

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE

**Villas by the Sea Resort
Jekyll Island, Georgia**

March 3-5, 2026

Transcript

Snapper Grouper Committee

Jessica McCawley, Chair
Kerry Marhefka, Vice Chair
Dr. Carolyn Belcher
Amy W. Dukes
Gary Borland
Judy Helmey
Dewey Hemilright

James G. Hull, Jr.
Trish Murphey
Charlie Phillips
Tom Roller
Andy Strelcheck
Robert Beal
Robert Spottswood, Jr.

Council Staff

John Carmichael
Myra Brouwer
Dr. Chip Collier
Julia Byrd
Dr. Judd Curtis
John Hadley
Kathleen Howington
Allie Iberle
Kelly Klasnick

Ashley Oliver
Emily Ott
Dr. Mike Schmidtke
Rachael Silvas
Nicholas Smillie
Suzanna Thomas
Christina Curtis
Meg Withers
Dr. Julie Neer

Attendees and Invited Participants

Rick DeVictor
Dr. Clay Porch
Sonny Gwin
Johnny Marquez
Shepherd Grimes

Kristen Foss
Kathy Knowlton
Charles McGuigant
Dr. Kai Lorenzen
Nikhil Metha

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Villas by the Sea Resort in Jekyll Island, Georgia, on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going into the Snapper Grouper Committee. The first order of business is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any changes or modifications to the agenda right now? I think we have one other item for Other Business that has to do with blueline at this point. Does anybody know of any other Other Business items that they would like to bring up? All right. Any objection to approval of the agenda?

All right. Seeing none, the next order business is Approval of the minutes from December. Are there any substantive changes to those minutes from December? Any objection to approval of the minutes? All right. We'll consider the minutes approved. Next up is Update on Submitted Amendments, and I'm going to pass it over to Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: All right. Thank you. I have a few amendments to go over, and just to give you update that these are amendments that we've received from the council, that the council finished up, or we are waiting on to receive from the council, and so, first off starting with Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5, and that is blueline tilefish, the council took final action at the last meeting, and submitted this to National Marine Fisheries Service a few weeks ago. We got that February 13th, and so we're working on the proposed rule for Abbreviated Framework 5.

Regulatory Amendment 36, if you recall, this is changes to the gag and black grouper vessel limits and stowage of on-demand gear. We are waiting for the proposed rule to publish on that framework amendment. Regulatory Amendment 37, this is the black sea bass framework amendment that puts in the annual catch target. The council took final action on that at the last council meeting. This document is undergoing final review, internal final review, and so we're waiting to get that from the council, to submit that framework amendment, and then we'll begin developing that proposed rule for the Framework Amendment 37.

Amendment 55, recall this is the scamp and yellowmouth amendment. This establishes a new scamp and yellowmouth grouper complex, including a rebuilding plan. This amendment has been approved, and we published a proposed rule, and so now we're just waiting for the final rule to publish on that Amendment 55, and, of course, that will have the implementation date in that final rule, and so we're just waiting on the final rule for that to publish.

Commercial electronic logbooks, we talked a bit about that today. We approved this amendment on February 16th, and so, again, a couple of weeks ago that was approved, and we are waiting for the proposed rule to publish for that amendment, and, of course, there will be a comment period with that, and, finally, Amendment 48, and this is the wreckfish amendment, and the next step is to publish the proposed rule, and that one would have a notice of availability, since that is a plan amendment, Amendment 48.

That's all the amendments, and we certainly got an increase in amendments, and we're expecting a couple more, and Andy spoke to that, and sort of the challenges that we're going through right now, but we're working on those.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Rick. Any questions for Rick? All right. I don't see any hands. Next up is New Exempted Fishing Permit Application Briefings, and I'm going to pass it back to Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: Thank you, Madam Chair, and so this is an exempted fishing permit application that was submitted to National Marine Fisheries Service. You can find this in your briefing materials under the Snapper Grouper Committee. There's a PDF document there, and that is the application.

This has been submitted by Cultimar Technologies, Incorporated. The title is "Collection of American Red Snapper Broodstock for Marine Aquaculture Research and Hatchery Fingerling Production". I will note that the applicant is in the room here, and he said he can answer questions, if you allow that, if you wanted to ask specific questions on the project, but as I normally do, I'll walk you through the application and hit the high points.

Just starting off, the proposed activity summary, and this is on the first page, Cultimar Technologies, Incorporated seeks authorization to collect 200 sexually-mature American red snapper from federal waters off the Atlantic coast of Florida for the purposes of establishing a dedicated broodstock population. They would establish that at a newly-constructed hatchery research facility in Puerto Rico.

They go through more of the proposed activity, and they do point out in here that, just to clarify, Cultimar will not be engaging in intensive aquaculture grow-out activities of these red snapper. Instead, they would let these red snapper spawn in these aquaculture facilities, and they would provide these fingerlings produced as a result distributed or sold to academic institutions for pilot scale aquaculture operations.

The first page, there's more of the primary goals of the research they intend to do, and Section II talks about the purpose and justification of the proposed activity, and they point out that Cultimar seeks to construct the first private American red snapper hatchery and research institute in the United States.

Section III goes over the proposed activity benefits to the council and stakeholders. I won't read those to you, but you can see that in Section III, one of them being strengthening domestic seafood production and gaining more research for raising these red snapper. A bit about the methods, and they sort of go over first the capture, and the methodology around how they're going to capture, where they're going to go, what months, and then how they're going to transport it to the facility in Puerto Rico.

Just going over Section IV, fishing will be conducted using spinning and conventional hook-and-line gear outfitted with single-hook circle hook rigs, and they expect to actively fish three to four hooks at any given time, and they note that proper dehooking and descending devices will be used for any bycatch and discards. They speak to the discards, and they have a section in there about discards of red snapper, and also discards of snapper grouper species, other snapper grouper species, and they would release those fish immediately, following the protocols described using approved descending devices, and so they walk through that.

Just a little bit about where they intend to fish, and they said the shallowest possible depths, to ensure minimal barotrauma effects -- Later on the application, they said the depth range will likely be fifty to 200 foot depth. More about the project lead there and the experience of aquaculture.

Project duration, what months, and so they would like to go from May 1, 2026 to March 30, 2027, and they intend to do this in one to two trips, and so it's a fairly large vessel, where they would take 200 fish in one to two trips. The location of fishing would occur in federal waters off Florida, hardbottom areas, and there is a map in the application, and there are coordinates. You can see it's off Cape Canaveral. Vessel transport, they walk through that process. The R/V Blue Manta would be used. It's a seventy-seven-foot vessel that has over 6,000 gallons of tank volume for transportation.

Then I always like to go over the exemptions that are requested there in the application that they are requesting to us, and that includes commercial vessel permits, closure of commercial and recreational sectors for red snapper, commercial trip limits, and my understanding is we wouldn't need the restrictions on sale and purpose, but we can talk more about that, annual catch limits and accountability measures, and that's it. those are the exemptions requested.

Finally, just touching on the very last page right before the appendices, they do outline -- There's bullets there of what they would be measuring, what they intend to study from raising these red snapper, including detailed spawning performance metrics, including fecundity, spawning frequency, egg quality, and larval survival for brood stock. Capture impact analysis, including correlations between depth, handling practices, and long-term reproductive outcomes, and they discuss how they would produce white papers and technical presentations and collaborate with NOAA scientists. That's all I have. That's a real -- Just a rough outline, a summary of the high points of the application that we received.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Rick. Questions about this? I figured that people would have questions. Just a reminder about our process, is we discuss EFPs prior to public comment. After public comment, later in the week, we'll have another discussion, and we usually send a letter to the applicant, or a letter to NOAA, about how we feel about the application, and any questions or concerns that we have, and so we'll work on that later in the week. Now is the time for questions, and it sounds like the applicant is here, if you would like to speak to them directly, and so, Kerry, I think you had your hand up.

MS. MARHEFKA: I have two questions, and one might be for NMFS, and one might be for the applicant. The first question is who makes the determination that those 200 fish are coming from the commercial ACL, and I will bring that up later, because I'm very uncomfortable with that, and, second of all, given the state -- The very low ACL in the Atlantic, everything we've been going through with red snapper in the Atlantic, is there a reason that this red snapper can't come from the gulf, where things are peachy keen, and they're not arguing over every single red snapper?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: Again, this is where the applicant could provide more information. Just to your second question, Kerry, about the Gulf, we had similar questions about this, and what the applicant has told me is a couple points. They're more familiar with the South Atlantic, and you

can look at the application, and they have done research at Miami, and they're more familiar with harvesting fish from that region.

They spoke about distance, and it's a little bit shorter going from the South Atlantic than compared to the Gulf of America, and they spoke about added complications dealing with the IFQ fishery, and so those are three reasons that they provided to me as to why they would prefer the South Atlantic region.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, to Kerry's first question, because you were saying why does it have to come from the commercial catch limit, and is that what your question was, and so it does not. The way EFPs work, right, is that they're exemptions from regulations. Now, they don't necessarily exempt you from Magnuson Act requirements and mandates, but they can exempt you from the overarching requirements to abide by specific catch limits, or accountability measures, as long as you're abiding by the broader MSA mandates of preventing overfishing and other sustainability considerations.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Additional questions? Clay.

DR. PORCH: Yes, and I was curious why they just don't get um the native species, *lutjanus purpureus*, which looks very much like, and is very similar life history, to, you know, the American red snapper, and that would be -- You can catch them in Puerto Rico.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Rick, do you know the answer?

MR. DEVICTOR: I did speak to the applicant about that question, and thought it would come up, and, if I have it right, he was saying there's less available perhaps, and it's about availability of the amount of red snapper certainly at those depths of capture, is what -- The response he provided me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: More questions? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to clarify the answer to Kerry's question about does this come from the commercial allocation, and I think Andy said that, no, it would not. Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. More questions? Okay. All right. I don't see -- Amy, did you have your hand up? Go ahead.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, Clay, you got my mind spinning a little bit here. Since there is a red snapper species that naturally occurs off of Puerto Rico, and it might just not be our Atlantic, is there any concern, from a genetic standpoint, that we should be worried about, any cross -- I don't know, and I'm just -- It just kind of made me think, and it's more of a discussion question maybe for this table, but it just kind of made me think a little bit, and, if this was going to be having spawning aggregates in open water, could there be any risk of genetic crossing? I'm just curious.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So Clay can certainly answer, and I think I would recommend that the applicant maybe speak to some of this as well, given the considerations that they're looking at.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Can the applicant come forward to the microphone there and maybe address some of our questions? Thank you, and if you wouldn't mind stating your name for the record.

MR. MCGUIGAN: Hi, and I'm Charles McGuigan, COO and co-founder of Cultimar. I appreciate all your time today in considering our application. I've heard quite a few questions, and I think Rick did a great job introducing kind of the project, and answering some of those, but I'm happy to take any other questions that council members might have.

To the most recent question, our facility is completely land-based, and so there is no risk of kind of genetic mixing from our broodstock population with anything native to the area, and, also, to the point about the purpureus versus the campechanus, this project really is an outgrowth of many years of NOAA-supported research that took place at the academic scale. There are quite a few species within that Lutjanus complex, many of which have very different kind of grow-out performance metrics, and so, while the purpureus might be a viable aquaculture species, we simply don't know the answer to whether or not it is right now.

What we do know is that the red snapper, at least in pilot-scale studies, has shown to be a very good performer in a wide range of grow-out settings. We're basing our hatchery in Puerto Rico because of environmental and biological considerations, namely the warm temperatures and the access to nearshore seawater that can be pumped through the facility that's of a very high quality, but the fingerlings that are grown on-site are intended to be distributed to stakeholders across potentially Puerto Rico, but, realistically, across the South Atlantic region domestically here, and that air freight of the fingerlings to those growers is relatively straightforward, and kind of built into our model, and so we're not planning on doing any ocean-based culture within our facility, and we plan to make the fingerlings that we raise available to stakeholders here to support kind of domestic aquaculture production.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that. Other questions? I see some people that maybe have some more questions now. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: First, thanks for being here, and I appreciate you answering our questions. You may have talked to Rick about this, but one of the questions I had was how you arrived at the 200 sexually-mature red snapper, and what were the kind of decisions, in terms of the number of brood stock you need, consideration about mortality, transport, things like that?

MR. MCGUIGAN: So that number is based on kind of ongoing conversations with geneticists who we've talked to throughout formulating the project. That number should allow us to build ten separate cohorts of twenty individuals each, and, with that initial 200 fish, we anticipate that we'll have the ability to kind of maintain an independent population at our hatchery without risk of inbreeding for many years to come, which would kind of ultimately reduce any future collection efforts that we would need to request from the council. This should be sufficient to kind of build our core population and then proceed with the project without having to continue collecting efforts from the wild.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think that this said this in the document, but I can't remember, and you're just planning on taking one trip to take all the fish, and not multiple trips, like ten at a time or something?

MR. MCGUIGAN: Exactly.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Now is the time to ask if you have questions. Okay. I'm just looking around. All right. I don't see any hands. Thank you so much. Wait. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, and so, of all of the possible species, red snapper look as the best candidate of everything, over a grouper or anything else, and is that -- So I'm guessing that's why you picked red snapper.

MR. MCGUIGAN: Based on the research that we've conducted at the University of Miami and elsewhere in the region, it seems to be the strongest on a variety of parameters, both from the market, and, obviously, there's a huge demand for red snapper, and the current commercial catch can't meet market demands, but, also, the biological performance of the fish does very well in captivity. It grows very quickly, and efficiently, and there may certainly be other species that are kind of determined to be viable for aquaculture in the future, but red snapper is one of those key candidate species that, through NOAA-funded research, has been identified as a real potential to help catalyze the industry here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions? Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Is your company being funded by any U.S. taxpayer dollars?

MR. MCGUIGAN: No, sir.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any more questions? All right. Last chance. All right. Thank you so much for being here and your willingness to answer our questions.

MR. MCGUIGAN: Thank you, all.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Next up on the agenda, it would be Updated on Submitted EFP Applications, and I'll turn it over to Andy and Rick.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so we'll start with Kim Sawicki's exempted fishing permit. Recall you talked about this EFP at the prior council meeting, and sent the Fisheries Service a letter, and this was the one that was continue to evaluate the use of subsea buoy retrieval systems. On Friday, February 27, we sent Kim a letter indicating that the application was determined not to warrant further consideration, and so we denied the exempted fishing permit.

That was based on not only input from you, but the Science Center and our kind of evaluation of the project. We considered the work that she had done invaluable, and we certainly support that continued effort, but, given the concerns about the stock status and catch reductions, as approved in Regulatory Amendment 37, we believed it was in the best interest of the fishery to not approve that exempted fishing permit, and so we contacted Kim, and let her know about this, and have shared, obviously, a letter with our rationale explaining the decision, and so any questions on that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions on that EFP? I don't see any hands. Back to you, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Great, and then we also spoke to you about the four state exempted fishing permit applications for red snapper state management and data collection. Those were originally submitted to us on November 10, and we had shared the preliminary applications with the council at the December council meeting.

After the December council meeting, we continued to coordinate with the states, and I believe, on January 9, we sent the states all letters indicating kind of our review of the exempted fishing permits, questions and clarification that we had for each of the states. On January 23, the states returned their exempted fishing permit applications, and with some revisions, based on the letters that we had shared with them.

I won't go through all the details of the changes, but I think the major substantive edits were certainly clarification on some of the data collection and survey methodologies, and a little more specificity around that, and then North Carolina's application was modified. Originally, they were proposing a limited-access-type system, where a hundred anglers could participate and harvest red snapper during the months of July and August. They're now proposing an open access July 1 through August 31 season.

Then, because of the timing of the of, if these are approved, the potential issuance of the EFPs, we had asked South Carolina and Georgia to be more specific, in terms of their proposed seasons, and they provided to us a July 1 start date, and they would be the same as North Carolina.

We went out to public comment, and I believe that started February 13, and is open until March 10. To-date, we have received over -- Around 6,700 comments, and most of those are thanks to FWC, because they pushed out a request for input and comment, and so I would say over 90 percent are from Florida anglers. As you, you know, would guess, the overwhelming majority are in support of the EFPs, but we're continuing to, obviously, collect those comments, and those will be reviewed.

After the comment period closes, we will take all this information into account, and continue, obviously, kind of our assessment and review of the exempted fishing permits. If they're deemed to move forward, our goal would be to approve them on or before May 1, and so we will keep you apprised, obviously, as this work continues, but I'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Andy. Questions? Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: On January 26, this council sent a letter, I think to you, and, in that letter, it said there were some that had concerns about the harvest of red snapper, what would happen, and I'm paraphrasing, to the commercial industry, and so I'm curious, and, one, will you be answering the council letter that was sent after everything else, the dust had settled, and so I'm wondering that, and is it still my assumption that the EFPs have no specific fish limit in its harvest? I guess that would be two questions.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Dewey, and so, in terms of the first question, I guess I considered the council letter as part of kind of input, even though it was prior to the public comment period,

and it was weighing-in, obviously, on input related to the EFPs, and it's not typical for us to respond back to the council when we get comment letters like that. We're actually seeking your input, and that's why it was sent to us.

With regard to your second question, you're correct that the EFPs do not specify a specific amount of harvest. Each of the states did respond back with questions we had, and provided additional rationale as to why they didn't feel they could provide that information. That was encompassed as part of our Federal Register notice when we explained the EFPs.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Andy, I'm guessing, after these experimental seasons, you will know the catches for the states, and so, when you start doing the ACLs again, could it possibly affect the commercial ACL the following year or something, because we -- Obviously, we don't know what the catches are until after August, or probably a month or so after that, and so is there a possibility that's going to affect the commercial allocation? What I see is an allocation change between what the commercial had been getting and recreational. If there is a significant allocation change, how is the region going to handle that?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I'll certainly defer to the states, but, you know, they've been fairly clear, with the EFPs, that they look at this as kind of adaptive, iterative process, that they want to learn from year-one, and then um benefit from the data and information that's collected in year-one to inform, obviously, future EFPs, and so I think that certainly what the states have laid out as their intent, in terms of evaluating harvest and, you know, making modifications to EFPs in 2027 and beyond.

A couple of, I think, complex issues, that are kind of intertwined with what you're asking, and so, one, we have an ongoing stock assessment, which will be completed, I think, toward the end of this year, or maybe early 2027, and that incorporates the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program results, but it won't incorporate, necessarily, what happens in 2026, right, and so, how that gets handled, I don't know, in terms of the stock assessment process, but we are going to get new scientific information to, obviously, inform red snapper management in the not too distant future.

In terms of kind of your overarching, you know, comment, to the extent that the EFPs increase fishing mortality, that has consequences for the stock as a whole, and then how we manage it, and any decisions that are made around this table in the future, and so that would, obviously, have to be evaluated and looked at, in terms of the impacts of the EFPs, if that in fact occurs or not.

MS. MCCAWLEY: More questions or follow-up questions? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I just want to make sure I understand this. The council is not getting new scientific advice until late this year, or early next year probably, and so, in the meantime, after this first season of these current EFP proposals, the states move into a second year of EFP proposals, and the commercial sector is then reliant on going to the states, to see if there is any benefit to the commercial fishery that comes out of the year-one EFPs, or else the commercial sector has to wait until the council takes action on the new science provided in 2027. In other words, it could be two

at least two years, if not three years, before the commercial sector sees any increase, or benefit, while EFPs could continue for the recreational sector.

MR. STRELCHECK: It's hard to speculate, and so I guess there's a lot of things there too, right, and so it depends on if we do an emergency rule, if we get a really positive stock assessment, and how quickly we could move forward with modifications to catch limits, and it would depend on whether EFPs were authorized for the second year, and it would be dependent on litigation, right, and, I mean, there's lots of other factors that potentially could be at play here, and so I don't want to get too far down the road, but I would say that, in general, right, if we just were abiding by the normal process, that you're correct there would be probably a long time lag between any sort of changes to commercial management relative to the EFPs.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see hands going up that, and so I'm going to Carolyn to speak to that, and then I had Dewey, Charlie, Jimmy.

DR. BELCHER: Kerry, as a state person, I would not want to try to do anything with numbers from year-one, two, or three, because we're talking about being adaptive. In year-one, we're kind of just starting out to see how it's going to go. It may not go as well, and we have to do tweaks on it, and so it's going to be just like what's kind of -- I hate using MRIP as the example, but with the pilot and the changes, and we don't we wouldn't want to keep, you know, you guys being frustrated, with things going up, going down, and going sideways, and so, to me, until we can narrow down how we're going to approach this as like a final state implementation, and like we could end up going the route of --

Right now, we're talking mandatory reporting, but it could not work as well, and we end up going towards a State Reef Fish Survey type approach, and so there's a lot of unknown to how that would go forward, but I would hate to tie allocations to a slip and slide of how good we can get at numbers.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I would just add to that that the plan -- I know it's in Florida's EFP, and I think it's in the other states too, is that we would make any changes between year-one and year-two and bring them back, you know, and we can certainly report-out like we did on FWC's current EFPs, on how that's working and what happened, and then it could change something between year-one and year-two. I have Dewey, then Charlie, then Jimmy.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Thank you. Looking at the EFPs, and the reason for them, and the potential for adaptive management, it also brings me to look at -- My state also showed, in one of their graphs, the PSEs, and why they shouldn't be used for management, and the numbers. There's a lot of other species that have PSEs equal to or greater than the ones for red snapper, and so, if NMFS approves the EFPs for this adaptive management look, does that mean that we're going to start going down a road where other species that have PSEs greater to -- Equal to or greater than, that we won't be able to use them for management?

I mean, it looks like the states have put a marker in the ground that, from now on, we're not going to be using PSEs equal to or greater than 50 percent for management, which we've known all along, but it's finally came to the marker in the ground from the states, and so how is -- How is that -- You know, and maybe it's too early, because fishermen tend to think -- I won't even call it outside the box, but on the deck of the boat of how it works, and so what's going to happen there when it -- From now on, if it's 50 percent or greater, we can't use it for management.

We've used it for allocation, and we've used it for a stock assessment, and so where are we going to get these numbers from to be used as we go through the future, and maybe it's just a future question, but any insight on that ability?

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, there's a lot of hypothetical there, right, and so I don't want to speculate, once again, and so I'll just say a couple things that I'm aware of, that either we're working on or that has happened in the past, and so with the Gulf, right, in terms of the state management that happened in the Gulf, it was an evolution, and it started off with some states that were doing reef fish surveys, and other states that were doing red snapper surveys, and that has evolved, over time, to reef fish surveys that are encompassing, or even broader surveys, more and more species, right, and to address kind of that nimbleness, the ability to estimate with more precision and accuracy. That certainly could be the way the South Atlantic goes, and maybe it doesn't, right, and so we don't know at this point.

The other thing that we recently announced is the Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive, and so we love acronyms in the government, and so it's called RAPID, which is intended to show the kind of effort to move forward quickly. It has three pillars essentially, and one is we're upping our investment in state sampling data collection, a 30 increase this year to address some of those PSE issues that you're talking about.

We're going to be implementing the full version of the FES survey that's gone through the pilot testing, and then what we've been focusing on, for a number of years, that we really want to get further down the road with, is this partnership between the state agencies and commissions and federal government with regard to data collection in a whole. It's not just MRIP versus state surveys versus something else, and it's collectively how are we going to all get better data for recreational anglers.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and we still have the problem. The states will get an EFP this year, and it's almost -- We know they're going to catch more fish than they caught in their last mini-season. I mean, it's almost impossible that they won't. How many more, nobody knows, but we will know these numbers by the end of the year, and we will have a de facto allocation change this year, and, even if the states tweak their EFPs next year, it's probably going to be another de facto allocation change, and I'm sorry, but the commercial sector doesn't see any equity in this.

It may just have to be that way, but, you know, we're being just told, well, two years down the road, three years down the road, and maybe we can fix it, and maybe after the new assessment, but we know we're getting an allocation cut, and that's just all there is to it, and I don't think you can say it any other way. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair, and so, you know, from the beginning of the state proposed EFPs, my immediate concern was to my sector, the commercial, the allocation we have, and the same concerns Charlie has, and so I reached out to council leadership, and was directed to

the fisheries management plan and the red snapper accountability measures, and so, if the worst case scenario happens, and the agency says we've overharvested, and we need to make reductions, now the commercial sector is going to have to pay too, and that's not the case. I guess you could make it the case if you wanted, but, in the fisheries management plan, it states that the commercial accountability is in-season accountability measures, and, on the recreational side, it comes for the next year, the next season, and so they would have to be accountable for the next season's EFP if there was some problem, and so I think that answers my worries about how would it affect the commercial sector.

As far as Charlie's point of view, I'm not sure I quite understand how it's a reallocation, but I could probably be told, and the good part about the state management is the numbers that we're going to get, the State Reef Fish numbers, and particularly in Florida. It's going to benefit the commercial sector, because the numbers come off the top, and then they come down and get divided, and so we're going to have hundreds of thousands of more animals that were previously assumed discards, that are no longer going to be discards.

They're going to be harvestable animals that we're going to share, and so, I mean, there's good -- There's some really good things that I see, and I could be wrong, and you can correct me, but I see the good is going to be this information, that's going to be much more accurate on the recreational discards and harvest information, and because, in the way we get our allocation, all that comes off the top, and that's going to be added back in the top. and we're going to get some portion of that. That's -- Tell me if I'm wrong.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, and then Dewey.

MS. MARHEFKA: Not to that point, but to your previous point about the -- None of the accountability measures for the recreational sector apply to these EFPs. They're not going to come off the EFP a second year. This is all being done outside of our normal process, and so I just want to make sure you understood that. If there are more red snapper caught in EFPs this year, there are not going to be less red snapper. Those aren't going to have to be subtracted from the EFPs from the following year, just so you know.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That is how it worked in the Gulf.

MS. MARHEFKA: That's not how it's worded right now. We're not playing within the realms of our accountability measures that we have set up within our management process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see what you're saying now. Thank you. I'll go to Andy, and then I'll go back to my list.

MR. STRELCHECK: Clay might want to comment, but, Jimmy, in terms of what you just said, keep in mind that you're dealing with different units, right, and so, when you talk about like running an assessment with MRIP data, and, all of a sudden, you switch to the State Reef Fish Survey, it doesn't necessarily mean that there's this different between the two surveys and you get all those fish, right, and so the assessment is going to have to use the State Reef Fish Survey, new information from the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program, and it will produce whatever the results it produces at that point.

You may be very right that it could produce the higher catch estimates, or more yield, or it may not. Typically, what happens is, when you have these surveys, whether it's a state survey or MRIP adjustments, but, anytime they're adjusted up or down, it adjusts the yield up or down accordingly, right, and so that's my expectation, and so I don't want to get too far out in front in trying to predict what the assessment results are and just kind of set expectations that we really need to wait for that process, to let it carry it through the course.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Back to Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and the process which the states will be using for the EFPs, and the reporting that you all are looking at for mandatory reporting, the potential there, and the fact that you'll be accounting for that catch during that timeframe of your month period, or two-month period, or your days or whatever there, and also your discards, and how about, once that goes away, during that the other ten months, or ten months and more, and what it could be -- Are you still going to be using your stuff to account for discards, or how does that factor in, that they're outside -- I guess it would once your EFP is done, then it goes back to what has happened before, or the accounting before during that time, and you all are not going to run your -- Not your EFPs, but your collection of accounting through the rest of the year, are you?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, Florida is. We talked about this at the last meeting. Yes, the State Reef Fish Survey is year-round, yes.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: How about the other states?

DR. BELCHER: It's MRIP. I mean, that's what we're doing. Basically, we're trying to do something that overlaps for a wave, so that we can compare MRIP to what the mandatory reporting is, and then MRIP stands the rest of the time, and then once we get past the pilot phase, then the question is how that's going to get taken up. The states are working on different things, with endorsements and things like that, that could totally preempt what we're proposing in the pilots right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a follow-up question to Andy, and so, Andy, could you tell me, and the other commercial representatives on this council, that these EFPs will not negatively impact the commercial allocations?

MR. STRELCHECK: So the allocations that the council has approved are not being changed by us in these EFPs, right, but in terms of your question -- I guess I'm not following, and so what is your concern?

MR. HULL: That we lose harvest that we lose TAC, what Charlie was trying to say, and so how is this -- You know, you're reallocating, and he called it reallocation, and my concern is so we have 28 percent of the harvest, and so can you tell me that these state EFPs are not going to affect the commercial sector? I mean, it's just that simple, or can they? Is there a way they can?

MR. STRELCHECK: So, first of all, we're in a public comment period, right, and so they're proposed EFPs. They haven't been finalized. You know, any finalization would happen between

now and May 1. We have to evaluate the effects of the EFPs. I can't speak to future impacts to the commercial sector at this point. I did, obviously, say hypothetically, right, if mortality goes up because of the EFPs, then that would have downstream effects on all sectors at this point, right, and there's nothing in this that is a commitment on behalf of states, or the Fisheries Service, that would prevent those, you know, potential implications happening down the road, right, but, right now, we're in the evaluation phase.

I think, based on the concerns I'm hearing around the table, what I would recommend, for everyone, but those that support this and oppose it, is that you submit public comments to the Fisheries Service, because we need to take those into consideration as we review this proposal.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see more hands going up, and so, just to speak to Andy's point right there, and then we'll go back to the hands, yes, the public comment period is still open, through the 10th, and so, if you want to bring these points up, you know, in a written format, you can still submit those during the timeframe. Robert, and then Charlie.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I too was trying to understand, and so, on its face though, the comment of a de facto change in allocation as a result of the EFPs, that's not the case, it sounds like, and, to the extent that, you know, the EFPs showed that there was actually less red snapper out there than we thought, and maybe that's how indirectly you get to an impact on, you know, the commercial allocation, because, as a whole, we are determined to catch less fish, but, sitting around this table, I think we all believed that this was going to give us data to show that the FES survey was off, and there's actually more fish out there, which the result of that would mean potentially more fish in the commercial allocation, and leave the 28 percent constant, and it stays that way, and what is that 28 percent of I think is the question that we were trying to get at, and so I just wanted to make sure I -- Because I heard that, and I just didn't understand how you could have a de facto allocation change as a result of the EFP, but I think, downstream, there is potential that these EFPs are going to change the way that we fish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and it's not that I'm against the EFPs in particular, and that's not what my concern is, but if, and I'm just picking a number, the recreational sector last year caught X amount of fish, and the commercial sector was supposed to catch 28 percent of this number, now the recreational sector is -- It's highly likely they're going to catch X plus, but the commercial sector is going to be stuck with the same number of fish again, and probably the following year.

That is, to me, where the de facto allocation change is, and we don't know what that number is, until at least after this year, and, if there was a possibility that the commercial sector could have some adjustment for what the recreational sector thought they were going to catch in maybe 2027, then we would have a little more equity, but I don't know if there's a way to do that, but that is my concern, and, again, I am not necessarily against the EFPs. I'm just trying to keep things equitable.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Charlie, I certainly didn't think you were against the EFPs, and this is a good discussion, and I want to make sure I understand, you know, every angle, and what could

happen, but I think, as I'm hearing you, I mean, maybe one of the -- The way that I'm looking at it is you talk about it in terms of catch, and it's one thing to look at what the fishermen caught year over year, but I think the overarching issue that we had here was the dead discards, which we talked about, you know, accountability, and the recreational sector should pay for that, but, at the end of the day, that dead discard number is affecting the entire pie, and that's what we were trying to kind of -- I think what we're trying to solve to and get to.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Good discussion. Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: With respect to -- It's my understanding that, no matter what that discard is, when we do the stock assessment -- Right now, discards are taken off the top in the stock assessment, is my understanding, all right, and so, therefore, it's at a number, and, out of number, we get our side's portion of the pie, and the recreational get their portion of the pie, so to speak, but, in reality, it should be, if you do a stock assessment, that stock assessment spits out a number, and, out of that number, each sector takes their discard off there.

That's the equality that I think that maybe Charlie is also getting at at that point, and that's the point that we've been at in looking for fish, the two-for-one for twenty-six years, and that has taken our industry down the road, and that's what we're asking the question, and continue asking the question, and I understand the EFPs, and I understand that people want to go fishing, and I understand it's their God-given right to go fishing, but, at the end of the day, we're looking at a process here that is not equitable and fair, and, at the end, if these EFPs are granted, and there's not some relief for the help of the commercial fishing industry, it will still be that same, but that's just why we're looking at putting it there, and that's the starting point, I think, of our angst, and it has continued to be, and so that's why we just -- We're wondering where are we at in this process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: So I think we had like two days of fishing in the South Atlantic for the last couple of years, and you still had all those dead discards, and so the answer that we got was you have to close bottom fishing, and we all agreed that was absolutely unacceptable, and so whether you eliminate those two days or you give the recreational sector zero red snapper, you're still going to have the dead discards, because they're still allowed to go fish for gag grouper and everything else.

I agree with kind of the premise, but, at the end of the day, the recreational sector is just playing within the rules that we set, and I think those rules have set up a situation where we are promoting waste of these fish, and so part of the EFP is to get a better handle on what is out there, but also to try to restructure the way that we allow recreational fishermen to go target these fish, to convert more dead discards into landings.

I think what we're finding now is they -- The recreational sector would rather go out and fish for two hours, rather than eight, and catch their twenty fish and come home, and so we're starting to prove that out, but, at the end of the day, we collectively, the fishery, recreational and commercial -- Our goal needs to try to be to figure out how to turn all of those dead discards into productivity for the commercial and recreational sector, and I think we're going down the right path, but, if we start -- If we don't go that route, and we go the route of, okay, let's just go ahead and make the rec

sector pay for their accountability, fine. Zero red snapper fishing in the entire South Atlantic off the coast of Florida. That's what the result will be, but they're going to keep catching red snapper.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: If this is a good structured thing, that wouldn't be the case, and I'm just saying you're giving -- You could still do EFP if through a stock assessment the discards -- Your sector has to use this discard for its catch, and we're looking to where we're having -- We would get more ACL if some of your discards were attributed to you, and not a portion of our pie. We only get 28 percent.

I agree that -- I agreed through this stuff in Amendment 35, and I'm not going back, but you could have had a one-hook rig five years ago, but the council decided they didn't want to do it, to look at these things, and so there's a lot of things, but we're not on equal footing as far as where we're at. We get a portion of the pie, I've always said, and so do you, and I understand trying to turn that in, but I just fundamentally have to wonder where we're at in this in this small portion that we have, and we're not asking for no more, but we've just got some fundamental differences, and that's all.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Good discussion, and so just reminding everybody the comment period is open through the 10th, and you guys can continue to submit comments individually if you wish. Any more questions or discussion on this? All right. I appreciate the discussion. We're going to conclude the Snapper Grouper Committee for today, and we will pick back up in the morning at 8:30. Thank you everybody.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thanks, everybody. It looks like we are back on time, and so we will see you guys at 8:30 tomorrow to reopen the Snapper Grouper Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on March 3, 2026.)

- - -

MARCH 4, 2026

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

- - -

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Villas by the Sea Resort in Jekyll Island, Georgia on Wednesday, March 4, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Good morning. We're going to get going. We're back in the Snapper Grouper Committee. This is the full Snapper Grouper Committee. We got through some items last night. We are not covering the commercial permit and trip efficiency, Amendment 60, because we're not ready to do the subcommittee report yet. That will be later in the week, and so we are going to jump to spawning special management zones. You already heard from the Major, who gave us the Law Enforcement AP report, and so now I'm going to turn it over to Chip, who is going to give us an overview.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you, and, as you're listening to me talk this morning, you know, consider what we're looking for as far as committee action for this, and it's to provide guidance to staff for amendment development, and maybe initiate an amendment, if you all would like to see this spawning SMZs. The sunset provision is going to be coming up in 2027, and so, if the council would like to start an amendment, it would probably be good timing to start the amendment, in order to get it in place to make sure it doesn't -- The regulations don't rescind.

All right, and so this presentation should be Attachment 3, and we're going to be talking about the evaluation progress that the system management plan workgroup has been doing for the spawning special management zones. Just a brief update on why we have these spawning special management zones, and so I went back to Amendment 36 and pulled out some key statements from the purpose and need.

The purpose and need from Amendment 36 is to protect important spawning habitat and to enhance spawning, and remember these areas were identified as potentially spawning locations for several species of fish, and I'll identify the species in a minute, but it was not the full complex, and it was just some targeted species. It was also put out there to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality, focusing in on -- It specifically mentioned speckled hind and Warsaw grouper.

When we're really thinking about these areas, they're less than twenty square miles, less than 1 percent of the EEZ out there, and so it's not likely to have a huge impact on reducing bycatch and bycatch mortality, but you'll see that there are speckled hind and Warsaw grouper in a couple of these locations, and so maybe it is achieving some of that goal, but it might be a minimal -- It will be hard to detect that difference there.

The other one is to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield, as far as National Standard 1, and then, with many of the amendments, we always try to achieve conservation goals, while minimizing, to the extent practical, the negative social and economic effects, and so, when we're thinking about this, you know, these were the council's purpose and need when they developed Amendment 36.

The regulations for these areas, as they're written right now, it's to prohibit fishing for, harvest of, and/or possession of snapper grouper species. The transit provisions that are allowed in there, vessels are allowed to transit through the areas, as long as the gear is appropriately stowed. There is no anchoring by fishing vessels, and there is a sunset clause in July of 2027 for the natural reefs, and I'll describe the areas in just a second. The other thing that is notable for these areas is trolling is still allowed in the area, and so people will go in those areas and still do some fishing.

The spawning SMZs, we have all of our marine protected areas here, and you will see the names of the spawning SMZs and, if you have really good eyesight, you might be able to see the spawning SMZs, but I did want to put that up there and just give them in relative context. They are very small, less than five square miles. If you think about what five square miles is, that is usually around the downtown of a city. It's not very big.

The natural reefs that we have up north is South Cape Lookout, and so that's basically a little bit east of Wilmington, southeast of Morehead City. We have Devil's Hole, which is off of Georgetown, South Carolina, and then we have Warsaw Hole, which is west of Key West.

Then we have two artificial reefs that were spawning SMZs. Those are called Area 51 and Area 53. These areas were designated by South Carolina DNR, when they originally put them out, as no fishing areas, and so they were never on the fishing maps when they actually applied for everything.

They were very transparent with the Army Corps of Engineers that these areas would not be fished. They were designed as special areas to test whether or not artificial reefs could potentially be a useful tool to increase populations of snapper grouper species, and so there's a couple research projects that South Carolina DNR has sponsored on these projects, or in these areas, and so they've been looking at them in the past. When the artificial reefs were placed there, you know, they did the surveys to make sure that there was not natural bottom already there, and so these are truly artificial reefs that were placed on sand bottom.

When the council was talking about putting these locations out there, you know, they were looking for natural sites where multiple species were spawning, and, if you read in the literature, many of these snapper groupers will go to these things called promontories, or elbows out there in the ocean, and use those as potential spawning areas.

When I'm talking about a promontory, you can see, up in that graphic, where it's just a dramatic drop in the depth, and so, if you look at Warsaw Hole or Devil's Hole, both of those areas have a very significant depth change in the location. Warsaw Hole basically looks like a sinkhole. It's a big circle, and it drops by about a hundred feet in less than probably thirty yards. It is significant, and Devil's Hole has a very similar depth profile to it.

The South Cape Lookout site, when that was selected, the council really talked about trying to protect a potential spawning site for red grouper. Red grouper do not like those promontories. They actually burrow in the sand. They have a very different spawning habitat, and so that habitat off South Cape Lookout is a little bit different than the other two locations.

I already talked about the artificial reefs, and you can see a picture of, and I think that's Area 51 there, and so another benefit that we have for all these sites is they've all been mapped, and we've been working on habitat characterizations in those areas.

The focal species for this, it's fourteen of the grouper species. You can see the list there. Probably the biggest ones that we've been seeing in the areas have been scamp, gag, black grouper, Warsaw grouper, and speckled hinds. Those are probably the highlights, but there's also been some of the snappers in the areas, including blackfin snapper and red snappers in there as well, and then, going into the tilefish, these habitats aren't really designed for -- The spawning SMZs aren't necessarily designed for the tilefish, just given the habitat characteristics, and so we have not seen tilefish in the areas yet, but then there's also greater amberjack that have been observed in the areas and in spawning condition.

There's been some research that's been done in the last five years, trying to get more information on the spawning SMZs, so that the council can have some information while they're making their decisions. There was a larval connectivity model developed by Brothers et al. and presented to the system management plan workgroup. There was also a seminar series where he talked about the findings of the model. Basically, some of these areas can potentially -- Through the simulated

results, some of these areas can actually have offspring, or the larvae, come back into the South Atlantic area.

Obviously, some do better than others. South Cape Lookout did not seem to be all that effective, as far as retaining eggs into the South Atlantic, and it was the worst of many of the sites, but the others, like in particular Devil's Hole, seemed to be very effective for something like scamp and some of the deepwater fish.

There has been some biological sampling that was conducted by the Nature Conservancy and LGL Environmental, where they went out to these sites and collected fish. They looked at direct evidence of spawning and indirect evidence of spawning. An example of indirect evidence of spawning that they were looking into was basically were the fish in a color pattern that has been kind of identified as spawning, or are fish in high numbers, higher density than normal.

Looking at the indirect evidence, in Devil's Hole there was gag grouper, blackbelly gag grouper, and so that's kind of indirect evidence of spawning. There was also what's called a tiger paw pattern for a scamp. They were observed on a video, and so both of those are kind of indicative of spawning. If you go down to Warsaw Hole, those areas, some of the indirect spawning was the high density of greater amberjack that they were observing in there, and so that was indirect evidence of spawning for greater amberjack.

Now, they also did collect direct evidence of spawning too, and they took samples of fish. They caught the fish, brought them to the surface, and then South Carolina DNR did the histology of those fish, and, in all locations, they have found multiple individuals of the focal species in spawning condition.

In Devil's Hole, there's been over 90 percent of the scamp samples that they have taken have been in spawning condition, and I will say that, when they went out to Devil's Hole, in that area, they were looking at trying to -- Or they were sampling at a time when scamp were likely to be spawning, and so that's why they found scamp in spawning condition. That's an important component of this, is the timing of the sampling. You have to go when the fish are spawning, and not all fish spawn at the same time.

When they went down to Warsaw Hole collecting samples there, the first sample that they did, they wanted to target spawning Warsaw grouper, and they did find an individual in spawning condition, and so they had gone down in June the first time. The next time, they went down in April, trying to find greater amberjack in spawning condition. They did find greater amberjack in spawning condition in that sampling, and they also found a Warsaw grouper in spawning condition, and so potentially expanding the timing of Warsaw grouper in Warsaw Hole might be some of the information that they could elucidate from this sampling.

Then, for South Cape Lookout, there was some sampling collected around the spawning time when suspected for red grouper, and they did find red grouper in spawning condition in South Cape Lookout, and so, in all these locations, they have found spawning fish, spawning groupers, as intended by the council.

The sampling of the artificial reefs has been done a little bit differently. TNC and LGL did not target those, but the South Carolina Aquarium has been going out to Area 51 and Area 53 collecting

information, and we had a presentation that was provided to us by the South Carolina Aquarium, and what they're doing there is they've done two big projects, I would say.

One of them is trying to look at the effects of removing lionfish from artificial reefs, and so they talked about that experiment, and how it would impact the other fish in the area, but they're also doing a diver sampling, and they're using reef techniques in order to get estimates of density, and also sighting frequency of fish, and so they provided information there, and there's many -- Many of the species in the snapper grouper complex are being observed on these artificial reefs, and so there is some potential benefit to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan of having these areas closed.

Then there's always the ongoing data that's collected through the Southeast Reef Fish Survey. They're not going to collect information in the artificial reefs, but they are going to the natural reefs, and sometimes they are randomly selected to go into these locations, and so there is additional information.

One thing that you'll note is we don't have a real good way to understand how these areas are performing relative to areas around them. We're not looking at that. We did not have the funding to do it. The information is not available. However, you know, one of the goals that we were looking at is it protecting spawning fish, and it appears to be doing that, and so it's a little bit different than, you know, is this the best area, and we don't know, but it's achieving what you all had intended.

The evaluation of the areas, this is going to be conducted by the System Management Plan Workgroup. This is a diverse workgroup. It includes biologists, communication specialists, law enforcement specialists, fishermen, a variety of people on the workgroup trying to make sure it has a variety of voices in order to evaluate these areas.

In addition to the System Management Plan Workgroup, we intend to gather information from other advisory panels, recognizing that not everybody is going to have all the experience that is needed. Some other groups might have information that's going to be very valuable. In particular, we have identified the Habitat and Ecosystem AP. We presented a -- That was we gathered information from that group in February, and then we've also been to the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and gathered information from there. We intend to gather information from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel as well, and potentially the SSC, if there's time on the agenda.

What we're trying to do is evaluate if management should keep the areas as-is, modify the areas, and, you know, should they be moved, or change size, and then, finally, change the regulations, and so we'll be providing that report to you all and trying to keep that in mind as we're doing the evaluation.

The evaluation tool, it's basically going to be an online survey tool that the workgroup fills out, and from there we'll develop a report, and the report is going to include feedback from the workgroup as well as the directed advisory panels, trying to make it very transparent to you all on everybody's feelings about what should be done for these areas, and then, just to let you know what's included in the evaluation, when we're thinking about these managed areas, you know, it's always good to look at the planning of these, and so there's going to be a section on planning.

There's going to be a section on each individual area, trying to make sure -- Giving you the flexibility, as opposed to having to remove all, or change all, and you can look at the individual areas to change as you see fit, and then there's going to be a cross-area comparison, to hopefully improve some of the things that go on over time, making sure it's still intended -- Make sure it's achieving your intended goals.

The timeline for this, we're finishing up the evaluation tool now with comments. In March, the system management plan will finalize and begin the evaluation. In April, we're going to gather additional advisory panel inputs, whether it's just the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel or the SSC. In April and May, we're going to compile the evaluation report. The workgroup will revise the report shortly afterwards, and then this will be presented to the council in June or September.

While the System Management Plan Workgroup is going through all this, you know, the council can be developing an amendment, in order to have things move along, and, just additional resources for this, if you would like to go back and really read up on all this, I did provide links to these different resources, but I also want to highlight that, you know, the Brothers et al., we do have a seminar series that was done for that. LGL, we had the November 2025 seminar series, and so, if you would like to hear from the researchers themselves, those videos are available, and both of them were excellent seminars, and so, with that, I will take any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Chip. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Chip, is there somewhere where we can view all of the spawning closures that exist in the South Atlantic, and I assume this is not all of them. There's some in state waters, and then like Riley's, and there's a couple others, and I was trying to figure out exactly where those fall, like Western Dry Rocks, and so do we have kind of a -- You know, of the total spawning closures that exist in the South Atlantic, do we know how many of them are an SSMZ?

DR. COLLIER: So these are the only spawning areas in the federal waters. We do have the deepwater marine protected areas. They had slightly different goals and objectives, and so there's going to be some spawning in those locations as well, but, yes, I can provide that to you. Now, as far as if we know where all the snappers and groupers are actually spawning, we do not know that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I heard you say that they didn't -- There was no observations outside of the spawning area, and so you really don't know if the spawning areas are any more, and I'm going to use the term "prolific", than outside of the spawning areas, and that, to me, is like -- Then the follow-up questions, that you haven't gotten into, is like how much does this cost LE, and how effective is law enforcement, and the list of -- I'm being a little bit of a devil's advocate here, because I'm good at that, but those are questions that I really would like to know. What are we getting bang for our buck, really, and is there a way to even know what we're getting bang for our buck?

DR. COLLIER: I get that one, and so I would say, you know, law enforcement, they do go to these sites, you know, and some of the researchers will go to these sites and let people know that, you know, these are closed areas.

As far as overall cost to the council, I think it's fairly minimal. As far as law enforcement trips, you know, they're not patrolled regularly. It's very difficult to know when people are there. You heard Michael Paul talk, as far as these areas are very difficult to enforce. We do have them on at least Garmin units. They were able to get them on those maps. They are provided in the Fish Rules.

We don't have a bounding box, and so you can't see that that area is closed, but, if you look at snapper grouper species, it would say that there's no possession, and so we do have communication tools that are out there. Additional costs for the council, I'm not aware of additional costs that it would be, other than having a regulation. It does seem like some folks are abiding by the regulations, and not going in the areas, and other people, you know -- Other people might not be aware of the regulations that are out there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Lots of hands going up. I have Kerry, Robert, and then Jimmy.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and thanks, Chip. As you know, these are sort of close to my heart, for many reasons. One, as a biologist, I was heavily involved in the deepwater MPAs, and that creation, and then my business was heavily involved. Mark was offshore working with LGL and TNC early on, and we personally are incredibly supportive of this.

What I hear from the fishermen in my area -- I mean, Devil's Hole was, obviously, very controversial at first. A lot of that had to do with the trolling. Amy can probably speak more to what she heard at the time than I did, but my understanding now is that the fishermen, the bottom fishermen -- Snapper grouper commercial guys are not that as upset about it as they thought they were going to be, and they're even -- I know a few people who truly perceive there being a benefit.

I also -- Chip, I want to make sure -- I'm pulling out the cobwebs out of my brain, but the benefits, and you probably said it, and the benefits aren't just the fact that the spawn will end up being transported, the larval transport, but some of these species are species that, when they aggregate to spawn, they come together, and they go to that spot to spawn.

They're extra aggressive at that time, particularly the groupers, and therefore more susceptible to sort of being caught when they're aggregating to spawn, and I guess the extent that they move in and out once that's done. Sort of, with these areas, I'm not sure, and I'm not even sure we can say that officially, but that is a theory, that, you know, maybe that's an added protection, and not just the larval transport. It's the -- In a time when they're really susceptible to being caught, they're protected, and then I'll let you answer that, but if you will, Madam Chair, I would like to say one more thing.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, you know, in the South Atlantic spawning aggregations, with the exception of probably mutton snapper, it's been a challenge to identifying spawning aggregations, and, when talking to other biologists, they kind of get nervous about using the word "aggregation", and so they do tend to speak in more density terms, but I will say that, if you read the literature on scamp grouper, you know, they're expected to be spawning in groups of twenty fish.

In Devil's Hole, there's actually a video that was collected, from your vessel, where it was a density of probably over a hundred fish, a hundred scamp, and so that was much larger than in the

literature, and so that was likely either a pre-spawning aggregation, or something along those lines, but it was a very high density of scamp grouper.

If you look at other videos of scamp grouper, I typically see three to five. You don't see a hundred in a small area like that, and so, you know, we're still learning a lot about these species. We don't know everything, and, you know, somebody said it the other day, is we know more about the surface of the moon than we do in the South Atlantic, and so it's kind of frightening, but we don't know the habitats, and, the fish in those habitats, we probably know even less.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, Chip, I'm pretty sure it's because my husband is a fish magnet, but, I mean, I don't know. I'm just kidding. I think the last thing I just wanted to leave with is, obviously, I'm very supportive of removing the sunset provision, and I don't want to truncate the conversation, but, when you're ready, Madam Chair, I would like to make a motion to begin work on this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right. Robert, then Jimmy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: So Charlie kind of jumped into it a little bit, and I share both Charlie and Kerry's perspective on this. You know, being in Key West, and having sat through a few very controversial spawning aggregation closures, I can tell you that I had the same experience. We had a lot of folks, fishermen, who opposed the Western Dry Rocks closure, and, today, most of the fishermen will tell you they believe they're seeing more juvenile mutton snapper, and a bigger population. They're catching fish, you know, in places they never did before.

Riley's, you know, the science was pretty clear. Riley's did the same thing for the Dry Tortugas area, and so my perspective on this is we should just be cognizant of, you know, removing the sunset provision. We should maybe look at some other closure areas, and what type of rules around them allowed for the maximum access without impacting spawning, and so whether that's trolling, or seasonal closures, or whatever it is, but really make sure that we're addressing what we're trying to do here and keeping in mind, you know, public access is pretty important.

The last question I had is are there any continued complaints, or negative feedback, about these closures? I mean, typically, that lasts for like a year after it happens, or two, but are we continuing to get feedback from folks like we saw with, you know, the closure related to the Oculina Reef in rock shrimp? We had a lot of feedback that that wasn't really, you know, serving the purpose. Do we have any comments or feedback on any of these particular areas?

DR. COLLIER: I haven't really received any negative feedback, and maybe other folks have. The one thing that I will point out is that, when we were trying to get contracts, or when TNC was trying to get contracts for the cooperative research that was done, they did struggle a little bit to get folks down in Key West to do Warsaw Hole. There was some concern of saying that we don't like that closed area, and so that is the one example I can provide of people saying negative things about it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and so Warsaw Hole has been an interesting one, and then, you know, we talked a little bit about kind of public awareness, and so I don't know if our best practices are actually, you know, highlighting this specifically for people, but that's a complaint that I get a lot about is, hey, we're fishermen, and we're supportive of this, but, if you're going to close Riley's, make sure the guys with, you know, triple outboard boats out of Miami aren't just looking at CMOR maps and blowing down here because they see the greatest pinnacle that exists on the map.

The same thing with the Warsaw Hole, and so I know Garmin has got it. I don't believe CMOR has it clearly marked on theirs, and it just looks like a great bottom area, and so I think one of the things we could do is make sure that, if people are producing maps for fishermen, that it clearly shows these areas are closed. Law enforcement issues certainly have been a big one for us. It's a long ways to run, like many of these I look at, and so I also wonder if there's any other technologies out there, whether it's buoy notification devices or something that allows law enforcement to know somebody is in these areas. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, we catch these species in the act of spawning in many locations, and so this this review of these sites proving that spawning does occur there, I mean, so that's -- At least you're not proving that it doesn't occur there, and so there's obviously spawning going on in many locations, and so I support these. They're doing what we want them to do, because we've shown that fish do spawn, and, obviously, there's many other locations, thank goodness, where they spawn, and it can change.

You know, sometimes they'll spawn on just somebody has dropped something somewhere, and they just pick a spot to aggregate on, but the -- So I support this, and I think it's accomplishing what we want to accomplish, which is more eggs being produced, and so these spots are as good as, and you've proven that spawning occurs there, and so I support it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair, and this subject is a little near and dear to me as well. You know, Mel Bell was instrumental in getting some of this done. I think you kind of hit it on the nail, Chip, when you said we're still learning about our SMZs, and we have continued research that is happening right now, and so we are looking at artificial reefs versus natural reefs with a state wildlife grant.

I mentioned it during the state update, but we're just now getting into that program. We want to be able to continue that, and so that is using artificial reefs at Area 51 and 53 and comparing them to other natural reefs. These natural reefs that are being protected right now are absolutely showing that they are holding spawning fish, and so the potential benefits, and the known benefits, right then and there, are justification to continue to protect these areas and to remove that sunset clause.

I will also say that, from a law enforcement standpoint, you're right. These are really small areas, but there have been adjudicated cases in both the SSMZs as well as some of the MPAs off of South Carolina. I don't want to not do something because of a few bad eggs, because I think the vast majority of our fishermen understand the longevity of this little teeny tiny area. It's not a huge area. In all honesty, I like the idea of maybe talking about expanding them, and so I appreciate

those conversations happening with the APs, and going through your evaluation, and so I'm just ready to second Kerry's motion, if she's ready to make it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Chip, I'm curious to talk a little bit more about timing, and so you mentioned that the council can be kind of working simultaneously as this workgroup provides a report. My concern is we're already late, in terms of development of this action. I think we do need to give a thorough analysis and review of this, and determine are we going to keep all of the SMZs, or are we going to eliminate some of them, or are we going to modify some of them, and, given that the sunset, I think, is June 30, 2027, what are we envisioning as a timeline? I did look up, and we can do a framework, and so that's at least helpful.

DR. COLLIER: When Amendment 36 was developed, they made special management zones, which the spawning special management zones are a subcomponent of. They made those so they were framework-able, and so, if you're just removing the sunset clause, that would be probably a pretty easy lift, as far as the amendment development, but, you know, it is unique. I don't know if we've really done that, and so it might have some challenges, as far as amendment development and analysis.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and, just to add to that, Andy, we've been essentially scoping this amendment for quite some time. We've got a lot of feedback from advisory panels. It's been on the council's agendas for several meetings, and so we feel that we can probably -- If, you know, the council approves, we can get started on this right away. We already have assigned this to a staff person, and so we are ready to hit the ground running, and we think we can get it done by the deadline.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right. I've got more hands. Clay, and then Robert, and then we'll go back to Kerry.

DR. PORCH: First of all, thank you for the presentation, and it's really interesting to see this work. I do support it, particularly in regards to examining the efficacy of artificial reefs as a source of new production, and I would be interested to hear more on the parameters of the study, like, you know, how far away they are from natural reefs and all those things, but I do want to reinforce something Chip said, that these areas are too small to have a discernible impact on bycatch, and there's no doubt about that, on discards.

Also, we want to be a little bit careful of getting overoptimistic about just protecting during the spawning season, because they're producing eggs at that time, but what really matters is how many you're taking, and not as much when you're taking them, and so imagine, you know, if you took all the spawners before they spawn, that's worse than taking it during the spawning season, and so you have to be a little bit circumspect about that.

The real impact is actually what Kerry was alluding to, that the fish often are more vulnerable, especially if they're aggregating, and so it's easy for fishermen to catch them, and potentially exceed the quota, and you might not know it, because it's just a short pulse, and they catch a whole bunch really quickly, and so you end up catching more than what the quota is, and never really end up knowing it, because you miss it on the intercepts or something like that.

That's a huge issue, and the other thing is if, while they're spawning, the act of fishing itself disrupts them enough, whether it's attracting more sharks or something like that, that they stop spawning, over and above the effect of actually pulling the animals out of the water, and so that's where it can be important to protect the spawning season, but I just want to make sure that we kind of -- It's not just that, oh, they have eggs, and we took them, and that's bad. You know, it doesn't help you if you take them before, or even after, and then that means they're not available for the next year. It just kind of averages out in the long run, and so that's just a key point.

Then I'll close with a question. Will the working group be giving the council a recommendation, because I see the main value of this, as it's set up now, is really kind of an experiment, where we're learning more, and, you know, I would really like to hear the working group's ideas of where we should expand, or change things, and then they could inform the council, and hopefully the council will say, okay, that makes sense, and then, you know, we approve it.

DR. COLLIER: With the working group, you know, it's a little bit challenging on how to expand. I think that -- I think it would be better to start off with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel on how to really change the areas. You know, within the System Management Plan Workgroup, we're focused on the research that was done in the areas, and not necessarily all the research that's been done, and so I think -- I mean, we could use that group to potentially expand the areas, but it's a little bit of a different charge, right?

They're charged with evaluating the areas, and not necessarily how do we get the best areas for spawning moving forward, and so I think, you know, in my mind, you know, we've got to get the research. We don't -- As far as the System Management Plan Workgroup, we have not been focused on the new research that's collecting where fish are spawning now, you know, how these areas are relative to other areas, and there's just -- That would take a lot more time than the evaluation that I'm planning right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip, is there already -- Are there already projects in the works to continue doing this research, or are they waiting for the council and the workgroup to figure out if they're continuing the areas, and kind of what are the next steps related to the research?

DR. COLLIER: I mean, the group is willing to do more work, but there is no funding right now to do more work. There was funding through the CRCP, as well as TNC and the South Atlantic Council all funded some of the research.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right. I have Robert, then Charlie.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: All right, and so I'll start on this last point. You know, talking about using this process to expand these makes me a little nervous, because we just heard we don't have enough science to know what's going on in or out of them, and so I think that, you know, for me at least, where we sit today, that seems like probably an exercise we shouldn't be allocating time to.

I was looking at this, and my next comment was the sunset provision I think has set this conversation up for a very, very good discussion, and I generally think we should have more laws that have sunsets, so that we have to come back to the table and talk about the purpose and need.

Are we meeting where we are, what we intended to do, and so I would actually ask that we consider extending the sunset, and not removing the sunset.

Then my last point was do we also need to talk about updating the purpose and need now, based on discussion we had, so that this extension -- You know, we're not addressing bycatch or other issues, and should we just kind of pare this down a little bit?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Charlie. Well, Robert was reading my mind. When I asked about the cost, I wasn't necessarily asking about council costs, because we don't want to cause LE to spend a lot of money, when they've got X budget anyway, and so, to me, cost is a total thing, but, again, Robert was right where I was thinking.

You know, a lot of this research got done because it had to be done, because we had the sunsets in. Had we not had the sunsets in, I'm skeptical of how much would have been done, and I would -- If we want to do this, and I'm hearing a lot -- The word "research" a lot right now, and so -- Especially, like Chip said, we don't know the difference between inside and outside really, and so there's still a lot of information that can be gleaned, and I would go along with Robert. I would strongly suggest that one of the options in our to-be amendment would be to extend the sunset to X number of years, and maybe a couple of alternatives on X number of years.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: It sounds like we're all pretty much on the same page. I have some grumblings with sort of the sunset again, or the timeframe of it, given that just remember a lot of these species are very, very long-lived, and so ten years into a grouper's life isn't really telling us a whole lot when they live -- Some of them live to be eighty, but I understand, and I do think you're right that it does put the impetus on sort of the rush to get the work done, and I do believe that there's probably NGO money out there if we continue these, and that's where it's going to come from.

Then the last thing I want to say before I make a motion, which I'm about to do, is, Robert, I know you're not suggesting that, now that you understand our timeframe, but I did want to point out that there's so much administrative record, extensive, extensive discussions on access, and I can't even tell you, but years and years of discussion on access, and that's one of these reasons trolling is allowed in these areas and in our deepwater MPAs.

You know, these areas have been established specifically for bottom fish, and we spent a lot of time talking about how you still allow access, but give the biological protection, and so I certainly wouldn't be open to revisiting that discussion in this amendment, and then, finally, before the motion, is I think what we may want to consider is, long-term, looking at -- We're still on our short-term, medium-term, long-term plan for the snapper grouper fishery, you know, as we look at the MSE, and is that a place to consider -- You know, like Amy said, you have more, and you make them bigger, and you look at one or two that maybe, you know, as we move down the road aren't accomplishing the goals. We simply just don't have time to do that right now, and we're going to go backwards if we don't extend or remove the sunset provision, and so I think there's mechanisms to do those other things.

With that said, I would like to make a motion to begin a framework amendment to address the sunset clause from Amendment -- Is it regular Amendment 36? I forget if it was a

framework. I will go so far as to say that, in that framework, we consider a range of sunset options from remove the sunset completely, another ten-year sunset provision, or a fifteen-year and a twenty-year, and we don't have to get into all that now. I think what I'm trying to get on the record, because I believe there will be some sort of inter-meeting IPT team discussion, but I would like to get on the record, hopefully, what this council is considering.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. The motion is going there. Amy, is your hand raised for a second? **All right, and so, right now, the motion says initiate a framework amendment to consider a range of sunset provisions with ten to twenty-year for the spawning special management zones, and so, one more time, initiate a framework amendment to consider a range of sunset provisions with ten to twenty years for the spawning special management zones.** All right. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: **Just, Chip, if you can capture -- I would like there to be an option to remove the sunset provision altogether, and so anywhere from remove to twenty years.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. One more time. **Initiate a framework amendment to consider a range of options to remove sunset provision or sunset provisions with ten to twenty years for the spawning special management zones.** Okay. Thumbs\up. The motion has been seconded. We've already had some good discussion on this. Any more discussion? Anything else that people want to say? Any concerns or anything with the motion? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Nothing with the motion, but I did neglect to say, when I was giving my comments about the support of this, in addition to the Southeast Reef Fish Survey continuing to do its work with the difference between the comparisons of the artificial to the natural reefs, both South Carolina DNR and the South Carolina Aquarium have both now purchased and are working through ROVs, and part of the South Carolina Aquarium's effort will be specifically to be looking at the special spawning management areas, as well as the marine protected areas, and so some of that information can be coming back to the council as well, and so just food for thought.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Any more discussion on this? Go ahead, Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I meant to make the comment, to Andy's point about the artificial reefs, I was really encouraged to see that there's artificial reefs in here, and the State of Florida just funded, last year, a coastal corridor program to work on a statewide artificial reef program, and, Amy, if you all wanted to collaborate, maybe we can drag that all the way up the east coast, and so I just wanted to leave that, and, Kerry, I appreciate all the work that went into this in the past. I certainly wasn't around then, and I know access is important to everybody, and that's why I think that ten years, not a long time, and, twenty years, not a long time, but, once you start adding these together, sea level implications, temperature change, other things I think could cause us to want to look at this, just to make sure it's getting the goal done of protecting those spawning fish. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Any more discussion on this motion? All right. Any objection to approval of the motion? All right. The motion carries. All right. Before Chip runs off, I'm going to turn it over to him. I think that we're going to look at a short video, but I'm going to let Chip introduce that.

DR. COLLIER: Before I introduce Meg, and she's going to go over a video for a call to action for the Release program, I did want to highlight there's some outreach videos that TNC had produced relative to the spawning SMZs. They're going to end up on our webpage for the managed areas. If you go to the managed areas, and then go to marine protected areas, and scroll all the way to the bottom, we're going to have those videos, and so I'll be able to share them with the council. I'll share the links, but those are going to be informative videos on spawning special management zones, or spawning areas, and so, Meg will talk about Release.

MS. WITHERS: Thanks, Chip. All right. Good morning, everyone, and so, for those that I haven't had the opportunity to meet yet, my name is Meg Withers, and I am the Citizen Science Project Coordinator for the council, and we just really quickly wanted to share a video with you all. It's a new video we have for the SAFMC Release project. In collaboration with the 963 Film Group, we were able to make this kind of call-to-action video, and you're going to hear directly from some fishermen in the project about why they're involved and what participating in the project looks like for them.

You're going to hear from Nigel Bowers, Jake Harmon, and also from Captain Matt Simon, and so we're just really grateful to these guys, not only for their participation in the Release project, but also for taking the time to participate in this video and kind of share their thoughts and perspectives, because they really made the video what it is, and their contributions are incredibly valuable to the project.

I also just want to highlight that, while we're kind of showcasing a few SAFMC Release participants in this video, we're incredibly grateful to all the fishermen who participate in Release, and make it possible, and share what they see on the water, and so, with that, I'm going to go ahead and share this video.

(Whereupon, a video on SAFMC Release was presented and not transcribed.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: Next up we're going to go into the headboat vessel limits, and, Chip, are you going to go over the overview of our requested information?

DR. COLLIER: Myra will go over that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

DR. COLLIER: Well we're going to tag team it. She's going to start, and then I get into the boring.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so the next topic is talking about headboat vessel limits, and so what we have for you -- I'm just going to sort of recap where we are, because we've been talking about this for some time. You've received some recommendations from advisory panels, and so I'm just kind of going to do a recap of what information has been collected and provided to you to discuss this topic.

In September, you did have a specific request, and that is the information that Chip is going to go over in a little bit, and that was to look at current catch rates per every six passengers for black grouper, gag, scamp, scamp/yellow mouth now, and snowy grouper, and also to define and explain the requirements to be considered a headboat, and so what is the definition of a headboat.

Back in March of 2024 when you were discussing Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 36, you requested that the advisory panel provide recommendations, kind of general recommendations, on how catch limits per trip or per day for recreational vessels could be applied to headboats. Recall that that was a conversation at the time, and so the AP offered some general comments and recommendations and then specific suggestions for black grouper and gag.

The AP thought that considering vessel limits in proportion to the number of anglers for federally-permitted headboats was a good idea. They thought it would benefit vessels larger than your six-pack charters, and even bigger vessels, and they suggested that you consider how headboat-specific regulations have been implemented in the Gulf, and then they provided some examples that could be explored further, like four fish per twenty to thirty passengers, six fish for thirty passengers, 30 percent of the passenger count, or some kind of a maximum of ten fish per vessel.

Like I said, these were sort of general recommendations, but they were -- They had been asked to focus specifically on gag and black grouper, and so, for those two species, this is what they recommended, and so this came to the council. They, you know, wanted for the council -- The amendment was already kind of well underway, and there was a need to correct the bag limits that had been put in place for gag and black grouper, but the AP, you know, still emphasized that there should be consideration for vessels that carry more than six passengers, and so this is what they recommended at the time.

To continue the conversation, in December of that year, staff put together an online gathering of information describing the South Atlantic fishery, headboat fishery, in the region, and that link takes you to that document. It was presented, like I said, in December, and that's when you requested more specific information, detailed information, to come back to you in June.

In June, there was a report, and that was very complete, that was put together by the Science Center and staff, and highlights of that report were brought to you at that meeting. Again, you can access that report from this presentation, the presentation that was given to you and the report itself, which is very detailed.

There was analysis of characterization of the headboat fleet north and south of Cape Hatteras, and a whole bunch of information that was put together, and then, in September of last year, we again talked about this, and this is where you honed-in on these species. You know, it took all that time to really say, okay, you know, we really need to just look at the this group of species, and so then it became a Snapper Grouper Committee topic, and so that's where we are, and we also discussed, as you heard from Major Michael Paul Thomas yesterday, or the day before, on vessel limits for headboats and what the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel recommended for that, and I just have their recommendations again here on the screen for you to refer to.

He has already gone over this, and so I'm not going to repeat it, and so, again, for this topic we've had a lot of feedback over the over the last couple years. There's been some public comments that have been submitted.

Haley Stephens, who is here in the audience, has been very vocal about this topic, and so I feel like the committee could decide if we want to get started on an amendment at this meeting, and, similar to the topic that we just got done talking about, the spawning SMZs, there's been a lot of

feedback provided to you, a lot of information that's been put together, and so I feel like we can -
- Not really skip the scoping phase, but there's been plenty of scoping already done, and so here's another amendment that, if you wanted to give us direction to get started on, we would be prepared to do that right away.

Here's the definition of a headboat that's in the CFR, and so it's a vessel that holds a valid certificate of inspection issued by the U.S. Coast Guard to carry more than six passengers for-hire. A headboat with a commercial vessel permit is considered to be operating as a headboat when it carries a passenger who pays a fee, or, in the case of persons aboard fishing for or possessing South Atlantic snapper grouper, when there are more persons aboard than the number of crew that are specified in that COI, and so that's, I think, what I have for you, and now I'm going to pass it over to Chip, unless you have any questions for me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Sorry, and that just caught me off-guard. Can you explain the when there are more persons aboard than the number of crew, because that almost describes a lot of charters doesn't it?

MS. BROUWER: I'm sorry, and can you repeat that?

MS. MARHEFKA: You just said, in the case of -- In the case of persons fishing aboard for or possessing snapper grouper, when there are more persons aboard than the number of crew specified in the vessel COI, and I'm just trying to figure out how that is -- That's the COI that is the -- Sorry. That's what -- I missed the COI part.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions? Okay. I don't see any hands. All right. Now we're going to look at some of the data that Chip has analyzed for us.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so, in putting this together, Myra said I nerded out a little bit, and so there's many more details in the report. If you look at Attachment 3b, that's going to have a lot more details, and so I'm just going to hit the highlights for you all today. What I did was I analyzed data that was collected through the Southeast Region Headboat Survey from 2021 to 2025, and so this survey is a census of all the headboat trips occurring in federal waters, and so they report on all the trips.

What we wanted to look at was the potential change in catch if you all went with a per vessel or number of fish per angler, as opposed to a per vessel limit, and so it was a little bit challenging, and so, for gag grouper, the regulations -- For gag and black grouper, the regulations change in 2023. For scamp, you all have approved an amendment to change regulations, and then there's also a scenario that you're asking for, you know, what if we go with this other scenario, and so what I have displayed over here is kind of the rule that I used for changing the number of fish for gag grouper.

It started off as one fish per person in 2021, and, you know, it changed, in 2023, to two per vessel, and so that's where you see that flat line, in orange, of two per vessel, and then, in the green line, you see the number of gag that could be gag or black grouper that could be harvested on a trip as the number of anglers increase, and so you see that step approach.

Additional rules that are used in this, as I went through and changed the analysis, is, if the fish were caught in the spawning season, no new fish could be caught, and so, because in 2023 we had a two-fish per limit, it is very different, and so I didn't want to create a scenario where fish were being harvested out of season.

Additionally, if there were no fish that were actually harvested on a trip, or landed on a trip, then no fish were actually added to a potential bag limit, because that was a potential indication that all fish that were caught on that trip were under the size limit. If there was a fish that was caught on the trip, and there were no discards, once again, there was no change in that trip. It would only be trips that had discards and landings of fish that were outside of the spawning season closure where things would change.

I did all these different rules, in order to really simulate what could potentially happen under the different regulation scenarios from 2021 to 2025, and so each trip is included in the analysis, and then it went through these different rules to figure out how many fish could have potentially been harvested on a headboat trip. Then I went through this, and we did a bootstrapping approach, and, basically, what that is you just go through the data, and you shake it back up, and then you pull random trips back out, and you want to see, all right, how stable is this estimate that I came up with, given some of the concerns.

You'll see that you know that the bootstrapping doesn't have a very wide confidence interval, and that's because it's fairly low trip limits. These are only positive trips that we were sampling through, and so there's not dramatic changes in some of them.

Going into the scenarios, once again, it started off with three per person. I analyzed gag and black grouper together. The reason for this is the regulations are going to end up being bagging gag and black grouper together. There's very few headboat trips that reported catching both gag and black grouper on there, less than I think -- I think less than 5 percent of the trips had that, and so it wasn't a significant impact, because, right now, the regulation is you can have two gag per vessel and two black grouper per vessel. Very few vessels are actually doing that.

Starting off in blue, that was the regulation that was in 2021 that was in place, where it was three gag or black grouper per vessel, and you can see the catches that occurred from 2021 and 2022. Those are actual observations, and those red dots are the observations of catch in the headboat fishery.

Beginning in 2023, that's when regulations changed for gag and black grouper, where it went to two per vessel, and so you see the red dot doesn't really match up with any of my scenarios, because things changed halfway through, but, when you look at 2024, the red dot is right on that gold, or yellow, data point, which is -- I have it mislabeled there, but it should be two per vessel, and that's where it's matching up perfectly with that number.

What we were exploring is what would be the impact of one fish per six anglers, and you can see, in 2021 and 2022, there's very little change from that three fish per person to a one fish per six anglers, and that's because it was typically one gag grouper that was caught on a headboat trip. There are very few, or one less than one, caught per person.

In all these scenarios, the one fish per six anglers was not significantly different than the three fish per person, and it was not significantly different than the two fish per vessel. There was a significant difference between the three fish per person and the one fish per vessel, and so, when you guys were trying to go into the rebuilding plan, there was a dramatic drop there, but it's not significantly different than the new scenario that is being proposed. You can see overall, you know, that the catch of gag kind of went down on the headboat fishery, with a slight increase in 2025 compared to the other points.

Really, trying to compare the what impact this could potentially have on the ACL, you know, when you're trying to think about this is, you know, what is the overall impact to the recreational fishery, and so what I wanted to do was look at the difference between a two fish per vessel and a one fish per six anglers, and, basically, you would reduce the -- You would increase the catch by seventy-two fish, is the estimated amount, and, if you use the average weight, the overall impact is around 1 percent of the recreational ACL. That would be the overall impact of changing from two fish per vessel to one fish per six anglers. Any questions on that for gag?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Remind me, and do we do we need to start an amendment or is this going to go into Amendment 36? Do we need to start an amendment? I'm ready for that. Let me know when.

DR. COLLIER: All right. Going into scamp, a similar analysis. However, the regulations were a little bit different here, where the current regulations on the book are three scamp, or they're in the grouper aggregate, where you're allowed a maximum of three groupers, and yellowmouth and scamp are in that list of groupers, and so you could have three scamp, or you could have three yellowmouth, or you could have two scamp and one yellowmouth, and so those all are scenarios that were investigated.

In this scenario, the three fish per person is, obviously, the one that's in place, and so that stays in place from 2021 to 2025. The one fish per vessel is the regulation that is currently under review, and so I analyzed that scenario, and then also compared the one fish per six anglers, to see what would happen.

There's a significant difference between the different scenarios in all of these. The one fish per six anglers, obviously, is in between the scenarios, and it has a little bit more impact for scamp grouper than it did for gag grouper, and, you know, just getting a little bit more into the details of this, you know, it can have up to potentially around a 5 percent change, comparing from -- Or a 5 percent decrease, or a 4 percent decrease, from the three fish per person, but up to an increase of a 5 percent for the one fish per vessel, and you can see that all the way to the right.

We were also requested to do this for snowy grouper. For snowy grouper, the data was confidential in some instances, and so it made analysis very challenging. However, looking into the data, there were a limited number of releases, and so, if we were look at the total removals of snowy grouper, less than 1 percent of the total catch included -- Less than 1 percent of the total catch was coming from releases. That means that there's very fish being released. They're basically all being retained on a trip.

Increasing the bag limit could result in more targeting. This is an overfished species in a rebuilding plan, and, additionally, the recreational ACL was exceeded in 2024 and 2025, and so a change in

the -- Increasing flexibility to catch more snowy grouper might cause additional challenges for the fishery.

In conclusion, changing to number of fish per angler, or per number of anglers, will have varying impacts, depending on the stock that you're looking at. Most of the stocks analyzed for this are in rebuilding plans, and some are reaching their ACLs currently. Gag and black grouper changing from one fish -- Changing to one fish per six anglers will likely have a minimal impact, around 1 percent. For scamp and yellowmouth grouper, changing regulations could have an impact of 5 percent. Once again, those regulations are currently not in place, but it is a substantial reduction from what was in place before for scamp grouper.

Snowy grouper had few releases and the number of retained fish on a trip -- Changing the number of fish that could be retained on a trip could increase targeted trips of snowy grouper, and so, with that, I think that's all we have for you this morning.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Robert, would you like to make your motion?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **I would like to make a motion to start an amendment to adjust the vessel limits for headboats to allow for a vessel limit of one per six passengers.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: **For those species that we just discussed?**

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **Correct.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We'll get that motion on the board. Do we have a second? Seconded by Kerry, and then we'll have more discussion on this. I figured other people had questions, but we'll get a motion, and then take more questions, and have more discussion. All right. Robert can you check out that motion and make sure that that captures what you intended there? The reason it just says number of fish per passenger is so that, that way, we could have a range of alternatives in there?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: My thinking on this was to align it directly with what a regular charter boat has, and to keep that very lined up, and so I'm --

MS. MCCAWLEY: We've got lots of hands going up, but do you think that this captures your motion?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: It captures my motion, and I think we'll have some discussion and maybe tweak this language a little bit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I have Kerry, then Jimmy, then Tom.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I'm absolutely 100 percent super supportive of the direction we're heading, and I think it's exactly where we need to go, and I'm excited that we're getting to do this. A couple of questions, just to think things through. One, the divisible by six, if it doesn't divide easily by six with the number of passengers on the boat, do they go up, or do they go down, and what's sort of the case of that? I don't have heartburn either way. I'm just curious.

Then to speak -- Snowy is probably the only one -- I'm not saying I don't -- It's not that I don't support it, but it's the one that I think we need to build some rationale for. It seems to me that, yes, in 2024 and 2025, the rec ACL was exceeded, and it would be really hard to argue that this very small portion of a very large fishery was responsible for exceeding it, and not that we assign responsibility that way, but it's really hard to rationalize limiting these folks that happen to get to the ocean in this particular way, because a lot of other people have more access, better equipment, fancier boats, and so I think that --

I also do question, and, obviously, we can get -- We're going to get input from the AP, and I see Haley is here, and if, in their public comments, they sort of want to address -- If they're here tonight, to address their public comments, if they want to address sort of would they really go out of their way to target snowy grouper to keep, what, three or four a boat, and that seems expensive to me, but I don't know their area as well, and so some discussion of -- I think it would be important to gather that input from AP, and that is my only concern. Other than that, I am I'm supportive of this. I'm supportive of us, when we get to the workplan, figuring out where we can work it in, because these guys are hurting, and, anything we can do to help them, I agree.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I agree with that, and, yes, I have similar concerns about snowy. I'm happy to see this analyzed, but, yes, that was my concern, after seeing all the data. I have a number of hands. Jimmy, you're next.

MR. HULL: Thank you. My question is so we're -- Right now, we have a limit, a vessel limit, of two, for instance, gags per vessel, and so a six-passenger charter boat has to abide by that, and a headboat, and so now we're -- My thought was, for every six passengers, the vessel limit would increase by two, but so now we're changing it to, for every six passengers, it's one animal for every six passengers. That's why I'm asking the question, and that's -- For me, it's we're going in a different direction.

MS. MCCAWLEY: What was your question again? Sorry, and we were trying to capture some of these points and concerns here on the screen, and so I heard the first part.

MR. HULL: The way I understand the regulations are so, for a six-passenger vessel, it has a vessel limit of two per vessel, and that vessel limit also applies to a headboat, and headboats have more than six passengers, and so we were going to use the six passengers as a scaler for that two-per-vessel limit, and so, for every six passengers, the two turns into four, or, at eighteen, it turns into six, and so that was the kind of the way I was seeing it, but that's not what that says. It says for -- Well, maybe it does, but you've changed it to one animal for every six passengers, instead of two, and that's what I'm trying to get through my head.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think I'm lost, but, Robert, can you explain?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think, for that purpose, I think we should -- I think we've talked about it in that regard, right? For every six passengers, we're going to treat a headboat like -- If they had twelve passengers, it's like two charter boats, and so they should get two vessel limits.

MR. HULL: The vessel limit doubles.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: So I think we should just go ahead and be intentional about that, and talk about it in terms of six passengers here, and leave that piece out.

MR. HULL: I'm good either way, because I want what's best for the headboats, so they can sell tickets, and so, you know, whichever way the industry wants it, but that's the way that I thought it was going.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: A lot of the data we just looked at was also related to six passengers. That was kind of the way they analyzed it, the way they looked at the impacts, and it seemed reasonable, and so I think we should keep talking about it in that context, and so the headboat limit would be increased for every six passengers, and so, if you have ten, it's one limit. If you have twelve, it's two. If you have thirteen, it's still two. Every time you get to six, you get another limit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Yes, and so I still have a list of hands. Thank you. **That helped, and, also, Chip edited the motion, which actually matched what Robert originally said, which was the number per six passengers, and so we put the number six in there, and so Tom, and then Dewey.**

MR. ROLLER: Thank you. Robert, thank you for your rationale there. I think that we really need to highlight that. That really explains and answers a lot of questions I had of some of the details. You know, obviously, I fully support this. This is something that we need to do, and, in an open access for-hire fishery, I view headboats as just multiple for-hire boats fishing at one time, right, and this really comes from the fact that we're seeing a lot of changes in our limits and ACLs, which, obviously, things like gag and scamp, we're going to vessel limits, where we didn't have them before.

Well, this comes back to why I put my hand up in the first place, and I have a lot of issues with snowy being included here, to the point where I'm not even sure that it's right for us to waste time and resources on a rationale. The idea with the snowy vessel limit -- It's been in place for a long time. Obviously, these are very deepwater species, and we target them in very specific areas. I love fishing for them. It's hard enough for me to just catch one, and I know exactly where they are, and we can get them that fast. **I would offer an amendment to remove snowy from this, a friendly amendment, if possible.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: **So Robert said that he accepts that amendment to remove snowy from there, and the seconder, Kerry, is back there having a discussion, but so Robert says he's good with removing snowy.** Is the seconder good with removing snowy from this? Okay. All right. Thank you. Go ahead.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm sorry, and I was talking about this, and so I would like to see the analysis on snowy before we just take it out, personally.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So can you -- Tom, can you repeat for Kerry what your rationale was, one more time, please?

MR. ROLLER: So, obviously, this comes from the fact that we're seeing changes in our per-person limits, right, for fisheries that have historically been a per-person fishery, to a vessel limit. With snowy, we've had a vessel limit for a very long time. They're, obviously, an overfished

species, and they're also a fish with much higher barotrauma, and they're also, in my opinion, much easier to catch, particularly if you know where they are and you're a professional fishermen.

It's, for myself, hard enough for me to catch one. If I'm in an area with snowy, I fish one hook, even if it's 800 foot, because I do not want to catch two, right, and so I do just guess my concern is here, and I'm not saying anyone is going to knowingly do this, is we're providing an avenue which we could really increase harvest and discards in a fishery that really can't afford it at this time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, to that point, and so we're still on editing this motion, because you're the seconder.

MS. MARHEFKA: To that, may I make the suggestion that, for today, we leave it in, and we hear some public comment tonight, and then, when we go to Full Council, we revisit this? It just feels -- I agree with all of your rationale, and I really do. I'm concerned about being short-sighted and not thinking it all through a little further. It just seems slightly premature for me to take it out. I'm not going to die on the hill. If no one else is supportive of that, then we can remove it from the motion, but that would be my path forward. Snowy worries me too, and don't think it doesn't, because it very much worries me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm going to go to Trish for a point of order. I do see all of the hands that are up, and I will come back to you, and so, Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Just a point of order, and you can actually make an amendment -- Well, I was going to say you can make a motion to amend this, or a substitute, and I would say amend, if you want to,

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we'll consider then, Tom, this a substitute motion.

MR. ROLLER: I'm going to look to the chair for that, and I'm happy to do an amendment or a substitute motion, but, if you want, I will do a substitute motion of this language without snowy grouper.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so then we now have a substitute motion. Is there a second for that? Okay. It's seconded by Charlie. All right, and so I'm going to go back to my list of hands. I have Dewey, Amy, Robert.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I mean, I don't know of anything between now and whenever we come back to Full Council that would change my mind on snowy grouper. The data is there, and we all know it, and you've got a cooccurring species with blueline tilefish in certain areas, and just I don't think snowy grouper is the avenue. I'm all for increasing the headboat limits, where it's at, for these other different species, but I'm not for snowy grouper.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks. I wasn't sure what your position was there, and so thanks for clarifying that at the end. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. I still agree with Kerry that getting a little bit more information on the snowy grouper as it pertains to headboats. When we're talking about charter

boats and headboats, the magnitude between those two fleets is so vast in numbers, and I'm not sure that I -- I would like more information on the snowy before we remove it, and we have the opportunity to have some public comment tonight. I personally, in the very few headboats that I have in South Carolina, I don't necessarily see them going to target, but I would like to have conversations with them and explore this a little bit more.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I agree with both Kerry and Tom, and so, for me, I'm looking -- I'm looking more to Haley and the headboat group to give us some feedback. What I'm sensing is that snowy grouper is likely to bog this down a little bit for you, and it seems to me like -- Just based on the discussion we're having today, what's it really worth to have snowy grouper in there, because, when we get to public comment, and we get further down this, I'm sensing right now that's going to be the sticking point, and I sense no friction with the rest of it, and so that's kind of just my thought.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm going to go to Chip, and then Tom.

DR. COLLIER: So you said you want to see more information, and it might be easy to provide you some information by Full Council, or when you want to talk about it next, and what information would you like to see? Like landings from the headboat fishery on snowy grouper, just simple things, or are you looking for like a full-blown analysis?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, we've got a lot of hands going up, and let's just -- I know that, when staff asks a question, everybody just wants to jump in immediately, and we've got a whole list of hands here, and so I'm trying to herd our cats here around this.

Before we go to Tom, I just want to say, basically, either one of these motions are going to be okay, because you can always hear public comment, and you'll see this again at Full Council, and you can edit it either way, and so, really, either one of the motions are going to get you to the same place, but, if you feel strongly now about going ahead and kicking snowy out of there, but you could hear something at public comment, and have a discussion in Full Council, when you see the committee report, and say either we want it in or we want it out, and so they are very similar. They will both accomplish the same goal of still allowing you to get public comment and make a decision. All right. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So I was just going to come back to Robert's statement, because that's where I was too, is snowy is going to bog this down, right, particularly for doing the analysis of it, and let's remember how small the ACL is for the recreational community, and using, as we have discussed countless times at this council, MRIP estimates for deepwater species is a problem, and, if we're going to increase the odds that we're going to get intercepts for these fish and close it down for everybody else that --

UNIDENTIFIED: (The comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. ROLLER: What's that? Thank you for that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Kerry, did you want to comment on this?

MS. MARHEFKA: I just wanted to make it very clear that I wanted no work from staff. What I was thinking would be different, different information we would have at Full Council, and it would be what we gathered from public comment. I was not expecting you to stay up and work at night.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more discussion before we vote on the substitute motion? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I've been just listening to the discussion, and I think it's been good. You know, I struggle with the issue of fairness and equity for the headboats, right, and, well, they're being restricted more with snowy grouper than others would be, right, and so that's the challenge, but then there's been great points made.

I'm just looking at the catch limit, and it's 1,700 fish. Fish, right, and we had a forty-day season this year, and we went over that catch limit. You know, Chip, you made the comment, and I don't -- I don't want an in-depth analysis, right, and I just want some basic maybe facts that you could bring back to us as to what implications this may have, and, I mean, are we talking, of the 1,700 fish, adding 200 or 300 or 400 additional fish harvested, and, if that's the case, that means the season gets even shorter, by, you know, a considerable amount, simply by adding the small fraction of fish and so, if you could at least give us some landings, and how many trips maybe are releasing snowy grouper, that would be helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so Chip is thinking about what he can provide later in the week. Any more discussion before we vote on the substitute motion, and so, once again, the substitute does not include snowy. Go ahead, Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: The substitute motion is what will be considered in Full Council or both motions will be considered?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, whichever one passes, and so, if we pass the substitute, the substitute becomes the main motion, and we'll vote on that.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: So are we removing snowy grouper or adding it back later? It's just a distinction, and it doesn't matter.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think that there's some people that want to go ahead and remove it, and feel like that would spark comment at the public comment, et cetera, and just --

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: So how do we decide which one we're voting on?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We are voting on -- Just to be clear, we're voting on the substitute that does not include snowy. All right, and so, all those in favor, let me see a show of hands, seven; all those against; abstentions. Were both you and Judy in the yes? Okay, and so that's nine. The substitute -- Where were you? You were which one? Okay, and so we're at ten. Okay. All right. **The motion passes, ten in favor and two opposed.**

Then the substitute motion now becomes the main motion, and we need to vote on the main motion. **All right, and so all those in favor of what is now the main motion, raise your hand, please.**

This does not include snowy. Twelve. **All right, and so twelve in favor. The motion is approved.**

All right and so we are done now, in the committee, for the headboat discussion, and so I appreciate all that good discussion, and then let's go ahead and take a ten-minute break, and then we will come back and dive into vermilion. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going. Come on back to the table. All right. The next item for discussion is the allocation review on vermilion snapper, and I'm going to turn it over to John Hadley

MR HADLEY: Thank you very much, and so today we'll talk about -- We'll gather your feedback on current allocations for vermilion snapper. To start off, I have just a kind of briefing presentation, just to orient everybody on the discussion, and then we'll jump into the discussion document itself to gather your feedback.

As a little bit background, I'll remind everybody on the council's current allocation review guidelines, and then caveats to the current sector ACLs and landings, and we'll review the Snapper Grouper FMP goals and objectives, since this is one item that the council has said that you want to review ahead of these allocation decisions, and then we'll jump in, again, to the discussion document, where I'll take a pause before that to answer any questions, but we'll jump in the discussion document and review relevant information on vermilion snapper, and then, finally, turn it over to you for discussion on the current allocations and whether or not they're currently adequate and why.

As a little bit of background, at the December 2023 meeting, the council approved the allocation review guidelines and updated the allocation review trigger policy, and so, really, the guidelines specify how the council wants to go about reviewing sector allocations, and when they will be reviewed, or the guidelines specify the council sector allocation -- Excuse me. When the allocations will be reviewed, and the policy specifies how when the allocation reviews will occur.

One criteria that the council chose is a time-based criteria, as far as triggering these allocation reviews, and so, specifically within that time-based criteria, each species is to be reviewed, or the allocation for each species is to be reviewed, once every seven years, and vermilion snapper has met this criteria, and so that's really why this is being brought to you today.

Currently, there's no new stock assessment or catch level recommendation for vermilion snapper. It is on the SEDAR review schedule, and the catch levels will likely be reviewed through the next stock assessment and associated amendment.

However, this assessment -- The assessment results are not likely to be available until 2028, at the earliest, and so you're looking at a few years out before this the species would be reviewed for its current allocation, and so you kind of have at least a two-year time gap there from when the review has been triggered versus when it may be reviewed by the council, and so, again, that's why this is being brought to your attention today. It also is worth noting that recreational landings estimates

for vermillion snapper are based in MRIP Coastal Household Telephone Survey units, and so CHTS units, in that methodology.

The council will be presented, and this is, again, something that we'll get into a little bit more, is the council has noted through -- Again through the policy, that you'll be presented the following information when reviewing sector allocations: the fishery management plan goals and objectives, the current allocations and rationale for setting those allocations, landings and ACL utilization over the most recent five years of data, and information that may be relevant from the fishery performance report, if there is one, for that species.

To kind of orient you on what we'll discuss today, versus what will come back to you in June, the intent today is to have a discussion on the current allocations for vermillion snapper. Staff will write up a summary of that discussion, and you will be presented this summary for final approval in June.

I'm going to take a second to switch gears, and we're kind of done with the background section, and move over to the goals and objectives and remind you of the goals objectives for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. There are several objectives, and I won't go through all of them, but, generally, going over the goals, and so Goal 1 is science, and so management decisions for the fishery are based upon robust, defensible science that considers qualitative and quantitative data analyzed in a timely, clear, and transparent manner that builds stakeholder confidence.

Goal 2 focuses on management, and this is to adopt management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery that rebuild and maintain fishery resources, adapt to regional differences, and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities. Goal 3 focuses on communication. Employ interactive outreach strategies that encourage continuous participation and support two-way engagement between managers and stakeholders, while building a greater understanding of management and science. Goal 4 focuses on governance, and so this is commit to a transparent, balanced, and timely decision-making process that allows flexible yet well-defined protocols and strategies for managing the fishery.

That's a high-level overview of the goals and objectives. Again, this is all provided in your background information, and so, again, this is just an orientation presentation, and so I'll pause here for any questions, but just note that, coming up in the discussion, we'll kind of get into the details of vermillion snapper, looking at the current allocations, the current ACL, how those ACLs have been utilized in recent years, and then, again, turn it over to the council for feedback on those current allocations, and so I'll pause here for any questions so far.

MS. MCCAULEY: All right. Any questions? I think most of our questions are going to get answered in the decision document, but any questions before we go to the decision document? All right. I don't see any hands.

MR. HADLEY: All right, and so, jumping over to the decision document, and this is Attachment 4a in your briefing materials, and so this starts off with a table that shows information on the current management, essentially, or summary information, I should say, on current management for vermillion snapper.

The current ACL is approximately 1.3 million pounds, and this is divided between the recreational sector and commercial sector, with the 428,000 pounds. The commercial sector received 68 percent of the total annual catch limit, which is approximately 900,000 pounds, and the rationale for this decision was the breakdown of landings from 1986 through 2005, and that was set in Snapper Grouper Amendment 16.

Looking at some of the current regulations, in the recreational fishery, there's a five-fish-per-person bag limit, a twelve-inch total length minimum size limit, and there's no season. As far as the commercial regulations, there's the same twelve-inch total length minimum size limit, a 1,000-pound gutted weight trip limit, and there's a split season January through June, and then also July through December.

As far as the accountability measures for the fishery, there's an in-season closure once that sector is projected to meet its annual catch limit, and this is applicable to both sectors, and there's a payback provision for an overage only if the species is overfished and the total ACL is exceeded.

Moving down, the next two tables cover landings, landings by sector and then sector utilization, whether or not there was a recent closure in that sector, and then the following table looks at the total landings and total ACL utilization, and so, focusing on Table 3, you can see, starting on the -- Moving from left to right, the recreational landings have, for the most part, been under the recreational ACL, the exception being in 2021, when there was an observed spike in landings. There were no closures for the fishery from 2020 through 2024.

Moving over to the right, looking at commercial landings, the commercial annual catch limit has not been fully utilized. The landings have been below the catch limit in recent years, and there has not been a commercial closure, in-season closure, over the past -- From 2020 through 2024, and so you can look at an average over that time series. The commercial sector, or sorry, the recreational sector rather, utilized approximately 79 percent of its annual catch limit, and the commercial sector utilized approximately 73 percent of its annual catch limit.

Moving down to Table 4, this is looking at total landings and relating those landings to the total ACL. As you can see, in most years, the annual catch limit has not been met. The total annual catch limit has not been met, and, on average, approximately 75 percent of the total ACL has been harvested.

Looking at some relevant points from the most recent fishery performance report, which this was completed by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel in November 2017, as far as stock observations, the AP noted that the -- AP members generally agreed that vermilion snapper are abundant throughout the region, and the stock is healthy. Again, this is from the time from 2017.

Commercial observations were vermilion snapper were referred to as the meat and potatoes of the commercial snapper grouper fishery, and so certainly a keystone species for the commercial sector. Looking at recreational observations, charter captains from throughout the region agreed that vermilion snapper are not a species that is normally targeted, but is considered a reliable catch year-round. As far as observations on management measures, minimum size -- The AP felt that minimum size limits are -- The current minimum size limits are appropriate, and it was also noted that the commercial season needs to be open during the holiday season, and so that's important to the commercial fishery.

As far as environmental and ecological observations, AP members noted that major storms disrupt the commercial season region-wide, and can notably impact commercial effort, and then, also, off of Florida, cold-water intrusions strongly affect the availability of vermilion snapper to the fleet, and so, with that, I'm happy to answer questions on any of that information, but, as far as the discussion questions, and turning it over to the council, does the council feel that the current sector allocations for vermilion snapper are adequate for the fishery, and, as a follow-up to that, if so, why, and so why does the council feel these allocations are still appropriate, and, if not, do you want to examine, re-examine, the sector allocations in an amendment to the FMP, and, if a decision cannot be made at this time, is there additional information that you would like to see? I'll turn it over to the committee.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, John. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks, John. I appreciate this, and I appreciate you all keeping us on track for when we need to discuss these things. It is my opinion that we would not address vermilion snapper allocations at this time. My rationale -- That we will wait until new information is available in 2028, the rationale being, one, I'm pretty sure you just said it's still in CHTS, and, obviously, we're still working through those issues.

Number two, there's been no closures. What we have working seems to not be constraining either fishery, and so the conclusion being that both fisheries have what's needed to do what they want to do, and the third piece of rationale would be that, in our innovation plan, which is not finalized, but we will be discussing later this week, and have discussed several times, and, to my knowledge, I've not heard anyone complain about this aspect of it, was the fact that we're not looking at making major allocation shifts in this fishery at this time

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Kerry. Others? Other thoughts? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I totally agree with everything Kerry said, and we're going to have some changes on the commercial side when we do our commercial amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's a great point. Good point. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. I agree as well, and it just seems a little frivolous for us to go down this path when we know we're going to have some updated information in the next couple of years, and we'll be able to have that transition to FES, and we just need to get a little bit further down the road before we start talking about allocation changes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I agree. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: I agree also that we shouldn't do anything, and leave everything the way it is. It is working very well for the charter boats, and also the recreational fishermen.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Judy. Anybody else want to weigh-in on this?

MR. HADLEY: So I think, at this point, we don't necessarily need a motion, and just gathering your feedback. We will need a motion in June, and so that will be the final approval, and then this will go on the website to serve as documentation that you did review allocations for the species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Unless anybody else wants to comment on this, I think we're good for today, and so, just to recap, we'll see this again in June, and then we will need a motion at that time to say that we're good with the allocation, and we don't want to reconsider it at this time. Okay. All right. Thank you, John. All right. Next up is the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision, which is Amendment 61, and this is John and Allie.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you, and so we'll switch gears here over to Amendment 61, and so all right thank you so I wanted to kind of start off with the introductory presentation, and really focus on the information that was requested at the last meeting, and so you'll remember, at the December meeting, the committee requested information on -- Really focusing on ecosystem component species and how other councils have addressed ecosystem component species, including the Mid-Atlantic Council, and other councils, and also the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

This is really a summary presentation based on what's in your decision document, but pulling out that specific piece of information, or specific pieces of information, that were requested in December, and so, you know, again, focusing on ecosystem component species, additionally, you know, what is the pathway for ecosystem component species, and that was a major discussion item from the committee in December.

Once we get through this kind of information piece, we'll pause for questions, and then jump into the decision document to discuss specifically what's in the amendment, and, there again, you know, this slide really highlights that piece from the requested information, again, on the Mid-Atlantic Council and how other councils have addressed ecosystem component species.

You know, to take a step back, what are ecosystem component species, and this should help frame the council's discussion on how you may want to move forward in Amendment 61, but these species are defined as stocks that a council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list at an FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives, and so, again, that conservation and management piece is an important part of the conversation on whether or not species are designated as ecosystem components.

There's really some guidance in the National Standard Guidelines as far as how councils may move forward with designated species as EC species, or ecosystem component species, and so, within the guidelines, if the council determines that stocks do not require conservation and management, again highlighting that term, based on considerations and factors listed in the section, so that's the reference to the list of ten items that councils should consider when designating -- When determining whether a species is in need of conservation and management, and the council and the committee has discussed that multiple times, but that's that reference there, and you've already started to work through that.

EC species may be identified at a species or stock level and may be grouped into complexes, and, specifically, management measures can be adopted in order to for example collect data on EC species, minimize bycatch or bycatch mortality, protect the associated role of EC species in the

ecosystem, and/or to address other ecosystem issues, and so we'll get into it towards the end of the discussion, but that data collection piece I think is an important part of some of your considerations in this amendment, specifically maintaining permit and reporting requirements.

As far as the path for designating ecosystem component species, the council would work through the ten factors listed in the National Standard General Guidelines to determine whether or not the species are in need of conservation and management. Species that do not fit the need for federal conservation and management would be candidates for EC species.

Again, the council has already begun this process, through your discussion at the June meeting, where you recall that you took the survey that looked at in-depth information on each one of the seventeen species being considered in Amendment 61. However, that will -- The rationale for that, and the feedback from the council, will be considered to be -- Continue to be developed through this amendment.

Then, upon completion of this amendment, the species that the council has noted should become ecosystem components would become ecosystem components in the FMP once the final rule for the amendment becomes effective, and so that's just a high-level look at the pathway for designating ecosystem component species.

Switching gears a little bit to look at how other councils have addressed EC species, focusing on the Mid-Atlantic, since this was a specific request of the committee, and, also, a lot of the committee's discussion at the December meeting and other meetings has focused around what the Mid-Atlantic has done in addressing ecosystem component species, and so the Mid-Atlantic completed an unmanaged forage omnibus amendment to designate sixteen species or groups of species as ecosystem components, and the amendment established an aggregate possession limit, and so a 1,700-pound possession limit for all EC species combined.

It specified a permit requirement where commercial vessels and operators that catch or possess ecosystem component species must be issued a commercial vessel and operator permit from NMFS. One thing of note here is it's a general -- It's not specifying a specific permit, and it's just a permit from NMFS, and so there's not a specific species-based permit.

There are transit provisions where commercial vessels may transit the Mid-Atlantic forage species management unit with ecosystem component species in excess of the possession limit if those species have been harvested outside of the management unit and gear is adequately stowed, and there's also a recordkeeping and reporting requirement, where vessel operators and seafood dealers must report the catch and sale of EC species. There's a little bit more information on the Mid-Atlantic Council's considered --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: If you can go back to the prior slide, I guess two questions, and so this pertains to their trawl fishery, correct? Is this retention of species in the trawl fishery, and are these bycatch, essentially, or you don't know?

MR. HADLEY: I'm not sure. It would apply to the trawl fishery, but I believe it may apply to other fisheries as well, and I'm not positive about that though.

MR. STRELCHECK: Do you recall the rationale for the 1,700-pound possession limit, and kind of how they arrived at that?

MR. HADLEY: I do not.

MR. STRELCHECK: Okay.

MR. HADLEY: Looking at the purpose and need statements, and so this -- You know, it gives a little bit of insight into what the Mid-Atlantic Council was considering in development of their omnibus amendment. They had multiple purpose statements, and so I'll briefly go over those, and the need statement, but the purpose statements include to advance an ecosystem approach to fisheries management in the Mid-Atlantic through the consideration of management alternatives that would afford protection to currently unmanaged forage species by regulating landings or possession of those species. Consider management alternatives to address data collection and reporting. Consider measures to establish a process for new fisheries to develop.

Then the need statement includes to prohibit the development of new and expansion of existing directed commercial fisheries on unmanaged forage species in the Mid-Atlantic until the council has had an adequate opportunity to assess the scientific information available, and so, you know, it's a little bit summarized there, but, you know, when I was looking at this, I found it interesting that there were multiple purpose statements. That was -- You know, it kind of stood out to me as an interesting feature, that there could be multiple purpose statements within the amendment, but I wanted to include that for the council's consideration, and bring that to your attention, because we will be getting into the purpose and need statement, a very preliminary draft of the purpose and need statement, for Amendment 61.

A little bit more information on the Mid-Atlantic Council's consideration. At the last meeting, this committee discussed the timeline for the Mid-Atlantic's development of that amendment, and so there's some milestones here for you to review, but, essentially, there was a forage fish workshop that kicked off, you know, the work that would eventually be completed through this amendment in April of 2013.

Then the council worked -- The Mid-Atlantic Council worked to develop the amendment, with final action by the council in August 2016, and then implementation occurred, or say let's say partial implementation occurred, September 27, 2017, and so, of note, the National Marine Fisheries Service partially approved and implemented the amendment. The part that was disapproved was the inclusion of bullet and frigate mackerel, but, as you may recall, for those of you that were around at the time, the South Atlantic Council addressed this by adding bullet and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan as ecosystem component species through Amendment 12.

That's an overview of the actions from the Mid-Atlantic Council, and I'll briefly go over those of the Pacific and North Pacific Council, and then I'm going to jump into the South Atlantic Council's actions, and so, with the Pacific Fishery Management Council, they developed Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 that focused on ecosystem component species, and it included a retention limit, as far as other species needing to be onboard for ecosystem component species to be landed, a trip limit, an annual -- Or should I say an annual per vessel limit and an at-sea

processing limitation. They also had trawl-gear-specific trip and annual vessel limits, and so gear-specific measures there.

In the North Pacific, the North Pacific Council classified squids as ecosystem component species in their ground fishery management plans, and so, in doing so, they included a recordkeeping and reporting requirement, and also a trip retention limit, and so, in that case, ecosystem component species could not make up more than 20 percent of total landings on a commercial trip.

Again, switching gears to the South Atlantic Council, and so the measures that this council has taken in the past, I wanted to highlight three amendments to the snapper grouper fishery, and so that includes the comprehensive annual catch limit amendment, Amendment 25, Snapper Grouper Amendment 27, and Amendment 35.

Looking at -- Kind of going with the earliest measure, looking at the Amendment 25, the comprehensive ACL amendment, which was in 2012, the council took action to remove thirteen species from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, and so, at that time, the council's decision criteria included species with 95 percent or greater landings from state waters, species that recovered under the Florida Marine Life Species Rule, and species with no landings at all, recorded landings.

As far as the council action, the council also designated six species as ecosystem component species. The council had considered removing those from the FMP altogether. However they changed course after receiving public comment, and then, as far as the decision criteria for designated ecosystem component species, the council examined various landings categories, and so. if the species had less than or equal to 1,000 pounds, 2,500 pounds, 5,000 pounds, or 10,000 pounds, and that was one of the considerations, and then also if the species met National Standard Guideline 1 criteria at the time.

Moving over to Amendment 27, this was in 2014. The council removed blue runner from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The decision criteria for this is that the council noted that the majority of landings of blue runner, 99 percent, were in waters off of Florida, and adequate management was already in place by the state in state waters.

Then, finally, Amendment 35, and this was completed in 2016, the council action was to remove black snapper, dog snapper, mahogany snapper, and schoolmaster from the FMP. As far as the decision criteria for the council at that time, the council noted that harvest of the four species was low from federal waters and in state waters other than off of Florida. The council also noted that species could be or already were adequately managed by the State of Florida.

The stated objective of this amendment was to create a consistent regulatory environment for the subject species and ensure that only species requiring federal management are included in the Snapper Grouper FMP, and so that's a summary of the information that's in your decision document, but, again, I wanted to highlight this, kind of pull it out at the very beginning, since this was requested in December, and so after this -- I want to pause for questions, but, after this, we'll jump into the decision document, go over a draft purpose and need, as well as the species in the amendment and measures that are being considered, and so I'll pause for any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, John. We had one question already, but we didn't we didn't have an answer. Do we have other questions before we dive into the document? Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, Madam Chair. John, with the aggregate in the -- So, the Mid-Atlantic, they had the 1,700 pounds aggregate limit for ecosystem species, and, when they did the reporting, do you know -- Was it reported just as ecosystem general, or did it break down the landings to species? What was the reporting requirement for that amount?

MR. HADLEY: I would -- I'm not sure about the reporting requirement. I do know how it was grouped. It was grouped by species categories, and so, you know, I don't know if the reporting is on a species level. I can find that information out. I imagine it also depends on what's on the VTRs and the dealer reports, and so how in-depth they could get on the species through those reports.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Isn't it more isn't it to the species level, because that's how -- It's also presented in that report that the Mid-Atlantic Council gives once a year.

MR. HADLEY: I think so, and so I can double-check on this and get you a more solid -- Get you a solid answer on it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes. and I answered my own questions, because I was looking at their omnibus amendment, but it's a variety of years, but primarily coming from their bottom trawls, right, and then, the 1,700 pounds, they essentially set it at the 99th percentile of the combined landings for the various species that they designated as ecosystem component, and it was intended to cap landings at ecosystem component species -- At like recent levels, you know, historic levels.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that. All right. Any other questions before diving into the decision document? All right. I'm going to pass it back to John.

MR. HADLEY: All right, and so what I pulled up is Attachment 5a in your briefing materials. I've jumped down to the objectives for this meeting section, and so you did get feedback from the Law Enforcement AP on this amendment. They reviewed it. They reviewed it at their meeting earlier this year, and so I won't go over that again, but that information is available, and so, also - - Really the goal here is to provide feedback on the draft purpose and need statements, and then, after that, look at the species that should be considered, continue to be considered, in this amendment, measures -- You know, go over the measures that are currently considered in the amendment.

Really, the goal here, and this is based on where the council and the committee left off at the December meeting, is to gather guidance on whether or not the amendment should move forward, and so you may recall, at the December meeting, it seemed like there was a bit of a split opinion amongst the committee on how to move forward with this amendment, and so that's kind of the goal here, is to gather direction to staff on how to move forward with this amendment.

With that, I'm going to jump to the draft purpose and need statements, and so what's in front of you is a very preliminary draft purpose and need statement. You know, it was put together by staff, based on the council's discussion of this amendment, and so looking for feedback on whether or not these statements are adequate, what needs to be added to reflect the council's intent for this amendment, and so I'll very briefly read that.

The purpose of the amendment is to evaluate species that comprise the snapper grouper fishery management unit to better align with obligations and mandates required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The need is to support Executive Order 14276 by prioritizing efficient regulations for species in need of federal conservation and management, and so this is where I'll turn it over to the committee to provide feedback, again, on this very preliminary draft, what -- You know, looking for feedback on is this adequate, what needs to be added, you know, what's missing here, that sort of information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, John. Questions? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I'm thinking back to how we got here, and we got here because we don't have the resources to do everything we want to do, and so what bucket do we put, you know, some of these species in that, if we had the resources, we would probably be doing stock assessments, but, since we don't, where do we put them, and where do we put them, and so, if we see something change, we can pull them back out and do more management, and so I don't -- We don't want to put it in the purpose and need, but the mandates required by Magnuson almost needs to be followed by "with the resources available".

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I was trying to figure out how what you were saying could be captured in the purpose or need statement, and so maybe adding a little bit more to the purpose about resources or something, available resources at this time or something. Okay.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and so, you know, that being said, I don't know where else we put things. Like spadefish is a significant ACL, and white grunt, you know, but we're -- We just don't have the resources to do anything, and so this probably is going to be the best vehicle, and it might not be -- You know, for what for what resources we have available.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, and so I have other hands. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I agree with Charlie, and I think I would like to see the need maybe built out a little more to include -- To not just refer to the executive order, the executive orders, and we could get a new administration, and that executive order may not stand the test of time, and so I think -- I think we would have been doing this whether there was an executive order or not, and so I'm not going to try to wordsmith that, but how do we bring in also what we saw yesterday from NMFS, and the reality of the funding priorities built both into the purpose and need, so that it's not that narrow scope of the executive order.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I'm going to go to John to speak to that. I think he has a suggestion.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was thinking that too, Kerry, and I think, you know, if you look at what we presented yesterday, and the presentation to the EDs from January mentioned narrowing the scope of NMFS' management, and so it seemed to me that you should reference something here

that references that, you know, the agency's intention to narrow the scope of management and assessment, or whatever their specific words are, but I think that directly gets at that, and we're being forced to respond to it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything else on purpose and need? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I still struggle with this entire amendment, and I struggle with this purpose and need as it exists, because, you know, in the rationale of the data, you know, we looked at the ecosystem component species of the Mid-Atlantic's omnibus forage fish amendment, and this is not the same thing.

First of all, I don't see a problem -- As it currently sets, I don't see a problem of resources. We spend all our time talking about the snapper grouper complex, and we talk about aggregate limits, and we talk about how we manage it holistically, and so our solution is to remove species that are caught concurrently? I just don't see this purpose and need aligning with our management of the snapper grouper complex, period.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think, given, you know, what we've seen develop in the last few months, and I certainly would look back from December to now and say, something like white grunt, we shouldn't be considering removing from the FMU. I mean, it's too valuable. If landed value and such is going to become something that we're evaluated on, then you guys should think really hard about the action of removing from the ecosystem component, you know, and that's not something that we chose to, you know, create that disincentive, but it's there, but, if you do look at Clay's presentation, and, you know, for example, on the low risk and low value stocks, there was mentioning of things as ecosystem components, and I would assume that ecosystem components still contribute value.

You know, simple proxies for status criteria, and moving to multiyear accountability measures, and so maybe some of these stocks become part of some type of aggregate that you look at falling in that low risk and low value quadrant, and you say the way to get these is not to expect that we'll get a stock assessment of these stocks, but we will have maybe an aggregate limit on them, and we'll have a multiyear accountability measure type thing, where we look at, after several years, and decide if we need a new direction.

Now, those of you familiar with ASMFC and cobia probably see that that's very similar to what they've done with the cobia FMP, where they have, you know, multiyear compliance criteria for those stocks, and if -- You know, after several years, if a state is collectively going over or under, then they adjust their management accordingly, so they're driving it just based on a single year.

I think you could take some things like that and be in the spirit of this matrix that we're looking at, and you may find that a lot of stocks fit in there in, you know, low risk and low value within the snapper grouper complex, and they could kind of be clustered in there together and not totally remove them, as, you know, Tom I think is supporting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for your rationale, and that takes us in a direction which I'm more comfortable with, which is not the discussion we were necessarily having at the last council

meeting, which I drew a lot of objection to this amendment. Now, I do have a little heartburn at the mention of cobia, and I understand why you brought it up, but, like most ASMFC species, they are overfished, and in currently poor shape, and, well, maybe they're not on the books, but I don't have cobia anymore, since we gave them to the ASMFC, and so pardon me for being concerned there.

If we were going to move forward with this, I think the discussion of something like an aggregate, right, where still retain management, and we don't have open access, no limit recreational and commercial fisheries that we have to subject to all the difficult rulemaking and legislative processes of each individual state, which is a huge concern of mine. If we were to do that, I am more comfortable with that, particularly if that is a resource -- A better resource issue for here at the council and with NMFS.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Tom, and I think that that's where the discussion is going to go today, and so I appreciate you bringing up those points, and maybe we come back to the purpose of need statement after we have the discussion, and then make sure the purpose of need is reflective of what we plan to do. Okay, and I see heads nodding yes to that, and so I'm going to pass it back to John Hadley.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you, and so I'm going to jump down in the decision document, because we already covered the ecosystem component species information, and we're going to jump to a discussion of species in the amendment, and so, as I do so, as you recall, you know, perhaps from previous meetings, the committee has -- It seems like committee members want to discuss which species are going to continue to be considered in this amendment and which species may not be on the table.

You know, going over -- This is more of a refresher than anything, but Table 1 shows the list of seventeen species that are being considered for potential -- Some sort of change of management in this amendment, and so some of these species have their own annual catch limit, and so you can see those that are in white. Atlantic spadefish and bar jack have their own ACLs, and then others are in complexes, and so, if the species has some sort of shaded background that isn't gray, it is up for consideration for potential removal from that complex, but also included, shaded in gray, are the species that make up all of the complex within, where appropriate, and so those species are going to remain, but just to give you an idea on say if misty grouper, sand tilefish, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper are removed from the deepwater complex yellowedge grouper and silk snapper would remain.

Looking at that visually, and, again, you've seen this before, but it's a pretty good refresher on kind of how the mechanics of this, and these are pie charts looking at the various complexes. Again, if there's -- If the species is shaded in gray, it would remain in the complex, and then, if it has some other color associated with it, that's what potentially would be removed, and, of note, the other porgies complex and grunts complexes considered for potential total removal.

So, you know, I'm not going to go over it in too much detail, because I know that the committee went over it quite a bit at the last meeting, but I did want to highlight that there's the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's, recommendations and I did include the consensus recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP, from their meeting last fall, and whether or not they recommended maintaining those species under federal management or potentially removing -- Potentially moving

them over to ecosystem component species with a permit -- But maintaining a permit and reporting requirement. You can see the breakdown there in Table 2.

The full Law Enforcement AP comments are included here, and, again, I won't go over those, since you did hear them yesterday, and I don't want to go over them again, but sort of the decision point here in the committee action, and I wanted to turn it over to the committee for discussion on really two questions. Does the committee wish to continue to consider all seventeen species in Amendment 61, and, if not, which species should remain for consideration in the amendment?

Sort of to frame this decision point, you're not really being asked whether or not these should fall on the EC species category versus removed from the FMP, and, you know, I think that decision will come later, as this amendment is developed, but, really, the question here is do you want to continue to consider them in this amendment, yes or no.

To help with that discussion, there's Table 3 here that goes through the list of seventeen species that are considered currently in the amendment and whether -- Again, the decision point here is whether or not you wanted to maintain them in in the amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm going to try to facilitate a discussion on this. To me, it's easier to look at the AP table, but that's just kind of -- That's what's easiest for me, but so I think that -- So, John Hadley, correct me if I'm wrong, but, if they stay in this, in Amendment 61, then you're kind of figuring out what, if any, like aggregate limit, or something like that, would apply, and so, if it stays in the document, it's about kind of what the new grouping and all that is going to do if it stays in the document.

MR. HADLEY: Yes, that's correct, and so, if it stays in the document, then you're not really being asked is it EC, or is it removed, or is it put in a complex, and, you know, that's a future decision point. Right now, the decision point is whether or not to keep them in the amendment, and so, if they're removed from the amendment, then presumably they wouldn't be part of that discussion of an aggregate limit, or any future decision points along those lines.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I have an idea about how to proceed, but go ahead, Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I would kind of like to know what kind of reporting requirements we would have if we put them in ecosystem, because then, if we've got adequate reporting, then we can at least keep track of, at some point in time in the future, will we need to put them back under management, should, you know, they become popular or something, and so how -- The reporting is going to be important to me.

MR. HADLEY: I think, based on the committee's previous discussion, it's maintaining status quo permitting, or reporting requirements rather, and so it's maintaining the permit requirement, and then also maintaining the reporting requirement associated with that permit, and so they would need to be on federal -- They would show up on the federal logbooks as well as federal dealer reports.

One thing I do want to remind the committee, that I think is relevant to this discussion, is that you also have an unmanaged species report coming to you later this year, and so that is currently in the

works, and so that's another kind of fallback mechanism, if you will, that the council will continue to review unmanaged species in the region.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I'm not as confident in the commercial, but certainly what we did with the for-hire reporting and other things is they're required to report all fish that they catch. They have the permit to report all fish they catch, wherever they catch them, because we had a discussion of, if a guy goes to Alaska, guess what? He still has to report back for this, because he has this permit, and MRIP gets all the fish that they catch, and I think most of the states do that as well. They get all the fish, and so I don't think that we're creating a reporting gap, which is really important to this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. I saw other hands up. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and so, on 3a, we say ecosystem component plus permit, and please define "permit" as it states in this table. just for clarification.

MR. HADLEY: So the permit is essentially related to whatever the current -- Maintaining the current permit.

MR. ROLLER: Okay, and so that would be you need a snapper grouper commercial --

MR. HADLEY: Commercial snapper grouper or for-hire snapper grouper permit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: To possess. Okay. Did I see other hands? Trish, did you have your hand up?

MS. MURPHEY: I was wondering -- Are we ready to start discussing species?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and one of my thoughts is maybe we should focus on the ones that are under status quo, maintain federal management, and I think, but, Hadley, correct me if I'm wrong, if it's in that column -- Whatever we decide is in that column is essentially out of Amendment 61, and is that right? So, if it's status quo, then it's not going to be covered in Amendment 61, right?

MR. HADLEY: Well, that's up to the committee, certainly, but, you know, I think one way to think about it is, if you definitely want to maintain status quo on a species, and you know it right now, maybe just remove that, you know, decision point from future discussions. If you want to continue to maybe move it somewhere else, keep that species in this amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That helps. Thank you, and so, Trish, did you want to start discussing it, and so I was thinking it might be easy to look at the ones that are in Column 1 there and figure out if we agree with that list or not.

MS. MURPHEY: So I'm going to go ahead and just kind of tell you how North Carolina -- How I've come to the conclusion of some of these species. I sat down with our snapper grouper biologists, when we first started this, and kind of qualitatively quantified what was important to North Carolina, and, actually, there's a couple of species that k-- Knobbed porgy is in this list, as far as keeping that ranked, and that was something that was important to us. Blackfin snapper was

actually in our top five, and I just -- I'm just going through the top five that we had, and so we are actually matching those two species, knobbed and blackfin.

We were very strong about white grunt, and white grunt definitely needs to stay, basically because it's, you know, top five in headboats in our area, and tomtate, and it's actually, you know, top -- It's also in the top five of landings for headboats, and so those are the ones I want to throw out, at least for North Carolina.

We also talked about spadefish, and that was really more talking about how that is more important in the other states, and so spadefish was in there for our group, but white grunt, spadefish, tomtate, and -- I'm sorry. White grunt, spadefish, knobbed porgy, tomtate, and blackfin snapper, but we were very strong about white grunt and tomtate, and so those are the ones I want to throw out for North Carolina.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Can you explain a little bit more about what you meant about spadefish and other states? Can you talk about that? You said something about --

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and I think spadefish is probably more popular in South Carolina and Georgia than North Carolina, but we wanted to -- Tom maybe can correct me on that, and that was just the discussion we had, but we kind of wanted to not throw out spadefish, just because it didn't rank in for us for North Carolina, and so I guess what I'm saying we would support spadefish if the other if the other states wanted that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that clarification. Tom, and then Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thank you, and so can we just scroll just to the top of the -- So I can see? Thank you. I am looking at this list in two different ways. I'm looking at it as are we going to manage this under an aggregate, or are we going to go individually, and try to take things out, or have some ecosystem component species, and so, if we're going to look at it like an aggregate, I think queen and cubera probably need to be removed and could stay in outside of an aggregate. They are larger species, right, and you don't want them to be part of an aggregate. You don't want people catching five cubera or whatever.

I think the porgies need to stay together. They're too hard to ID, and so, if you're going to take one out, you've got to take them all out. If you're going to keep one in, you've got to keep them all in. I have no opinion on scup. They mean something different to us, right, in the in the South Atlantic as they do the Mid-Atlantic.

I will go back to my comments at the previous meeting, and the only species I could see that should be removed, I mean like to remove from the FMU really, is bar jack. Obviously, if we're going to put -- If we're going to do white grunt, they're very important, and you have to do sailor's choice and margate, too. They're all grunts, and they're a little bit hard to ID. I think that, you know, you have to mesh them together, and it just makes things too confusing for a lot of stakeholders.

I agree with Trish on tomtate. While maybe not a desired catch, they are one of our number-one bottom fishing catches, and I promise you I'm making a point here. When it comes to Atlantic spadefish, I have a lot of concern about removing them at all. They, you know, occur mostly -- While they occur everywhere, they're predominantly in federal waters.

While they are very important south of North Carolina, they are very abundant in North Carolina, and they are growing in importance. We are seeing a lot more people target them, and the reason we're targeting them is everything else is closed, right, and we can't catch flounder in North Carolina. A lot of our inshore species are closed, and it is a way for people to go out and harvest something, and they are very good food quality.

They just -- They're susceptible in the sense that, if you are fishing for them, you can catch them. If you're spear fishing for them, you can really spear them. They will come and peck at the end of your spear tip, and it's kind of sad. I'm just kidding, and they don't really do that.

The rationale I would provide with spadefish is I'm concerned if we remove them at all, or they would -- They need to be part of an aggregate, but I'm kind of viewing this more like the direction we move forward, and I can't -- If we're going to just remove fish from the FMU, and throw them to the wind, I struggle with any of them, except maybe bar jack, and then we get into the whole discussion of is the juice worse the squeeze, but, if we're doing an aggregate, I can provide my rationale pointed towards that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so let me make sure I understand, and so I'm going to try to recap some of your comments, and so it sounds like you're saying species that completely get removed from the FMP, or the fishery management unit, which means they would stay in Amendment 61, the only one of those that you're recommending is bar jack, and that's right?

MR. ROLLER: So if we're going to say, hey, let's just take fish out of this FMU, bar jack is the only one I can provide rationale for. You might be able to convince me of scup. Again though, they are a cooccurring species when we're bottom fishing, and so I struggle with that, right, and, if we're doing an aggregate, like I said, I'm looking at more of like along the lines of which fish would fit in an aggregate limit, versus which fish you don't want to have caught, and does that make sense, what I'm saying? Like cubera, and I don't want -- You know, I don't want them as part of an aggregate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Right. Agree, and so then can I stay on what you're saying about the aggregate, and so you're saying, if we create an aggregate in Amendment 61, that you're thinking the aggregate -- Can you scroll up in the table a little bit, please? Thank you. That the aggregate could be maybe the porgies or something, but, whatever you do, do the same thing with all the porgies. Queen snapper and cubera snapper, they need to be individual, and not part of an aggregate, and so can you -- Can you speak to the aggregate a little bit more and your thoughts on what would be in an aggregate? Can you explain that again?

MR. ROLLER: So an aggregate -- If we're going to have an aggregate limit based on these fish, I think you have to do all the porgies, and you probably need to throw scup in there too, and you probably need to -- You absolutely need to do something with spadefish, and all the grunts, all the grunt species, including tomtate. I have a little bit of consternation with sand tilefish and blackfin snapper, just because they tend to be -- They're deeper-water species, right, and so --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we wanted to talk about this table, and then I was going to recap what you said so, and so go ahead, John,

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was going to say, Tom, I think we have a good bit of what you're saying, and it's already created, and these are the complexes that we have now. We have a porgies complex, and we have a grunts complex. You know, you mentioned potentially queen and cubera may be standing alone, and so that would be -- If you wish to do something like that, well, that would be a change in these complexes, and so, you know, I think that is certainly something that should be discussed. I've got a sense that nobody is really looking at the idea that we're going to throw something out of the FMU. That's not going to happen.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's for bar jack.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right, and, well, other than maybe bar jack, but Tom didn't seem particularly committed to this, but that's at most the one, and so I think we're really more looking at are you satisfied with these complexes, and then think ahead of how would some of these complexes be handled within the framework of, you know, low risk and low value, versus, some of them, I don't know that I would say that they're low risk and high value. They're more like low risk and moderate value in some of these, but, you know, having low and high is the clean way to do the table, but I really think of that quadrant of the matrix as low risk and moderate-ish value, and we have several here.

You know, if we -- Maybe this thing shifts to are there things that are ecosystem components which get less, and are there things here that are staying within these complexes, and are you tweaking these complexes, and then, when you're happy with the composition of the complex, you can talk about does this complex -- You know, what is the accountability measure for this complex, is it like a three-year average type thing for this, and then that would be getting you off of it, and you would say upfront that we do not anticipate getting stock assessments for species in these complexes. I think that would do somewhat of where we're trying to head, and it would take off some of that pressure to maybe chase after some of these species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think you're saying two different things. I think you're saying pick some species that you would group in a lower-risk category, and put some sort of aggregate limit on that, et cetera, and then I think that would also -- Once you start removing them, it would also require you to redo the existing complexes, and isn't that partly what you're saying?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Somewhat, but I'm saying do the existing complexes lend themselves to saying this complex fits within the low risk and low value quadrant, and like the porgies complex. You're looking at 143,000 pounds total, and that sounds like a low risk and low value type of situation to me, and so you could say, you know, we like this porgies complex, and we recognize they may need to stay together, and, like Tom said, you know, scup is there, but it's not much, and there's no commercial landings, and so I think they would fit in there, and then you would say, once you sort of get that thought in mind, then you start figuring, okay, so maybe my real benefit from this exercise is how do I change my management approach on these complexes, so it's not an annual year-to-year type thing, and I'm not creating this, you know, impression out there, and keeping people awake at night, that, oh my gosh, when am I ever going to get an assessment of knobbed porgy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so it sounds like you're doing two things with Amendment 61. Okay, and so lots of hands going up. I have Kerry, Amy, Andy, and Charlie.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks, and I'm just trying to take in what John said. I agree with your approach. I just want to make sure I understand it. The complexes would still remain within Amendment 61, and they wouldn't necessarily be -- Without removing them, but would we remove them from the FMU and have those complexes, no, but, even if they're in the FMU, we can avoid the -- We can avoid what we're all worried about, which is the burden of worrying about the assessments.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, yes, and you could -- So I think you would do kind of two things, and let me try to reinterpret, because I was the same confusion, and so I think that you're saying -- John is saying two things. You would grab a bunch of species out of here, which might be an entire complex, and like you might grab, if you look at this, the purple, the other porgies complex, and the whole complex moves over to ecosystem component, and everything you're doing with that, and that's part of what he's saying.

He's also saying you might take an existing complex, and I'll make this up, like the deepwater complex, and also, as part of this amendment, and I don't think that this is a very good example, but do something else with the deepwater complex that's not making them ecosystem component, with an overall trip limit or whatever, and so I think that he's saying you could do a couple of different things with this amendment that still accomplishes the goals when you were looking at that matrix that NOAA had. I think that's what he's saying.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just the only -- Maybe it doesn't matter now, and I was going to move misty grouper out of the FMU, and put it in the other two columns, but we can deal with that when we deal with that complex.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You know, to go maybe a bit of a step further, to prepare for a what-if, you could say consider -- Maybe you say, okay, the porgies becomes an ecosystem component complex, and set a catch level related to preserving their ecosystem value, but not having it be tied to MSY type things, because it's ecosystem component, but, if for some reason that flexibility that we're kind of leaning into now turns out to be rejected, you still have the complex.

You still have your intent that you want to set like an aggregate, and a multi-year accountability, and then maybe it just falls back, and then changes how the Science Center goes about saying here's what we think the reference point is, and so you're sort of hedging your bet to see how far this takes you, but, if you do say we would like to use this complex as an ecosystem component, as is kind of being alluded to in these presentations, then at least it puts the question out there, to get an answer to it, to find out how far the agency is willing to go in that flexibility.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, to that.

MS. MARHEFKA: I think that's a great approach. It makes me very comfortable, and I presume that also does not take away our ability to have the conversation of permit requirement, where the permit would fall --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Agreed. 100 percent.

MS. MARHEFKA: -- Which was my sticking point, and it sounds like everything is covered within that, and I support that that methodology.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I've got a lot of hands. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Madam Chair, that conversation kind of got me to my question, and so thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I appreciate John's comments, and I agree with them, and I think that's been helpful. I'm also going to play a little bit of devil's advocate here, in that we just went through and started listing all the things that should stay, and we're saying, okay, well, they're in need of conservation and management, but are we really managing them? Are we really managing them?

We have catch limits that aren't being met, and we have some that have size limits, and a lot of them have maybe aggregate bag limits that are never caught, right, and there's not accountability, right, and so I just want to emphasize, and kind of getting back Clay's and my presentation, right, low value, and we're not sure what the risk is. We're not really managing a lot of these species.

Maybe some are in need of management, but we can't really do the science, or have the tools to actually effectively manage them, and that's the hard part, is trying to differentiate the two, but I would still encourage us to kind of go down the path of looking very hard at, you know, the management approaches we're using now, whether these species truly are in need of management, trying to pull some of these out of the management unit, as well as making some modifications to the aggregates and how we kind of manage the species holistically.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. After we go through the hands, I'm coming back to you for some specific suggestions. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I agree with Andy. You know, they're all important. Everything is important, but we don't have the resources to do it, and we're not doing it. We haven't really done anything with any of these species in a long time, and so putting them in ecosystem, and keeping the permit reporting coming, so we can kind of keep our finger on the pulse, and, should something happen, then we, you know, react to it. To me, that seems like the simplest way to do it. We still know what's going on, and it might help the Regional Office, and Clay, to not have to do a lot of stuff that we don't have the resources to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That sounds good, and so, Clay, back to you.

DR. PORCH: Thank you. I like where this is going. One point I would add though is we tend to frame everything in terms of whether we can get kind of a full stock assessment, but we do have indices of abundance, and we can use index-based methods for some of these species. For instance, in the Gulf, we used an entirely index-based approach for managing lane snapper, and setting ACLs, and that requires relatively minimal investment, and so we do have some pretty good surveys, and we're getting them better and better.

I think I wouldn't dismiss them because we don't have an assessment yet, because we could use some index-based approach, and, for white grunt, we could do an assessment, but, just because of the backlog, have elected not to as a council, but I would certainly say it's hard to argue the grunts

complex should be an ecosystem component, given how many landings there are, and actually people target them, but we could do simplified assessments to guide that.

Looking at some of the others, I could see the argument for porgies getting wrapped up in an ecosystem component, those particular species. Some of them, like the other snappers complex, I mean, we have an assessment for gray snapper, but lane snapper possibly could be an index-based approach, and, again, that's not that much of a time investment, and so I think, yes, as we go through that process, as John described, I think it would be expedient just to identify things that we could assess as a complex, using simpler approaches, and then, things that we think we're not going to have the information, like probably the other porgies, and we're not going to have information for an assessment, and so it's either an ecosystem component or wrapped up in some aggregate limit or something like that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Clay, that just made me feel a lot better, and also thinking about -- One of the things that helped me get past this hump of, oh my gosh, we're not doing anything is the thought of, you know, once a year, we get Tracey Smart, and she comes, and she gives us, you know, her presentation, and, quite frankly, you can pretty much tell what's happening, and like I would put my money on that, really.

So, for anyone who has sort of heartburn about the unknown of what happens if they're taken out, or whatever we end up doing with them, we will -- We still have that, and I wonder, Amy, if you can ask them at some point -- You know, they're always going to do these main species, and we always see gag and red porgy and vermilion and things like that, but if we -- If we tend to start getting worried about some kind of signal that we're getting, can we then give feedback to the SERFS folks and say, hey, this year, can you make sure there's a slide on any gray snapper you might be seeing? I guess that's my question, because I know they see a lot of fish, and they can't necessarily present it all to us, or analyze all of it, but the thought of that index really makes me feel better.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so I think that the SAFE reports are doing that too, and they have like a stoplight approach in there, and so I think that that, you know, gives me comfort as well. Amy, did you want to speak to that? Otherwise, I'm to try to go -- Try to facilitate a discussion here on this.

MS. DUKES: To that point, yes, we did talk about this specific list of species with our SERFS group, and there are several that there's just simply not enough data out there to do anything with, which could be a good ecosystem kind of component. There are definitely, as Clay mentioned, really good candidates for an index-type event, and I almost think that this idea of -- I feel, personally, that we're having too many conversations, and I almost like the way that John wanted to kind of go through Table 3 and be like is it in, or is it out, but like tomtate, white grunt, scup, and knobbed porgy are all really good candidates. I will remind this group that longspine porgy and knobbed porgy are often misidentified, and longspine is already an EC species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so let's talk about, and we'll look at whatever table you guys want to look at, whether it's this one or the other table that Amy is talking about that's further into the document, and so let's maybe see if we can have a conversation about what species, if any, and

you've heard one thrown out so far, needs to completely come out of federal management, and that means it's not in the fishery management unit at all.

Tom threw out bar jack, and so let's have a conversation about is bar jack the only one, and so this would mean it completely comes out, and it's not in the fishery management unit at all, and it would not go in some type of aggregate, and it would not be part of some overall trip limit, and it's not an ecosystem component. It's completely out, and so, that way, if a state wants to regulate it in state and federal waters, they could. Okay, and so we've heard a suggestion for one of those, and it's bar jack. Is there anything else that would completely come out of the fishery management unit, and what do we think about bar jack? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm supportive of bar jack, and I am referring back to Ben Hartig's email that he sent us, and he the one who mentioned misty grouper, and he had sort of the biological basis for it, which is it's not a population, according to him, and I haven't done my own research, and maybe Clay knows more, but that it's not a population that actually originates in the South Atlantic, that misty that show up are coming from a different population, and so that would be my rationale, based on -- I trust Ben Hartig greatly, and so --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So I really appreciate Ben's email on this, and the first thing is I was shocked to realize that I've caught more of one species than Ben has, because he says he's only caught two in his life, and I was -- I had to pat myself on the back. They are a rare species. However, I'm not sure that I'm comfortable with this rationale. I think I need to understand more about the biology.

They are a deepwater species, and the reason I bring this up is we hear they're not common, and I am seeing lots of social media posts of people targeting misty grouper now, in very deep water. Over the last few years, people have figured it out. A thousand-plus-foot of water, and this is in the South Atlantic, from the Keys north. I don't know what people are doing, but I've seen some really interesting posts on it. I mean --

UNIDENTIFIED: (The comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. ROLLER: No, and they're misty grouper. I was shocked myself, but, you know, we're seeing expanding technologies and whatnot, and people are able to do some really interesting stuff. I'm not saying tons are being caught.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. Stand by. Let me try to facilitate, and so I appreciate that comment, and I feel like that's -- So we don't need to make the decision today, and we're trying to make a list of, in Amendment 61, is there anything in a category that we would consider possibly removing from the fishery management unit, and so I think that the type of information that Tom is bringing forward would come out as part of this discussion, plus the Ben Hartig information, and so it sounds like we're considering two species from possible complete removal, and so it would be in Amendment 61 for possibly exiting the fishery management unit, and it's bar jack and misty grouper. All right. Are we are we good with that? I'm making sure

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to concur with misty grouper, because I was looking at our discussion with our biologists, and it's just like yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we've got two species now. Tell me why you're confused.

MS. MARHEFKA: Let me -- Sure. We're now -- This current list, that have these two species right now, the misty and -- Are for potential removal of the FMU and remaining in -- They will remain in 61, but be -- That's the --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so it's kind of like imagine --

MS. MARHEFKA: I have another species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Imagine like Action 1 is complete removal from the fishery management unit, and you would have the list of species that you would do that with, and, right now, we have bar jack and misty.

MS. MARHEFKA: Add spadefish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: And spadefish. Okay, and so we've got three on there. I get it, but maybe it goes into a different category. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm sorry, and, Kerry, did you say remove spadefish?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Keep, she said.

MS. MURPHEY: Or are you saying keep spadefish?

MS. MARHEFKA: Keep spadefish in Amendment 61, but under the alternative of remove from the fishery management unit.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think part of it is it is the confusion of removing from, and I think we should set that aside until we get through what we want to do, and then you can fill in anything that you say that's not part of 61, because that wasn't -- It didn't seem to be necessarily going anywhere, but this seems to be doing more, and so focus on these other questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So we have three possibles, and there's debate about one of them, but we're typing it up in words, so that people understand what that means, and so it will get analyzed in the document, and so -- Jimmy

MR. HULL: So, by leaving species in, such as sailor's choice and that complex, we can potentially then just move that over to an ecosystem, and try to manage it, and keep track of it that way? Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so now I'm going to try to do this whole what could go into another bucket that would be ecosystem component, and have some aggregate limit, and so you could do it species-by-species, or you could remove the whole aggregate, and, when I say remove, just more like move it, move it over into some aggregate limit, and so the species that would be considered for that -- You just heard Jimmy throw out sailor's choice, and then, earlier Tom threw out scup, porgy, tomtate, and the grunts, and so these are species that would -- Either species or

groupings of species that would go into a new group within some type of aggregate. Jimmy, then Carolyn.

MR. HULL: To that point on the grunts complex, so the current complex includes white grunt, which I think I wouldn't want to just move over to an ecosystem, and I think it needs something more than that, because it's a really high-value grunt. The other grunts are not, in my opinion, and so I don't know how you can do that, but you would take it out of the complex, potentially, or something else, and move the sailor's choice, tomtate, and margate over to an ecosystem.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I like the way that Jimmy was explaining that, and like which one in the complex like wouldn't come with it, because it needs something more, and so, the needs something more, we need to know that as well. Okay, and so I have Carolyn, and then Charlie.

DR. BELCHER: Jimmy basically got my thing. I had a couple that were -- That basically would divide up your current complexes, if you were trying to extradite out a complex in and of itself, and what happened if you found some species that needed to come out, and so I'm fine.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm sorry, and I was having a conversation up here. Which species did you say, Carolyn?

DR. BELCHER: No, and I was just basically affirming what Jimmy said, because I do think that there's some species that are part of a complex, and it would be easy to extradite out a complex, if everybody agreed that they all should be moved below the line or whatever, right, but, in that situation, I kind of felt the same way about white.

MS. MCCAWLEY: To keep it separate, and it needs -- Okay. It needs something more, and so it would go in a different category. Okay. I took note on that. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, if I was going to pull it out because it needed something more, but we don't have the something more to deal with, why are we taking it out? We're going to track the landings, and we're not going to change any way they're caught, and I don't think there's much we can do with something like white grunt. Yes, it's important. Everything is important, but if you're -- If you want to pull it out, do we have the resources to do anything with it? If we can keep it in an ecosystem, where we are getting our landings, and something starts getting out of sync, and it's probably been going fairly level for the last five or ten years, then I'm kind of inclined to just move everything that we can to ecosystem, and still watch it, and then we can always pull it out.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm going to let Carolyn try to explain, and so we don't need to figure out what that other thing is today, and it's about which species/groups come over to this category, and so, Carolyn, you go.

DR. BELCHER: So I -- Just to kind of go where I'm thinking, using information that we have, first of all, white grunt has been on the list for getting an assessment, and so we know that there's clearly enough resources available, and it's just getting the priority for it. The other thing is I look at the landings magnitude, and the landings magnitude is high enough that I would like to know. I mean, we don't know what that population is doing, and it's getting managed under the three highest still, correct, and isn't it part of the average? Even with that, you know, the rec quality --

The data in the recreational part is of sufficient quality and stuff, and I just would hate to see that go away.

MR. CARMICHAEL: But, I mean, I think that's right. You could certainly come up with a more robust catch level basis for white grunt than the other three. Even though, you know, we don't have the resources to do a full-on assessment, if you keep in mind what Clay said earlier, there's the full-blown assessment that we think of, that most people think of when we say the word "assessment", but there's a whole lot of other territory between average landings and that, and where we're trying to go is just have the council set this expectation that like we're good with this getting one of these not full age-based assessment type things to set the ABC.

You know, you also should think about the management, and like, if you have a complex, you're likely to have a complex aggregate, and would you want something like white grunt part of you can keep five of these grunts, or would you like white grunt to have its own limit, and, these others, you keep five of these, and so, you know, to me, there's two components of it, because there is how do you set the ABC, and how do you get the limit for this complex, but then there's also how do you approach management, and so it's really -- You know, I think, as we were saying, like Jimmy was pointing out, just not being comfortable with saying leave this white grunt in here, and it's a more important species, and it has other concerns, and let's get that out, and I think that's the kind of thinking that really gets this moving ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so let me try to restate and point to the document on the screen about what John is saying. He's saying that we're considering some of these species either for an ecosystem component grouping, or some other alternative management, and we're putting them in a list down there, and so I want to go to Andy to name some species, and then I'm going to go back to Jimmy, who had to stand up. Andy, do you have some that you would like to put in this either ecosystem component or alternative management grouping down there that you would like to throw out?

MR. STRELCHECK: I guess, first, let me ask a question, and so, with what's on the screen, when we say like scup only, is that -- We're saying essentially that would be ecosystem component or alternative management for that complex, and is that right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that's the only one of that complex that's been thrown out right now, but I think you could suggest the whole other porgies complex. It's just listed out what people have mentioned so far, but you could, Andy, say I think the whole other porgies complex, because it says partial or total.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, that's where my head is at, is the whole porgies complex.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any others, Andy?

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, kind of the ones that I was thinking in the keep category, don't remove, would be cubera and queen snapper, just to get a start on those.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You said cubera and queen?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Got it. So, just to take that one step further, that category means -- Keep means would not be further considered in Amendment 61, and just making sure we understand, and so that's cubera and queen. All right. Jimmy had his hand up.

MR. HULL: Yes, and, listening to the conversation, and what Charlie's thinking is, I think, is that, you know, if we just move them to ecosystem-based, and like, even if you kept white grunt in there, we're going to -- Even though we're going to manage it in an aggregate form, we're going to get information, and then we can then go, hey, we need to do something here, and we go to the Science Center, and they say, well, we can come up with something for you, and we do something later, but at least we keep them in the field of vision in the ecosystem, so that we can monitor things, because there's going to be reporting, and so I think we get what we want either way.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I've got Trish, then Carolyn.

MS. MURPHEY: Excuse my denseness, and are we basically here just setting up options for 61, and is this basically what we're doing, because I'm just struggling with -- I'm still struggling with spadefish being in that spot, and that's -- Like, to me, spadefish should be moved down with cubera and queen, but, if we're doing options, and that can fall out later, then that's fine, but I just -- You know, in my mind, I'm thinking spadefish is down with queen and cubera, as well as white grunt, and so that's my brain thinking, but if we're -- If we're setting this up so that we can have further conversation in the future, then okay, and so that's -- So excuse my denseness, but I was just not quite following, and so thanks.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Trish, that's exactly right. All of this is stuff that you're going to look into more, and so bear in mind that one of the reasons we started this was to avoid doing the full ten-point evaluation for like twenty-five species, and so, these things that you're proposing for removal from the FMU, you're going to have to go through that ten-point question list, basically, and establish your rationale, and you may get through that and decide that your rationale doesn't hold water, and then you decide not to proceed with that one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: My thought process is where Trish was. I was kind of going to argue to put white grunt down with cubera and queen, and so -- Anyway, I mean, proceed, and we'll figure it out as we go, but that was kind of where I was going.

MS. MCCAWLEY: What about banded rudderfish? Where do we want banded rudderfish to go? Carolyn, and then Kerry.

DR. BELCHER: So I'm going to defer to more experienced people in the room, but, because of the magnitude of the landings, and, again, this is one that, for me -- I put three all in the same category, because of the magnitude on a single species, and that was Atlantic spadefish, white grunt, and banded rudderfish, but, looking through, I don't have enough of an understanding about -- I would look to Tom to tell me more about banded rudderfish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I saw it as a category for this alternative management, but yes. Kerry, and then Tom.

MS. MARHEFKA: It's pretty commercially-important species, and becoming more commercially important, and so I would like to put it down, if I'm understanding the list properly, with cubera and queen, which means they stay in the FMU.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that, Kerry, and that's one of the things I was going to say. I think banded rudderfish are one, given their value, should stay, should not be considered in Amendment 61. I appreciate the rationale with grunts, and I appreciate everyone recognizing how valuable they are recreationally and commercially, but I am with Trish and Carolyn regarding spadefish.

I think they should be in that middle category, the middle category with the grunt -- With the grunts complex and other porgies complex, as part of a potential future aggregate, and so I think that's a more appropriate place for them, and I just don't think state management is necessarily the best avenue for us on the east coast. I do agree with the rationale provided for the other porgies complex as well, and that's just more of a statement.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Got it. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: I agree about the banded rudderfish. It's been a very popular fish for the charter boats a lot lately, and I feel like, sooner or later, it's going to go under an FMP, and later maybe. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. So, Tom, I think -- When I think about spadefish, and let me just back up. When I look at this entire list, I think about what could a state be comfortable in perhaps putting forth regulations at the state level to manage, knowing the difficulties that each of the states have, some more than others, and spadefish would, in my mind, be one that we may be able to consider for state management.

To me, it's not unlike sheepshead and the path that this group went down before. I'm not saying it's going to necessarily be an easy road, but it would be probably the one that I could see having the most traction, especially in my state, where it does have to go through the general assembly, and I still would like the opportunity to continue to talk about it, and that's what I'm basically after.

MS. MCCAWLEY: To that point, and then I'm going to facilitate more of this discussion back on this table.

MR. ROLLER: Amy, I appreciate that. I can go forward with that rationale. I do think it's a really, really heavy lift though, but, if we want to consider it potentially, and thank you for providing that rationale. The only difference I would offer you, in terms of sheepshead, is these are -- Those are predominantly a state-water fish, right, and spadefish are not, and so that would be the rationale that I would provide here of why we would need to keep them in federal management.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so, hearing all that, we've got spadefish in two categories. I think we're fine with that, and so we're going to look at it both those ways, and so can you scroll back up in the table, please, and let's look at the deepwater complex there, and should the deepwater complex as a whole go -- You know, we've already taken a couple species out of there, but should it go down to where the porgies are for alternative management, in that you might have something that's multi-year or whatever, some grouping here, because we haven't said anything about blackfin or sand tilefish, and so how do we feel about this deepwater complex, and which thing, category, below does this go in? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I like the porgy approach for this. I think that that's a nice, middle-of-the-road safe approach.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. To that, Amy?

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, if that's the case, and we're cool with putting things twice, I kind of like the idea of putting misty grouper down there with them a second time, just listing it twice.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I got it, and so you're saying analyze in both categories. All right, and so I saw some other hand over here. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I like the idea of putting the deepwater complex kind of like whole there. Where I struggle with these species is when we look at them individually, because I think what the fishery would look like when we're removing -- When we're removing management from a deepwater species, which is something I'm uncomfortable with, right, but, when we look at it whole, and we say we're going to potentially do it as an aggregate, I'm more comfortable with that, and that also includes misty grouper. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Got it. All right. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Just to the point on the deepwater species, I think we've also been talking a little bit about trying to align the seasons, and reduce bycatch, and so maybe there's some benefit in that discussion occurring here, too.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I would just say, to Tom, I think, to my way of thinking, the only ones you're talking about removing management are the top three. Everything else in here is going to have some type of management.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Correct. That's what we're -- Clay.

DR. PORCH: Just to be extra clear, you know, looking at that second category with respect to white grunt, it does seem to be saying move white grunt to its own ACL or management, and so then, just to make sure we're completely clear, can we add it to that last category under banded rudderfish, because we are saying that, yes, it's doesn't need itself to be considered in 61, and I'm just afraid there might be some confusion later when it gets transcribed.

MR. HADLEY: I think it can eventually go there, but the decision point right now is whether or not to continue to consider it in Amendment 61, and so, if it goes to the bottom, then it's just pulled out altogether.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, right now, we're still having a discussion about it, and so I think that we're saying it will get analyzed as part of this grouping in that middle group, because, if it goes to the bottom, there will be no further discussion on it.

DR. PORCH: Well, that's kind of where I was hoping it was going to go, because there is no argument you could make that it's an ecosystem component when you look at the list of the ten criteria.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It's in the grunts complex, and so, if we did consider alternative management for the grunts complex, I think people are saying they may not be comfortable with white grunt falling fully under alternative management, and so it really doesn't fit there in kind of the bottom, as that's being crafted, if that makes sense.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're saying don't -- So what we're saying up here is it might eventually end up in Category 3, at the bottom, but it needs an analysis as part of the grunts category, grunts complex, under alternative management.

DR. PORCH: Yes, and I guess I would just be clear -- I mean, you're also revisiting whether you should drop it from the FMU or consider it as an ecosystem component, if you keep it in the way it is now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think I would like to stick with where it is in this middle category for analysis. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I think we can figure this out, obviously, as the amendment develops. I mean, I'm kind of like with Clay, and I would want to be a little stronger with identifying white grunt, that we're not going to designate it as an ecosystem component species, but figure out, obviously, whether we want to do alternative management, but I'll let that lie right now.

You know, we've been a little bit all over the place with some of the rationale and reasoning, and, obviously, for the first two categories, we're going to be developing the amendment, but I think it would be helpful to have some further conversation around the third bucket, because those are going to be species that are not going to show up in the amendment, and I heard, obviously, some of the rationale around banded rudderfish.

I just wanted to be clear, and certainly others can offer their opinion and thoughts with regard to cubera and queen snapper, but cubera is one of the few species that we actually have a size limit in place for this fishery, you know, that we're considering in terms of species to remove, and so we are at least doing some level of minimal management with cubera snapper.

Then, with queen snapper, I don't know as much about the South Atlantic fishery, but I know we've seen, with deep-drop fishing in the Gulf, expansion into deeper water, more targeting of queen

snapper, and certainly it has become a more popular fish, and so that was my rationale for wanting to keep queen snapper, as well as the fact that it's caught in federal waters entirely.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. That sounds good. I appreciate that rationale, and so I think we've had a good discussion today. I appreciate this discussion, and the thoughts, and then this will come back in another document. Except for the bottom three species, this will come back as Amendment 61 moves forward, with some different alternatives for what could be considered here, and so good job. All right. With that, I believe that we can break for lunch, but I'm going to turn it over to our chair to tell us when to come back.

MS. MURPHEY: I would just say can you all come back at 1:30, and is that still doable for everyone? I know yesterday was a little tight, but I think it was just an isolated case, and is everybody good with 1:30? Okay.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going again. Next up is the black sea bass follow-up, and I'm going to turn it over to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, Madam Chair, and so I'm going to pull up the presentation, and so this presentation is going to be somewhat of a review, just reminding you of what has happened with Amendment 56. That got put on hold, and let me double-check and make sure we're live on the webinar. There we go.

This will be a review of kind of what has happened for Amendment 56. That got put on hold, and you all switched black sea bass efforts towards Regulatory Amendment 37, and so there will be some review there. There's not as much an action item as it is just kind of keeping the conversation moving for 56, and, if you all have any directives for that amendment by the time we get to the end, then we can have that level of discussion.

First, just kind of a review of the timeline of how did we get to the current state, as far as the assessment and management of black sea bass, and so SEDAR 76 was completed initially in 2023, I believe, and this indicated strong declines in black sea bass over the last about fifteen years. Associated with that assessment was a lot of uncertainty concerning the fishing mortality rate and whether or how the stock could be rebuilt to maximum sustainable yield levels that have been estimated going back in time.

That started kind of this sequence of back and forth of the SSC having discussions, the Science Center producing additional projection runs, and some of those coming to the council, and there was a lot of moving back and forth and changes to the model over time up until June of 2025. Also within that time, the Marine Recreational Information Program, MRIP, they had found some potential bias in the Fishing Effort Survey, and so within that timeframe is when the pilot study had been conducted and there was the indication that recreational catch estimates might need to be updated, and that's not black sea bass specific. That's across many recreational species.

Also within that timeframe, in June of 2024, you all approved Amendment 56 for scoping, and so Amendment 56 was initiated to respond to SEDAR 76. You all approved it for scoping, and scoping was conducted in January through February of 2025, and then, in June of 2025, we had

another round of discussion related to the assessment, and the SSC provided ABC recommendations that began with a recommended catch level for 2027.

At that meeting, you directed staff to develop Regulatory Amendment 37 and pause work on 56 until the SEDAR 76 update stock assessment is completed, and that would include incorporation of those revised MRIP-FES catch estimates. In December, you approved Regulatory Amendment 37, and this would establish and maintain -- Establish and manage catches to annual catch targets, and those catch targets were set approximately 50 percent of recent catch levels. It also established a spotting season closure for both sectors during February and March and reduced the recreational bag limit from seven fish to three fish per person per day. As was updated earlier in the week, that that amendment is kind of in its final review stages, and it should be sent to the Regional Office within a couple weeks of this meeting.

Just as a reminder of what was in Amendment 56, within your briefing book packet, this presentation has -- Those links in that presentation are live, and so they can connect you to the most recent decision document and the committee report associated with the last time you all talked about Amendment 56.

Actions included a revision of status determination criteria for black sea bass, and you'll remember one of the recurring discussions about the assessment was the discussion about changing the proxy for maximum sustainable yield. Right now, the proxy is based on 30 percent spawning potential ratio. The recommendation from the assessment team was that it would be a 40 percent spawning potential ratio initially, and then, as the assessment was revised, the latest version of the assessment used a direct estimate of maximum sustainable yield.

Regardless, a change to the proxy for MSY would need to be an action within the amendment, and it was talked about potentially crafting that action to be a bit more flexible moving forward, so it doesn't always have to come back to an amendment, but that was one of the recurring discussions, and that was one of the actions that you all had considered at that time.

Then there was an action to revise catch levels, acceptable biological catch, the annual catch limit, and optimum yield for black sea bass. There was consideration of changing the fishing year start date. Right now, the commercial fishing year begins on January 1, and the recreational year begins on April 1, and there was -- The consideration was to align the start date to be the same for both sectors.

There was another action to reopen the nearshore areas that are seasonally closed to on-demand black sea bass pots, and that is kind of a follow-up to what was done in Regulatory Amendment 36, where you all looked into kind of is there anything stopping people from using these on-demand pots, and you looked at the stowage requirements, and you made some changes to the stowage requirements, so that they can be transited, but now you were looking at potentially reopening those nearshore areas to that gear.

Then we have a whole list here, and so the three actions that you completed within Regulatory Amendment 37 were also originally in 56, in terms of -- Except for the annual catch target, and that was a deviation from that, but you looked at the recreational bag limit, and that has been reduced. You looked at potentially changing the recreational minimum size limit, and that was considered through 37, but you ultimately decided not to not to approve that action, due to the

significant shortening of the recreational season that was projected to occur from a lower minimum size limit.

Then, originally, you had looked at a recreational annual fixed closed season for black sea bass. That, through the amendment process in 37, kind of evolved into what became the spawning closure for both sectors during February and March, and then, finally you had brought back up the action of potentially prohibiting multi-hook rigs in the recreational sector of the snapper grouper fishery, possibly as a way to reduce recreational discards, and so those were the actions that were included in that amendment. Obviously, some of those things have been addressed through 37, and so those don't need to be brought back in as Amendment 56 gets revised.

The next steps for this amendment, so we are waiting for the release of updated recreational catch estimates from MRIP. After those catch estimates are released, then the stock assessment will incorporate those, and a revised stock assessment will be brought to the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The SSC will then review the assessment and recommend catch levels to the council.

I kind of outlined the steps of amendment development that would happen after you get the SSC recommendation. You'll notice that Meeting 1, Meeting 2, and Meeting 3 do not have dates associated with them, because this schedule is kind of dependent on that first step of getting the updated recreational catch estimates. Once those are provided, then we can kind of plan out what the later steps of this process would be, but this is a typical -- This is typical schedule that we would have for a plan amendment after we've already gone through scoping, and so we don't need to do that, but you all still would need to develop the draft amendment and then take it out for public hearings before considering your final approval.

That's kind of the upcoming schedule, what's on tap for black sea bass through Amendment 56, and I wanted to pause here to see if there are any questions or discussion related to how this is going to move forward in the coming months.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Mike, and there's not an action for the committee. It's just this was an update and a chance to ask questions and discuss all this. Okay. Questions? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Mike, thank you for going over this in very grave detail. This was awesome, from a refresher standpoint of what we've discussed, what we had in 37, and so we're doing an update to an update, correct?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I wouldn't necessarily phrase it that way. I mean, the assessment will be updated, but it will be a full stock assessment, similar to, you know, any other assessment that you would have, and then you would be making management decisions based on the recent assessment, and the assessment would include updated recreational catch information, but, again, you've received assessments before with updated information, and so this is still a full plan amendment, and there's a possibility -- Given the state that we've kind of seen black sea bass consistently in the different iterations of the assessment, there's a decent possibility that this amendment will also include rebuilding for that stock.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy, do you want to continue with that, and then I'll go to Dewey.

MS. DUKES: If it's okay with you, Madam Chair.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Sure.

MS. DUKES: So I liked update to an update, because then we could do update squared, but just saying. Okay, and so I just wanted to make sure, because it is an update of an assessment, and I'm assuming that this is just like a plug-and-chug with adding a new year of data, and there's not going to be any calculations adjusted, or life history parameters reviewed, or anything like that, and that's all just status quo?

DR. PORCH: Almost. We will look at the discards, and the size distribution of that. That was one of the things that was discussed during the previous council meeting, and we'll pay special attention to the nature of the spawner-recruit, whether it can be estimated or whether we should use an SPR.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I'm just trying to figure out, and I don't know this answer, and so that's why I'm asking, but when was the last stock assessment for black sea bass?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: As far as the one that we're currently managing on?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I guess so, yes.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think that was completed in 2018, and I'm slightly looking at Chip to make sure, and so, yes, 2018.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: So what's this about you're not having a full-blown stock assessment, and you're just updating it, the 2018 stock assessment, and is that what -- I'm confused here a little bit.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No, and it's -- This is a stock assessment. The model is already built for the stock. It's incorporating the most recent recreational catch data. That will be one of the adjustments, and then, like Clay said, there was significant discussion about the -- About how maximum sustainable yield is estimated, whether it's done through a proxy or whether it's done as a direct estimate. Historically, the previous models have used a proxy, and so there's been a lot of discussion about what should be the process moving forward, and are we able to accurately estimate maximum sustainable yield, and is the proxy still -- You know, is the current proxy still the one that should be used, or should it be changed to something else, and so that is something that will be looked at within the stock assessment as well.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Okay, and one follow-up there. The other slide is showing six meetings, or was it five meetings, five or six meetings, for council approval, and then so you're looking at close to two years or something before anything -- A return from SERO on what happens, right?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes. Depending on how you develop the amendment, there may be a meeting, potentially, where we could wiggle it shorter, but that is kind of the standard schedule that we normally have for a full plan amendment.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I'm just trying to get an idea, for the fishermen's sake, when could something be looked at, or something like that, and so I've got an idea. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: My question is you have, in Amendment 56, actions that remain to adjust the SPR proxy, revise ABC, ACL, and OY, change the start date, reopen nearshore areas to ropeless gear, and so you're asking us -- At this time, we're not really taking action on any of that, but do we want that to remain in there, or do we want to add, or do we want to delete, and is that what you're asking us to do here?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I wasn't necessarily asking what needs to be in the amendment, because that's something that you all can have discussions about once you get the stock assessment, and you see the results, and you kind of determine what the best course is for addressing, you know, the stock changes that are that are necessary. This is more of an update, you know, bringing the conversation back to your forefront of, okay, your short-term plan was complete Regulatory Amendment 37, and you did that at your last meeting, and so now we're coming back to the longer-term plan of 56 is where you're going to set up long-term management for this fishery, and these are the steps that are going to need to be completed for Amendment 56.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any more questions, comments, discussion before we leave this item? Okay. Are you sure? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, do we have any rough idea on when we can get these updated catch estimates from MRIP, so we --

UNIDENTIFIED: (The comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. PHILLIPS: So it's going to be December? Hopefully -- Okay. I'm just trying to figure, because, like Dewey says, it's going to be two years down the road after we get started, at least.

DR. COLLIER: Just in response to that, and Clay can probably correct me, but, right now, they're saying late summer, probably in August at the earliest, probably late August, but Judd will be going over that a bit in his SEDAR presentation, about the timing of this and then the review that we want to have set up and everything like that, and so it will give you a better idea on the overall timing of things.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Just, you know, from attending the SEDAR Steering Committee a couple of weeks ago, I think it's going to be an internal update, right, and so no SEDAR development, and so that will actually speed things up, and like I think you said it would be done by August, this year, and so I don't know -- Will they be able to have the FES stuff in, because I know that's been delayed slightly.

DR. COLLIER: Like I said, Judd is going to get into this a lot more in his SEDAR presentation, and we talked to Science Center staff on how long it will take to do some of this, but it all hinges on when we can get the MRIP data on whether or not we can have a stock assessment by October.

If we can get the MRIP data prior to full release of the MRIP data, then we could potentially have something for the October meeting, but that would probably be the best-case scenario.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more questions or comments? Okay. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Just one more comment, and so, basically, this is just a review of where we're at, and we're kicking the can down the road.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're waiting for the next step, yes. All right. Thank you for that discussion. Thank you, Mike, for the presentation. Next up, we're going to go to yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, and Allie can come up here and talk to us about that.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so we'll go ahead and jump into Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55. I will say this is going to be a little bit more brief this go-round. We've had a little bit of a -- I don't want to say hiccup, but we're waiting to get the data, and we'll talk a little bit more about why here in a second, and so we don't have any numbers to look at. We don't have any catch levels to look at, and so it's going to be hard to make any decisions or recommendations at this point, but we'll just go through where we're at.

As far as background, I linked to the SAFE report here, and then which sections are going to provide you a lot of great background on these two species. Our SEDARs are SEDAR 79 for mutton and then 96 for yellowtail.

At your last meeting, you guys approved the purpose and need. We discussed a little bit about sector allocations. If you remember, we tried to use the allocation decision tool, and it got a little complicated, but then we did end up discussing a range of alternatives, and so we've built in those alternatives. Again, we're not really able to make any decisions, or kind of parse down that list at this meeting, because we don't have percentages or catch levels, but we will get there.

Then, for this meeting, I kind of updated this, and so we'll just review the updated timeline. The one thing I did want to dig into with you guys is review how the data is attributed in that Monroe County region, and so we talked a little bit about this in December. We've had some discussions with the planning team, and we kind of modified how that's going to be done just a little bit, and then we'll just review the actions and alternatives, specifically the sector allocations, but, again, not too many decisions to be made on that one right now.

This is our tentative timing. Depending on how long it takes us to really parse out that data in Monroe County and kind of work together, the two entities that are working with the data, and get that for us this timeline might change a little bit, but, right now, we have planned that, at this meeting, we would do kind of this tertiary review.

In April, the Gulf would review -- Kind of have that same review that we're doing right now, and then, in June, since the Gulf Council has a June meeting, both councils would review a public hearing draft with the preliminary analysis, select preferreds, and approve for public hearings. Again, when we get the data is going to be really the sticking point for whether or not we can achieve that June timeline, and then you can see the rest of the actions and their tentative dates as well.

I'm not going to dig too much into the ABC. We've kind of gone over that at the beginning, but those values are there for you for each species, and then your recent landings and closures, and, again, that information is in the SAFE report, and kind of given as a summary here, and then, your purpose and need statements, you guys approved these in December, but I will pause, really quickly.

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

The need for these fishery management plan amendments is to update the existing catch limits, jurisdictional apportionments of the ABCs, and the South Atlantic sector allocations for the southeastern U.S. mutton and yellowtail snapper to be consistent with the best scientific information available and achieve optimum yield, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects. I'll pause here. Any modifications or changes to your purpose and need?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Allie. Are we good? It looks like heads nodding yes.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so that brings us to the discussion of Monroe County, and so, at the December meeting, the IPT had discussions about kind of how to treat the data coming out of Monroe County, and the IPT had proposed attributing the data in Area D, and so I'm going to just flash this figure for you, and I apologize that it's -- We couldn't fit all of this information on the same page as the figure, but we're talking about kind of the way that the data is separated in Area D and E and which council it's essentially attributed to when you're thinking about splitting the stock ABC between the regions.

In December, the IPT proposed that shore mode, coming from MRIP-FES, be assigned to the South Atlantic Council, offshore private with SRFS assigned to the Gulf Council, charter-for-hire assigned to the South Atlantic, and then headboat to the Gulf, and the -- When we were thinking about that, it was -- SRFS was giving us more resolution than the MRIP-FES in certain areas, and so that's why that was used for the ones that it was.

After that meeting, FWC and NMFS reviewed kind of the breakdown and proposed the following changes, and so, for shore mode, no change. We would continue to use MRIP-FES and attribute to the South Atlantic Council. For offshore private, the area would be split based on the ratio of Areas D and E of the catch from of SRFS, and then, for charter, the same as above. However, for monitoring purposes, a five-year from 2020 to 2024, or 2021 to 2024 if we're excluding the COVID year, that average ratio would be used for monitoring, and will be reassessed at the next assessment. Then, for headboat, split the area between the regions based off of SRFS.

Then so, in thinking about that ratio, and so that ratio would be determined -- You would determine the ratio of private recreational landings between Region D and Region E, and then you would apply this ratio to federal data collection programs, so the MRIP federal charter-for-hire and MRIP shore, specific to the Florida Keys and determine the jurisdictional landings for Region D and E for each mode, and then this could be done for the most recent yellowtail snapper and mutton

snapper assessment. Then, as you move forward and conduct future assessments for these species and other species within SRFS, you could apply this method.

Then it was also discussed, for all the SRFS species, as the assessment terms of reference are reviewed, that the way the data would be split should be included in those TORs, so that it's clear upfront, kind of at the start of the process, making it easier, so that there's less hang-ups once we get to this part of the process.

I also included a little bit of that justification FWC provided us, and I'm not going to read every word, but so that's pretty much the change from the December meeting in the way that the data are attributed for those regions, and so I'll pause here and see if there's any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Can you scroll back up to what it looked like at the last meeting? Right there. That's perfect. Just to try to offer some explanation here, so, when we talked about this at the last council meeting, I brought up, you know, those four bullets that you see there at the top of the screen, and said, hey, I want to look into this more, and you guys said sounds great, and, FWC, go look into this and figure out if this needs to be modified, et cetera.

Our South Atlantic rep, myself, our Gulf Council rep, C.J., as well as a bunch of folks from FWRI got together and talked about this, and thought that we could do better, because, ultimately, the way that this data is assigned is going to affect the jurisdictional allocation between the Gulf and the South Atlantic, and so we felt like we could be a little bit more exacting, especially since yellowtail and mutton have State Reef Fish Survey, and so that's split a little bit more fine down in the Keys.

We did work on this, and spent a significant amount of time, and then, as Allie mentioned, had some discussions with both South Atlantic staff and Gulf staff about how to do this, including how to track the landings as well as how to do this for other State Reef Fish Survey managed species in the future, and so, right now, it's just being applied here for yellowtail and mutton, but, when other species come up, and so think something like black grouper, we would use this as well, and so you guys told us to go work on this, and we did, and spent a lot of time on it, and Allie was kind of explaining the whole kit-and-caboodle there. I don't know, John, if you wanted to add anything here.

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, and I think that's a good explanation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks for the explanation, and one of my questions was, you know, how are we going to be able to actually monitor this, right, because we have a lot of decision points, and so we're going to have to make sure that that's consistently monitored. The second is already being corrected, and so that was my question, because the headboat survey should be able to split by region, based on reporting area, and so thank you for clarifying that.

MS. IBERLE: Sorry, Andy, and I was typing. That correction, can you say that one more time for me? My apologies.

MR. STRELCHECK: I was asking why are we using SRFS to split headboat, right, but you've already corrected it, because it was an error.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions or comments on this? All right. Back to you, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so my plan for this was just to go quickly through your actions and alternatives again, just to keep you up-to-date on how these actions and alternatives look. Again, we're not going to have catch levels, and so I'm going to go through pretty quickly all the actions, and then I think I'll pause, you know, for any questions or concerns.

Action 1, and I tried to put the species emblem or image on there, so we can keep it straight, because we split the actions out between species. Action 1 is that jurisdictional allocation for mutton snapper between the two regions. As a reminder, the current breakdown between the Gulf and South Atlantic is 18 percent to the Gulf and 82 percent to the South Atlantic, and so you have a true no action alternative, which would retain both those percentages and the old catch levels for the stock based off of MRFSS.

Alternative 2 would take those current percentages and apply them to your updated stock ABC, and then, Alternative 3, you have two sub-alternatives, and my apologies that they still have numbers in here. These will change depending on the catch levels that we'll calculate, but, essentially, what it would do would be to modify or update the formula that was used to determine your current percentages, and it would include a more recent date range, and so from 2004 to 2023 and 2021 to 2023 in Alternative 3a, and then 2014 to 2023 and 2021 to 2023 for Alternative 3b.

A very similar action, Action 2, is going to update the regional jurisdictional apportionment for yellowtail snapper. This is going to look a little bit different, because the Gulf currently has an 11 percent buffer between the ABC and ACL. The Gulf has stated that they do not intend to keep that buffer. However, because it's there, they need sub-alternatives to remove that buffer, if they so choose, and so the sub-alternatives that are shaded in blue are Gulf-only alternatives, and so the Gulf will select these alternatives, and it kind of will just, for you guys, be, you know, like a non-starter.

The way that the preferreds will be selected is both councils will need to agree on the greater alternative that is preferred, and then, within that, the Gulf will say, okay, we want to retain the buffer, or not retain the buffer, in the sub-alternative underneath that, if that makes sense.

Alternative 1 is the true no action, again retaining the jurisdictional allocation percentages, with those catch levels based off of MRFSS. Alternative 2 would retain those current percentages, apply them to the updated catch levels, and then Alternatives 3 and 4 are going to use those same -- Update the formula using those same date ranges that we saw with mutton snapper.

Then that brings us to the South-Atlantic-specific actions, and so these are going to look at your sector allocations, and so we're going to start back with mutton again, and so this is the sector allocations for the South Atlantic, and so we've got a pretty long list of alternatives here. Once we have catch levels, and we can look at these percentages, I have a feeling that you're going to have a lot of alternatives with very similar percentages, and we can whittle this list down a little bit, so it's not six alternatives, but, at this point, it's going to be kind of hard to do that.

You've got a true no action, again retaining those same percentages, same catch levels. Alternative 2 retains the percentages, but applies them to the updated South Atlantic ACL that you've determined in Action 1, and then Alternatives 3 and 4 are going to update the current formula that was used to determine the sector allocation percentages, and these years are going to look familiar, because that's the years that they used -- That we used in the jurisdictional allocation actions.

Then Alternatives 5 and 6 were what we discussed after we had walked through the decision tree, and so this is a modification of the share-the-pain-share-the-gain from gag grouper that we all loved so much. The one thing I will note is that, when this method was used for gag grouper, there was a decreasing catch stream, and so each year you were seeing a reduction in the catch level, and so that's where you were sharing the pain.

This will kind of operate differently, in it will just distribute the change, and so the change could be an increase, or the change could be a decrease, but the method would just use the same steps, but it might be -- It might be going up or it might be going down, and so maybe the share-the-pain-share-the-gain, the split reduction method, isn't the best name for it, but it will operate the same, and, again, you have -- Similar to that that amendment where we pioneered this, you have an alternative that bases it off of the most recent three years and then the most recent five years.

The other thing that I wanted to kind of start, have you guys start thinking about, is that, mutton snapper in particular, and we don't have to deal with this issue with yellowtail, but, the commercial sector, the ACL is in pounds whole weight, whereas the recreational sector is both tracked and the ACL is in the units of numbers of fish.

In Snapper Grouper Amendment 41, this method was developed to convert the recreational ACL into numbers of fish. There was -- I think the size limit was changed in that amendment, and so there was concerns over making sure that the commercial weight was reflective of that size limit change, and the reason that the ACL is in numbers of fish is because that's what it is tracked in, and so this method is kind of outlined here in the discussion.

Again, no decisions really need to be made on this until we have numbers that we can, you know, look at and crunch, but, to start thinking about it, I did look in the most recent assessment, and that assessment provides average weights by region from the TIP program. I guess the "P" is redundant there, but I've listed the areas there, and then the average of all of those regions.

Again, I think the committee might need to look at the Tortugas and Keys and make sure that we're matching what's been done when we talked about the Monroe County um attributions, but you have an average weight there, and so, when we start looking at numbers for this, we might want to revisit and just make sure that we're comfortable with what weight is used to convert to numbers of fish, and so that is all of the actions, so I'll stop here, and, again, I wish I had numbers, but is there any questions on actions and alternatives?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions? I think it looks good. I like how it's laid out, too. Those tables make it super helpful. Go ahead Kerry, and then Andy.

MS. MARHEFKA: I just have a comment, because sometimes I feel really bad when we get to like yellowtail and mutton, because I have little experience, nor do the fishermen that sort of I

represent, and I talk to. I'm looking around at who is at the table right now, and, unless someone has some secret thing I don't know about, we don't -- You know, it all falls, the burden, on Jessica, and so I would hope that, when we do get to the point where those numbers have been calculated, and we're really digging into the actions, that the AP is given a load of time to talk about this, because there is a load of people on there who have a lot of experience, and that's going to greatly inform I think a lot of what happens around this table, outside of the burden being completely on Jessica, and so that's just a comment. It's not that I -- It's not that I don't think we care, and we do care. It's just very hard to weigh-in on something when we're not in that part of the world.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Two comments. One is, you know, I think we need to give some thought to whether we want to continue to monitor this in numbers of fish or not, right, and we don't have to. The other, and I recognize you're just throwing up numbers on the screen, but any sort of average that we calculate should be weighted based on the landings, kind of by region, and I would expect that the average weight would be considerably lower than that, because most of the yellowtail are going to be coming from south Florida.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks for that.

MS. IBERLE: Kerry, to what you were talking about, I think that would be an important thing to remember too, is, when we get to the stage, and, obviously, we're not at the point now, but, when this is approved for public hearings, maybe something to think about, when we go back to public hearings, is maybe this is an amendment that really would benefit from, you know, taking it out and doing physical hearings in the region in which the fishery operates, and so just some food for thought.

To the weights here, I think I more meant for this to be kind of like a jumping-off point and thinking about, you know, going back to the process that was conducted in Amendment 41, and thinking about how that could be updated to incorporate recent information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. Sounds great.

MS. IBERLE: I guess so your allocation action just repeats for yellowtail, and so I guess what's next is we'll try to keep moving forward on the backend, and hopefully we can get you some catch levels and an analysis as soon as possible, and then we'll keep you up-to-date on whether or not the timeline is changing for this one, and so that's all I've got.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, and so we're going to skip the MSE, because we have a presentation from Kai, and we'll keep that on tomorrow morning. I think we're going to go into the innovation plan, but maybe we could take a short five-minute break, and then we'll go into the innovation plan, and then we'll keep moving through the committee agenda.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. DUKES: I just wanted to say, really quickly, in my state report, I talked about how the Palmetto was going to go out and do some test traps with their on-demand gear, and I got a text message a little while ago from Dr. Tracey Smart, and they successfully did a test trap. Everything

worked, and they got it back, and then they proceeded to go ahead and set a four-trap set at Area 51. They got all of them back, really cool, and cameras on the receiver and the release housing, and cameras on the buoy and the line. She said they saw a couple of red snapper and a bunch of little gags going what is this, and they were very interested in it on the cameras, and so I just wanted to say that's very successful, and we're very happy for our SERFS team, and so thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right we're going to dive into the innovation plan, and so, since the last meeting -- We took the document and all of the notes, and so, at the last meeting, we had these overarching statements for goalposts and principles, and then a couple other categories at the bottom, and so what we did is take all of the bullets underneath and try to be a little bit more succinct, reword them, and we tried to remove some redundancy.

We reordered some of the goalposts, and we reordered some of the principles, and I think we squished a couple of the goalposts together, and so the goal for this meeting would be to try to do another review on the document, and then consider additional edits, and try to finalize what we consider to be a living document at this meeting, and then begin incorporating these concepts into committee discussions.

You'll see some action items in here, and so let me give an example. We had an action item that we wanted to have these nice binders that would come to every council meeting that would have this information, and that's already done, and so there are a couple of action items in there that we definitely need to talk about, but one of these has already been completed, and so I'll look to John and Kerry to see if you want to add anything.

Just a reminder here about the overarching goal, which was to establish these goal posts and principles for the committee discussions and consider ways to streamline and be more efficient during the committee discussions, and we put a quote at the top of the document from Genio that he said when he came to talk to us about, "The council is where fisheries science meets reality." All right. I'll look to Kerry to see if you want to add anything before we dive into this. John, do you have anything? Okay. All right.

We added a paragraph, there at the top, that talked a little bit about what we talked about at the last meeting, which was that this plan is a way to bring together some of the current priorities of the committee, including priorities and realities that were expressed by NOAA Fisheries, and consider a new path to improve how the committee operates, meaning considering efficiencies and other ways of doing business.

The intent of what we have here we hope reflects the presidential executive orders, changes in the type and amount of data for species within the fishery management unit, and, also, we've talked a lot about risk, and accepting a greater level of uncertainty by the committee when managing species in this complex, and so I just wanted to note that paragraph there at the top.

All right, and so then, diving into those overarching goalposts, the first two that we have here, one is about recreational yield, and one is about commercial yield, and we took out the word "optimum yield", and we took all the bullets that were underneath and we tried to write paragraphs there to capture everything that we talked about at the last meeting, and so I'm not going to read it to you. I'm going to let you all read it, and see what you think, and see if you have any feedback for us. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, just to help people, because I forgot if it was in the first paragraph, but I think it's later in the document, and, no, it doesn't say that in the first paragraph, but this is intended to be a living document, and so read it now, and this isn't like some, you know, action item that goes through a proposed rulemaking or anything like that that's hard to change. The intent of this is to be living, and so, if you say now this is a good idea, and then we sort of get down the road, or have other issues come to us, we can adapt to this. The concept -- It does say that. Sorry. I just wanted to make sure that people didn't feel like we had to wordsmith this into oblivion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I agree. We are intending for this -- So it's finalize a living document as much as you can finalize a living document, but, yes, and so don't panic and think that you need to wordsmith everything, but we've just tried to take those bullets that we have and kind of write either one succinct paragraph or a couple of bullets under each one of these items, and so just looking to you guys to make sure that we have captured everything that you all brought up at the last meeting.

Do you guys have any concerns, or edits, with how we've reworded the paragraphs under recreational and commercial or how we edited the blue text, which would be the goalposts? It looks like some folks are still reading. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, I mean, I'm generally good with it. I think where I'm still having some pause is the term "recreational yield is about access", right, because I equate yield to maximum sustainable yield, Magnuson, and I feel like opportunity is more what we're trying to focus on, and not yield, from a recreational yield standpoint.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, what if we put "yield", and then, in parentheses, "opportunity", or vice versa, "recreational opportunity (yield)"? What do you think about something like that?

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, I think that describes what we hear often with regard to recreational fisheries, yes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think part of the innovative idea here is to try and push the concept that, you know, many recreational fisheries care more about the access and the opportunity, necessarily, and that's what they're most interested in. That's what tends to come up as what's more important than the actual yield of fish that they take home. That's pretty often been recognized as often more of a commercial type of construct, you know, and I think the for-hire, in particular, is one where, you know, they get -- You pay to go on a for-hire trip whether you catch a fish or not, and that makes it pretty substantially different than commercial, where they don't get a dollar until they come home and sell a fish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We were just talking about how we're going to take notes. Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I was just wondering on the recreational part, where it's opportunity and -- Never mind. I'm good.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm going to go to Clay.

DR. PORCH: I'm just wondering if you could just replace "yield" with "opportunity", because, technically speaking, you know, Magnuson, when it refers to yield in the context of maximum sustainable yield, has nothing to do with maximizing opportunity. They're really two different goals. I mean, you can't simultaneously maximize both things.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, this is not a scientific document. This is not a Magnuson-mandated document. I will draw your attention to the very -- The third line of the document is where fisheries science meets reality, and this is a document that puts words to the reality that we hear, and we're not using this to -- This is just a reference.

This is a, hey, we're looking at this action, and does this action reflect what this council, this body, has said it wants to do, based on what it hears, and this is not going to be -- We will always manage to Magnuson. We're not trying to not manage to Magnuson, but I think it's okay, and I'll say this again, that there's capital Y yield, and there's the proper definition of yield, and this is lowercase, non-governmental yield.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So, you know, this is great, and I think it's inferred here, but I guess what I keep coming to is to make sure that, you know, we're still keeping a sustainable fishery, and I think it's inferred in here, but I wonder if it needs to be clarified, even in the first paragraph or something, that -- You know, we want to be innovative, and, you know, be able to -- Everybody have access and yield and stuff, but not at the cost of sustainability, or something like that, if that makes sense.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I agree. Maybe in that overarching paragraph. I took some notes. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and that's what I was thinking. In the overarching goal, if it would make everyone feel better, we add some wording about this document is not intended to supplant our responsibilities to Magnuson, our goal for sustainability, whatever language, so that it's very clear at the beginning that it is a living document to just always help us reference back to what we hope to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Got it. All right, and so commercial. What do we think about the commercial paragraph and the commercial blue statement there? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, I'm just sitting here looking, and maximum harvest with minimum effort does not necessarily cover it. We also have to consider maximum value, which may not, and probably does not, coincide with maximum harvest, i.e., you could go catch everything in two months.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Yes, and I took some notes on that. We'll go back and fix it. That's a good point, and it's not in there. Anything else on this one? Okay. Then we moved one up that was in a different part of the document that says optimize year-round access to snapper grouper species for commercial and recreational sectors, to the extent possible.

It's similar to the two above it, but stated a little bit different, and so we felt like it should be -- Remain its own goalpost, and then we reworded the bullets that were underneath there, and so I'll give you a minute to read the next one. I see heads nodding, and just making sure we're good. Okay. We also said that we wanted to consider regional and temporal management of fisheries to account for differences across the council region, and then there's a little paragraph under there. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Is this also include sub-regional?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think, yes, that's how I took it. Do you need that -- Some wording in there to try to clarify that, and like it could be off of a particular state. I mean, it could be however the committee wants to -- Okay. Let me make some notes. Okay. Anything else on that one? I mean, we have gear things down that are split inside Florida, and so, I mean, we've got some of the things that we've done in the past are down -- Even split partly within a state.

Okay, and I'm going to move on to the next one. The next goalpost would be consider holistic view of the snapper grouper fishery, and so this is where we combine two concepts, consider multispecies nature of this fishery when making decisions, and so this is where we squished two of them together, and so see what you think about that, or should they -- Should we break them out as two separate goalposts, or do we like it like this, or should we delete some of those words, and then look at the bullets underneath and see what you think. Okay. I see some thumbs-up. I feel like we already did this earlier today, and so I feel like we're already incorporating some of these concepts, and just making sure we're good there. Okay.

All right, and so this is a long one. this one was hard to summarize into just one small paragraph, and so this one is going to take you a minute. The goalpost was to maximize trip efficiencies or satisfactions for recreational and commercial sectors, and there were even more bullets in this underneath there, and we squished it down to this, but it's still a lot, and so I'm going to give you guys a minute to look at this, because there's some concern, and we brought this up at the last meeting, that there might be some opposing objectives here when we try to improve efficiency or satisfaction. There might end up being shorter seasons, or other access limitations, and so just make sure -- There might be some discussion on this one. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think my overarching comment is, since the achieving trip efficiency in commercial is very different than satisfaction in recreational, it may be worth splitting these two apart, right, rather than merging them together.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Will do. We'll work on splitting that. I'm looking -- Everybody else thumbs-up to split it into two? Okay. Good, and that will make this easier. Okay. Good, because it was hard to write this, and so, yes, we'll do some splitting on this. Anything else that you see in there that you want to comment on as we split this one up?

MR. CARMICHAEL: You know, Jessica, I think one thing I would just point out, like you kind of did, is it's really hard to define efficiency. We think we're going to put some work into, when we deal with individual items, of like what does efficiency actually mean, and it's very different between the two fisheries, and it's probably different within fisheries and species and components,

and so I think the idea is there that people want to do this, but figuring out what it means, and how, could be tough.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: This is, in part, to a lot of these things that we're looking at here, is we don't know what the data says to do these things, and this is not -- I'll give another plug for putting out what each state catches, very similar to the GARFO region of what they put out for their quota monitoring page, that would show what's caught in Georgia, what's caught here, and in North Carolina and all, and it would show what is during the time of the seasons, all these things that would help people at the table be able to look at the more efficiency, a vessel's distance from the fish, and what's being caught.

I mean, I'm agreeing with this stuff in looking, but I'm thinking, man, if we had this data here, which we don't yet, it would answer a lot of people to be able to see the writing on the wall of what's being caught in North Carolina, the species, what's here, and you could decide on split seasons, and, I mean, all this data that's already put out there, and so, to me, it would be more efficient to look at. You know where the fish are being caught at, the time of the year, the month, and all this stuff, and it would help on making decisions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so we have -- I would say wait for it, and so we have an action item coming in the document --

MR. HEMILRIGHT: All right. I'll wait.

MS. MCCAWLEY: -- where we talk about the data needed, like what you're saying, and so, when we get there, can you look at that and see if you think it captures this, because we did try to capture -- You brought this up before, and we tried to capture it in there, and I agree that it's a data need.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I just think since -- You know, I want other folks around the table here to be a devil's advocate of why it wouldn't be good to see that, or it would be, you know, but there's only a certain amount of people left in the commercial side, and you can see where the fishery is, and, that way, we ain't got -- The pros and cons, and saying what we want, you know, and stuff like, and I think it would be very helpful for us.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I understand efficiency is a good word, but we've often done things at this table, like when somebody brought up something like permit stacking, and we said no, knowing that it was efficient, and so there's -- You know, there's a lot of things that we do to get have fish going to the market, you know. in a more stable and stretched out, and still trying to reach our ACL, and so efficiency is a good word, but it's not always where we want to go.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Andy, and then Kerry.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I'll caveat my comment, given Kerry's comment just a minute ago about not being too government, you know, bureaucratic here, but there is a National Standard

specific to efficiency. Now, it speaks more to efficiency, I think, from a commercial sector standpoint than a recreational sector standpoint, but there is at least something to go on, in terms of focusing on how we can look at efficiency more holistically, and I agree with Charlie, and a lot of the things that we do around this table are contrary to efficiency, in many instances, because we're trying to achieve so many different goals and objectives.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I took notes on that, and I feel like we can fix it, but, Kerry, did you have a comment on it, too?

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, I agree, and I don't want to beat a dead horse, but I've really struggled with the word "efficiency", because there are a couple -- Particularly one fishery management tool that some people think is really efficient that I don't like, and don't want to talk about, although we took it out of the document, and so I think you're exactly right. I've really struggled with that word.

I think for our for our particular -- The snapper grouper commercial fishery economic -- Like you said, if economic efficiency was all we cared about, then we would have no trip limits, and we would have ACLs, and we would go fishing, and it would all be caught up quick, and so hopefully maybe -- I think we're just struggling to find what that word is, and maybe, if we all put our heads together, we can come up with a better word for it, but economic efficiency isn't really what we meant. I think we meant overall -- Like an efficiency that went beyond economics, and I've just struggled with coming up with that word.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Ditto. I don't know what the word is either. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: So, if we're going to use the word "efficiency", and, for me, to relate it to something, actions, that we're preliminarily working on, it would be to be able to use multiple gears on a trip, use the permits that we have on a trip, and that provides trip efficiency. We've made all this expense and effort to get offshore. While we're there, we need to be able to utilize and catch the pulse of fish that's there at that time, and so that, to me, is trip efficiency, right? While I'm on a trip, let me efficiently use my time, and the permits that I have, and the equipment that I have to make a paycheck.

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, exactly, and I think that was the intent. I think that exact circumstance that you're talking about that got it in there in the first place, but, again, to your argument, a different body could sit here and look at this document and think that means, well, as long as you're out there, then you should be able to catch all the fish you can possibly catch, and come home, because you could argue that that is the most efficient use of your trip, but what we're trying to do is have an efficient use of the fish, instead of efficient trips. We're trying to use the fish efficiently, which, in my mind, means for the highest value, for the for the best of the market, for, you know, all kinds of other things. I think your example is how it got in the document, and it just doesn't cover everything we want to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I feel like maybe the three of us can go back to the table on this with you all's ideas, and maybe edit this one a little bit more. Charlie, do you have some other thoughts?

MR. PHILLIPS: They've said it all, basically, but it's kind of a value efficiency, and that's a new term I just made up, but it kind of covers all of those things put together.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think that, Charlie, and I think that is reflected in the comment you made earlier in the other section about harvest yield, and I think, you know, if you look in here -- We're not going to get a single definition of "efficiency", and one doesn't exist, but does the general language, you feel, help you make a decision, and I think it kind of does.

You know, we have the statement that, in general, actions promoting each sector achieving its yield, while reducing costs and expenses, and I think that's in line with what you were saying. You know, Jimmy, you talked about you're out there, and you need to be able to catch stuff, and decreasing regulatory discards gets at that directly, right, you know, those types of things, trying to spread out harvest, and so I feel like, maybe for now, we have kind of the gist of it captured, and, you know, Jessica, maybe we sort of leave this where it is for now, and, like we said, it's a living document, and let's get a few meetings trying to use this, and we look at it again in, you know, six months, nine months, a year and say do we know any more about efficiency now than we did then.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I think that, based on the discussion, and we talked about splitting it up, and so I feel like we can make some changes to it to improve it even now, and so, yes, and more to come on this one. Okay. Go ahead, Gary.

MR. BORLAND: Just listening to everybody, it's almost -- You know, from a business term, it's almost ROI, right, ultimate ROI, and, I mean, you've got a calendar year of fishing effort, as a commercial fisherman, and you want to make the best of what you're allowed to harvest across that twelve-month window, because, obviously, there's a lot that goes into that. Obviously, it's not the best ROI, if you go catch it all at one time, and the price goes into the dirt, but, if you catch it across the whole year, and spread it out, and, obviously, you've got to have the right trip limit, to make sure your fuel and effort is worth the trip and all that, but there's a lot that goes into that ROI statement, but it just felt like --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and that was helpful, too. Thank you. All right. The next one is take more risk in making decisions, and this is something that we keep talking about over and over again. We narrowed it down to two bullets from our discussion from the last meeting, and then we put an action item under there, and so this is what -- You know, this kind of reflects something that we've talked about before, but I expect some discussion on it, and so read this these two bullets, and the action item, and see what you think here, especially Andy and Clay. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Certainly Clay can weigh-in. In terms of the action item, I mean, I think this is consistent with the ABC control rule, that ultimately the final decision rests with the council. We do provide them kind of some guidance in the ABC control rule, in terms of initially using a risk rating, and so they need that information, and so that's the only thing that gives me pause. If we're saying, well, that we want them to be risk neutral, well, what does that really mean if they're having to plug in a risk rating, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and let's talk about that, and so I think you're talking about the last sentence, and so, John, do you want to talk about this a little bit?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and this gets back to some of the things that have come up at the SSC and such, and certainly in assessments as well, about, you know, concerns about stacking the precautionary principle through the process and potentially, if you're making risk-averse decisions

of multiple steps within an analysis, your end result is not risk neutral, and then the council comes in and applies the ABC control rule, and its risk policy, to something that may be perceived as already being somewhat risk-averse.

You know, a simple example is, if you had a range of -- I'm not saying this happens, but I'm just saying it's something I think people understand. If you have a range of natural mortalities from 0.2 to 0.4, and you choose 0.2 instead of 0.3 to take, you know, a risk-averse decision on that, or, if you assume a risk-averse decision on something like recruitment when you're doing projections, then what's been raised certainly in the past is that, well, that's not really a risk-neutral position that we're starting from, and so that's all that's intended to do, to just, you know, provide that bit of guidance back to the SSC and, you know, let them know that that is something that they can certainly feel free to highlight when they don't think that is the case, but it's not intended to be prescriptive. There's no way the council can be prescriptive on that, but that is what it's intended to address, really.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: I would just say, in principle, that is what we strive to do. Whether that's always been the case or not, you know, we could we could argue, but, in principle, when we develop say the best estimates from an assessment, then all the decisions should be risk-neutral, in the sense that we're just trying to find the best estimates, and not build in, you know, conservatism at that step, but it is a little confusing when you start talking about harvest levels, because, by design, the ABC is supposed to be lower than the OFL, to account for uncertainty, and so that's where I struggle a little bit with the wording of what you're actually trying to say, but I think if you're just saying, in terms of the calculation of OFL, it should be risk-neutral then, yes, absolutely.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and that was the hope, to really reinforce what is expected to be the practice, and then, also, I mean I think the harvest levels -- It's not really -- It's just leaving that in their general, and so, like Kerry said, we're subject to Magnuson, and so the harvest levels they're going to give us are going to be lower than the maximum, and how much lower is supposed to be tied back to the council's risk policy, and so just, again, hopefully this is just reinforcing what we already anticipate is happening, but, you know, if it helps the SSC, then it's probably worthwhile.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so one that is similar to risk, and so we moved it up in the list here, is don't like the search for perfection stop progress, and so we left three short bullet statements there underneath this one. Sometimes, in the past, we've been somewhat paralyzed by what we're considering imperfect data, or challenges, or should we wait for another assessment, or should we wait for the perfect assessment, and so this is reminding us that don't let this search for perfection stop our progress. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I would like to point out we almost -- An example of that happened this morning, right, when we were talking about white grunt, and we're like do we leave it in or do we not leave it in, and we're never going to have the Cadillac-model assessment for white grunt. Clay reminded us that there are other things you can do that are less perfect in the world of fish, but possible, and so this is already happening in real life. It's just do we -- Let's remember that that's always possible, is how I was thinking of it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, also, that last bullet there that, the decisions that are taken by this body, we can come back and change them, or future councils can come back and change them, and it's not like, once they're in place, that they're in place for forever, but I know that that sometimes stops us from making decisions. All right. Anything on this one? Amy, did you have something?

MS. DUKES: Yes, Madam Chair, and I was wondering too if this would be a good place to add some of that language about non-traditional data sources, and we get into it a little bit later, but this is a good segue to making sure that we're recognizing citizen science, and we're recognizing fishermen testimonies on local conditions, because that could then be the bridge between imperfect data and getting us the decisions we might need.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's great. I took some notes on that. All right. Anything else on this one? Okay. The next one is we'll never have the perfect solution for everyone. We spend a lot of time, which I think is good, in us trying to figure out what is going to work for every single person in every single scenario, but I think it's just a reminder for us that I don't think that we're going to always be able to figure out what that perfect solution is, and so this is -- You'll see in the bullets there about balancing expectations, and managing trade-offs, and we put a little phrase in there, and I think Charlie said it, that nobody is really happy, but everyone can live, and so that was one of the bullets underneath this item, and so we tried to incorporate that into this innovation plan. All right. I don't see any hands. Go ahead, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I love you, Charlie, but I'm just not in love with that statement. I think, for some stakeholders that might pick up this document, they would be highly offended by that, right, and so I'm -- That's my concern, right, and I was trying to think of another way that maybe that could be said to accomplish the same thing, but the easiest thing is just to remove it altogether, but that's me personally.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So there's two sentences in that bullet, and so we could just keep the first sentence by itself, and so look at that and see if you think it captures it, or we've put something in yellow there, and what do you think? Is that more palatable, Andy?

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm less concerned about the first part of this sentence. I think it's the but everyone can live, right, and, I mean, people's livelihoods are at stake with so much of what we do, right, and, a lot of times, these -- I mean, these fisheries issues have huge impacts, and so I recognize I might be, you know, different, in terms of perspective here, but I just provide caution with using the statement.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and, Andy, you certainly know that, if anyone knows, understands, people's livelihoods -- I am always concerned about that, and I think that the point is, and, in my thirty years of doing this, I have not seen a fishery management action that, both sectors, every single person was like, yay, I'm so glad that happened, right, and, if it has happened out there, I would love to know, but I've never seen it happen, and so how do we -- How do we describe the balance that we're trying to strike, where we understand that we have to make decisions that are hard, but our goal is to make the least hard ones with the most beneficial impact, and so is this just

too crass for you? Is it a little too -- Does it make us sound crass, because I don't want to -- I would hate it if anyone thought that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy has his hand up. Do you want me to go to Jimmy and then back to you, Andy?

MR. HULL: I think what you have in the blue pretty much says it all, rather than trying to define it further in bullet points. I mean, just eliminate that. We will never have a perfect solution for everyone. I mean, that says it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I think what Jimmy is saying is we just balance expectations, so everybody can live, and maybe that's a kinder way of putting it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that's in that that bullet, and so deleted that second sentence. See what you think now, Andy, and is this -- Is that better? Okay. All right. We're good. All right, and so those are all of the goalposts.

This is principles, and so there's a little statement there about we intend to consider the following principles when we're thinking about the goalposts we just discussed as we're moving through committee business. We have items -- We have it broken down into items that can be considered now and aspirational items, and maybe we don't include the aspirational items, but just see here, and so we have listed -- Under can be considered now, there's a number of bullets there before it gets to economics. Look at those and see what you think.

There's things about risk, and there's things about, as Amy mentioned, ensuring local knowledge is factored into decision-making, how we want to be proactive, and the type of information that we want, and the type of information that we may have to act on without waiting, and then considering minimizing wasted fish, and so thoughts on this? Dewey, this is where some of that information is that you're talking about. Thoughts?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and my thoughts are pretty simple, that the way you're going to track these fisheries is you've got to know what's being landed, what state it's being landed, what time of the year it's being landed, and all that. We already get the data already, and it can be put in some format, and this has tracking trends, like, you know, up and down, or did it meet the ACL and different things.

This is like something you see every week, or every council meeting, that's there, and that would answer a lot of questions of like, well, it looks like -- You know, I just think it would be more transparent, and it would answer questions that we've got to take time, and staff does, to go get a report, or request information, and I just think we don't have stuff timely enough for decision-making like on certain things, and when we're looking at something, and I think it would help us when we look at different areas, you know, the time, the month, what's being caught, the amounts, all that stuff. We don't need to know who it is doing it, and just give us the amount of fish that's being caught. That way, you can see where your fish are at in the South Atlantic, you know?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we have we have other folks' hands up, but John was pulling up some examples of some of the things that we do have, and they are in the briefing book for folks to look at. John, did you want to respond before we go to others?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and, Dewey, we have some of this. I don't think it's really at the -- What is the word we like to use? At the granularity that you're talking about. You know, we have the landings for the different species in the FMPs, and it's total, and so it's not showing, like you're saying, by state, and it seems like you're interested in something like this with a finer scale, that maybe looks at it by state, and I don't know if you would want snapper grouper for every species, and we would run into some confidentiality, or, you know, would that be fine through something in some of the bigger groupings that we've talked about? You know, I'm just trying to figure out how to get this to you so you're not hit with, you know, fifty-five different numbers.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and we're not looking at fifty-five. A lot of our discussion is on ten or twelve species, and, you know, I always hear this -- Somehow, the GARFO region doesn't -- I guess they don't have to go by the confidentiality, because their numbers are in there every week, and it's a small amount of pounds.

I don't know who -- I know what state it comes from, and I don't know who the fisherman was, and I don't know who the dealer was, but it's there, and I just think something like that -- You know, we don't need to know the king mackerel, and that's something else, but all these other ten or twelve species that we're always talking about and managing, we need a more granular looking at it, where it's caught at, the season, the time, and all that stuff, but that would answer a lot of questions, you know, of, well, what's being caught during the spawning time, or, you know, there's spawning closures, but, other times of the year, what's being caught.

I just -- I think it's very helpful, and I'm going to keep asking for it until hopefully maybe one day we're able to get it, but, that GARFO region, if anybody goes on there and looks at it, and you'll see how it shows every state, every species, what's caught that week, and you can track it from last year's ACL, what was caught over the time period, and I just hope -- It would help me, and I'm sure it would help others.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Andy, and then Kerry.

MR. STRELCHECK: Dewey's comment got me thinking about maybe another bullet here, and it's kind of wrapped up in trying new things, as well as not waiting on a Cadillac, and it's essentially what we've been talking about, trying to simplify our management approaches, right, and focusing on tools that are available to us that might be faster, or more straightforward, that we can use for management, and so I just wanted to emphasize that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Perfect. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Dewey's comment really has me thinking, and, John, what you pulled up nailed it for me. We often only see landings when we are in the process of working on an amendment, or a management measure for that species, and we're often only looking at those landings in isolation, and so, when we're doing a black sea bass amendment, we're looking at black sea bass information, but Dewey is right we're blind to all the other information in the fishery at the same time.

I think that how do we -- What's the middle ground, because I don't think we're going to get GARFO-level weekly numbers, and I suspect it's in -- A lot of it is in SAFE reports, but it's in SAFE reports -- Like you click on red snapper, and you see red snapper, and you click on vermilion, and you see vermilion. Is there a way to um consolidate that data annually, and let's go -- Let's start with annually, where you're -- Listen, and I'm just being realistic, okay, and, I mean, I get what you're saying, and it's not that I'm not supporting you, but let's -- We're not going to get it weekly here right now, and you just heard them say that they're the most worked branch, with the least amount of money, but, at the very least, I think let's talk about Dewey's main point, which is, when we're making decisions, and we only see one species in isolation, it makes it very hard to think what else is this part of the fleet doing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think the issue is we're trying to understand how you want that digested and presented to you. Like, for example, at every meeting, you get -- Like I showed CMP, and then this is I'm showing the commercial landings. This is a snapper grouper. Again, it's not by state, but it is showing you, four times a year, what the landings are, and the progress and stuff, and it's there.

You know, the other thing we've done is we do have the fishery performance reports, which is an online app that anybody can go look at. Now, the thing we struggle with there is we understand that people don't do that. People don't go and look at it, and so I think what we need is, you know, to get a better understanding of, well, how do we need this packaged to you to answer the questions.

One of the challenges is, well, you don't always know the questions until you guys start asking them, and so we have been in situations, in the past, of providing an exhaustive amount of information, and then it's so much that nobody looks at it, and so, I mean, if we can come up with something that you think would really be useful, and helpful, we can probably extract some of that from some of these other sources, and, you know, do we make it available within an FMP, and you want to see a broader look at what's going on within snapper grouper, say if you're talking about sea bass, and that's certainly something that that could be done, but, you know, that's different than what maybe gets provided at every meeting in the way that Dewey is talking about.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, then Dewey.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and, I mean, I do think -- I know we have confidentiality issues, and Charlie catches all the snapper grouper in Georgia, and so we don't want to know his business, but outside -- I'm kidding. I'm kidding, but I think that there -- I think, on some level, we can get state data, and, where it's confidential, you would put an asterisk, and you say it's confidential. I think that you don't -- You don't need to relate it back. I mean, when we're really getting in the minutia, it's like related back to this boat caught -- Not this boat, but this number of vessels caught vermilion snapper, and they also caught these things, and I think it's okay to take a step back and just say, by state, here's what was caught, when we can do it without confidentiality.

I think it could come once a year, in the same time that we look at the unmanaged species landings, and like it's a landings report, and we look at it when we're heading into an amendment, and is there a table in the amendment that shows at that level, and then if we need to get into -- I know

that they have the ability to go much deeper, but maybe we don't need to. I do think we can do state, and just asterisk it where it's confidential, because --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I mean, I understand what Kerry is saying. I was just looking at if it could be -- You know, I look at it for tracking the fishery, and, when we just see a presentation that dealers are -- You know, could be seventy-five days late, and I look at it tracking the fisheries, and, right now, when I look at the SERO quota monitoring page, I'm appreciative that it's there, but it could be far better, and I know that's in the works, and nobody has got no money, and we're broke and all that stuff, but I just know that there's got to be some way better when you look at making these decisions.

You know, maybe it could be ten species that we've talked about, or got some different things to, and we don't want to know who the person is, you know, and everybody gets wrapped around the axle with this confidentiality stuff, and there's no way to identify the person. You know, we can put Georgia off to the side, if Charlie don't mind that, you know, and then just go with the other three states or something. I made a request to my state, and, you know, there was some confidentiality, and I understand that, but we shouldn't be having to make long requests to get the information, given it's supplied from the fishermen to the dealer and the dealer to the region. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and, you know, narrowing it down, narrowing the scope, Dewey, I think is consistent with what we're talking about, and maybe that's something for the high risk and high value species, that we ask for some more detailed information. I called up the GARFO, and it's really easy. Just Google "GARFO quota monitoring", and you're going to go right to it.

You know, Massachusetts has got twenty pounds of cumulative landings reported for bluefish, and so I think that gets to Dewey's questions about confidentiality, and maybe it is different, and I have no idea. Maybe that's three fishermen and three dealers landing six pounds apiece, and I don't know, but this is the kind of thing that they're showing.

They're showing cumulative landings, and they show it by state, and they got some figures. There's a variety of things they do, and maybe we need to, you know, burrow in a bit into this request of Dewey's and potentially come up with a letter of what you would really like to see, and for what species, so that we don't say we've got fifty-five species, and we can never do it. You don't want that for fifty-five, and so maybe we identify the high risk and high value species and say we really need to know a little bit more about these.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: We had, I think a few meetings ago, where Chip has provided us something with like ten or eleven species that we've got background on. I'm not asking for the whole fifty-five, but just something that we talk about at the table that are intertwined with cooccurring, that the commercial fishermen use up and down the coast, and stuff like that, and I would -- I would not add yellowtail, since most of that is off of Florida, and I don't know of anybody catching them in Georgia, and you know what I mean? You won't have to use yellowtail, but I appreciate it, and, any way I can help, I'll be more grateful to you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right. We had good discussion on that, and so we'll scroll down to some items that we had under the economic, and so, once again, these are principles that we want to consider, and so look at that. We also have -- This is another one of the action items that had to -- We've talked about this before, but it had to do with some older data that we looked at on these portfolio fishermen, and so look at these bullets, look at that action item, and see what you think here. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think this would be kind of like Dewey's landings, and it would be valuable information to see. We all know it's portfolio fishing, but, if we know how it's changing over the years, it can also help us forecast, you know, how we may want to do some regulations.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You're talking about something that has a frequency to it? Add a frequency to it? Okay. Anything else on this one? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Madam Chair, I know that we -- I'm on my citizen science hat all the time, and I'm sorry, but I like it, and so, after "cooperative research", can we do "and citizen science projects", and I know we reference the initiative, but we don't specifically talk about our projects anywhere, and it might be kind of just good. Just, in the first bullet, the committee seeks to use more cooperative research and citizen science projects, and I understand that they could be one and the same, but I like the idea of clarifying cooperative research and citizen science separately. You know, we talk about study fleets and things like that, and I don't -- I just didn't know if that would be entertained.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Amy has jumped down to science and data collection, and that's okay. You're fine, and so John is splitting those out, and so, if you want to go ahead and look at science and data collection, and there's an action item down there, and we'll scroll up in a second here, but go ahead, Amy.

MS. DUKES: I scrolled back up, and it's sort of in your action item, but I think just -- Just simply reviewing the SERFS data, and I know we do it annually anyways, but, when you were talking about the committee supports interim assessments and more timely stock assessments, review of the SERFS data annually. It's down below in your action plan

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so I'm confused. Amy, can you help, because you're kind of all over the place. Are you inside -- So we have an action item here, that I was hoping people could look at, where we're suggesting maybe there's a workgroup, or a workshop, to develop this particular item that has to do with timely stock status evaluations using simpler approaches, thinking about multispecies and ecosystem-informed catch recommendations, identifying data gaps that could be addressed through cooperative research timelines, deliverables, et cetera, and this would be council staff, SSC, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center work together to do this.

We feel like this kind of goes with the NOAA prioritization process as well, and so are you suggesting that there's another bullet that would be added under this action item for other things that this group should consider? That's -- I'm struggling to understand what you're saying.

MS. DUKES: No, Madam Chair, and I think I was a little further up ahead, but I had not gotten to the action item. I think that this workgroup is a good next step, and so I was a little premature.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Are we good? Do we have any thoughts, questions, anything on this one? Okay, and so, under those principles, there were some items there about allocations based on total catch, and so we categorized this under aspirational, because we don't feel like we have the data to do this. I don't necessarily agree with this even being in there, but it's part of what the committee discussed, but I don't know if you guys wanted to have some conversation about this, keep it, remove it, that it shouldn't be here, and just thoughts.

DR. PORCH: Just a couple points to remind the council of previous discussions we had, actually back when Roy was in Andy's position, and the council elected not to include the discards explicitly within the ACL, because the discards were self-reported, and so, if you built them into the ACL, then all people would have to do is just say we didn't catch any discards, and so that's why they didn't build that in there.

What we do instead is make some assumptions about what the discard rate will be in the future. In the case of red snapper, we assume that it will be -- The discard rate was the what it was in the recent past, and so it's a little confusing when you say you take it off the top, and what we do is say, if the council hasn't taken specific steps to reduce the discard rate, or the discard mortality rate, we'll assume it was the same as in the recent years of the assessment, although, for some of the other species, we make the very optimistic assumption of assuming discards are reduced in the same proportion of landings, which is usually the opposite of what happens, but, in any case, I don't know if we'll get a lot of traction there unless we do the last part, which is, you know, improve the estimates of the discards, and so that I think is worth including in there.

Yes, discard data are uncertain, and we do need improvement, and it would be great for the council, whether it's through citizen science, cooperative research, or other initiatives to find ways to help improve the quality of the discard information

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we could just have a bullet about wanting to get better discard data, but I saw a hand up over here. Was it Kerry?

MS. MARHEFKA: I try to pay attention every meeting, and I've heard multiple justifications for how we do things, and I think that's the first time I've heard that one, or the first time I've picked up on it maybe, but I want to be charitable here.

Knowing that this concept of this even being in here is somewhat controversial, based on what you said, and I've had other conversations with people where it is, and I've had conversations with people who feel very strongly about it being in there, and what I think is happening is not everyone is understanding how discards are handled in every step of the process, and I'm not 100 percent sure we're very far apart on how -- On what we all want, but I don't think we're all speaking the same language.

I wonder, and I'm hesitant to ask for a presentation, but some kind -- At some point, can we get some education, however you guys want to do it, on how discards are dealt with in every step of the process, from collection through incorporation in the stock assessment through anything that

may happen at the SSC level through how they get incorporated in the ABC to projections, the whole thing?

Can someone dumb it down and give us a Discards 101, so at least we're all working from the same primer, and, also, all the justifications for why choices have been made over the years, because I hear different ones every time, and, Jessica, you're much smarter than me, and you spend more time thinking about this, and so I'm inclined to like trust your judgment, and the judgment of other people I've talked to, but that's going in blind for me, because I don't understand this discard issue, and, to the extent you can talk about any variations of how it's done in other regions with similar issues, that would be helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so what if so -- So he's typing up an action item there that matches what you're saying, and so what if we had an action item about this, but, in the meantime, took out the rest of these, or moved these ideas somewhere else, because it's -- Just put a line through -- Put a line through them, but then we keep this action item, and is that okay? Clay.

DR. PORCH: To that action item, I'm sure your SSC could actually explain it, because they're very familiar with the approaches that have been used, and, you know, why they made the choices that they did. I mean, we can contribute to that too, but, you know, the SSC actually makes some decisions along those lines.

I would also point out, with respect to compare how discards are addressed in other regions, there are no other regions like us, with the same level of discards, and it's completely different. Remember that we have more recreational fishing than the rest of the country combined. The Western Pacific has just a couple percent of the total recreational fishing, and it's mostly us, and the Mid-Atlantic has a fair amount as well, something like 20 percent of it, and so it's really Mid-Atlantic, and you could look at what they're doing, and the Gulf, of course, has that issue.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We mean rec and commercial discards, right? We mean both discards. Okay, and so I'll make sure we capture that.

DR. PORCH: But my point is, yes, for the other regions besides the ones that I mentioned, discards is not the same magnitude of an issue.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and we have a hard stop in five minutes, and so I don't know how much more we could get through. John thinks we can get through it in five minutes. Okay. All right. The next thing on the list would be this -- I'm sorry, and can you scroll up a little bit? All right, and so this section is about ideas for the process of how the Snapper Grouper Committee runs and committee efficiency.

There were a number of things that we looked at in that category, and so this -- There's just a little statement there that says we'll consider these items when conducting our committee business, and so the first thing on there was the booklet of the commonly-requested information, and there was an action item, and Jimmy is holding up the booklet that we have that we're bringing to each council meeting, and so, check, that's done.

Next on the list is we talked about wanting to maximize the time of the Snapper Grouper Committee, and so, during the time that we're allotted at each meeting, how we can save time

during the full Snapper Grouper Committee discussions by possibly using subcommittees that could make recommendations to the full committee, and then we also talked about, and I'll look at Amy, her safe word here, where we could, during our discussions, get down in the weeds, and get off track, that we could possibly have a word where we could kind of stop and use that word to redirect the question, or redirect the discussion.

Then we also talked about, in thinking about being more efficient, we could put motions on the table and call the question quicker as we're having the discussion, and so any comments or discussion on this? It looks like people are nodding their heads that they're okay with this. Okay.

Be more responsive and timely, and this is how we seek to be more responsive and timely on fisheries issues, about making the decisions, hard decisions, more rapidly, finding the proper vehicle for the action, and so that's something that we struggle with, when we say we want to start a new amendment and then we sit there and debate is it a framework, or is an abbreviated framework, or expedited framework, or is it a full plan amendment, and so it would be thinking about how we respond to assessments more timely and those types of things. Anything else on this one?

We also had one about get out of the rut and be more innovative and efficient, which is kind of what this whole plan is about, and so this is about how the committee seeks to operate in a solution-oriented way, thinking about trying to move away from single species management, when possible, and think about testing new and innovative ideas, making difficult decisions, when they're needed, that align with fishery goals.

There was also a bullet about more communication and collaboration between the states and NOAA in between the council meetings, and this would allow committee meetings to operate more efficiently, and so this is about more collaboration between the states and NOAA.

We also had a section that was kind of how we're going to treat each other, that words matter, that, as we conduct our business of the committee, just encouraging committee members to use tact, and know that words matter, and to try to avoid blaming and shaming statements, especially those that might be directed at a particular sector, industry, organization, state, whatever. Just saying.

Then we also had a section about our responsibility to stakeholders and our role as council members on the committee, about how we want to seek to understand our audience better. We desire stakeholder and fishermen satisfaction, and we want to keep fishermen engaged, and, ultimately, we would like to improve the confidence of stakeholders in the federal fishery management process. Okay. That's the whole plan. I appreciate the discussion. Any other thoughts or comments on this, or, Kerry, would you like to speak to this?

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I would just like to close it out, real quick, that my hope my hope is that, sort of next meeting, as we're going through whatever we're working on, and say it's yellowtail, and as we have to make these decisions, that we have this in our minds, and we refer to it. Staff helps us remember that we said we wanted to do this, and here's how it applies to yellowtail, and it's the real-life -- I'm hoping the real-life application starts there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Is it in the binder?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we'll put it in the binder. So we'll update it, and then make some of these edits, and then we'll put it in the binder for the next meeting. I appreciate the conversation on this, and the discussion, where we've captured ideas that we said we wanted to adhere to and try to be more efficient, and so I appreciate it. John, do you want to close us out on this?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I think this has been a really good effort, and I look forward to us starting to use this, learning more what some of these things mean, and trying to make some progress on those action items, and coming up with more as we run into issues. Like you said, it's -- We don't want this to just die. It should be a living document, and, if we get an idea, say, hey, throw that in the innovation plan, and we should be able to just do it at a meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Thanks for that discussion. Madam chair, I'm going to turn it over to you, because I think we're at our time, and we need to get ready for public comment.

MS. MURPHEY: All right, everybody. We'll take a thirteen-minute break, and we'll start back at four o'clock with public comment.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on March 4, 2026.)

- - -

MARCH 5, 2026

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

- - -

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Villas by the Sea Resort in Jekyll Island, Georgia on Thursday, March 5, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Good morning. We are still in the Snapper Grouper Committee. We are going to backtrack in the agenda, and we are going back to the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation, and so first up is a presentation by Kai, but I'm going to pass it to Chip, so he can introduce Kai.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you, and I just wanted to remind you all on some discussions that you had in September of 2025. I know that's been a couple of meetings ago, and so you probably -- It's not probably top on your brain. In September, you all had passed a motion for the management strategy evaluation to consider aggregate bag limits, mandatory stopping for reef fish, seasonal management, and then spatial management, whether it's either open or closed areas, and so you wanted those analyzed through the MSE.

In addition to that, the performance objectives that you wanted included in the MSE were looking at a successful rebuild for overfished stocks. You wanted to look at short-term landings, long-

term landings, the discard fraction, and then angler access in the snapper grouper fishery, and so, as you're listening to Kai's presentation this morning, we had requested that the University of Florida go out and -- Well, we didn't request. We wanted information to include in the management strategy evaluation, and so they went out and did a survey on trying to gather input that would be relevant for the management strategy evaluation and so that is what Kai is going to be presenting on this morning.

I just wanted to put this presentation in a little bit of context of what it meant to you all, and a little bit of reminder, and so, at the end of this, if you want to change your recommendations, or maybe modify some of the things to include in the management strategy evaluation, please let us know. That's what this presentation is intended to do, and so, with that, I will pass it over to Kai and allow him to give the presentation and explain what he did.

DR. LORENZEN: Great. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you this morning, and so I'll be presenting, but this is very much a team effort. In addition to myself, this involves Edward Camp and Kotryna Klizentyte from the University of Florida, who are professors in Fisheries Governance and in Natural Resource Policy and Economics, and those two are actually the main experts behind the discrete choice experiment that is an important part of what I will present to you. Then Susana Hervas, Joy Hazell, and Chelsea Crandall, who works for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

Just a little bit of background, and you will mostly know this, and so I'll go fast here. The snapper grouper MSE is a council initiative, and it's contracted mostly with Blue Matter Science for the actual MSE modeling, and with now through a series of contracts with us at the University of Florida for the situation assessment and then this recreational angler attitudes and preferences project.

The focus of the MSE is on strategies to reduce the number of released fish to improve yield throughout the fishery, the snapper grouper fishery, considering the need for fishery access and resource use while preventing overfishing and rebuilding overfished stocks, and it's really an opportunity to evaluate different management strategies, and the tradeoffs, before you actually make decisions and implement anything.

This is just a snapshot of some output from that MSE model, and so, at the moment, the model is set up to include red snapper, gag grouper and black sea bass, and it models the whole sort of council-managed sort of reef fish area here, and it has two depths zones, and it has more northern and southern. or several, you know, geographical areas that it models explicitly.

This was important input for us, in that we decided to focus our survey on the species that are in the model here, red snapper and gag grouper. We did not explicitly do a discrete choice experiment. One of the key parts of the survey for black sea bass, mostly because that probably would not have attracted a lot of people who are primarily interested in recreational fishing for black sea bass, and I'll come back to that, and so our focus has been red snapper and gag grouper.

The remit was to gather information on private recreational angler attitudes and preferences to further develop the snapper grouper MSE, and we decided to go about that in a sort of three-pronged approach. We convened a stakeholder working group to help us with some of the design and setup of this, but also to have this working group as, you know, a group, a stakeholder group,

that can continue to work with the MSE as this progresses, and so we are done with this part, and so we have information for the MSE, but the MSE itself will continue.

We did a bit of a literature review, and we did a survey of South Atlantic recreational reef anglers, and, mostly, that's that last point that I want to talk about today, but I did want to introduce the stakeholder working group, and so it was really the idea was to discuss management options in greater detail and provide input to the survey design, and also pre-test the survey, and, as I said, this group will remain sort of available to work with the MSE as it progresses, and I will add here that being on this working group, and in the picture, does not necessarily constitute endorsement of everything that I say. It's just these are people who were part of the process of designing what we did.

Finding out what anglers think, there are various ways in which we can find out what anglers think, right? One is public comment at meetings, and that is how probably you most often find out what anglers think. There are email surveys that one can do of license holders, and certainly my group has done those before, and, you know, often research groups do those.

Then there's what we call an incentivized panel survey, and the incentivized panel survey is a survey where we work with a survey company, and that company essentially has a captive audience of people who respond to surveys, and get incentivized to do so, and so they earn some money by responding to surveys, and what these companies will do is they will assemble panels that are broadly representative of the demography of the population that we want to survey, and so they will be sort of representative of the age distribution and gender balance and so on of the population.

Then you go to the survey panels with a qualifying question, because we want to find -- In this case, our qualifying question was have you recreationally fished in the South Atlantic region in the last two years, and so, if they said yes, that brought them into the pool, and, you know, the same panels do very different surveys, and so maybe, the next week, they'll get a question of do you like eating burgers, and then they'll be asked about what kind of burger they like to eat.

The important point here is so these people are incentivized to do the survey, and they do it mostly for that incentive. If we send people an email survey, say to fishing license holders, but usually we do not incentivize them, and so they have to, you know, use their own time, and they have to be interested, or fired up enough, to respond to that survey, because they're not getting anything else for it.

Then, when you think about public comment, you have to know where the public, and when the public comment opportunity is, and you have to think about what you want to say, and you have to go there. If you're coming here, you also have to pay ten-bucks even to get onto the island, I found out yesterday, and so, basically the bar to participate in that process of sharing what you think gets higher towards the right, and that leads to what we call an increasing selection bias, and so mostly those with high interest, and/or specific opinions, will respond to the opportunities further to the right, whereas we're trying to avoid that in the incentivized survey panel.

A lot of the surveys that you read about in the news and so on, they're done with these incentivized panels, including by the way, for example, the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Recreation, and so this is a very common way of doing surveys, and, in theory, it's what should give us the least bias in responses.

We opted to primarily focus on an incentivized panel survey, and so we developed a survey instrument that was the same both for the incentivized panel, and we did do a bit of an email survey. The main population we're targeting was marine recreational reef fishers. We specified that all the states in the South Atlantic region should be included. Temporal, we asked have you reef fished in the last two years, and so we didn't want people for whom that would have been a very long time in the past.

Then so the implementation was primarily we did the incentivized panel, and the panel was there both to address the issue that we can't actually easily get license holder data for most of the states. Florida is unusual, in that the license holder information is public record, and so we can do an email survey of Florida license holders fairly easily, but that's not the case for the other states.

Response rate concerns, and so we're getting relatively low response rates on email surveys. It used to be a few percent. Now it's down to 1 percent, or less than 1 percent, which means that there's a very high potential that you're only hearing from a very particular share of the stakeholders, because the vast majority -- We send the survey to a random sample, but only a very small proportion of people respond, and so, to address those concerns, we went with the incentivized panel.

A secondary thing that we did was a survey of recreational reef fish permit holders in Florida, and so this is not incentivized, and, as a reminder, the reef fish permit in Florida is a free permit that most people get in addition to their fishing license, but you're meant to also get that even if you don't have to have a fishing license, and so, if you're over sixty-five, for example, but you're reef fishing, you should still have that permit, and it's really a way of finding people to include in the State Reef Fish Survey, and so it's kind of setting up that survey population. We did a survey of that population, partly because we wanted to know how that might differ from what we get from the incentivized panel.

Okay, and mostly we'll be focusing on the incentivized panel results today, because that is really the core, and what we expect to have the least bias. The survey instrument had multiple components. There was an informed consent to do the survey, and some background information, and then the qualifying question, as I said, was have you reef fished in the last two years, and then, at the beginning, and throughout the rest of the survey, there were a variety of what we call sort of attention checks and questions, and so there was a --

After people said, yes, I do that, there would be a question of, okay, so what sort of outdoor activities do you engage in in the South Atlantic region, and it would have some that are relevant, including the reef fishing, and it would have some that are actually non-existent, just to see whether people pay attention to that question. You know, it's to weed out people who might be in it just to get the money for doing the survey. The typical what one does is include these things that helps us weed out people who are not responding in a sensible manner.

Then we had questions about fishing behavior and experience, opinions about management strategies and tradeoffs, the discrete choice experiment. We asked them about novel options, and then we had questions about demographics, and what I'll do for the presentation today, rather than go through all the methods first, and then the results, I combined the two, and so I'll explain what we did and show you the results.

I want to add here that we did do a more methods-focused presentation to the Social and Economic panel about two weeks ago, and so we got some feedback, and that was by and large sort of positive, and so there were no major concerns brought up about the way this was done.

Okay, and so this is the demographic information from the incentivized panel, and so you can see we have a reasonable distribution across income levels, age groups, and we had the most respondents from Florida, fewer from the other states, and we had 60 percent male and 40 percent female, and so this is just an overview of the demographics of that panel.

We asked them which reef fish have you targeted in the last twelve months, and so red snapper was the top here, and then there's a variety of others. We did ask respondents to indicate which species, red snapper or gag grouper, they most cared about, and we then channeled them into specific discrete choice experiments for those species, because, basically, we expect to get the best results when we survey people who care really about the species we ask about.

It turned out that, not surprisingly, 83 percent cared most about red snapper, and 17 percent cared most about gag grouper, and that also means that, since they were channeled into these specific discrete choice experiments, we have a larger sample for red snapper-interested anglers than for gag, and we'll see that later, that we have sort of probably more reliable and significant results for red snapper, and that's largely a question of sample size.

Then we asked them general views on fishing regulations and tradeoffs, and so this was to find out how they feel or think broadly about regulations, and so there were questions like regulations are necessary to prevent overfishing of reef fish populations, and what you see, the numbers here, they're the average rating on a five-point Likert scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and so you can see that, you know, 4.1, that's above, a little bit above, agree, and so generally they agree that regulations are important, or necessary, to prevent overfishing.

Stricter regulations would lead to increased reef fish populations and so, again, on average, people agree with that, if a little less strongly so than with the previous question. I would rather have less restrictive regulations now, even if they lead -- If they led to being harder to catch keeper-size reef fish in the next ten years, and so it's basically I would rather fish more now than have benefits in the future, and, actually, people moderately disagreed with that, and so this is below three.

Then the other way around, that I would rather have more restrictive regulations in the next two years if it led to better fishing in the next ten years, again, there's more agreement with that, and so it gives us some idea how people think about tradeoffs between more immediate benefits and longer-term perspectives.

We also asked them if so stricter regulations would be acceptable if they lead me to catching more reef fish per trip, and this is a check-all-that apply question, and you can see catching larger reef fish, needing to travel shorter distances on the water, and so you can see that sort of a majority of anglers, both those most interested in red snapper and in gag grouper, think that stricter regulations are acceptable if they lead them to catch more reef fish per trip or if they lead them to catch larger reef fish.

Needing to travel shorter distances on the water is a bit less, and, importantly, only 9 percent of each felt that I don't believe stricter regulations would lead to any of these, and so that is interesting, because people fundamentally think that, you know, regulations help achieve those objectives, and so, you know, it could be in a situation where they say, no, actually, I don't think this is really necessary, but it was interesting that that was a distinct minority.

Okay, and so, the discrete choice experiment, it's really there to help us analyze preference and tradeoffs without asking directly, and so what we do is, rather than saying would you like a longer harvest season, or would you like a targeting closure, or would you like something else, and, every question people would answer independently, we present people with scenarios that have multiple attributes and different combinations of levels in these attributes, and I'll show you that in a moment.

Participants choose between options with different attributes, and, by doing so, they reveal what they prefer, what they find important, what they don't find so important, what they do not like, and so we developed separate discrete choice experiments for red snapper and for gag grouper.

The reason is that, obviously, those fisheries are managed quite differently, and so, in order to have relevant attributes for the DCEs, we can't have one that encompasses both fisheries, because they're really different, in terms of season length and other things, and so that's why we had that question of which species do you care most about, and then we channeled people into the relevant one.

They also always included, apart from the two choices that people, the two options that people have at every choice, they edit and opt out, and so where people could say I would not fish for the species under either option, and I'll talk about red snapper first, and so these are the attributes.

We had different harvest season lengths from two days to sixty days, reef fish targeting closures of either non or three months or six months, a reef fish aggregated bag limit, and sort of the current sort of basically unlimited as an aggregated limit, medium limit of five to seven reef fish, a high limit of ten to fifteen, a mandatory stopping rule, yes or no, and then we had a South Atlantic reef fish permit as something that people would have to acquire either for free or for different levels of payment.

The reason for that permit is partly because we wanted to know what people thought about it, and it's partly what's called a payment vehicle in the discrete choice experiment. It helps us estimate the willingness to pay for different management options, if you like, but I will not go into details about that part. I'll focus on the choice outcomes, but just to explain why this was in the survey.

Okay, and this is an example of the question that people were asked here, and so which management option, one or two, would you most prefer, and you can see it has -- Option 1 has a harvest season of sixty days, a six-month targeting closure, a reef fish aggregated bag limit of seven, mandatory stopping rule, yes, and a \$50 permit, whereas Option 2 has fifteen days of harvest season, no targeting closure, a fifteen-reef-fish aggregated bag, no mandatory stopping, and a free reef fish permit, and so then people would choose Option 1 or Option 2, and in doing so, they would consider all these different things, right, but they would pay more attention to the things that they particularly care about, and that's really what we're trying to get at here.

This is the outcome for the overall red snapper sample, and I want to explain to you what these things are, and so we have these coefficients that are also known as part-worth utilities, and they basically tell us how much people prefer or disprefer a particular, in this case, management option or, you, know, attribute of those choices that they're given.

Basically, if that is zero, or near zero, it means they don't particularly care about that attribute, or that option. If it's positive, they prefer it, and, basically the higher the number, the more they prefer it, and then the negative is where they don't prefer it, and, the more negative, the more they don't prefer it, and so those are the coefficients, and then we have a significance level.

Here you can see most of the coefficients up top here have three stars. They're extremely significant, and so it's very unlikely that, you know, those coefficients have sort of arisen by chance, if you like, and then there are others that are not very significant, and so you can see the aggregate bag limit coefficients here are not significant, and they also are very, very small, and so they're very close to zero.

The interpretation here would be so people very moderately dislike the permit. They do want a longer harvest season, and, in fact, those are -- Particularly the longest season here is thirty days, and it's the highest positive than targeting closures. Interestingly, here in the full sample, they also are positive about the targeting closures, and I'll come back to that, and so this may surprise you.

Then, the aggregate bag limits, they don't particularly care for one way or the other, and the mandatory stopping also is something that they don't seem to care about very much, and you can see there's a low coefficient for opt-out. That also means that they, by and large, do not like to opt out, and so they are staying in the game, if you like.

Okay, and now some of these responses may have surprised you, and the reason that may be the case is that this combines people with quite different thoughts about these questions, and so not all anglers think the same, and one way of understanding that better is what we call a latent class analysis, and so it segments respondents into different groups based on their choices in the discrete choice experiment, and so it identifies different preference patterns.

When we do that, we find that the red snapper anglers fall into three classes, and so, our Class 1 here, you can see it has positive coefficients for -- So the same coefficients that we just looked at, but they're now divided up into these three different classes of anglers, and you can see that, so the Class 1, they want a longer harvest seasons, and they want those quite a lot, because the coefficients are very large. Then they do not like targeting closures, and, in fact, the three months targeting closure, they don't like. Six months, they really don't like, and so you can see it's more negative. Aggregate bag limits, you can see they have a preference for the larger aggregate bag limit. They don't like the mandatory stopping, and about 42 percent of the anglers in our sample are in this Class 1.

Class 2 is different, and so these are people who are actually against the longer harvest season. They're moderately in favor of targeting closures. They don't like the aggregate bag limits, and so you can see these people have a very different pattern. They mostly essentially are in favor of quite restrictive regulations, and then we have a Class 3 that is sort of not very distinct in any way, and so I want to -- The Class 2 here is 33 percent, and the Class 3 is about 25 percent, and I want to transition us to just a verbal summary of what these classes are.

Basically, we have this Class 1 that we call harvest-oriented, based on the way they stated their preferences, and so they prioritize access and harvest opportunity, value longer seasons, resist effort restricting rules, like closures and mandatory stopping, and have a mixed view on aggregated bag limits.

Then we have Class 2, that we call conservation-oriented, and so these are people who favor closures and mandatory stopping rules, dislike both of the aggregate bag options, and actually have a negative utility, or sort of dislike longer harvest seasons, and then we have this third group, which we call the flexible pragmatists, who have sort of more balanced preferences, a mix of access and conservation tools, and they're open to moderate controls.

What this tells us, I think in the big picture, is really all the anglers are not the same. There are really different perspectives on these things among different anglers, and, also, that they think about these regulation options, not just in terms of how they directly affect them, but they think about them in terms of, you know, the perspective of how conservation is needed, and things like that, and so it's not only how does the regulation affect me, although the people may be the people who fish the most, think most about, you know, how it would affect them, but, in this wider population, we also have people who primarily think about it as say a conservation issue or, you know, other attributes of these options that they like or dislike that are not necessarily related to how they are personally affected or their fishing behavior is affected.

Okay, and there's some demographics here, how they distribute across the classes, and you can see, interestingly, so Class 1 and Class 2, the male and female distribution is not much different. Class 3 has a bit more females than -- The distribution is a bit more female skewed. In terms of income levels, you can see that, and this is sort of distributed across the classes, and so you can see that, in Class 3, they have sort of a slightly higher representation of lower-income people. Class 1 has a stronger representation of higher income levels, and so there's a little bit of a difference, but nothing that really jumps out in a big way. Then, also, state-residence-wise, there's not a big -- So they all have -- The residents of the different states, all have similar distributions across these classes.

Okay, and then we asked them about -- Outside of this discrete choice experiment, we wanted to ask them about some novel options that were not in that choice set, and one of those is harvest tags, the second was spatial closures, and the third was an education requirement, and so the harvest tags, so individual tags needed to harvest fish, but there would be no season, bag, or size limits, and numbers would depend on allowable harvest. Allocation we said would be at random, and the tags wouldn't cost any money, and so I'm just describing how these choices were described to the respondents.

Spatial closures, we said, well, 50 percent of the water closed for nine months and open for three months, and 50 percent open year-round, and so we call it spatial closures here, but it's actually a mixture, and it's spatial management, and so there will be closures, but there are also open areas, and the closed and open areas would rotate on a yearly basis, and then the education requirement would be they have to pass an intensive course to get that South Atlantic reef fish permit.

The course would teach best catch and release practices, ethical fishing and so on, and it would cost them \$25, and, of course, so there's some time commitment in this, right, and so they would have to actually attend a course and do that.

Okay, and this is what we got back for the red-snapper-focused anglers, and you can see -- I think two things are interesting here, and so there's a majority of people who like somewhat, or like a lot, basically all of these options. Interestingly, the spatial management actually had more -- A higher proportion of people who liked or liked them a lot than the other two, although the difference is not huge, but that was interesting, and, of course, we don't know exactly why, but my guess would be that both the harvest tag and the education are things where people have to do things in addition to what they're already doing, whereas the spatial management would be, well, there's an area where you can't fish at the moment, but they don't have to go and do anything extra, or get a tag or anything, and so this was sort of interesting, because we probably expected this to come out a little differently.

Okay, and so this is red snapper. I am going to show you the gag grouper results, and so there we see gag grouper has a longer harvest season, and we also had a choice of, you know, overall longer seasons, and this is where you see why it's important to do this separately for gag and for red snapper, because the same levels would not work for both.

Then, again, we had the targeting closure, and we had an aggregated bag limit, a stopping rule, and the permit, and what we got here was actually -- So there are two things that are important here. One is that, again, they very mildly disliked the permit, but then they had a preference for the fifty-seven-day season, less so for the 114 days, a slight preference for a short targeting closure against a longer targeting closure, and they were somewhat positive about the aggregate bag limits.

Now, one important thing to recognize here is that most of these are not significant, and so they're small, and they're not statistically significant and so we actually, I feel like, do not have very good information about the gag preferences, and that is partly, or largely probably, a result of the much smaller sample size that we had, because most people cared mostly about red snapper, and it may also be that people actually are not as opinionated about some of these choices as they are about the choices that they had for the red snapper.

We also did the latent class analysis, and I just want to go to the verbal description here, and so we had a control supportive Class 1, and so people who favored fairly strong management, disliked longer harvest seasons, liked mandatory stopping, and so this Class 1 is actually kind of more like the Class 2 in the red snapper classification, but they are not the same. They're sort of different.

Class 2 are moderate conservationists, and then we, again, had some access-oriented pragmatists, but this -- As I said, remember that the overall results here were largely non-significant, and then the differences here are less pronounced than among the red snapper anglers in the different classes.

We also asked them about the novel management options and the picture is somewhat similar. Overall, they seemed less interested in novel options than the red-snapper-focused anglers, but the pattern here is similar, and then we asked them so how would your trip numbers change if, you know, targeting red snapper or gag grouper in response to the preferred option, and so, whenever they had identified what their preferred option was, the first question was -- They had the

opportunity to opt-out, and so to say I would not fish under this option, and then we had questions of how would this option influence the number of trips that you take targeting the species, and so the options were decrease a lot, decrease a little, stay the same, increase a little, increase a lot.

You can see that, by and large, in both the red snapper and the gag-grouper-focused anglers, people said, you know, their fishing activity would stay the same or increase a little, and so there were relatively few people who said, no, I'm done, or I will reduce my trips.

Okay, and so the panel survey summary is most respondents thought regulations were necessary and would prefer regulations that improve their catch. Most cared more about red snapper than gag grouper. In the red snapper, among the red snapper respondents, there were three main classes, and so the largest one here was the 42 percent wanted longer harvest seasons and few restrictions. There was a smaller class that wanted more restrictions, including targeting closures, and they did not -- Those classes did not differ much at all by demographic or general regulatory preference. Overall, the classes showed positive willingness to pay for restrictions, especially targeting closures, and so I actually didn't dwell on the willingness to pay information here in this presentation.

Most of the -- More than 50 percent of the red snapper respondents liked novel options, and especially the spatial closures. A few really disliked those options, and gag grouper responses suffered from a small sample size, and had a much larger no-change class, and so people who didn't really want to see any change.

Okay, and I want to bring us back to where we started with the different ways of finding out what anglers think, and so I presented the results on the incentivized panel survey, and now I want to briefly show some results for the email survey of license holders, and remember, we expect those to be potentially slightly less representative of the overall population, because you're not getting incentivized, and you sort of have to want to give your opinion in those surveys, more so than in the incentivized survey.

This is the demographic information compared between the incentivized panel and the reef fish permit survey, and so you can see gender-wise, and so the reef fish permit survey is 88 percent male, and 12 percent female, and so that's a substantial difference to the incentivized panel.

We will see that the email survey respondents were substantially more wealthy, had a higher income than the others, and so you can see here there a very few in the low income bracket, and many more in the higher brackets here. They were also -- The email reef fish permit survey is very, very strongly focused on the thirty-five to sixty-four-year-old age group, and so there were less distributed across the different age groups than the incentivized panel, and, of course, they were all residents of Florida, and so there were no residents of the other states.

I should add here that so one of the ways we had to basically try and hit mostly reef fish anglers in the South Atlantic region was to take reef fish permit holders in coastal counties on the Atlantic side of Florida, and so people who may have a permit, but are not resident in Florida, or are not resident in the Atlantic coastal counties, wouldn't have been in that frame.

These are the results, and so you can see the panel results on the left, and, for the overall samples, this is not broken down into the different classes, and then you can see the email survey, and you

can see on the right, and so the people who responded to the email survey are much more strongly in favor of longer harvest seasons, and so much larger coefficients. All of those were highly significant.

They're generally more opposed to the targeting closure, and you can see that those were -- Actually, the three-month response was not statistically significant. The six-month response was significant, and so what you can see is, basically -- One of the things that I think is really interesting here is that the preference for a longer harvest season is much stronger than their dislike of the targeting closure, and so that -- But they definitely, you know, have this combination of they want longer harvest. They don't want a targeting closure, and what that really means is that these are sort of more representing our Class 1 people from the panel survey.

For comparison, we have the Class 1 responses here from the panel survey, and you can see there that what we get in the email is not just the Class 1 panel, and so you can see they're less strongly supportive of the longer harvest season, and they're less opposed to the targeting closure than the Panel 1 people from the panel survey, but you can see that that group is more strongly represented in the email survey, probably, and that's why we're getting what we're getting, and so these are more the people who prioritize access and opportunity.

Okay, and that brings us back one more time to this how -- You know, we have different ways of finding out what anglers think, and so we've covered the incentivized survey, which we, on theoretical grounds, think is what gives us the most representative information. The email, which is more selective, if you like, more prone to selection bias, and then we have public comments at meetings, and you will remember public comments on some of these issues at recent meetings, and so you can complete this picture for yourself.

Okay, and so, in terms of broad management inferences, there's broad support for restrictive regulations in general, split opinions of red-snapper-focused anglers regarding harvest and targeting closures, overall preference for longer seasons, and, to some extent, targeting closures, but a numerical minority group would strongly dislike the latter, and this is out of the overall big, most representative survey.

Most fishers seem open to and interested in novel reef fish management options, and including especially spatial closures. From these results, also restrictive reef fish regulations may well increase overall satisfaction if they improve fishing, but, in any case, they will be strongly opposed by a subgroup, and I would say that is the subgroup we most likely hear from in our, you know, public comments, and even in email surveys.

Key uncertainties with this information, one is should we trust panel data, and, from first principles, panel studies are expected to be the most representative of the general angler population, and not favor the most avid or regulation-opposed anglers, who will be more visible in those other forms. Species-specific uncertainties, well, the results are most -- We're most confident in them for red snapper. There's some indication that gag grouper respondents were less interested in, or open to change, but the information we have on gag is just not as strong and reliable as we have on red snapper.

Then DCE surveys have some hypothetical bias, and that means that, basically, because we are giving people hypothetical options to choose from, right, and so it's possible that, you know, if

they were confronted with those options in real life, they would choose a little differently, but I think the discrete choice experiments give us a more realistic idea of how people think, and what tradeoffs they make, then, you know, say surveys where we simply ask people to state how much they like or dislike something, because we're gaining information from how they make choices between options with different attributes.

Implications for the snapper grouper MSE, we have key information on recreational angler management preferences and responses that hopefully will help scenario development, and also the modeling of the angler response, and, by the way, one interesting thing here, if you haven't cottoned onto that already from the response where we asked them how do you -- How would you change your numbers of trips under these options, and so mostly people did not indicate that they would fish less.

What that also means is that so probably the people who were in favor of say a three-month targeting closure will not fish a quarter less, but they will fish in the times when the targeting closure is not in effect, right, and so people will not, you know, respond proportionally to the closures by reducing their fishing effort in proportion to that, but they will change how they -- You know, when they fish, and where they fish, depending on, you know, what measures you put in place.

It's quite clear that there are some things that people like more, and some things they like less, but also that probably the overall levels of recreational effort here will not change in a really big way, and so the question, with a lot of these management options really, is then -- That's where I think the MSE comes into its own, is so, if we have a particular regulation in place, and it affects how people behave, how does that then interact with the biological conditions, and the catchability at the time or place, and so on, and how will this add up to something that will give us less discarding, or more discarding, and so there's -- Basically, we should take this information, combine it with the more sort of biological information that we get out of the MSE modeling, and, if we want to look at those management options, it's going to be a combination of people's preferences, and their responses to management options, and how that interacts with the biology of the stock.

The stakeholder working group, we still have, and so our project is finished, but the idea was that this group would remain available to interact with the MSE as it goes forward, and that leaves me to just really thank the stakeholder working group and the project, all the participants in the survey, and, of course, the council for funding. I'm ready for questions. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Kai. Questions for Kai? Gary.

MR. BORLAND: Yes, and thank you for the presentation. A question on non-targeting. Did the question lead them to understand that that could mean bottom closures, because I feel like the results you got and the results we heard when we teed-up spatial closures was completely sort of - - There was a big gap there, right, and so I think that would be a huge miss, if we didn't tell them that that did mean no bottom fishing.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and no reef fish fishing, bottom fishing, and that's right.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. This is very interesting, and so, in your conclusions, you stated that anglers were favorable to spatial closures, to some degree, but that it would not change -- During those spatial closures, they wouldn't be able to fish, but they would just shift their effort to times that it was open. Is that what you said?

DR. LORENZEN: So we don't completely know that, but they did not indicate that, and so when they -- Because they had these options that had spatial closures, right, and they could have then said, well, you know, this would really reduce the number of trips I take, and they did not say that. They said mostly I will fish the same, and sometimes they would fish more, and you can totally imagine say, if you had a longer harvest season, and some spatial closure, then people would still probably go fishing more, because they would fish more in the harvest season, and so what I'm -- All I'm saying there is that, you know, we should not -- We should bear in mind that people have preferences for different things, but they will also, you know, not necessarily change their overall level of fishing effort.

Then I think that's borne out by a lot of what we know about, you know, fisher behavior. There would be some change. I think, you know, really, if you did have a prolonged bottom fish closure, probably people would be fishing a bit less than without it, but they would also shift a lot to times when -- When they can, yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: Thank you for this. I think it's really fascinating results, and, as everyone here knows, in the statements made yesterday, the council has kind of treated the idea of spatial closures as an anathema. You know, just we're not going to do it, and we're not going to consider it, but what I'm hearing here is, in the general fishing public, they're open to the idea. It's just going to be the details are going to matter. In your survey though, the choice between having a longer harvest season and spatial closures were discrete, right, completely independent.

DR. LORENZEN: Because they're giving up -- So the spatial closure was part of what we call the novel management options, and so that was separate from the discrete choice experiment, but the choice experiment had the temporal closures, and those were part of the choice set, and so people would have to juggle, you know, a season length and a level of temporal closure, or not, because closure was part of the choice set as well.

DR. PORCH: But not as a package deal, right? What I mean is --

DR. LORENZEN: So they had to choose between different options that had sort of variations of all of these attributes, right, and it wasn't -- They were not looking at only one attribute at a time, but they were looking at options that had -- Each had multiple attributes.

DR. PORCH: So, with the longer spatial closure, that should be correlated with a longer open harvest season, and so, in your options, was that the case, because that's the whole point of spatial closure, is to basically reduce discards, and those can -- That means you can have a longer harvest season, and land more fish, and that was, you know, all the discussions, all the presentations we've made in the past, and so that's why I was wondering. The way it was laid out, were those two linked, and so, if you had a longer spatial closure, you would get a longer harvest season?

DR. LORENZEN: I think the choice sets, the way they're set up, do not directly make that tradeoff, if I'm not mistaken, and this is a technical question.

DR. PORCH: But my point is so, if that had been the case, there probably would have been even more favorable responses, if they would say, wait a minute, we have a longer spatial closure, you know, for part of the year, or whatever, and I'm going to get longer harvest season, and be able to land more red snapper, and so you might have even gotten more favorable responses.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and I'm not sure whether that is -- I think this is a DCE question, and we can come back to that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kai, is it possible to share the question list with the council members, so that, that way, you could get it kind of what Clay is saying, and see if one question was dependent on the other, or how it was worded, and I don't know if that's possible.

DR. LORENZEN: I mean, the survey instrument is -- We have, you know, as part of the contract, we shared it with the council. It's tedious to look at, because you can imagine setting up the survey is quite complex, but, yes, absolutely we can do that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: (Mr. Strelcheck's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: Your microphone isn't working, and so, as soon as the air cut on, we couldn't hear any of that up here, and so someone -- Rachel is coming to help. Maybe you need to get closer.

MR. STRELCHECK: Can you hear me now? All right.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's better. Thank you.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I was asking -- You had a slide that was saying you collected data on avidity for demographic data, right, and you then showed the classes, and how they broke out, but I didn't see any information about like frequency efficient, because I would expect that there would be differences in how you answer those questions based on how frequently you go fishing, and so that's my first question.

DR. LORENZEN: So, yes, we did ask them, you know, how many trips they do, you know, in general, and targeting those species, and, yes, we haven't analyzed it for this presentation. I'm quite sure, when we do the email respondents, they will be substantially more avid than the average of the panel respondents, and then, of course, there are going to be differences among the avidity, among the different classes, but, yes, we don't have that in here.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, and then second question is this included both private anglers that fish from their own personal boats, as well as fish from charter boats, and were charter captains also inclusive of this group?

DR. LORENZEN: So the qualifying question was did you reef fish in the last two years, and so that would cover people who fished from their own boat, people who fish from charter boats, and there were some people who would have fished from a pier, from shore, and remember, this is broad. This includes fish like, you know, the black sea bass also, but it wasn't -- So it wasn't targeting charter captains, and so it was -- The question was did you recreationally reef fish.

MR. STRELCHECK: Okay, and so that I think partly answers my next question, which is just simply I could also expect some division based on how the charter community business owners would answer versus private anglers that are either fishing on charter boats or fishing on their own personal boats.

DR. LORENZEN: Absolutely, but we -- You know, this did not cover charter captains or, you know, the recreational sort of industry. It was specifically people who recreationally reef fish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I'll just remind you, before we submitted our Florida state management EFP, FWC went out and did public workshops, and had hundreds of participants. Of course, not this statistical rigor, but it had private anglers, charter captains, headboat captains, et cetera, and we reported out on that at a presentation at the last council meeting, but we could provide that information as well.

It's a little different, in that those particular folks indicated they didn't want spatial closures, and we also did not cover gag. It was specific to red snapper, but we got into things like the snapper grouper aggregate, how many fish should be in there, what the fishing season should be, what's the preferred dates, what time of year, all of that, and so we had reported out on that at the last meeting, and so we had some of that information. Of course, not the same type of statistical rigor here that Kai used. Gary.

MR. BORLAND: Just a quick question. Is the plan to have this survey peer reviewed?

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and so we did, you know, present to the Socioeconomic Panel, and that's kind of our review mechanism for the council. Obviously, this will eventually be published, and further peer reviewed, but, so far, yes, we've shown it to the Socioeconomic Panel, and they commented on it.

There's also more analyses that we can do. I think, you know, I was trying to present you with the biggest picture sort of overview that we have, but there's clearly more here that can be pulled out, and will be pulled out, you know, in conjunction with the further development of the MSE.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Kai. Great presentation, and a lot of work, and so we appreciate that. Andy got to my one question about perhaps the dynamics of the questions between the private recreational angler and that of our for-hire fleet, and I think having a dedicated survey out to them could be something that the council considers in the future, just to sort of get that difference of opinions, to build upon what Florida has already done, but I had a question.

I appreciated your key uncertainty as it related to the panel data, and the ability to sort of have that representation of the general angler versus our avid anglers, and, to that point, your incentivized

panel was just under 2,000. I was curious as to the magnitude of the original panel, and how many people sit in that panel that you first asked do you fish in the South Atlantic, and so sort of like the overall pool that got whittled down to that 1,900, and I imagine that 1,900 also has the percentage that you took out because of the -- You mentioned it, and you said that, based on their answers, if they weren't really a South Atlantic fisher, and I'm just curious magnitude of the larger pool down to that 1,900.

DR. LORENZEN: So I actually don't know, because, these companies, they have really big panels, right, and they -- So, when you contact them, they say, well, yes, it will, you know, cost you this much, and we can get -- Probably we can get 2,000 or so, and I don't know exactly how big their overall panel is, and, in this case, that's not so important either, because we're assuming, because of the incentive part, that there's not a strong selection bias in the people who will respond, and so this is different from when we're doing say an email survey.

The response rate is really important, because it indicates potential for essentially selection bias, right, and so if you have a 5 percent -- If you send the survey to a representative sample, but only 5 percent respond, then it's quite likely that those 5 percent are not really representative of the overall group, whereas here it's sort of different, because these people are doing the survey because they're incentivized to do so, and so I don't know how big, you know, their Dynata panel overall is, but it's not as relevant here.

I wanted to add one thing, by the way, that so we have this instrument, and we can provide links to that survey that you can send, and so the states in particular, and we offered it to the council, and I think the council is saying, well, you know, we can't ask this many people so many questions, but we can totally provide you with survey links, and we're happy to analyze the results, and so, if any of the states would like to put this in an email for, you know, people in your state, we can do that, and that would give us another sample of, you know, a particular group of respondents, if you like.

I think we've sort of hit the most -- Probably the most representative of the overall angler population. I think most of what you get when you have workshops, you have public comment, you have anything, you sort of get the people who are most avid, most engaged, most enraged, and so what this provides is kind of a glimpse of what happens in the very wide world of anglers, including a lot of people who would never turn up for a meeting or respond to an email survey or anything.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish, and then Jimmy.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and this is a quick question. If I missed it, I apologize. What was your incentive?

DR. LORENZEN: So we paid the company just under \$10 per respondent, and, of course, the company keeps some of that, and then they would pay the people who respond a few dollars to respond to the survey.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Just a couple of questions, and so this survey information primarily -- Obviously, it's useful for us as managers, but, in the upcoming MSE, the new version that you're developing, it will be useful in some of the determinations from the MSE, whether they're going to be something that anglers would favor or not, because I remember, in the first version, you know, spatial closures by depth were the solution to, you know, the discarding, and so -- And yielding more animals, and so I think it's good information in that form, and thank you for it. I appreciate it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Clay.

DR. PORCH: Kai, what are your thoughts on using a method like this, the incentivized panel, to get information on discards, and so a flavor of that, because, you know, we hear lots of testimony, but, as you implied, that's a certain motivated group, but if we used something like this approach, which hopefully would give us a less biased view across the whole fishery, do you think we could get maybe almost an independent estimate of discard rates?

DR. LORENZEN: That's a good question. In principle, yes. I think the question -- So there's two things. Of course, the ability, and how much people fish, does factor into that, because, the people who fish a lot, the discarding is more quantitatively significant than the discarding of the people who don't fish as much, right, and, of course, you can work that out. You can ask them how often they fish, and you can, you know, use that information.

I think in principle, yes. I guess the question is whether you would find enough people who, you know, fish quite a lot, who will provide information on the discards, because clearly this includes people who don't fish a lot. They fish a little bit, and they have an opinion on management, and, for the discarding, you really, of course, want to know from particularly people who fish quite a bit, and so I think there's some challenges with getting that, but, in principle, it should give you a more sort of unbiased sample, yes, and it's expensive, but so are most of the other things we do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Timing is everything, Kai. I appreciated your comment that this particular survey could perhaps be shared to the states. In the future, if perhaps the EFPs were to come to light, we will have a more identified audience of our anglers in South Carolina that will be more offshore-based, and I think I could see some utility down there, but, unfortunately, I'm thinking that's going to be a little bit of time away, but perhaps we can talk offline a little bit more about how to collaborate in the future.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more questions for Kai? All right. Thank you, Kai, for that presentation. I'm going to turn it back to Chip, because I think you have some questions for us about the MSE relative to this presentation.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, once again, just tying this back to the MSE, on what you all had talked about in the past, where it was you wanted to consider the aggregate bag limit, the stopping, and you wanted to consider seasonal closures, and then, lastly, if nothing else was working, consider spatial closures, and, given the results of the survey, and also the results of the FWC survey that you heard about last time, is that how you still want to move forward with the MSE, making sure that, you know, it's going to be including management options that you would like to consider?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have a question, and so is the snapper grouper aggregate bag limit in there, and, if it's in there, you're saying that it's not in there in a way that once that aggregate was reached, and, also, how many fish is it? Is it ten, or is it fifteen? I think it's at ten, but it doesn't say that, once you reach that aggregate, that you would stop bottom fishing?

DR. COLLIER: No, and that could be an option that's in there. That's what you had requested to be in there last time, and, you know, with this aggregate, what we would be looking at is going to be slightly different than what management would be looking at, because it's only going to be a suite of species, likely five species, as opposed to the number of snapper grouper species, currently fifty-five, but could be changing in the future, and so it is going to be a little bit of a difference there, but the concept would be there, and see how it works out in management.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I would like to see that stopping bottom fishing, once like a ten-fish snapper grouper aggregate is hit, and I would like to see that added. Can you remind us of the five species that are in there, and so it's red snapper, and it's gag grouper, and is it black sea bass? What else is in there?

DR. COLLIER: So that was going to vary by state, and I still need to get up with you all to finalize that list.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Other thoughts on the MSE? All right. I mean, me personally, I would love to see the closures out of there, but I know others would like to see it analyzed, and so I'm just not -- I'm just putting that out there again, but so anything else on this discussion? All right. We have a couple more items under this committee, but maybe we could take a short five-minute break, and then we'll go into the topics for the AP, and then, right now, I have three other items for Other Business that we need to discuss before concluding this committee, and so a five-minute break.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get started again. We only have a couple more items on the agenda, and so, next up, we're going to review the topics for the Snapper Grouper AP meeting that is happening in April, and so we have the list there on the screen for folks to comment on. I'm looking to make sure Amendment 60 is on there, and all the other things that we were hoping would be ready, and thank you for increasing the font on that, that we would be ready to talk to the AP about, and so, Mike, do you want to add anything before we get feedback from committee members?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so, just kind of staff talking in the background, taking a look at the upcoming SEDAR schedule, we may need to do a black grouper fishery performance report and stock risk rating evaluation. That's why we have it. I added it, and we have it highlighted and italicized. That is an item that just we, as staff, need to talk about is it necessary to do it at this time, but it may be added to the agenda, and I just wanted to bring that to your attention.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Anything else? Does this look like a good list? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: The list looks really comprehensive to me. I think that this is just more of a comment. I don't have a solution for you, but I'm slightly concerned about, given how the

discussion went around this table of Amendment 61, and the in verses out, and what that means, to the extent there's a way to simplify that, or make that really clear for the AP, because that was hard for us.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I heard talk of a table being created.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and, by the way, I want to just say that wasn't a critique of how it was presented to us. That was a critique of us, and not you. I just wanted to make that clear.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that, Kerry. I want to make the same mention. I feel that the input the AP gave us on 61 was excellent, and I really appreciated the conversation yesterday, which I felt was really productive in workshopping. If we were to bring this to the AP, I just wanted a little bit more structure, and so I think we just need to be cognizant of that, and so, if that's the case, we can better capture our conversation, and get some feedback on it, and I think that's the appropriate way to do it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Sounds good. Thank you for that. Anything else that folks see or don't see? Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: On the discussion with the SG 2 225, I would hope that you will be able to present some of the -- How many permits there are, the history, and stuff like that, similar to what you presented to us under the permits and stuff like that, to give them an idea of, you know, how they can proceed on thinking.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike is taking some notes, but don't you also mean those tables that had the latent permit percentage and stuff in it?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Got it.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Anything that has to pertain with that SG 2.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right. Anything else? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: For conversation points, when you think it's an appropriate time to discuss black sea bass again, and the reason I'm bringing this up is I'm hearing from a lot of fishermen in North Carolina, particularly in the southeast, our experience with the fishery is not reflective of the last few years. It's not reflective of the current stock assessment, and so people are getting really, really frustrated, and so I'm just curious how we could approach that, and if there's a better time, or if there's some sort of like way to look at a fisheries performance report for that, and I don't know. I'm just thinking out loud.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and Jimmy and I are hearing some of the same things for Florida, and so I don't know what the vehicle is, but I really like that idea. Mike, do you know of a way that we could capture some of that information?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I think -- I guess I'm trying to think of the timing of that conversation, along with the other actionable items that you have going on with black sea bass. Thinking about the timing of 56, like I think a fishery performance report may be useful to, you know, updating the fishery performance report, or rather may be useful to have that conversation. Thinking about the timing of it though, I'm a little hesitant of having it in April, and then having that -- Having that just kind of sit until 56 is ready to get going, and possibly maybe aligning it a little bit closer to when the assessment is getting completed, and 56 is getting ready to go, but I'm certainly open to hearing other points.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and maybe we could talk about it at the fall, or reconsider it for the fall AP meeting, but Tom, and then Kerry.

MR. ROLLER: So I would say, on that point, I agree with that. I think the timing is more applicable to the fall, but perhaps we can mention it to the AP, that this is something we're hearing about, and just to make sure the community knows we're paying attention. Mention it to the AP and say it's going to be a discussion item for hopefully in the fall.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We put it on the update list. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I slightly kind of disagree, because the big season is in winter, and I would be curious to hear -- I would like to catch it fresh, and I would also -- But I won't -- I'm not going to die on that hill. I think that it's really important, and this is a very good opportunity for us to refer back to our innovation plan and the concept of taking into other accounts of information, local traditional knowledge, using whether it's fishery performance reports or something else. Black sea bass could be our first test of fishermen are seeing something else on the water, all of a sudden, and how do we capture that and use it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so what I have -- I like that, and so a couple of thoughts. What if we put it under updates, and, in the presentation that we give them about kind of what the management committee talked about, we could give them an update, like a more detailed update, on the innovation plan, and provide them a copy of it, and what about that? Would that work? Okay. Trish, did you have your hand up?

MS. MURPHEY: Well, I was just going to say I agree with Kerry. You know, I would be curious to see more about what's going on now with the, you know, black sea bass, but, if you've got it worked out, with just kind of tying it into the innovation plan, I'm fine with that, but I kind of liked that idea.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: I agree with Kerry and Trish. I would rather present this to them to update it at this time, while we're seeing this pulse of animals, you know, and then, if we feel like we need to see it, and do it again, we can do it again, but, while you've got them here, take advantage of it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. We changed that up. All right. Amy, and then Tom.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm curious about how to discuss Amendment 61, and, honestly, all of these with the backspin idea of the risk value matrix coming into play. I know it's very early in the process, but yet with an aggressive timeline, and I'm just curious of how we might be able to incorporate some of that without overwhelming the AP.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So we're just debating over here, and so there might be a way, in the presentation that we give them about, you know, what the management committee did, we could show them the risk value matrix, and talk about the presentation that we got from Clay. Okay. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I was just going to go back to black sea bass and say that Jimmy and Kerry kind of convinced me to think about it a little differently. I do agree with that. We're coming off of the majority season, recreational and commercial, and it may be helpful to get a little update now, while it's still fresh in mind, and, as important as this fishery is, and as many changes as we're seeing, maybe we revisit it again in the fall, briefly. It doesn't have to be a big agenda item, but I think this AP in particular is really well suited to give some good feedback.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we already moved it up. Okay. Anything else that folks -- Any other comments or ideas? Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and I don't think that this goes here, but I was about to forget it. When can we get a presentation from the observer program on the snapper grouper fisheries? I don't -- To my knowledge, I do not believe we've -- This council before me has ever had a presentation from the observer program. We take observers on our boats, and we take them sea bass potting, and I just wondered -- We've never had that, and I think that's a good idea, because that's the mechanism that -- You know, we've got observers on boats, and I think it would be a good thing to hear from.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we're taking some notes over here on that, and it's a good point. I don't know when we had one, but Chip is coming to the table.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and another option is always the seminar series, and so you can consider that as a potential time to do it, the seminar series. We do it once --

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Well, I think it needs to be a presentation to the council here, longer than that, but I just -- We've never -- To my knowledge, I don't know if you all have ever had one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. We captured that. Clay.

DR. PORCH: Just to that point, are you focusing more on the observer program for the commercial fishery, because we also have, in partnership with the states, the observer program on the for-hire fishery.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Just commercial, and not unless than the other ones --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We took some notes on that. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: If they've got one for recreational, I would like to know how they do it, and how it fits in.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Mike took some notes on that. I feel like we're getting into Other Business here, and so let me try to close out the topics for the AP, and so I think we're good. We had good discussion on topics for the AP. I think we're good with that. You'll see it in the committee report, and let's dive into Other Business.

The first item of Other Business, and I'm going to turn it to Mike, and there's a blurb there, is we also received a letter from the Mid-Atlantic Council. This is about populating that joint council subcommittee, but I'll turn it to Mike to talk about this, but, ultimately, we need to have some names for this.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so this is coming back to the conversation that was had coming out of the last stock assessment for that portion of bluefish north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. We have -- If you'll remember, that group is kind of assessed separately, due to data availability differences north and south of Cape Hatteras, and then a method is applied to allocate that assessed portion of the stock to the South Atlantic and to the Mid-Atlantic.

The most recent method that was used was based on SADL survey information, but there was some conversation around the council table here about some concerns about the methodology being used to have that allocation between regions, and so, the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic staffs, we've kind of had conversations, and the Mid-Atlantic has sent a letter to the South Atlantic Council proposing a joint subcommittee that would work on this issue.

They proposed that the subcommittee would be comprised of three council members from each of the councils, and one SSC member from each of the councils, and so we have a volunteer from the SSC. What we're bringing to you is do you all agree with this proposed methodology, and, if so, would any of you like to volunteer to serve on this joint subcommittee?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We need three people. Dewey, I'm hoping you're volunteering.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes. I would, and will, but I've got a crazy schedule, and so I'm afraid the bookings -- We need to -- The only way I can participate is if I get a chance to look at a schedule, and I never thought in my life I would have to look at a schedule, but I've got to, and so I'll participate, but we need to draw down the dates.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Dewey. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: (Mr. Roller's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's the north of Hatteras component, right? Yes, it is, and can you put Tom Roller on the list? Amy has a question.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mike, you said you had an SSC representative already. Could you share who that is, please?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Jim Gartland.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, you had your hand up?

MS. MARHEFKA: If you need a third person, I'll be a body, but I defer to anyone else who has more experience, but I will happily be a warm body, and I will pay attention and do my very best.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy, did you have your hand up?

MS. DUKES: Yes, Madam Chair. I'm also happy to be in that role as well, and so it's just what the pleasure of the committee is.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so we have four names up there, including Kerry as the alternate. Are we good with that? All right. I see heads nodding yes. All right. The next item of Other Business that I had was I want to bring us back to a discussion from Monday from the Law Enforcement AP. It's something that we talked about before that had to do with sale being defined as not -- Well, the end of the trip being defined as when the fish are sold and recorded, like on the trip ticket, as opposed to the offload, et cetera. I'm going to pass it over to Kerry, because, if we want to continue this discussion, I think it needs to go into Amendment 60, but, Kerry, can you speak to this a little bit?

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, Jessica, and I agree completely. It felt very urgent at the time. We're getting some mixed signals, with law enforcement saying it's not an issue, but certainly, initially, that's not what we heard from the fishermen who it had affected, and so I think it's still worthy of a look, and I feel like, as long as we're -- When we're in Amendment 60 looking at trip limits, is this an opportunity for the council to sort of -- This isn't the first time this issue has come up, and Shep has pointed out that it comes up every five years or so, and so is this an opportunity, while we're talking about trip limits, to clarify the council's intent, or get the wording fixed in the CFR, and so it would be my suggestion that it's included as part of the trip limit discussion in Amendment 60.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Okay. We're taking some notes on that, and so include as part of trip limit discussion in Amendment 60. Are we good with that? Does everybody know what we're talking about? I see heads nodding yes.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So this would be -- It sounds like this would be another action to add to that amendment. I mean, it would follow in the trip limit discussion, but it would be a completely different decision point than, you know, deciding whether you're going to increase from 1,000 to 2,000 pounds for vermilion snapper, and so it would be a separate action.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and it looks like folks are saying yes. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: To clarify, it's just simply to determine the language of when a trip is ended. Is it when the fish are unloaded or when you have a receipt in your hand off the scale?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. Exactly that. Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I listened to the Law Enforcement AP discussion, and they were like what's the issue, and what's going on, and, I mean, it was like -- I listened to like -- They were going

around and around, and like what's the problem, and so just we need to make sure that, whatever we're asking here, it satisfies everybody in this, because it sounds like this was -- I'll leave it alone.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I think we have enough to go on here for that. All right, and so then I heard that there's another item for Other Business that has to do with black sea bass. Who is going to bring that up? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Since we do not have the EFP for ropeless gear, and it looks like the black sea bass amendment is going to probably get stretched out for two years, and that's probably a best-case scenario, is it possible to just go ahead and have an abbreviated framework to allow -- To make the ropeless gear allowable, and, if you're going to fish -- If you don't want to use ropeless gear, you can't fish in the closed zone in the wintertime, and just make it a very, very simple framework, so these guys can get back to work with ropeless?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I guess my question is we already added the gear, and so is the action to open the closed area? Is that the action? Okay, and so I'm looking -- Maybe John Carmichael can, or Myra, somebody could speak to this, because I'm not sure if opening the closed area could be a framework action, and so that's my first question. Can it be a framework, and then will we need another protected resources BiOp or something, because it's with whales, and can you speak to some of these things?

MS. BROUWER: Some of them. I'll tell you what I think I know about it, and so we could do this as a framework, and not an abbreviated framework, and so it would just be like the regular framework. I think it would not trigger anything to do with protected resources. My understanding is those folks have been at the table, especially when we developed Reg 36, and they're onboard with the ropeless gear, and so I don't see an issue there.

One thing you might need to consider though is, you know, when Reg 37 goes into place, and that ACT becomes, you know, the catch level, opening up those closed areas -- Do we want to go back to the derby fishing-type situation that Chops was talking about yesterday, and, so if you're going to open up the closed areas, then you might need to also think about other things to do to prevent that situation, which means you need more than one action in the amendment, which means it takes longer to develop.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Myra. Comments or questions on that? Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and I know that it would be -- Just for that framework, it would be a good thing, but I think there's a lot of other things, because the ACT is going to put the forty-some-thousand pounds, and then what -- I mean, then you're going to have to decide on the gears, and you don't have much quota, and so I understand that, but I think it's -- There's more to encompass than just allowing ropeless gear, which I'm for.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So then what are you suggesting? You know, come back if it's not just ropeless, and it seems like it's other pieces of -- Is that 56, other pieces of what we said we would have in 56? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I thought they were going back -- I don't even think the assessment is locked in. Aren't they going back and looking at some of that stuff, and so just the numbers we have now

may not be the numbers we're working on later, and that's not even getting into the fact that Jimmy is seeing his stock pick back up in Florida, and North Carolina is telling us they're seeing a lot of fish, and so I know where the ACT is now, but, by the time we get this done, all of that is very highly likely to be changed, but we need to go ahead and get the ropeless gear where we can fish it, and then, as we deal with each other things, I guess we'll have to deal with them, and hopefully we won't crash and burn somewhere along the way, but we know we're going to do it, and so let's go ahead and do it, and hopefully those guys will just go ahead and use the gear, fish where they need to fish, where it makes sense for them, and we can at least put this piece of the puzzle to bed.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Somebody help me out here. Right now, we have an ACL for black sea bass of 250,000 pounds, and can anybody help me out?

MS. MARHEFKA: Say that again, and what's your question?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Black sea bass, what's ACL right now, and that's going to change, isn't it?

MS. MARHEFKA: 276,000.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Didn't we put something in that's going to change to 42,000 pounds here?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we put in an ACT.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, to 44,000 pounds, and the next thing that will be happening will be Amendment 56, but that's two years down the road, and so, if we go do this now, and we get an ACT of 44,000 pounds, that's what the ropeless gear and everybody, the black sea bass fishers, hook-and-line will be fishing off of, correct, and so how do you -- Well, I mean, that's all there is, is forty-some thousand pounds, and how are you going to split that up, or what is your thinking on splitting it up, or trip limits, or thinking ahead like that?

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, just because ACT is forty-something thousand pounds today, in two years, by the time they do these other analysis, I don't think that's going to be the number. I really don't, and they can still go fishing there, you know, using the ropeless gear, whoever wants to. I'm not sure, other than being more efficient, and they don't have to go as far offshore and things like that.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: So you're fine with the forty-some thousand-pound catch limit until 56 kicks in?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Can we let staff respond to this, and so can you guys just pause that? I'm going to go to Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Just to throw one more thing for you all to consider is the closed season that's going into place with Reg 37, and so that's -- Is it February and March, and so a two-month long closed season as well.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and just kind of going off of like some of the -- At least some of the commentary that I heard yesterday from the public, if you all are thinking of reopening the nearshore closed area, like the kind of the expected result is that would increase the catch rates, the fish would be caught faster.

Yes, the limit is going down. If you wanted to spread that out, there may be consideration of do you want to change the trip limit for black sea bass, to be able to spread that season out more, or, if the fishermen are fine with a shorter season, to be able to have access to that area, then that can be the case, and just kind of recognize, going into it, that it's going to be, you know, kind of like golden tilefish longline is, where, you know, you go in, and you know there's an expected closure coming into the season.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, Mike, are you suggesting that that framework amendment also have a season component? Is that what you're saying. or a trip limit component or something?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: It could if you want it to, and so, if you wanted to decrease the trip limit, to potentially spread out the season, then that is an option that you have at your disposal.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Kerry, and then back to Charlie.

MS. MARHEFKA: I think I know the answer, but just in case I'm not as smart as I think I am. We cannot do within sector allocations in a framework, correct?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, we could take that to the fishermen, for sure. I think, if I remember, you know, they've told us that the current trip limit really doesn't need to be any lower to make it economically feasible, but we could also -- It's not going to be a lot of heavy lift to take that to them and say do you want this, or do you want that, and at least we can go ahead and get part of this stuff done, and then maybe 56 might be a place to put some sector allocation between, you know, the pots and the hook-and-line, because that's going to take a while anyway.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Let me try to interpret, and so look at what's on the screen there about the framework. Does that framework include a trip limit and or season? Can you help edit that, please? Mike is editing to consider inclusion of changes to trip limit. Is that right, Charlie? Okay. All right. Got it. Pot trip limit, and is that okay? Okay.

Myra is asking, and are we asking staff to go to scoping with this, like straight to scoping with the concept, or are we asking this to go to the AP? What is the request like for this, and, of course, we'll look at this when we get to the workplan, to see where it can be slotted in, but what are you wanting the first step to be? Let's go to Mike first.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess it seems to me that this may have already been scoped, because both of these actions have been in the discussion that you had for Amendment 56, and they were on the table when Amendment 56 went out for scoping, and so, you know, making sure that this aligns with, you know, the scoping definition, which we've heard from GC can be quite broad, but they were on the table, and they went out for scoping within the 56 process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so Mike is saying, since we've already done scoping, we could bring it to the AP. I see heads nodding yes. All right. Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and can we get an analysis of the gears, and what they've caught for the last five or ten years, even though we know that the sea bass pot has been constrained, as we heard from yesterday, just to see who is catching what, the two different gears, and that's going to be needed for the future.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we think we already have it, and so we'll just track it down.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more discussion on black sea bass? We have a plan, as well as include this on the AP agenda. All right. Okay. I'm going to leave that topic. Is there any Other Business to come before the Snapper Grouper Committee? All right. Seeing no hands, we'll conclude the Snapper Grouper Committee, and I'm going to pass it back to our chair.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on March 5, 2026.)

- - -

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
April 13, 2026