we do include these statements, to make sure that the council is aware that we have some concerns about the red snapper and what's going on with the management.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thanks.

DR. BARBIERI: I just wanted to say that I understand, and I agree with most of the comments that have been made thus far. I do think that it was confusing for us to receive an official letter by the Science Center that had in writing a number of statements, and I believe that letter was signed by the Science Center Director, that had a number of statements that I think added to this confusion.

You may remember, if you go back to our briefing book, we were told explicitly in that letter that the council would need to request a new ABC. Remember that Erik approached the table back in April and explained that, no, this is not the case.

DR. REICHERT: Luiz, can I interrupt you? What letter are you referring to, in case people want to look that up? Is that the Attachment 21 at the last meeting?

DR. BARBIERI: I would have to go to that folder.

DR. REICHERT: Is that the April 3 letter from Bonnie to the council?

DR. BARBIERI: Yes.

DR. REICHERT: That's the letter that addressed overfishing.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, and there was a second page. I am trying to get to that folder in my computer as well.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, because there were a couple of letters that were written.

DR. BARBIERI: This is an April 21, 2017 letter to Gregg Waugh from Bonnie Ponwith, red snapper guidance request. This is Attachment 21.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Yes.

DR. BARBIERI: It has explicit language there, and then there is a second page that says, "SSC Input for April 2017 Meeting". Right there, it says the Southeast Fisheries Science Center proposes creating an index projection methodology that uses trends in the fishery-independent survey to monitor rebuilding progress and serve as the basis for the SSC's future ABC advice to the council. Then there is a number list of topics there, and Item Number 3 says to discuss how the index may be used by the SSC to develop ABC advice.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I am showing that. This is Attachment 21 from the April 2017 SSC briefing book.

DR. BARBIERI: Right. From the Science Center Director to the council's Executive Director, with explicit mention of the SSC, and it brings ABC advice there, and so, this weekend -- Scott, thank you for sending that. Scott sent out the meeting minutes from April, and I went over those pages to refresh my mind about that discussion, and, those notes and those minutes, I found it confused about what we were actually supposed to do, and I still am. I am just trying to explain here that there were things -- The way that this thing was set up, this process was set up, I think it added to the confusion.

DR. REICHERT: Can you scroll this up, John, a little bit?

MR. CARMICHAEL: To there?

DR. REICHERT: Can you scroll it further up?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Sure. Then you're in the first page, the response.

DR. BARBIERI: Marcel, I don't know if this is going to add much to the discussion here other than to say that I think there have been a number of issues that were unclear to the committee and that, when we receive official memoranda from the Science Center providing explicit instructions to the committee, it becomes very difficult for us to interpret that relative to other types of guidance provided by the Center.

DR. SERCHUK: Marcel, this is Fred.

DR. REICHERT: Fred, hold on. Luiz, and hold on to that thought, Fred. I will come back to you in just a little bit.

DR. SERCHUK: Sure.

DR. REICHERT: I am not entirely sure -- I am looking at that attachment here also, and I am not entirely sure where to go from here or what your recommendation is. Then, also, someone else had his hand up, John, and who was that? Can you remind me?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It was Rob earlier, but I think it was from the earlier comments, and so there are no other hands raised at the moment.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Sorry. Luiz, what is your --

DR. BARBIERI: I don't have a specific recommendation, Marcel. I think that this discussion that we are having is not really focused on recommendations. It's really to discuss issues. This is one that I want to point out that made things very confusing to me, because the way they interpreted the language here is --

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and, with recommendations, I didn't mean to formulate recommendations to the council, but it's just what your thoughts were relative to the SSC, and so thanks for that, and I agree. There were a bunch of issues that we discussed at our red snapper discussions at our last meeting, and I think I listed about seven that were relevant to our recommendations to the council. Fred, sorry. Go ahead.

DR. SERCHUK: I wanted to take that sentence that appeared in the letter and use it in our second sentence. This one, that the SSC proposes creating a -- That uses trends in the fishery to monitor rebuilding and serve as the basis for the SSC's future advice to the council, and I think to take that language and subsume it in our second sentence, and then we can make reference to Bonnie's letter.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This piece here, Fred?

DR. SERCHUK: Yes. Take that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay, and you want to put that in here?

DR. SERCHUK: Regrets this news, because the SSC -- We will have to make some changes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: How about maybe a new paragraph for that, or a new statement?

DR. SERCHUK: Okay, but I was trying to put it with the SSC regrets the news, because it could be useful for monitoring the stock and for ABC, whatever was in that sentence about ABCs.

MR. CARMICHAEL: What about if you said for monitoring the stock and developing ABC recommendations and you all struck the "ABC"? Do you want to put that back?

DR. SERCHUK: What I want do is "regrets this news, because the SSC considers these efforts useful for monitoring the stock".

DR. REICHERT: And serve as the basis for the SSC's future ABC advice.

DR. SERCHUK: Exactly.

DR. REICHERT: That is what is Fred is saying. That's the language from the Science Center's letter.

DR. SERCHUK: As noted in the -- That's right. That's exactly right.

DR. REICHERT: As noted in the Science Center's letter from April 21, 2017.

DR. SERCHUK: We consider those efforts useful for monitoring the stock.

DR. REICHERT: So does that mean that we can drop that second -- Sorry. Go ahead.

DR. SERCHUK: For monitoring the stock. I would like to see "for monitoring the stock" the first issue in that sentence, because that's what Erik emphasized, but that is what is also emphasized in the letter.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I misunderstood you there.

DR. SERCHUK: Sorry.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right. I think we got it, what you were looking for.

DR. REICHERT: That means that that second paragraph below there, starting with "further", we can drop that, because that's now inconsistent with what we said above.

DR. SERCHUK: Right.

MR. CARMICHAEL: However, as was noted, Erik, a number of times during the meeting in April, indicated that what was in that letter was perhaps a bit farther than they could do with the index. I think that is correct, if I'm capturing that. Is that right, Erik?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, and I think you need to be very clear in the language that you guys are using. The method that we were proposing was going to provide indications of whether the stock was on progress with rebuilding or not and to what degree. It was not going to provide an actual ABC number explicitly, but that information could obviously be used to determine if a current ABC is effective or not, and so it's a nuance, but it's an important one. I think you guys are -- The way this reads now, you were expecting that this method was going to give you a specific ABC setting, when it wasn't, but it was going to give you a tool that would help in determining if an ABC that was in place was appropriate or not or consistent with rebuilding, and so there's a slight nuance there, but a very important one.

DR. REICHERT: Perhaps that goes to the confusion that Luiz brought up earlier, but I don't want to put words in his mouth.

DR. SCHUELLER: Does anybody have comments specific to this, because I am going to change gears just a little bit here, and I don't want to do that unless this conversation is complete.

DR. REICHERT: We have about ten minutes. Let's finish this, and then I will let you -- Unless this is directly related to this text, I would like to -- Because this is important, I would like to finish this text, and then I will come back to you, and you can bring up another issue.

DR. SCHUELLER: Okay. Thanks.

DR. REICHERT: Luiz, is this -- You earlier brought up this letter, and thanks for reminding us of that, and I had the April 3 letter printed out, but does this kind of address some of the things that you brought up earlier?

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, it does, yes.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, because I think there is still, in my mind, a little bit of a confusion with to serve as the basis of the SSC's future ABC advice and the fact that this wasn't -- Not support an explicit ABC recommendation, and I think there is still -- I need to think about how to wrap my head around that a little bit.

I need to look at the minutes of the last meeting. Erik may have mentioned that same issue at that meeting, but I need to look through the minutes, and so, in terms of the text, as we have it here highlighted in yellow, any of the SSC members have any comments or issues or questions relative to what's in here, because this is the language that will go into our report to the council. John, are there any hands raised?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Scott has his hand up, but don't forget that we need to check on any public comment before we end the meeting.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks. Scott, go ahead.

DR. CROSSON: I don't want to make this long, and I know we need to wrap this up, but I just would add that we did have NOAA General Counsel up during the discussion, after looking at the minutes from that meeting. We had NOAA General Counsel up there at the table telling us that, if you can't make an ABC recommendation, you basically should be trying to give some kind of help to the council on this, and so that was our understanding, I thought, or it certainly was my understanding, of what was driving the discussion, in terms of this index, and so that's all I have to add on that.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thank you, and I agree with that. I noticed that myself. Anyone else, before I go to Amy?

DR. BARBIERI: Marcel, I have just one more comment. I find the statement that the fishery was supposed to stay closed, that there would be no ABC, confusing, because, if a new ABC was not needed, the SSC did provide a yield stream of OFL and ABC that started in 2016 and went for five years, and so there were OFL and ABC recommendations from the SSC that were on the books. I am bringing this up because this idea that there was an expectation that the fishery would have no directed harvest I think conflicts with that.

DR. REICHERT: I think you're right, and I'm not sure if that's what Fred said, but I will let him answer that. The other thing is we need to -- There may be an opportunity for us to discuss this, or I hope there will be an opportunity for us to discuss this, at the October meeting, because maybe you will remember that, after the corrected assessment, we never revisited that ABC recommendation, and so there is an ABC recommendation, but that's based on that earlier stock assessment, but perhaps we can pick this up at our October meeting.

DR. SERCHUK: While I understand the second paragraph there, my point in the first paragraph was to give some support to those people at the Center that were working on this project that the SSC considers this important and not to get bogged down in these details about what the exercise is going to do or not going to do.

For me, really, the only thing that was important is our hearing that it was temporarily suspended and that we regret this, because we thought the exercise was important, and my only reason for putting this in was to give added support for those people at the Center who indicated that they were working on the project and that it continue. Everything else in the bottom paragraph is details that, for me, were irrelevant to my intervention.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Do you want to clarify that? Do you want the SSC to request that specifically, that that research continue?

DR. SERCHUK: Well, I think it says that. The SSC regrets this news, because the SSC considered those efforts useful for monitoring the stock and for serving as a basis, and I think that's clear enough.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. That's fine.

DR. SERCHUK: But I don't think anything in the second paragraph is important relative to that, and I guess I would ask Erik. I know you're trying to be letter perfect here, but would the first

paragraph be sufficient to give you the support that might be needed to continue the work at the Center on this approach?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, I think that would be sufficient, yes. Just to add, I do think that second paragraph sort of hints at the reason it was suspended is because we're waiting on an outcome of management actions, and that's only part of the picture. The other is a resource commitment problem. We were basically tasked with doing another assessment revision, which I think Bonnie is on the record at the June council meeting as saying that, if you ask for this, it's going to impact our research on the red snapper index work, and it has, and that specifically was the golden tilefish revision analysis that we're actually working on right now in place of this index work.

DR. SERCHUK: Erik, if we struck the second paragraph, would it be better or would it -- I think the second paragraph undermines the first paragraph. That's all I'm suggesting, and I'm asking your opinion of whether we would be better off without the second paragraph.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, I think you're right.

DR. REICHERT: I would also like to pose this question to the rest of the SSC. Is there anyone that disagrees with removing that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Don't forget that it will be in your minutes, and so, if you don't feel this adds to your recommendations, this clarification, then certainly we can do that, delete it.

DR. REICHERT: Okay.

MS. LANGE: I agree.

DR. SCHUELLER: I was thinking that, or wondering, if the SSC would want to make another statement in this Other Business and specifically related to scientific integrity and upholding the process. I don't know, but it seems like things have gone a little astray. It seems like there's been a lot of confusion, and I guess, in a typical process, the assessments are reviewed, the amendments are reviewed, and there is several steps.

I guess I'm wondering if we want to make a statement about maintaining scientific integrity and maintaining a review process, because I am really unsure at this point as to who is reviewing the ad hoc approaches and if it's being reviewed externally somehow, because, most of the time, these assessments are reviewed and vetted very thoroughly, and so I feel like there is a disconnect here in the process, and I wondered if anybody else felt that way or if the SSC wanted to make a statement about that.

DR. REICHERT: Anyone else to that point?

DR. SERCHUK: I think that point was made in the public submission by I believe it was Oceana, that they felt that there was a scientific process that the council should take cognizance of. My feeling is what's the emergency? The Service has defined what the emergency is. They believe that there is opportunities foregone here, economic, and the Service can declare an emergency, but, as I recall the letter, and I think it was from Oceana --

DR. REICHERT: Was it Oceana or Pew?

DR. SERCHUK: Excuse me. Pew. It was Pew, and we all received it, I believe, and I thought that letter was well crafted, but I don't want to get into the politics of it. Obviously, when someone creates an emergency, then the Service has full authority to do what they think is appropriate, and they have and they will. I don't want to create ill political feelings here, irrespective of how I feel about the action, and I think that the rest of us would agree that it's not our role, particularly when we saw the article that basically said the council has the authority to set the ACLs, and they do.

DR. SCHUELLER: Fred, I am not trying to start a political thing. I was just trying to make sure that we're ensuring continuity in science across assessments.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay. If you have a sentence or two that you would like to provide, I think we could consider it. I would consider it, and I don't know about the Chair, but I think we're all unhappy, a little bit, about the process.

DR. REICHERT: Amy, you mentioned assessments, and I think this is broader than assessments, because, in the past, as an SSC, we have reviewed methods, and we have reviewed every amendment, as well as assessments, and so our role to the council is broader than just providing review of an assessment and providing an ABC that results from that assessment, and so do you have any suggested language that you would like to add to our report?

DR. SCHUELLER: I hadn't even thought about that part of it. I wanted to see what other people thought about it before I went that far.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. While you are pondering that, let me ask other members to chime in relative to this topic.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel, I do want to make a statement clarifying regarding the record. Fred mentioned a letter, and we didn't send you guys any letter of comment as part of the official record, and so I'm not aware of what letter he is referring to, and it wasn't part of the meeting materials.

DR. REICHERT: No, it was not.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Just to make that clear, that's not part of our record, some correspondence which you may have received, and so there are probably people on here that aren't really sure what that is about, and we certainly can't show it in the way that we showed the attachment, for example, from our April meeting.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks for that reminder, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think this committee may want to wait and see how things go in September, and know that you're meeting in October. You can have a more reasoned discussion, perhaps, since it's already 12:06, and I will note that Rob just raised his hand.

DR. AHRENS: I guess the only comment that I had was that I actually appreciate that, as the SSC, we're here to provide scientific advice, and maybe, if there is something within the structure and

the process that prevents from providing that input in a timely manner, that -- It is unfortunate that we haven't worked towards creating a framework where that scientific advice can happen more rapidly on these sorts of things, and so I think my -- I appreciate that maybe they did not want scientific advice on it, but, if they did, that maybe thinking carefully about how that information share and that evaluation can happen when these sorts of circumstances arise would be perhaps a useful thing to visit. Thank you.

DR. SCHUELLER: I agree with what you just said, Robert. It's about better service, right, and so better scientific service to the topics at hand and in a timely fashion, and so maybe that's more along the lines of what could be put in here.

DR. REICHERT: Anyone else?

DR. SERCHUK: John, can I ask you a question while Amy is working on her language? Regarding correspondence to the committee, were you implying that any correspondence that was submitted by SSC members to the rest of the SSC really can't be considered as information that the SSC was provided?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, you guys are free individuals, and you can send things to whoever you choose, but I'm just clarifying what is a part of our official record versus things which are not.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay. Official record of the committee or official record of -- I'm not really quite sure. Does that mean, if I want something to be considered official, that I have to send it to you and you would have to send it to the committee?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, that's the way it goes, John, right?

MR. CARMICHAEL: If you would like to send something to the committee and have it be part of the record of the council and the record of the council's business and its administrative record, then, yes, it needs to come through us.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay, but the letter that Pew sent went to the council.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't know that it went to the SSC. That's why --

DR. SERCHUK: Well, that's because the council often doesn't --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Some don't know of the letter.

DR. SERCHUK: Yes, I know, but that's because the council doesn't often provide the SSC with information that, in my view, the SSC should be provided with. In the future, when I see that, I will certainly provide it to you and ask that it be provided to the SSC, if that's the way it's done. I am sorry that I didn't understand that, but the fact is the council received the letter, and my feeling is, if the council received the letter, then it's in the domain of the council, and we're a committee of the council.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It is in the council's administrative record if someone forwarded you a letter that they also sent to the council.

DR. SERCHUK: Okay. I will make sure that, just to be on the right side of things, if I see something that pertains to the SSC, I will make sure that I send it to you and ask that you distribute it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and all of our stuff is available to you guys. If you would like more of the information that comes in and the comments, we can certainly make that available to you, that which isn't already available on the website and other places. Most of it is, and perhaps one thing we can do is I can have our outreach folks come in at the October meeting and brief you on what the council is now doing, in terms of making all those comments available. It will give you a way to look at them online at your leisure.

MS. LANGE: I think everyone on the SSC did receive that letter from Pew, Fred, in case you weren't aware of that.

DR. SERCHUK: I know they received it, Anne, but what I'm hearing from John is, even though we received it from Pew, it didn't go through the proper channels to be considered as a formal thing that was sent to the SSC from the staff.

MS. LANGE: Gotcha. Sorry about that. Thank you.

DR. SERCHUK: Is that correct, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's correct, because we don't know -- I don't know if you guys are talking about a letter that we received as comment on an amendment or something that was simply forwarded to you guys or if it's an entirely separate letter. When we don't have it to look at it, we don't know anything about it, and so apparently some SSC members, maybe all, received a letter, and, here at staff, we weren't copied, and so we don't know that letter.

We don't know if it's something that we already received or it's something entirely new, and so it just gets difficult, in terms of an open public meeting, when people refer to a letter, but it's not something in our briefing documents. We have to make it clear, just to head off troubles down the road. We can have, for example, the people doing the minutes go, well, there is this letter discussed and you didn't provide that in the documentation. That's not part of the record, and so we need to make it clear what we have and what we don't have.

DR. SCHUELLER: John, I just emailed you some rough, vague text. You can take a look at it and put it up there, I guess, for the group to pick away at.

DR. AHRENS: I threw some in in the question thing, too.

DR. REICHERT: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This is the text from Amy.

DR. AHRENS: I threw some in in the little question box, too.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay, Rob.

DR. REICHERT: Is this your language, Amy?

DR. SCHUELLER: Yes. One thought I had is we meet twice a year, and I know other SSCs meet more often than that, and so that's just one example, and I'm sure there are others that other folks could come up with.

DR. REICHERT: The other thing is we do have -- I mean, the whole reason that we are having this webinar is because there was an issue that came up that the council wanted our input on, and so we had the webinar, and so there is a process in place for that, but your point is taken. Would it be useful to meet more often or have a potential ad hoc meeting? I just wanted to point out that we do have a process in place for us to, at relatively short notice, discuss an issue, and we've done that in the past, I believe with blue-line tilefish.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think I can merge the two comments together fairly well. Let's see what you think. I see Shepherd has his hand up, and so let's give him a chance, too. I'm sorry it's been a while as we worked through that.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you. I just wanted to speak to what John had said in terms of making sure that the documents get in the record. It's more of a practical consideration. If SSC members are emailing each other individually, that is not going to be captured in any central email database or somewhere we can access it all and compile those documents for any eventual administrative record that might be needed, but also, any time we're talking about documents in the context of an SSC meeting, council meeting, AP meeting, you name it, we just need to be very specific about what that document is, so, as John mentioned, we can match up the discussion in the minutes with the actual document being discussed, and that was my only point. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Thanks for that clarification, Shep.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I also have Michelle and Zack. I don't know if you guys want to -- Michelle, I see you were on there, and did you want to add something on this, or did you want to wait until the final public comment?

DR. DUVAL: I was waiting and had my hand raised for public comment.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. I will wait on you guys. We're getting there.

DR. REICHERT: I am reading the text. The questions are going to be what -- We can discuss this at our October meeting, but what improvements to the process can be made? What improvements are we proposing? George and I can have a conversation with council members, council leadership, and council staff leadership, to discuss this and see if we can come up with some ideas that may help improvement of the process.

DR. AHRENS: I think that would be useful. That would be helpful.

DR. REICHERT: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Do you wish to meet more often?

DR. REICHERT: Anyone?

MR. CARMICHAEL: In the past, we have discussed this, and, the last time, and obviously SSC membership changes and attitudes change over time. The last time we had the discussion about meeting between each council meeting, the recommendation of the group at that time was that, no, they didn't wish to do that and twice a year, they felt, was adequate and getting any more than that could be more of a time challenge for the members.

DR. REICHERT: John, given the time, what I would like to do is -- I really would like the members to consider what we can do, including adding meetings, and I would like to discuss this at the next SSC meeting next month, in October, and so we will make some room on the agenda to discuss this.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think that's best, given the time.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. All right.

DR. SERCHUK: Marcel, can I make a comment?

DR. REICHERT: Absolutely, Fred, but keep an eye on the time.

DR. SERCHUK: Yes, and sometimes saying very little can say a lot more. My feeling is I would like to have that last paragraph just have the first sentence: The SSC regrets that the nature of the timing of the emergency action precluded an opportunity for its input. Full stop. The rest of the stuff is for us to discuss with the council at another time.

MS. LANGE: I agree with that.

DR. SERCHUK: That's my proposal, Chair.

DR. AHRENS: I am okay with that.

DR. REICHERT: The only reason I am hesitating is because I think this goes beyond the emergency action.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think we can have a discussion. You have asked for it, and you're the Chair, and you can have it on the agenda, and we can have further discussion.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. I am good with just keeping the first sentence, and then we can discuss this further at the next meeting. Anyone?

DR. SCHUELLER: I am fine with that, if the resolution is to keep the first sentence, but then we chat about this as a group, but it would be worthwhile to have some input from council staff or folks on this topic, and so thanks.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I will see that I get some input prior to our meeting, and then also we'll ask council staff and council leadership to participate in the discussions we will have in

October. Okay. No one disagrees with deleting that? Seeing none, John, any hands at this moment, except for Michelle and Zack?

MR. CARMICHAEL: That is all, and so, if you want to move into public comment.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, let's open the floor for public comments. Michelle, go ahead.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments on the discussion that you all have been having. I think, with regard to Amendment 43, the discussion that the council had in June was that this would be an interim approach while the Center was working on this alternative index-based approach, and Dr. Ponwith did indicate that the request that was made with regard to golden tilefish would impact the delivery of that index-based approach, but I think the council was also looking at the same letter that you all had discussed with regard to using that as a basis for a future ABC recommendation that the SSC might provide, and so I just wanted to emphasize that Amendment 43, by our discussion at the last council meeting, was meant to be an interim approach, and so that was just one comment.

I think the other thing that I wanted -- A couple other items that I wanted to note was, in terms of comments to the SSC, just at the top of your process document, your agenda document, it clearly states that the SAFMC public comment process for the SSC -- It states that written comment to be considered by the SSC shall be provided to the council office no later than one week prior to an SSC meeting, and it's stated that the deadline for that would have been 12:00 p.m. Tuesday, August 29, 2017.

My concern, in terms of documents that are submitted directly to SSC members outside of this process is that it can certainly give the appearance of, for lack of a better term, third-party lobbying as a mechanism to influence a management decision, and so I would just certainly urge caution in that regard.

Then I think just a couple other items. In considering emergency action, so this was an issue -- The emergency action that is before the council for the meeting next week was one that was raised by the Regional Administrator that the council might want to consider an emergency action, based on communications that have been received by Florida congressional delegation members, and this was after the council's June meeting, and those were letters that suggested the actions taken by Secretary Ross in the Gulf might be something that he would want to consider in the South Atlantic.

This is why that agenda item is on the council's agenda, and it would certainly be disingenuous of me to presuppose what the outcome of that discussion might be, but I do think it behooves the council to have, certainly, a full and robust discussion as to the pros and cons of moving forward or not with emergency action, and I guess, in regards to the timeliness issue, certainly I think we could discuss additional SSC meetings, and, as a personal perspective, I certainly agree that additional meetings would probably be useful, additional regularly-scheduled meetings, but I would note that the National Standard 2 Guidelines state that, with regard to timeliness, mandatory

management actions should not be delayed due to limitations in the scientific information or the promise of future data collection or analysis.

In some cases, due to time constraints, results of important studies or monitoring programs may be considered for use before they are full complete. Uncertainties and risks that arise from an incomplete study should be acknowledged, but interim results may be better than no results to help inform a management decision. I will simply leave my comments at that, and thank you for the opportunity. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Michelle. Zack, go ahead.

MR. BOWEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a clarifying question for me, and I know it's in public comment, but I've kind of had my hand raised for quite a while, and I know that you and Luiz kind of touched on this a little bit, but, if the index of abundance approach was not intended to provide an ABC recommendation, does that mean that the 2016 ABC recommendation still stands? Thank you for letting me comment and speak.

DR. REICHERT: I am hesitating, because I want to -- This could potentially be a lengthy discussion, and this is something that we discussed at length at the last SSC meeting, and so I am not sure how to address that without running the risk of a lengthy discussion.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think that may be part of the direction the council has to discuss in September of dealing with this. I see Shep has his hand raised, too.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to Zack's question, I think that's a record issue that the council and the agency are going to have to address and consider relative to any action that involves potential harvest above the ABC that came from the SSC last time an ABC recommendation was provided.

I would also like to add and echo some of what I think I heard Dr. Barbieri and others mention, and perhaps it was some failing on my part at the last SSC meeting, but, when I went back and read the minutes, it was even more confusing than it was to me having experienced it, and, initially, there was talk about getting an ABC recommendation, and then we had explicit comments from the NMFS Regional Administrator and others that the body was not being asked for an ABC recommendation at the meeting, yet there was a lot of talk around it, and so it is a rather confused record, and we should strive to make it a little more clear when addressing these issues in the future.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, and that's why I was hesitant to start that conversation, because I brought earlier up that we have an ABC recommendation that is based on the original stock assessment. We did not correct our ABC recommendation based on the corrected stock assessment, and so that's a much more complicated discussion that we'll probably need to have, and we'll probably need some guidance from you and others in terms of how to approach that, but thank you for that clarification. Anyone else?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No further hands, Mr. Chairman.

DR. REICHERT: All right. With that, I thank everyone for the discussions today, and I apologize that we went over for about a half-an-hour. I look forward to seeing everyone in October, and I will, as I said, talk with John and with George and talk about meeting with council members and council staff in preparation of our October meeting.

All I want to say now is that I hope that Irma stays away and peters out, although the forecast doesn't look like that, and I wish everyone good luck and a good day, and we'll see you in October. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned on September 5, 2017.)

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

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September 7, 2017

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