

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Webinar

October 24, 2023

Transcript

Executive Committee Members

Dr. Carolyn Belcher, Chair
Trish Murphey, Vice Chair
Mel Bell

Kerry Marhefka
Jessica McCawley

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Attendees and Invited Participants

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Monica Smit-Brunello
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Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Executive Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on Tuesday, October 24, 2023, and was called to order by Chairman Carolyn Belcher.

DR. BELCHER: Welcome back, everyone. We're now in the open session, and I'm going to start out with the housekeeping items. First off is the agenda approval, and does anybody have any objection to the agenda as it currently stands? Okay. Hearing none, the agenda is good to go. Prior minutes approval, does anybody have any comments or additions that need to be made to the minutes as they have been submitted to the group for review? Okay. Seeing none, the minutes will pass. The first item on the agenda is the 2024 Personnel Budget Component, which is basically coming out of our previous session, and so, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That will be Kelly.

DR. BELCHER: Kelly.

MR. KLASNICK: All right. Thank you, Carolyn, and so, yes, we had the closed session earlier, and what the committee has authorized, through that session, is represented in the numbers that we'll go over here today, with one modification that we will talk about as we move through, and, for any of the committee members, feel free to interrupt at any time, and you should be unmuted, the folks that are online, and so just speak up if you need something from me, as I'm going through this, and we'll take a look.

You will want to be referring to, in the briefing materials, just the budget summary table, which is Attachment 2b. Kind of as I'm going through this, if you have that handy, and you might want to go back and forth, and we will take a look at that table as well.

All right, and so the first up is just a little recap of 2023, year-to-date, and year-to-date, for the purpose of this presentation, was through 9/30. That's when the numbers are, to get things ready for the briefing book and the timing of this meeting, and so the council had approved a \$4.8 million operating budget for 2023, and our funding was right around \$4.12 million, which was a 2.8 percent increase from the 2022 budget that had come through.

If you will remember, you know, the council approved that budget knowing that it was going to be more than the funding amount, but knowing that there was carryover funding from previous years to cover that, if indeed, you know, spending reached that \$4.8 million figure, and so not an area of concern, when you see those numbers lined up there.

As of the 9/30, we had 57 percent of the budget was expended, and I will just bring up the table here, real quick, and so this is that Attachment 2b that I had mentioned before, and, kind of working the table from left to right, we have the main expense categories listed down, and the first column you have there is the 2024 numbers, that we'll talk about in a few minutes, and the second column there for each category is what I'm referring to now, and you will see it summarized in this kind of middle column here, in this 2023 budget.

That middle column that you're seeing, the 2023 budget, that was that \$4.8, and then the number I just referenced through 9/30, the expended column, the second-from-the-right, gets you to that \$2.7, and then by category there. Our last column is representing just the percentages of where we're at, and so, in total, you know, we're sitting at that 57 percent expended through 9/30, which,

you know, if you're just looking at it from a calendar year standpoint, it really puts us in good shape, and we're pretty much right on in personnel and fringe, right where we need to be. Travel is coming in under budget, as we go this far through the year, and, of course, we still have -- October is a heavy month for council business and travel, but I expect travel to still come in under that budgeted figure for 2023.

Contractual also will probably come in a bit under budget, but we do still have, you know, a couple of items that are usually hanging out there, and one is the rest of the payments that the council makes to our state partners, those grants, and we fund those typically twice a year, with South Carolina getting funded once a year, and so we still have half of those to hit, plus the full South Carolina amount, and so that number will come up. We also have the MSE project, and there's still another relatively large payment that was budgeted that is due for that, and that will hit that contracted line as well, and so you'll see those numbers coming up as we, you know, move through the rest of the year, but the short is that we're still looking good, and I'm still expecting us to come, if not at, maybe a little but under budget, overall.

I mentioned the travel, and, you know, that is consistently our most variable, and most difficult, item to budget. How many people are going to attend these meetings, and does every meeting take place as planned, and, of course, no, not exactly, and so that's why we see some variations there, but, as long as things are coming in under, I think that's all good news for the council.

Everybody is aware of the inflationary environment, and, you know, I've been keeping kind of an informal tick list, as the year goes by, of every vendor that has sent me something about an increase, and it's at least twelve, or thirteen, or probably a couple more than that that I might have missed, and the increases range anywhere from four-and-a-half to 100 percent.

Now, you know, individually, each one of those dollars might not be, you know, huge, when you look at like the 100 percent one, and, yes, it was a high percentage, but, you know, it was maybe a \$1,700 increase, but, when you start adding those up, you know, across-the-board, it does start to have an impact in the bottom line, and so it's been interesting to see those come through, and very few have left us alone, but we'll see how that plays out for that rest of the year. I already mentioned that liaisons are still pending out there, and so I guess I will take a quick pause at 2023, and go back to that table there, just to see, and does anybody on the committee have any questions about how 2023, as it stands through the 9/30 numbers, and where we're at?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Members, feel free to raise your hands, if you like, and we are monitoring that, or just shout-out when it's quiet.

DR. BELCHER: So the equipment, and is that --

MR. KLASNICK: Equipment is -- That was a budgeted item that we're not really expecting that we'll probably incur any of that, and we're probably going to push that to 2024, and I will mention that, and what we're looking at is replacing the file server here at the office. It's getting to its -- It's close enough to its end of its useful life that we might as well cover that in this grant cycle, to get that one through.

DR. BELCHER: Okay.

MR. KLASNICK: All right, and so, talking about 2024 just a little bit, the initial working budget is going to be about \$5.3, and that's going to go up to about \$5.4, based on the update that we'll give you in a minute from the closed session on some of the projects, and just a couple of the key line items in there, and like what's driving that number, and it's going to be -- You know, we're anticipating some healthcare cost increases, and hopefully no more than 10 percent, but we'll see, and we have that meeting typically early in 2024, and so we'll get a better handle on that number.

We're expecting roughly a 5.2 percent kind of across-the-board federal cost of living adjustment for council staff and for members that receive payment from the council. That number is not certain, and that's based on kind of the scuttlebutt that I'm able to get from the news media, and just, you know, what the President has proposed, but we will see what actually passes, and that typically comes through really late in December, and usually a letter goes out with that number.

I went through, and, with that activities schedule, I put in the new numbers that GSA, which is the General Services Administration, had released, and, surprisingly, the per diems actually did not go up, and I won't pretend to be able to explain that to everybody, but there's like a two-year lookback, apparently, and so the little bit that I did read about it is there's still, I guess, some sort of COVID-time impact, and the inflation isn't in there yet, because they look back two years for that, but they did increase the lodging allocation for the hotels, and so, any hotel that we work with that gives us a government rate, we'll then be able to do increases, and it varies a little bit, depending upon the time of year, but roughly -- Like there's going to be a 10 percent increase for South Carolina, which is where we do most of our business. North Carolina went up 4 percent, Georgia went up 9 percent, and I didn't see any increases in Florida, which was surprising, and I didn't check every area in that state, but the ones that we mostly do business in.

I guess what I'm trying to portray to you there is, even though the per diems, which is what the individuals receive, did not go up, we're looking at anywhere from a 4 to 10 percent increase in the hotel rooms, which, you know, most hotels take full advantage of all that.

DR. BELCHER: Does that mean that we might get hotels back in the queue because it's going up?

MR. KLASNICK: That's possible, I suppose, but, usually, if the government rate goes up, then their other rate is going up even more proportionately, and, if they can get other business, you know, outside of the government rate business, that comes into play, for sure.

MS. MARHEFKA: Do we have to pay the government rate? Is that part of --

MR. KLASNICK: It's not 100 percent required, but there's an effort type of thing to prove that we contacted three others, and that type of thing, before we go outside of that, but, yes, if we can't get something, then we can go above that. Then we still have the contract that is still being fulfilled for the MSE work, and there will still be some payments for that in 2024, which are reflected in there, but the majority of it will have been paid by the end of 2023, at least as that existing contract stands.

I mentioned the increases, and, you know, we're still planning for having all the meetings in-person that make sense to have in-person, and then supplemented with virtual meetings, as it makes sense operationally, and, you know, we've tried to account for that in the budgeting as best we could,

and I think it's always interesting just to kind of see the Federal Register notices, and how many has the council put out, because, you know, that gives you kind of a good sense as to -- If there was a Register notice, then there was a meeting of size, shape, or form, and I just put the trend on there, so you can kind of see where we're at, and I'm sure that 2023 will be right up there with 2022, by the time we get through the year, and I mentioned the file server, and so we're going to get that taken care of in 2024 as well, and we don't really have a firm cost estimate on that, but I'm not expecting it to be any more than \$10,000 to \$12,000, and that stuff is not quite as pricey, with all the cloud services that are out there now.

You know, as we typically do, and the purpose of this meeting is to get the committee's feedback, and, if so, approval on what we present, and then we would take this to the Full Council in December, for any other discussion, and then, if the council is good with everything, put an approval stamp on it, and then we would only really ask you to revisit this in 2024 if there is some big surprise on the grant allocation, and we're basically anticipating level, to maybe a slight increase in 2024, but they haven't -- John, unless something else came out of the CCC, and I haven't heard anything 100 percent, although we got a pretty good feel for where it should be, and we're not expecting any decreases or anything along those lines.

We do account for -- Even though they get a separate allocation, I do put the SEDAR numbers in the overall number, and, when this was put together, they hadn't had their Steering Committee meeting, and so I used last year's numbers, but, since then, I can just give you a verbal update, and they have had that meeting, and they're actually a little bit below where they were, coming in budgeted at least, in 2023, and so no negative impact to the numbers that I gave to you guys for SEDAR, and so no issues there. If anything, their number will come down a little bit, or at least their budgeted number, based on what they submitted.

You know, as we always do, and, you know, Suzanna does a great job, on the staff, of keeping track of all this stuff on an everyday basis, and her and I update, you know, monthly, and then Suzanna leads the annual audit process for us, and, of course, we'll continue that process in 2024, and, you know, bring any concerns to the council, if they arise as we're going through this. Just because you all, you know, approve the budget, as long as we're on track, either at or under, you don't hear too much from me, but certainly if, you know, something was moving in the other direction, we would bring that to your attention, as appropriate.

I just want to bring up this list just real quick again, just so everybody sees the 2024 number now, which is -- As it's presented here, it's at this \$5.3, but we're going to talk about some projects here, and John is going to talk about some projects here in a minute, that are going to increase this number, and what I will do is I will ask you all to, you know, approve whatever we talk about today, with modification, and then, for the December meeting, I will bring you, and the Full Council, the revised numbers, with these projects that we're going to talk about here in a minute.

I guess the point I'm making is I don't want you to be surprised when you see this \$5.3 number go up, because I don't have all these projects in there, and that's all, just so everybody is clear with that. Then, John, I will turn it over to you.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and so we'll talk about the projects, and, as you recall, we talked about having the surplus funds from the COVID travel, and, for a couple of years, we've been watching those, and being -- Still continuing to be fairly frugal in our spending, as we've always been, with

the idea that, you know, if budgets held in post-COVID years, and we did end up with a surplus, we could look at different projects that the council has wanted to work on and how we could use these funds to, you know, collect some information where it's needed and support other activities of the council that have been on the wish list, but not really able to be supported financially.

We're at a point now, going into the last year of this grant, where we are able to free up some of these funds and support some different projects, and so we talked about these in more detail, and we want to highlight the projects that we're looking at initially approving for the council to support in 2024.

The first item is support for the South Carolina vessel that works in the SEAMAP program, and there's a new vessel that's been purchased by the state, and some additional funding has been sought to help outfit the vessel, so it can do that SEAMAP work, so that it can -- You know, particularly, we're interested in supporting improving the scientific facilities, so that they can work twenty-four hours a day and collect samples through the dissections, collect otoliths and ageing structures, et cetera, do some bottom mapping and such, and so this will be a pretty big improvement in the capabilities of that vessel, and it's critical to keeping those data streams going, which are important to many of the things that the council does.

It's always been important, but, you know, we always seem, lately, at the national level, to be talking about climate change, the impacts, and how we're going to address them, and I think, you know, surveys of this nature are recognized everywhere as being really the first line of defense in understanding what fish stocks are doing, and so it's really great that we can support that.

The next project is something that we've been working with The Nature Conservancy, as a lead, to do some evaluations on our SMZs, and these are set to expire, if they're not evaluated, and they have supported some work in them in the past, in the Warsaw Hole, and there's also the one off of Georgetown, and so we've been working with them to do a project to get back into those SMZs and try to see if they can identify different spawning species in those areas, so that we can have the information to allow the council to decide if they are meeting their objectives and these areas should continue.

We're talking about some improvements in the outreach grant to update our displays, and some of our display materials, and a big part of that is getting some silicone fish that will really serve as centerpieces of the display, and it lets people see what the fish are like, and get used to handling them, and appreciate the size and the weight. If anybody has been to our booths, at places like ICAST, or any of the other places where the staff has gone, and we've borrowed them, for a number of years, from the law enforcement folks here from the Coast Guard, and we're looking at getting some for ourselves, now that we have the opportunity, to really keep our booths being a big draw and get people in there, so we can tell them about the things that the council is doing and best fishing practices and handling fish, et cetera.

We have the MSE project, which has been underway for a while, and there was a lot of discussion about the need to increase the stakeholder input, and that is really a critical part, and it forms the foundation of how you judge various components of the MSE and whether or not it's giving you what you want, and so we're working with an initial grant with Kai Lorenzen, who has been coordinating, or really serving as a liaison with us on the project, working with the contractors who are developing the actual model, to start trying to incorporate stakeholder input into the model,

and I will also note that we got funded, through the red snapper project funds that we discussed back in June, for the modelers to develop ways to incorporate increased stakeholder input, and so we've got two projects here in mind.

One is the initial \$100,000, that is going to start making its way soon, and then we would put out an RFP to do a much broader survey approach, likely, of anglers' attitudes, what they want out of the snapper grouper fishery broadly, which will help inform the MSE, but we think also be really important to the council, when its judging various management alternatives, and hopefully give us a way to look back, considering all the work that we put into visioning a number of years ago, to see if angler attitudes have changed regarding what they want out of the fishery, and I think that part of it is going to be really interesting to council members.

DR. BELCHER: Who did your last survey?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, we haven't really done a survey. We've been just like reaching out to people, and they did some workshops and stuff.

MS. MARHEFKA: It was Amber.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The visioning? The visioning was done by staff, and we went out and did basically meetings with fishermen, and there was facilitated discussions.

DR. BELCHER: I just didn't know if there was somebody who had done it before, if we could engage some of --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right. No, not really. Then Amendment 46 is looking at a potential education program for recreational anglers, and we've got \$50,000 highlighted to hire someone, contract with someone, to actually develop an educational video, and then \$25,000 to expand the habitat presentation and information on our website.

There is a lot of habitat information that was on our old website, and we haven't got all that ported over to the new website now, and it will probably require some additional programming to bring in some features to deal with that information and the different types of presentations that are there for maps and providing some interactive abilities to let people see the maps, but then also be able to download the actual shapefiles, et cetera, when they're needed. This overall comes to about \$740,000 of additional information that would be funded using the surplus that we had on-hand.

Then the last update comes around to the Inflation Reduction Act, which is a federal act that has put a lot of money out for the Department of Commerce, NOAA, for NMFS, that is really geared toward responding to the climate crisis, and there's \$20 million that's going to all eight councils, and they're still working out a lot of the details. I think that there is things going on at higher levels, much above even say, you know, the base NMFS people in D.C., as to dealing with this funding, and so it's not moving as quickly as I would say anyone would like, when we've had the updates from the folks at S&T and in Headquarters, but the initial commitment was to give \$375,000 to each of the eight councils.

They would like to get this money going out to us by the end of the year, or early next year, to set up initial grants, and then we could potentially compete for an additional -- For the remaining

funds, which would be about \$2 million or so for each council, as all worked out across the eight councils, but each council will be competitively competing for those funds over the next few years.

The crux of this is that things need to be done and in place and completed by 2026, not requiring additional funding, and there won't be additional funding, and, you know, if we're taking actions to be more climate resilient, we need to have those approved, or certainly submitted and well on their way, by 2026, and so we'll know more about that as this process continues to play out. What we're kind of looking at is the first \$375,000, and we would probably spend the bulk of that on someone to help work on the scenario-planning process, doing some of the tasks, and then helping us support future grants related to the IRA.

Again, that's really an unknown, and I don't think the agency has the money freed up yet, and we certainly don't know what the criteria is going to be for the funding, and so we're just keeping you updated as it develops, and so that's the funding outlook. Any questions? I would say to members to just go ahead and raise your hand.

MR. KLASNICK: We'll move on to the activities schedule and workplan, but, before we do, if there's any of the members online -- If you have any questions about what we've gone over, let us know, and, primarily, we've been talking about the budget table here, and so just, again, summarizing this middle column, and it shows you the 2023 budget, the second-from-the-right, where we have expended through the 9/30, and then, on the left, the 2024 number, again, will be increased to include those projects that we talked about, if you all, you know, approve all of that at the end of this discussion. All right, and so let's move on, if you're okay with that, Carolyn, and we'll move on on the agenda here.

DR. BELCHER: Perfect.

MR. KLASNICK: What we've got on the screen here for you all now is what we refer to as the council activities schedule, and so what this document -- The purpose of this document is basically to try to outline, you know, to the best of everybody's knowledge at the time that this is produced, what are the most significant meetings that the council is planning to have in the next budget year, and so we kind of do an internal survey process.

I get input from John and Myra and the other staff, and, based on, you know, whatever the council has decided that you all want to do, we put this schedule together, and then, using, you know, those updated numbers that I was talking earlier, per diems and lodging and basically a lot of just budgetary estimation on who is coming and where we're going to end up, this gives us some dollar figures to punch into the budget for all those travel categories that make up the meetings.

I'm not planning to walk through this line-by-line or anything, and it's fairly similar to each year, and, you know, the council meetings are the most structured, and usually the easiest to budget for, and so, you know, I list those at the top, and then, as you move through the document, you have AP meetings, and you have -- The AP meetings, again, and some are more predictable than others, as far as whether they occur and how many people and all that, and so those are all accounted for in here, and, as you move through the document, near the end is kind of where we try to catch things.

This last page or two is where we try to catch things that -- Some may be reoccurring, but others are more maybe one-off for that year, depending upon council priorities and what you all want yourselves and the staff to work on, and so I'm going to pause, with that explanation of this document, and kind of what it's used for, for any discussion, or questions, that you have or if there are specific items on here that you want to talk about.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Kelly, I have one update, and I talked with Christina yesterday about the mackerel port meetings, and there's really been a good response, as we've discussed those at the ASMFC, and with the Mid-Atlantic Council, a couple of times, and they're really interested in having our folks, you know, be up there and interact with their fishermen, and their constituents, and so we're probably looking at the staff travel days going from saying ten days in the budget to twenty, to be able to get up there, and, you know, I think that's good, because I've gone to a couple of ASMFC meetings, the Pelagics Committee, and have kept them briefed on what we're doing, and the response has been really strong, and particularly the Mid-Atlantic states, to have us come to their states and have them work with us and get feedback from their fishermen, as we see that fish becoming more common up the coast, but that's the only late-breaking updates I have on it.

DR. BELCHER: Just a quick housekeeping. Relative to the liaison expenses, where do those fall?

MR. KLASNICK: So on page 6 here, and you're talking about when we send people to other --

DR. BELCHER: Yes.

MR. KLASNICK: So it's under the last -- So on page 6, kind of the other meetings category, I guess. That should be the --

DR. BELCHER: Okay. I skipped over it. I just didn't see it at first, and I was expecting it up near HMS or whatever. Okay. Thank you.

MR. KLASNICK: Sure.

MR. CARMICHAEL: There's a lot more detail than there was a number of years ago, which you guys asked for, to just better account for all these added meetings that go on, so we can see what the costs are, and so there's a lot more in those other meetings, and you see all the CCC detail and other things that are listed.

MR. KLASNICK: Jessica has her hand up.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Go ahead, Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, and so my question is, and maybe I just can't find it, but what about the U.S. Coral Reef Taskforce meetings that are two times a year, and is that on there?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think we added that on there, and it's down in that other stuff.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see it now. I also saw COFI on here, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and COFI is on there, and so that's -- Yes, we have first right of refusal on that for this year, since we've missed so many other years, and so we've got that budgeted.

MR. KLASNICK: All good on that, Jessica?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, I'm good, and I just couldn't find it, but I kept looking in that other area of what you have on the screen, but I see it now. Thanks, you guys.

MR. KLASNICK: Sure. Thank you.

MS. MARHEFKA: So I have a question about MREP. As you guys probably saw, John was calling out for someone to go, and I was supposed to go, but I have a conflict, now that Mark is on the boat more, but one of the things that came up -- I had asked Tim, and I had asked a couple other non-state council members who have been before, whether or not it was just MREP -- Like your travel gets paid, versus getting your stipend, and everyone was like, no, no, you don't get your stipend, and so I bring that up only because, if people think that, and maybe that's why it's been harder to get people to -- Like, you know, maybe people would be able to go, because, you know, for some of us, like Tim and me, who have to like actually hire people to do your job while you're gone, it offsets that, because I see on here that you have member compensation, and so I think that people don't know that they will get that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and we make sure that they know that, because, if you're sent by us - - If you're going as a council member, you're going in the slot that we cover the travel for, we absolutely do cover the --

MS. MARHEFKA: Because Laurilee and Tim both said, no, we didn't get -- You know, we didn't submit a timecard for that, and people may be more flexible on going if that's an option, or don't tell them and save \$5,731. I don't care, but I'm just letting you know that that's the impression that people have.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's definitely good to know.

MR. KLASNICK: I do try to -- In January, I send a little update to everybody that gets a stipend, and it hopefully includes some verbiage in there that -- I mean, I don't call out MREP specifically, but, basically, like John said, if you're an approved -- Then, you know, then you're stipend eligible, if you are one of the members that gets sent.

MS. MARHEFKA: I guess I forget that you send that, because sometimes it's like going back to -- Some of the things are going back to when we first come onboard and you give us our talk, and then, for some of us, that's been, you know, three or four years, and we forget.

MR. KLASNICK: I don't take it personally, Kerry, that you don't read all my emails.

MS. MARHEFKA: I read your emails, Kelly, I swear.

MR. KLASNICK: All right.

MR. CARMICHAEL: A lot happens over the year, but, yes, any time a member is certainly on a travel order, they're eligible for stipend, and then, if they're on a webinar meeting that they're, you know, cleared to be on, then they get it as well, but, yes we do always have to remind people of that, and we always encourage council members that, when in doubt, just give us a shout.

MR. KLASNICK: Yes. Right. We'll let you know.

MS. MARHEFKA: I think you would be surprised, because I think that, for a lot of us, we're like -- We don't want to ask, because we don't want to seem like greedy.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We never feel that way.

MR. KLASNICK: No, and we're here for you to ask. There's a lot of -- It's even hard for us to keep track of all the ins and outs of all this stuff, and so just let us know. All right. Anything else on the activities schedule, before we move on to the next agenda item?

MR. CARMICHAEL: So the workplan?

MR. KLASNICK: Yes, and I'm not seeing any hands online, and so we'll bring up the workplan here, and John is going to talk about that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes. Thank you, Kelly. I will give a few updates on this, based on the latest that we know, once it wakes up and decides to show. The SEDAR Steering Committee had met a few weeks ago, and it was generally okay, the overall assessment plan that we discussed at the September council meeting, with some delays, based on dealing with the FES survey realities and the sensitivities of getting, potentially getting, a stock assessment coming out with pre -- You know, aware of this bias, and potential adjustments, coming out right when the adjusted numbers may hit, whatever the adjusted numbers are. As we know, even if the impact is not huge, it has a big impact on the credibility and the confidence that people have in the analysis.

The SEDAR Steering Committee was onboard with that, and another issue came up, which we'll have to talk about some more in December, and this should be discussed at the SSC a little bit this week, is Clay mentioned some concerns with proceeding with the tilefish assessments, and we had hoped to incorporate the new South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey into those assessments, when they were scheduled, and the SSC is going to talk about, this week, the review of that, but the general gist of it, the initial outcome, is that they think more years are going to be required to develop a reliable index.

It could be as much as five years, and we have to wait and see what comes out of the SSC, and so maybe five total, and so they're not sure they trust the first year, and so it would be like four more years from here, and so that would put these two tilefish assessments quite a bit down the road, if we have to wait for four more years of data collection, and then putting it together, and so that's going to be the question for the council, and that's going to potentially impact, on this line, say the golden tilefish, their assessment response, that we've got penciled in.

The Mid-Atlantic has also been waiting on blueline for a while, and so they're not really interested in delaying it, based on waiting for this survey. To me, it somewhat falls in the realm of, you know, we don't necessarily withhold management just because new information is coming down

the road, and I think waiting for, you know, four or five years to get these assessments may not be, you know, the best move for these stocks, but, you know, we'll have to look at the timing of the last assessments, et cetera, and hear from the SSC, but anticipate some more discussion on that.

That could affect then, of course, what I see as one of the kind of blocks that's in our schedule. If you look down there in the yellow, highlighted on the far column, for the planned things, and you see like a row of things that are all getting started on the same schedule in December of 2024. That's not ideal, because, if they stay in lockstep, then we end up with a whole bunch of things being done at the same time for our poor chair to review, and this is far enough out that, you know --

DR. BELCHER: I will be off soon.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right, and it will be Trish, and don't you worry about it. Based on the initial -- You know, what I'm saying on tilefish and these other assessments, that could shift, but that is the kind of stuff we do look at when we look onto the horizon. Otherwise, we have about five projects scheduled for overall final approval in 2024, which is definitely much more reasonable than what we were dealing with in the first six months of this year. The overall workplan is fairly well-balanced with the amount of things to be done during each council meeting.

A couple of other things is, you know, yellowtail snapper is on there, and I think Jessica probably has some comment on that, but that was scheduled to start a document in March, or June, of 2024, which, pending the new assessment schedule, and where we're headed on that, that's likely to be pushed back some, which creates a little more space, possibly, in the workplan, which brings me around to the question, which is buried down there somewhere below, of you remember Coral 10, and we submitted it, and it was rejected. At some point, the council may want to consider bringing Coral 10 back around and revisiting it, and I think there's an opportunity, maybe, based on this workplan, that we could perhaps do that around June of 2024.

Then the last item then that's also pending is the vermilion assessment response. The SSC, this week, is getting the vermilion interim analysis. If they decide that it supports a change in the ABC level, then we may act on that and update that catch level. If they decide that they don't think there's ample justification for changing the catch level, then that project will have to be pushed back, and we'll see what the SSC says during their review this week, and so that's my updates, any questions on the workplan? Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I was going to ask a couple of questions about the yellowtail, and so I think that the message from Luiz was that they could have the assessment rerun by spring, but then both the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs would then need to review it. If they can't get it in -- If our SSC can't get it in on the April SSC meeting, can they, what, have a special SSC meeting with the Gulf, via webinar, to try to get that done, because I agree that the timeline on this document might be a tiny bit ambitious. I saw that you had it for June of 2024, and, by the time it gets through all that, maybe it's September of 2024, and I'm not sure.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and that's sort of what I was thinking, that it may be September of 2024, and I think, if we don't make the April SSC meeting, and the council did want to get that started as soon as they could after the assessment is done, which is sort of the understanding I had,

then we would hold a special SSC meeting, in hopes of getting that to you at the September meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Sounds good.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's another work in progress that we will continue to monitor and update this as we learn more about that assessment and getting it reviewed through the SSCs. Any other workplan questions?

DR. BELCHER: Just out of curiosity, I'm assuming that the unassessed stock ABC implementation is because we're waiting for that to come back to --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and we're waiting for approval of the amendment, which then establishes what the tools are that they can use.

DR. BELCHER: So is there a chance that might be able to move up in the queue, depending on when that comes through, is that really when we're expecting, that it won't happen before that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think there is a chance, and it may depend somewhat on the timing of the SSC workgroup to actually get in and do those, and so I think this timing is assuming the SSC would have ABC recommendations in September, which may actually be fairly realistic.

DR. BELCHER: Okay.

MR. KLASNICK: Jessica, I thought I saw your hand there, but I wasn't sure.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and one thing I was looking for was the black sea bass ropeless gear, but I found that, because it's on the same line as gag and black, because it's in that same amendment, but where is like the snapper grouper MSE? Where is that listed on here, as to when the council is going to start seeing that regularly?

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's line 7, and that's the long-term red snapper.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: So we're thinking December.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MS. MARHEFKA: I guess did we not have a discussion, when we were going through this, and maybe it was during SEDAR planning at September, but about the vermilion interim assessment and its relation to the FES situation?

MR. CARMICHAEL: A little bit, but not much, and I think, because it's an interim, it's a little bit different, and because it was nearly done and coming to us, and so --

MS. MARHEFKA: We're just going to let it come to us --

MR. CARMICHAEL: We'll sort of wait and see, and we felt like we needed to see if the SSC even believes it's a viable approach for setting catch levels.

MS. MARHEFKA: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Maybe we'll know tomorrow.

MS. MARHEFKA: Right. I will be tuning-in.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes. I expect that most of you will be tuning-in tomorrow. There's some interesting discussions at the SSC this week, for sure. All right. Anything else? I appreciate the comments and the attention on this. You know, this has really emerged as kind of our marching orders for the year, and what we work on, and so, you know, this has proved very helpful for staff, and it lays out the year, or really, at this point, you know, the next two years, and, as I said, you know, mid-year, we will start working on the next five-year grant, or four-year grant, as it may be, document, and the things that are on here will be really important to, you know, the foundation of that next grant document and what we intend to work on.

DR. BELCHER: So one other question, just because we don't have it as a -- But the snapper grouper discard white paper, is that what the SSC is talking about when we're doing this right now, that Erik was presenting something about discards?

MS. MARHEFKA: I believe, and I could be wrong, but I thought that the SSC is responding to the question that maybe like --

DR. BELCHER: That was the topic that's coming --

MS. MARHEFKA: Tim and Dewey and I had asked, at the March, or June, meeting, where we were talking about how the discards were handled in the -- When the discards are taken out of the stream, and I think that's what they're talking about. I think this is -- Sorry.

MR. KLASNICK: John Hadley has raised his hand.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's who I was going to shout-out to, and so let's call a friend.

MR. HADLEY: Hi, everyone. So that discard white paper item at the bottom, that was left over from -- Do you remember when Andy brought up bringing together -- I guess tasking his staff with maybe bringing together information on discards in the snapper grouper fishery, and I can't remember which meeting it was, but that was something that the council discussed in detail, and it kind of ended up as -- It's a placeholder, and it never really ended up getting time on the council agenda.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think it was last December, perhaps.

MR. HADLEY: Yes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It was February or December.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Yes, and I was just curious. When I saw the presentation from Erik on there for the agenda today, if that was a linkage or not, but thanks.

MS. MARHEFKA: I just was going to say that I've seen, now that I have been to these two other councils, how they sort of forecast their time and do their planning, and, obviously, what works for every council, but I prefer -- I think this spreadsheet, and the way we look at this, is incredibly helpful, and I think it's sort of the best way to do it out there, and so thank you, all.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you, Kerry. I think we really like it, and it shows you everything that you have going underway, and it really makes it apparent -- If something doesn't proceed per the plan, there is consequences for other things planned, and that's been one of the biggest outcomes of it. We don't look at everything on its own in a vacuum anymore. All right, and so I think we're good with this.

MR. KLASNICK: If it's okay with the Chair, if we could get a motion here, before we go to Other Business.

MR. CARMICHAEL: To approve the 2024 draft budget, as amended.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Do I have somebody that wants to make that?

MS. MARHEFKA: **So moved.**

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Do I have a second for that motion?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Mel's hand is raised.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Any more discussion? **Any opposition?** Okay. **Hearing none, that motion passes.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay, and so I will just read it in. **The motion is approve the draft 2024 operational budget, as presented and modified.** It was made by Kerry Marhefka and seconded by Mel Bell and approved by the committee unanimously.

MR. KLASNICK: All right. Madam Chair, I think that takes us just to Other Business, if anybody has any.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Does anybody have any other business that we need to discuss today?

MS. MURPHEY: Real quick, were we going to talk about these lightning rounds for December, or are we just going to do this offline?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We can do that offline. I reached out to John Walter and provided some feedback on the topics.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We should hear back from them.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. That sounds good.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If folks remember, it was planned to have some -- The Science Center showed some interest in giving us talks on some of the different topics that they're working on, as part of our December meeting, and they talked about doing it with the night that we do the social dinner.

MS. MARHEFKA: That's right.

MR. CARMICHAEL: So we'll have dinner and entertainment, and, if they don't entertain us enough, we can turn loose Captain Judy. She is always entertaining.

MS. MARHEFKA: Trish, are you throwing us a party in December?

MR. CARMICHAEL: She is working hard at it, yes.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right. Any other Other Business?

DR. BELCHER: Seeing none, we can adjourn the meeting. Thank you, everybody, for your time today, and we'll be heading back into the SSC meeting, I guess, here shortly.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, we will. Thank you, everybody.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 12, 2023.)

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Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
November 15, 2023

Attendee Report: SAFMC Executive Committee

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