

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

COUNCIL SESSION I

**Hilton Garden Inn Outer Banks/Kitty Hawk
Kitty Hawk, North Carolina**

December 9, 2025

Transcript

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Sonny Gwin
Dakus Geeslin
Shepherd Grimes
Monica Smit-Brunello
Dr. Jessica Stephen
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Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Council Session I of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Hilton Garden Inn Outer Banks/Kitty Hawk in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Trish Murphey.

MS. MURPHEY: All right everybody. I'm going to go ahead and call our Full Council I to order. Thanks, everybody. I know we kind of did things a little differently in doing Full Council today, but I think everything has worked out great, as far as scheduling.

First, I would like to introduce -- From our Gulf Fishery Management Council, we've got Dakus Geeslin, and he's here somewhere. I saw him, and then, of course, our old buddy here, Sonny Gwin, from Mid-Atlantic, and so hi, Sonny. I would like to go ahead and adopt the agenda.

There are a few changes in the agenda, just based off folks' availability. We'll have -- Marcel is not going to be able to make it today, and so, his update on items that have not been discussed by the SSC, we'll just add that to the Snapper Grouper Committee. I don't think he's got too much to cover.

Also, we've got -- We need to work around Andy and Clay a little bit, and so, right now, we've got Rick sitting in for Andy, and we've got Monica online sitting in for Shep, and I think we're going to try to get their reports in probably later, after lunch, but I'm just going to -- We're going to just kind of wing them a little bit, and so, if we get an opportunity to get them in sooner, we will, or, if we need to get them in later, we will, but we'll get them in today. Other than that, that's the only changes to the agenda, if everyone is okay with that. Any objections to the agenda, with its changes? All right. The agenda is approved.

Approval of the minutes, if everyone has had a chance to look at the minutes, and, if they've seen anything that substantially needs changing, you know, let me know now. Any minor changes, just get with council staff, and so we'll go ahead and approve the agenda. Do we have any objections to the agenda? Okay. We'll call the agenda approved. Monica, would you like to go through the litigation brief? Do we see Monica online?

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Can you hear me?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, ma'am. We can.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Okay. I'm sorry. I've got some feedback. At any rate, oral argument has been scheduled for January 12, and so, it might be possible that we get some sort of decision by the March meeting, but that's if your fingers are crossed. Other than that, I don't have any updates.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Monica. Any questions for Monica? All right. We'll go ahead and go to our council liaisons. First, we'll go ahead with Dakus, if he would like to provide what happened at his last Gulf meeting.

MR. GEESLIN: Perfect timing. All right. Thank you so much. Thanks for hosting over here. I wish I could have brought some more decent weather from Austin, Texas. Nevertheless, I did want to give a shoutout for the accommodations, incredible, and exceptional service from Myra Brouwer, getting me coordinated and in line, which I know is somewhat of a Herculean task.

Nevertheless, I'll start with what we've all been waiting for, our liaison report from the Gulf Council.

We met there in Biloxi in October. A couple of regulatory actions, and you all have the liaison report, and so I won't read that verbatim, but I'll just hit on a couple of key highlights. A couple of final actions that we did take is venting tools and descending devices. The council felt very strongly about this and took final action on the requirement that all reef fish anglers, commercial -- Really what this did is just extended the DESCEND Act.

Reef fish anglers, commercial and recreational, to have rigged and ready venting tool or descending vices onboard. It replaces the DESCEND Act regulations, which will be expiring in January 2026. This amendment is expected to improve reef fish survival. The amendment will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce after final review, and I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge both the states of Texas and Florida. We've also required, inshore, our fishermen and women that are in state waters to actually not only have those rigged and ready, but to actively use those when we see fish exhibiting signs of barotrauma.

The other final action that we took was in the shrimp. The council took final action on Shrimp Amendment 19 to extend the federal shrimp permit moratorium to October 26 of 2036, and so we extended that essentially another ten years. This amendment maintains the biological, social, and economic benefits and supports fishery stability by extending the permit moratorium. The amendment will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce after final review.

We've got several drafts currently in discussion, working through the process. The first I'll hit is mutton and yellowtail snapper. Both stocks are assessed as healthy. The Gulf Council continued to work on Joint Amendment 55/44 to revise catch limits. The Gulf Council did not make any modifications to the document during its November meeting.

Red grouper, a new assessment shows a healthy stock, with significant higher catch advice. We advanced Reef Fish Amendment 62 with preferred alternatives, phase-in catch limit increase over three years, set the sector allocations at 68.2 commercial and 31.8 rec, maintain an existing 5 percent commercial and 9 percent recreational buffers to those catch allocations, remove the February through March shallow-water grouper recreational seasonal closure beyond twenty fathoms. We also have a public hearing planned for the final action in January 2026.

We reviewed Amendment 63 exploring a pilot quota set-aside program for the new IFQ entrants. That is to achieve some of the priority goals we've established for IFQ. For the shallow-water grouper complex, due to new species-specific stock advice, the complex will be split into two. Complex one will include scamp and yellowmouth grouper. Complex two is black grouper and yellowfin grouper. We selected preferred alternatives in Amendment 58A, which includes setting new catch limits, sector allocations, and biological reference points.

We also proportionally redistributed IFQ shares, or talked about redistributing IFQ shares, using existing shallow-water grouper shares. We discussed establishing a January through June recreational closure for scamp and yellowmouth and set a rec ACT 14 percent below the ACL. We did discuss adding postseason accountability measures for black and yellowfin if limits are exceeded, and public comment will be gathered before final action in January of 2026.

Moving on to essential fish habitat, we reviewed an amendment that will update essential fish habitat descriptions and maps using contemporary scientific literature. We also selected preferred alternatives for the amendment, which will serve as the five-year review.

Federal-for-hire red snapper management, we discussed delegating federal-for-hire management to the Gulf states, which raised a lot of concern from some factions, and, at this point, that's simply just a conceptual discussion. We did initiate an amendment to explore state option management and allocation approaches. We'll be discussing that more in our next Gulf Council meeting there in New Orleans in January.

A couple of non-regulatory actions on our agenda, we discussed regulatory streamlining. Contractors presented preliminary findings from regulatory process comparison across regional councils. The council decided to evaluate a final report when completed and requested staff bring back a workplan to consider adopting some of the contractors' findings into a streamlined regulatory process.

Fishery ecosystem plan, we reviewed a draft Gulf fishery ecosystem plan. This seems to be one of those standing agenda items. A contractor will begin stakeholder workshops in early 2026 to identify ecosystem issues.

Commercial vessel telecommunication, the council requests approval for Starlink as an emergency communication device. We heard from the Coast Guard, and the Coast Guard indicated FCC rules prevent approval, and so the council has sought the Council Coordinating Committee to request a joint FCC and Coast Guard pathway for certification, simply, you know, to work through the process, to see if we can get Starlink as an approved emergency communication device. That concludes my liaison report. I'm happy to attempt to answer any questions or provide any clarification.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you very much, Dakus. Anybody have any questions? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, sir. I appreciate the presentation. I also applaud your attempts, or, I'm sorry your actions to get Starlink as an approved emergency radio communication, but my question actually had to do with the start of an amendment to further explore the state management for federally for-hire red snapper, and I was curious how that conversation perhaps circled back to the idea of getting a SEFHIER program back up and running in the Gulf, and how those two might be -- Or have you guys put that on the back burner? I'm curious how those work together, or not.

MR. GEESLIN: Yes, and so what I've observed, and good question, and what I've observed, through the charter-for-hire sector, is we have some strong proponents of SEFHIER, what I'll say is SEFHIER 2.0, and then we have some that are adamantly against that. I can't make heads or tails of that, and so, how that folds into state management, I do believe that, you know, the states, and certainly states have various, you know, data collection programs, but those data are being turned over to the states, as of now, and so would that serve as a surrogate or not? It's unsure, and a lot of uncertainty there, and how that would play out, but I can assure you that the crux of your question is certainly at the forefront of that discussion of how those pieces would align or not.

MS. DUKES: Thank you.

MR. GEESLIN: You bet.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm pretty sure the South Atlantic Council also sent a letter to the Coast Guard about Starlink, correct, and so we're following suit as well. Anything else for Dakus? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, and thanks for the report. Just on the Shrimp Amendment 19, the moratorium, and the decision to extend it, could you explain maybe a little further the rationale for the decision?

MR. GEESLIN: Sure, and, you know, some of that -- Primarily this is a lot of what is based in my home state, the Gulf of America there in Texas. We did like to preserve -- You know, we didn't feel the need at this point, given the market uncertainty and the impacts within the Gulf fishery that -- You know, we didn't feel like there was a need for more additional shrimp permits or licenses out there, but being able to preserve that option, if things did change, and that's something we do in Texas also, is our commission has that authority to look at the conditions in the fishery, the market, and, if those economic factors and the biology could support additional licenses at some point in the future, that you could extend that and offer up additional permits.

MR. HULL: Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, Dakus. We'll go ahead and move on to Sonny to give us an update on the Mid-Atlantic.

MR. GWIN: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met last month, in October. I'm sorry. The month before, in October, and we got briefing materials. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met in October in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and you have the highlights in your briefing book, but I'm just going to touch on a couple things, and one of the things we worked on was the omnibus alternative gear marking framework, which you all will be looking at in part of your buoy-less. I've got a mind block here.

Anyway, this action was developed in collaboration with the New England Fisheries Management Council and NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. It considers revisions to current gear marking regulations to allow optional use of alternative gear marking in fixed-gear fisheries and trap pot and gillnet in the greater gillnet fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region.

Currently, these persistent buoy line closures only apply to American lobster and Jonah crab pot fisheries, which could create new and persistent buoy line restrictions in areas for other fisheries. Regulations could allow increased fishing access in the future for fixed-gear fishermen for all fisheries with the TRP-restricted areas.

The council voted to delay this action, along with the New England Council, because they want to get more information from the trawl boat fisheries, because the trawl boat fisheries can't see the gear. There's no buoys. We have regulations now that you have to have two buoys on each end of pots and gillnets and lobster gear, and the draggers want to know where the gear is, and so they're going to delay the action, so we can get some more information on technology and different things, so that they can see the gear, and so we delayed this action, and hopefully, in 2026, we're going to solicit public input on various questions pertaining to alternative gear marking and approval of certain systems for use. Updates can be found in the briefing book.

Then one of the other things we did is we did some recreational tilefish reporting framework. The council reviewed a draft range of alternatives for the recreational tilefish reporting framework. This action considers options to streamline and simplify reporting requirements for recreational tilefish anglers, with the goals of improving compliance, reducing the reporting burden, increasing enforceability of regulations, and improving the accuracy and reliability of self-reported data.

It's requiring to submit electronic vessel reports, through eVTRs, for every trip where tilefish were caught and targeted, eliminate certain reporting fields, trips with no landings, discards, and we requested that staff add an alternative that would maintain the requirements to report catch location, feasibility, and utility of adding a requirement to report tilefish length and weight information. The modified range of alternatives will be further developed, and a public input meeting will be held in early 2026 to gather stakeholder feedback on the range of alternatives. The final action by the council is tentatively planned for April 2026, and I think -- If there's any questions, please ask. Sorry for the confusion.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Sonny. Anybody have any questions for Sonny? Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just a comment, and I was the liaison at that meeting. I thought it was interesting, and maybe I am the last person to come to this conclusion, and just not knowledgeable enough, but I thought it was really interesting with this discussion of the on-demand gear.

You know, we've always -- I've always sort of thought the hesitation was the cost of the gear, and the use of implementation, and things like that that, Jimmy, you guys tackled in your EFP, but it was interesting that, up there, they have to think about this interaction between the fixed gear and the mobile gear, and just mentioning that we're pretty lucky that that's not an issue we have with our fisheries, and so it's just not an aspect I had thought of, and, if any time in the future, you know, it expands, whether it's states using it for pot gear or something like that, it's just always good to remember about those interactions that I hadn't thought of, and I learned a lot at that meeting about it, and so --

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you for sharing that, Kerry. You're absolutely right, and we try to learn from everyone else, and so, Sonny, I think you wanted to say something.

MR. GWIN: Yes, and, with respect to that, it seems like one problem always creates ten other problems, and one of the biggest problems up there is the mobile gear -- They're responsible if they run over somebody else's gear, whether it's buoy-less or with buoys, and so they're trying to come up with more technology to allow them trawlers, the mobile gear, to be able to see that gear, but then that creates a problem too, because a lot of the fishermen up there are saying, well, we don't really want everybody to know where our gear is, and so it's -- You know, what do you do? You try to fix the problem, and, like I said, one problem creates another problem, but we believe technology will pretty soon catch up, and everybody will be happy.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you so much, Sonny. I think the next thing was staff reports, but I think that's just a written report. I don't know if John wants to say something about that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and so you do have the document. It's a written report that updates you on various things. A couple of things I wanted to highlight is some late-breaking news. We

have the latest What It Means to Me posted video. There's a link in an updated staff report that's out there. The video is on the website, and it is our Haley Stephens, who is in the back of the room, who many of you know, in the headboat industry down in Florida, and so a pretty nice video, and I encourage everybody to look at that. A lot of work goes into that, both for the people who are being interviewed, and giving the information, as well as staff to do it, but it's been a really great outreach tool, and we learn a lot from it, and so I'm glad to see that continuing, and thank you, Haley, for putting the time into that.

Then I also want to point out, as a staff thing, and, as most of you know, this is Kim's last council meeting, and end of an era there, to be sure, and who will be taking over for the outreach aspects of her job will be Ashley Oliver, and so congratulations to Ashley.

Then more of the communication things will be shifting over to Nick, and so we appreciate Nick for stepping up for that, things like *The Bite*. John Hadley, in the future, will be handling your AP selection process, and so transferring some things to John, and then a lot of people might not have known, but Kim also handled Federal Register notices, lots of those, and that will be Ashley. I mean, excuse me, that will be Rachael for the admin side. Did I scare you, Ashley? That will be Rachael, and then it will be Emily handling the SEDAR, and so we're shuffling Kim's things around a bit.

Then I guess last, but not least, remember the Marine Recreational Education Program, MREP, or Marine Resources Education Program, and I'm getting my things confused, but Christina will be our representative on MREP in the future, and so, as you can see, it's taking a lot of shuffling around to get the many things that Kim had taken under her belt over the years that she's been here spread out to other staff, and so you'll see some different people reaching out to you on these different topics in the future.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, John, and I just want to say congratulations to Kim on her retirement. You're going to be missed, and you must do a heck of a lot of stuff to have everyone - - To have it all spread from one person to several staff, but I just want to say thank you for being there for me. You've mentored me through some things in this council as I was -- Especially when I was new, and I appreciate it, and so congratulations.

All right. I think we'll go ahead and move on to Lines of Communication. I think the plan here is we're going to have Carolyn, Judy, and Charlie discuss their experience with the Lines of Communication, as well as Christina to tell us all about it, and so I'll turn it over to you guys.

MS. WIEGAND: Thanks, and so, before we jump into Lines of Communication, real quick, I also wanted to let you guys know that we have hired our final Sea Grant Reef Fish Extension and Communication Fellow, Ryan McMullen, who is sitting back there, and so please take the time to introduce yourself to him today. He'll be at the dinner tonight, and so plenty of opportunity to chat and get to know him.

Then, jumping into Lines of Communication, I am very happy to report that we have officially done our very first series of Lines meetings, which was in Georgia, and, before I turn it over to the Georgia council members to give you their perspective on what they learned at the meeting, I did just want to give a very, very brief reminder of the goals and objectives of these meetings, since it's been a while since we've talked about Lines of Communication at the council table.

If you can think back to almost a year, or a year-and-a-half, almost two years ago, when we first started talking about this, the goal was really to improve the way the council members are able to interact with stakeholders. It's certainly not a secret that trust has been a challenge in the fisheries management process, and the South Atlantic Council is certainly no exception to that.

In talking to stakeholders, as well as you all as council members, it was clear that the informal discussions you were able to have with fishermen were some of the most valuable conversations, and so staff put together Lines of Communication to be separate from the typical public comment process, and so, instead of people getting up and having three minutes to comment on a specific management action, this process was meant to be much more discussion oriented, allowing council members and stakeholders to have a conversation, so that council members could share information with stakeholders, but stakeholders could also share what was really important to them with council members.

As a result, it's a very council-member-forward event. Council members give the presentations. Council members run all of the discussion. Staff is available to help, but it's really an opportunity for you all as council members to have conversations directly with your constituents, and so, with that, I wanted to give a huge shoutout to Carolyn and Judy and Charlie.

They were the first ones to do this, and it can be a little bit intimidating being thrown into something where you're expected to run an entire meeting, but they were more than willing to jump in, and they did a truly phenomenal job with these meetings, and I'm very appreciative of their willingness to try something new.

There is a summary of the meetings in your briefing book, but, instead of sort of just listening to me go through those points, we thought it would be better to have, again, council-member-forward, council members talk about what they learned from fishermen at these meetings, and so, with that, I'm going to turn it over to Carolyn and Judy and Charlie to tell you guys a little bit more about what they learned during these three meetings we held in Georgia.

DR. BELCHER: Do we need to do a lottery? No, and I shouldn't say that. Unfortunately, Georgia, we struggled. We go back to the port meetings too, to try to how to get people to come into the groups to have the interactions, and we had -- As indicated by the report, we had a small group to start out with. I said it was four people. Technically, I guess it was three people, because we had -- Well, we had our local news person that came, and it was kind of more as watching the process, and not participating per se, and we tried to get Michael to talk with us, but he was kind of reserved a little bit, but we had Spud, and so there was a little bit of a stacked deck there too, and so I said we'll drop it down.

Judy brought her entourage, and then we had one gentleman that was involved in spearfishing, the diving aspect, and so that was kind of -- For me, that was interesting, because I really don't hear a lot from the dive sector. We know they're out there, but we don't really think about how this particular individual goes up and down the coast. He's not just in a particular area.

The informal set, I think the only struggle that I had, which Christina knew, is because of the moving slides. When you haven't done the presentation, and you're kind of used to using a static image, because of the failures that have come up in your past history for things that are automated,

or have the flying objects, and I generally don't do as much with those, and so I didn't recognize that those were there, and so as you're going through, and cycle to the next slide, all of a sudden something changes on your slide, and you're like, oh, what did I miss that I should have talked about, but she did a great job.

I mean, everything that you needed was in the presentations. It gave some good icebreaker moments. That was the other fun part of it. I think, when we went through our facilitations, my take-home at first was like this is a very different approach, because it isn't as much of the standard this is how we're going to do this, where people come, and they talk at us, and we take notes type of thing.

It was more of a trying to crack the nut, get the nut to kind of fall apart and give us some things, and then place things around for people to talk about, and so we did get a lot of really good -- More spontaneous things, because you're not talking to specific items, and so, again, like we said, we talked about the fact of the diving, what they're seeing with gag, right, and it was the gag that was the species of interest.

Cannonball jellyfish, which obviously is not a federal fishery issue, but the questions came up about what has happened with cannonball, because the production is not seemingly there, but a lot of that has to do with how that fishery operates in the State of Georgia.

When we moved out of Brunswick, we went to Darien, and our captive audience was one of our lead folks for CCA, and so that was a very different banter. We didn't necessarily go through the exercises, but had a lot of good exchange about CCA, where CCA sees the council, how they might be able to help us more, as much as us helping them moving forward. Unfortunately, Richmond Hill, we had one person signed up, but Robert ended up not making the meeting.

I think it's a great tool. I am extremely excited to see North Carolina and South Carolina. Florida, I know, has a very active community, but, knowing where you guys were with the port meetings, I would be very interested to see how your dialogues, and especially these activities, go with those groups, because, like I said, with us, with just a small sample size, it's really hard to test it, but I did feel like it was a good conversation. Like I said, the kind of letting your hair down, people just kind of hanging around, and having a good conversation and discussion, I think was really, really helpful with that.

From the state's perspective too, the one thing that I didn't think about as a tool, and Kathy and I came up with it about a day too late, was we have a system, GovDelivery, that we generally use for regulation updates to our -- You know, people voluntarily put into it with an email address, but we do email blasts.

Because that's not traditionally the way we've shared information, it was probably a lost opportunity for us that we could have used that as a means to try to get that up, and so, in the future, if we have another round-robin here in a couple years, that's probably one of the first things that, if I'm still here, I'll recommend that we do, is we put the GovDelivery blast out there. That's enough of me talking, but, like I said, overall, I think it's a good process. I'm looking forward to seeing, again, how the other states can pull in, and what their folks will give them for information, and I'll let it go to Judy and Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Like Carolyn says, we didn't have a lot of attendance. What attendance we did have were some very good conversations. For instance, listening to what the spear fisherman was seeing, and him telling us that gags seem to be rebounding, again reminded me of the time lag between when we get an assessment, when we make regulations, and what's really going on on the water, and so that kind of brought that home.

I think he talked about, you know, when he's gutting fish, seeing juvenile, I think black sea bass or something, and I think that's what it was, in red snapper and things like that, and so, again, they see stuff that -- Can share with us back-and-to, and we can ask questions, which is really, really critical, and I think that, as we go forward with these, I think the stakeholders are going to, you know, see the benefit of coming and talking, because not only did we have the three council members, but we had like seven staff, I think, and so there was nobody there that, you know, couldn't answer a question of some sort, or at least get pointed to.

The amount of effort that, you know, John's staff put into it, I was really awed by it, and so, you know, we -- You all know me, and I'm bad at making it up as I go, and so it kind of suited me fine, but, yes, I think this kind of stuff -- Once we get some assessments done, and some regulations done, that have been hanging out there, and we can, you know, show the stakeholders we're serious about, you know, listening to them, and making things happen, I think it's going to be easier to get people to the Lines.

Like the conversation in Darien with the CCA was a totally different conversation from the night before in Brunswick, totally, and so, you know, we just bounced off, you know, other topics, and other policy issues, more so than, you know, fishing issues, even though they're kind of the same, but, yes, and I tried to get a couple of my snapper boat permit captains to come.

One had been working all -- Had been running in all night, and he didn't make it, and another guy had been coming back from North Carolina or something, and so he also didn't make it, but, you know, as we do this, maybe, you know, people like me can be like, okay, we are going to have this meeting, and plan your, you know, fishing trip around this, if you can, but, yes, and I think, the more of them we do, the more people that come --

I think these people would come back, which to me is -- I may be wrong, but I think the people that we talked to felt value in it, in spite of the fact that, again, we were told we just -- We don't listen, when actually we do. There's just a lot of stuff they tell us that we just can't do. It's above, you know, where we can -- Our pay grade, in a way, but we are listening, and I think this is a good way to start getting that message out. Thank you.

MS. HELMEY: Well, I agree with everything that Carolyn and Charlie said. The good news is it's not a formal setting, and I think, even though there wasn't a lot of people there, only a few people there, I believe that they'll talk about it, and maybe they'll get other people, encourage other people, to come, because we were all on the same level.

People asked questions. We got in small -- Well, we were a small group, but we still got to talk amongst us all, and get to hear what they had, what the complaints were, or things that they felt we needed to look at, which I thought was pretty cool. The diver, he was very interesting. He didn't just dive off of one area, correct? He went up and down the coast, and, the way he described the way they get their commercial fishes, it's like a pyramid.

I believe that's what he said, and the top fish was gags, and he says there's plenty of gags, or maybe they're rebounding, and we don't know, in certain areas, but I asked him about the sharks, and how he didn't have any hands and legs missing, and he said that he would shoot the fish. Now, they're fishing in 150 foot of water. He would shoot the fish, and then he would hold it close to him, and I'm like, oh my god. Think about that, you know, and then they have to come up in a depth, and stay twenty or thirty minutes at a certain depth, and it was really cool. It was just interesting to talk to him, and he was very knowledgeable, or, like he said, if he wasn't, he wouldn't be around to talk to us about it.

Let me see what else we talked about. Of course, red snapper. I'm not going to talk about that. Somebody did mention about measuring fish. They said something about, instead of total length, or fork length, maybe come up with a way that you could have that one, because people have a lot of trouble measuring fish, like doing it right, which scares them, and they might get a ticket.

We had -- Let me see what else I've got here. Well, I guess we just need to get the information out, to get the people more information out, however we can get to the fishermen and get them to show up. I really enjoyed it, even though we didn't have a lot of turnout. We all got to spend some time together with the staff, and it's just pretty interesting. I enjoyed it. Thanks, guys.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so I think they summed it up well. Just a reminder, again, that that report is in your briefing book, and, of course, building trust involves sort of taking all of this information that was learned and using it in the management process.

Just a reminder that part of the way you guys had talked about using this Lines information was to set your workload priorities, when you're looking at that spreadsheet at the end of every meeting, identifying issues that might not be on your radar, but are important to fishing communities, and then, of course, to inform current management actions because, while these meetings are meant to sort of be proactive and forward-looking, it is inevitable that things will come up that are relevant to management actions currently under consideration.

Just a reminder of how you intend to use the Lines of Communication information. Look at the report, and talk to staff, if you have questions, and talk to your Georgia council members if you have questions about what was discussed, and we will be in North Carolina the first week in February, doing another series of Lines, and then, don't worry, South Carolina and Florida, we will be doing Lines meetings the end of next year with you all.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, guys. Does anybody have any questions for the Georgia contingent? All right. Seeing none, thanks a lot for sharing all that information, and so next on the agenda is we're going to hear reports from our law enforcement, and so, first, I've got Matt Walia for NOAA OLE, and so I'll turn it over to Matt.

MR. WALIA: Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Matt Walia, Compliance Liaison for the Office of Law Enforcement in the Southeast, based out of St. Pete, and so I want to give you some updates on where we've been. Our last report was back in June, and our latest council report is in the briefing book. I don't have time to go over all that. There's a lot of in-depth stuff, and so I encourage you to please take a look at that. You can kind of get a snapshot of what we've been up

to, what we've been doing, but one of the main focuses that we always do is we rely on our enforcement partnerships to get our job done.

Many are aware that we have a cooperative enforcement agreement program with the majority of states. We work closely with a lot of federal partners, and, below, you see the numbers since the June meeting. Our last two quarters of referrals overall, 167 referrals have come from working with our partners, and so it's integral that we all work together to get it done.

This encompasses everything from variety of Magnuson stuff, and one of the most common violations we come across are undersized fish, fish closed during the retention, not having a descending device, and so those are still pretty common. We get those and process them as well, and we do a lot of seafood import monitoring work. That's in the report as well.

Just this past quarter alone, nationwide, we inspected over 277,000 kilograms of seafood, from eleven countries coming in, and so we're always looking at the point of origin, making sure the seafood is good coming in, where it's coming in, how it's harvested, can we trace it before it goes out to market, and so helping protect domestic seafood on that aspect.

This graphic shows you overall -- You can see where these violations, the referrals that have come over to us, where they've been, and I would say, even just recently, our officer Miles Dover, and he was here in person yesterday, and he's online right now, but he was just knee deep in bluefin the other day, just down the road in Wanchese, with the general category HMS closing, and so we did a lot of partnership work with the folks at Coast Guard and the local sector, going out monitoring the closure of that, and so, from everything I've heard, it's been pretty -- It's relatively fresh, but the majority of folks have been compliant, and so that's been good to see as well.

What I want to take time here is to just kind of do a quick overview reminder of how we enforce regulations, and what to maybe take into consideration when you all at the table are making decisions of what to do.

In the past, we have made a document called the LE precepts, and, essentially, what we've done is we got together, as enforcement, of, whatever the regulation is, we try to look at a matrix of how can we enforce that, and it's broken into these three categories you see here.

If the regulation -- Can we do that through monitoring means? You know, this snapshot particularly shows a VMS, of what we would see of monitoring electronically, and that could be aircraft, and that could be, you know, vessels on the water to monitor. Is it something we can enforce that we have to do at-sea, and so that's resource-intensive, us having vessels out, having folks on the water, intercepting, doing boardings on vessels, or is it something as well as dockside enforcement?

All that comes into consideration when regulations are being made. An example where all three are utilized, I would say a good example that would be in the Gulf, with the IFQ program, and so that's something we can use all three of these aspects to effectively enforce the regulations that are made for it, but then, if you take something as far as say closed season retention, there's not much we can do with the monitoring on that.

That's harder to see, from say an aircraft, of what a recreational boat is catching onboard. We're relying on that part two of at-sea boarding, and maybe dockside, but that also comes into play of are the regulations compatible between state and federal waters, and so there's a lot of nuances like that that have to get taken into consideration, but, effectively, anything that's simple, compatible across-the-board, and accountable. If we can account for that fish from when it's caught to when it's sold, all that is effective, and, you know, the industry wants to see simple regulations, and it helps us as well, and so, the more simple it is, the more compatible it is, the ease of enforceability is better in that aspect.

What we don't want to see is the lack of accountability and something that's resource intensive. It makes it hard, and so hopefully that helps when you're all at the table trying to make different decisions of what gear can and may not be used to consider this.

I wanted to kind of show this in motion, of how we took this in and what we just talked about, and so these are some tools that we use in what I just showed regarding the rock shrimp fishery. Since the last meeting, we've had a handful of boats that have been in the closed area. Some have been anchored up, and some have been fishing, and some don't have their VMS on, but this kind of shows you the process.

We were able to use our monitoring aspect, and we could see that a boat looked like it was potentially in the closed area, like that snapshot on the left. What we usually do, at that point, is we have our support staff that will then notify the vessels, and owners that, hey, it looks like you're in a closed area, and you need to get out of there.

Then we want to identify that, and so we're going to use our surveillance going out, and a lot of this has been working with our partners at FWC and Customs and Border Patrol, where we've been able to do flyovers. Once we're on that, and on scene, we're able to then verify, hey, is this boat truly in the closed area, and are they looking like there is maybe a potential violation, and these pictures on the right show -- This is a shrimper that was anchored up.

It's kind of hard to see the anchor line, and their nets are out of the water, but they're anchored up inside Oculina, and so we have a handful of cases that occurred over the summer, that are at different processes of where they are, and I can share updates as they're available, but just to give you an idea of kind of how we go through the process and what resources we have to use to make that effective.

A couple of updates I want to give on some recent cases, some notable highlights. This is in the briefing book, and that link goes to a story that I wrote, but we had -- A couple months ago, I wrote out a story. There was a commercial fisherman down in South Carolina, and he falsified his trip reports. He had a couple vessels swapping the catch, ignoring the quotas that were on there. He ended up also lying to law enforcement.

That was a criminal trial that we went, and worked with our partners at the Department of Justice and South Carolina, with SCDNR. He ended up getting three felony counts, and you see there he was sentenced to just over a year in jail and \$7,500 in fines, and so this was a notable case. It took a lot of work to do this. This helps protect all the rules that you're making day in and day out at the table, as far as ACLs and all that, and so it's important that we're able to show some results and hold people accountable for this. We had expert testimony from the Southeast Regional Office

staff as well that went on the stand and helped -- That helped with the prosecution side on that as well, and so check that out.

The picture down below, that you see on the right, this was a commercial fisherman down in northeast Florida. He exceeded his trip limit, and we found that out, working with our state partners, with FWC as well, when we did a dockside inspection. He was claiming a thousand-pound trip limit, but, on top of that, we were able to see that he had over a hundred undersized fish, and so that exceeded the trip limit. You see there that he had some gray triggerfish, cobia, and those were vermilion snapper. He had some other gear violations, and we ended up working with our partners at Office of General Counsel, and they received a \$5,000 Notice of Violation Assessment for that case.

I want to show another area where we've done a lot of focus, especially in the summer, and it involves sanctuaries and protected resources. Pertaining to you all here with the South Atlantic, most of this is in the Keys. We do have a presence out on Gray's Reef, but it's a pretty tiny area compared to the effort we're able to do down in the Florida Keys.

The mini-season, we usually have all hands on deck. We had crews in the Middle and Lower Keys this time, and a lot of interaction. I think we had over 100 patrol hours. We did a lot of compliance assistance. We were able to work with folks, let them know if they're in a protected area, what they can fish for, what they can't fish for. We encouraged them to download the marine sanctuary app, so they could keep track on their own how to stay within the law, and so we did a lot of that work, and we still came across violations.

The areas to be avoided, that's a larger tract in the reef line, protecting it, where it's mostly merchant vessels and merchant yachts that are going in a closed area, and so we've had a slew of cases in there. In the council report, you'll see in there that there's been some recent violations. They can be -- I think the recent was around \$7,000 Notice of Violation for getting in there, and that's to protect the habitat and the reefs.

Then, a couple other operations, we recently had two that were I thought noteworthy, is some illegal casita operations that some folks were doing. In this case, one was prosecuted by the state criminally, and one was prosecuted federally criminally. The one picture you see on top is for the top, and this ended up being working with our state partners at FWC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife, actually in both the cases.

He ultimately received four years' probation. He's prohibited from commercial fishing that whole entirety, and he was required to remove all the casitas that he made illegally out in the water as well, and we supervised the removal of those. I think he had -- It was fifty-two illegal casitas that this one fisherman had that we took out of the water.

The other one, same deal, and you see the probation. This was two years. He had to remove the casitas, and something that was unique is he was -- The court ordered to forfeit his vessel, and so he had a seventeen-foot Mako, with all of his electronics onboard, and he had to forfeit, and sell that over, and turn the proceeds over to the government.

I had a couple reminders that I want to throw in there as well, and so we're -- We just kicked off down in this area. We're in the right whale season, and so there's a slew of dynamic areas and

other areas up and down the seaboard, from November through April, where larger vessels have to follow the speed restriction of ten knots. What we do, on our side, is we first send out a lot of compliance assistance to the vessels we identify. We recently sent out 500 letters. Most of this goes over international, and so a lot of the shipping companies are based out of other countries, and so we're dealing with correspondence, trying to get them up-to-speed, when they come into U.S. waters, that they're following it. That QR code will take you to more information than you need on right whales, and what to do, and what to do, and so it's on there, and please check that out as well.

We did have a lot of -- Some recent vessels, just to give you an idea of merchant vessels that are coming in out of say Charleston or other ports, that are exceeding the speed violation. They ranged, working with our Office of General Counsel, anywhere from \$7,500 to it can be a \$30,000 Notice of Violation Assessment, and so it's pretty heavy fines that we're trying to get across-the-board international to protect the whales as they're coming down to breed.

A couple -- Another other couple of reminders just to throw out there. The golden tilefish commercial is closed through the new year, through January 15. I did want to put the Bahamas fishing in again, because I had that in last time, but we're still continuing to see a heavy number of recreational boats that are coming back from the Bahamas exceeding that limit. That's a Lacey Act violation. They're coming in with multiple fish coming over there, and so we've been issuing a lot of summary settlements on that. That's usually around a \$500 ticket that those folks are receiving.

There's some highlights that I showed, but I did want to also highlight, out of the 176 incidents that we've created and encountered over this last quarter, 51 percent are compliant, and so, I mean, that's our folks, and our officers, getting out to the docks, inspecting vessels, doing boardings, working with industry, making a presence known, and, you know, I would say, for the most part, there's a lot of law-abiding folks out there. People are trying to do the right thing, but we're also holding those accountable, and then our tip line is on the next slide.

We always encourage folks to come in, come talk to us when you see us. You know, I'm around here for most of the week. We have other folks that are always online too, and I'm happy to talk to you offline as well, if anything, and so I just encourage -- We always have a duty officer on that line. Leave a message, and they'll get back to you as well, within twenty-four hours, and so, with that, I'm happy to take any questions there are. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Matt. I think I have a question from Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Hi, Matt. I have a couple of things. Thank you so much for that. First of all, I just wanted to clarify that the golden tilefish closure I believe it's just for the longline component, because the hook-and-line is still open, and so I just wanted to make sure that anyone that was listening understood that that's just the longline fishery.

Then I wanted to ask you a few questions, and I think it's probably in relation to the new executive orders that have come out with the new administration, the ones that focus heavily on like American seafood competitiveness. There also seems to be an uptick on paying attention to IUU fishing, you know, sort of where SIMP fits in, and, also, there was new MMPA regulations, or MMPA determinations, that came out in the fall that will have import restrictions, and I'm

wondering if your group is -- Are you getting more dedicated resources? Are you getting a diversion in sort of what they're asking you to do in relation to imports, import provisions, SIMP, sort of anything that relates to that?

MR. WALIA: Thank you, and I appreciate the clarification. I was just putting out a reminder from the bulletin on the commercial fishery, but, yes, and thank you. As far as IUU and SIMP goes, there definitely has been an uptick over the years. I mean, SIMP has been around since 2018. We have dedicated officers that are -- Their main focus is SIMP, and so they're at specific ports, up and down the Eastern seaboard and in the Gulf, that are monitoring that.

We have a five-year priority document we always put out, but, yes, there's been an uptick, and a more focus to go on that. We're currently reassessing some of those priorities, to even narrow it down more, and so that hasn't been released out yet, but, yes, it's there. In the Gulf, we're always doing port of entries on the Texas-Mexico border. That's a pretty heavy area, as folks are aware of, and a lot of shipping containers and airports as well, and so we're monitoring a lot at airports everywhere coming in, and even in the Caribbean as well. I think that was it, right?

Our resources are still -- We have finite resources. That's stuff everywhere. We've lost a few folks, with all the actions that have happened with the new administration, and I don't see new hiring happening anytime soon, and so, unfortunately, it's a bigger job, with the same amount of people, and we're doing what we can with it.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thank you.

MR. WALIA: Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Anybody have any other questions for Matt? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Matt. I appreciate the presentation, and you touched on the speed violations, and you specifically mentioned container ships and things like that. How does the safety navigation play into some of those cases, meaning perhaps a container ship might be in fact breaking the speed rule. However, it is because of a safety issue, whether that be the movement of tide, the water speed and direction, that kind of thing. I was just curious how that plays into this.

MS. WALIA: Thank you for the question, Amy, and so, in general, the compliance letters we send out, that's usually a first notice of, hey, we noticed you were speeding, and we try to get folks aware for next time, but, if we start to see a pattern, like anything else, we're going to look more into that individual vessel. When we do our investigations into the vessel, we're looking at the tracks. We're seeing when they sped up, when they slowed down, and, if there is -- There's a standard deviation provision that folks will get documented, the captains will in their logbook, and we'll find out about that during the course of our investigation, whether it's through interviews or looking at the logbook, and so then we'll -- It's kind of case-by-case, but, yes, that's something we take into consideration.

MS. MURPHEY: Anyone else? All right. Well, thank you very much, Matt. I'll turn it over to Lt. Pease to do his Coast Guard report.

LT. PEASE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, everyone. Lt. Tom Pease from the Southeast Coast Guard District Enforcement Branch in Miami. Thank you for having me again, and, today, I'm going to be going over kind of a fiscal year 2025, you know, review, in addition to highlighting a recent case, just since it is new, and technically in FY26, but I didn't think it should have waited until the next meeting to highlight, and then just kind of going over some goals and expectations for the Southeast Coast Guard District in FY25.

We had zero U.S. EEZ incursions in FY25. This was down from FY24, in which we had a total of two EEZ incursions down in the Sector San Juan area of responsibility, both from the Dominican Republic, and so that is an improvement.

Going over our domestic fisheries enforcement, we did see -- So a year ago, when I sat before this council, as my first meeting as the Southeast District LMR officer, I made it a goal to increase the number of boardings performed in the Southeast Coast Guard District, and I'm happy to report that we did see a seven-and-a-half percent increase in enforcement efforts across the district, with a total of 390 across the district.

As you see, Sector Key West bringing in the largest number out of our six sectors, at 262, and I would like to highlight, you know, Miami and San Juan. Obviously, those, you know, nine and eight, respectively, are not big numbers, but, you know, they are preoccupied with other mission sets in those areas of responsibility, counter drug and alien enforcement, and seeing an uptick in the Miami AOR coming over from the Bahamas, and then, San Juan, we've seen an increase in counter drug interdictions and migration interdictions from the Dominican Republic, and so they are -- It's not that those two sectors, and their subunits, are not doing anything. They are actively engaged in other missions, and, you know, a good overall turnout from St. Pete and Jacksonville and Charleston as well.

We had a total of ten significant violations in FY 2025, and those are specifically related to fisheries violations. I am going to create a metric for next meeting that highlights safety violations, because those were up significantly from FY24, and so I think it's good to highlight the number of violations and terminations that we have for safety as well.

We had a total of zero catch seizures. I did asterisk that, because something that the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement -- What we've seen in a trend is, instead of seizing the catch and, you know, potentially letting the catch go to waste, OLE is allowing the fishing vessel to offload their catch, and, in lieu of making money off of that, fining the fishing vessel, and/or company, that amount of money that they would have profited from and adding that to the total fine on top. This way, the catch isn't going to waste, and we had a total of zero vessel seizures in 2025.

Here's the recent case, the Sector Jacksonville AOR fisheries violation from the Fishing Vessel Lady Alison, which is an Alabama-based shrimper fishing in the Atlantic on a Gulf of America permit for rock shrimp. This was a joint effort between NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement and Sector Jacksonville.

Sector Jacksonville performed the boarding after NOAA advised the sector of a fishing vessel turning off and turning back on its VMS, and then that kind of piqued their interest, and so they did see that the was, based on their tracks, fishing where they shouldn't have been with the permits they had onboard, and so that resulted in the vessel's termination and then the seizure, quote,

unquote, of 14,000 pounds of rock shrimp, and, to my point before, in lieu of a catch seizure, the vessel was allowed to land the catch, and then whatever that price was was added in the top of the fine.

On marine protected resources, Sector Key West and their subunits continue to do a great job, primarily in assisting the Marathon Turtle Hospital with responses of turtle entanglements, or turtles in distress, and so we had a total of eleven assistance requests from the Turtle Hospital, and then we had seven responses directly assisting marine mammals and other marine protected species, and Sector Key West performed two pulse operations throughout the year directly related to marine protected species.

Okay, and so, just last year, I laid out some goals that we had in the Southeast District, that we wanted to look at to, you know, bolster our LMR enforcement and education efforts in the Southeast District. The first one was to increase the fishing vessel boardings from FY24. We did succeed in that, and that really just comes down to empowering the units from actively going out and doing the boardings. You know, we have patrols that happen daily, and, you know, we're just really empowering the units to go out and say, you know, during your training mission, if you see a boarding of opportunity, go do it, you know, and that's resulted in that uptick in, you know, citations, for safety primarily.

Promote the decal program, this is still in progress. We've seen a small uptick in participation. The sectors do provide me with a fairly regularly produced product that this is -- How this is tracked, and from the end of the -- From the beginning of FY25 until the end of September, we did see a small increase in participation there, but we still have a long way to go as far as that is concerned.

We wanted to increase the number of pulse operations across all sectors. Unfortunately, we did not meet this mark internally. We actually saw a decrease in pulse and surge operations dedicated towards the LMR mission, and so that's something we're taking a look at between myself and Coast Guard Atlantic area, and, again, you know, empowering those sectors to do both surge and pulse operations.

Sector Jacksonville and Charleston did a joint pulse operation the month of November, just last month, and those numbers are starting to come in, and it appears as if that joint operation between those two sectors, which encompasses three different states of South Carolina, Georgia, and the northern half of Florida on the Atlantic coast, did produce some good enforcement numbers, and so it's something I can report on next meeting.

Then we wanted to increase the throughput for LMR classes at our Regional Fisheries Training Centers in both New Orleans and Charleston, and, unfortunately, we did not meet the mark there. The commanding officers of both units are reporting to me that each class is about half full, as far as their max capacity, and I was actually in Charleston in September, at SRFTC, and I had an opportunity to speak at -- They actually had a class going on at the time, coincidentally, and I had an opportunity to speak to that class, and the commanding officer there is a good friend of mine, and he and I got to sit down one-on-one, and, you know, he let me know that each class is about half full.

That's a conversation that I've already had with our six sectors, you know, promoting, you know, these classes, these qualifications, that, you know, an individual takes their whole career. I attended my first fisheries, you know, boarding officer class, in I think it was 2001 up at NRFTC on Cape Cod, and then, you know, I then proceeded to do fisheries for the next fifteen years up in up in New England, and so it's something that, you know, these young petty officers can take with them, you know, and use an entire career, possibly, and so we're -- That's something we're working on for FY 26, which leads us into our goals and expectations for 2026.

You know, obviously, you know, first and foremost, to, you know, outdo ourselves, you know, this year, as we did last year, and that's to, you know, perform LMR boardings often, whether it's, you know, boardings of opportunity while underway, or, you know, those surge operations and pulse operations, and I probably should have done a circle for these goals, because it is cyclic. You know, all of these goals and expectations go hand-in-hand, and then -- Which leads me to increasing those surge and pulse operations, which, you know, these are monitored by, you know, the folks I work for, you know, at the Coast Guard Atlantic Area, you know, and the Office of Law Enforcement in D.C.

They do see this, you know, the drop or the rise in what it is every district is doing, and, you know, when they ask why has it dropped, I have to provide an answer for them, and so it's something that we're looking at with the sectors and, you know, the six sector LMROs, the fisheries officers in each sector, to promote and bolster their surge and pulse operations throughout the throughout their respective AORs.

Specifically, the next one is to increase the manatee speed zone enforcement in FY24. Sector St. Petersburg I felt like did one of these at least once a month in 2024, which -- This could be an internal comms issue too, you know, and it doesn't necessarily mean they're not doing them. It's the reporting, and it's a reporting piece. So now that, you know, we've put it out there, it's like, hey, if you're doing this, report it up, you know, in your monthly LMR summaries, and to perform these missions, you know, dedicated to manatee speed zone enforcement.

Moving on to increase the right whale speed zone hail and inform, you know, we have assets underway in these vectors where, you know, the right whales, you know, are moving, you know, you know, north, and, when a Coast Guard asset observes a prospective speed zone violation, you know, it's our job to call out to that vessel and inform them that they are either speeding, or of the right whale enforcement that's going on, and, again, this also goes hand-in-hand with internal communications between Coast Guard units, the subunit that's performing the hail and inform to their sector, and the sector gets it in their monthly LMR report up to me, and then I continue to push it up to Atlantic area and the Office of Law Enforcement, and so it's just something -- It's really just kind of tightening those screws with, you know, information sharing within Coast Guard units.

Then increased council attendance, and, obviously I am, you know, hopefully not a stranger to this council. I've made it a priority to attend these, and deliver this brief quarterly, and I've encouraged the same of our sectors, to attend their regional meetings, you know, for the -- Whether it's their council meetings or their marine sanctuary meetings, Gray's Reef, Florida Keys, and our Caribbean partners down in Puerto Rico on the islands as well.

I think it's a good opportunity for us to do that networking with our respective councils, and it's just something that I would like to see kind of bolstered at that sector level with those regional -- With those regional memberships, and then, lastly, you know, why we do the boardings is to ensure our commercial fishing fleet is safe, and, you know, participation in that program is really paramount.

When I was a boarding officer up in New England, you know, I've probably done over a thousand commercial fishing boardings in my career, and, in New England nobody had an expired decal. It was good for everybody. It made their lives easy, because it got me off their boat faster, and it allowed them to get their job done, and so we would definitely like to see an increase in that in the Southeast, and some of the products that I see from our respective shops at the sectors indicate that there is not a lot of participation, a lot of expired decals out there, and so that's something we want to bolster in 2026.

Last slide, and I know I'm keeping everybody from lunch, and so this is my contact information. If anyone has any questions, or needs to get ahold of me, my email, my Microsoft Teams number, and my -- Which, during the workday, during the week, that 571 number is probably the best way to get ahold of me. Email is probably the best way to get ahold of me, but the second one is that 571 number, because I cannot have my cellphone or any electronics with me in my workspace when I'm actually at work, but that is my cell phone at the bottom there, and also the same number for Signal and WhatsApp.

I did want to plant the seed now, so everybody isn't surprised come the summertime, but I am transferring this summer. I don't know where yet. You know, it's the joys of being a military officer, is they let you know at the last minute, and they give you about two months' notice to move, and so I will be transferring, probably at the end of June, and so I do anticipate being at the June meeting, with the person that's replacing me, to kind of give a minute introduction to the council and the council and introduction to him, and so, with that, I'm up against it, but I am happy to answer any questions the council may have. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Lt. Anybody have any questions? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you. You were -- You showed how you use the AIS to track the rock shrimp boat. How effective is that for if you want to monitor a boat for possible longline activity, versus bandit activity or something like that? How well can that be monitored?

LT. PEASE: So pretty well actually, using various programs in, you know, correlation with our partners. If there's any suspected -- You know, like a track that's observed that, you know, could be suspect, you know, just bringing up the vessels information, you know, and their MMSI, you know, information will give us, you know, everything that we would need to know, and what their AIS is pinging, and so it is an effective tool as far as, you know, possible enforcement measures go.

MR. WALIA: If I could just quick add to that, and so, from our side, on the VMS side, when you zoom-in on that, depending on the frequency of a reporting, we essentially call it a vessel signature, and so not a hundred percent, but you get a pretty good indication. You can actually see when gear is set, and when it's hauled, if the boat is drifting, and you're looking at speed factors, and so that helps us narrow down what we're looking at.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you. Well, I pretty much knew the answer to the question, but I just wanted it, because we're considering doing some other things, and it helps us get a grasp on what we can do to keep guys doing what they're supposed to be doing.

MS. MURPHEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Kind of a follow-up to that question, and then I have a second one as well, but, since you are in fact monitoring the AIS system, are you monitoring vessels that are turning it on and turning it off that are perhaps not commercial, but maybe for-hire or recreational as well?

LT. PEASE: Yes. Sector Miami -- While it's not necessarily LMR-centric, Sector Miami leads the way, so to speak, for the Southeast District in captain of the port orders, as far as illegal charters are concerned. That is a very big problem in Miami's AOR, Miami proper. We do see that quite a bit and how -- You know, whether that is from, you know, an anonymous tip, or if they're just out doing patrols, and they're cold hits, and I think it's a mix of several things, why those illegal charter terminations are so high, but that is one factor, certainly.

MS. DUKES: Thank you. I appreciate that information, and, to both of you, I just want to offer our sincere gratitude for all of the efforts that you do, and all of your staff do, and I just really wanted to applaud you for your efforts to optimize catch, versus seizing it, and actually making a viable commercial product being sold as part of that case package. It's something that has been applied in South Carolina, by our Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Office, and it's really been kind of a nice way to be able to get that product into the market, and then use that cash as a way to really push that you shouldn't have done this, and this is now a loss revenue from you, on top of any other violations that you're doing, and so I applaud you for that effort.

LT. PEASE: Thank you, and all the credit goes to, you know, NOAA for making that determination. That was nice to see, because that was certainly not the case we'll say fifteen years ago, when I'm escorting a crew into Gloucester with, you know, 25,000 pounds of NMS onboard, and it all goes to waste, and so that was nice to see, from my perspective, having been doing this for as long as I've been doing it, and so that's all the credit to NOAA for that.

MR. WALIA: Donating is another way too, and I forgot to mention that. In some cases, we'll have the vessel donate their catch, and so, instead of it going to waste, it's going to a local food bank or something.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you very much, Lt. Pease, and I'm glad to see that the Coast Guard is trying to increase their engagement with the councils, and I think it's much appreciated, and I guess we will still see you in March and June, and we hope you get transferred to someplace nice.

LT. PEASE: I'm hoping so. Fingers crossed.

MS. MURPHEY: So, anyway, so thank you very much.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You mentioned the effort to increase the decals, and vessel safety, and I think that's certainly something that council is interested in, and, you know, I mentioned our new outreach coordinator, and, earlier during this meeting, we mentioned trying to expand our efforts to consider some commercial activities.

We've been very engaged with a lot of tackle shops, through the best fishing practices, but, you know, if we consider looking at fish houses and things, I think that could be a great opportunity for us to partner up with you guys on that initiative toward the vessels and safety, and so, you know, I think Ashley would be glad to be in touch with you, and your successor, because I think that's something the council would be very passionate about.

LT. PEASE: Absolutely. We're certainly happy to do that as well. You know, as the Coast Guard, that is our number-one priority when we're doing these boardings, is fishing vessel safety, ensuring that the vessels have the proper equipment of, you know, working life raft, working EPIRB, you know, it's registered, you know, and so on. You know, when we do get on -- You know, when our boarding teams hop the rail, you know, that is our number-one priority, you know, is the safety of the vessel and crew, and so I'm happy to work with the council in that venture.

MS. MURPHEY: I've got one last question with Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just a comment, John, and that's a great idea, and I think we really need to follow-up on it, because I have to say, in our area, and my husband is a commercial fisherman, we literally just got our vessel safety sticker last week, and just the relationship, and the view of the vessel safety officer with commercial -- The relationship is so good. That is one place where there is trust, and so, in a way, those people can act as like the, hey, here's Ashley. You know, I'm a trustworthy person, and here's Ashley, and I'm bringing another trustworthy person in, because we trust those guys so much. They're so good. There's no -- I mean, I'm not saying anywhere there's no animosity, but, in our area, I'm not seeing any animosity.

LT. PEASE: Great.

MS. MARHEFKA: They're doing such a good job, and so I think that's a really important point.

LT. PEASE: Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you. Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I know that, if you possess a snapper grouper permit, you're probably going to be chosen to take an observer, and so you already have, or you will be forced to have, your safety sticker on that, and also with HMS, with observers, and so you might would -- Maybe have Ashley contact them, and see how they do it, or whatever like that, but that's something we've got to do every year, to a tune of about \$1,500.

MS. MURPHEY: All right.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Not the inspection, but to update our life raft and a few other things.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Before we adjourn, I just kind of want to remind everybody that, from the Habitat Committee meeting yesterday, the Habitat and Shrimp, if people can get their dates that they would be available that week of the January 22, and we'll just ask you to email Myra, and we'll try to nail down a time for that webinar by the end of the week, so that they can get it turned into the Federal Register and everything, and so, with that, I'll adjourn until 1:30, and so I'll see you guys at 1:30.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MURPHEY: All right. I see most everybody is back from lunch. Let's go ahead and get started. We got some more updates and stuff to hear from folks. Andy, are you ready to do your regional report?

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Trish. I will keep it fairly short, and so, in your briefing book, you'll see an update for Protected Resources. To be honest, most of it is not an update. You had already seen that before in September. You're, obviously, aware of some of the work ongoing with sawfish and manta rays in the shrimp fishery, and so we're continuing to make progress on that for both the South Atlantic and the Gulf.

A couple of updates on fishery closures, for your awareness, and so, first, during the shutdown, I worked on some new skills, including learning how to do closure packages, and so we continued to, obviously, operate, and Mary Vara, and some of my other staff, assisted me. We did close golden tilefish longline very early on in the shutdown. Landings have continued to come in. We, I think, are at ninety-seven-and-a-half percent, and so we haven't reached that catch limit for longline.

For gag grouper, that was an interesting one, where we were actually looking at closing I believe in mid-November, and, based on landings, the rates had slowed. We ended up closing right around December 1st or 2nd, and now we have a small overage, largely driven by just some fairly significant late reporting by a couple of dealers, and so we'll have to work on an overage for next year for commercial gag.

Overall, I know you had some conversation about kind of prioritization and workload yesterday during the Coral 11/Shrimp 12 discussion. We have, obviously, come out of the shutdown, and I think that's one of the biggest impacts right now, is we had a forty-five-day essentially delay with regard to rulemaking, having to get caught up, obviously, on all of our council actions.

Between October and December, we have three fishery management council meetings for Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean, and so jamming a lot of work, obviously, into preparing and supporting, obviously, all those councils. We're going to continue to work with John and others with regard to prioritization, both on things that have been submitted to our agency as well as ongoing actions and rulemakings, but I ask that there's some patience, obviously, with that, just because of the challenges of having, you know, a month-and-a-half less time to, obviously, work on a lot of that, and so we'll continue to, obviously, share those impacts going forward.

Otherwise, we continue to remain under a hiring freeze. We do potentially have some good news, where we may be able to hire at least one of our key leadership positions going forward, and so I

see potentially some opportunities there to fill some key gaps in staffing, and then I know Clay is not here, but, in mid-January, Clay and his team are hosting the Regional Office in Miami.

We're going to have an annual planning meeting to really talk about prioritization of our science and research enterprise and work toward alignment of some of our common goals and priorities, in light of staffing reductions and resource constraints, and so I look forward to sharing more about the outcomes of that meeting going forward, but this is something that we had to put on hold last year, but typically we meet with the Science Center annually to discuss that prioritization, and so, with that, I'll take any questions.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Andy. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Andy, this is a protected resources question, but I'm just going to ask it, and then, if someone is listening, and they want to get the answer later, and my understanding is there's a proposed rollout right now to make some changes to the ESA. Sorry. It's right after lunch, and my brain is not working, but to some of the Section 7 definitions, and it's sort of reverting to like the prior Trump administration language, which changed over the Biden administration, which is going to change back to old Trump administration language, and I'm curious about if your office expects any of those changes to impact the section seven consult for the shrimp fishery, sort of if there's been any conversation about that.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think that will be a we'll get back to you on that one, but, yes, I'm generally aware of, obviously, the definition changes proposed. I'm not sure about specific impacts to the shrimp consultation. Certainly we'll make changes to the Section 7 process once those regulatory changes are made, yes.

MS. MURPHEY: Do we have any other questions? So, Andy, I've just got -- I'm sure you got briefed yesterday by Heather, but, you know, one of the priorities that was discussed during Habitat was the Section 3.4 and 3.3, but, anyway, the economic and social stuff, and the plan is to try to have a webinar towards the end of January, and, you know, one of the questions was could that --

That needs to be a priority, if you all can get that economic and social information put together, and, I mean, I think the expectation is -- I don't think it's going to make a lot of changes, as far as trends and everything, but, because we've taken so long to get to the point of finalizing that one, and that was a big -- That is probably the big priority for us, so that we can do that webinar on the end of January, and so we really need to have that data done.

I know you guys have lost, you know, economists, and coming off the shutdown and everything, but I guess I would suspect that doing that update of those data -- I wouldn't think it would be a big, cumbersome job, and so I just kind of wanted to reiterate to you what we said to Heather about that concern.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I would like to maybe have some sidebar conversations between now and Full Council, just to talk about this, but I did go back, and I talked to Heather last night when I got in, and asked for some information from our lead economists, in terms of the workload and prioritization.

We are coordinating on, you know, continuing to get that work done, but right now it's a volume or throughput challenge, right, and so everything can't be a priority. We have to make things higher priority or lower priority, and what my team has been focusing on is -- Not only with the South Atlantic Council, but the Caribbean and Gulf Council, is looking holistically at all of the amendments, all of the regulatory actions and rulemakings, that we're collectively working on, what things have timing drivers, or time critical or mandated to end overfishing, right, and rebuild overfished stocks, and move those, obviously, the top of the list, right, and so we can have conversations about then where Coral 11/Shrimp 12 falls into that.

I'm open to, obviously, having those conversations, but we then have to have conversations about what then comes down the priority list, and keep in mind we have black sea bass that was a priority for this meeting, and blueline, that was also a priority for this meeting, and we now are going to be discussing exempted fishing permits, and so there's a lot of things that are, obviously, swirling as priorities, and the capacity, obviously, to complete all that, especially with a limited economic workforce right now, is really challenging.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Andy. I just -- You know, we are looking at trying to plan something for the end of January, to go ahead and finalize that FMP, both those FMPs.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, and the one other thing I'll add to this, so we can talk more, is, even if we finalize it at the end of January, can we have it in place to influence the summer and fall fishing season for rock shrimp, and the likelihood of that happening, given how slow rulemaking is happening right now, is probably low, right?

I'm not going to say it's off the table, and so the question is do you gain anything by taking action at the end of January, versus waiting until early March to take action, because it's not going to be a benefit to the shrimp industry until the following fishing season, regardless, and so those are the things that I'm carefully looking at when making these decisions and trying to account for, obviously, everything that we're working toward, in terms of rulemaking. Thanks.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, Andy. Anybody have any other questions for Andy? All right. Thanks, and so I think we'll skip Clay at this point, and, also, as I mentioned earlier, Marcel is not here, and we're going to have his report during the Snapper Grouper Committee, and so I think up next is Steve Poland, and he is going to give the presentation on the management program review. I'm sorry, and we also have Purcie Bennett-Nicholson.

MR. POLAND: All right. It's a long, awkward walk from the back of the room. All right. Well, good afternoon, everyone. I think it's been, gosh, five years since I've sat at this table, and so it's good to be back. A lot of new faces, but a lot of familiar faces, and so I'm Steve Poland. I'm with Cynoscion Environmental Consulting. I joined with one of our project partners, Purcie Bennett-Nickerson. She's with Bennett-Nickerson Environmental Consulting, and our third partner, the third head of our triumvirate, Aaron, he couldn't be here today, but I'm sure he's out there on the internet right now listening.

All right, and so we're just going to give you a quick overview and project update on the fishery management process review, and, just to orient everyone, this is one of the suite of projects that the council has embarked on under the IRA-funded Resilient Fishery Initiative. You've received updates on these projects at previous council meetings, but this is our first time we've had a chance

to have a face-to-face with you, and so we're just going to introduce ourselves today and provide that quick project overview.

Our three-person team includes myself, Purcie, and Aaron. We are three contractors, and we were awarded the contract to perform the process review. Just a note that Aaron is serving as the principal PI on this, and so a lot of the communication that you will receive from us will come directly from Aaron at Akorn Environmental Consulting.

A little bit about us, and our team brings over fifty years of experience in fisheries management and policy, and we've all been engaged, in some form or another, over the years in fisheries management, fishery science, process and strategic planning, and environmental law, and so it's our goal to bring our combined and complementary experience to bear to provide you all with a comprehensive and clear assessment of the council's management process and provide practical, specific, and actionable recommendations to improve the efficiencies of the council's work and explore new or underutilized management processes to further your work. It sounds simple enough, right?

All right, and so the project is addressing three primary objectives. The first is identifying and resolving regulatory bottlenecks that slow processes and delay timely management action, and so, you know, what are the things that typically slow down amendment development? Are there other ways to address common fishery management issues that the council is not utilizing, and are there opportunities to streamline some of the development process to allow for more efficient council deliberations?

The next objective is to look at the council's committee structure and cross-council coordination with other councils in the regions, and so are the committees currently used by the council appropriate to cover all the responsibilities of the council? Are there overlaps and redundancies with the current committees? Is the representation appropriate to gather the needed discussion to move the actions forward, and are there opportunities to improve efficiencies with other councils and joint complementary FMPs, and is the council structured in a way to address emerging cross-council issues?

Lastly, our objective is to explore and more robust risk policy framework for the council to incorporate uncertainty with shifting stocks and changing environments, and, with this objective, we're collaborating with Sarah Gaichas. She's the contractor that the council hired to complete the ecosystem information review and strategy development project for the council, and our goal is to incorporate her findings and recommendations into our recommendations for improved council processes for considering ecosystem information in the decision-making process.

All right, and so how are we going to achieve all this? The short answer is we're going to review reams and reams of documents, because you all are really good at producing documents, and having a lot of conversations with all of you here sitting at the table, and others involved in the process, and so already we've scoured many of these documents of the council to extract the current procedures and process used to take issues from inception to council action.

We've coupled this with detailed case studies exploring the development of some key FMP amendments to construct detailed timelines of development and identify bottlenecks in the current process, and we've also inventoried all of the council's actions over the last twenty-plus years to

quantify the real-world timeline of council management. This information gives us a snapshot, or a current baseline, for the council's process to evaluate our recommendations against.

We've begun investigating and documenting other council processes as well, and we plan to compare those to the South Atlantic Council's process to document and identify actions that the council could incorporate into their management system, and so seeing what other councils do, seeing if there's any lessons learned there, or if there are any, you know, processes, or new ways of addressing, you know, similar or common fishery issues that the South Atlantic Council can adopt.

Lastly, and this is the part that we consider the most critical aspect of our data collection strategy, is a semi-structured interview and focus group approach, and so this is where we have conversations with you, and others involved in council management, to gather feedback on firsthand experiences and hear directly from you ideas that you all may have for process improvements.

This is your opportunity to provide us with candid feedback on how you see the process currently working, the frustrations you have with it, the things about it that you think are working well, and the ideas you have that could be incorporated into our management process that can improve the council's workflow and efficiency.

To date, we've already conducted ten interviews. We've done those just over the last couple weeks. We've talked to a few folks who are already sitting here at the table, and, just in those short interviews, the feedback that has been provided has already begun to improve our understanding of some of the potential solutions that can be developed for the council, and I just want to reiterate, again, the success of this project hinges on the feedback that we receive from you and all the other partners involved in council management, and we look forward to speaking to all of you over the coming months.

Just a quick note that, right before I left for lunch, Purcie and I sent out invitations to all the council members. Some of those are duplicate invitations, and so, if you have your email up, just go ahead and click on it and sign up for an interview, and don't make me have to be the, you know, disappointed dad when I have to email you again because I haven't heard from you.

All right, and so when do we expect to provide these results to the council? We're following a somewhat aggressive timeline, with the target completion date of March 2027, and so we're currently transitioning from phase one to phase two of our workplan, and we've completed initial document discovery and review, and have submitted our first draft of the council process mapping to staff and our oversight team.

Now our focus has shifted to interviews and engagement with council members and other involved parties, and, as I mentioned a moment ago, we've completed ten interviews so far, but we're targeting at least fifty to sixty interviews overall, but I do want to note here that, you know, there is no hard quota. We will have all the conversations that are needed to gather input from everyone, and so, you know, certainly, if we conduct most of those interviews, and there's still, you know, rocks to look under, and, you know, rabbit holes to go down, you know, we'll certainly do that. We're not going to limit ourselves.

All right, and, as I mentioned earlier, I've already sent everyone in this room, or at least sitting around this U-shaped table, an invite for an interview, and so, you know, I do want to just assure everyone that we plan to talk to every single council member, and so some of you have already received these invites, and we're just waiting on responses and consent, and this is an important part, consent for the meeting scheduling tool.

What you can expect when you receive an invitation, you'll receive an automated email, and it will come from Aaron, with information about the project and a link to an interview consent form, and so we understand, in this process, that confidentiality is important to all of you and that the success of this work relies on candid and honest feedback, and I just want to ensure everyone that we take this seriously and provide procedures and guarantees to protect your input and information.

We're asking that these interviews be recorded to assist us in note taking and feedback analysis, but that none of these recordings will be shared with anyone outside the team, and none of your comments will be attributed to you, unless you provide written consent.

All right and so, from that stage of the workflow, we'll transition from the interview phase to the validation and focus group and outreach phase, and this will be another opportunity for us to have face-to-face interactions with council members and others involved in the process, and so we'll take the input from the interviews and process mapping and develop potential recommendations to the council, and we will want additional feedback at this stage, just to make sure that those recommendations -- Just to make sure those recommendations are really honing-in on the issues that were identified to address and that -- You know, really that we're giving the council a product that they need, and a product that you've requested.

All right, and so, from there, we'll refine these recommendations and provide the council with a comprehensive report that also includes an implementation plan for your consideration, and I mention the implementation plan because just -- You know, my experience, from serving on the council some years ago, and just general experience with, you know, managing programs and, you know, managing staff and policies and procedures, a lot of the times ideas -- You know, they fly around everywhere, and you hear a lot of people with good ideas, and sometimes those ideas even get written down, but, really, the process that seems to break that stage of change is, you know, implementation.

We want to make sure that, when we provide a final report and final recommendations for the council, we also provide an implementation plan for the council to consider, and, if they so feel compelled, to initiate that implementation plan and make some of the changes that we identify.

All right. With that, I know that was a short overview. I certainly expect myself, Purcie, and Aaron will be here many more times presenting information and results throughout the course of this project, but I just want to say we really appreciate the support from the council for this project, and we look forward to delivering you results that you can incorporate in your process, and hopefully improve the process, not only for you, but for the stakeholders in the Southeast.

You'll see, here on this slide, it's got all of our contact information, and so just do not hesitate to reach out to us at any time with questions or, you know, if there's burning ideas. You know, if you're lying there in the middle of the night, and you wake up with a great idea that will make, you

know, red snapper management that much better, just go ahead and send us an email about it. All right. With that, thank you, and I'll take any questions.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Steve. Does anybody have any questions for Steve? Andy, you look like you're thinking about a question.

MR. POLAND: Have you got a burning idea?

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I'll just share that I had a chance to do an interview on Friday, and I really enjoyed the conversation, and I think the part I enjoyed most about it is it wasn't, to me, a scripted set of questions, and we kind of went down different rabbit holes and issues based on, you know, the comments and questions that were being asked. I certainly encourage everyone to sign up and have that conversation.

MR. POLAND: Thank you, Andy.

MS. MURPHEY: So I've already had dreams about red snapper, and so, if I wake up at three in the morning with this dream, or idea, call you?

MR. POLAND: Yes, or email me. How about that?

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. I'll FaceTime you.

MR. POLAND: You probably don't want to FaceTime me in the middle of the night.

MS. MURPHEY: Anybody have any other questions, thoughts, comments? Go ahead, Amy.

MS. DUKES: Hi, Steve. It's good to see you.

MR. POLAND: Hi, Amy. How are you?

MS. DUKES: I was listening intently, but I feel like I missed it, and so you mentioned that you've done ten initial interviews and that you were looking at like fifty to sixty others, and so, in addition to council members and folks sitting around this table, can you go into a little bit about who all those other folks are going to be, so I can make sure I didn't miss that, please?

MR. POLAND: Yes, and so we're looking for individuals that are involved in all steps of the management process with the council, and so that includes council staff, as well as agency staff, and we're looking at AP chairs, and AP members, and we've already had a couple of conversations with SSC members. Really anyone who at some point in that process, you know, has a voice or, you know, kind of sticks their finger in the pie, so to speak.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, and I apologize again if you said that, but you got to exactly where my next question was, is just to ensure that staff, who probably know more than anybody through this process, should be included, and so thank you for doing that.

MR. POLAND: Thanks, Amy.

MS. BENNETT-NICKERSON: One other group that we'll probably be talking to -- So part of this project is to try to figure out, across council management, how you guys deal with species like blueline tilefish, for example, with the Mid-Atlantic, and so a lot of my interviews will be focused at the Mid, and at the Gulf, and with folks that have sort of have experience dealing with that cross-council management, and also at the ASMFC.

MS. MURPHEY: Anything else? All right. Well, thank you very much, Steve and Purcie, for coming today, and we're looking forward to, I guess, interviews and results and reports.

MR. POLAND: Thanks, Trish. Thanks, everyone.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you. John, did you want to do the Science Center report in place of Clay?

DR. WALTER: I'm happy to let Clay do it, when he gets back. He's at another Headquarters meeting. I could do it, but, if you can find the time for Clay to do it, it's probably better for him to do it in-person.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. Then did you have a question for Steve?

DR. WALTER: No, and it was just my hand raised just to let you know that Clay was tied up. I could give it, but I think we would prefer him to be able to give it in-person. I know he would rather do that.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Well, thank you, John. We'll wait on Clay then, but thanks.

DR. WALTER: Perfect.

MS. MURPHEY: I think we've got Katherine Papacostas. Is she on? All right, Katherine.

DR. PAPACOSTAS: Yes, I'm here. Can you hear me?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, ma'am.

DR. PAPACOSTAS: Okay, great.

MS. MURPHEY: So whenever you're ready.

DR. PAPACOSTAS: Okay. All right. Well, thank you all so much for having me today. I'm sorry I couldn't be there in-person. I look forward to coming to a future meeting though, and so, for those of you that don't know me, my name is Katherine Papacostas. I work in the NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Statistics Division, and lead the Rec Statistics Program Management Branch, which is one of two branches that works on MRIP at the national level, at Headquarters.

Today I'm going to be talking about two progress updates on some major recreational fishing data collection initiatives that our office has been leading. The first is the status of a study we conducted throughout 2024 to investigate potential improvements to the Fishing Effort Survey, and the

second is a collaborative initiative to evaluate the recreational fishing data collection partnership, to identify and make further improvements, and so, as some of you may recall, we came last year and had a pretty extensive listening session with the South Atlantic Council, and so we'll kind of be report out a little bit about where we are with that, and next steps, and then I'll talk about a few other related programmatic updates.

Starting with the Fishing Effort Survey, if you can go to the next slide, and so, just to give a little bit of background on the FES, it is a self-administered mail survey of residential households that is implemented from Maine to Mississippi, and also in Hawaii. It collects trip information for each resident of a responding household for specified time periods, and it's used to estimate shore and private boat recreational fishing effort, and then that's combined with catch rate information, and that's collected through a dockside survey that's collaboratively administered with the states, and then that's used together to produce catch estimates.

As you're all likely aware, we completed a large-scale follow-up study for the FES, based on the results of previous pilot studies, to gain a clearer understanding of the differences in effort estimates between the current survey design and a revised design that changes both the question order and increases the frequency of sampling from every two months to monthly.

The goal of this was to improve response and recall accuracy and create flexibility for more frequent production of estimates, which has been expressed as a high priority across the Atlantic and Gulf, in particular, the South Atlantic and Gulf.

We did this study in response to concerns from the recreational fishing community and partners that our shore and private boat fishing effort estimates may be too high, and it was also kind of in alignment with our -- We're always looking to do research, and figure out better ways to collect information, and so this was kind of a commitment to our continuous improvement process for getting the best data that we can.

What was specifically tested in 2024, we had an experimental design revising the FES that overlapped with the current FES design, and that ran from January to December of 2024. It was administered Maine to Mississippi, and in Hawaii, and so all of the states that the FES is conducted, and so it was essentially a one-year benchmarking study, and the key differences were increasing the frequency of the administration of the survey, and so it was mailed monthly, instead of every two months, and we revised the fishing activity questions, and that was intended to improve reporting accuracy, based on findings from a prior pilot study that we released in 2023.

The experimental design also had a split reference period, and so the current FES has a two month activity fishing, fishing activity question, and, in the revised experimental design that was separated into two individual one-month questions, and so that -- Administering that monthly, and then having individual one-month questions each month, gave us two independent samples for each month, and so we were able to use those to come -- To use composite estimation, and so combining those two independent samples for each reference month, and that's done to improve precision and stability of the estimates.

Those are kind of the key changes to the revised experimental design that we tested in 2024, and, since it's sometimes easier to see something rather than be told what it is, I wanted to show a side-by-side comparison of the FES questionnaire to the experimental questionnaire. These are the

main fishing activity questions, and you'll see the FES, the current design, asks about two months of fishing activity in one question, and then the next question asks about twelve months, and, in the experimental questionnaire, we flip that, and so we ask about twelve months first, and then we break up that two-month question into two individual questions.

That split reference period there here in the slide, with asking one question about January and one about February, and then, the next mailing, it would ask about February and March, and so we would have that, you know, overlap in those -- Basically two independent samples for February in that example, and so that's just to try to explain, you know, how the composite estimation works there.

I wanted to show -- I have a couple results slides that I'm going to show you all. This first one is just the overall results, from all states and all waves, and then the next one I'm going to show you is by wave, and then the following one will be by state, and so this is just the overall results here. On the Y-axis, we have the ratio of the experimental FES estimates to the current FES design, and, on the X-axis, we have private boat on the left, and shore mode on the right, and so, for anyone who, you know, wasn't sure how to interpret this graph, and so, basically, a ratio of under one means the experimental estimates are lower than the current FES estimates.

You can see, on average overall, the estimates are coming down a little bit with the revised design. That effect is a bit more pronounced for private boat than shore mode, but, on average, all the -- You know, on average, the estimates are going to be lower with the revised design.

That said, we did see some seasonal differences in the results, and so differences between the experimental and FES estimates are more pronounced during periods of lower fishing activity, versus during periods of higher fishing activity, and this pattern is consistent with what we observed in cognitive interviews, where fishermen wanted to be identified as fishermen, and, actually, you know, in some instances, expressed frustration when asked about periods where they didn't fish, because they wanted to tell us about when they did fish.

If you think about that kind of cognitive mechanism, during times of the year when there's not a lot of fishing activity, and if identifying yourself as an angler is important to you, you would be more likely to overreport your fishing trips during times where you didn't fish, and, in the busy season, when people are actually fishing, it's more likely that they're going to accurately report their trips and still feel like an angler, and so it kind of supports our hypothesis that the FES respondents are overreporting, but less so in the high activity months, because they're already fishing, and so less likely to overreport.

Then putting that twelve-month activity question first seems to mitigate that overreporting error, by providing an opportunity for respondents to identify as anglers without biasing the primary survey measure, and then resulting in lower estimates, on average.

The next slide shows just a state-by-state -- The results across all waves, but by state, and you can see there is some variability. I've highlighted the South Atlantic states here, just so you can kind of see compared to the other states, and compared to each other, but there are some state-by-state -- There's some variability by state.

There's different reasons for this, you know, one being the prevalence of shore fishing versus private boat fishing can vary from state to state, and so the change in questionnaire can lead to different results, depending on the state-specific fishing patterns, and then the main differences that drove the differences between the experimental design results and the current FES results were the percent of households that reported fishing during the reference period, and so it wasn't necessarily the trips per household, but the number -- The percent of households that were reporting trips during a particular reference period.

Just to kind of recap some key findings, our experimental estimates of fishing effort were generally lower than the current FES estimates. The differences were more pronounced in private boat mode, and also in low activity waves, and then the primary driver of those differences was revised question order. It seems to be creating a beneficial bounding effect to mitigate overreporting, and it allows respondents to identify as anglers without biasing those primary trip count questions.

The study also demonstrated the feasibility of monthly sampling and the benefits of composite estimation. I didn't show this in the slides here, but, comparing precision instability of the experimental estimates that used the composite estimation, versus the current FES estimates, there was an improvement there, and so, yes, the revised design we tested in 2024 seems to address a primary source of measurement error in the current FES design, which removing error ultimately improves accuracy of the estimates.

As far as our plans for 2026, we are planning to shift to using the revised design for the FES starting in January, and so next month. The rationale for that is where we found, you know, that there's more accurate reporting, and so the reduction in reporting error, via allowing respondents to identify themselves as anglers, without affecting answers about the primary reference months, and then also reducing telescoping, and so where anglers just might misremember and report trips outside of the intended timeframe.

We had some relative consistency in the results with the 2023 pilot study, showing lower effort estimates on average. We also did, in the lead-up to the 2024 study, some rounds of cognitive interviewing, and we got feedback from anglers during that period who communicated that the revised questionnaire, asking the two one-month questions rather than one two-month question, they felt more confident in answering those separate questions, to be able to think more critically about when they did fish, and so that was another kind of anecdotal feedback, you know, small sample size feedback, but useful and informative for our planning purposes as well.

Then, given there are systematic differences between the revised estimates and the current FES estimates, we have been working on developing a calibration model. We hosted a peer review workshop at the end of September, right before the shutdown. The model builds on what was used for the 2018 calibration, and so we just received some of the individual peer review reports from that peer review workshop we held in September, and so we're reviewing that, and going to be working to do that this next year, work on implementing the calibration.

Then, as far as monthly estimate production, and so a goal of shifting to this revised design was to give us the ability to produce monthly estimates. That was our original goal, but, for the near term, we plan to maintain our bimonthly publication schedule, based on our current resource levels, but implementing this new design does give us that flexibility, because we're mailing it out monthly,

the survey, and so we are analyzing resource requirements, to see what we can do to support a shift to monthly estimate production.

Many of these milestones are now in the past, but we -- You know, we have the study report ready from the benchmarking study. The peer review of the revised design has been completed. We've received those Center for Independent Expert individual review reports, and they were favorable overall.

We had the calibration peer review workshop at the end of September, and we just days ago received those peer review reports, and so we haven't gotten a chance to evaluate those yet. We've been developing a transition plan with partners in the Atlantic, Gulf, and Hawaii, you know, all the partners in the regions that use the FES data, to try to -- Just get organized before we do this transition, and so that's almost ready, and then we plan to kind of roll out all of this information once it receives, you know, agency approval.

We plan to roll it out sometime in January, as a kind of a big package, and so we'll make sure to communicate with everybody and make sure everyone has that information. We'll plan to implement the revised designs in January, and so we're on track for doing that, thankfully, and, with the calibrated time series, our original plan was to make that available in spring of 2026, and we're reevaluating that timeline, in light of the shutdown and some staffing changes, and so that timeline is under review, and, as soon as we are able to give you a more detailed update on what the new timeline will be, we'll make sure to tell everyone, and communicate that out as soon as we can, and so that's all for the FES.

Then, transitioning gears just a little bit to the partnership re-envisioning, about a year ago, or a little over a year ago, our previous NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator directed MRIP to collaboratively begin to reevaluate the long-term partnership vision for recreational fishing data collection, and, essentially, this move was in recognition that, while the current data collection system has its strengths, it also has challenges that can vary region to region, and we felt the best way to address those was through increased transparency and collaboration.

We put a lot of work into this effort, for the past year or year-and-a-half, which has culminated into a framework report that we're ready to roll out, which reflects all of the extensive input we received from all the councils, commissions, states, and also from the fishing community directly.

These are the top five priorities nationally, and also from the South Atlantic region specifically, as identified by partners, data users, and members of the public, and so the top five nationally were improving catch and effort data, biological data, figuring out how to use non-probability data and data available through new technologies, ensuring consistent warehousing and shared standards, and developing adaptive management frameworks.

I'll note that this last one is outside the scope of rec data collection, but, given that the partnership consistently highlighted it nationally, it really underscores that management approaches have to improve alongside the data, and that's going to require, you know, pretty highly interdisciplinary collaborative work to accomplish that, and so that was, you know, an interesting finding of this.

So, specific to the South Atlantic, related to Priority 1, the South Atlantic partners communicated that, you know, increasing timeliness to inform in-season monitoring and management, and

comprehensive and cohesive for-hire reporting for the region was a sub-priority within that Priority Number 1. Considering simplifications to the dockside questionnaire, looking at how to get information from private docks, and then also obtaining better discard data.

Not included in this list, but also highlighted by the southern Atlantic states, they flagged, for particular importance, the need to improve characterization of depredation, to help quantify the extent of the issue and identify potential fisheries where depredation may be contributing to excess mortality, because, you know, beginning to quantify it is the first step in figuring out how to manage it.

The NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species team has been developing a proposal to add catch disposition codes, identifying depredated catch to the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey on the Atlantic coast. They've been working through a ACCSP's Rec Tech Committee, and we're hoping to be able to add -- Ultimately add those questions, or that information -- Be able to collect that information through APAIS, which will be exciting to be able to get that information.

Another final thing from the South Atlantic that was highlighted by our state partners was survey sampler recruitment and retention, and just the need for recruiting and retaining highly-skilled, you know, dockside interviewers, and so that was kind of a big thing from our state partners.

The original vision for our -- Just to give you an update on the status of the partnership re-envisioning efforts, and so, originally, we had planned to launch regional workgroups and shared leadership and have in-person workshops, all aimed at updating our partnership model, but we've had staff losses, contract interruptions, and it took -- There was some delays in our funding that we were able to provide to states and regional partners for base, you know, data collection support, and so that plan just wasn't feasible this year, unfortunately.

We ended up pivoting and being -- You know, pivoting towards a more focused you know, more focused national and regional improvements, using this framework report as our guide, and so what we plan to do -- We have the framework report is ready. It's just we're waiting to roll it out, which we hope to do within the next month or so, and we'll be working with partners on implementing targeted improvements, and there are some that we've kind of already begun to make as we've gone along, and so that's been good.

Then I've just got a couple more slides, and so the first one is the peer review of the recreational fishing survey and data standards. This is kind of related to the re-envisioning, and so we -- As you all may know, we established national survey and data standards back in 2020, and they were intended to serve as guidelines on core aspects of fisheries data collection and estimation, to promote consistency, comparability, and quality across different data collection programs, and so, like no matter who is collecting the data, whether it's a federal data collection system, a state, or a regional partner, it's all kind of adhering to the same set of shared standards.

Over this past year, we've commissioned an independent review from the National Academies to review and make recommendations about our standards, and we're excited about their findings, and what they'll say, because we've also asked them for potential guidance related to things like artificial intelligence, or modeling approaches, integration of non-probability data, you know, app-based data, that sort of thing, and so, that report from them, it's going to be -- We're going to receive

that around March, and then we'll of course, you know, share those findings and work with partners to figure out how best to implement those recommendations.

Then, finally, one last update related to the re-envisioning and improving, you know, the estimate quality. We have started and, as of 2024, initiated a new set of review procedures for our catch estimates, and we did this in collaboration with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, ACCSP, and all of the Atlantic states.

The new process leverages the local expertise of state partners in reviewing estimates to help improve the quality of the data used for fisheries management. It's been going really -- The states have been really engaged. They flagged -- I think, last year, there was over a hundred estimates that the state -- That ultimately led to statistical adjustments and did -- You know, quality control that the states did, and so, you know, there's more of a sense of ownership there from the states on the data, and the data review, which has been really good.

Then we have a tool that we're working on, that we hope to have operational within the next year or two, and it's going to take a little time to finish it, but the goal is to have an online data review tracking tool that can help increase transparency, and efficiency, so that you won't just be able to see estimates in the query tool, and you can also kind of dig into how they were reviewed, and what was found, and so, just, you know, increased transparency there, and make it a little bit less of a black box, the estimates, and so, yes, that process kind of aligns with several of the re-envisioning priorities, and it's been going well so far, and so that's all I have, and so thanks for your attention . If there's time, I'll be happy to take any questions you might have.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, Katherine. Do we have questions for Katherine? I've got John coming up to the table.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and, Katherine, thank you for that. That was really helpful. If you could go back to slide 16, and I guess it's more of a comment for the council than a question necessarily, but with the asterisked information about developing adaptive management frameworks that account for data being beyond this, and I agree with that, and it's certainly not a criticism of where this is going, and the progress that the program is making, but I think we at the council have struggled with the quality of much of the recreational estimates for a long time, decades, you know, and concerned about the reliability of the numbers, particularly in the discards, and particularly in the snapper grouper fishery, because they're rare event occurrences, to use the language of the program.

It seems that we have not been successful in being able to have a management approach that can actually evolve to reflect the data. I would say I've been, since being on the SSC, over twenty-five years, and this has been a problem that we've talked about all that time, that, you know, we just don't have a management system that aligns with the quality of the data we have for the bulk of our fisheries, and it's really unfortunate.

It comes from the highest levels in Magnuson, I think, because the vision was laid out that was built upon areas without recreational fisheries, with really good data collection, and expecting a bit of accountability without multispecies fisheries, and, when it applied it to us, we've been struggling since day one.

I'm hoping, maybe as part of the efforts of the agency to tell us, as councils, that we need to do more with less, that we need to have a different way of doing business, that something like this is something perhaps we take up to the agency and say, okay, how do we do this, because what we've generally experienced is that, once data gets determined to be BSIA, that's it, and you use it, you know.

MRIP was determined to be the BSIA program, and so the estimates come out, and, well, they're used in assessment, and we say they're BSIA, but we know, a lot of the times, they're only called BSIA because they are just the A. They're the only thing that's available. There's nothing else that is separate from the MRIP attempt to estimate discards and stuff, and that's really a challenge, and so I appreciate you pointing this out. I just want to thank you for that, because I think that's a huge problem, and, to me, it really underscores much of what we've been grappling with around here for many, many years and are going to continue to.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, John. Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Something that I was going to bring up is it just seems, in the past, that MRIP can't really adequately handle pulse fisheries, and so fisheries with really short seasons, and I listened, in your presentation, where you talked about how that you would, you know, like to get to a monthly system, which I think is great.

I think it would be, you know, welcomed, and needed, but still there might be some pulse fisheries, like Gulf gag, that's two weeks, and I know we're monitoring that with State Reef Fish Survey, but, some of those fisheries that are pulse fisheries, it really seems that MRIP doesn't really perform well for those, and so I didn't know, when you all were going through this process, if you all really talked about that, thought about that, and thought about, if the season for a particular fishery is less than a month, kind of if there were changes that you guys were going to make that would try to better capture those pulse fisheries.

MS. MURPHEY: Go ahead, Katherine.

DR. PAPAKOSTAS: Yes, and I don't have a good answer to that question about -- It's something that that, yes, that's a big challenge for us, being able to -- Being able to collect -- Being a general program and trying to collect, you know, as much data as possible for all the federally-managed species, and state-managed species, but then also having it be, you know, one data collection system that can serve all uses has been, has been -- Yes, and it's been a really big challenge. I think what we were trying to do with this transition is try to get -- Try to have more timely estimates, but, yes, I don't think we have a solution, at this stage, to being able to support those really just couple-day seasons fisheries, at least with our current resourcing.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Katherine. Any -- Bob Beal.

MR. BEAL: Great. Thank you, Madam Chair. Katherine, thanks for the presentation. It was great, really helpful, and I'm probably going to state the obvious here, but the FES work, and the need for that recalibrated data, is, you know, of utmost importance to the commission and the councils along the east coast.

I think, you know, I get it. You guys are coming off of six weeks of a shutdown, and your staff resources are not what they used to be, and, you know, I'm not sure how we overcome that, but, you know, as the program is considering priorities moving forward, I think getting that recalibrated FES data out as soon as possible would be wonderful.

I know it's under -- Your slide has it under active review, and so it's -- You're working on a new timeline, but, you know, I can speak most intelligently about the commission, and we have a number of stock assessments, and other pending management decisions, that are waiting for that FES information, and the recalibrated, you know, data, and so anything you can do, with the resources you have, to speed that up, and stay as close to that original timeline, I think it would be really helpful for, again, all three councils and the commission along the coast. It's a big project, and I understand that, but it's a really important slug of data that, you know, managers need, and the assessment folks need, to move forward, and so thanks for considering that.

DR. PAPAKOSTAS: Thanks, Bob, and it would be great -- We don't have to talk about it right this second, but, yes, it would be great to get a good understanding of the different partners, kind of pressing timelines on your end, so that we can kind of better evaluate our timelines, and internal resources, to be able to kind of expedite this work.

At this stage, it's -- I can definitively say it's not going to be spring 2026, but how far away from that it will be is still to be determined, but we're working within the agency. It's, of course, a huge priority for a lot of -- We support five council regions, and the commissions, and so it is a huge priority, and we want to, you know, get it done as expeditiously as we can.

MS. MURPHEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and, Bob, I appreciate your question, and, Katherine, I also appreciate your response, and I really appreciate the fact that we have the ability now to have that communication about those more priority species coming down the pipes that may require that FES calibration number sooner than later, and we understand that you guys are working really hard.

I also, while we're looking at slide 16, appreciate the fact that the report will be published in March that is going to provide those recommendations for improvements specific to those non-probability app-based data collections and management. As we know, we had our Citizen Science Committee this morning, and that falls right in line with that, and so we're really looking forward to seeing those recommendations in that report in March, but I have another question.

It basically goes back to the support for the one-month wave estimates, and, to kind of piggyback on that, as you're aware, several states have, and will be expanding, sampling intercepts in Wave 1, and that FES expansion to doing a survey during those months is being discussed, but has not been implemented. That kind of rolls back to the re-envisioning initiative, and can you provide any thoughts, or perspective, on the feasibility of adding FES survey distribution in Wave 1 for those states that are conducting the dockside interviews, and how that's going to fit into your current workload?

DR. PAPAKOSTAS: Yes, and so we have been discussing this with ACCSP and the states. We, in 2026, without adding additional funding -- You know, in the absence of additional funding for

FES in Wave 1, with the revised design, we are going to have partial data for Wave 1 from the multiple mailings of the FES that we're doing with the monthly administration.

We will -- We have talked with ACCSP, and the states, about, at least in 2026, putting -- You know, being able to produce what we'll call, you know, experimental FES Wave 1 estimates, with at least partial data, because of the -- As a result of the new design, and then we're going to look into what resources we have to put towards full Wave 1 sampling of FES, likely in 2027, but that that will be to be determined, with funding levels and being able to kind of reallocate resources to that, because, yes, we are really supportive of Wave 1 sampling. It's just figuring out how to get there with our resourcing levels, but we're hoping we can figure it out by 2027.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Katherine. I appreciate that.

MS. MURPHEY: I have Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Katherine, for this presentation. I have a quick comment. I just, first of all, I want to thank Jessica for her question there, and I just want to reiterate the importance for us being able to get better mechanisms to estimate pulse fisheries going forward. This is an issue that's facing not just federally-managed species, but our state-managed species as well, which we have many fisheries that are going to seasons that are not even fully corresponding with a full MRIP wave, and so it's been a big challenge for us on all levels of fisheries.

The question I have is I'm going to look at these, the estimate ratios when we look at the South Atlantic member states, and slide -- Just so I know I understand this data correctly, and my understanding is, when we look at those two estimates, that the shore-based estimates seem closer to FES, versus the private boat, which seemed to be more considerably underestimated, and am I understanding that correctly?

DR. PAPAKOSTAS: Yes, and so the current FES estimates -- Yes, the shore-based estimates for the revised design are a little bit closer to the current FES. They're -- In this graph, you know, it looks maybe about 10 percent, around 10 percent, lower. The private boat estimates are in the, you know, 20 to 25 percent lower, on average, and so they're -- On average, all of the estimates are, on average, lower, but, yes, the effect is more pronounced with private boat estimates.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Fantastic. Thank you for explaining that. I guess I was just a little bit surprised by that, only because we've had a lot of issues with the shore-based estimates from some of our species here, and I was -- I was just a little bit surprised to see them that close to FES. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Tom. Any other questions for --

DR. PAPACOSTAS: Can I -- If you move forward to slide 9 too, because this is -- This slide that we're looking at was the overall results, and so slide 9 breaks it down to the South Atlantic, so that you can kind of -- You have the slides as well, and so you can kind of see that here, and so you see that there's some variation, but, generally the South Atlantic has, yes, the lower estimates overall, and probably the most consistent of all the regions, it looks like, as well. Sorry, and I didn't mean to interrupt.

MS. MURPHEY: Oh no, and thanks, Katherine, for pointing that out as well. I appreciate that. Any other questions for Katherine? I am seeing none. Thank you so much, Katherine, for presenting all this to us and updating us on the effort survey, and we're looking forward to seeing the calibrations, and making use of them, and so we'll --

DR. PAPAKOSTAS: You're welcome. Thanks, everybody.

MS. MURPHEY: So we are ahead of schedule. Do we want to see if -- Do you all want to take a break? Okay. Do you all want to just go ahead and take, I don't know, a fifteen-minute break? Okay. We'll take a fifteen-minute break.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MURPHEY: All right, everybody. Let's get back started. We've just got a few more things. All right, everybody. Thanks for coming back. I think we've got Clay here now, and we'll get Clay to go through the Science Center update, and so we'll turn it over to Clay.

DR. PORCH: Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry for not being able to do it on the council's schedule, but I had a few things that I had to do with NOAA leadership that I couldn't miss, and so I'll start out with, first of all, thanking the council for your support of our Beaufort facility and the letter that you sent.

Just to let you know, all the contracts were awarded before the end of FY25. The shutdown did delay some progress, and the vendors are still developing some timelines, but we're pretty confident that temporary modular spaces will be installed this summer, in place of the building that they're demolishing, and I can relay that our operations in Beaufort are continuing with minimal programmatic impacts, thanks to a variety of mitigation impacts that we've put in place.

With respect to the furlough, we've been assessing the impacts of that forty-three-day federal government shutdown, and we're evaluating the options to fulfill our commitment to providing necessary data and stock assessments for you all. On the positive side, the video, trap, and SADL, South Atlantic Deepwater Longline, surveys were not affected by the furlough. Most of our fishery data collection and otolith reading for the South Atlantic are still on schedule. It's not quite true for the Gulf, but, for the South Atlantic, we're pretty much there.

The biggest issue is likely stock assessment leads, and, unfortunately, as you may already have heard, we recently lost our senior stock assessment scientist, Dr. Kyle Shertzer, to cancer, and as many of you have heard Kyle before making presentations before the council, he was definitely one of our top stock assessment scientists, and a good friend to many of us, and we're really all still reeling from his loss. It was just, you know, a month ago. He left an immense legacy in support of this council, and nationally, through a lot of scientific contributions, and so we will miss him very much, and it is a hole that's not going to be easy to fill, which brings me to our plans for 2026.

We have three South Atlantic assessments on our plate, in addition to the assessments in support of the other councils. One of them is continuing support for the red snapper stock assessment. We were scheduled to begin work for a gag stock assessment, and then to conduct an updated black sea bass assessment.

It's not clear that we can complete all of these on schedule, and we've been working with council staff to identify some alternatives. One, for example, is to potentially postpone the gag stock assessment and focus instead on prioritizing and completing the red snapper and black sea bass assessments, and Kyle was intimately involved in red snapper and black sea bass, and so we would shift some people around to make sure we got that covered.

I would also mention that, although there was a delay in the review, the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program product that will be incorporated into SEDAR 90 is scheduled for CIE review January 13 through 16 in Charleston, and this review will likely inform whether the project schedule needs to be further adjusted. The draft report is already available on the Sea Grant, South Carolina Sea Grant, webpage, and they do a great job outlining the process by which this information is going to be incorporated into the assessment.

The Greater Amberjack Count review is scheduled for March 24 to 27, and the South Atlantic assessment, which hopefully will incorporate some of the things we've learned from that study, is scheduled for mid-2028.

The dolphin MSE project is on track for the council, and we're hoping that they can consider final action in fall 2026 for a management procedure to be adopted by the council. There's going to be kind of a final sprint to the end, which will require some repeated scheduling between the council, the SSC, and the panel, as well as the CIE review, and so that's making good progress.

Something that's not specifically a South Atlantic assessment, but I think of interest to a lot of people here, is the sandbar shark stock assessment. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the data workshop, because of insufficient time to complete data provision going into the shutdown, and so that's likely to be rescheduled for April. Then the Atlantic States Atlantic cobia assessment, the Atlantic States requested an additional year of data to be included through 2026, and so we will extend the timeline there to April 2027.

I would also point out that the staffing shortage is expected to impact the 2027 assessment schedule. NOAA has expressed support to fill some stock assessment vacancies, but we're really unclear on when that hiring will actually be allowed to occur, and, therefore, how the assessment schedule could be impacted. Keep in mind that it takes a little time to train new people up, in terms of how to conduct our stock assessments, with the types of data streams that we have.

The South Atlantic branch was already shorthanded, due to the hiring freeze and some previous losses, and now, with the loss of Kyle, we're actually down to three analysts to support Atlantic States and the South Atlantic, and so one of the things we're looking into, and no promises yet, is discussing the possibility of cross-training assessment staff from other branches that were less hard hit, but we also lost almost our entire shark team and ICCAT stock assessment scientists too, and so big, big losses in the stock assessment lead realm.

As you've just heard, there will also be some delay in finalizing the FES statistics, which will affect when we can revise the stock assessments for key species with that data, and so the plan, moving forward, is to work with all of the respective councils on the most practical course of action, develop our strategies for discussion at the upcoming SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, and, in that respect, it's important that the South Atlantic Council have an opportunity to work with

their staff and give input on the relative priorities of assessments currently scheduled for 2026 and 2027, and which ones might be most suitable for postponement, if necessary, and that concludes my report for the Southeast Center.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Clay, and, on behalf of the council, I just want to extend our condolences for the loss of Kyle. I had met him a couple of times. He was very sweet, and incredibly smart, and I know the scientific community right there in the Southeast, as well as in my county, are reeling from his loss, and so condolences to his family, and to his NOAA family.

DR. PORCH: Thank you for that.

MS. MURPHEY: So does anybody have any questions for Clay? All right, Clay. I think you got off easy today. All right. Well, thank you, Clay. What do we have next? We have Kevin McIntosh. He'll be presenting the Southeast Region Permitting System. Kevin, are you online?

MR. MCINTOSH: I am online. Can you guys hear me?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, sir.

MR. MCINTOSH: All right. Perfect. First off, I want to thank the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for this opportunity to provide this update on the Southeast Region Permitting System, and so here's a brief history of the permitting system, also known as the Permit Information Management System, or by the acronym PIMS.

PIMS was developed and launched in 2007. In 2015, we added the ability to renew our first set of specific vessel permits online, a small subset of our for-hire vessel permits. In 2021, we reimagined and redesigned the PIMS frontend and backend on a completely different software application solution called Appian, and, in January and February of this year, we plan to launch PIMS 2.0, with additional features that I'll discuss later on in the presentation.

Some of the successes of the PIMS modernization, instead of only being able to renew that small subset of permits I talked about, we've moved all of the existing vessel permits online. It allows them to also renew their dealer permits, wreckfish permits, aquaculture live rock permits, and operator permits all online, while also allowing them the ability to submit new permit requests for open access permits, and to submit permit transfers online as well.

The system itself was built to help reduce application deficiencies. Since you can't issue permits with application deficiencies, applications that are free, or have a reduced rate, of deficiencies allows the Permits Office the ability to issue permits at a faster pace, and so, since 2012, the permitting backlog has never exceeded more than two and three days and more than 100 applications waiting to be processed.

Just a note, we did, obviously, with the shutdown, being shut down for forty-three days, that application backlog, because we were not allowed to process applications and permits, ballooned to about 500 applications in the backlog, with about forty-three days, obviously, lead time. We were able to dig out of that backlog once the Permits Office was back open, to -- After nine days, we actually dug out of the 500 applications, and we were back to kind of normal operations. That's incredible for the team to do that, because, the last long shutdown in 2018 and 2019, there was a

600 application backlog, and that took us about six weeks to dig out of that, and so we are back to kind of processing near real time.

One of the biggest changes too with the system itself were the application deficiencies getting emailed versus mailed, and that's a game changer for us. I tell the story of, you know, we used to mail out paper deficiency letters to our constituents, sending out with regular mail, first class mail, and, depending on where they were from the St. Pete office, it could take anywhere from seven to ten days to get there.

They would get the letter from us, read what they were missing, send it back to us, which was another seven to ten days, and so it would be a two week to twenty-day, you know, lead time getting that information back to us. We're hoping they, you know, at that point gave us the information that we needed, and, if not, then we have to send another deficiency letter, and that process would basically start all over again.

In the new system, we've actually had folks have an email deficiency sent to them, and then resolve their deficiency within ten minutes, and so that's really one of the biggest reasons why we've been able to kind of keep our applications low, is just the efficiency of the system itself.

Another game changer was how we handle our open access permits, and so we are able to digitally transmit or issue these permits, and they're immediately available in the user's account to download and use, and so, again, the same idea with folks that have their open access permits being mailed to them. In the old way, we would mail it, and it would take seven to ten days for them to get there. It could be lost in the mail. This way, there's no chance of losing the permits, and, in the event there is a permit that's damaged or lost while out to sea, then they could go back into their account and download a new permit.

The future of PIMS, and what we expect in this next iteration of PIMS 2.0, and so permit data available in real time, and so one of the areas we received the most feedback from our new system launched in 2021 was our Freedom of Information Act page, or our FOIA page. The new FOIA page that we have right now, it's a CSV file that we essentially dump all of our permit holder information, that was once on the webpage, in a CSV on our public page, and so we're going to move away from the CSV, file and back to something that's integrated into Appian called Portals, and, essentially, that's just a real-time webpage that gets updated when a permit is issued or transferred. It immediately shows that new and updated status on the FOIA page.

This page will also have the ability to search, and so, if a permit holder or somebody is interested in finding a specific vessel, or dealer, they can also sort and filter by fishery type, or expiration dates, and there's going to be a lot more functionality available with this new iteration of PIMS.

There's also going to be additional online account control, and so, right now, we generate an auto-generated renewal application for every one of our permit holders two months prior to their permits expiring. The announcement, or the emails, will still go out to the permit holders, but we are no longer generating those auto-generated renewal applications, because we found they're causing more issue.

While it's supposed to be convenient, those folks that didn't want to renew their permits, or they intended to transfer those permits, then would have extra applications in their account, and, for our

permit holders that have multiple vessels, this could equal dozens and dozens of just unused applications, and so we're changing it to the permit holder then can go in, and they can request their renewal application get generated, instead of having it auto-generated.

This also prevents any accidental locking of a permit, and so, if you were to start a renewal on a permit, and then intend to transfer it, at that point, because that permit was on a renewal request, it gets locked, and essentially you have to call the Permits Office to get it fixed, and so having that, having the ability for the users to control that, should allow for additional account control for them.

Enhanced validation, there will be additional checks within the system itself to reduce application deficiencies, and, also, one of the big drivers of this project was the backend design, and so the challenges with the current design, as it sits right now, stemmed from how the data was stored in our database, which limited the ability to use data for programs analysis and council purposes, and so there was a new structure to it.

The new design is going to revert back to the old structure that we're familiar with. It's the old structure that we have queries for, that we can utilize, that we've used in the past for council purposes, and so going back to that design will allow us to reuse those queries and, once again, pull data for analysis and council purposes, and that should be it. Any questions?

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Kevin. I've got Kerry with a question.

MS. MURPHEY: Hi, Kevin. It's Kerry Marhefka. That was a great presentation, and I can say that I just think your shop has been doing a very good job, from like the fishermen perspective, and so thank you.

One of the questions I had, when you're talking about the -- I want to make sure I understand the auto-generated permit applications, and that that won't necessarily be happening in the same way it was, and will you still -- When you go to renew your permit, will it auto-fill still like a lot of the basic information, your boat, your boat length, the tonnage, like all of that information that doesn't change, and is that still auto-filled out, and then you just have to go in and put in new information?

MR. MCINTOSH: So it will be, and I understand your question, yes, and so the process -- It's only the process of generating the renewal application that's changing, and so, right now, we auto-generate the renewal application when you're up for renewal, which essentially copies over all the information from last year, from the last application you submitted, all the permits, all the documents, everything. That's the old way.

The new way is we're not generating that renewal application. The permit holder is. They're going to go in, and the system is going to say you have a renewal, a vessel that's up for renewal, and do you want to create the renewal application yourself, and you hit yes, and then it generates the renewal application just like the old way, with all the information already filled in.

MS. MARHEFKA: Got it, and so it's not blank, and then you have to -- Okay. I think I understand. Thank you.

MR. MCINTOSH: Correct.

MS. MARHEFKA: It just saves time, for some of us who fill it out on behalf of our less-technologically-advanced better halves, from having to go remember like horsepower and gross tonnage and stuff like that, and so I'm glad that stayed the same. Thank you.

MR. MCINTOSH: Yes. Sure.

MS. MURPHEY: Any other questions? I've got Amy.

MS. DUKES: Hi, Kevin. Amy Dukes with South Carolina DNR. I really appreciate the presentation, and extremely look forward to PIMS 2.0 coming out early in 2026. Just from a data management perspective, from a state individual, just remind me, I guess, or I guess ease my mind, that conversations are being had with ACCSP, in order to upload all of this information into perhaps the data warehouse, versus having state agencies having to go to that website and scrub data down and be able to utilize that, so that we can cross-reference and match federally-permitted vessels to state-managed vessels.

MR. MCINTOSH: Yes, I believe it is, and, if Jessica Stephen is on, she may be part of those conversations as well, but one of the other highlights too, that I didn't mention here, is we brought the database back to the Southeast Region, so we have control, more control, over it than we did before, and so, if partners want access to that data, want to connect to that database to pull data, then we have we have more freedom locally at our region to be able to provide that to you guys.

MS. DUKES: Thanks Kevin, and a follow-up question, Madam Chair. I think that will be a great way, and we can reach out after the first of the year, and maybe make those connections with database administrators and what have you at my end, but, just out of curiosity, I really appreciate the fact that you guys have done the effort to add the CSV files over time, and, yes, I understand that those, in essence, are a snapshot of time of permits at that particular day for that particular file, but, in essence, they are going to be close to perhaps the total number of permits that are really out there now, or at least not very far off from what we're going to see when 2.0 rolls out.

MR. MCINTOSH: Yes, and they should be -- If you remember the old FOIA pages, which list all of our permits individually, that had permit counts in the bottom of it, and had the ability even to sort and filter, they're going to be more -- It's going to be more back to that.

The CSV file is going away, and this webpage, which is going to be even more interactive than the previous one, is going to be available, and so, if you want to sort by fishery count, or fishery type, like let's say SG 1, and you're going to be able to sort by that, and, at the very bottom, it's going to show the number of valid and renewable SG 1 permits that are currently available, and so it never showed terminated ones, just valid and renewable.

I always put out the caveat though that our counts are usually that's so fluid that you can have a terminated permit that was -- An application was received prior to terminating, and we're still working it up, and so it may not show on the site as a valid or renewable permit, because it did terminate, but, because the application was received prior to the termination, and we issued that permit, it then shows back up on that page again, and so there's always a couple of counts off, because we have that happening quite a bit throughout the year, but, overall, the counts will be much cleaner and easier to see for each one of those fisheries.

MS. DUKES: Cool beans. Thanks.

MR. MCINTOSH: Sure.

MS. MURPHEY: Anybody got any other questions? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hi, Kevin. Jimmy Hull. Good job dealing with the Permits Office. I would describe it as pretty much easy-breezy these days, and usually it's a seven to ten-day turnaround on renewals for us. Transfers are quick, you know, once you receive the original assigned permit, and so it's looking pretty good. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: I've got Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Kevin, Dewey Hemilright here. I've got a hypothetical question. Suppose you're a snapper grouper, single SG 1 permit holder, and you die, and you want to pass it on to your -- Or put it in your daughter's name, and what is the process that has to happen for that?

MR. MCINTOSH: So definitely reach out to the Permits Office first. Every single one of our cases that involve the death of a permit holder -- I know SG 1 is even more interesting, for the limitations of the two-for-one on there, but we run it through our General Counsel, and so reach out to the Permits Office. You can reach out to -- You can ask for me.

I handle a lot of those cases still myself, and, depending on the circumstances -- Each one is unique and different. We definitely try to work with the permit holder, and certainly with GC, to try to get that transfer. Now, if it's SG 1, and it's going to a family member, we know that you're able to do that, and so most likely, in your case, in your scenario, the hypothetical, we would be able to move it to the daughter.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and then she would be able to sell it, if we're successful in doing away with the two-for-one permit or something like that, correct, something like, you know, into the future?

MR. MCINTOSH: Yes, and she could still even sell it once it's in her name, while the two-for-one provision is still going on, right? She could sell it as an individual permit, if someone is looking for that second permit, and so yes.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: All right. I appreciate it. Thank you.

MR. MCINTOSH: Sure.

MS. MURPHEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: It's a hard act to follow after Dewey's question, and so I just wanted to first thank the council members for their compliments. There's been a lot of work that's gone into this system over the years, and I think we're bearing the fruits of all that hard work, based on your experiences with the system, and certainly, as you interact with the system, if there's further suggestions, improvements, things that you see that could benefit it, certainly pass those along.

A lot of what Kevin spoke to, obviously, was just reducing errors in the application process, and expediting the applications, and so the frontend has worked seamlessly for quite some time, and we continue to make refinements and improvements.

As you're well aware, the backend is where we've asked for your patience, and we are, obviously, very excited in anticipating the PIMS 2.0 rollout, because that's what has hung us up, and where we've had some challenges with some of the council amendments and actions, and you heard Kevin, in terms of what we've done to get that data in a format that we can use, and pull data, and more easily analyze it. We do expect a few hiccups, but I am excited, obviously, that we're moving forward to use that data.

Originally, before the shutdown, we were targeting a release prior to the holidays. We just think it's advantageous now to hold off and wait until January to roll this out, but we will give an update in March, and let you know how it's going, and hopefully we'll be back on track with being able to easily pull data and provide information for amendments and other council actions going forward after that release, and thank you.

One last thing. Kevin, I wanted to thank him directly for his presentation, but one of the things he emphasized was how quickly we were able to recover from the backlog after the shutdown. What he didn't say is that we did that also with two less permit processors, and Kevin doing double duty as our Permits Branch Chief and Assistant Regional Administrator for Operations, and so it's showing you how efficient this system actually is in helping us to process permits. We're actually gaining efficiency with less staff along the way, so thank you to Kevin and his team.

MR. MCINTOSH: Sure. Thank you, Andy, for noting that. I appreciate it.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Andy, and I've got Dewey with one more.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, and my experience is, if all my stuff is done, and my logbooks filled out and everything else, about fifteen minutes, and I can have my permits renewed, and it is really good, and I'm getting less calls from fishermen also, and so I'm always happy with that. Thank you all, and thank you, also, Kevin.

MR. MCINTOSH: Thank you, Dewey, for that. I'll pass it along. I appreciate that.

MS. MURPHEY: Any other questions? All right. Well, thank you, Kevin, and thank you for your hard work in getting this up and running. Appreciate it.

MR. MCINTOSH: Not a problem. Thank you, all. Take care.

MS. MURPHEY: You too, and so we have Jessica Stephen up, or stepping up next, on the one-stop reporting. Jessica, are you online?

DR. STEPHEN: I am online, and then, just for the presentation, I do have a video that plays in it, and so it probably needs to play in PowerPoint.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. Hang on just a sec. All right, Jessica. We're ready.

DR. STEPHEN: All right. Great. You can go ahead and advance to the next slide, and so we are asked to give an update on where we are on a lot of the various work that we've been doing that's looking to streamline the data reporting through the agency across the entire east coast, and so, today, I'm going to concentrate on the East Coast Logbook System.

This was an IRA-funded project. Our original vision of the system would be to eliminate all these different databases that are held within each different region, because a lot of our fishermen cross over those regions, and move it to a single database system that's sitting in the cloud, and create a reporting application that can supply the information needed for each of the different regions.

Within those reporting programs that we considered in our initial vision was all of GARFO's eVTRs, or electronic vessel trip reports, the Southeast Commercial Fisheries Logbook, which you know is an amendment that we have to move the reporting to electronic, Atlantic HMS's Pelagic Logbook, the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, and then the SEFHIER Program, and the goal of this vision, and this project, was that we would reduce duplicative reporting across the different federal regions. We would reduce costs overall to the agency. We would be able to share our resources, and align data collection programs better, and able to access the data that we needed to share between regions.

Currently, I want to give you an update of where we are in this rather complicated project. One thing I want to note is that we have federal staff that's participating from GARFO, SERO, Southeast Science Center, and HMS. GARFO in particular is providing a lot of the technical support for this project, because a lot of this is largely based on one of their systems that we thought could be easily modified to accommodate the needs of this project.

Down below, you see kind of progress bars on where we are on each different aspect. I'm not going to go into a lot of detail on there. What I will say is that, so far within this project, we have reporting applications that are being built for both receiving trip reports or logbooks, as well as no-fishing reports that are required down in the Southeast. Of that application, we're about 85 percent towards completion. We're also working on the database, but that design is not yet standardized to where we're ready to receive reports from it.

This project also plays into the permit vessel registry project that we're working on. That is also proceeding along very nicely. What I want to point your attention to is we have hit a hurdle in what we call authentication and authorization aspect of the program, and I'll get into that in later slides.

Okay, and so this is a video and so, if you hover over that, you should be able to play the video, and I'll talk while it's playing. This is an example we got from some of our developers that were working with the application about how an application would work within this system, and, as you can see, we have a lot of clear lines, and easy ways in which to enter information, and we're collecting a variety of information that may be needed, depending on which fishery you're reporting to and what the programs are for it.

This was actually built on what we call the RADFish framework design. That was another funded project that we had that was able to allow us to rapidly build applications that meet NOAA's IT security requirements, as well as our branding and our 508 compliance requirements, and so a lot

of time is often spent in the initial building of an application, and this RADFish project helps to save us from that.

This demo was given to the team working on it, just to get a feel for it, and so I apologize that it moves through kind of fast, but what I wanted you to get a feel for is how information could be entered and how someone might move around within the system.

This demo here does have the Southeast coastal demographic information that we were looking for within there, as well as the Southeast coastal economic information, for those that will be selected to supply that economic information, and so, as we move forward with this, we'll also be looking at ways in which to speed up data entry within it, and so you can see, in some places, that you have drop-down lists, or areas where you see information that was previously put in, and we'll continue to work and refine the applications as we're talking with the fishermen and working through these. The system also allows you to see all the trips you reported and move through there, and so that was the quick demo of it. You can go ahead and move on to the next screen.

So what have been our challenges, and how has that changed the scope of the project, and this is a really important question. One thing to keep in mind is that we had significant funding delays with the IRA funding for the project. This was originally built as a three-year project, with where we had to spend the money in the time given to us. Because it was given rather late in the year, we only had about 1.5 years, and so we reduced our entire project scope by 1.5 years.

We also lost some critical positions. We had federal staff that we lost due to the government reductions, which affected our ability to move forward, and then the furlough also did impact us. We were in the middle of getting contractors to have security clearance, and so that's getting back spun-up again, but that did delay, by at least forty-five days, if not more, how long it was until we got some contractors on. Also, during those forty-five days, that was scheduled for us to go over the different reporting requirements for each of the different fisheries, and so we were delayed in doing that.

The other big challenge is what I mentioned earlier, is that the agency is required to do what's called multifactor authentication, and so this was an executive order, and the way we typically authenticate will no longer be viable, and so, in order to release any new system, we need to accommodate this mandate.

How are we handling the kind of challenges that we've seen? One way we decided to handle it is that we're going to reduce the number of initial programs that we're putting into this system, and so, before, we had five listed, and we're going to drop out the two for-hire-type programs from it. I want to caution you that that does not mean they're gone for good. We're just not going to put them into our initial application and release of the program.

The three programs we will be including are the Southeast Coastal Logbooks, GARFO's eVTRs, and the HMS Pelagic Logbook, with the caveat that we're not including the weigh-out slips. That's something that's still in development, and we would like to release everything before we get to the end of that development.

One thing this does do is allows us to really concentrate on the functionality of not only the application, but the database system, and then how managers would access data, and so, by looking

at that functionality, we believe it will make it easier to add in the other programs as we move into a phase two of the program.

One of the other things we did do was formalize what we call data governance, and so, if you think about the fact that we all used to manage our individual systems, and now you have multiple people from multiple regions, we need to have a set of rules, and so you want to make sure someone is not editing a record that was already edited, or not in forming people of that. We want to make sure that any changes to the overall database system have agreement from all the partners.

We've gone a fair bit into formalizing the data governance, and we think that this application of how we're doing the data governance might be applicable to other projects that might span across regions in the future, and, of course, as I mentioned earlier, our biggest hurdle right now is this increased authentication scope.

As I mentioned before, the agency is required to move from what we call single-factor to multifactor authentication, and these are terms that kind of get thrown around without clarity. If you want to think about authentication, it's proving you are you, and that authorization says, because you are you, you are allowed to do this, and so let's just take a simple concept of you're going to an ATM machine. You're going to put in your ATM card, and you're going to enter your PIN. That's a single-factor authentication proving that you are the person who should be holding that PIN.

Once you do that, and the PIN is accepted, then comes the authorization, and what are you allowed to do now that you've entered that system, and so, if you were attempting to withdraw money, you would only be allowed to withdraw money that was contained within the account, and not in excess of the account, and so this is how the idea of authentication and authorization work together.

Currently, all NOAA Fisheries systems are what we call single-factor or simple authentication, and so they either use a username and a password or a username and a PIN. Multifactor authentication requires that you have something you know, something you have, and something you are, and, again, this is an overall government mandate. It's not only for fisheries that is moving towards it.

One of the challenges that we're moving to is we'll probably using login.gov. That is also the same system that you would use to authenticate and authorize you to access say your Social Security or the IRS system, and so keep in mind some of that.

While we're going through it, all of our systems will need to be modified to work through login.gov. In particular, the Southeast is going to have some challenges, because we have a lot of people submitting data that are not the permit holder, and we're going to have to work through that hurdle, and challenge, to figure out how we get them into our system, so we can authenticate them, and then what are the processes that we would use to authorize them.

For example, if you have a hired captain who is submitting your logbook, we need to have that authentication and authorization, but the permit holder may not want them to see other logbooks that were entered for that same permit holder, and so those are different hurdles that we're working with. On a good note, GARFO already has operator cards, and so they have a concept that we

might be able to piggyback off of. We'll just need to figure out how that works in the Southeast in particular.

So what is the future vision of a concept of a program like this, where we're sharing the database and the resources? One of the things that we've run into as we've been building this project is that electronic reporting requirements have not necessarily be standardized across the different fishery programs, and what that can do is, if we standardize, we could reduce data collection gaps, and we can reduce some uncertainty, and allow for this cross-region submission without jumping over numerous different hurdles to get there.

We also noticed that we have varied reporting requirements that hinder the general concept of one-stop reporting, and so, if you think of it, we have some fisheries that report on a gear level, some on a set level, and some on a trip level.

While overall the system has to be built for the trip, having that different gear and set level, and knowing when you have to apply that, and when you don't, are one of the challenges in building an application and database system. Another example we ran into is that oftentimes logbooks will have depth listed as a field, but it's not clear whether that's fishing depth, average depth, bottom depth. All of those are very different, or can be very different, depending on your fishery, and so we're working together across the regions to think about how we standardize this. This is an area where, if the councils also work together and think about the needs, it would help us as we're moving towards that.

Kind of a final statement here is that the East Coast Logbook system structure needs to think about current logbook reporting as well as future logbook reporting, so that we can get to the one-stop reporting aspects, and, as we get more updates, I'll probably be giving you some information, and more demos, as we move along, and I believe that's my last slide, and if you can just go to the next one.

Before we go into questions, I kind of wanted to thank the other project leads within this, and so we have Torey Adler at GARFO, Dave Glockner from the Science Center, and Jackie Wilson from HMS. We've also worked with numerous different collaborators, not just within these offices, but across these offices, such as ACCSP and GulfFIN, as well as other Headquarters offices, such as the Office of Science and Technology and the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, and, at this point, I'm happy to take any questions.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. Thank you, Jessica. I have Dewey.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Well, I'm kind of glad we're maybe finally getting there one day with one-stop shopping. Can you go back to where you -- Well, in your video, it was showing where you had to fill in a state trip ticket on your video, and, to date, I've never received, when my boat unloads -- It's not given to me, a state trip ticket number, and so the dealer does that, enters it in there.

I'm curious about is that going to -- Would that be stopping me from filling out my logbook, or my e-trip ticket, or my vessel trip ticket, and being able to give a number to the dealer, and something else is the economic parts, and it could be ten days to two weeks before I'm given the economics

back to me, and so how am I going to fill out my e-logbook as I'm coming to the dock to hand my dealer my logbook number?

DR. STEPHEN: Yes, and so I can start to try and answer some of these questions, and so, as I mentioned, we're still working through the requirements for each of the different fisheries, and so what you saw was sort of a -- It mashed together some different requirements of different fisheries over time.

I'm going to concentrate on the economic portion, and so one of the reasons why the authentication, or authorization, is so important is that you might be filling out most of your logbook at one point in time, and then filling out additional portions of it later, and so we would need a way to make sure that the right person is entering that information and has the authority to enter that information, and so I'll definitely bring back both of these points to the team as a whole. As I mentioned, we didn't get where all the FTEs were in talking about the different requirements, and so we're still working through the requirements for each of the different systems.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I have another question. I possess both GARFO permits and snapper grouper permits in the South Atlantic, and, because of a requirement from GARFO permits, if I go fishing in the South Atlantic, and I catch a blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic jurisdiction, and land in North Carolina, in the South Atlantic, and I have to send another logbook to the GARFO region, just to satisfy my ownership of that permit.

I have found it to be just useless of the reason why I have to do that, more so than just the fact that they have -- If you possess this permit, you have to do this. I've never watched it be used in a stock assessment, and never watched it be used in management, and I'm wondering if -- That might could help you all save some more money, so you don't have to worry about that part, and so is -- Are you familiar with that, about having -- Be landing fish -- Fishing in the South Atlantic, landing fish in the South Atlantic, but, because you possess a GARFO permit, you have to also report to the GARFO region?

DR. STEPHEN: Yes, and I am familiar with this, and so, a lot of times, what we have with each of our permits is that as a requirement of the permit is why you have to do reporting, and so you have a permit, and we ask for any fishing anywhere. The whole point of this project, and what we're building, is that it's all going to go into one database, and so then that one report will be accessible by both GARFO and SERO, and you're able to see that and satisfy that requirement through this shared singular system, and so that question that you asked was the driving reason we were looking towards a system like this.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Well, I was hoping to get rid of that regulation, but it's useless. I understand you've got your one-stop shopping here, but that's a regulation, and maybe that's for another day, which it probably is, but, I mean, you should -- The folks involved should be looking at how to minimize stuff, and save money, and it shows no futility for their project, but that's beside the point, and so I'll be looking forward to the draft, when this gets closer, and being able to see how it works in my world, and thank you for your presentation.

DR. STEPHEN: Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Hi, Jessica. Amy Dukes, from SC DNR. I have a clarifying question, please, and so, on slide 2, you specifically talk about the east coast region, and the following reporting programs, and you say Southeast Commercial Fisheries Logbook, but, then on page 6, it refers back to the Southeast Coastal Logbook, and so is the Southeast Commercial Fisheries Logbook and the Southeast Coastal Logbook in essence the same thing, or am I missing something?

DR. STEPHEN: No, and they are the same thing. My apologies for that. I put this together really rapidly, right after the furlough.

MS. DUKED: Okay. Thanks, and is there a current timeline from you all's office for when that Southeast Commercial Fisheries Logbook, the electronic logbook, is going to be 100 percent live?

DR. STEPHEN: So I do not have that at the time. There's a couple things that are in play. One is the permits system, and one is also the rulemaking, and the process that takes, but it is on our list of things that we're continuously working on and moving towards implementation.

MS. DUKES: Okay. Thanks. Is there going to be -- I'm sorry, Madam Chair. Can I ask a series of questions? Thank you. Is there going to be some potential outreach to TIP samplers, or state samplers? Oftentimes, we get a lot of questions on the docks, and I was just wondering if there's going to be a state component from an outreach component from you guys in the future?

DR. STEPHEN: So I'm not directly involved in this, because this is somewhat the Science Center, but I am definitely inherently involved in the outreach, just because of our experience with our IFQ programs and the SEFHIER, and so outreach is going to be considered before the release of this. I appreciate you pointing out in particular the TIP and port samplers also need to have that information.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, and then I just want to make sure that so, for right now, you said the headboat survey and the SEFHIER program is going to not necessarily be a priority, but will come back around. Again, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it, but I think the bigger question for me was this idea of the multifactor authentication, and so is there a deadline for this effort to be implemented, because I think I'm trying to probably go about four steps down the road and think about how that might impact state agencies that are assisting with data collections through other platforms that may need to be thinking about this deadline, and that way I can get staff on it sooner than later.

DR. STEPHEN: Yes, and that's a really good question, and so the multifactor authentication is a huge hurdle. I think there was originally a past deadline that the agency did not meet. For agency staff doing it, we've already had to meet that deadline, and we've explained that there are challenges when we're looking to our fishermen for multifactor authentication.

I know, from running quite a few electronic reporting programs, what those challenges are, and so we're trying to make everyone aware of this, so that we can have the timeline actually to do it right, and so not only is there how do you build it into the system, but how do you also make the fishermen aware of it?

I know, for example, a lot of times, people might share their passwords, even though we advise not to do that, and so we want to make sure that people are aware of what this means when we move to it, what access that is, and then how do we do the outreach to show them by having the data secure is beneficial to them. Even though it might seem more of a hurdle, you do not want to have that information not submitted securely.

MS. DUKES: Yes, babe, and we're speaking the same language, and so I think, where we can collaborate more in those outreach techniques, the better off we'll be able to be to distribute this information appropriately to our fishermen.

DR. STEPHEN: Yes. Absolutely. I've been already kind of turning away in my head how I want to handle it for each of the different fisheries, what kind of communication, and most likely we will need some in-person work with them to really explain it. Particularly, we have segments of the fishery populations that are not as technically inclined as those that are, and one of the things I want to make clear is, if you use login.gov, if that's what the agency goes with finally, which we think we're going to go with, what that means for all the other things, and that is not, you know, a username and password of any sort that you want to give to someone else, because it opens up the rest of your interactions with the government to that person.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Jessica. I appreciate it.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Jessica. I think we have a hand online. Go ahead, David.

DR. GLOECKNER: Well, I think Jessica covered most of it. I was just going to respond to the timeline. You know, I think it's difficult for us at this point, without having gone through the whole process of re-scoping, to lay out a timeline, but I think what we were thinking is we may have something available for folks to voluntarily try out the new system, or the new application, at some point in late winter or early spring.

Jessica wasn't at the meeting today for the East Coast Logbook, but it did sound like we may have an application that we can make available to our agency testers next week, and so that was good news, as long as our contractors make it through their processing and onboarding and can get their CACs in place, then we should be able to do something next week to make that available, so we can test it out before we make it available for fishermen to test out, and so we're moving in that direction. It's just, after the closure, after being shut down for a month-and-a-half, and after losing so many staff, it is difficult to estimate how those will impact that timeline. Thanks.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, David. Any other questions? All right. Seeing none, thank you so much, Jessica.

DR. STEPHEN: Great. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: I think we are at the end of this meeting. Is there any Other Business anybody needs to bring up? Okay. Well, I will adjourn Full Council 1, but everybody hang out for a minute, because we're ahead of schedule, and we'll see if there might be something we can do, and so hang -- Just hang.

All right, guys. I think we're going to try to knock a couple of easy things out. We'll probably still get done early, but, you know, this will buy us a little bit more time if we need it on a different day, and so we're going to start out first with the Law Enforcement AP topic discussion, and then we'll move into the early pieces of red snapper, and so I'll go ahead and --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Snapper Grouper.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm sorry. Not Red Snapper. I'm sorry. Snapper grouper. Sorry. I had another nightmare last night, you know, and so, anyway, okay, and so we'll go ahead and turn it to Myra, and we'll talk about law enforcement topics.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Trish. Okay, so this is an attachment in the Full Council Session II, and it's a very short list of draft topics for the meeting of the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel, which has been scheduled for January 20th and 21st in Charleston, and so, depending on where we land on Reg 37 at this meeting, I put it on the list to potentially receive input from the Law Enforcement AP.

However, they already received that amendment. They received the public hearing presentation, the public hearing draft of the document, and they were requested to provide their feedback, and we did hear back from several members of the Law Enforcement AP, and so we have already obtained some feedback on black sea bass.

Amendment 60 is the commercial measures that the Commercial Subcommittee talked about on Monday, and so, whatever there is in there to obtain input from the AP, we would bring to them. Snapper Grouper amendment 61, the revision of the FMU, that one is at the scoping -- Like a little bit after the scoping stage. You're going to be looking at scoping comments at this meeting, and so there may be some questions for law enforcement on that amendment.

There's also Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, yellowtail and mutton, that potentially could be brought before the AP, although I'm not quite sure. That's, you know, kind of not a lot of regulations there. It's mainly catch levels and jurisdictional allocations, and then, well, Snapper Grouper Amendment 62 would be the numbered amendment that could potentially include the transition to state management of recreational red snapper. We haven't talked about that at all. I've simply assigned a number to that amendment, and, again, depending on where you guys end up at this meeting, there could be some topics for the AP coming out of those conversations.

The second big bullet there is the conversation you guys had in September pertaining to how the sale, how it connects to the end of a trip and, what that means as far as how it's being enforced. Recall that we talked about this being an issue in snapper grouper, but maybe not in some of the other FMPs. In the regulations, that same language applies to dolphin wahoo, and I believe mackerel, and so I put it on there to see if you guys wanted your Law Enforcement AP to provide feedback on that.

Sunsetting of SMZs, here there will be, by January, a kind of an evaluation tool, and I'm looking to Chip over there, that would come before the AP to look at enforcement and compliance of those spawning special management zones.

Another topic I put in there for your consideration is the headboat vessel limits and how, you know, any input that Law Enforcement would have for you as you potentially move forward with that, those discussions, which will come back around, I believe, in March, and then, you know, the AP would provide and receive various updates, including JEA priorities, an update on -- To not just inform them of the shrimp Bi-Op update, but also give you guys feedback on how that could be prioritized, and so that's what I have for you, and so please let me know what you would like to add or strike out of this list.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Myra. Does anybody -- How does everybody feel about this list? Anybody want to add anything? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I'll suggest eliminating the Amendment 44. I don't think there's really anything that they would provide with regard to catch levels or allocations at this point. For Snapper Grouper Amendment 62, I would say that's premature, but I think this meeting might overlap during the open public comment period for the exempted fishing permits, and so I would suggest instead that maybe they provide input on the red snapper EFPs.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Andy. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm sitting here looking at the sunset of SMZs, the evaluation tool enforcement compliance, and I understand LE definitely needs that, but, when they come to the council, is there a way they could give us a cost of maintaining these, or a cost of enforcing these, and patrolling them, so, when we're trying to figure out, okay, we may get X amount of spawning in there, but it is costing us X amount of effort to maintain them, and is there a way to do that? I'm just asking.

MS. BROUWER: I want to say that sounds complicated. I'm not sure. I would think that that kind of information is not something that the advisors would be able to provide, and that, you know, we could look into obtaining that through different -- Through a different approach, and not necessarily through the advisory panel.

MS. MURPHEY: I see Chip came up, and so I'll let Chip speak.

DR. COLLIER: In past evaluations, we did have values that were developed for monitoring some of these, but it does get complicated, as Myra said, but I would rely on Matt to really provide whether or not they can give direct estimates on how much a trip out there costs.

MS. MURPHEY: Go ahead, Matt.

MR. WALIA: Thank you. I would just say, some of those specifics, they are hard to get into. That's more internal. It's not really the council purview of how many patrol hours and costs, but we can definitely -- We have our priorities, and can we access that SMZs, and, you know, are we able to -- Do we have resources to get out there, and we can definitely get into details of that. I was actually supposed to present at one of those working group meetings with Chip, but that occurred during the shutdown, and we weren't -- But that was the plan, was to kind of give a summary, just not to that detail, but we definitely can give some specifics.

MS. MURPHEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, and I'm not talking about anything detailed. I'm just trying to think, if we decide there's value in keeping these, what's it costing us, so we can decide if there's a tradeoff or not. That's just kind of looking big picture, and so thank you very much.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Charlie. I think Myra is capturing -- Is that going to work, what Myra is writing, for you? All right. Great, Charlie. Anything else? I'll let Myra finish. Are we good, Myra? Everybody good with this list? I see heads shaking, yes. All right. Thank you very much, and so we'll go ahead and adjourn Council I, and I will turn it over to Jessica to start the Snapper Grouper Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 9, 2025.)

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Certified By: _____ Date: _____

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Amanda Thomas
January 20, 2026

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✓ Gary	Borland		
✓ Amy	Dukes		SC DNR Marine Resources Division
✓ Judy	Helmey		
✓ Francis (Dewey)	Hemilright		
✓ James	Hull	Jr.	
✓ Kerry	Marhefka		
✓ Tom	Pease		Seventh Coast Guard District
✓ Charlie	Phillips		
✓ Tom	Roller		
Robert	Spottswood	Jr.	
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Deirdre	Warner-Kramer		Office of Marine Conservation OES / OMC
TBD	TBD		U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Representative

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Kristin Foss

Kathy Knowlton

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Steve Poland

Dr. Clay Poreh

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Attendee Report: December 2025 Council Meeting

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Newman	Thomas
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