Bill Whipple: My name is Bill Whipple. I'm a golden crab fisherman. I'd like to address three different issues. First one is concerning CEBA. One objective of CEBA 1 was to retain the historical fishing grounds of the golden crab fishery. Intensive collaboration between golden crab fishermen and council members and staff aimed at fulfilling this objective. Unfortunately, the complexity of the overall task took its toll and the objective fell short in two areas – coral boundaries and buffer zone with royal red fishermen. As far as the coral boundaries is concerned, at least three golden crab fishermen have identified in their individual traditional fishing areas significant reductions in the grounds available to them. These limitations became apparent only after the final publication of the HEP C boundaries. We were advised when we brought this to the attention of the staff and council to delay efforts to pursue these issues until work began on CEBA 2. We would now like the opportunity to work with council and staff to correct what we believe are inadvertent discrepancies between original intention and final result.

Secondly, there was an agreement made between golden crab fishermen and royal red shrimpers approved by their attorney and confirmed by a letter to Dwain Harris, then chairman of the council, that gave access for golden crabbers to royal red grounds. This agreement confirmed a longstanding practice approved by the fishermen affected. This agreement was to be honored by the terms of CEBA 1. Only after the fact did golden crabbers learn that the agreement was left out of the final document apparently at the request of law enforcement. For years, use of these grounds has been part of our historical fishing practice. There has never been a conflict of any kind between shrimpers and crabbers, and accordingly we would like to have the issue revisited.

The second comment is relative to amendment five. In regard to action one concerning implementation of a catch share program for golden crab, the answer is, "Yes, I would approve." The recent upheaval of interest in the golden crab fishery has caused a lot of concern among all of us participating, and we want very much to avoid a derby and exploitation of the resource, avoid going through the normal pattern of relatively new resources when they are still plentiful and the interest and capital expense becomes too great, there's a decline, a free-for-all, poverty starts to set in and conflict, and then you try to rationalize what's going on and dig your way out. We want to avoid that process if possible.

With regard to the other alternatives and actions noticed in the amendment, I think you are aware that the advisory panel

developed these options with the cooperation of staff. They're premature in my opinion to make selections at this point, and we would like to analyze again with the cooperation with the staff and us all of the options that are there pruning and refining them as we go before we make the final choices on any of them.

The third comment has to do with the comprehensive ACL amendment, actions 26 and 27. Alternative two is to equate the ACL with OY and ABC at a total of 2,000,000 pounds. That we approve of. I do, and everybody else I think is thrilled to have it.

Historical landings have typically been around 600,000 pounds per year. These numbers do not reflect the capacity of the resource. Reasons for these conclusions are several. One, there has been no decline in crab size or CPUE over the years. Secondly, sales have been low, largely because of limited marketing range due to a perishability of the crab. And thirdly, fishing activity has been limited to a small portion of the available grounds. Under these conditions, the crab has been unable to gain stature in the marketplace, but recent developments are rapidly producing drastic changes. The instillation of refrigerated recirculated seawater in the fishing vessels had made global shipments of the much higher quality crab possible. Buyers from distant areas have found the crab highly desirable, and accordingly demand end prices have escalated. In order for the fishery to rise from a near subsists level to a profitable and highly professional status, the 2,000,000 pound ACL is both necessary and proper.

And with regard to action 27, we feel that alternative two and alternative three should be combined. I would comment though that we – I keep saying "we". I think we all agree on what we're looking for here. Needs to be some clarification on both two and three. It should be noted that the closure of the fishery and the harvest _____ sales and landings and so forth should be limited only to those areas so they are under the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Council. The range of the golden crab that's available, even in Florida, exceeds the range of the council.

And, secondly, I think it should also be made precisely clear what is meant by harvest, purchase and sale. For example, on the harvest, is that when the last trap is taken aboard the vessel at sea? Is it when the boat gets to the dock? The time when that could be two or three days later, and sale to the dealer might not take place for several days after that. And is this strictly live crab? Or can frozen crab or otherwise processed be sold at a later time? Issues of this sort should be clarified.

We would also request that we have some kind of notice of the approach of the deadline, especially if we don't have a catch shares program in effect. We don't know what other people are catching and what the status of the catch level is, and we certainly need to be able to plan for that.

With regard to alternative three, we would agree that if the ACL is exceeded, then there should be a reduction in the following year. But by the same token, suppose the ACL is not met. Can that underage be made up in the following year? We would like to have that considered and hopefully approved. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Bill.

[End of Audio]