

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

LAW ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY PANEL

**Drury Plaza Hotel North Charleston
North Charleston, South Carolina**

January 20-21, 2026

Transcript

Law Enforcement Advisory Panel

Neil (Scott) Pearce, Chair

Michael Paul Thomas, Vice Chair

Robert Beaton

Joshua Burton

Tracy Dunn

Kevin Roberson

Alana Harrison

Chris Hodge

Benjamin Boots

Garlnad Yopp

Bob Zales II

Council Members

Dr. Carolyn Belcher

Tom Roller

Dewey Hemilright

Amy Dukes

Judy Helmey

Tish Murphey

Council Staff

Myra Brouwer

Allie Iberle

Christina Curtis

Nicholas Smillie

Julia Byrd

Dr. Judd Curtis

Kelly Klasnick

Dr. Mike Schmidtke

Ashley Oliver

Dr. Chip Collier

John Hadley

Rachael Silvas

Meg Withers

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Drury Plaza Hotel North Charleston, North Charleston, South Carolina on January 20, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Captain Scott Pearce.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I want to welcome everybody here to Charleston, South Carolina, for our annual Law Enforcement Advisory Panel meeting. This is the first we've had in person in a while, and so it's good to see everybody, everybody that could make it.

I think, Rob, Rob Beaton, you're our newest member, correct, and Bob Zales. I'm sorry, and so we have our new members, which everybody will get a chance to introduce themselves. We have Bob Zales and Rob Beaton that have come onboard since our last in-person meeting, and so welcome. Welcome to the team. Welcome to the panel. What we'll do is we'll start out with just doing introductions around the room. I'm going to start online, and so if I'm going to start with Benjamin Boots, if you can go ahead and give us a little background on yourself.

MS. BROUWER: Ben, you're unmuted, and so if you can unmute yourself on your end.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right. So we'll come back to you. Ben is one of our NOAA officers out of Florida, and I've known Ben for quite a few years, and so we'll go back to you, if you can get back online. How about Kevin Roberson?

MR. BOOTS: This is Ben. I'm unmuted now.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay. Ben, welcome. Ben, why don't you go ahead and give us a little background.

MR. BOOTS: I'm Ben Boots. I'm the Assistant Special Agent in Charge for NOAA OLE's South Atlantic and Caribbean region, basically from North Carolina down to Key West, Florida, and I also cover Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands for all of our special agents or criminal investigators. Prior to this, I also was a special agent and enforcement officer, and, as Scott said, I also used to work for Florida Fish and Wildlife, as an officer there, and I'm also right now acting as the Deputy Special Agent in Charge for all of the Southeast, since Manny Antonaras took a promotion. That's about it, unless anybody has anything or questions for me.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thanks, Ben. I appreciate it. Kevin Roberson, are you there? Okay. How about Jamal Ingram? I think, Michael Paul Thomas, you're not there are you, Michael? He's not going to make it. All right, and so that's the folks we had online, and so I'll go ahead and introduce myself to everybody that doesn't know me. My name is Scott Pearce. I'm with the Florida Fish and Wildlife. I've been with Florida Fish and Wildlife for a little over twenty-seven years, and I've been involved with this panel for probably about since 2017, and so it's been a good run. I'll go ahead and hand it over to Chris.

CAPTAIN HODGE: Chris Hodge, and I'm Region Supervisor, Game Warden Captain from Georgia. I supervise the coastal region from Savannah over to the middle part of the state. I've been with DNR in Georgia now for almost twenty-five years.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Chris. We'll go work our way around the room. Garland, go ahead.

CAPTAIN YOPP: Garland Yopp, Captain with North Carolina Marine Patrol. I've been with them since 2003, and so kind of with you all guys.

MR. ZALES: Bob Zales, II. I'm currently the Executive Director for Southeastern Fisheries Association. In my former life of fifty-eight years, I was in the charter and commercial fishing business, and represented -- So some of the guys around here know me, and I represented the charter fleet on various organizations and whatnot, and so I retired from that and then took this job.

MR. DUNN: Tracy Dunn. I started off my career as a NOAA Corps officer, and got into the NOAA Office of Enforcement, where I spent thirty years, ending as Assistant Director in Charge of the Southeast Division, and now happily retired.

CAPTAIN BEATON: Speaking of happily retired, Rob Beaton. I did thirty-three years law enforcement with FWC, and, for several years, I was the captain doing the fisheries rulemaking with our Marine Fisheries Division, that Scott is doing now, and so I'm familiar with the process, and I'm happy to be here.

MS. HARRISON: Hello. I'm Alana Harrison, from North Carolina, and I have a retail seafood market, and so I represent commercial wholesale and retail. Thank you.

MS. BROUWER: Hi, everybody. I'm Myra Brouwer. I'm staff for the South Atlantic Council. I've been the staff responsible for facilitating, or helping, the Law Enforcement AP since like 2010, and so I've been doing this a little while, but, anyway, I'm happy that we got you guys together in person, finally.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right. Good deal. I got up this morning, like a lot of people, and -- Josh Burton, would you like to introduce yourself to us?

MR. BURTON: Hello. Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and we got you.

MR. BURTON: Hi. Joshua Burton, and I represent the Charleston, South Carolina, and I represent commercial and recreational fishermen. I'm a merchant marine. I spend a lot of time on the water. I wanted to go professional fisher, and I couldn't do that, and so the next best thing was getting paid to dock ships and sell ships here in Charleston Harbor and sailing as a merchant marine, and so, anyway, it's a pleasure to be here today.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you for being here, Josh. Have we got anybody else online that popped up? Okay. All right. So, as I was saying, like a lot of us here, a lot of people traveled a long way today. I got up at four o'clock this morning, and so, if I sound a little off, it's because I didn't get much sleep last night, and so bear with me, but so we'll go ahead and move forward.

If I have no objections from the group, I would like to go ahead and approve the February minutes, February 2025 minutes, the AP's last meeting. Any objections? All right, and so the minutes are approved. Do we have any public comment at this time?

MS. BROUWER: We have a public comment form that goes live when the briefing book is posted, and so there's online comments that are sometimes submitted, but, also, I wanted to bring up to your attention that there was a letter that was submitted this afternoon by Haley Stephens, and that was emailed to council members, and to you all, if you haven't had the chance to read it, but I believe somebody has their hand up, and that's Haley.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Go ahead, Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Hi. Can you guys hear me?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: We can hear you.

MS. STEPHENS: All right. Perfect. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for the time today. My name is Haley Stephens. I run a federally-permitted Coast-Guard-inspected headboat out of Ponce Inlet, Florida. We've been in operation since 1977, and I wanted to just quickly touch on a topic for tomorrow's agenda, I believe Attachment 5, vessel limits for headboats.

We really appreciate the council continuing to keep vessel limits for headboats in the conversation. I know that vessel limits are not something we use a lot of on the recreational side, but the current two grouper per vessel rule, these past few years, has really hit us tough. According to the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, there's only about sixty-two headboats left from the Florida Keys up to the Outer Banks. We're already a small, very visible and highly accountable fleet.

The two-fish vessel limit makes sense for a six-pack charter, but, when we applied that same rule to a headboat carrying forty, fifty, or more paying passengers, it really hasn't scaled. It's ended up hitting our subsector, if you will, a lot harder than the rest.

What we're talking about, potentially, is a more proportional approach, perhaps a vessel limit tied to the number of paying passengers onboard, like two fish for every six paying passengers, with a reasonable cap of six, eight, ten, whatever makes sense in the science world, and this would only apply to federally-permitted Coast-Guard-inspected COI headboats.

From an enforcement standpoint, headboats are honestly one of the cleaner sectors to manage. We already have mandatory reporting, which includes the number of fish harvested as well as the number of paying passengers, regular onboard observer coverage, dockside sampling and intercepts from our NOAA port agents, after almost every trip, and they do a really good job, and we're also legally required to carry a daily passenger manifest. If law enforcement were to board, or inspect us, LE could simply look at the manifest, or count the people, and then count the fish, and so it's pretty straightforward.

As Myra mentioned, I sent in a letter with a few more details and rationale, but I just want to finish up by saying we really appreciate the LE AP being asked to weigh-in on enforceability. Thank you again for the work that you do, for your dedication to our South Atlantic fisheries, and for continuing to listen.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Haley. I appreciate the comments. Have we got anybody else online? At this point, we'll open the floor for Carolyn Belcher. Feel free to make your comments. Thank you for being here.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you. This is my first meeting as the chair for the LE group, following behind distinguished people such as Mel Bell and Spud Woodward in previous years. I appreciate all the feedback we are going to get from you all today, specifically a lot of the redo that we're working on relative to snapper grouper. You'll notice a lot of that is -- Pretty much your agenda is a lot tied to snapper grouper.

We're working really hard to try to figure out a good way to help optimize that fishery, and so feedback from you guys is really going to be important for us as to ideas that are going to be valid and enforceable, and so just bear with me. If there's things that come up, and you have questions, I'll do my best to answer those for you, and, meanwhile, I'll just be taking notes from the committee. I appreciate your time.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Well, feel free to chime-in and let us know if you think we're missing something. I mean, we need all the information we can get, and so thank you for being here. Myra, at this point, I'll turn it over to you, and we'll get started with our presentations.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so the first thing I have for you is an update. As we've said, the Law Enforcement AP hasn't met in some time. My recollection is, last year, you had like one topic on your agenda that the council really needed help with, and that was an amendment they were working on to improve the reporting requirements for for-hire.

What I would like to do is kind of walk you through this summary document that you have in your briefing book. It's kind of the Cliff Notes version of the one the council receives at every meeting. Basically, you know, it gives you a very quick summary of each amendment, and where it is at in its timeline, and so feel free to always refer to this. We call it the active amendments document, and it's in every council briefing book, but this one I prepared for you, to just sort of bring you up to speed on where the council is with the various items.

The first one is the commercial logbook amendment. This is one that we submitted -- I'm sorry. Apparently the webinar was paused, and so I apologize to those online. I hope everybody is seeing what I'm talking about now.

The joint commercial logbook amendment is one that was done jointly with the Gulf Fishery Management Council, and the intent was to bring -- Kind of modernize the way that we collect the information on the commercial fisheries, and the logbook, and so it was submitted back last year. It's going to be almost a year, and so I hear there's been some movement in that amendment, and so we're eagerly awaiting implementation of that one.

The next one is Amendment 55. This is a snapper grouper amendment. This one was a response to the stock assessment that was done for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. They're now kind of combined into their own complex, and so the council needed to establish catch limits and all the other -- Catch level, and sector allocations, and the various things they have to do, and that one was also submitted to the agency a little over a year ago. Again, I believe the rulemaking process is at the proposed rule stage, and so we're awaiting a final rule on that amendment.

Wreckfish, Amendment 48, this one was also put in place to modernize the system, to get rid of those paper coupons that I believe some of you may be familiar with. It took a long time to develop, because it ended up having a whole bunch of actions, and that one has also been in the rulemaking pipeline. Of course, all of these amendments, recall that there was, you know, the government shutdown that happened this fall. It kind of put a monkey wrench in some of the timelines for these.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 36 is another one that was submitted, and this one pertains to gag and black grouper, and this is one that, you know, Haley was involved in providing public comment. This one kind of rectified a regulation that was put in, and it was to do an aggregate limit for gag and black grouper, and also to revise the transit requirements that were in place for commercial black sea bass pot gear, and, those vessels that are now using on demand retrieval systems, there needed to be some transit provisions put in place for that, and that one was submitted in March of last year, and so that should also be coming online hopefully pretty soon. Any questions so far? Those are the things that have already been submitted, and so now we're going to go into what the council is currently working on, but any questions on the other ones?

Okay, and so, moving on Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 37, this one pertains to black sea bass. This one is going to reduce the catch levels for black sea bass, and this is in response to the stock being quite depleted in our region, and so I've put in here sort of a summary of what's being proposed.

This amendment will be submitted in the next few weeks. The council finished it at their meeting in December, and so we're looking at a pretty sizable reduction in catch. There's going to be -- Instead of annual catch limits, the sectors are going to be held to an annual catch target, and that's what you see on your screen, so it's quite a reduction.

The allocations will still be the same. The accountability measures will now be tied to those annual catch targets, the ACTs. There will be a spawning season closure for both sectors each year, from February 1 through March 31, and the amendment also proposes a reduction in the recreational bag limit from seven fish to three per person per day, and so, like I said, this will go to NMFS in the next few weeks, and hopefully implementation will happen later this year. Any questions on that one?

Okay. The next one, that has been gathering a little bit of attention as of late, is Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12. This is an amendment that the council is has been working on -- If you count when it was Coral Amendment 10, if you count those years, the council has been working on this amendment since 2014. It's sort of been repackaged. It was initially submitted as Coral Amendment 10, and now the council is looking to potentially resubmit it.

This is the one that would establish a fishery access area along the western edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, and so the council has been through a lot of discussion. They did not have all the information they needed to consider approving it in December, and so they're going to be holding a special council webinar this Friday to talk about this amendment.

As you can imagine, there's -- I wouldn't say it's controversial, but there's opposing views, you know, that the shrimp -- The rock shrimp fishery wants this area back, because it's an area that was historically fished for rock shrimp, but it's within the boundaries of the HAPC, and so the council will be discussing that on Friday. Okay. Any questions on Coral 11?

MR. ZALES: Not necessarily particular to Coral 11, and it backs up to the black sea bass thing too, and basically my question, and I don't know if this is the appropriate venue, but my understanding is that a lot of these amendments that have been approved and submitted to the Secretary are sitting on somebody's desk up there, and they're not doing anything with them, and nothing is getting fed back.

The concern, I know what the rock shrimp people, is going to be if we assume that, on Friday, the council moves this thing forward, and it goes to the Secretary is to how we can try to help, from industry anyway, how we can try to help get with people in D.C. to get these things off the table, and either get them approved, or not approved, or implemented, whatever we need to do, and that's not just for them. That's for any amendment that's in the process.

MS. BROUWER: Well, all I can say to that is, you know, once an amendment is submitted, and the rulemaking process starts, there's additional public comment periods that are open, you know, the proposed rule and final rule, and there's other opportunities for the public to comment.

Beyond that, I think, you know, you could email Andy and the council. Once the amendment has been submitted, there's really no more involvement from the council itself, or its advisors, at that point, and, like I said, because those -- I know those amendments were submitted a long time ago, and the shutdown did put a lot of kinks into that process, and also the reduction in force that happened earlier in the year also had something to do with it, and so we're hoping that things are now going to pick up pace a little bit and not be as sluggish as it's been this past year.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: If I just add too, you know, and something along those lines, and, again, you could correct me if I'm wrong, but something like that, as Myra was saying, you really want to voice that to your council members. Our primary role here is going to be, you know, looking at it from an enforceability viewpoint, and is there anything that we can provide advice to the council on that would help them move forward with their decision-making process, but, again, things like that -- Again, that's not -- It's kind of outside of our scope to address that issue, but, obviously, you are, outside of this, are a stakeholder, and so you can still go to the council with those concerns, and present it there.

MS. BROUWER: The next update I have for you is Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework 5. This is going to adjust catch levels for blueline tilefish. This is an assessment that was completed last year, and the council took action pretty quickly, because all that's happening is there's going to be an increase in the allowable -- In the annual catch limit with this adjustment, and so they felt it was important to get it done very quickly, and so we did what's called an abbreviated framework, and the council held a public hearing in December, when they were in Kitty Hawk, and that one is ready to be submitted in the next couple of weeks, and so you'll be seeing that change soon.

Then these coming up are more kind of long-term, and things that have been postponed, and so Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 is one the council has been working on, on and off, for quite a

while. It is going to propose -- It proposes is adjusting catch levels for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper, and so there's a bunch of stuff that council has to do.

Both of those species are assessed as single stocks, and so we have to first split the jurisdiction, the jurisdictional apportionment, with the Gulf Council, and then each council takes their chunk and does allocations or whatnot, and so this one is going to take a little while to finish, and so we're looking at continuing it throughout this year.

An update on things that have been postponed, and recall that we had been talking, the council had been talking, about a potential private recreational permit and an educational requirement for snapper grouper for some time, and so we worked on developing this amendment for a while, and this was intended to address deficiencies in recreational data collection.

We worked through it until I believe it was June of this past year, and the council decided to pause work on that amendment to focus on more deregulatory actions, and so it's kind of been put on the back burner for now, and that is also the case for the comprehensive for-hire reporting improvement amendment, which is the one that you guys talked about in February of last year, and, again, that amendment includes actions to improve compliance with for-hire reporting, and also improve the way the data are collected through the SEFHIER program.

I know, Bob, you were very involved with that, and you're in fact part of the advisory panel that was put together to advise development of that amendment, and, again, the council did scoping, and paused work on that back in June, to focus on other things on deregulatory actions, per the recent executive orders.

There's a Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 56, that's also been kind of on the back burner, and that addresses black sea bass, and so that one would adjust catch levels based on the assessment, but there were some issues with the assessment, and so that's why the council decided to start working on the amendment I just mentioned, Regulatory Amendment 37. This one is going to address more long-term management for black sea bass, and so that will be also undergoing development this year.

Golden tilefish is another one where there was an assessment done, and the council needed to adjust catch levels, but it turns out that there was also already going to be an increase in the ACL for golden tilefish this year, and the recommended catch level was below that, and so the council decided, you know, let's not do anything right now, and we're going to include an action in an upcoming amendment to the snapper grouper plan to adjust the catch levels later on, and so we'll be talking about golden tile at some point this year, but no changes there right now.

Then, moving away from snapper grouper, and there are other fisheries in the South Atlantic, Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 3, and that one -- This one has been also kind of on pause. The council started working on this for a little while, and then there was a management strategy evaluation that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center began, and the council agreed to pause work on this until they saw the results of this management strategy evaluation, which will come to them this year, and so that's why this one has been on pause. That one includes actions to extend the applicable geographic range of the minimum size limit for dolphin, look at recreational bag and vessel limits, and remove captain and crew bag limits for dolphin.

There's another one that's also been on the back burner, and that's to address pelagic longlines. It comes up once in a while, and it's still on the council's workplan. I'm not sure where they're going to go with this, but I think we're all -- You know, once that management strategy evaluation is completed, and they pick work back up on the recreational side, we'll see what they do with this one.

Then, finally, Spanish mackerel, Framework Amendment 13, was also kind of on pause. Recall that the council did a series of port meetings for the coastal migratory pelagics in 2024, and so we, staff, went up and down the coast, and into the Mid-Atlantic, and all the way up to New England, to talk to fishermen about that fishery.

The council has chosen to wait until results of the pilot study that was recently concluded for the Marine Recreational Information Program, looking at the methodology of how the data are collected, to wait to see how that adjustment is going to affect catch levels, and so we are waiting to see when the council wants to pick back up with that assessment, with that amendment, and I was -- Okay. Christina is saying the assessment is now on the schedule for 2027, and so I think that's -- Yes, and so that's my update on amendments. Any questions the AP has on that?

MR. ZALES: A question, and this may apply to the enforcement part of it, and this is just a hypothetical, because you all know where I am on the whole for-hire data program stuff, and, in the South Atlantic, it's open access, right, and so, from an enforcement standpoint, what is, I guess, the difficulty, or how are you able to enforce?

If you don't have a limited access permit for a for-hire fishery, it's open access, and you have a data program that would be required, and people do not comply with it, and how effective is enforcement in that situation, and I guess I'll relate that to a driver's license, right, and, if I speed, and I get so many points, my license gets pulled, and I can't drive anymore. How are you able, from an enforcement standpoint, able to adequately enforce forcing people to fill out information that they're required to do?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So I can say from -- Moving to Florida with the SRFS, they have to have the survey, and that's probably where the most enforceability comes in, and so, if they have a license, and they're going to harvest reef fish, they've got to have that survey attached to their license, and so, when we check a license, we look to make sure that they have that attached. That's really where the bulk of the enforcement comes in, if they don't have that and they possess those fish onboard.

As far as them being reached out to by our staff to do surveys, or to have phone interviews, things like that, I mean those are -- That's stuff that works through our management folks, but the enforceability part is really going to be that basic requirement of you have to have this in order to participate in this fishery, and then, if you don't have it, then that's where we can mandate that, because everything else, on that end, is done through phone interviews and things like that, or they send out the surveys, but I can't speak, you know, in a broader sense for the council and everything, but that's kind of how we deal with that in Florida. That's where we get our enforceability from.

MS. BROUWER: One of the things I recall during the discussions that we were having about limited entry for the for-hire component was very similar to the question you just asked, Bob, and it was like, well, it would make more sense for the you know, for-hire sector to be limited access,

for enforceability purposes, and the comment I recall is that, yes, it's true that enforceability would be facilitated by having limited access, but, really, for the council to consider limited access for a fishery, there needs to be -- The intent needs to be to achieve optimum yield. You know, that's -- I don't know if that -- You've probably heard that before. Are you ready to go on to the next agenda item.

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

MS. BROUWER: Actually, we're on Agenda Item 1b, and I was going to give you a very quick -- Just an update on where we are with the exempted fishing permit applications that the South Atlantic states have submitted, and so they were included in your briefing book.

It's the same applications that the council discussed at their meeting in December, and, for informational purposes, the council held a discussion in December, and they, you know, had a chance to ask questions, and kind of compare notes with each other, and now we are preparing a comment letter that will be submitted on behalf of the council, and the exempted fishing permit applications are under review at the Regional Office.

The timeline, the applications were submitted in November, November 10th of 2025, by the four states, and the agency has been undergoing review from then until now, and I believe the states have been asked to make adjustments to each of their applications and submit them by next Friday, or this Friday, and so I was going to sort of just hit the highlights.

It's Attachments 1b through 1e, and so I'm not going to bring them up on the screen. Folks can just look through those, but, basically -- Let's see, and I'm going to start with Florida. They are proposing to test two methods for recreational data collection and monitoring. They're going to continue with the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, and then they're going to have a voluntary smartphone web-based application that needs to be used by anglers and captains to report catch and discard data effort within twenty-four hours of their fishing trips.

They're looking at -- In 2026, they are proposing continuous fishing from May 22 to June 20, and three-day weekends in October, October 2nd through 4th, the 9th through 11th, and 16th through 18th, and that would be this year, if the EFP is approved, and then they would adjust the seasons in 2027 and 2028 based on the results of what happens this year.

Florida is also proposing to test a ten-fish snapper grouper aggregate bag limit, to reduce discard mortality and fishing effort, and, of course, they're going to have to request exemptions from federal regulations to put this in place, and they're going to want -- They're going to require anglers to use single-hook rigs and descending devices or venting tools. All the states are going to be collaborating with NOAA Fisheries. Florida is proposing to provide NOAA Fisheries and law enforcement officials with participant information before any operations begin under the EFP.

Moving on to Georgia, and, if there's any detailed questions, Carolyn is here, and Amy Dukes is back there from South Carolina, who can also answer your questions, and so Georgia is proposing to develop and test a mandatory data collection system for private and for-hire anglers that's going to be modeled after what South Carolina has been using, the VESL application.

They are proposing an extended fishing season that would span one MRIP wave. I don't think there was a specific date, just a length of time, and I think South Carolina has a specific date, but -- No? Well, it would be a two-month fishing season, right, to span a whole MRIP wave.

Georgia will also have a fish carcass donation, where they will be collecting carcasses for analysis. Anglers need to register and comply with requirements to legally harvest red snapper, and then they're going to use the data collected, again, during the 2026 season to refine future applications, and then they will then consider whether to extend the EFP for another two years.

South Carolina is going to continue to use their VESL application and include it -- You know, expand it, I guess, to private anglers, and they were going to continue to collect information for SC DNR=licensed charter vessels that also have the federal permit, and so they are proposing, again, a sixty-one or sixty-two-day season, and other highlights are the trip declaration will be mandatory, and that's what South Carolina is proposing, and verified through authorization codes.

A lot of these, one of the things that came out of the discussion on December is like, you know, that the states did their best to try to align their applications with each other, but, you know, the reality is going to be a little bit different, and so there are things that are not the same for each of these, and the council acknowledges, and understands, that that could -- You know, is not ideal, but that's how things are.

Finally, for North Carolina, and so this is a little different than the other two, the Georgia and South Carolina, and so they're also going to pilot test a state-based recreational data collection and monitoring application. They're going to target 100 private recreational and federally-permitted for-hire anglers, and, also, the length of the season would be sixty-two days, sixty-one or sixty-two days, and they are proposing to provide a list of documentation and contact information for anglers, captains, and vessels through their scientific or educational activity permit, and so that's something that's already in place.

They requested the period for this exempted fishing permit from July 1 through August 31, and so that's the one I was thinking of that had the actual dates. For-hire captains would be required to call or email NC DMF to specify Atlantic red snapper fishing activity and location, but will not be required to report through the application, and so for-hire captains are currently required to report through SEFHIER, and through the headboat survey, and so those would stay in place.

North Carolina is also proposing to collect demographic, social, and economic data through surveys, and so those folks that have already -- You know, members of this EFP, those would be surveyed via email, and so those are kind of the highlights, and, like I said, you know, we are awaiting to see -- The states are awaiting to hear back from the agency. Andy Strelcheck will provide an update to the council at their March meeting, which is coming up in Jekyll Island, and then we'll go from there. Any questions on that?

MR. ZALES: I might know the answer to this. For any angler that is, checked and has harvested fish outside the season. I'm sure there's penalties and fines for these people now, and so, during this EFP, if it gets approved, if somebody is checked, and they've got fish, that they are not part of the EFP, that are outside the season, are the penalties and fines going to be similar, or are they going to be more for being during the EFP or not, or has that even been discussed? How will that be handled from an enforcement standpoint?

CAPTAIN HODGE: Tracy, you may have some input, but, normally, when we encounter folks, whether they're in the season or out, it's going to be turned over to NOAA for enforcement anyways, because, in Georgia, we only encounter those folks well offshore. When they come into state waters, we're still going to turn them over to NOAA and then they would, you know, implement the fines according to the violation. I would suppose they would take that in consideration, if they were, you know, during the season or out of season, but a lot of those things are set up in summary settlements, and such as that.

MR. DUNN: Yes, and, unless they came up with something special, it would be just the normal fine that would go with fishing out of season.

MS. HARRISON: Since they're exempted fishing permits, why wouldn't it be classified as fishing without a permit, and so, a commercial fisherman who doesn't have a snapper grouper permit, he can't go catch snapper grouper and commercially sell it. If he was, his punitive -- The damages would be -- Well, his -- I don't know how to phrase it, but the repercussions would be a lot greater than just fishing out of season and holding -- See what I'm saying?

If a commercial fisherman fished out of season, but he still had a snapper grouper permit, that's just considered fishing out of season, but, if he does not have a permit, and he's fishing for the fish, that's fishing without a permit and fishing out of season, and so why aren't the recreational fishermen going to be held to that same standard? If they don't have the exempted fishing permit, it should be the same level.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: When I think about what they're doing in the Gulf, I mean, the exempted fishing permit would be established as a necessary permit to allow the activity, but that's issued to the state, and is that correct? The exempted fishing permit is issued to the state that allows them to have -- To provide access and so the angler is not necessarily -- I don't think the angler is actually seeking out a permit, but they're participating in the state's program that was approved through the permit.

MS. HARRISON: That's understood, but, in North Carolina's case, only a hundred anglers are going to be allowed to participate, and so what about the other 9.9990 million people in the state? They don't have a permit. If they go out and fish for red snapper, and they don't hold that permit, then why aren't they going to be held to the same standards of fishing without a permit?

DR. BELCHER: So, as Myra said, we're going through changes right now with the applications. We got questions back from the agency that each of the states are addressing, and so North Carolina is revisiting, and relooking at, what they're doing. In talking with Captain Hodge for Georgia, our understanding is the EFPs, and I'm looking to Amy too, is that the EFP will be done, and there won't be a federal season, and so the EFPs are actually replacing the federal season.

If they're fishing outside of what's established under the EFP, they are found in violation of federal law, and so the way that we're approaching the EFPs is through the attestation. They have to attest to all the agreement in order to be able to participate. If they don't agree, and they're caught with red snapper, then they are fishing without a license.

You know, for them to be intercepted on the water, as we were talking through with law enforcement, what makes a person not pass muster for being part of the EFP, and they have to their -- In our case, you have to have a fishing license, and it has to have a saltwater permit endorsement, and you have to have a trip number that is an active trip number on you. If you do not have any of those three things, you are basically in violation of what's under the permit.

Our state wrote in that, if you are found to not be in compliance with what the expectations of the EFP are, you will not be allowed to do the subsequent year's EFPs, and so there is a penalty on that on the backside, and so they will not get the next two years' seasons, if the EFP is how we're managing the federal season in 2027 and 2028, if that helps any.

MS. HARRISON: So, if there's not a federal season, then why is it still federally managed?

DR. BELCHER: I'm looking to you guys. Because it's still that the season is set federally, and so what they're doing is, in lieu of a two-day season, the EFP is allowing for us to be exempted from the quota that's normally established, the seasonal window that's normally established, and that's what we're asking for, is this testing window, and, within that, the EFP is allowing for these activities.

If you do not agree to all the compliance of the EFP, you can't participate in the fishery, and so it's not an open access at that point. Anybody who is out there and holding a red snapper, if they are not actively in the EFP, and using that app, they are not legally participating in the fishery in federal waters.

MS. HARRISON: Okay, but they still aren't being held accountable for catching the fish out of season without that exemption, and so just saying that you can't participate the following year, that doesn't -- It just seems like a slap on the wrist, and not anything punitive, which is going to deter people from doing that.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So, if I can add, just like Carolyn is saying, the permit provides access under certain -- Like under that certain window, or certain parameters. The state has to establish what that access looks like, and what the requirements are going to be for that person to participate, and then the council and NOAA authorize this to move forward with that.

Anybody that is not complying with what the state requires to access that fishery -- Because the federal law has not simply disappeared, and it's still in place, and so, outside of that state EFP that authorizes you to participate in that program -- Outside of that, you're still bound by federal law, and so, if you are caught doing things that are outside of the EFP, or not complying with the EFP, then you will be charged under the regular federal regulations, and so there is a process.

They will be charged. It will just be charged -- Like you're saying, it simply could be charged for harvesting out of season, even though technically there's a season in place, but they were outside of the boundaries of that EFP, and so now they're basically being charged with harvest out of season, or whatever the standard federal regulation would be to apply.

That's how it was in the Gulf, with the original EFP, which has now turned into state management, which kind of shifts a little bit on that, and more of that falls on the state, after it shifts into state management, but, during the EFP, it's all about what the parameters of the EFP are, how each state

sets up that access, and then anything outside of that would still be bound by the normal federal regulations. Those regulations are still there, and so anybody who is acting outside of that EFP is going to be bound by those federal regulations.

MR. ZALES: Thank you, and that's kind of where I was going with this, and I appreciate Alana commenting, because what we see in this is we see the EFP is going to be what I would consider a special permit, right? It's kind of like a special blanket permit that, whoever is involved with that EFP, that is approved that they can go harvest snapper or whatever during that period of time, they're under some type of a permit that they currently don't have.

When it comes to commercial fisheries, with our permits, if there's anything any commercial fisherman that operates and violates a fishing regulation under their commercial permit, typically the penalties and fines are fairly steep, and so I can see where you've got an angler that's fishing, just fishing, right, and they're not involved in anything, and the EFP is not in place, and you catch them with red snapper illegally harvested.

There's a penalty and whatever for that, whether it's the state or whether it's the feds, and so I guess my question is that why wouldn't under an EFP, because it's going to be a special thing, and you're going to have a special privilege to be able to harvest fish during that EFP, and so I would argue that, your penalties and fines, if you violate that during that special period, they should be substantial, and not just that you don't get to fish next year, but they should be more involved with that. That's kind of getting to where the recreational sector and the commercial sector are both treated equally on everything that they do, but, right now, we see a differential in that process.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I do think that, going back to -- There's going to be -- There would be a charge, on top of just that person not being able to fish the next year, if that was part of it, but I think we've also got to remember that, when we're addressing these questions from this panel, we're addressing that question in particular, and we're not really comparing between the two. If we had a question in reference to the commercial side, we could provide input on that, but, again, also, the penalties part of that really falls under -- You know, it falls NOAA and their structure of penalties. Carolyn, can you -- The council, can they recommend penalties for any of that kind of stuff? Do you know?

DR. BELCHER: I do not know. I don't think so.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and I think -- When I look at that, I think of us, as the State of Florida, and like penalties come from our legislature, and then, you know, things like that, and so I think, with the councils, and with how we work with the councils, and how we work with NOAA, NOAA handles all the penalties, and that stuff is done through the Secretary and all that, and then the council's job is to look at the regulations and the management side of it, and so, again, I don't know that we have a lot of input on those penalty structures, although it's good information, and I appreciate that concern.

MR. ZALES: If I could, it may be something in this discussion for the council to consider whenever they meet in Full Council, and not on Friday, but whenever they do this, to talk about this, the way they're going to enforce penalties and whatnot, under this special privilege, because the EFP clearly is a special privilege to allow these guys that couldn't fish but two days a year,

now they're going to get thirty or forty or sixty days, or whatever it's going to be, and they're going to get to do that because of this special privilege.

If you're going to operate under that, all the rest of the anglers that are out there need to understand they're doing this for your benefit, and, if you go out here and violate, you should be -- Your penalty should be stronger than just in a normal situation. That's just my opinion.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So, at this point, they're not asking us to provide any direct feedback, are they?

MS. BROUWER: Right, and so the council provided their initial feedback. Like I said, a comment letter is being put together, but they did want you guys to -- If you have any additional comments from an enforcement perspective, and, you know, like I said, Carolyn and Amy are here to listen to what you guys have to say. I will say that the representative who was at the council meeting from NOAA OLE did bring up some points to the council as well, and so it's an opportunity for you guys to bring up any concerns.

There will also be a comment period, and like an official public comment period, on each of these applications, once the agency puts them out, and so another purpose of this discussion is to bring that to you all's attention, so that, you know, your agencies, or as individuals, you can also provide comment.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So, based on our discussion so far with Ms. Harrison and Mr. Zales, can we just -- Can we highlight their comments as a concern, and then, whenever we present this at the Jekyll Island meeting, we can make sure those are noted?

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and I will include those in the report from this meeting for the council.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Does that work for you, Bob? Okay.

MS. HARRISON: Can I make one more comment, before we move on? I would just like to say, from North Carolina, that, because we're not a part of the joint enforcement agreement, I am very nervous about this, because I don't feel like we have the enforcement in our state to protect our red snapper fishery.

I just don't see how this isn't going to turn into a derby fishery, and our fishery is going to collapse in a few years. I mean, it's just -- Something has to give in North Carolina. I understand Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and you all are doing fantastic with your state management, and you all can cover it.

In North Carolina, I believe we have one OLE agent, and he's in Morehead City, and so how does one man cover 500 miles of coast, even though it's just 100 anglers that are supposed to be allowed, but you don't know how much the shadow fishery is going to be, and how big that's going to be, and I just really want to get on the record that I feel like North Carolina is not in the place to manage this with the enforcement that we have. Thank you.

CAPTAIN YOPP: Just a comment on that. We'll be taking up a portion of what we can take up, minus the NOAA agent that we have in North Carolina. It's no different than, a couple of weeks

ago, we had a snapper grouper case from American Red, you know, in my district, and we're going to handle that probably the same way, depending on however our proclamations written, or, you know, whether that's a permit violation or out of season, and we're going to handle it the same way we do currently, but I agree our fines are, yes, a lot lower probably than NOAA.

MS. HARRISON: I just worry about the boots on the ground. Like I just don't feel like there's enough boots on the ground, boats on the water, patrolmen on the water to -- They're not -- Correct me if I'm wrong, but state jurisdiction is only three miles, and I don't believe red snapper live within three miles off in North Carolina.

CAPTAIN YOPP: You're correct on that, but, when they come back in North Carolina, if there's a closed season, we enforce that by the proclamation, and so it depends on whatever is written is how we enforce it.

DR. BELCHER: So, just quick, there's a little bit of disconnect too right now. Like I said, what the council reviewed was not completely reviewed and stamped by NOAA Fisheries, and so we were reviewing and providing comment on drafts, and we had the meeting last week to talk about where the deficiencies are.

We all received letters, and so we're all in the process of changing our applications, and so there is a chance that there will be substantial changes to state applications in the near future. That's the best I can offer. Obviously, I can't speak for North Carolina, and what they're doing right now, but just letting you know, again, based on what you have in that binder, our applications may look quite a bit different from what was submitted back in November, and so those changes will be coming soon.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Carolyn. Any other comments? Okay, you all. At this point, we'll take a quick fifteen-minute break, and then we'll pick up on commercial snapper management and get back.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay, everybody online. We're going to go ahead and get started again. Okay. Before we get started, I want to cover a couple of things, so I won't forget, and so, everybody, in your briefing packet, make sure you go in and fill out the survey, the SMZ survey. Do that, and so we need to do that today, and so, if you can, please go into your briefing packets and find that survey and fill that out for Chip. That's for the special management zones.

Tomorrow, we're going to have a vote for the new chair and vice chair, and so Michael Paul has been the chair, or, I mean, the vice chair, and so we'll talk about it tomorrow, but I want to nominate him to be voted as the chair, and then we need to choose. We have to get a nomination for somebody to be the vice chair, and so be thinking about who you would want to nominate, if you have somebody you want to nominate, for vice chair, and then we'll move forward. All right and so we're going to start off with the commercial snapper grouper management.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Hello, Law Enforcement Advisory Panel. My name is Mike Schmidtke. I'm a staffer here at the South Atlantic Council, and I work primarily on snapper grouper species.

Today, I will be talking to you about Amendment 60, which is an amendment that the council is developing right now. It has two main objectives, the first one being to address commercial issues for the SG 1 permit, and really it's looking -- Once we get down to the actions, you'll see it's looking at revising the two-for-one policy that is currently in place for that permit, and then, two, looking at increasing commercial trip efficiency, and they have a couple actions that they've outlined to develop for that, and so I'll bring those up, and we'll be looking for you all's feedback on those actions, potential pitfalls, and how the council can avoid them.

The objectives for today are to take a look at the proposed actions, and for you all to provide any comments on foreseeable enforcement difficulties, and then recommending any changes to the actions, or any considerations that the council should keep in mind in their development, so that the council can accomplish their objectives, but also aid enforcement while doing so.

The timeline that we are looking at right now for this amendment, it was started back in March of 2025, and right now we're in the stage where staff are developing the language for the draft actions and alternatives. The council will review some preliminary analyses in March, as well as some draft language, and then they'll consider for approval for public hearings in June, and, ultimately, they would have their decision for council approval in December of this year, with regulations potentially effective in 2027.

One thing to note, before we get into the specific actions, is that the action language, the alternative language, the specific language itself, even with this document that we're going to be going through today, is not necessarily current, because the planning team, the IPT, has been developing this, and we actually have had two meetings since this document was put up for you all's briefing book.

It's just kind of the nature of the beast when you all are providing input as the document is being developed, and so I'll try to highlight the places where there's relevant changes, but a lot of the discussion questions that were put in this document are still relevant for this action, and, even if the language is tweaked here or there, or the formatting is tweaked here or there, a lot of those discussions would still be very helpful for you all to have to provide that input for the council.

The first action is considering removal of the two-for-one policy for the snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit. That is also known as the SG 1 permit, and so, right now, there is a policy in place that, if someone wants to acquire a new permit within the snapper grouper commercial sector, in order for that to be transferred to that person, they need to obtain two permits and exchange those for one new permit.

The alternative that the council is considering right now would be a one-to-one exchange, rather than the current two-for-one exchange, and so this action would not look at changing any other aspect of the limited access nature of the fishery. It would still be a limited access fishery, and we kind of have -- Some of the notes that have been compiled as we've gone through this process are listed there.

There was some clarification that, after one permit has been acquired, the new owner has one year after the expiration date of that permit to acquire that second SG 1 permit to exchange the two to get their new permit, but the ownership is not transferred in the federal system until both permits are acquired and turned in and that's exchanged.

There also has been statement from the council that they're not looking to, you know, expand or change, like I said, that limited access nature, or the number of permits here. They've stated that the current number of permits, whenever this is implemented, would be kind of that set number moving forward, although they did talk about kind of including guidance for the future, as far as when permits begin to decrease, due to not being renewed or transferred, how they would approach that in the longer-term future, but, for today, we wanted to get feedback from the AP on if there are any significant difficulties that may result from consideration of this action. Are there any recommendations that you all have that the council should keep in mind as they approach this action? I will pause there and see if there are any questions first related to this action, and then I can take notes as you all have your discussions.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right. Do we have any questions or comments?

MR. ZALES: Where it's got in here that the ownership of each permit is not transferred -- Until everything is done, who is listed as the owner of the permit?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: It's the, I guess, the original owner, the one that is selling the permit to the new buyer. They're still listed associated with that permit until the buyer of like the two permits has acquired two of them to exchange. Then, once they exchange both, then it's transferred over. That's my understanding.

MR. ZALES: So, if you own the permit, and I buy one from you, then it stays in your name until I buy one from Scott. Then, at that time, it transfers over to me as the sole for one permit. I'm now the new owner, and so the enforcement question that I would see there is, if I bought the permit from you, and you're listed as the owner, and I'm fishing, how does that work when it comes to -- When the enforcement guy gets on my boat and starts checking all the paperwork?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: You wouldn't be able to use the permit. In the current system, you wouldn't be able to use the permit that I've sold to you, like if it's just me, because you only are acquiring that one, and it's a two-for-one exchange, and so you would have to have the two permits in order to get that one in your name.

If it were changed, then it would be one-to-one. Then that system would change, but it was outlined that that's how they would identify any potential latent permits that are not being used, that, you know, kind have somebody who they have acquired one, but they can't use it yet, because they haven't gotten that second one to put into their own name.

MR. ZALES: So, until I get two, I can't use it?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: That's the current system, yes, and that is what the council is looking to potentially remove, would be to change that from a two-for-one exchange to a one-for-one, where, you know, if I had sold you my permit, then you could directly put it into your name, and you would be able to then use it right away.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I guess, the way it works now, if I have a permit, I can keep using that permit until -- It's not going to affect my ability to use the current permit I have. At some point, am I going to be forced to need to buy another permit to exchange, and is that --

DR. SCHMIDTKE: It's only if you're looking to acquire another permit. Liked if any permits that are currently in, you know, a fisherman's name, those are their permits, but, if they're trying to get another one -- Right now, they need to get another two, and then exchange those.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So they can keep their existing permit, but they've got to go buy two more to get another permit to have more access? Okay, and that was kind of where I was going from, is that as long as -- Once that permit is sold, the new permit -- It would clearly be identifiable to law enforcement that this is the new permit they're fishing under, and is there a system that we could access where you all would be -- I mean, what's the notification to law enforcement, or how would we access to know who has sold the permits, who is purchasing permits, and is there a way to do that?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: That would be through the Permits Office. I wouldn't know as much about that, but Alana is more involved in the business, and she may know more.

MS. HARRISON: Yes, and there's -- Actually, on NOAA's website, there's a Freedom of Information Act, and you can download an Excel spreadsheet, and you can see who owns every single permit, in addition to the dealer permits, and it tells you the expiration date, so you can see if it's been expired.

How it works is so, if I'm selling you a permit, I sell you my permit. You have a year once my permit expires, and so like, if I sell it to you in January, and it doesn't expire until June, you have a year past that June expire date to find your second permit to complete the pair. If you can't find your second permit, you lose that first permit you bought, and you can never complete the pair. You have to start -- Buy another one to start, and so that's how it works.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Do you have to sell it before it expires?

MS. HARRISON: No, but, if you don't renew it, you can't sell it. It's worthless.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Gotcha.

MS. HARRISON: It renews on the holder's birthday, I believe, on the birthday of the permit holder.

MR. DUNN: As far as enforceability goes, I don't think we're really concerned on how many permits are required to build one. As long as we get on that boat and that permit is -- We can verify it belongs to that boat, and we're good, and so I think, as far as enforceability goes, this wouldn't change things up. The only difficulty that I've seen in the past is where somebody sells a permit, and, somewhere along the line, it doesn't get registered by Permits.

They send out a notice that, hey, you need to renew your permit. They call for a duplicate, and now we have a guy who sold his permit who has a duplicate, and so we've had that kind of case, and so, really, it's not an enforcement, and it's more of an administrative issue, and so maybe that would help clean that up as well.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and that was kind of what I was alluding to. Is there anywhere in the administrative process that these things can be confused, but I agree with you 100 percent. If we're on the boat, we're looking for that permit in-hand, and, as long as it's accurate, and everything we need on it, we're good. How about you all?

AP MEMBER: I was going to say exactly what Tracy said about the duplicate permits, because we encountered that several years ago, but the issue is not for us in enforceability of it, because, when we get on the boat, I'm looking for Scott Pearce's name on a permit. If you don't have a permit, I don't care how many you bought in the background. Until you complete that process, you can't fish, and so enforceability I don't think is an issue at all, either way they go with this.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So would you agree, across-the-board, that we don't see real issues with this enforcement?

AP MEMBER: No, and I don't see any issues.

AP MEMBER: No issues.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I'm sorry. How about online?

AP MEMBER: No issues here. The same as what Tracy was saying. We look for the boat to have the permit. It has to be a valid permit on that boat. The rest of it is administrative.

AP MEMBER: Scott, I've got a real quick question, just for my own education, and you can hear the confusion about this two-for-one. It almost sounds like you alluded to the fact that the council is looking at -- Preferred Alternative 2 is almost the preferred, going to a one-to-one, which to me seems like it would be a simpler process, because it seems like it was a permit reduction program, almost, under that guise, and now they think there's a good number of permits out there, and Alternative 2, from what you said, almost seems like that's the way that things are leaning.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I won't say preferred, just because I know that's loaded language, but the council has stated their intent to consider this change, and that was that was directly what they wanted to consider. They wanted to consider one-for-one, versus two-for-one. They're not really looking anywhere in between. It's one of the other, from their perspective at this point. Okay, and so it sounds like we can move on to the next action. That one --

MR. ZALES: One more question. I wasn't at the last South Atlantic meeting I listened into as much of it as I could, but I don't remember if the question was asked of Andy or not, but I know, for the past year or two probably, they ain't got a clue how many permits are out there, right, and their permitting division really has some serious issues. Have they corrected that yet? Do they know how many permits are out there now, or are they still -- Do you all know?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So we are still trying to stay in contact with them about that, and we are anticipating another update at the March meeting on the timing and any outstanding issues related to that, but that is something that is related to this amendment, and definitely affects the analysis that would need to be done for this amendment. We're in connection with the Permits Office, to try to figure that out, but I don't have a final answer on when it will be available at this point.

AP MEMBER: I would add just one more thing, Mike, is that I believe, kind of leaning to what you're saying, it looks like that may be what they're wanting to do anyways, is go to the one-for-one. It would make it much cleaner for us on the enforcement side of it, because they're going to make the transfer quicker.

As soon as they get their hands on a permit, they're going to go ahead and get it, and start fishing it, and it will be in their name, and there's not these lingering permits out there that could be -- Well, a lot of things could be done with them, and it would just be cleaner that way, you know? You know, I mean, if I'm selling it to you, and I still want to go fishing, but, if I sell it to you under the one-for-one deal, then you're probably going to have to put your name within days, or at least a few weeks, and so it will clean it up quicker.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you, and so we'll move to the next action, and, actually, this is one of the places where don't hold on tightly to the way that this is formatted, because the formatting is changing as we as we speak, and as our -- As the planning team works on how best to approach this for the council.

This is looking at commercial trip limits, and right now there's a whole slew of species that are listed that could potentially be included. That does not necessarily mean all, or even most of them, will be included in this type of action. The council did want to kind of look at different species, and evaluate do changes to the trip limit make sense for each of these species, and some that's a yes, and some that's a no, but they will have that discussion at the March meeting, as far as what species they would like to have these considered changes for.

For the purpose of law enforcement, I would encourage you all, as you kind of discuss and think about it, think about it as more of an example of concept type of thing, rather than all the species that could or wouldn't be included, as we go through that, just because we don't know for sure what that number will be.

There are potentially three different types of changes that the council could look at for any of these species, and so number one would be changing the overall trip limit for a species, and so that would be quite familiar, from an enforcement standpoint, to any other type of trip limit change. The example that we're using right now is vermilion snapper, and so the current trip limit is 1,000 pounds gutted weight, and changing it to, for example, 1,500 pounds gutted weight. That would be one of the one of the potential trip limit changes.

Another potential change would be what they've called a step-up, and this is a place where we have a couple of different ways to approach this, and so the one that's been talked about to this point is doing it in-season, and so, if the landings hit a certain threshold level, or if they don't hit rather a certain threshold level, and they're below a certain percentage of the annual catch limit by a date, then there will be an announcement that would go out, from the federal end, that says, for the remainder of the season, remainder of the fishing year, whatever it would be, that the commercial trip limit is now some higher level, and so, if it was 1,000 pounds before, it's at a higher level of say 1,200 pounds, and that's the case for the remainder of the season, and so that's another way that they've talked about kind of changing the approach to trip limits.

Within, you know, the planning process, that that has presented some administrative difficulties, and so just an alternative route would be to do it on a separate year basis, where, if you look at it

from the perspective of an entire year, if year-one is below a threshold, then year-two gets the increased trip limit for that entire year, rather than trying to do something in-season. That's another way to approach a similar type of stepped-up trip limit.

Then, finally, they've talked about a step-down, and this would kind of necessarily need to be an in-season change, just because the entire point of a step-down is to extend an open season, and so that would be, if the landings have gotten above an annual threshold, then the commercial trip limit would be reduced for the remainder of the fishing year.

I know that that is a lot of information thrown out, and this table just includes all of the current trip limits, for all these species that are under consideration. Basically, that's anything that has its own trip limit, and not a complex trip limit, and, obviously, it would still be subject to any limits that are associated, and say like the 225 permit has a has an overall poundage limit, but thinking about the concepts of in season changes to the trip limit, thinking about the concept of a change in the trip limit from one year to the next.

That's really what we would be looking for you all's feedback on, on what would be the potential difficulties that you would foresee, and what are things that the council should keep in mind as they think about these different options, and these different routes of approaching this issue.

Really, the goal of this action is to try to make the commercial fishery a bit more flexible, a bit more adaptable. In the cases where there is additional poundage of the limit to be caught, the council wants to be able to provide access to the commercial fishery to be able to catch that additional poundage.

In the cases where there's a priority on -- You know, maybe they're catching their limit right now, and they the commercial fishery has a preference to extend that season, rather than condense the season, then the council wants to be able to have that that flexibility as well, and so thinking about those types of issues, and, if you have any questions again for this action, please feel free to ask, and I'll try to inform as much on the discussions as we've had them to this point.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Any questions or comments? How about online? Any questions or comments from online? No? Okay, and so, the midseason change, would that be -- Could that be done at any point during the season, or would there be a set time during every season where they would be evaluated?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: We have talked kind of about both, and so the concept has come in that, if it hasn't hit a percentage by a specific date, then there would need to be -- You know, then there would be a subsequent announcement, after said date, that the trip limit is here for the for the time forward.

We've talked about whether that should be a set date, or whether that should be -- You know, if it hits it, obviously, before the date, then, you know, should that come in a more flexible manner. There is a bit of a lag time between when the data come in of the landings amounts, and when that announcement of a date could go out, and, from what I understand, that could be in the range of about a month, or a few weeks at least, and so --

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I think the only concern I would have is -- Because there's a lot of things that, you know, we have to adjust to through the announcements as it is now, and so I think just that timeframe of, you know, when the announcement comes out, and when the actual change will take place, and, you know, giving a full month to make sure that the message is out, that all the officers are aware of it, I think would be key, but I think that's not -- I think it's very enforceable, because we do it already with a lot of other, you know, aspects of the fishery, when they put out the announcements on season changes, or seasons ending early, things like that. Would you all agree to that? Bob.

MR. ZALES: I'm just thinking, and you've got a quota, and I'll use beeliners, and let's say you've got a quota of whatever it is, and let's say 15,000 pounds, total quota, and you establish a trip limit at the beginning of the year. I mean, the purpose of the trip limit is to try to fish all year long, right? Well, clearly sometimes you catch fish quicker, and sometimes you catch them slower.

I'm assuming that each one of these step-ups, step-downs, and whatever can be all be done together, and you don't have to have one or the other, so that you -- When you know what the quota is, based on past history, you set a trip limit, or you could set that trip limit a little bit lower, to try to extend it, and, as you get close, because in the Gulf -- There are fisheries in the Gulf that -- Where they have quotas, and, when that quota reaches like 75 percent, then the trip limit falls down to some smaller level, right, to extend that season, and so I would assume that something could be done this way.

I mean, the issue with enforcement is how soon you're going to get that information, and, you know, and clearly that's been slow at times, but where that would play, but, you know, commonsense would tell you that, if you're not a Barney Fife, that you would play with it, and do whatever, and so, I mean, is that pretty much where this is kind of headed?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, I think so, and I think there will be some information provided to the council, within the next meeting, that they'll be able to consider whether it's worth it to do the in-season change, or whether it would be more worthwhile to simply change the trip limit. Is the trip limit, you know, preventing the ACL from being reached, and have those types of conversations as well.

That way, they can evaluate whether they want to do something in-season, or want to do something between seasons, or want to do something as just an overall change, you know, overall conceptual, or not conceptual, but an overall trip limit change, and what the most appropriate path would be for each of those species.

MS. HARRISON: I'm a little confused why Alternative 3 and 4 are separate, because if you -- Like, to choose between the two, why aren't they just combined for a step-up and step-down, the same alternative?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: This is one part that has definitely changed in the formatting. The thought going into this was, if they want to do a step-up for this species, then they could select Alternative 3. If they want to do a step-down, they could select Alternative 4, and they could just select multiple alternatives to accomplish all the changes that they want.

Kind of in the current form that we're working on, we've actually separated these three into separate actions, to try to clarify, you know, one is just overall trip limit change but whatever species are having overall trip limit changes, and so the alternatives that you see here are not the up-to-date versions, just because we've had some meetings in between where we thought this might be a cleaner way to present it to the council. We just didn't have time to get that into the briefing book here, with the time that we needed to get documents to you all.

CAPTAIN HODGE: The one thing too, Mike, I think we need to -- Or they should consider, and you mentioned lag time, and then Scott mentioned the other side of that lag time is not only informing our officers, but making sure that the fishery has been informed properly too, and so there's going to be even more lag time there from the time that notification is made, as we do with new regulations.

We're going to have a grace period, because we want the folks doing this stuff to make sure that they've been seeing the new regulations they're following, and so there's that educational period that you've got to consider. You've got to give time for the information to get there, and you've got to give it a little bit of a buffer before you start referring people to NOAA, or making a state charge against them, and so there's just -- I think a lag time is going to be bigger than what they really think it is overall.

I'm not saying it's -- I think it's a good idea to have to step-up or step-down in there to extend the fishery, but, that lag time you're going to have in there, how much enforceability are you going to have during that lag time is going to be a question, because, once you put it out, then you kind of suspend your enforcement efforts for a few days until you know everybody has been notified.

MS. HARRISON: I have a question for you all. Do you think that would be easier when we transition to the electronic logbook program, that it would be easier to notify all the participants through that form?

CAPTAIN HODGE: I've never worked with electronic logbooks, because we don't deal with them much. I don't know how that notifies you through the electronic portion of it, but still, even having the electronic logbook, the lag time for the fisheries folks to calculate, all right, it's time to step-up, time to step-down, that lag time -- Because they're not getting their data for close to a month, I think Mike said, and then the lag time for when we can actually really start enforcing it, believing that the fishery is aware of what's going on, and our officers have been made aware, and I think that lag time is going to cost you more enforcement time in the whole process of the season then.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and I agree with Chris. I think basically what he's trying to say is the council needs to be aware that there could be a period of time where enforcement is lacking, because of that transition, and so they need to be -- If they're comfortable with that, and, again, as you have multiple seasons, and you do this thing over time, people become more accustomed to it, and they'll hopefully move a lot faster when the notifications go out, but, again, communication -- That's the biggest concern, I think, for law enforcement, is making sure that adequate communication has gone out to make sure that everybody knows about the change, you got a good timeframe, and then understanding, as Chris was saying, that there's going to be a transitional period for law enforcement to make sure that everybody is aware.

MAJOR BEATON: A real quick point, I guess. I'm going to put my fish house hat on for a little bit, and Bob can probably attest to this. The predictability of what you're going to have come into your doors is important, and so, you know, halfway through the fishing season, but we've caught 75 percent of the catch, an announcement is made that, effective ten days from today, that the daily trip limit is reduced to X. At least I've still got product coming into my door, rather than the council has determined that the season is over.

You know, I've got outstanding orders overseas, because I'm looking down the road, and depending on the product, what I'm shipping out, and to just cut your buyers off in a market fishery, I kind of like the step-up and step-down, and I think the communication is key. I mean, you know, not to brag on FWC, but it's what I did for thirty-three years. We get it through our law bulletins, and we get them emailed directly to us from the councils. I mean, law enforcement is getting the word. The fishermen, they get the word. They just play that they don't.

I mean, I don't want to lump everybody "they" together, but, you know, they know how law enforcement is, and it's like, well, I didn't realize that that's what they've done, you know, and you know who your players are that play that card every time, and so I kind of like the idea of the step-up and step-down, because it does give the flexibility.

It does kind of try to maximize those fishing days of those seasons for it, and, I mean, we're -- Well, not anymore, but law enforcement is used to, you know, these changes, and, with the technology now, to Alana's point, the technology now that's in the fisheries, the notifications are becoming simpler and simpler, and it's not just the coconut telegraph anymore for these fishermen.

MR. ZALES: Two things, and, one, the electronic logbook. I mean, in theory, that's -- Everything would be perfect if you had real-time data, right? The electronic logbook is an effort to try to get there. I don't know that it will ever happen, but that will speed the process up, and it's like you just said.

When it comes to the market, to the fish houses and the markets, the whole issue, and that's hardly ever discussed anywhere that I've been in this whole management process, is the markets for these fish, right, because you have to -- In order to have a market to sell anything, you have to have a steady market, and where this comes in to step-up or step-down, rather than being completely shut down, you're allowed to move on to a lower or higher level to maintain to catch the quota.

You're able to keep that species in the marketplace, so that that helps the business, and the consumer is the ultimate person that's affected by all this, right, because they're the ones buying the product, and eating in the restaurants, and so I would think all of these working together, and in a system, and I would imagine that the way this is working would be, if this goes through an amendment process, that it would then, I guess, eventually give the power to the Regional Administrator, Andy at the time, that, once the issue comes out about the quotas, what's there, as to what it needs to be changed, he would make that decision to step it up or step it down to whatever, and then move forward with it.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes. Related to the timing of it, in order to make sure it's, you know, efficient within the in-season timeframe, yes, it would need to come out from the Regional Administrator, an announcement of some form, kind of similar to when, like in the current day, you know, when

closures happen, when in-season closures happen, and it would need to be a similar type of situation, just a different nature of that announcement.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, I think so. I guess, you know, kind of in summary, it sounds like, even if there are in-season changes to the trip limit, from an enforcement standpoint, you all don't see huge difficulties in enforcement, but the thing to point out to the council is that the lag time from data to announcement is extended further when it comes to on-the-water enforcement, because there would then be announcement, you know, some level of lag in actually applying any type of charges to violations between when the announcement comes out, and there would be some grace period, education period, to make sure that the fishermen are understanding the current in-place charges or --

The current in-place limits that are going out, and that may reduce over time, as the fishery gets used to these types of changes, but, especially in the early years, that might be a little bit more extended out within a season. Does that all kind of capture the discussion?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I think, to simplify it, the longer period of time you have between the time you announce it and the time it goes into effect, the less problem you're going to have, and so if you give them a week lag time, you're going to have issues. You give them a month, it won't be as bad, and so that's kind of the key takeaway. Would you all agree?

CAPTAIN HODGE: Yes, I would, Scott, and I'm just curious, from the fishing side of this, how much do you all pay attention to the annual catch limit as it's going throughout the season? Do they share that with you all throughout the season, so that you know when they're getting close to that?

MR. ZALES: It's watched pretty much on a daily basis. You have to.

CAPTAIN HODGE: I expected that, and that's why I say it, and so you know, if they set a limit like this, that, if we exceed 75 percent, and they're going to drop it back, you guys are looking at that daily anyway.

MR. ZALES: I'll give you the classic example. The current is red grouper in the Gulf of Mexico. The red grouper stock assessment that came out last year showed that the red grouper fishery is just in fantastic shape. A lot of us say it's way too good, but what it did is it dumped a couple of million pounds on the market today, right, and the market couldn't handle it, because you have all these fish all of a sudden that's there, and so the prices went in the toilet.

Because the amendment wasn't done yet at the beginning of this year, the quota was cut back to what it was before the dump came, and so now you had the quota here, and now you've got the quota down here, and, in six months when the quota gets approved again, you're going to have the quota back up here, and so, you know, you're throwing fish up and down on the market, and that don't work. That doesn't work with the business model.

You've got to be able -- It's like anything. If you go to Walmart, you've got to have steady supply on there, and it's got to be reasonable. It can't be jacking up one year and down the next, and so, yes, that's critical.

CAPTAIN HODGE: Yes, and I wanted to know that for my personal, and so thank you all.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just in follow-up, you know, just to make sure it's clarified, this would be only the trip limit that's being discussed. It wouldn't be the annual catch limit that would be talked about here. The annual catch limit would still be in place. This is more of trying to make sure that the fishery is able to -- Assuming the annual catch limit is the same as the optimum yield for a lot of these, but that the fishery is able to catch as much of that annual catch limit as they can catch, or, if they are already catching it, then, if they need that to be stretched out in a longer fashion, that they would be able to do that as much as possible, where that's applicable.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: It gives them the opportunity to have a full season, depending on how you need to adjust it.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and --

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I mean, I know it's annual, but I'm just saying that they don't get shut down early.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, that's what the step-downs would be geared towards. Now, the conversations that the council is going to have to have are looking at the individual species issues, because a lot of the ones where right now fishermen are hitting the limit have pretty low -- Like there's very few cases where there's a high trip limit, and so a low trip limit, stepping down a low trip limit, then they would have to have the conversation of whether it's worth it to the fishermen.

You know, for a gag example, a 300-pound trip limit, is it worth it to the fishermen to go out for 150 pounds of gag, or would they rather be able to do the 300 and just play out the season? That would be, you know, an example of what they would have to weigh and talk about. The majority of the snapper grouper species right now are actually not hitting their annual catch limit, and so then there would be the discussion of the step-ups and potentially increasing the trip limit. You know, in some cases, depending on what is going on in the fishery, would a trip limit be necessary? We do have snapper grouper fisheries where there is no trip limit for that individual species, and so the council would be able to weigh all those different options.

MS. HARRISON: Two things. I think, from a commercial perspective, where I'm at in the Outer Banks, is we lose a lot of fishing days to weather, and especially snapper grouper. If the current is running, you're not going to go and spend \$500 in diesel to go out there, and it takes -- We fish thirty miles offshore, and so it's a long way to go, and if you could have the ability to -- Like, on average, I think my brother had five fishing days from January to June, you know, and so it's like he doesn't even use that permit, and that's sad, because just the money -- It doesn't work on paper for him to spend the money to go out there and not be able to cover his expenses with what he can catch.

Then my second comment, Mike, I think that, if on the NOAA South Atlantic landings monitoring page, and you know what I'm talking about? If you could have the ability to put a column that showed the trip limit, like the current trip limits, I think that would be very helpful, especially if this goes through, and so then people could see, like in real time, what the trip limit was when they checked the ACLs. Thank you.

If we step up, then the fishermen can see, like right there, okay, my new limit is 300 pounds, so they don't have to go hunt it out. Then, also, from the commercial perspective, your fish dealers are really the funnel, and so as long as the fish dealers, and there's not that many fish dealers, compared to fishermen, and, as long as they're up to date, and you have port agents, and the port agents can tell the fish dealers the updated regulations, if they're not checking it, but, I mean, if you're a fish dealer, you're checking every single day. You're subscribed to the text messages, to the emails, and I think that they're telling their fishermen, okay, your limit is now 200 pounds, and are you planning to go fishing, and so there's a lot of communication in the industry.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: If we're all set there, we can move down to the next one. The last action that the council is looking at in this amendment is looking at potentially changing the bottom longline species limitation, and then specifying gear storage requirements. The overall goal here is for fishermen that have bottom longline gear to be able to have access to species that are not currently allowed for vessels that have that gear onboard.

This is not for them to use bottom longline gear to catch species that they're not able to catch with that gear. This is more for them to be able to change the gears that they're using on the same trip, and so say they go, and they're offshore fishing, and they're using their bottom longline, and, you know, they catch whatever, and they have enough space to be able to make a hook-and-line drop on the way in, for them to be able to put away their bottom longline gear, and then fish with hook-and-line, and be able to catch some of the species that would otherwise, under current regulations, be prohibited for them to even possess onboard.

The possession limit seemingly was tied to those species that they would typically catch with that style of gear, you know, to try to clarify that, but the council is interested in changing that limitation to be able to kind of allow that switching of gear, and there have been a couple of methods thrown out as potential ways to try to verify that they're fishing with appropriate gear for appropriate species.

The council has discussed the possibility of some form of call-in notification system that would inform you all of a trip that's going out that would either use multiple gears, or that would inform law enforcement of, hey, this trip is out, and they're switching gears now. They were fishing longline, and they're switching gears now, and now they're going to be fishing hook-and-line.

Some of the questions associated with this, obviously, potential enforcement difficulties that you all foresee, but then, in addition to that, what are some appropriate stowage requirements that you all would be able to identify that would make longline gear, and we're talking bottom longline, and that's the only longline that's allowable in the Snapper Grouper FMP right now, and so that would make longline gear obviously unusable while fishing for snapper grouper species, so that you all would be able to see on the water.

They may have longline gear, you know, on the vessel, but it is clearly not in a state where it is being used right now to catch these species, and so some of the suggestions that have been thrown out by the council would be to have hooks not baited, to have the hooks completely removed, or to have stowage of the spool below the deck, have the hooks stowed below deck, or not on deck, depending on how the boat is configured, but things of that nature.

What would you all suggest the council consider as the requirements to show a fishermen has completely -- Has switched gear within this same trip, to be able to potentially allow this to happen?

MAJOR BEATON: I'm going to put my law enforcement hat on this time. I don't like it, and I think the risk you're running is, you know, that guy that's on the gray line, and they're offshore, and they see a boat hitting course and speed right to them, and they've got their longline gear out, and they know what they're catching, and you're going to have ghost gear. They're going to cut that line, and you're going to have ghost gear out there.

The only -- It doesn't do any good in transit, because there's no way you're going to be able to prove. It's going to be a use of gear in violation of what they're saying they're doing, and so I don't like this one. To stow a spool below deck, you're going to have to have a hydraulic crane on that boat to put a longline spool below the deck, and so, just me, my input, I don't like this.

MR. ZALES: I disagree. Clearly, the criminal, you're not going to stop. I don't care what you do, or what regulation you put out there. They're going to do whatever, but I'm going to give you a classic example, and he's a council member, Jimmy Hull. He shark fishes with a longline spool, and it's basically a modified bandit that's got more line on it for it, because I think it's like a mile-long line that he uses.

He cannot snapper grouper fish when he's got sharks on the boat, and he should be able to, because you should be able to take that -- There should be a way for you to take that equipment and stow it to where -- I mean, it's not like you've got five or six people on the boat that's able to move around and get everything done. Typically, these boats have one or two, or maybe three, people on the boat.

Bandit fishing, you've got to put bait on the hooks. You've got to have them ready to go. It takes time to do this. A longline takes a lot longer time to get everything situated to do that, and, if you cut the line, like he's talking about, if the enforcement officer gets on the boat, and he sees an empty longline spool with it up there, then he clearly knows something ain't right here, right, because you either lost it, or you cut it on purpose, but there should be a way, and I think --

We talked about this when we were talking about the ropeless gear with Jimmy, that the person on the boat, the vessel captain and the owner -- In this situation, I guarantee you they would be willing to work with enforcement and work out a way to get this done so that they can fish, because it makes 100 percent sense that you shouldn't be restricted by the permits that are on the boat that you can fish only one species, when you've got the ability to fish multiple species and do this all on one trip.

It creates efficiency. It creates more marketability for your product, and everything is improved, and, when you get into the Trump Executive Order 14276, it clearly complies with that, because you're increasing the American commercial fisheries. There's a way to do this in today's technology to do it. Some people are going to clearly violate, and you're not going to stop them. I don't care what you do.

MS. HARRISON: I personally am not a big fan of this either. I think that there is potential for a lot of damage to snapper grouper species if someone is a bad actor. I think of snowy grouper, and

like you set a bottom longline, even a mile long, with no current, I mean, and you know they would disregard the trip limit, because you have a dealer who doesn't care, and then you're looking at like thousands of pounds, and, I mean, how can you justify that?

I think, if these people want to do it, I think they should have VMS onboard. That I believe is -- The people who have longline, and are fishing for HMS species, already have VMS onboard, and so maybe there's a way that the South Atlantic can tap into that, and get the VMS, and they can be monitored that way, but I think that -- I mean, longline, like the HMS longline is fifteen miles. God forbid somebody sets fifteen miles of bottom longline for snapper grouper. I mean, what would you do? You would ruin the fishery for that entire port, and so I personally am not a big fan of this.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: From an enforceability standpoint, we look at this, and, okay, if this was in place, how would we be able to manage this, or enforce it? This is going to be an officer has to be on scene to enforce this, and so it's not going to be something we can enforce through -- I mean, VMS tells us where the boat is, things like that, so we can go to the boat, but we're going to have to be out there on scene to enforce this regulation.

Kind of going back to what Rob said, you know, there's that consideration that, if we're coming up on scene, and we have a bad actor that cuts the gear, we run the risk of losing that gear, or having to try to grapple it up. Even if we do see indications that there was something like that that happened, we're still going to have to recover that gear to make that case. We have to prove that that line was there, and that it was cut, and so we're going to have to grapple that gear up, things along those lines, you know, if there's not a float somewhere on the end that we can find, and so there are difficulties there.

I think everybody brings up really good, valid points on both sides of it, but I think the key is this, and so that's only going to be enforceable if we're out there on the water, on site, and so you're really putting a lot of faith and trust in the harvester to do that when you apply. I think a lot of them will, but, again, from an enforceable standpoint, you know, again, as I always say, the further offshore a fishery exists, the less frequency you're going to have of officers on that boat, because, the further offshore you go, the less capabilities you have to get out there to them and get onboard.

For the council, you have to consider that, that, if you do that, you're going to still have a challenge with being able to put people on those vessels to validate that they're complying with those requirements, and so that's the difficulty with enforcement. Can it be done? Yes. Do we have people that are doing that? Yes, but, again, you have a lot of officers patrolling close to shore, and you have very few that are going offshore, just because of having the platforms and capabilities to do it. You know, you're limited there, and so that's the risk you take, and, if it's worth it to take that risk, then that's what they have to consider. Anything else?

CAPTAIN HODGE: I'm here as well. I would add to that as well. Even if you do get on scene for enforcing this, that officer, that just showed up, has no way of telling what was caught and what gear was used prior to him showing up, and so he could already have red snapper on the boat, or vermilion snapper on the boat, and using longline, but we don't know if he caught it with the longline or if he caught it with bandit gear, and so it's really difficult to enforce this.

MAJOR BEATON: Scott, just one more thing. The only way that this could possibly be palatable for, I mean, at least me from my law enforcement experience, is, if they want to do this switch hit fishery in their longline boat, mandatory onboard observer.

CAPTAIN HODGE: Well, Scott, if I could, and adding to what you, Rob, and Scott have said, I can't argue with you guys about it is or isn't a good idea. I can just tell you that this group is tasked with talking about enforceability, and, if you're talking about enforceability, and you want to do this, you know, and the council agrees to do this, what you're going to lose is enforceability, and you're going to lose the ability to do -- Just like Ben, I think, just mentioned, I ain't going to have no idea, or any officer to know, how the fish that are already on that boat were caught, and, if somebody is going out there and targeting these species --

I go back to -- This takes me back to the circle hook conversation years ago. You know, how are you going to get to the point where you know what they're using to catch that fish with, and not saying it's a good or a bad idea, but I'm just saying you're going to lose some enforceability if you go down this road.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: If the success of this thing, if the success of this suggestion, requires a high level of enforcement, then it's going to be a big challenge.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So I guess, just following up, if the council were to kind of go in this direction, and they wanted to put in some form of stowage requirement, what would be a potential option for a stowage requirement that you all would be able to see? Obviously, there's the case that was brought up of, you know, they were fishing with longline when they shouldn't have been, and a line was cut, but, if somebody is operating, you know, within the law, and you're able to board that boat and see they're not fishing with their longline gear, how would you be able to tell that longline gear is onboard, but they're not using it?

CAPTAIN HODGE: I think we go right back to what we were just talking about of what are they doing when we get there? I mean, it doesn't matter how it's stowed or where it's stowed. The manner in which it's stowed really doesn't matter to me at that point. What are they using when you board that boat, you know, and that's the only thing that I'll be able to prove, or any officer will be able to prove, is what they were doing at the time you approached them. If the gear is stowed -- I've only seen one of these boats, but you're talking about a hydraulic crane to even put this spool away.

All the things that they would have to do, I still don't know what they were doing the day before, before I approached them, and so it still brings up the same enforceability, and, no matter how you stow it, I don't think it changes anything, from an enforceability standpoint. If the gear is on the boat, there's a possibility it could have been used, and that's how we look at it, but, without that certainty, you don't make a charge, and so the enforceability gets set to the side.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and I agree with Chris. The challenges are there. I mean, if you're going to say, okay, all the hooks, all the gangions, everything had to be stowed below deck, which could be a challenge, but all that stuff could be stowed below deck, but if there were some way to make that to the reel, you know, where it would be locked down, and covered, or things like that, that would make it difficult for them to just quickly detach from all that, but, again, all that, you

know, is kind of window dressing, because, again, it comes down to what Chris said, and what was the activity that was occurring on that boat when I got there?

You know, whatever happened before, or whatever happens after, but it's what they're doing when I get there, and so, again, if I can write them a ticket for not having the gear properly stowed, then we can easily come up with, say, okay, the gear must be in this manner when I come onboard, but, really, it comes down to that activity, and so it's still a challenge, and, again, I'm not an expert on the longlining, as far as how all the equipment works.

I've been on a lot of long line boats, but I don't know how hard it is to make that reel to where it's not readily accessible. If there was some way where you could be made that way, where it would take a lot of steps and a process to make it where it could function right, or things like that, those are all things to consider, but I don't know what those things would be, but the other thing would be all gangions, all hooks, anything that would be used for that longline fishing, would have to be stowed below deck, not readily accessible, is the recommendation, but, again, I agree with Chris on what he's saying. Ben, you got any thoughts on that?

MR. BOOTS: Yes, and I think it would be difficult for them to stow all of their gangions. Again, it would depend on the longline boat too, because a lot of the dolphin wahoo boats are longlines, and they have fifteen miles. They have those big, giant spools on the front, and then that's the same with the bottom longliners for tilefish, and they have hundreds of gangions, and hundreds of hooks, and they usually stow them in a big box, and so it's going to be difficult for them to stow it, and I think there would be pushback on that. The bottom longliners that just use a bandit reel, that makes it difficult too, because are they bottom longlining with that, or are they using it as a bandit reel? It's just -- It's a hard regulation, in my opinion.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thanks, Ben.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just to make sure I run through, so I can appropriately, you know, describe and help Scott, you know, as you put together your report concerning it, but it seems like there's a lot of concern from the AP about enforceability of this type of action. Even if there is a requirement concerning the gear, there's going to be a precedence from the officer of what they see when they approach the boat, when they board that boat, and so they're only going to be able to make a case based on what they see.

There's concern about the potential of gear that is being illegally used, being cut, and then needing to recover that gear in order to make any cases concerning that, and so the council has to weigh the tradeoff here of, if this action is being put in to provide some additional flexibility to the fishery, the downside of it is that they're going to lose some effect of the enforceability of this type of action. Does that kind of summarize fairly well what you all have stated?

MR. ZALES: I just had this thought, and, you know, cameras are being used a lot today on these boats, right? As a matter of fact, Jimmy has got cameras on his boat. If you did something like this, what would be the feasibility of having the cameras locked in on the gear of the boat as it's fishing, right, and it's recording, and it knows what's there.

So, if you've got the longline out there, and you're catching whatever on that longline, and you bring it in, and you change -- You stow that gear, your gangions, whatever, and you switch to a

different gear, and the camera is still videoing everything, and so you've got video proof of what's going on on that boat, and how would that play if, to do this, you required camera systems to be installed on these vessels?

MR. BOOTS: I can chime-in on that. The camera systems that are on Jimmy's boat, that's required because he has a tripack for HMS, and so his permits have nothing to do with snapper grouper. He does have snapper grouper permits as well, but those cameras only turn on when the spool is in gear, and so when he's setting, they turn on, and when he's pulling, they turn on.

They're not on his entire trip, and so those electronic monitoring systems only come on and off when that spool is in motion, and so that would be a difficult thing, and we would have to figure out -- Then you have to figure out storage of all of that video, if you are going to leave it on the entire trip, which could be a week of video, and I don't know if there's systems that we have that could do that, and so I don't think the camera thing would be an option, and that would go along with VMS. That would require these other boats that don't have cameras or VMS to have VMS and cameras, such as just the bottom liners.

MR. ZALES: One of our board members out of Steinhatchee has cameras on his snapper boat. That camera activates whenever he's offshore fishing. He can tell you, because he's told me a million times, and he can tell you the number of snappers that he brings onboard.

He can tell you the bycatch, the discards of the snappers, or whatever else he's catching, how many of them are there. These cameras are focused and give you every bit of that information. This system, and I don't know if it was developed by the Mote Lab, but the Mote Lab out of Sarasota is working with all this, and I know Jimmy Hull, and his boat, they've gone over to work with him on this same thing. These cameras, from what I can tell, have the ability to do that, and give you real time, because the camera is timed. It's got the time on there, and you see all the activity as to what happens every minute of every fishing activity that's on that vessel.

AP MEMBER: Just a real quick comment on that, because electronics never break on boats, right? Especially commercial boats. You know, for you to make a case with the camera, we would have to 100 percent control, we, law enforcement, 100 percent have to control that camera. It can't be something that somebody puts on their boat because it makes counting fish easier for their reporting, or this and that, and it would have to be a highly non-tamperable, dependable type of camera system.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: You took the words right out of my mouth. I was trying to formulate how to say that, but, yes, and, anytime we would use something like that to make a case, it would be one of these things where we would have to have access, and nobody else would be able to touch that camera. Just like our body-worn cameras, it's very strict on how those things can be used to capture video evidence, and that's what you're talking about is video evidence, and so there would be a lot of scrutiny on that.

I'm not saying, somewhere down the road, there couldn't be some possible way to do it, but that would be a big challenge, and, again, it's a good thought, but I think there would be a lot of challenges with using that for that purpose, and plus the downtime that it would take. Every time you check a boat, you're going to spend hours reviewing that video footage, and, also, that's not a very feasible way to do it.

If there was some way that NOAA could monitor all that stuff, and then notify us if they saw something, that would be great, but we wouldn't have the -- You know, a lot of states don't have a lot of -- I mean, Florida is blessed. We have a lot of officers out there. A lot of states don't have that. Your manpower to be able to review all that, and things like that, is just not practical. Again, maybe one day, but I don't know if we would be able to do it now. Tracy, go ahead.

MR. DUNN: Yes, and you hit on the point I was going to make, and also how long do you keep that video evidence, and so let's say you would be looking at somebody providing a complaint that they thought somebody was using it, and you could focus on that one vessel, but you would still have to have the historical video, and who keeps that, and how the cost -- It's pretty cumbersome, but remember that, as far as manpower goes, I was it in South Carolina, and so not a lot of people.

MS. HARRISON: I'll make a comment from the video perspective. The HMS video, it's my understanding, from observers, that only a sample is actually reviewed, and so a lot of it is not even watched, unless there is something, like you all go on the boat, and then you need that evidence for the court case, and so I think it is a really big loophole, and why do we need loopholes on fisheries that are thirty years into a twenty-year rebuilding plan, you know, and so I think that, the more loopholes we can close, and protect these fisheries, the more my kids will thank you, and so thank you. I don't have kids yet, and so that just gives you how long down the road we're looking. All right. Thank you.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, and I think that was the -- Yes, and that was the last item for this amendment, and so if there are any like final overriding comments that you all have related to it. Otherwise, I can be done and turn it back over to Myra.

Okay, and so, if there's nothing else, I'm going to go ahead and pull up the overview. We had one other item related to commercial snapper grouper. Apologies for scrolling, and moving down to this commercial trip limit sale discussion, and so we were made aware, or council members were made aware, of some differences in -- I don't know if they were differences in enforcement, they seem, or questions about enforcement of trip limits as it pertains to the sale of fish, and it came up in Florida.

It came up with the local fish house being closed on weekend days, and so, if fishermen went out, and they harvested, and they were trying to bring fish in on say a Sunday, they were not able to necessarily complete the sale with their fish house, and so they lost out on being able to go back out on Sunday to be able to harvest again after selling their trip limit.

There was concern about how that was enforced, because, in some areas they were able to -- Fishermen were able to, even if the fish house was closed, possibly leave it in a freezer, and have some level of communication with the dealer, and the dealer would, you know, tell them that they have received the fish, and then they would go back out.

We've gotten some feedback from the Office of Law Enforcement concerning this. I think the clarifying question, that the council was looking for, is kind of how this type of issue would be enforced kind of throughout in a uniform manner moving forward, and so how you all would see this type of concern, where somebody brought in a harvest on a day when a fish house was closed, and how they would be able to then offload that and then go out.

There was also concerns about what would qualify as a sale of fish, whether it be some type of like paper transaction, noting that fish are sometimes taken on consignment, and they need to be inspected before an actual formal sale is completed. Talking through some of these issues, Myra may have some additional input that she remembers concerning this, but what I think the council was looking for.

MS. BROUWER: I think Mike summed it up pretty well. The council initially also talked about, well, this is tied to how a commercial trip is defined in the CFR, and I believe, you know, the definition may be similar, and there may be similar language, not just for snapper grouper, but it may also apply to dolphin wahoo and CMP, and so, you know, they wanted to bring this to the AP.

They requested that this be brought to you guys, with the intent of them -- If there's any changes to the regulatory language that need to be made in order for this to be more clear, then they're willing to -- You know, if we have to do an amendment to do this sort of thing, or whatever, then, you know, they would like feedback from law enforcement on that.

MR. ZALES: Do you know how many commercial vessels are selling to fish houses that close on weekends? I mean, is this, you know, like two or three fish houses, because I can't imagine a fish house that's in the business of buying commercial fish is going to be shut down, but I guess they do, and so, I mean, how significant is the issue?

MS. BROUWER: Well, that is part of the question from the council to law enforcement, because it's come up in public comment. You know, so they -- I don't know that we have a really good idea of whether this is an issue throughout the region. We know it's happening in some areas, and so I don't have that information, and I don't know how to -- How we can get it.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So the trip limit, if there was a way of -- Not so much documenting the sale of the fish, but if you could confirm the landing of the fish, and I don't know how you do that, but, to me, it's more of a landing issue. They've landed the fish, and they've been offloaded to a fish house. That trip limit has now been landed. Now would they be eligible to go back out for the other trip limit the next day, and then how would we document that?

You know, it couldn't be a word-of-mouth thing, and so we would have to have some mechanism, some tool, for law enforcement to be able to verify that that landing took place. I don't know whether it would require the development of some type of reporting system, and then, again, law enforcement having access to the reporting system.

When I first heard about this, I was kind of like why would it be so hard, but, the more you read into it, and the more you think about it, it does seem to be more difficult, but, to me, it's all about the landing of the fish and being able to prove, or verify, that that landing took place and that they're at the fish house waiting to be weighed out and sold, but any input online?

MR. BOOTS: I think the other issue is the regulation actually reads commercial trip limits are limits on the amount of applicable species that may be possessed onboard or landed, purchased, or sold from a vessel, and so, even if he landed it on the weekend, on Monday, you can still only sell for one limit for that day. I think that's the hard part with it.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay. Good deal. Makes sense.

MR. ZALES: I don't know where this goes, but, in the Gulf, with the IQ system, the vessel coming in is required -- What, two or three hours before they hit the dock, they've got to notify enforcement that they're going to be at a particular dock at a particular time, and they come in there, and then enforcement has the ability to show up or not, depending on what they want to do to do that, and so I don't know how that would work in a non-IQ thing like this, if that vessel -- If there's something that could be done to where, if I'm coming in, and I've got a thousand pounds of fish, I notify law enforcement that I'm going to X, Y, Z dock, but they're closed, and then figure out some way for me to store those fish on the beach, and then turn around and go back off shore fishing or what, but somewhere along that line to require some kind of reporting. Then, if enforcement can get there and check it great, and, if they can't, then the guy did what he was supposed to do.

MAJOR BEATON: Just from my experience, working in the Keys and all the fish houses down there, and to Bob's point, you know, there's -- It might be closed on Sunday, but there's an employee that the fish house owner trusts on a Sunday that can do a rough weight on the fish, get them iced, and then you do the formal transaction the next day, on Monday. I mean, that's the way a lot of them operate.

I mean, it's they're closed, but there's generally somebody onsite, or on call, that can get those fish off the boat, get a weight on them, scratch it on a piece of paper, you know, and then the formal process of paying and all that stuff is done the next business day, and so I really don't know how widespread of a problem this is, if it's worth going through this whole amendment process and every -- I just -- I don't see it, and I would be curious -- Well, I'm sure Florida law enforcement, or whoever, would be curious of who is saying this.

MR. BOOTS: I think this complaint mainly comes from the day trip boats during red snapper, and so it's basically just the red snapper fishery, the boats that go out, catch their seventy-five pounds, and come right back in. It's those boats, because all the other boats, that have big trip limits, if they come in on a Sunday, they're going to offload on the Monday anyways.

MS. HARRISON: I'm not sure how it works in other regions, but, in the Outer Banks, if the fish house is closed on Sunday, you unload your own boat, put them in totes, or put them in a vat, and then just put them in the cooler and text your fish dealer and say, hey, I left my catch, and then you go back out fishing, and I -- Is that illegal for us to do it that way? Do you know what I mean? Now this is making me like this -- I don't understand why this is an issue, and then now it's making me fearful that maybe we are in the wrong doing that.

Then another point is the only time I've ever heard of this being an issue was when a snapper grouper commercial fisherman caught two limits, put both limits in the fish house, got caught by whoever, Marine Fisheries presumably, and the dealer was on the hook, and the dealer was getting in trouble, and he had to take his video footage and show that it was the fisherman who brought the two limits, and not the dealer encouraging it, and so that's the only -- But that goes into a whole new can of worms, but I don't see this being an issue in North Carolina, personally, and I would like to clarification if it's wrong for us to unload on Sunday, and just tell the dealer, and then they write the ticket for Sunday on Monday.

DR. BELCHER: I was going to say that I know Captain Hodge and I talked about this, because it was brought to our attention before the September council meeting, and there is some kind of craziness with the definitions, because, if you look at what defines a trip, it's ended when it comes back to the dock, right, and so that's where the fisherman is operating under that, but then the other language, as Mike was talking about, involves the sale part of it, and so, if you haven't had that transaction, now it looks like you've got two things that are being coded in on one day, and so it looks like you have a double trip limit being turned in, when it's actually just that the person came in, and it was landed for Sunday, turned around and went right back out, came back in, and then now both of their day catches are being transacted on the same day.

That's, again, some of it -- We were talking about that at the December meeting. That came up, about the fact that that's kind of the differences in how the definitions are set, and so I'm speaking for Captain Hodge, but he didn't feel it was an issue in Georgia, because of exactly what Alana is talking about, but that's not how everybody is interpreting it, is our understanding.

CAPTAIN HODGE: Well, if I can, real quick, to clarify what you're saying, in our conversation, our definition in Georgia of landing a fish is it stops when it's landed. That's when the trip is over with, but then, when you get into the definitions that were just thrown up here while ago, in these regulations, that the trip isn't over until the sale is completed, and I won't speak on whether that's legal. I would think it's very similar to what Rob was --

MS. HARRISON: I just had a -- We have VTR numbers as well that you have to supply to the fish dealer before they'll buy your fish, and so I don't -- Like, if each trip has a different VTR number, and a separate log, page in your logbook, then the only thing I'm seeing is if you want to go out and double dip on your seventy-five-pound trip limit for red snapper, because they live closer to closer to the shore, then, yes, you're not going to be able to sell two trip limits on the same day, but then, I mean, why -- This seems -- Like somebody else mentioned, this seems like a really big process for a council who is spread so thin.

MR. YOPP: So North Carolina land, it's when that vessel reaches shore, or structure tied to shore, that's the land. That's our definition. Then a trip ticket is going to be done, and so that completes that. They can go back out. They're free to go back out and do whatever. That's going to complete that transaction with you, when that trip ticket is done, and so it's not going to show -- It shouldn't show double-dipping.

MR. ZALES: The definition that you said on a commercial trip to possess, land, or sell, what was that, one more time, for me?

MR. BOOTS: That was the commercial trip limits, which is 622.191. Commercial trip limits are limits on the amount of the applicable species that may be possessed onboard or landed, purchased, or sold from a vessel per day, but a caveat to that too is, if you go into the definitions, the definition of "sale" or "sell" means to act or actively -- Active activity of transferring property for money or credit, trading, or bartering, or attempting to do so, transfer, trade, or barter.

A definition of "trip" in 622 means a fishing trip, basically regardless of number of days, that begins when you embark dock, berth, beach, seawall, and return to such dock, berth or seawall, and so, I mean, the trip is the same. The issue here is selling multiple possessions in one day, I think, and the question, I think, from what I recall from listening in on the council meeting is you

want -- Some of these people want to have fishing vessels business multiple days, so they can bring everything in on a Monday, even though they went out separate days on the weekend. I don't think it's an issue if they land the fish, attempt to sell it, and there's a record, such as a text or a VTR, that says I attempted to sell this, and this fish is now at this dock house, and I don't see that as an issue.

MR. ZALES: My question is -- Because, in that, it's talking about landing, possessing, or -- It's all "or" and so it's not "and" and so you don't have to land and possess, or possess and land, and sell. You can do either one of those, and I'm not aware, and there may be one, of any requirement that says a commercial fisherman that catches fish must sell fish.

I mean, he has the ability to do it if he wants to, but he doesn't have to, and so, when it comes to a dealer selling multiple trip limits, if the dealer gets a trip limit today, and a trip limit tomorrow, what prevents that dealer from selling those two trip limits the next day? I mean, does he have to sell the trip limit every day, once the dealer gets it? I mean, I can understand the fisherman only being able to land one trip limit a day, and so I don't know how that works.

MR. BOOTS: That's what is the fishermen landing multiple trip limits. It's not, it's not the dealer.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I think, if we break this down and say, okay, well, let's go back to the core of this, and is it enforceable, and I think, if you were not going to do any -- If you're not going to change any of the wordings in the definitions and regulations, then there are a lot of challenges with enforcing this, because we see a lot of conflict. I think it just has been said, you know, there's always an ulterior motive, and, if they were trying to stockpile fish on multiple vessels, and claim they were from different trip limits, and then try to sell them all on the same day, that's an issue.

I think, if you were going to do this at all, you would have to have some change in definitions or regulations that would require a physical landing of the fish, and some type of verification that those fish were received by a dealer, and that's something the council has to work out, but I think that's what -- I think, at a minimum, you would have to have that, and you also would have to look at all these things that are conflicting, that we see that may be conflicts, to verify whether they are or are not a conflict between definitions, regulations, and things of that nature. Ben, would you agree with that?

MR. BOOTS: Yes, and I agree with that.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay. Yes.

MS. BROUWER: So I'm looking back at the paragraph that's in the overview, and so the council was pretty specific in their request. They want you all to think about what are acceptable forms of evidence to denote that an attempt to sell occurred, right, because I remember there were some folks that came up and said, well, if somebody takes a picture of the fish in the in the cooler, is that is that going to be good enough to show, you know, that -- You know, like what is going to be acceptable to law enforcement?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Again, the challenge here goes back to -- To me, a trip ticket, a filed trip ticket, is going to be your best evidence, and, you know, in Florida, which I'm sure everybody -- It's all electronic, and so we can actually access it and look it up electronically, but that -- I think,

if you fill out a trip ticket that the fish product was physically landed, and there's a trip ticket that exists that shows that landing, that's going to be your best evidence. That's going to be your best bill of lading, so to speak.

Then, again, if we wanted to go back and spot check and see if that fish was landed, then we would have the ability to do that, but I think trip ticket would be your best. What do you all think, because the trip ticket has to be filed whether the fish are sold or not, depending on the fishery.

MS. HARRISON: This sounds like more of an issue with this these people's fish dealers than it does with the council, you know, and like maybe they would be it would be easier to solve their issue if they just got their fish dealer to send somebody over on Sunday, and so I really -- That's my personal opinion, as somebody who is in the commercial industry.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: That's a good point, and this may be one of those situations where they're trying to use us as a management tool to try to manipulate the actual fishery -- The actual dealer responsibilities. If they want to accept that purchase that day, then they have to make -- You know, they have to make considerations for that, and so that is something to consider.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So I guess it sounds like, from the discussion -- Would you all say that as regulations -- the way the regulations are currently being written, currently being enforced, that you all do not think that there is a widespread issue that needs to be addressed through changing of regulatory language, or do you think that -- Would you recommend a change to regulatory language that would clarify this issue, and enforcement of it?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I will say that, me, I have no way of verifying whether this is a big issue or not. I think you really have to go back to industry and really drill down on who is having this problem, which harvester is having this problem, and how real is it. From a law enforcement standpoint, I'm not aware of -- Again, going back to Florida, I don't know that we have too many places in Florida that wouldn't open up to take that product, and so, again, going back to who is this really affecting, and how big is it, and is it worth doing that, in the big picture.

MR. ZALES: I guess I'm confused. I mean, is this a trip limit issue, or is a closed fish house issue, and not being able to land? I mean, what is the problem that you're trying to work with and identify here, because I'm hearing both. I'm hearing it's people taking advantage, and bringing in multiple trip limits when they're not supposed to, and not getting caught, or they're coming into a facility that's shut down, and they can't unload their fish, and so they're stuck until the next day, because, with the current regulations saying that you can possess, clearly that vessel can sit there for several days.

If he's got fish on the boat, they're not landed, and now he can't clearly go fishing again until he lands them, but, once he gets to Scott's dock, and offloads them, then they're landed, and so then he can go fishing, and then it's on Scott, as the person that accepted the fish, to do whatever, is what I'm seeing.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Which I is the point we brought up, and is this really a management issue, or is this a dealer issue, as far as access to the dealer.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think, of the scenarios that you brought up, Bob, it's more of the latter issue of -- It's affected by fish houses that are closed, or situations where the fish might be able to be landed, and they might be able to be offloaded, but, if they're not considered sold, then in -- You know, in situations there, that enforcement hasn't considered the fish to be sold, because there's not appropriate evidence tied to the sale of the fish, even though it's been landed, and it's been offloaded, but the fishermen are wanting to go back out to get another trip limit, even though they haven't completed like the sale step of the trip limit, because the trip limit includes the possession, and it also includes the sale, and so being able to go back out and get another day's worth of fish, when the sale may or may not necessarily have been completed, and that's where there's a bit of ambiguity of what designates the sale step has been completed.

We've talked about the language of attempted activity, and so that's why the council kind of came with the question of what shows attempted sale activity, trying to get some clarification, so that can then be communicated to these fishermen that are having this issue of, okay, if you want to be able to bring your fish in, and then go back out that day, this is what you need to have. This is, you know, the type of evidence that you need to have to be able to show you've completed -- You know, you completed the landing of the fish, you completed the sale of the fish, and now that those fish are no longer in your possession anymore, and you can go back out and get another trip limit.

MR. ZALES: I guess that's what I'm not understanding. If bring the fish in, and I land them at Scott's dock, what position provision says that they must be sold as soon as they're landed? Once they're landed, they're off my boat, and I can go back, and then whatever transaction happens between Scott and me at some point in the future about the sale of the fish -- If I don't give them to him, or if he intends to buy them, is there. Where is the part of the sale being required to do this?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: You don't -- You're not required to sell the -- You're not required to sell the fish in general, but you can't sell, I guess, more than the one limit, and, if that sale is not counted as a sale, and say it's closed on Sunday, and, if the sale is not counted as sale until Monday, then that means, if you went up back out on Sunday, and you got another trip limit, you know, and you're coming back, and you're trying to bring them in, then you would technically, by some definitions, be selling multiple trip limits on a Monday, because you've got two trip limits that haven't gone through that transaction of a sale until that day, if it's held off.

That's why they're trying to get some clarification of what can show the attempt to sell on -- Say a trip comes in Sunday, and an attempt to sell on Sunday, and so that's Sunday's trip limit. That way, you can go back out, and you can get Monday's trip limit the next day, and they're not both lumped into one day. I think that's where the council is looking for potential clarification.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I think, across-the-board, if you were going to -- Again, I'm not saying you have to change regulations, but taking a deep dive, and making sure everything lines up, so we're not they're not conflicting, I still go back to say that, if you wanted to have a way of verifying that a sale took place, across-the-board, the most consistent way to do it is trip tickets.

MR. DUNN: Can I make a ask a question and make a suggestion? I think we're all trying to figure out exactly what the issue. The persons, or people, or whomever, was their concern on the record, and are they identifiable? That's my question.

My solution, or suggestion, is then, whatever state they're in, let's have a one-on-one conversation with them directly, to figure out exactly what the issue is, because I don't think anybody in this room really understands what the issue is, and so I think talking these people individually, to find out really what's going on, will benefit us a whole lot, and might maybe save a lot of council time.

CAPTAIN HODGE: Just a comment on that, is that we're spending a lot of time talking about possibly changing regulations on something, and there's a lot of experience in here, from both the industry and law enforcement, and nobody can identify the problem. Nobody even knows where this issue is at, and so I think -- Honestly, I don't think there's any need to do anything with it until you identify where is the problem, and who is the problem with.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: As far as identifying the individuals, I would have to talk to some council members that have heard from people directly. I know that we have gotten public comments concerning this issue. I don't know if they were necessarily the individuals, or representatives of organizations that the individuals belong to, but we've gotten public comments from people regarding this this type of issue, and so I do think that, you know, it's possible to check with council members and see if there can be a deeper dive, and possibly more individual conversations.

I think there was concern, when the council members heard about it, that it's probably similar to what Alana was feeling, in terms of, if this is being enforced in this way in this area, is it a bigger problem, and is this going to, you know, become an issue elsewhere, if it's across-the-board enforced in this way, because it's not an issue in South Carolina, or in North Carolina, but, if law enforcement were enforcing it the same way that it was being enforced in this specific case, then it could have been an issue, and, you know, kind of that question-mark of are we doing things the way that we're supposed to be doing them.

I think that was the concern that got brought up from the council end, is whether the law enforcement is going to -- When it's working in one place, if it's going to be, you know, enforced differently, because there's now this case in this certain specific context, but I hear what you're saying, that, you know, address the specific context, and possibly give that give those fishermen advice on how to approach the dealer, and how to have the appropriate forms of evidence. It sounds like the AP is not suggesting that any regulatory changes necessarily need to be considered at this point.

MR. DUNN: I don't think we have enough information to make any recommendations, is my point. I think, you know, I know the way it probably works with all the state people here. An officer comes across something, and the officer goes to the lieutenant, and the lieutenant says, damn, that's a good question, let me call Captain Pearce, and he's the marine guy, and have you gotten any calls about this issue? Have you gotten any calls at your desk? Have you got any calls at your desk? So something -- There's a disconnect, so if we can drill down, and we -- It doesn't have to be evidence. It just needs to be a conversation, with whatever the source is of this, to find out exactly what the issue is.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I go back to what Ben said, and just to make sure that we're not getting, you know, a Trojan horse issue, where they're saying, well, this is a problem, but yet there's another underlying issue where they're trying to stack the deck with multiple boats with product onboard they can all try to sell, and so I think there's always a bigger picture that we need to drill down on.

All right, you all. We're done a little early with today's agenda, and we're going to try to tackle at least one more topic, and so let's take another fifteen-minute break, and we'll come back and we'll tackle one more topic.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right. Myra, whenever you're ready, I'll hand it over to you.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so we are going to pivot a little bit. We are going to give you guys an update on what's going on with shrimp, for a change, so Allie Iberle is coming up to give you guys that update

MS. IBERLE: All right. Thanks for the introduction. Again, I'm Allie Iberle. I'm the Shrimp FMP lead for the council, and I'm going to update you guys a little bit on what's going on in the world of shrimp and how you guys can hopefully tie in as we move along in this process. My overview is going to be kind of brief, because we are still at the starting line for this process.

An overview, to get us started. In September of last year, the council, in response to a presentation that was put on by Protected Resources regarding the Section 7 Endangered Species Act consultation for both giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish, the council passed a motion to establish a shrimp workgroup to achieve a couple of different things, and so mainly to identify workable solutions that would aim to reduce the interactions with giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish in the federal shrimp fisheries of the South Atlantic.

They wanted this group to be pretty diverse and include harvesters, NMFS and council staff, council members, an SSC member, and then researchers, and so what I'm going to do is kind of outline what we've put what we've put together so far for this group, and then kind of where we're headed.

I'm not going to read these goals for verbatim, but, essentially, what the goals of this group is, it's to bring together that diverse group of people, share knowledge, and then get input from fishery stakeholders, and then to develop an action plan that will be then brought back to the council with recommendations to reduce interactions with these two species within the shrimp fisheries.

Again, I'm not going to read these verbatim, but this is pretty much how the workgroup plans to achieve those, and so, again, reviewing that Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation, talking to stakeholders, reviewing scientific papers, bycatch, any analysis that can help us as a group develop that action plan, identify gaps, and anything that might help fill those gaps, and suggest that to the council, and then, obviously, review the feasibility of any suggested actions with stakeholders, eventually, and this list is what we have right now for that group to achieve those two goals that I had on the previous slide.

Like I mentioned we're pretty early on in this process. The council has identified who they want on this workgroup, and we have started to try to nail down scheduling for our first meeting. The first meeting is kind of more going to be, you know, what do we need to do, and who do we need to bring together to get these objectives met, and those goals accomplished.

How do you guys play into this process? After the workgroup meets, and this may be, you know, several meetings, where we're kind of pulling information and looking at research, but, after this group meets and develops that action plan, we would like the LE AP to kind of look into the enforceability of any proposed solutions that were brought to the council's table, and so, just to kind of keep you guys in the loop, we'll probably be touching base with you again as this group forms that action plan, and just kind of touching based on the enforceability of it.

I know we've -- You know, in the process of implementing the bycatch reduction devices, and the turtle excluder devices I'm sure, and I wasn't here, but I'm sure that the law enforcement group was consulted, and so kind of the same process. We'll look at that action plan, ask you guys some questions, and then kind of go from there, and that action plan will then be presented to the council.

That's pretty much all I've got, and, again, this is -- We're early on in this process, and so not too much for me on that front, but, if you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them, and, if you have any questions down the line, feel free to email me.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Any questions from the group? Bob.

MR. ZALES: It's not an enforcement thing, but in the South Atlantic -- Because I know, on the Gulf, they've identified, for manta rays, the area that they typically hang out is off the mouth of the river, and is there an area like that in the South Atlantic where they congregate, or they just happen along?

Just to give you a brief information on another story, Florida used to have, and I guess they still do, a special activities permit, and so, several months ago, somebody got one, and they captured a manta ray off Panama City, where I live. It was a big news thing, right, and everybody jumped up and down, because they caught it, captured it, and then sent it to Saudi Arabia, and so now there's been legislation introduced in Tallahassee to never let this happen again, and so we'll see where that goes, but, anyway, is there such a place in the Atlantic similar to the mouth of the river?

MS. IBERLE: I don't think that there is an area as specific as what's been seen in the bycatch data in the Gulf. I am admittedly not an expert on that bycatch data. I will note though that it's -- There is less -- We have less bycatch data in the South Atlantic than the Gulf does, but looking at that bycatch data is going to be one of the charges of this group, is to really dig into that a little bit more, and so we'll be definitely doing that as the group moves forward in developing that action plan.

Then, also, the Gulf is doing a very similar thing, and, in fact, the motion that our council made is kind of in tandem with the Gulf Council. The Gulf Council is scheduling their shrimp workgroup as well. I know they're focusing a little bit more on the finfish side of things, in bycatch reduction with regard to finfish first, and then kind of switching gears and looking at manta ray and sawfish with that group, but, again, more information to come out of that process as well, because they're still early on.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Any questions online?

MS. BROUWER: So next we'll go ahead and just give you one more update before we let you go to happy hour, and that will be Christina Wiegand talking to you about the Lines of Communication, which is Attachment 6c.

MS. WIEGAND: Well, it's tough to go right before the happy hour break, and so I'll do my best to be quick and efficient, but I did just want to briefly let you guys know about Lines of Communication. This is a new council engagement initiative, and the goal here is really to capitalize on informal conversations.

We've often, you know, talked to council members about, you know, what did you find valuable about this event, or that event, and for them it was really those, you know, two-way conversations that they were able to have with stakeholders, and so the purpose of Lines is to design something that really facilitates those more informal conversations, and also allows council members to get into fishing communities.

These won't be meetings that are held in Charleston, and Charleston only. We're actually going up and down the coast, to engage fishing participants where they are, and the hope here is that we can slowly start to build relationships and trust with fishing communities, and encourage more participation in the management process, which is incredibly valuable, because fishermen hold so much information that is really needed to make the management process work in a way that's best for both communities and the resource.

The goals and objectives are listed here, but I'll just sort of briefly go over them. Again, the goal is to provide space for an open dialogue and mutual learning, so that council members can share information with stakeholders, and stakeholders can also share information with their council members directly. One of the big differences you'll see at Lines is that it's not being led by staff. Staff will be there to help facilitate, but it is the state council members that will be at those meetings doing presentations and having these conversations with fishermen.

The second goal is to really increase knowledge of the management process. The management process is complex, and the hope here is that we can start to get to know fishermen in the community, and really encourage them to engage in more council initiatives. The next is to provide a mechanism for stakeholders to bring their concerns and observations forward. You know, council meetings only have so much time on a given week-long agenda, but there are often things happening in the fisheries that fishermen want to bring to their council members now, and so this is an opportunity to come to these meetings, talk directly with your council members, and start having those conversations.

Then, finally, it allows council members to share information on, you know, really salient management issues with stakeholders, and so, again I would say the overall broad goal here is to build relationships by having a discourse between council members and fishery stakeholders.

One of the things I really want to harp on here is that Lines is very different from traditional public comment opportunities, whether it's public comment at an AP meeting, at a public hearing, at a council meeting, and they're often structured where stakeholders are being asked to, one, provide comment on a set of actions and alternatives that has already been sort of defined, and they're asked to sort of give a three-minute, or five-minute, however long it ends up being, comment,

which means there's not really that two-way discourse that is so valuable, and so Lines is very different.

The council is not coming with a specific set of agenda items to these meetings. There will be an agenda of activities we walk through, that are geared toward having conversations, but there is no specific management measure on the board. The council really wants to use this opportunity to have a two-way discourse, and information that they learn from fishermen during these meetings is going to go into the management process in a variety of ways, and one being helping the council set their workload priority.

If you've ever been to a council meeting, there's a big spreadsheet, with a ton of things listed on it that the council hopes to address, and they hope that these meetings, and input from stakeholders, can really help them prioritize some of the many things that they need to get through, and also use that information to provide additional context to some things that are currently being talked about at the council table.

Maybe there are aspects of a certain management action that they haven't considered, that really need to be considered from, you know, X community's standpoint, and then, finally, are there issues that aren't on the council's workplan, that are really important to communities, that they should be considering?

These meetings are now going to be sort of a standard part of the council's engagement process. They'll be happening in two states every year, and so we just did our first round in Georgia at the end of 2026. We're going to be in North Carolina February 2nd through the 5th, and then we'll be looking at doing South Carolina and Florida later this year, and into next year.

One of the things we wanted to talk to you guys about is how can law enforcement assist with Lines. At all of our public meetings, we always have law enforcement available, but, because we want these to be so conversational, we thought it was worth sort of letting the LE AP know about these, one so that, when you're talking to fishermen, and you guys all interact with fishermen regularly, you can share information about Lines, and how they can get involved, but, also, should you, or any other law enforcement that you know, be one of the officers in attendance, we really wanted you to feel free to engage with attendees.

Conversations are going to be happening, and attendees may have questions about how certain things are enforced, and we wanted to make sure that sort of this body knew and could pass along the message that you all should feel comfortable to engage in those conversations at Lines. If anything, sharing knowledge from law enforcement to fishermen, and from fishermen to law enforcement, is only going to help achieve the goals and objectives we've set out for Lines, and so we wanted to give you guys a heads-up that these were coming to an area near you soon, and, if you have any questions, I am happy to chat about Lines.

MS. HARRISON: I think it would be very beneficial for law enforcement to be in attendance, because like my brother is always calling our local marine patrol and asking for clarification, or he calls the Regional Office, and then they forward his message to law enforcement, and then law enforcement calls him back, and so I really feel like law enforcement is that middle man to clarify a lot of things for fishermen, and it doesn't hurt to kind of break the ice, I think, so fishermen know

that you all care, and that you're there, and that you're not these big, bad, scary guys with gold badges, and so thank you.

MR. DUNN: Well, just to clarify, I never fit the big, bad, scary guy, but I still got the job done. How are you planning on documenting or capturing what people learn from that?

MS. WIEGAND: Excellent question, and so, without getting too deep into the weeds on how exactly we've structured these meetings, they're broken up sort of into roughly three different activities. One is a sticky wall activity, and so comments from stakeholders are recorded on that sticky wall. We also have staff in the background taking just notes on everything that's said.

The second activity is more sort of breakout-group-discussion-oriented, where we're actively taking notes on a board in front of attendees, so they're seeing what we're capturing. The last part of it is a bit more of an informal. We've got sort of stations that are going to be set up around the room, and attendees can move from one topic to another, and have different conversations as they please.

For that, people will sort of be noting, as they can, what they're learning from stakeholders, and then, the following day, council members and staff have a meeting debrief to discuss what is learned, and all of that is recorded, and then that information is then presented at the following council meeting, by council members, and then staff puts together a full report.

CAPTAIN HODGE: I've got one comment, based on the meetings we had in Georgia, and I know that I received the email from Myra, and we do engage with the industry and fishermen all the time, and I probably talked to more than a dozen people the week before, and encouraged them to show up, and you all have seen how many -- It was just same industry people that show up, and a couple recreational fishermen, but they burn our phones up, and Carolyn would tell you, like they do in every office.

They burn your phones up with all these concerns and questions, and then I don't know how much you all advertised that, and I know I shared it with a lot of people, and tried to get it out, but I think local advertising, and even if -- Give it to me, and say go get this out for us, you know, and get it on the local radio stations, or wherever it needs to get the people to come participate in that meeting.

That's been the hard part for me, and, after those meetings, I said, all those people that call me, and I talked to for a month before that, and none of them show up. You know, none of them show up and voice their concerns, or even meet the council members, and so I don't know how you can better advertise it, or how well you did.

MS. WIEGAND: I mean, we certainly welcome any, you know, contacts you guys have. We have information on Lines ready to share with you, if you have people that you want to share it with, and you're absolutely right that, the more we can get the word out, the better.

I think one of the things that is challenging with Lines, and it's one of the reasons we've developed Lines of Communication, is trust in the council process is a challenge right now, and I don't think that's a secret, and part of what Lines hopes to do is start to rebuild that trust, by building relationships, and so I think there's an understanding among staff and council members that it

might be a little slow to start, but the hope is that we'll -- We use this metaphor often, and we'll keep pushing that snowball up a hill, as we continue to do these, and make a really committed effort to having conversations with stakeholders and incorporating their feedback into the management process.

MR. DUNN: I definitely think this is a great idea, because, when I attended council meetings, I actually got more done on the sidebar conversations than anything else, helping people out and whatnot, learning, but the fact that you're being able to document that, and provide it as historical data, is the missing link.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Anybody online?

MR. ZALES: You know, I just -- You know, hopefully this will produce something that people can see results from, because I can tell you, from my over thirty-five years of experience in this stuff now, people still today tell me that I'm crazy as hell for going any kind of council meeting, or doing anything at all, because you never get anything done, right, and that's the reason why you don't see any participation at council meetings, and I don't care if it's the South Atlantic or if it's the Gulf, or any council, because the public, when they come in, and they -- You hear public comment from these people, and they give their advice, and their recommendations and things that they would like to see, and then the councils typically turn around and do what they said they were going to do anyway, and discount what the public says.

The public, without any kind of positive feedback -- These things may work great to begin with, but, after a period of time, once the public doesn't see any action or anything positive that they see there, it's probably going to end up the same way, where you'll end up with five people at the table, and that's it, and so anything you can do, and, you know, I stress this to council members all the time, and anything that you all can do to try to get things moved to where you listen to people, and actually try to respond to what they're saying, is very helpful.

MS. WIEGAND: Thanks, Bob, and I think that's a great point, and I think it's a good note for us and council members to take, that it will be important to evaluate these as we move forward, and work to illustrate how feedback from these has directly impacted the management process, and so it will definitely be about closing that loop, and that's important for us to keep in mind as we move forward.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Well, thank you very much. We appreciate that. All right, and so we have no more business today, and so I've got a couple things. Those of you that are interested, we're going to -- Lewis's BBQ, we're going to kind of have a tentative -- Basically, if you want to come join us at Lewis's BBQ at six o'clock, because we're going to kind of all -- Whoever wants to come, we're going to meet up there. The food is really good. Me and Garland went last time with Myra, and it was awesome, and so really good BBQ, and so, if you're interested, six o'clock at Lewis's BBQ for dinner, you know, and I'll definitely be there. Okay, and we'll make it 6:30.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on January 20, 2026.)

- - -

JANUARY 21, 2026

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

- - -

The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Drury Plaza Hotel North Charleston, North Charleston, South Carolina on January 21, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Captain Scott Pearce.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: First off this morning, we're going to talk about the revision of the snapper group for fishery management unit. John, I'll let you take it away.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you, and so, if you want to follow along on your own, on your own devices, there's Attachments 3a and 3b. I'm going to go over Attachment -- I think it's 3b, the presentation slides, but there's a more in-depth document available, that has additional information, but this kind of this brief presentation kind of hits the highlights of what's in Amendment 61, and I'll say this is an amendment that is being let up by myself, and then also Allie Iberle, who you heard from yesterday regarding shrimp.

We've been the council staff leads on this, and kind of helping to facilitate the council's discussion on this amendment, and what this amendment really does is looks at potentially removing seventeen species from the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and so -- Well, I should say removing those species from federal, full federal, management, if you will, and so, right now, the snapper grouper complex is fifty-five species. There are several species in there that do not necessarily always have data available for them, and they may have low catches, and so the council is kind of taking a look at that fishery management unit and thinking about potentially streamlining it.

What that means is it could be -- These species could be removed from the fishery management unit, or designated as ecosystem component species, which I'll get into the details of that, but, just sort of to set the stage here today, I'm looking to just provide a little background information to you guys on what the council is considering, what happens on full removal, if you will, versus ecosystem component species designation, and just looking for me for your feedback from a -- Particularly from an Office of Law Enforcement perspective, and do you have any concerns with any of these species, other potential benefits for removing these species from full federal management, and so that sort of input, and so we'll come to that at the very end. There are a few discussion questions for the AP.

Generally speaking, as mentioned, the council has begun to examine whether or not seventeen species, and I'll get to the exact list of species in just a moment, whether or not these snapper grouper species continue to need sort of full federal management, and council members have reviewed various pieces of information on these species, and they selected these out of the fifty-five-species complex to continue to consider for changes in management.

In their discussion, several council members have noted that they do not necessarily want most of these species to go completely unregulated, and so they prefer some sort of federal or state management associated with them.

Looking at the list of species, and I'll go over them really quickly. Starting off, there's Atlantic spadefish and bar jack, which are kind of on their own. Then there are other species which are part of complexes, which I'll get into a little bit more, but those include misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, blackfin snapper, banded rudderfish, cubera snapper, white grunt, tomtate, sailor's choice, margate, jolthead porgy, saucereye porgy, knobbed porgy, scup, and whitebone porgy, and so that's the full list there.

I'll have a few reminders on that. You don't need to memorize that list. It will come up a few more times in the presentation, but that's what -- When I say -- When I refer to the seventeen species, those are the exact species I'm discussing, and so some of these species are kind of on their own from a management perspective and an annual catch limit perspective.

However, as I mentioned, many of them are part of complexes, and so the two species that have - - That are sort of on their own, and they're not part of a specific complex, include Atlantic spadefish and bar jack, and then several of the other species are part of various complexes within the fishery management unit, and so misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, and blackfin snapper are all part of the deepwater complex, and so, if you look there on the right, there's a pie chart, and what that shows is which species are part of the deepwater complex.

Shaded in gray there, you'll see silk snapper and yellowedge grouper. Those are staying under -- Those are not being considered for removal from federal management, but those non-gray-shaded, so the colored, various colors, pieces, if you will, of the pie chart include the species that would potentially be removed, and so, if those species were removed from federal management, you know, assuming all four species were removed, then the silk snapper and yellowedge grouper would be the only two species that make up the deepwater complex.

Similarly, banded rudderfish are part of the jacks complex, and so you can see, if those are removed, lesser amberjack and almaco jack would remain within that complex. Cubera snapper are part of the snappers complex, which include lane snapper and gray snapper, and so, if cubera were removed, lane snapper and gray snapper would stay within the snappers complex, and then the last two, the grunts complex and the porgies complex, the council is sort of thinking of those as a whole, and so those would potentially be removed altogether, and you can see how the different species make up what is the complex annual catch limit.

What exactly happens to these species if the council determines that a federal management is no longer needed for some or all, and so it's not necessarily it's not necessarily an all-or-none proposition. It could be two species, or it could be ten of the seventeen species, or it could be all seventeen, and so, if some or all of the seventeen species that are being evaluated -- If the council determines that they no longer in need of federal management, then there's two major options, and the council could remove those species from the fishery management unit altogether, and so you can think of these totally coming out of the federal fishery management plan.

There are no more federal regulations associated with those species, or the species could consider designating them as ecosystem component species. Now I'll get into that a little bit more, what that means, in a second, but, for that first option, as far as species removal, and so, if these species are removed from the fishery management unit, all existing federal regulations, and so possession limits, permit requirements, reporting requirements, annual catch limits, accountability measures,

all those associated federal regulations and management measures, would no longer apply to those species.

However, if those species are removed from federal management, and from the fishery management unit, states would be able to implement regulations for those species that could be extended into federal waters, and that is if they choose to do so, and so that's really at the discretion of the states, whether they would want to do that or not.

There are several examples from Florida where they have done that, where the state showed interest, or wanted to manage a particular species that was totally unmanaged, and the state, FWC, set those regulations and was able to extend those into federal waters, because there were no associated federal regulations with those species, and so there are a few existing examples of that on the books, but that's sort of the highlight of the first option, total removal from the fishery management unit.

Moving over to ecosystem component species, sort of the other main option, and there's a little bit more information on what that exactly means, and so what are ecosystem component species? They are stocks that a council has determined do not require conservation and management, but would like to list in a fishery management plan to achieve ecosystem management objectives.

There are currently five species within the Snapper Grouper FMP that are designated as ecosystem component species. However, there are no associated management measures with these species, and so, with that, there are some potential levels, if you will, of what could be applied to an ecosystem component species, and so, if these species are designated as ecosystem components, most federal regulations and management measures, as I mentioned, as annual catch limits, restrictive trip or bag limits, and size limits, would be removed in federal waters.

However, the council could implement some more non-restrictive measures, or retain some more non-restrictive measures, such as permitting and reporting requirements. There could also potentially be aggregate possession limits put in place that are relatively non-restrictive, and so higher -- You can kind of think of them as higher limits than what currently exists, and likely in an aggregate.

Going over, again, the three major actions that the council is considering, there's always the no action alternative, where the species can remain within the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and sort of everything will continue as-is, and so these species will continue to have annual catch limits, accountability measures, and other existing management measures.

The next major option, as mentioned, would remove these species from the fishery management unit, and so the species, again, are totally removed from federal management. They're removed from the FMP, and federal measures would no longer apply. Again, states would be able to implement management measures if they choose to do so, and they could extend these into federal waters, under that scenario.

Then the third major option, looking at ecosystem component species, the council could do this. It certainly elevates the species for data collection, research, and monitoring, and other potential measures that could be -- There's sort of a few other options the council could consider under the ecosystem component species major category, if you will, and so they could just simply say these

species are ecosystem components, and there are no other management measures that are implemented or retained, and so that's essentially -- An example of that would be the five species that are currently ecosystem component species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

They could retain the reporting requirement for these species. They could retain the permit requirement for landing these species, and then, to go along with that, there's been guidance provided by the agency that, if the council wanted to maintain a permit requirement, they could certainly keep the current snapper grouper commercial permit, but they would likely need to also include some other permit that would be open access, and so potentially it could be, and I'm giving an example here, any commercial permit issued by the Southeast Regional Office, as an additional option.

Then, finally, there's the potential to implement an aggregate trip limit, and so, again, this is -- The council would specify these by sector, and so recreational versus commercial, and, also, these would likely need to be relatively high, non-restrictive, and so kind of think of it as a little bit -- Not as restrictive as they are necessarily now, and so they would have to be set at a higher -- Likely a higher level, and so this is where I turn it over to you guys. I'm happy to answer any questions, but, really, we're looking for input from the law enforcement perspective.

You know, do you have any concerns for removing any of these species from the snapper grouper fishery management unit, potentially from -- I don't know if that may differ from a federal versus a state perspective. Are there any potential benefits from this, from removing these species, and so paring down the list of species within the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and then would those comments change with total removal from the fishery management unit, and so, you know, kind of kicking them out of the FMP, so to speak, versus keeping them within the management unit, but considering them as ecosystem components.

Again, as a reminder, on the right there, I have a table with the list of species. Again, as I mentioned, no need to memorize them. They will be there again, and so there they again, by complex, but there's the list of species, as a refresher, so they're kind of front and center in your discussion, and I'll hand it over to the AP from there.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you. All right, and so any discussion or comments? Go Bob.

MR. ZALES: I think it's beneficial for the council, and also for the Science Center primarily, to probably remove these, but keep them in the -- What is it, the ECU, or EU, thing, to where they still collect data, and still have all the information coming in on the fish, so that, at some point in the future, if something needs to be done, but, in the meantime, you're able to eliminate the staff time and everybody playing with all this for ACLs and the whole bit, when they're really minor species that are out there, and so my suggestion would be to allow the council to take these and run with it, but put them in that one category, so they're watched, but not really a whole lot of work being done.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Go ahead.

AP MEMBER: If they go into the ecosystem, does that prevent states from regulating them?

MR. HADLEY: I don't think it prevents states from regulating them, per se. One thing, and I don't have the information handy right now, but it may vary by state, and so if there's any sort of state measure that says you can't implement regulations that are more strict than the federal requirements, and there may be some limitations there, and it will vary by state, but, generally speaking, no.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I think it just depends on what defines a management plan, because the federal law says, if there is no management plan for a species, the state can extend their authority over that species, and so, as long as this wouldn't constitute a management plan, then I think we would be okay.

MR. DUNN: I think they should stay within the federal management system. However, I found that, the more we have this convoluted, the state sometimes can extend things way out, and, if we're not managing them, then people get really confused with that, and same with the officers. You know, what is real federal-managed fish, and what we need to concentrate on, and where does the state and the federal kind of -- It's like cousins marrying. That's where I'm with that.

MAJOR BEATON: I've got a quick question, and so, if they do fall into the ECS, are the reporting requirements for recreational as well?

MR. HADLEY: So there are existing federal for-hire reporting requirements, but there wouldn't be necessarily a private angler requirement, since there currently is not one in place, and so partial, but specifically to the for-hire sector.

MAJOR BEATON: So, to feed off of what Tracy was saying, and others, obviously, Florida is very familiar with this. We do it a lot, and so it's not a big deal. I think it's actually easier for the angler to understand one consistent regulation, no matter where they are in the pond. You know, we've got the issues with mangrove snapper, you know, and so then the state has to deal with direct and continuous transit, and, you know, if you've got -- You can get ten in federal waters, but you can't -- If I'm in my boat in state waters fishing, and I've got ten, I'm breaking the law, and so I think it helps a lot with the recreational angler. It simplifies things. It's consistent, and, you know, Florida will have rules promulgated to ensure that these things just aren't wide-door open.

You know, a lot of these, like the white grunt, and some of these other species, are pathway fish for people to get their SPLs in Florida, because they don't require a restricted species endorsement, and so a lot of these people that want to just get into the commercial fishing industry can go out and get their poundage in grunts, and some of these other fish that are being considered to be removed, and earn their landings, in order to qualify for an SPL, and so I think that's an important thing to consider, you know, because they are kind of a pathway fish to your restricted species endorsement in Florida.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Kind of going back to what Rob says, that could be an incentive to put more pressure on these fish, when they're removed from that, because, again, people would seek them out, because there is no regulation, and they're trying to do just what Rob was saying, is trying to qualify for those SPLs, or restricted species endorsements, and so, yes, and, I mean, in Florida, you know, the biggest thing is, as long as we can extend our authority to manage what is considered commercial bag limits, versus recreational.

The other question I have is if say -- These are deepwater species, and so, the areas in Florida where we don't have them within state waters, can we still extend authority over that species? I mean, I'm assuming they are in state waters, but I don't know. They're deepwater species. Would that be an issue for us to extend our authority, and that was really probably more of a question from my management team in Florida.

MAJOR BEATON: Yes, we can, as long as we include that language in there within or without the waters of the state. That's how we extend our jurisdiction.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and I just didn't -- I was curious whether or not, if we didn't have existing regulations for state waters, that we could add the within or without language too, but, again, I'm assuming we can. It's just one thing I wanted to bring up.

MR. DUNN: I agree with what Rob said about consistency, and, if all the fish in the state were extended out, that would work fine, but now you have a mismatch of regulations on the state -- For that one species, correct, that is very easy for the fishermen to do, but there are more than one species out there to fish for, unless they're just a sole whatever fisherman.

MS. HARRISON: From North Carolina's perspective, I'm not a fan of giving any -- Like any management to the state, because our processes are so much different between the state and the federal. Like the federal process, you have three years. You know, like the council says, okay, we're looking at this, and you have a public hearing, and then the council looks at it again, and then they tweak it, and the public has another hearing. I mean, there's three public hearings.

In North Carolina, we literally can wake up in the morning and the MFC has issued a proclamation closing our entire fishery, just like that, with no public input, and so I don't see how the federal can pass over seventeen species to a state that has the ability to close a fishery overnight, and that's state proclamation authority, but it doesn't sit well with me, as somebody who has been so involved in the federal process, and then to take seventeen species and just give it to like a marine fisheries commission, who really has no understanding of federal fisheries, and has does not have the similar process, and does not have the enforcement presence beyond three miles to protect these fish.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Anybody else?

MR. ZALES: I can understand the issues with Carolina having here, but, like in Florida, and I'll just -- I think I'm correct. In the Gulf, banded rudderfish are, I guess in that ecosystem part of it, on the Gulf side, but they also have them included in an aggregate bag limit, just for primarily identification purposes. People have a hard time identifying a rudderfish to a greater amberjack, at times, and so they put a restricted bag limit on them of five fish in the aggregate in there, just to try to get a handle on it, and not so much to manage the rudderfish, but because of the identity problem with graders.

The states -- Well, I know, in the State of Florida, they do a really good job at it handling this, and clearly there's always been confusion between state requirements and federal requirements. I don't know that you're ever going to solve that problem, but, by taking these fish out of the federal part of it, it saves staff time for the Science Center, and the people dealing with stuff, that they can apply to more important species.

Not that all species are not important, but, you know, I don't know that there's a big fishery for a lot of these species that I see here, off of Florida anyway, and so, you know, they're kind of like an incidental catch, and so, you know, by removing them, it makes you all's job, I would think, in enforcement a little easier, and it clearly frees up staff time at the Science Center to work on or other stuff.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So would we say that we agree that, overall, it probably wouldn't be as big of a law enforcement issue as it would be a management issue, and, if needing to extend any authorities over these species, that would really be the management team doing that, but law enforcement -- You know, we're just -- We're basically going to -- If we're out there on the water, we're going to identify what we see, and handle it as the regulations allow us to.

I guess there could be some confusion with the, you know, the stakeholders, but that's -- You know, for law enforcement, I think it's -- I don't see it posing a major challenge for us, other than just education. Would you all agree to that? Okay. One comment on the recreational side.

MR. BURTON: I don't want it viewed as a free-for-all. Clearly, I mean, I'm off Hilton Head, and spade fishing this time of year is a -- That's a big target fish, and it gets the charter guys another trip in an off time of the season, but I would not want it perceived as we can go kill all of them, if it comes off the federal.

MR. BOOTS: I would just have one thing to add too, and this is Ben Boots with NOAA. If it is taken off the federal side, and it's only regulated by the state, when federal officers are offshore enforcing the regs, they wouldn't be able to regulate or do anything with these species. It would only be a state officer once the fish turns back to the state waters, and that's my only suggestion, or comment.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thanks, Ben. For example, in Florida, if there were no specific state management for these fish in state waters, then they would fall under our 100 pounds, or two fish, whichever is greater, for each species. John, did we give you what you need?

MR. HADLEY: Yes, and I certainly appreciate the discussion. Great points, and so we'll -- We'll take this information, and summarize it. It will be in your summary report, and this is what will go to the council in March, when they discuss this, and so thank you. Appreciate it.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Any last comments or anything from anybody? All right. Nobody online? Okay. All right, and so I believe it will be Chip. You'll be up next with spawning special management zones. Thank you, John.

MR. HADLEY: Thank you. Appreciate it.

DR. COLLIER: Good morning, everyone, and so today we're going to be talking about spawning special management zones. These are five areas that the South Atlantic created off the coast of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida to enhance spawning, and also to protect warsaw grouper and speckled hind. The reason that warsaw grouper and speckled hind are differentiated there is just because the overall condition of those stocks in 2017 were perceived to be very low, and probably are still low today. We have very little information on them, but the council was trying to design something to protect them.

Within those five areas, three of the areas occur on natural hardbottom, or have a promontory associated with them, and so what these areas were trying to do is, the natural areas, we're trying to protect an area where multiple species spawn, and they had a list of focal species. Those focal species generally included the snappers and the groupers. John Hadley had mentioned there were several species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, but these spawning areas were generally targeting the snappers and the groupers, as well as greater amberjack. That was another species that was included, and the tilefishes, and so blueline and golden tilefish.

All these areas are fairly small. Most of them are less than five square miles. There is one that's over five square miles, but just barely over five square miles, and, just to give you that relative context for that, it's about the size of the city of Charleston, and so, if you look at the downtown peninsula of Charleston, that's about what five square miles is.

There's an additional two areas. These two areas are artificial reefs that were created by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. These two areas, they were created over sand bottom in the early 2000s, or late 1990s, and, when South Carolina created them, they never put them on any maps or anything like that.

Typically, with artificial reefs, it's designed for fishing. These were designed as potential areas for fish to have a little reprieve, and not necessarily as a fishing area, and so, when they got the grant for them, that was actually written up in the grant, in how they applied for the area with the United States Coast Guard as well, and so those two areas are being treated a little bit differently.

The three hardbottom areas have a sunset clause that's expiring in July of 2027, and so the council wants to have discussion on whether or not to extend regulations for these areas beyond 2027. The two artificial reef areas, those regulations do not have a sunset clause, but, just because they don't have a sunset clause, it doesn't mean that management cannot change for them.

What we wanted to do, or what I was trying to do for this meeting today, was get input from the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel to help inform discussions by this group called the System Management Plan Workgroup. The System Management Plan Workgroup is a group of fishermen, scientists, outreach professionals, law enforcement officers, a variety of people, in order to gain insight on how to manage these protected areas.

When we're talking about protected areas, it is usually very complicated to know exactly what's going on and to evaluate them. Everybody has different perspectives on what effective means, and how they're being treated, and so what we want to do is make sure, when we're thinking about effectiveness for this, we're getting the most information that we can, and so when I -- Then I'll get into the responses to the survey.

I'll show them to you shortly, but I did want to go over what the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel -- The conclusions that were included in Amendment 36. This was the amendment that did develop the spawning special management zones, and the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel had identified -- They made some comments and concerns relative to these, and the first one that they identified is these small areas were very far offshore, and so enforcement would be difficult.

The council should consider protecting these areas with buoys. However, buoys can be an issue if they're close to the shipping channel. There's also concerns with having buoys out there for some of the protected species, such as whales. More vertical lines in the water can be problematic.

The transit provisions, as you all had recommended, they were consistent with other areas, and so there are stowage requirements if people are transiting these areas. The council should refer to enforceability when designing closed areas, and consider that fishermen have advanced equipment on their vessels. I believe the council did listen to that. Most of these areas are square boxes following -- One follows a depth contour more than others, but most of them are square contours following lat/longs.

The spawning special management zone should be included on NOAA charts, both paper and electronic, and just a response to that is that we are not allowed to have these areas included on NOAA charts, according to the NOAA line office that builds these, because these areas are not permanent, and so you'll see, out there, there are some protected areas that the South Atlantic Council has managed, and some of those are on maps, on NOAA maps, but it's not a complete list of them. We have worked with some of the providers, like Garmin, and so these spawning SMZs are on Garmin. I don't know if they're on all of the units, and so we've been working to try to get these on there. It is just slow process.

Then enforcement is possible, but it is -- We need to get buy-in, and so this is another form of buy-in, making sure that we're evaluating these areas and listening to folks on how to change them, if it's needed, and so this is our first time that we're going through an evaluation for this. We were supposed to do it a little bit more frequently than this.

However, me personally, I have a hard time coming to a group and saying, we've done nothing, and so there's been a lot of work done in the last four or five years in order to gather information on these areas. There's been some spawning work that was done, looking at the potential simulations of where larvae in the different areas would go out. There's been work on which fish are spawning during which times, and so that funding has been very limited, and so it's basically been targeting certain times of the year where suspected fish were going to be spawning.

Warsaw Hole, obviously, sampling occurred around when warsaw grouper were likely to be spawning. Greater amberjack is another species that is suspected to be spawning in Warsaw Hole, and so the sampling has occurred around the greater amberjack spawning season, and so they looked at those two species.

In Devil's Hole, they went up around scamp spawning season, because scamp have been seen in high numbers in that area, and just trying to confirm spawning of scamp in that area and to see if other species are spawning, and then, for South Cape Lookout, sampling has been conducted in that area, trying to look at when red grouper would be spawning. It's one of the species that they were hoping to protect with that area, and so they've been collecting species around the time of red grouper spawning. As far as the two artificial reef areas, some sampling has occurred, but it's not necessarily gathering spawning condition for those fish, but they have more of a list of species that occur in the area.

I'm trying to think of other research that's going on in the area, and I think that's a full list of it, and so is there any questions on the spawning SMZs, or any of the background on why the council

had created that? I know there's some members of the LE AP that was around when the spawning SMZs were created. There's other new ones, and so, if there's any questions, I'll be happy to talk about these before we go into the survey.

MS. HARRISON: You said that NOAA won't let you have them on the charts, but are they on the logbook charts, you know, like where you have to select your grid to where you were fishing, because I think that would be -- I don't know if that's along the same lines as not being permanent, but that could be a really useful location to have them, because they have people like look at those every day.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and I think that's a really good idea, to try to make sure that they're on there. I know we have worked with Fish Rules in the past, and it would highlight in those areas whether or not you were in a closed area, and so there is -- Those tools are available, and so it should be available in the commercial Fish Rules app, to let folks know, but I will work with the two providers of those, especially for the for-hire fishery, to make sure it's on there.

MR. ZALES: Has there been any information, or studies or anything, conducted that shows the effectiveness of these area closures to spawning and what it's done to increase stock biomass, and I'll preface that with my reason for asking, because, in the Gulf, we've got several marine protected areas. We've got a forty-fathom closure area, and I'm going to work on gag, that all these areas were set up and established to increase spawning of the gag fishery, to increase the stock.

Well, ever since all these places have been created, the stock has gone to hell in a handbasket, and so they've done nothing to do that, right, and I'll use the analogy of, if you own a yard, and it's got grass on it, and, on that yard, if you don't cut it, that grass is going to grow, but, on the outside of that yard, where everybody else is doing their thing cutting grass, it's down to nothing, and so, in the box, it does great things, but, outside that box, it does nothing for the stock.

The fishermen have a problem with all these areas that they're being told is going to enhance their future in fishing, and everything is going the opposite way, and they have problems with all these closed areas, that clearly are not working to increase the biomass.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so I think one of the best cases, or the best examples, of where it potentially is working is down off the Florida Keys where they closed for mutton snapper, the spawning aggregation for mutton snapper, and, shortly after closing for that, they're seeing changes in the population of mutton snapper. Now, whether that is due to the management changes associated with closing that area, we don't know.

We suspect that it is effective at increasing the mutton snapper stock, and so that's why we want to protect certain areas that we know these fish are going to, and it appears that they're spawning there. They're going there for a reason. We don't know why, and we don't know which areas are the best to protect, and it's also a weighing of the areas to protect as well, because we go through a public process, and it might not always be the best areas getting protected. It is the area that the council has agreed to protect, based on the comments from the public, and so I will also say that, getting to what you're looking at, Bob, that is the holy grail of research.

That is a very high bar to meet, but there are new techniques that are out there that we might be able to get to. Just last week, we had a red snapper -- The South Atlantic Red Snapper Research

Program meet, where they're using these techniques called close-kin mark-recapture, and so you can see half-sibling pairs, and you can potentially see -- Maybe you catch an adult in the area, and then you could potentially see their offspring in other areas, but that's going to take us a long way to get there. It's going to be expensive, and we just don't have the information to provide the concrete evidence of it occurring.

The best we can do is maybe correlations, which isn't what people want to hear. They want to know it's being effective, and we just don't have that information. We do have information on simulation studies that indicate some of these areas could be very valuable for spawning of the fish, but they are pretty small in the grand scheme of things. It maybe is 1 or 2 percent increase in the population, but we just don't know, and so, unfortunately, not great information.

MAJOR BEATON: Bob, I was going to use the Riley's Hump example. You know, my son-in-law is a charter captain in Islamorada, and I fish down there regularly, and that spawning closure at Riley's Hump has paid dividends.

I mean, for, you know, the 1970s, and early 1980s, people would go out and target mutton, because you could, and then it became a unicorn, and, I mean, maybe a year-and-a-half after Riley's closed, the mutton are all the way up -- I'm a spear fisherman, primarily in the upper Gulf, and I've seen mutton snapper in the upper Gulf that I've never seen in twenty years, and so, I mean, Riley's Hump is a true success story. I think, you know, there's just recreational comments about -- You've heard them, the success story that it's done, and so if -- You know, there's a lot of how do we best do it, but surely, if you want to look at one, Riley's Hump.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so I did give you all some homework last night, and we'll grade you on your homework. Not really, but we'll go through the responses, and so we had it broken out into different parts of it.

One is talking about the planning, and so, when the council was developing these areas, how did the planning go for it, and so we've had four responses to the survey, and you can see, for the most part, it's either an agreement or that management purposes for the spawning SMZs were clearly defined. Two were saying that it is clearly defined. One said it's strongly agree with that. One says they agree, or two say they agree, and then one said there's not great evidence that the council did that, and they disagree with it.

So, moving over to the objectives, one of them was indicating that the reduction, or protecting spawning and bycatch reduction, those objectives were very clear, and three of them say that those objectives were very clear in the outset of them.

For the boundaries of the people that agreed, there was one that was neutral, and basically two more, or three more, that were positive for this, indicating that the boundaries are clearly defined around habitat and known spawn aggregation sites.

I'm not going to go into the actual notes on these, but another part of the planning is defining the roles and implementation, the roles and responsibilities for monitoring and implementation, and this one was a little bit more negative, where there was one disagree, two neutral, and one agree that the roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, and then the coordination is even more

negative, where two were saying that there's little coordination. One was neutral, and two were positive, and so we can look at --

Just because I know you guys are spread out through the coast, I didn't expect everybody to know all these sites equally well, and so we've had an evaluation for Warsaw Hole, Devil's Hole, or South Cape Lookout, and one for Area 51, or no, and what's this area? One was completed. Okay.

Going into some of these areas, is there adequate resources for monitoring South Cape Lookout? It indicates that no, there's not adequate resources, and, once again, there's not sufficient enforcement resources for these areas, and this is something that the council can put into their research and monitoring plan, saying we need more resources in order to monitor these areas, but this is clearly an area that could be improved.

The outputs to include are outputs for implementation, some of the management measures. Some agree that the management measures are being implemented pretty well. There's equal agreement and disagreement there, as well as some of the outreach and communication, and so we need to improve our outreach and communication for these areas, and then, finally, some of the enforcement and compliance actions are regularly conducted, indicating that strongly disagree that there's regular enforcement of these areas, and also disagree, and so we need more enforcement of that area.

Then, looking at some of the outcomes, looking at compliance, one individual had indicated that there's pretty low compliance in the area. The other was neutral, and both of them were neutral on whether or not the stakeholders support the spawning special management zones. One had indicated that there's not sufficient information on whether or not to change management measures for South Cape Lookout, and then one had indicated retain as-is.

I think this is probably the most valuable part of the evaluation, is whether or not to retain as-is, to modify, and figure out how to modify the area, remove the area from management, and so I think that's key for these, from all the advisory panels on how to move forward.

We had some information on Area 51, which is one of the artificial reefs that was created off of South Carolina. There is - This individual that indicated that there's not enough resources for it, and enforcement is a struggle in the area. They're neutral on some of the outputs, and they were neutral on the effectiveness, and so compliance and support, and then there was unsure on whether or not to change management in the area.

We'll skip Area 53, because we don't have any information on that, and we'll skip Devil's Hole, and move on down to Warsaw Hole, and so, getting into the resources that are available, once again, disagree that there's enough resources for the area. Neutral on some of the management pieces of it, and that includes the outreach and the enforcement and compliance, and then neutral on compliance and stakeholder support, and then unsure on whether or not to change management for the area.

Then, looking at some of the cross areas, trying to make sure that -- Are there overall things that we could change in the management of these, and trying to figure out what we need to do best, and so some of the process stuff is to see if there's been progress on enforcement, compliance, and outreach. One says there's not been any progress, and two said there's been little progress.

Looking at available resources, there's been no progress on resources, according to one individual, and then three had indicated that there has been some availability in resources and capacity for the area.

Not surprising, coming to this group and asking what could be improved the most, and it's enforcement, compliance, and outreach. I think those are all important, but there's also inputs on where it could be improved for the planning, as well as the funding, and so, with that, I just wanted to see if there's -- From the overall group, if you all felt like you had enough information on how we should be managing, or have any guidance for the council on how to change management, for these spawning special management zones. Do you feel like they should remain as-is? Do you need more information?

I'm not certain the best way to get all this information, because it is a ton of work to go through a full evaluation. We can't come -- Because that would be a two or three-day meeting, to come to the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel, as well as all the other advisory panels, and provide that, but we also want to get the compliance and law enforcement input on how to change management for these areas, and so I welcome the group to speak up and talk about how to manage these areas, and whether or not management should remain.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Do we have any comments or questions?

MS. HARRISON: I see really the only way to be effective at this is have VMS, like the sea scallop fishery. Like I had a friend who was working on a scallop boat, and they went into a closed area and thought, okay, no big deal, and nobody is watching, but they have VMS. Within like fifteen minutes, here comes a patrol officer ready to ruin their month.

Without VMS, I really don't see, like how these are effective. I know in Florida, and I always say this, but, Florida, I feel like you all have people at these closed areas like on a very regular basis, because I see, in the newspaper, people get in trouble all the time for fishing inside these closed areas, especially off the Keys, right, and there's a big one, but, I mean, in the rest of it, you're sixty-five miles offshore. Nobody is out there, and like very rarely other fishermen are, and so you're relying on people to have ethics and morals, and it's hard.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you. Anybody else? Go ahead, Bob.

MR. ZALES: To the VMS thing, it's my understanding, and you all can correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm just going to throw Madison-Swanson out there as an example. You can have a boat that's got a VMS, and you see the boat in that area, but unless you've got somebody on scene to board that boat, to see what they're doing, even though you know they're there, you can't prove what they did or didn't do, and so it's not an effective enforcement tool for that, even though I would agree that it would probably help, because --

I'm going to go back to some of the comments that were made yesterday about having the meeting that you all are going to do, bringing everybody together two times a year to talk about stuff. My experience in dealing with fishery management, for the many years I've been involved, is the key problem with stakeholders and management is that management has a history, and I'm going to go

all the way back to circle hooks, and circle hooks are a great thing, and, at the time, we didn't like them, but they really worked.

We were told, when circle hooks were brought in, that they're going to help eliminate discard mortality, and you'll see benefits in the fishery. Now, there may or may not have been some small increases in that. When you get into the descending devices, it's the same thing, but, when it comes to the management part of it, and when you see these closed areas that are out there, and you're being told these things are going to really help, and you're going to see tremendous benefits from these closed areas and whatnot, stakeholders don't see this.

That's why they don't have any confidence in what management is doing, and until we're able to show something, and my suggestion would be, for all these closed areas, to try to concentrate on some kind of program to show whether or not they're effective or not. Granted, time, effort, and money is a key problem, and staff time is a key problem. Everything is a problem, but until you're able to show the benefit of what you proposed was going to happen actually did happen, and Riley's Hump is an exception, that it does show that. In some cases, they can, but, until you have that there --

I was one of the first thirty people that was put on the Marine Protected Area Federal Advisory Committee back in 2000. I was on that panel for six years, and we developed all the stuff for marine protected areas in this country, and had all these discussions, and there's a lot of controversy with MPAs, as to what they do or not do, and there's really no information other than showing that, if you close this room, you've got benefits. Outside this room, you're not seeing any of it, and that's the key problem that stakeholders have with all of this whole management process, and not just with the closed areas, but everything that they're being told that, if you do this, you're going to benefit, but they don't see it.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Go ahead, Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, just to respond to that a little bit, and I'll start with that last part, where, you know, some of the stakeholders aren't seeing the benefit of it, and compliance is key for these areas. If people are going in there during the spawning season, and taking some of the fish, they're stealing from everybody, right, and we know noncompliance is a big issue in these areas, and so are we protecting fishing holes for people that are bad actors?

That's a horrible protected area, and we don't want that either, and so I think it's important to recognize that we need good compliance in these areas to get the benefits. If you have bad -- If compliance is low, that's going to make it seem like these areas are not effective. They could be very effective if compliance was higher, and I feel like people bought into Riley's Hump, and they're not going there. Compliance is pretty high with that area, and you saw a benefit pretty quickly.

All these areas are not going to be as good as Riley's Hump. I think that one is going to be like the golden child. We're trying to get some other areas that are working for other species. We just don't know where they are. We don't know enough about the resources in our area. It's a challenge. We can do models that predict where a fish spawns, and where their larvae might go, and I will say that we felt like we had a pretty good model that was presented to our workgroup.

Some of the indication was, based on those models, red snapper were coming from the Gulf of Mexico. Based on recent genetic evidence, it's saying, no, red snapper are not coming from the Gulf of Mexico into the South Atlantic.

We can put models out there. Because we don't know where these fish are coming from or going to, it makes it very challenging, and I just think we need to -- We're not going to get an immediate change, and immediate response, in the resource for a long time. Some of these areas might take twenty years for a population to recover. We just don't know.

They're sporadic spawners, and they might have one good event every decade, and it's that one good event that's effective, and so I hope we can get there, and hopefully we can have some good stories to tell, but, right now, we lack a lot of the resources. We lack the research in order to say, hey, this is going to be the best area, because we're only looking -- When I talked about the studies that went on in these areas, it was only in these spawning special management zones. It wasn't in the areas that were around them.

The areas that were around them could be better, and we don't know, and the problem with protecting an area here, and saying you must go fish over there, and, well, what if we're pushing them to the best spawning site? It could be really bad, but this is the area that's recommended right now, and, you know, should we change and try to move forward? I don't know. That's why we're trying to reach out to everyone, to make sure we're getting the best thing.

As far as something like circle hooks and descending devices, whether or not those are shown to be effective in management, I think they are. For red snapper, one of the species that we do have a lot of research on those, where best fishing practices are implemented, you do see a change in the discard mortality, at least in the South Atlantic, for that species, and so, when the circle hook regulations went in place, there's a reduction in discard mortality for that.

For the implementation of descending devices, there's a reduction in discard mortality that's associated with it, and so there are positives for these, and we just need to continue to spread the positive word and not focus on the negative. There are some good that comes out of this. We just don't know exactly where it's going to be.

MAJOR BEATON: I'll make a comment, and I say this with my friends. You know, twenty years ago, you had to learn how to fish. You had to go out trial and error. You had to find your spots. You know, you were self-learned. Now you go on a couple of YouTubes, and you can learn how to tie all your knots, and you can learn how to rig your rods, and you can learn what baits to use.

You get your four-engine, thirty-seven-foot Freeman, and you can access all these places, with the aid of technology, and you can be a decent fisherman in a short period of time, whereas, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, I mean, there were times, when my dad and I first started fishing, and we would get skunked and be happy to catch a couple of grunt, you know, but the technology -- The fish don't stand a chance, and so I think every little thing we can do to kind of give the fish a chance is a benefit, because it's not going to get any better.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I just want to kind of circle back to our law enforcement challenges, and I know we've talked about these, but I'll just kind of reinforce this. You know, obviously, when you have a zone like that, especially ones that are way offshore, there's a win right from the beginning,

because you're going to have a certain amount of people that are just -- They're conservation-minded people, and they're not going to violate that zone, and so, just by having that zone, you're going to gain a certain level of compliance from a large portion of the population.

For the rest of that group, the challenge is going to be catching them in the zone doing something, and, obviously, as I always say, the further offshore these zones are, the less frequency of patrol you're going to get. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't do it. It just means that the acceptance is that we're going to get out there as much as we can, but it's going to be limited. You have limited vessels that can make that run. You have limited officers that are available to get that far offshore, and things like that, and so that's just part of it, but the big thing is coordination.

I think, you know, we already have good coordination through our JEA with NOAA, with us and our priority patrols, but I think, when it comes to these special management zones, especially in all the states that may not have a lot of resources we have in Florida, you really -- You know, we need NOAA to take on that coordination role between us, the United States Coast Guard, and state law enforcement, to where we're using all those tools to the best of our ability.

I mean, if there's a way where, when Coast Guard is doing flights in an area, for whatever reason, if there's a way they can add those areas to their things of, hey, I'm going to do a flyover, and capture what I see today, and it could be a quick snapshot of what's happening that day, but, over time, that's information that can really provide a lot of information to us.

It can be something as simple as that, that gives us more ideas on, okay, when do I need to be in that area, and what are the days of the week that we seem to see more people that are in the area, things like that, even if it's surrounding vessels. It may not be that that day we found vessels in that zone, but, this particular day, we found a lot of vessels around the perimeter, and things like that, and so it gives us a lot of intelligence, where we can use that intelligence to plan those trips, and make sure they're the most effective. Because of the distance offshore, when we go, we need to make sure we are doing it the best opportunity, and the most effective times.

When it comes to buoys on these sites, I feel like the presence, or lack of a presence, of a buoy should have no impact on whether a person is in violation of being in that zone. I think, when you put -- You have coordinates, and, if anybody is that far offshore, if they don't have a good GPS system, and know how to use it, they shouldn't be out there.

I think that, by putting buoys out there, if there is a buoy one day, and then the buoy is gone the next, the person is going to argue, well, the buoys weren't here, and I didn't know, and that's not going to be -- That's not an excuse, and so I would say that I wouldn't worry about buoys. You provide the information, and the biggest thing is providing the information and making sure the public has that information. Make sure we're getting it out there and they understand clearly what it is and what they need to avoid. Buoys, I would say I wouldn't even put money in that. I would just put more money in outreach and education.

My last bullet point was outreach and education. The more that we can do as a combined effort, law enforcement, management, everybody, making sure people understand this. When I'm looking at the website, and, again, I'm -- You know, places like -- We talk about Riley's Hump, and Western Dry Rocks, and are those considered special spawning zones or spawning aggregate zones, or are they -- I mean, they all kind of work the same, right?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and they all work the same. Because those are created by the state, they're not something that we put a name to.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right. Good. I was looking at how we identify things, and so, if somebody was getting those all confused, and you see Warsaw Hole, but you don't see the others, and that's all kind of irrelevant, and I'm just -- All these different zones that are basically handling that job, and, I mean, the more we let people know what the successes are, even the ones -- If Riley's Hump is a huge success, we need to promote that.

Even if it's a state zone, we need to use that as a tool to let people know that, hey, the potential is there, and it's worth avoiding these areas at all costs, but, again, the biggest challenge for enforcing these zones though is you've got to be out there to enforce it.

When you talk about VMS, you know, you've got to -- VMS will only impact a small portion of your user group. There's a lot of user groups that are accessing these areas, or transiting these areas, to a degree, and so VMS is going to work for those user groups that we can apply it to, but, unless you're applying VMS across-the-board, to everybody who is going offshore to fish, it's going to be -- You know, it's a tool that I wouldn't say no to, but it's not going to be the end-all-be-all.

You're still going to have a lot of boats out there that we can't identify through VMS, and so all those are tools, but, again, it's just the big challenge is you've got to be out there to make those cases. You got to have eyes on, you know?

Going back to flights, with VMS, we've done -- We've had effective cases where we had a vessel in an area, that we can see on VMS, and we couldn't get out there with a boat, or at least it would take a long time, and so we got a flight out, and we were able to identify the activity that they were doing in that zone, and we were able to make the case, because there was a longline boat within a closed area, and so there are ways we can, but you're exactly right that we had to have eyes on.

We couldn't just base -- The VMS in that area was an indicator that something is happening, but now we have to get out there and identify it and say, okay, yes, this is exactly what's going on, and so, again, the challenge is always going to be frequency of patrol, and availability, but the biggest thing is coordinated effort. It's got to be a good, coordinated effort among all law enforcement agencies that have impact in the area, as well as management teams.

DR. COLLIER: What about -- Like after a case has been adjudicated, and whatever happens, and, I mean, I feel like following through, letting people know that enforcement did occur in these areas, and make sure people are aware of it, and I think that's also important as well too, because some people are like I'm just going to take my chance, and what's going to happen? Well, we can provide you an example of what happens when the court gets involved. It's probably not a good situation.

As you're aware, Scott, there is a little information on these managed areas. We did put together an information flyer for the spawning special management zones, and it does have the coordinates for all the locations. It's in lat/long. It's in a variety of lat/longs. I think I had tried to convert them

to TDs as well, but I did not have a converter, and there's not a good one online either, and so I did not feel comfortable making those.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I think the challenge -- I think I've done a great job with what you've done, and the challenge is getting in everybody's hands, you know, and we can help with that. You know, getting us those flyers, and, you know, rack cards, that we can hand out to the public, stuff like that, which I know they're out there, but just things like that, and utilizing all of these resources to get that messaging out is, I think, really key, but I do think I've done a great job trying to get everything -- You've got a good package. We've just got to get the public aware, make sure the public is aware.

The other thing is, the more we educate the public, and I'll stop in a minute. The more we educate the public on these areas, and, that user group we have that is very conservation-minded, that's going to avoid that area, they may fish close to it, because they want to, you know, get close to where the action is, but they're also going to let us know what they see. The more we get this out there, the more people know about it, the more feedback we're going to get from the community as well. We can add that to our patrol plans.

MR. ZALES: Especially in Florida, and you all know this too well, and Franklin County is historically known for this, but there's a significant disparity between a commercial fisherman and a rec fisherman that gets popped for violation, and, in Florida, the recreational community has a lot of power, and so, when they get a ticket in something like this, they go to their friendly judge, and the case you just made gets thrown out, because the judge has got the influence to throw the case out, for whatever technicality he can find.

The commercial guy, he gets out there, and he gets publicized, and everything comes back on the commercial side of this, and, when you look at the overall picture, the commercial fisherman, who has his livelihood, his vessel, his permits, everything he's got is tied to what he does, and any kind of violation can seriously affect what happens to him and his family.

The rec guy, he's out there for a good time. He's got money in his pocket, that \$37 million Freeman, with 2,000 horsepower on it, and he's out there running around doing whatever he can do. In Panama City, we're fifty miles from Madison-Swanson. That Freeman is out there in an hour, and, forty-five minutes later, he's got a boatload of fish. He's an hour back home, and nobody has done a thing, and all his buddies are seeing what he's doing, and, damn, we can go do this too, because he's not getting caught, and, if he does get caught, he goes and gets with his local politician and gets the case thrown out, and so that's another part of the problem.

Publicity on all this stuff, you know, it would really help for not just keying in on the commercial guys that are getting problems, because you've got dumbasses everywhere, right, and so it needs to be done on all sides, because it's a significant issue in both sectors.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: You have any comments from online?

MR. BOOTS: I'll just say, I mean, I think these have great potential, but, again, it comes down to compliance and enforcement, and, when you have closed zones sixty miles offshore, it is very hard to enforce them, because you can only make that patrol happen so often, and, in places like North

Carolina, we only have two people there, and we don't have JEA, and we don't have a boat, and so it would be the Coast Guard only, pretty much, and we would have to coordinate with them.

South Carolina, we only have one person in there. We do have JEA, and so we could coordinate with them, and, here in northeast Florida, where I am, we have been coordinating with Coast Guard. We've also been coordinating with CBP Air and Marine, so that we can get flights, and get visual on these flights, like Scott was saying, because that that's key. If we can get eyes on it, any way we can, with any partner that we have, it's great, because that does help us enforce, but it's still you got to get out there and so that's the hard part, is getting sixty miles offshore with limited people. It's difficult to do.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thanks, man.

DR. COLLIER: Just to build on that challenge, it's radars are getting better now too, and so they see you coming from a further distance, and so, when you're hook-and-line fishing in a small area, yes, it adds to all the challenges that you guys are talking about.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Do you have any other comments or questions? Chip, have we given you what you need to work on?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, I think so, and so, just to follow-up with what I've heard, it's, you know, improve outreach and education. I think we need to work on that some more. Potentially recommend to the council to consider VMS for some of these areas, to improve compliance in some of these areas. You know, highlight some of the stronger points, where we're talking about Riley's Hump, and maybe -- Let's see what else.

I think that's -- Not worry about trying to put buoys out there. Buoys are going to be a challenge, and so are there any other recommended changes that you guys would recommend for the area? Do you think we should remove them, keep them? I haven't really necessarily heard whether or not it was a thumbs-up or thumbs-down for some of the areas.

MR. DUNN: Going with what Scott has said before, our role is just enforceability. It's really up to the management to decide whether these are important. You know, we can just comment on can we help with the enforcement, but I do want to reiterate that, without enforcement, they're just suggestions, and Bob said it best. If you have a group of people that get away with it, there's a portion of the society, or the fishing community, that wouldn't normally break the law, but now they're prone to, because they're like, well, there's nobody out there, and look at this -- You know, the highways, and speeding, and that's a that's an indicator of exactly how enforcement works.

DR. COLLIER: Sounds good. Thank you, all.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Chip. So I guess, right now, we'll go and take about a fifteen-minute break. We'll take a fifteen-minute break and come back and reconvene.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right, and so the next topic of discussion will be vessel limits for headboats. I'll turn it over to you, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so you heard yesterday from Haley Stephens. She submitted a letter to you all, and made public comment, on this topic of potential different regulations for the headboat fleet in the South Atlantic, and so I've put together a very quick set of slides here to kind of walk you through this topic.

First, to give you some context for how we got here, a couple of years ago, the council asked the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel to have a chat and provide some general recommendations for how a catch limit per trip, or per day, for recreational vessels should be applied to headboats, right, and, at the time, they were, you know -- I think they were working on the gag amendment, and so, you know, there were comments regarding how headboat businesses would benefit from a different kind of regulation.

The advisory panel offered some general comments, and very and very specific ones, again for gag and black grouper, which was the topic of conversation at the time, and that was for Regulatory Amendment 36. That amendment, as we went over yesterday, was submitted to NMFS in March of last year, and is still undergoing rulemaking, and, when that amendment is approved, if approved, the amendment would implement a vessel limit of two fish, gag or black grouper for private and for-hire vessels.

The Snapper Grouper AP, when they talked about this, they said, to the council, that maybe you should consider a vessel limit that is proportional to the number of anglers on federally-permitted headboats, and so they talked about how this type of measure would be better for vessels larger than a six-pack, and for even larger boats, and they talked about how headboat-specific regulations have been implemented in the Gulf, and encouraged the council to explore that, and they recommended, or, you know, kind of threw out suggestions of potential things the council could consider, like four fish for ten to thirty passengers, six fish for thirty passengers, maybe 30 percent of the passenger count, or maybe a maximum of a certain number of fish, for example ten fish per vessel.

When they talked specifically about Regulatory Amendment 36, and, again, this is for gag and black, they were going over the alternatives the council was considering, and the council at the time already had a preferred alternative, and so the AP included the language that you see on your screen that is in italics.

They wanted to add an alternative that would include analysis in that amendment to consider some of these other options, right, and so, for a federally-inspected and permitted vessel that carries more than six passengers, they recommended having an aggregate gag and black grouper vessel limit of two for every six passengers, not to exceed a maximum, and then they gave a range of six to twelve fish per vessel, and so they were very specific in the recommendation, and then they suggested that the council select that modified alternative as their preferred.

The council, you know, went through the amendment, went through with the original preferred, but the council wants to continue to explore in which ways could future regulations be modified in order to benefit and to meet the needs of the headboat fleet.

In December, the council asked for additional information to start looking more in depth at any potential management changes, and, in June, we went over the highlights from a very detailed

report that the Science Center, or the headboat survey, provided, and so that's a hyperlink here in your presentation, if you're interested, and I'm not going to go through the details of that, but it's really informative. It looks at characteristics of headboats north of Cape Canaveral, south of Cape Canaveral, and it divides it all up.

The council took quite a while to digest all this information, and they decided to focus on snapper grouper species, in terms of any regulatory changes, and so, in September of this year, again, the topic came up for conversation, and the council directed us to start looking at current catch rates per every six passengers for four different species, right, and so they want us to look at black grouper, gag, scamp, and snowy, and this is because these were from the information that we gathered, the species that were going to be most of importance to headboats, and so that's kind of where we are.

We also need to make sure to explain the requirements for a vessel to be considered a headboat, which, you know, in the CFR, in the Code of Federal Regulation, the definition is included, and so there has to be a Certificate of Inspection issued by the U.S. Coast Guard to carry more than six passengers, and then, you know, I've got all the requirements there on the screen.

In terms of the request for you guys, the council wants you to provide feedback on any enforceability of some of these potential changes, establishing vessel limits per every six passengers, and any other enforcement issues that the AP may feel could potentially arise, and so we're at the very beginning of the process.

The council hasn't yet given us direction to get started on this amendment, but the topic is coming up in March, and so we expect that if, you know, they want to pursue this, that we will be told that let's get working on an amendment, and so we are making sure that we include you guys for your -- For any suggestions or recommendations that you may have at this point, and so I'll turn it over back to you.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Myra. Any questions or comments?

MR. ZALES: I would suspect that, for the enforcement point of view, I mean, the issue for you all is going to be it doesn't really matter how many fish per vessel, per angler, or whatever. As long as you can identify the number of people on that boat, and the number of fish on that boat, then you do whatever you need to do, and so trying to determine what number of people are going to be played with here is a management decision, right, and so I guess that's kind of where that goes.

In my business, I had COI vessels for years, with maximum capacity, on a couple of them, of twenty-five, and I've always had issues with the Fisheries Service's definition, and the council definitions in the South Atlantic and the Gulf, of headboat versus for-hire charter, because, even though I could carry up to twenty-five, I was a for-hire charter boat, because our definition of a headboat is -- The reason why they call it headboat is because you charge by the head, right, and you sell tickets.

Traditional charter boats, regardless how many people got on the boat, it's a flat fee for the number of people that's there, but, regardless of that, the issue here, I think, is, if you're able to enforce the

number of people, and the number of fish, then you're good to go. The rest of it really doesn't matter, but I don't know if I'm correct or not.

MR. DUNN: The only suggestion we have here that we don't think you should consider is a percentage. We don't -- Cops don't do math, and so do you round up, or do you how does that work, and so no percentages, please.

MR. ZALES: To that point, that issue was discussed a lot in the Gulf, because they were looking at like, for amberjack in particular, whether it was going to be one fish for every however many people, and whatever, and what they did is, if it was going to be one fish for every two people, if you had three people, then you got two fish. If you had four fish, you got two fish. If you had five, then you moved it up. You didn't really cut the fish in half. You just did it that way.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So, obviously, there's a lot -- There's a lot of discussion that probably needs to take place on this before they move forward, but I think I agree with Bob that, as long as you have clear-cut guidelines on the amount of fish per people onboard, but I think the biggest part of that is you're going to probably have to create a regulation that requires how they account for those people, which would be --

You know, I think the caller the other day talked about how they have their client list for people that are onboard, and we can see a total number of passengers that day, and so we need to make sure that that is a requirement to go along with the regulations, that they must manage something where we can come onboard and look at that list and see that, okay, you have twenty-four people onboard, and then we can go and look and see how many black grouper and gag grouper they have, and go from there, but that's -- As important as the fish are onboard, it's really to be able to clearly identify that.

We don't want to have to go through and head count everybody, and have everybody stand along the edge, and count all the people, and so just identifying the number onboard, and then going from there, but do you all agree or disagree?

CAPTAIN HODGE: I agree. I agree with everything you said there, Scott, because, when you define the parameters of this thing, it's easy. Like Bob said, if you climb onboard the boat, and the captain gives you his manifest, and says I've got twelve people onboard, you should be able to figure out pretty quick then how many fish they can have at that point, and I see nothing enforceability-wise that's rolling.

MS. HARRISON: I don't really see -- I mean, in North Carolina, it's not like, and I hate to say it, but law enforcement is really going on charter boats to begin with, but I do have an issue for management, because I just did the math here, and, if there's sixty-two headboats, and they have forty to fifty passengers, that is about 3,000 passengers a day across the region. If they have an increase of six fish, and so, for snowy grouper, that would be an increase of 517 fish.

The recreational limit for the entire region is 1,713 fish, and so you're giving them an extra -- You're giving them almost a third of the quota, and then it says here, on NOAA's website, that the 2024 recreational catch limit was exceeded. They landed an estimated 5,778 fish, when they are supposed to be landing 1,691.

Just from my perspective, especially with snowy grouper, I really don't see how we can increase -
- Without increasing the ACL, how you can increase the trip limit, especially when it's an increase of almost 30 percent, and so that's just from my perspective, and from somebody who is a stakeholder in the snapper grouper fishery, and I just -- That feels like reallocation, to me, in a pseudo term.

MS. BROUWER: Thanks, Alana, and so, you know, these options are -- Like I said, it's just the very beginning of the council starting to explore this, and so we would definitely go through and do an analysis, just like what you've said, you know, a more in-depth look, and, obviously, if it doesn't look like, for specific species, like for snowy, as you said, it's not going to work out, then we would bring that information to the council, but good point on that, and so thank you.

MR. ROLLER: You know, there's always been a lot of debate regarding having different limits for for-hire vessels, right, particularly when you when you look at the difference between recreational and for-hire. When I look at this from the headboat perspective, you know, I view it as kind of the fair thing to do, particularly as we look at having more restrictive vessel limits, right, and I think about it in terms of -- I do have a question here, and I'm getting there, but in multitudes of six, right?

If we allow a two guy grouper for every six people, that's just -- It's just like having multiple charter boats all wrapped up in one, but my question is this. From a legality standpoint, what if there's fourteen people on that boat? How do we treat that? Do you see what I mean, and so that's less than three multitudes of six. Do those two people -- I'm just saying like how does the council address some of those questions, to make sure that that we're addressing it from a law enforcement perspective, and so that's my question for the AP.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: For law enforcement, in that scenario, I would say you're only eligible for four fish, because you have up to fourteen, and so you have, you know, two per every six, and so, again, at this point, you qualify to have your four fish. You're going to need four more people onboard to qualify for two more fish.

MR. ROLLER: Do you think that's something that we should be addressing in the conversation?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, and I think so. Like I said, I think there's a lot of discussion. I think a lot of quirky things like that are going to come up. I mean, I'm thinking -- I can't quote the rule right now, but our blackfin tuna rule, where we have an expanding bag limit based on the amount of people onboard.

That was very confusing for people to get their head wrapped around. It was kind of a backwards way of doing things, and so I think you're going to have similar discussions on this, and so I think, for us as a law enforcement panel, we just need to be kind of included as you all go through this. As the council discusses this, and they come up with these different questions, and different quirky things, I just think we need to be revisiting this along the way, to make sure that it's heading in the right direction and nothing gets -- You know, it goes on a side route, because there is a lot of little questions like that that are going to come up, and they're going to try to figure out, okay, what about those two people, and they're left out now, and all this kind of stuff.

MR. ROLLER: But on that note, you know, this is something, in this current day and age, we are seeing more regulations where we have vessel limits for fish that are less than the amount of people on the vessel, and so I think it's really important that we do address this, and also get it right.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Yes, I agree.

MR. ZALES: First off, from my experience, whenever the Fisheries Service has played with bag limit analysis, and everything they've done through all the screwed up recreational data programs that they've had, they make assumptions on how they collect the data, and you assume that everybody will catch whatever bag limit you put out there, right, and fishing ain't that good. I'm sorry, and fishing is pretty good, but you don't catch a bag limit every time you go.

In Florida, the headboats that I'm familiar with in Florida on the east coast, a lot of their business now has switched over to half-day trips, for a number of reasons. Number one, it's more cost effective for the consumer to get on there. It's cheaper to get on there, and they still catch plenty of fish, and are happy, and so the long-range trips for the deeper water are not so prevalent anymore.

The likelihood of those boats even getting close to catching bag limits, because of where they're fishing, because they're fishing in shallower water, is probably slim to none, and it's my understanding, the headboats up there in northeast Florida, they've never even seen a snowy grouper, and so you don't have to worry about snowy being caught there, but, at the same time, and when you bring up the thing about fourteen people, if a headboat is able to carry fifty, they don't always sell fifty tickets, right?

A headboat -- Typically headboats, from my experience, they have a minimum number of people that they can sell with. If they've got a passenger limit of fifty people, they will typically put -- They can't run a trip with five people. It's not cost effective, and so they have a minimum number of people that they have, and so, if you set a vessel limit of four, six, fifteen, whatever the vessel limit will be, that limit, to me, would apply to -- If you have a six-fish vessel limit, that six-fish would apply if you've got twelve people on the boat or if you've got fifty people on the boat.

It's up to the vessel owner, and the captain, as to how they put those fish out there. Once you catch your six fish, if you catch them, then, if somebody else catches a seventh fish, that fish is going back overboard. You can't keep it, right, and so the enforcement part, to me, is still fairly simple, but the key issue here is with the management process to determine what will be the vessel limit for these vessels that carry more than six people, because apparently you're going to have a vessel limit for even a vessel that carries six or less.

Well, a vessel that carries six or less doesn't always carry six. I carried -- In my six-pack boats, I've carried one or two people many times. Sometimes you have six, and sometimes you have a different number. You don't always max out, and, when you're collecting a fee for the boat itself, it doesn't make any difference if you've got one or six. You're still making the same amount of money.

On the headboat, like I say, you've got the minimum that you have, that you have to have that number of people in order to be profitable, and so you sail with that minimum, or you have some

number up to your maximum capacity, and so the key here, to me, is the vessel limit and the number of people that's on the boat that that limit applies to.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So, just so I understand, what you're saying is each vessel, based on their potential for passenger capacity, would have a set limit for that vessel?

MR. ZALES: The way I would see it, the council would set -- Okay, for a headboat, that carries more than six, that the vessel would have -- I guess you would have to look at the passenger capacity to where -- There's not what we call COI vessels, and what we call them is overload boats, where you carry more than six.

There's not that many what I would consider just basic COI vessels that carry ten, twelve, fifteen, or twenty people. Most of the boats on the east coast are headboat type, to where they carry fifty or more people on their boat, but, yes, it would have to apply to the passenger capacity. If the vessel is able to carry twenty people, if you set -- I guess, if you set the six-fish vessel limit, it would apply to any so-called headboat with a passenger capacity of say twelve or more, whatever that would be, two fish per person, or whatever, however you would work that out from a management level.

That still doesn't play with you all's part of it, enforcement, because all you need to know is you've got six fish you can have on the boat. If you've got a minimum of twelve, you're good to go. If you've got more than twelve, you're good to go.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Then, again, I want to say too that I think what you're talking about is more of a council discussion-level item, as far as how they want to decide to manage that, and so I think that's something -- I'm surprised the industry hadn't brought that up already, and maybe you have, or maybe they have, at the council meetings, but that's definitely something the council can consider.

For our purposes, it's really -- I think any of it is enforceable, as long as it's clearly laid out, as long as we don't get into percentages, and as long as we have a clear way of identifying how many passengers are onboard that vessel, and so we can quickly move through that and not take up a lot of time.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to put a couple of additional notes on the discussion. The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel has discussed, and I think this is what Bob was getting to, of, you know, kind of a maximum number, and that may not necessarily correspond to, you know, you have your six-passenger increments, but up to some maximum number for, you know, a vessel of any size.

The Snapper Grouper AP has discussed that, and there's some level of support from those within the fishery for that type of idea, and then, also, just on the discussion, just clarifying for the bag limit analysis, the way that they do it, it's not assumed that everybody hits the bag limit. What they look at is they look at a frequency of how many people have hit the bag limit, or how many people have hit some limit that is above the proposed, and so, for example, when we did the black sea bass amendment most recently, it went from seven fish down to three fish, and so they looked at how many -- How frequently are people hitting three fish or higher, and that's what was assumed to hit the bag limit.

There were still a significant number of people who were one fish per person, two fish per person, and so that was included, that there would be an amount of people that would be zero fish, one fish, two fish, and then any of the three or higher were assumed to hit the bag limit there.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you.

MS. HARRISON: Why is it only pertaining to snapper grouper? Why aren't we expanding this to every species managed by the South Atlantic?

MS. BROUWER: So this came before the council during Ful Council discussion, and so they were looking -- I believe the report includes information on other species, like dolphin and CMP, but the council felt that it was, you know, not as prevalent of an issue that headboats really needed to have vessel limits for other species, and that's why they kind of honed-in on those four. Not to say that that couldn't change, but that's where we are now.

AP MEMBER: Is this change because of a perceived shortfall to the headboats, because of the additional bodies, or is this because we think they're taking too many?

MS. BROUWER: No, and I don't think it's either, and so the issue came up, as I said, when we were talking about gag and black, because that's a combined limit, and so the headboat contingent came out during public comment for that amendment and said, hey, you know, this really doesn't work for the way we run our businesses, and the council really needs to consider that headboats also provide, you know, access to a lot of people that would not otherwise have access to the fishery, and so we would like for the council to consider something more specific to their headboat component. That's my recollection.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I'll say that too, if you were to go to something similar to what Bob was saying, where you had, you know, individual vessels qualified for certain amounts, based on passenger capacity, that does get a little more complicated for law enforcement, because you could have a lot of different variables about what these boats can possess onboard.

There would need to be some mechanism where, maybe on their permit, it had it listed that they're eligible for X number of this, or whatever, based on capacity. I don't know, but that can be difficult for law enforcement, to know exactly what the capacities are for all these boats, if they assign a certain amount for each boat based on that overall capacity limit. I mean, again, it can come down to simple math, but just that's another element that law enforcement would have to consider when they're boarding these boats. I think, by sticking it to the actual number of passengers onboard, and what the potential is for those people at that time, would probably be the most efficient. Go ahead, Bob.

MR. ZALES: I think too, kind of to that, it was -- The headboat sector that I'm familiar with in the east coast, I think basically was trying to be fair, because, if you're looking at taking the traditional bag limit per person away, and do a vessel bag limit, then clearly a vessel that's carrying fifty passengers, if they've got the capability to catch one gag per person, then you're going to have fifty gags come to the dock every trip, even though the likelihood of that is probably slim to none.

At the same time, that would be unfair to the six-passenger vessel that could be bringing six fish to the dock at the same time. They tried to work out what they consider to be a fair compromise, and let's come up with a reasonable vessel limit to accommodate the number of people that we carry, and then work it out for both type vessels.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Anybody online?

MR. BOOTS: I would just say I agree with what you said, Scott. For enforcement-wise, and not management-wise, and we're in the enforcement business, the easiest way to do it would be the headcount, and so, if you have six, you get the two. If you have more than six, up to the next twelve, you get another two. Up to eighteen, you get another two, and, I mean, a vessel cap limit is fine, but I would stick with the simple math and the headcount.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Ben.

MS. BROUWER: I'm going to put the agenda back up, and so, at this point, Mr. Chair, we will have an update on citizen science. That's Item C or B on your agenda. Julia Byrd is on her way here, and so I would suggest that we move to Item 7 and 8, and we do the JEA updates at this time.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right, and so right now we'll go ahead and go around the room, and we'll talk about our joint enforcement agreements, and the compliance updates, and so I can go first, if you would like, and then we can just kind of hit everybody up, to just get an overall idea of the compliance on that.

For Florida, so far in this JEA contract year, we have 1,309 hours of JEA patrol. That is our regional asset patrol, and then, on top of that, we have 1,117 hours of our offshore patrol vessel patrol combined to go with that 1,309. We've had 1,354 hours contributed to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and we've had 470 hours contributed to IUU and IFQ patrol.

So far this year, we've had 409 combined citations and warnings. Of that combination, 175 have been written warnings. The rest have been citations. That could be either state or federal citations, and that just gives you an overall numbers of what we've done so far this year, and that covers our dockside patrol, CEP, recreational reef fish, marine mammal outreach, and all the other priorities, and so that's just a rough overall in Florida.

CAPTAIN HODGE: Thanks, Scott. For Georgia, we're at about 48 percent completed with our JEA contract for this year. I don't have the hours broke down, like Scott is being an overachiever here, but we are ahead of the curve right now. We've had nine JEA referrals so far. I don't think all of those have made it up to Ben's office yet.

We had some right whale issues earlier in the year, where we had an entanglement. I think our conservation folks, along with FWC's conservation folks, spent about five days offshore fighting with this whale, to de-entangle it, and then, if you all ever have been a part of that, that becomes a huge crime scene for them. I mean, it really does. They take up our entire back parking lot stretching these lines out, and identifying the markings on it, and it's really neat to see how they go through that stuff. That's been -- We helped them a good bit over those four or five days, with logistics and stuff with the right whale stuff.

As far as descending devices go, we're still seeing about 60 to 65 percent compliance with that, but you're still running into those folks that are trying to make their own descending devices, or they're not keeping whatever they have there to descend the fish in a readily-accessible manner, and so there's still an education piece to that.

They think, just because they have it on the boat, they're good, but, when you ask them to show it to you, they take fifteen minutes to find it, and so we're addressing that issue, and we're seeing a little more compliance with that over the last couple years, but the descending device -- Although there's been a huge educational push for that at the state level, and the federal level, the folks just don't get -- They're not getting that they have to have that thing readily available, ready to use when they catch these fish, and so we're working on that, but I think we have made one case this year related to a descending device compliance issue.

Other than that, we're good. We're on track to complete our hours, and Gray's Reef is just about over with. I think our marine sanctuary hours are just about over with, but we'll spread those out through the rest of the year.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thank you, Chris. Just for the record, my lieutenant gets 100 percent credit for all my numbers, because he keeps me going, and I want to say too that I didn't talk about descending devices, but I would concur with Chris on what we're seeing in Florida. There's still - - It's a lot better than it was a couple years ago, or a year ago. I think, at one point, we were at 50 percent compliance. Now we're up there in that probably 65 percent to 70 percent compliance rate, and still doing education wherever needed, but anyways. Myra, did you have something?

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and I just had a question, as far as -- When you say so far this year, you mean the last three weeks in 2026 or the numbers for -- Can you clarify that?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: That's the contract year, and so it would go back to June 1, or July 1, I mean. July 1.

MR. ZALES: Can't you have the venting tool? Isn't that kind of an either-or thing or no? With a venting tool, do you still have to have the descending device ready to use?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: For Florida, or for the Gulf, you can have either-or, but, on the Atlantic, it's going to be -- The descending device is required. You can have the venting tool too, but the descending device is 100 percent required, but the Gulf allows either-or.

CAPTAIN HODGE: I'll add too, Scott, for the way we educate folks, and a lot of the old-time fishermen still want to use their venting tool, and you can tell those people know this, but the descending device is to get past those predatory fish too, you know, and that's what we tell them, is, yes, feel free to deflate the fish with your old venting device, if you want, but the descending device is to get that fish past that predatory line a lot faster, and, you know, I think it's best practice that you vent them, if you have the tool to do it, but the descending device is required to be on the boat, readily accessible, off the east coast of Georgia anyway.

CAPTAIN YOPP: Garland Yopp, North Carolina, and so I don't have JEA, but I'll just tell you a little bit of what's going on in North Carolina. We were, at the end of last year, fully staffed, for the first time in many years, but that has since gone away, through retirement, and so it was short-

lived. We've recently got a new colonel in place, Chris Lee. There will be another major. We had both of them, that we got it pretty much the exact same time, and so that's going to create -- We've got some retirements going on, and so we're already back, you know, looking for people.

We're waiting any day for, at least in my district, getting a twenty-three Metal Shark, which will help push us offshore a little bit more. Also, in Morehead City, we're hoping -- The grant went through for a thirty-five Metal Shark, that's going to be based out of there, which will definitely increase us getting offshore. Things are looking good with that, from everything I'm hearing.

As far as the descending device, we're seeing better compliance. I don't have hard numbers, like Scott, but even -- We've been educating a lot, but even some vessels that we're seeing, that we have issues with, they have -- They might have issues with the fish, but they have descending devices onboard. The kind of rigged and ready, we're trying to get people to understand what that means, not taking ten minutes after you ask for it for them to find it. We're seeing better, but it's - - Every little fair, or little event, we go to, we're trying to talk about it, when we encounter fishermen and they start talking about offshore, and so we're trying to educate as much as we can.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay, and that kind of concludes all the representatives in the room. Ben, did you have anything you wanted to add? Okay. All right, and so that concludes the LE representatives.

MR. BOOTS: I was muted. I didn't have anything. Sorry about that, Scott.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: No problem. I just wanted to shout out, and so, yes, that concludes all the representatives for LE in the room, to really talk about our stats and numbers, but I'll open the floor for any other questions or discussion on JEA, or descending devices, from everybody else in the room. All right. We're good to go.

MS. BYRD: All right, guys, and so, for those of you I haven't met before, my name is Julia Byrd, and I oversee the council's Citizen Science Program, and I don't think I've had an opportunity to share information on the program with the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel before, and so I really thank you guys for letting me kind of share a little bit of information about the program.

There are two kind of council staffers who work primarily on the program. It's myself and Meg Withers, who is our Citizen Science Project Coordinator, and so today I just wanted to give you kind of an overview of what the Citizen Science Program is, why the council set it up, and what it's trying to do, and update you guys on a few projects, and I know -- That we have underway right now.

I know a couple people around the table are very familiar with the Citizen Science Program, and so some of you guys will be hearing information you may have heard before, but we really just wanted to give you guys an update on the program, and what we're trying to do, to see if there are any opportunities to kind of collaborate with you all.

As many of you guys know, the council manages a lot of species, over a large geographic area, and so we have a lot of data needs, and the South Atlantic Council had consistently been hearing from fishermen that they wanted to help collect more data used to manage their fisheries, and so citizen science can provide that opportunity, and so the council really started looking into

developing a citizen science program because of Ben Hardig, who is a commercial fisherman down in Florida, and Michelle Duval, who was on the council, and Ben was on the council as well. Michelle was a North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Council member, and it was really those two who kind of pushed the council in the direction of developing a citizen science program.

We're the only one of the regional fishery management councils that has a specific citizen science program, and we really got started developing the program back in 2016. We had a workshop, and we brought together fishermen and scientists and managers and said, if we had a citizen science program, what would you want it to do, and what would success look like?

What came out of that workshop is what we called our program blueprint, which basically laid out kind of how we wanted to develop the program, and so we worked with a really large group of stakeholders, fishermen, scientists, managers, data managers, stock assessment scientists, and there were some law enforcement people involved in these. We called them A-teams, or action teams, that helped us really build the program.

What the program is really trying to do is we want to fill data gaps and address research priorities that are important to the South Atlantic Council, and are kind of important to our fishermen, our scientists, and our managers. We want to make sure that we're supporting and developing projects that complement existing programs and partnerships. We're not trying to kind of compete or replace things. We want to provide supplemental data that can help inform decision-making.

One of the things we heard loud and clear, when we held the workshop back in 2016, is that fishermen said, if they were going to collect data, they want their data to be used, and so, you know, when we originally have a project idea, we're already thinking about how that information could be used to help inform management or stock assessment, and so we kind of try to think about that from the start of our project and through its implementation.

One of the things we really try to do is to have fishermen and scientists collaboration when developing a project, and then we wanted to be able to sort projects where kind of our staff are running day-to-day operations, or if there are kind of other organizations that want to kind of run a project that's helping fill some of our data gaps, and we wanted to be able to support those external projects as well, and so that's a little bit just about how and why the program got started, and now I wanted to kind of update you guys on three of the projects that we have underway right now, SAFMC Release, FISHstory, and then a project called SMILE.

First, SAFMC Release, and so this is a project -- This is the first project we launched kind of under the program's umbrella, and I'll give you a quick overview, but, if you're interested in learning more, there's a QR code that will take you to our webpage, but this is a project that works with commercial, for-hire, and recreational fishermen like Mark McWaters. He's a private recreational fisherman out of the Jacksonville area, and they're helping us collect information on released shallow-water grouper and red snapper using a free mobile app called SciFish, and so they're collecting information on the eleven species you see on the screen.

The data that they're collecting are really helping us learn more about the size of these released fish, and information that helps us better understand how many of those released fish survive, and so they're collecting information on kind of species, the depth caught, the fish length, but also collecting information on things like hook type and location, whether or not someone vented or

descended a fish before it was released, and so things that help us better understand how many of those fish survive. People can provide kind of a fishing location if they want to, but it's optional, and they don't -- They aren't required to share kind of fishing location information with us if they don't want to.

One of the biggest parts of this project is kind of recruitment and retention, and so talking to fishermen, trying to kind of encourage them to participate in the project, and we do that in many different ways. Meg and I are just two people, and so we're really lucky to have partnerships. We work really closely with other council staff, with Sea Grant, with state agencies, with some folks in the industry in our area to help us kind of spread the word about the project, and so we're always looking for new partnerships to help us kind of spread the word about Release.

Meg Withers is the one who does a lot of the outreach. She works with a lot of our kind of best fishing practices campaign folks, and they make a lot of tackle shop visits. They also kind of partner with different kind of tackle shops or charter captains to do seminars. They often go to fishing clubs, to share information about Release and best fishing practices, and then we also share information on social media.

It's not just kind of getting people to sign up to participate in Release. What's also really important is kind of retaining folks. We want folks to participate in the program over time, and so we do that through a lot of different communication strategies. We have kind of one-on-one emails and calls with folks, one-on-one communications. We do a monthly newsletter that we share information about the project with participants, and we also have a recognition program, so where fishermen can earn kind of rewards for meeting certain milestones within the project.

Just to give you a taste of the kind of data that we're collecting, so every year we do an annual data summary, and so this is an example of the 2024 data summary. You guys might be saying that it's 2026, and why are you sharing 2024 data summary, and it's because we're kind of crunching numbers, or Meg is crunching numbers, on the 2025 data summary right now, and it will be coming out to our participants soon.

We put together a data summary. It initially goes to our participants, and then, after they've had a chance to look at it, we post it to the webpage, and it's available to all, but just to get a -- To show you an example of some of the information we're collecting and showing in the data summary, it's kind of looking at the release submissions by state, and by fishing sector, and we look at kind of the species that are submitted through the application.

We look at kind of length compositions for some of our released species, and we also look at things like release treatment by depth, and so when were people using descending devices? What depth were they fishing at, or using venting tools, and then we also look at shark depredation observations within the project, and so, if you're interested in checking this out, there's a link. You can barely see it, but it's the bottom of the screen there, and that will take you to that data summary, and all the data summaries we have are posted on our website, and so that's a little bit about Release.

Then the next project I wanted to provide a quick update for you guys on is our FISHstory project, and so this is a project that uses old, historic fishing photos to help us learn more about what was caught, and the size of fish that were caught, back in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, kind of before we had catch monitoring programs in place within the region.

The project kind of has three parts. The first is really just trying to digitize and archive a lot of these historic fishing photos from across the South Atlantic region, and we're really focusing, initially, on trying to digitize and archive kind of for-hire fishing photos. You guys are probably well familiar, but there's a kind of longstanding tradition from kind of charter and headboats, particularly in that historic time period, of, when they got back to the dock, they would kind of hang up their catch on a leaderboard, and then take a commemorative photo in front of it, and so what we're trying to do is digitize and archive those fishing photos so we can gather data from them to help us learn more about the catch.

Once we get the photos, the next step is we're trying to estimate kind of what was being caught, and we have members of the public who help us kind of identify and to count the fish in these historic photos, using an online platform called Zooniverse, and so it's a website where you can kind of build a project to have -- To train folks to kind of analyze your photo, and, in our case, we're training folks to help us identify and count the fish in the photos.

We also have a validation team, that's made up of kind of fishermen and scientists, that help us validate a subset of those photos that are analyzed by volunteers, to kind of verify kind of that species counts within the photos, and then the last component of the project is we're developing size compositions from some of those key species.

A lot of times, the leaderboards are two-by-fours, or two-by-sixes, and so we can use that to help scale and get an estimate of size of fish in the photos, and so this is a really kind of awesome project. It's one of kind of my favorite projects that I've worked on, and kind of the idea for this project really came from a fisherman down in the Daytona Beach, Florida area who is retired now, Rusty Hudson.

He's kind of his family's -- You know, he comes from a fishing family, and he's kind of his family's historian, and so had, you know, hundreds and hundreds of these old, historic photos, and knew they were valuable, and kind of came to us, and to folks from NOAA Fisheries, and said I know these are valuable, and how do we get the data out of them, and so that's really one of the reasons the project got started.

To-date, just to let you know kind of what we've done to-date with the project, we've archived over 2,300 photos throughout the South Atlantic. The majority of our photos are from Florida, both kind of the Daytona-ish area and then the Keys, and so we're looking for more photos. The more photos we have, the more representative our data is from across the region, and so we're especially looking for photos from the Carolinas now, and so, if you guys know anyone who might have historic photos, I'm always all ears to try to dig up more photos.

As far as kind of analyzing the photos, we've had over 4,000 volunteers that have helped us analyze just under 2,000 photos using this Zooniverse platform, and then we have our validation team that's reviewed -- It's probably more than 250 photos now, but they're helping kind of verify the information within those photos.

Then we're working with partners at NC State to kind of analyze those photos. What we're doing is we're using the validation team to basically help us calibrate those kind of general public

volunteer photos to develop things like indices of abundance, and so looking at catch rates over time.

Then, for the length component of the project, we've measured all the king mackerel and red snapper that we've seen in our current photo archive, and we've developed length compositions for both, and we presented the red snapper length compositions at the most recent SEDAR 90 data workshop panel, where those length compositions were recommended for use by the data workshop panel, and then we'll be presenting the king mackerel length compositions at the next South Atlantic king mackerel assessment, which I think was slated to begin in 2027, although that timeframe may be shifting a little bit.

Just to give you a taste of the data collected from these photos in FISHstory, so this is looking at length compositions of red snapper by decades, and so, if you look at kind of -- This is the 1950s, and you can see that the kind of size we're seeing most frequently is between twelve and fourteen inches, but you can still see some of these kind of larger fish here. If you move to the 1960s, again, you see the same kind of twelve to fourteen inches was the size of fish found most frequently in the photos.

You're starting to see fewer of these kind of larger fish here, and then, if you look at the 1970s, again, kind of you see that twelve to fourteen-inch size is the size seen most frequently in the photos, but you're seeing fewer and fewer of these larger fish, and so this is actual data that are being collected from these old historic photos. That's really valuable in helping us fill some of these historic data gaps that are important to assessment.

Then just the last project that I wanted to share with you guys is a project called SMILE, and so this is one that's led by a group called the Reef Environmental Education Foundation, or REEF is their acronym, and so this is a project that partners with recreational divers to collect length information on some data-limited species.

They basically have developed this laser-mounted underwater Olympus camera. Divers use it. They put the laser kind of on a fish, take a burst of photos, and then, right now, we're developing kind of an artificial intelligence model to kind of analyze those photos and get lengths of those fish, and so we did a three-year pilot project with the folks at REEF, kind of developing the camera technology, developing the methodology, and working to develop this kind of AI model to help analyze the data.

They did field testing down in the Florida Keys, and so the pilot project wrapped up at the end of last year, and we were able to get another year of funding, and so the project is continuing to grow, and, if you're interested in learning more about this project, they did a great presentation as part of the council's seminar series back in October, and there's a link to that recording online, and so that's just a little bit of a taste about what we have going on in the council's citizen science program, some of our projects. I wanted to make sure you guys were aware of them, and happy to provide more information if you all are interested, and I'm happy to take any questions, if anyone has one. Thanks so much.

AP MEMBER: Cool stuff. How many downloads of the Release app have you had?

MS. BYRD: I don't know that off the top of my head. It's hundreds. I could look that up, but it's hundreds. I will say there are a lot more people who have downloaded, and the app is called SciFish, than are actually like regularly logging things within the project, but we have, you know, 400 or 500 or so people have downloaded the app, and we've set up accounts for them.

AP MEMBER: Shark depredation data, what's the long-term plan, and what does the council plan on doing with that?

MS. BYRD: So, I mean, I think that's a good question. I think, you know, what we're recording in the app is kind of observations of shark depredation for our Release participants, and so we kind of share those, and put those together, in our annual data summaries every year, and, you know, I think it's normally kind of 2 percent, 4 percent, and maybe 6 percent one year. I would have to go back and check to get the exact numbers of depredation that we're seeing, and so we're happy to share that with anyone who is interested. I know we provided that information, and we did a working paper for the most recent stock assessment of red snapper, and included that information there.

I think -- I guess it's -- I'm not sure exactly how the council will use this information, but one thing that we've been hearing loud and clear, from many fishermen, for many years, is that depredation is getting worse, and this is one opportunity where they're able to share observations of depredation with us, that we can provide directly to the council, and so I don't know -- Did that answer your question? I mean, I guess I don't have a clear answer.

AP MEMBER: Yes, and I wasn't looking for anything specific. It was just more curiosity driven.

MR. ZALES: Then to that point, just like Julia said, because I know ,on the Gulf side, we've been talking about sharks for, I don't know, probably at least ten years, if not longer, working with HMS folks about the same thing, and what we've been able to do, and this is a long, slow process, is we've been able to move from talking about it, and trying to get some data collected on it, to finally having the Fisheries Service, and other people, start collecting data when they're collecting data for shark predation.

When you see different surveys that are out there now, you'll see a column about shark predation, so that we can get a handle on, rather than just talking, because anecdotal information -- Typically Fisheries Service people don't like it, and so now they're getting it in black and white, so we'll be able to get a handle on it and get it -- I don't know what we're going to be -- I can tell you all that one of our -- Actually, he's our chairman, Eugene Raffield, from Raffield Fisheries, and he's working with some people now, and I put him in touch with some more people yesterday.

They're working on -- There's a device that they've been playing with, and it works on magnets somehow. Apparently magnets put out some kind of energy force that sharks hate, and they're using this, and it's making sharks go away, and so it's helping to reduce the predation in the commercial fishery, and so there's stuff coming online about this.

There's another organization that contacted me, and I put them in touch with some people online, fishermen in Madeira Beach, that are using similar type devices, and so there's several people working on these kind of things, to create devices that you can put out there that deter sharks and get them away from you.

MAJOR BEATON: We use -- When we're red snapper fishing, we'll put a shark shield, which is like a long whip, and we'll drop it down to about forty feet, because that usually -- Unless you're getting them right off the bottom, that's usually where the sharks come in, and so we'll put a shark shield down, and then there's also -- On my descender device, and I was telling Tracy, I put a shark band. They've got what they call the Zeppelin weight. It's a rare earth magnet, and that's what drives the sharks crazy, and I actually have a shark band Zeppelin on my descending device, which, again, I'm trying to do the best I can for the fish, but I think that does have some impact. I've yet to put a GoPro on it when I'm dropping them, to see, and I'm not that into it, but it seems to work.

MR. ZALES: These efforts, we've been able to move people to try to do something to do this, because it's a problem that people say, oh, okay, well, this is a shark, and, well, it's getting worse. Actually, and I've even gotten -- Because I've been meeting lately with other issues, and SBA has an office that's called the Office of Advocacy.

Everybody thinks of SBA as they give you loans. Well, this Office of Advocacy, what they do is they promote small businesses, and I've gotten them involved, to where they're now looking into not only the predation issue, but they're looking at the significant more impact of shark attacks along beaches, as to how that's playing into that, and so there's a whole lot working with the whole shark issue now.

MS. HARRISON: Is there any data -- I see you have a lot of length data. Is there any like way to draw a conclusion of weight to coincide with that length data, so we can kind of get a better idea of what the actual impact of our -- Because the recreational limits are in numbers of fish, and it would be really great if this program could give us more insight in how many pounds they're catching.

MS. BYRD: So is the question -- I can answer, but I think you're -- Are you specifically talking about Release, as opposed to FISHstory, or kind of both?

MS. HARRISON: The Release, the one with the red snapper.

MS. BYRD: So a couple things I'll say is -- So we just have lengths. What we could do to get an estimate of size is look at the stock assessment and look at kind of -- They have a growth curve, where you can see kind of the length-weight, kind of that kind of conversion equation between the two, and so that's one thing we could do.

One thing I will note is, with the Release project, we're more trying -- We're not trying to estimate the total number of fish that are being kind of released of these kind of shallow-water grouper and red snapper species. We're more trying to characterize the size class of the releases, and information that helps us better understand how many of those releases survive, and so I don't know that we could use it to kind of estimate the poundage of kind of released fish, but we could look at kind of -- Kind of do the length-weight conversion to get estimates of poundage for what's being logged in the project, but I don't know that you could use that for kind of estimates of poundage of total number of releases. Does that make sense?

MS. HARRISON: Yes, it does, because I think that is a major weak spot in management, is that the SSC allocates in pounds, and then the council says, okay -- Like, for example, snowy grouper,

I believe you say the average snowy grouper caught is eight pounds, and so your 1,000 fish is technically supposed to only be a 10,000-pound limit, when, like off where I am, your average snowy grouper is thirty pounds, and so it's -- I really think that's, like, if any -- If this program could help improve that, like length and weight, and just have a better estimation because it's -- I don't really understand where we're drawing those average fish weights from to start with. Thank you.

MS. BYRD: Yes, and, Alana, this is -- I'm kind of veering off course a little bit, but there was a project that was funded through the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, ACCSP, that looked at conversion factors, and I think snowy was one of the species that was included in it. Anyhow, I can try to connect you with that. Okay, and I don't know -- Anyhow, we can talk after this, and you might be able to pull up their final report, or something like that that you could dig into.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right, and so now we're down to our -- I brought it up yesterday, and so I'm at the end of my service as chair, and so Michael Paul has been the vice chair for several years with me now, and he's not here, but he has agreed to -- If everybody is willing to support his nomination, he has agreed to take over as chair moving forward, and so to start this off, I would like to go ahead and nominate Michael Paul as the next chair for the advisory panel, if I can get a second for that.

AP MEMBER: Second.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right, and do I have anybody that opposes it? Okay. Well, based on that second, I would go ahead and say Michael Paul is now the new chair for the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel. Now, the next part of this is the vice chair, and so I know I said yesterday for you all to kind of think about if you want to make any nominations for vice chair, and so, if you have a nomination, I would love to hear it.

I will say that Chris has graciously offered to volunteer to take over as vice chair, and so, if everybody is in agreement with that, I'll make a nomination for Chris to take over as vice chair, and if I can get a second on that.

AP MEMBER: Second.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right. Does anybody oppose that? No opposition? Okay. All right.

MS. BROUWER: I think you should vote.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay.

MS. BROUWER: We can do a vote. That way, the folks online can also --

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I got you. Okay. All right. I was doing it the way we did in the Gulf.

MR. DUNN: We like the railroad version of getting people to do something.

MS. BROUWER: I think you've got a second for your motion, and so now I think we would just do a vote.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay, and so how should we -- Just do a --

MS. BROUWER: All in favor.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay. So, for the chairman position for Michael Paul, all in favor say aye. Anybody online? Okay. Anybody opposed? All right, and so the ayes have it. Then, for the vice chair, for Chris Hodge, everybody say aye in favor. All in favor, say aye. Sorry, and I am not good at this. There's a reason why I need to step down. All opposed. Any opposed, or all opposed, say no. All right. So the ayes have it, and so Chris will be the vice chair. Okay.

I feel like I've been doing this a long time, and I haven't gotten any better at it. All right, and, now we are -- With that behind us, we will move on to Other Business, and I know that -- Alana, I think you had something you wanted to bring up for Other Business, if you're prepared. If you're not, I can talk about a couple of things.

MS. HARRISON: Yes, and we moved through that agenda so fast that I was not anticipating before lunch, but if you want to start, then --

CAPTAIN PEARCE: We can take a break, if you want to.

MS. HARRISON: That would be great too, because I'd like to use the restroom. Thank you.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Okay. Let's take a quick fifteen-minute break and then we'll come back and wrap it up, to give Alana a chance to --

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

CAPTAIN PEARCE: All right, everybody online. We're going to get back in session. All right, everybody. We're going to go ahead and pick up where we left off in Other Business, and, Alana, if you're ready, I will let you go and have floor.

MS. HARRISON: Okay. Thank you. All right, and so I've mentioned this before, but I think that the issue is growing and that, from a legal standpoint, a law enforcement standpoint, it is -- You all can really help close this loophole, and I'm asking for your help today in closing a loophole that makes the commercial fishery unsafe and unenforceable, the tournament sale exemption.

From an enforcement perspective, this exemption creates three critical problems. First, it sanctions uninspected commercial activity. Under 46 CFR, a vessel engaged in trade must carry specific safety gear, life rafts, EPIRBs, and survival suits. When a tournament boat sells fish, they are engaging in trade, yet they lack this mandatory gear. We are effectively allowing uninspected, unsafe vessels to act as commercial boats.

Second, it breaks the chain of custody. Commercial boats have strict logbook requirements that pair with dealer tickets. This creates a traceable path for every pound of fish. Tournament boats

bypass this. This creates a gray market, where it becomes difficult for an officer to distinguish between a legal tournament catch and a legal fish being laundered into the market.

Third, it complicates dockside enforcement. This loophole muddies the waters for officers in the field. It blurs the line between a recreational boat and a commercial boat, making it harder for you to enforce the limited entry statutes that are supposed to protect this fishery.

I am asking the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel to advise the council that, if a vessel is selling fish, it must meet all commercial safety and reporting standards to ensure the regulations are enforceable, and I move to recommend that the council require any vessel selling king mackerel to fully comply with 46 CFR Part 28, Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Regulations, specifically regarding life rafts and survival equipment, regardless of tournament exemption status. If I can have a second, I will give you more rationale.

MR. ZALES: I was one of those dual-permitted vessel owners and operators, and I represent a whole bunch of those people. The regulations in the Gulf, and as far as I know in the South Atlantic, are already there. If you are a federally-permitted for-hire vessel, whether you're certified or whether you're uninspected, and you have two permits, a commercial fishing permit and a charter permit, you cannot operate under both permits on the same trip. You have to do one or the other.

When you're commercial fishing, when you're for-hire charter boat, you're limited to the number of crew that you can have, which is limited either by the vessel or by the COI. Most COIs that are out there, depending on the vessel size and the number of passengers, have a requirement for two licensed captains and two deckhands. You have to have that. That's your crew for your commercial vessel.

Anytime you go commercial fishing, regardless of what kind of vessel you are, you have to comply with Coast Guard regulations and have a safety inspection to do that. In doing so, you have to have an inflatable life raft, and you have to have all your commercial players, and you have to have all your communication devices, all your safety equipment, everything that's required on just a basic sole commercial fishing vessel, and so those requirements are already there.

If you've got charter boats somewhere operating without the required Coast Guard equipment, they're already in violation, and that would be up to them, and I guess up to the Coast Guard, or NOAA Law Enforcement, to take action on it.

There's a significant need. These people -- The reason why you have dual permits is because charter seasons typically are only so long. These vessels, they have something to do when they're out of season. This is extra income for those people. It keeps the industry viable. They have to comply with every regulation that what I would call a normal commercial fishing vessel has out there, and so I would be opposed to removing that dual-permitted process.

MS. HARRISON: I'm sorry, and I don't think you quite understand the issue as I described it. The issues with tournaments, and so they're outboards, and they're professional tournament fishermen, and so, like in Wilmington, we have a kingfish shootout, and it has 150 outboards, that range from like twenty feet to thirty feet.

These aren't charter boats who hold vessel permits. These are outboards with private recreational fishermen onboard, and the tournament has a license that they get to sell their fish, and so these recreational private boats, anglers, are fishing under a tournament, landing the fish, entering the fish into the tournament, the biggest one they get, and then the tournament gives them a raffle ticket for the rest of their fish, and then the tournament takes all those fish that everybody caught, and they sell them to a fish dealer, and that's not fair.

That's not a -- They're acting as a commercial fishing boat. I'm not -- The charter boats who hold a king mackerel -- If you hold a commercial king mackerel permit, you can sell commercial king mackerel, unless you are having -- Fishing in a tournament, and then you also get to act as a commercial king mackerel boat, and they don't have a permit, and so I don't really understand what -- I don't really understand what you're getting at, because this is a tournament issue, and it's not a charter boat issue.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So let me just clarify too that, these tournaments, these fish are being sold, but the money is going to charity, and so it's not that -- You know, yes, they are entering the market, but the fishermen aren't benefiting from the sale. The tournament doesn't benefit from the sale, and it goes to an actual -- It goes to a charity that's approved by -- I think it's all managed by the state, as far as how that works.

I will say this, and I don't know that this is something that the law enforcement -- I mean, this is my thoughts, and I don't feel like this is something the Law Enforcement Committee would make a final decision on. This is really a management discussion, because I don't have an LE -- In Florida, we don't have a problem enforcing this, and you know, there's certain things that are set up, permits and all that, and, as long as that stuff is in place, we don't have a problem enforcing it. I'm not saying that I'm 100 percent onboard with the recreational sale of these things and all that, but it is going to charity, but that's more of a management discussion than it is a law enforcement discussion, in my opinion.

MS. HARRISON: I'm on the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, and we have voted unanimously twice to advise the council to repeal this, and it's been five years, and we've had no advancement, and so, being as I'm on Law Enforcement, and I feel that we're essentially allowing upwards of 300 boats to participate in the commercial market, and they get to sell their fish alongside our fish, and they don't have to have any safety equipment, they get to transit sixty to 100 miles, in a twenty-five-foot outboard, and then that goes to on the Coast Guard to have to search and rescue them, and they don't have the life raft to be able to survive that. I just don't see why they're allowed access to a commercial market without following the limited entry rules, and especially the commercial fishing industry vessel safety regulations.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Any other discussion?

CAPTAIN HODGE: The only thing I hear from you, Alana, that would be a law enforcement issue, and I disagree with you, is that -- Those boats are not operating in a commercial status when they're recreational fishing. They're not selling the fish, and the captain of that boat is not gaining -- I'm speaking specifically of Georgia, because I know how we do there.

The fish is donated to the tournament, and then the tournament coordinator has the permit to sell the fish. The fisherman doesn't get anything in return for the fish, and so I would disagree that they're acting in a commercial status. I know those fish are entering the market, and that's your concern more than -- But, requiring them to have commercial vessel safety gear, I think that's completely outside of the law, and I don't know that this committee could change that anyways. I think that would be a federal regulation. Just my opinion.

MR. ZALES: I agree with that, because, from what I'm understanding on this, if I've got a million-dollar Freeman, with four outboards on it, and I'm fishing this tournament, and I donate my fish to the tournament, I'm not benefiting from the commercial sale of those fish. I don't get a penny, and so I'm not in the commercial fishing business and operation by doing that. That would be, like you said, the tournament people.

Now, I have problems with the tournament selling those fish for profit, where I think they would be better off donating those fish to a food bank, or doing something else that way, to where they don't get any monetary compensation for the thing, and that would eliminate that little bit of a gray area, but I don't see where this is an issue for the boats that are fishing, because they are not in the commercial fishing activity.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Again, I don't have the regulation right in front of me, but there is no financial benefit to the wholesaler or the harvester. The money goes to a non-profit, and so what it comes down to is making sure that these fish are being utilized, that they're being harvested, and they're being utilized, and nothing is going to waste, and that money that's generated goes to a non-profit organization, and the states have input on what those non-profits will be.

So, you know, again, I appreciate the concern, but I agree with Chris on this. I don't think this is something the Law Enforcement Committee would have -- You know, can change, and I think this is something that the council needs to discuss. I know you've already presented it to them, but, again, that's how the process works, but go ahead.

MS. HARRISON: So, from your perspective, the Magnuson-Stevens says that commercial activity is the sale, barter, or trade of a fish. N They are bartering and trading these king mackerels in exchange for a raffle ticket, and then their raffle ticket -- They get a prize, because everybody gets a prize with the raffle tickets, and so how is that not still a commercial activity with the anglers? If they're taking their fish and bartering it to the tournament and saying that you can have my fish, in exchange for this raffle ticket, so I can win a prize, and how is that still not the boat, the angler, participating in commercial activity?

Then, further, so the fish are sold to a local fish dealer, and that's true, and that first check goes to a charity, and I have proof of that, but I also have proof of a second fish dealer buying the fish from the first fish dealer at a four-dollar-a-pound increase, and so there's just so much ambiguity, and it goes against multiple National Standards, and Magnuson, and I think it's unfair to say, just because the person who caught the fish isn't getting a check from a fish dealer, that it's still not commercial activity.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I understand what you're saying. It sounds like you may have some issues within your own state as to how it's being managed, but I do think this is a topic either for the council, or even for NOAA, to have consideration in. I mean, I don't think that -- You know, I

don't think that this committee carries the weight to recommend a change in this, because, again, it's not a law enforcement issue.

This is a management issue. This is a conservation management issue, and you have to show that whatever is happening is actually having a negative impact on conservation, and I don't -- Again, I get it. I understand where you're coming from. I just -- My point is I think you have a great argument, and I think it needs to be with the council, to be presented to NOAA, and, again, I don't know the official way to go about that, other than going and starting with the council, but I just don't think this committee, or this panel, is the right one to present this argument to, or to be able to vote on. Go ahead.

CAPTAIN HODGE: I just want to clarify a point that I made to you, because -- Ben, are you still there? This is Chris from Georgia.

MR. BOOTS: Yes, I'm still here.

CAPTAIN HODGE: So, when we encounter these boats that you say should have commercial equipment on the boat, but they're not operating in a commercial status, but, by your belief, they are, but, by my belief, and this is where the law enforcement world gets separated from the civilian world, and there's certain things you have to be able to prove, and have to do, to be able to charge somebody with a crime.

If I send this case up to Ben, because a recreational fisherman in a kingfish tournament at St. Simons Island doesn't have equipment required of him if he's got a commercial permit, I don't believe Ben is going to take that case. I don't think the Office of Law Enforcement with NOAA can take that case, because there's no crime being committed, based on what the laws and regulations currently say.

I agree with Scott that I understand where you're going with this, but this panel, I don't think, is the proper place for it, because we can't change the regulations that are in federal law right now that require that safety equipment. We can only enforce what's there, and our job here is to tell you what we can and can't enforce, and so, therefore, the regulatory changes are what you're looking for, versus this committee making a recommendation to the council, because you're already in that position to do that, in my opinion, and I think your energy should be invested where you're already putting it to make those changes.

MS. HARRISON: I'm just knocking on every door, because nobody will answer.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So, Alana, again, I do appreciate what you're bringing to the table, just again, but, as Myra just explained to me, and, again, this is my lack of education here in what we're doing, is you have made a motion, and so the next thing would be for us to vote on this motion, okay, to see if it moves forward or doesn't, all right, and so is there anything else you want to add to this motion as we go forward? Okay, and so what we'll do now is say we'll vote on it, and so, all in favor of this motion moving forward to the council, say aye. What did I miss?

AP MEMBER: A second.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I'm sorry. Okay. Do we have anybody to second the motion? I'll go ahead and second the motion, so we can vote on it. All right, and so I've seconded the motion. **All in favor say aye. All right. All opposed.** Okay.

Again, I do appreciate your passion on this, and I don't think you're -- I think you have, you know, a good argument. It's just I think you need to take it to the council. I know, but just your persistence is the key, and I do appreciate you bringing it to our attention though.

AP MEMBER: Scott, real quick, could she go to one of our commission meetings, and other items not on the agenda, and because, I mean, can't the states individually say, no, we don't want to allow the sale of tournament caught fish in our state?

CAPTAIN PEARCE: I mean, I know we manage it. We have state regulations that manage the actual how it works in each state, and so, yes, if you wanted to take it to the state level, and see if the states would take action to prohibit it within their own states, then that's an option, and so, yes, you could definitely do that, but, you know, throughout the South Atlantic states.

CAPTAIN YOPP: Alana, have you gone before our commission or try to push anything with our director? I was just curious.

MS. HARRISON: Yes. I haven't made public comment, but --

CAPTAIN PEARCE: So is there any other business? Bob, go ahead.

MR. ZALES: Clearly I don't think you can do anything, other than keep an eye out, and I'm not even sure if you're aware of this. In the commercial industry, and especially in Florida, especially in the Keys, and I don't know so much in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, but commercial vessels operate with certain size crews. A lot of them operate with a single crew member, and some of them have two or three, and some of them have four or five.

Crewing these vessels has become a critical issue over the past couple or three years. Some of these vessels now are using these H2B visa people, these immigrants from other countries, that are clearly approved, and, since the new administration is there, and he's gone after all this kind of stuff, and with all the ICE things that are going on, an HMS commercial vessel -- If you solely fish nothing but HMS species, you can operate that vessel with an American captain and a complete foreign crew, and the reason is because that vessel can fish in international waters.

The only difference between an HMS commercial fishing vessel and a domestic reef fish commercial vessel, any of them, is that they can fish international waters. A reef fish vessel cannot, but the other commercial vessels are required to have 75 percent of the crew onboard has to be U.S. citizens, and 25 percent can be foreign, with H2B visas.

Now, the issue there is that some of these vessels are operating with one, two, or three people. Clearly 75/25 don't work. The math don't work out, right, and so you've got to have a full American crew on there, and so we've been working with the , and others, to try to get some things changed.

What we would really like to see is that these vessels that are fishing reef fish, or kingfish, or whatever, or compared to the HMS vessel, to where they could operate with an American captain, then they can have a full foreign crew, if necessary, because in the Keys, and I'm sure you all have seen this, this ICE thing has come out, and these ICE guys have gone in there, and gone to vessels, pulled legal people off the boat, and thrown them in jail before they ever do anything, and so you've got a vessel here, and not only have you got the foreign crew member in jail, that he doesn't know why, because he's here legally, but you've got a vessel that can't operate, because they ain't got any crew.

I don't know where that plays, and I don't know if you're all aware of this, and I don't know how significant it may be on the other states, but, in Florida, it's significant, and, in other states in the Northeast, it's a critical problem and so we're just kind of looking at it, and I'm just kind of making you all aware of that whole thing.

CAPTAIN PEARCE: Thanks, Bob. Any other Other Business discussion? I just want to add to keep an eye out for a Myra. She's going to send out an email for the Officer of the Year, and so that will be coming up shortly, and so make sure you keep an eye out for that in your email, so we can get our nominations together for her and make that happen nice and smooth. All right. Any other business? All right. I will go ahead and say meeting adjourned. All right. Meeting adjourned. My last one.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 21, 2026.)

- - -

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
February 5, 2026

LEAP Tue 1/20/26

Panel	Prefix	First	Last	Suff Position	Affiliation	Seat	Expertise
✓ LEAP	Capt.	Scott	Pearce	Chair	FWC	agency	state LE
LEAP	Major	Michael Paul	Thomas	Vice-Chair	SCDNR	agency	state LE
✓ LEAP	Major	Robert	Beaton		retired	at-large	state LE
LEAP		Joshua	Burton <i>wlb</i>		fisherman	at-large	recreational
✓ LEAP		Tracy	Dunn		retired	at-large	fed LE
✓ LEAP		Alana	Harrison		fisherman	at-large	commercial
✓ LEAP	Capt.	Chris	Hodge		GADNR	agency	state LE
LEAP		Jamal	Ingram		agency	NOAA OLE GC	fed attorney
LEAP	Lt.	Anthony	Liuzzi		USCG	agency	USCG
✓ LEAP	ASAC	Benajmin	Boots <i>wlb</i>		agency	NOAA OLE	fed LE
LEAP		Kevin	Roberson		fisherman	at-large	recreational
✓ LEAP		Garland	Yopp		agency	NCDMF	state LE
✓ LEAP		Bob	Zales	II			for-hire

LEAP Tue 1/20/24

	Committee	Name	State	Affiliation	Seat
1	Law Enforcement	✓ Dr. Carolyn Belcher (Chair)	GA	GA DNR Coastal Resources Division	State Agency
2	Law Enforcement	✓ Tom Roller (Vice-Chair)	NC		At-Large
3	Law Enforcement	web Judy Helmey	GA		Obligatory
4	Law Enforcement	Kerry Marhefka	SC		At-Large
5	Law Enforcement	Lt. Tom Pease	FL	Seventh Coast Guard District	USCG

Amy Dukes

Haley Stephens - web

DeWay Hembright

LEAP Tue
Jan 20, 2026

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
COUNCIL STAFF

Executive Director

John Carmichael
john.carmichael@safmc.net
843-302-8435

Deputy Director - Science

✓ Dr. Chip Collier
chip.collier@safmc.net
843-302-8444

Deputy Director - Management

✓ Myra Brouwer
myra.brouwer@safmc.net
843-302-8436

Citizen Science Program Manager

WBS Julia Byrd
julia.byrd@safmc.net
843-302-8439

BFP Outreach Specialist

✓ Ashley Oliver Ashley.Oliver@safmc.net
843-225-8135

Admin. Secretary/Travel Coordinator

✓ Rachael Silvas
Rachael.silvas@safmc.net
843-571-4370

Fishery Scientist II

Dr. Mike Schmidtke
mike.schmidtke@safmc.net
843-302-8433

Quantitative Fishery Scientist

Dr. Judd Curtis
Judd.curtis@safmc.net
843-302-8441

Communication and Digital Media Specialist

Nicholas Smillie
Nick.Smillie@safmc.net
843-302-8443

Fishery Economist & FMP Coordinator

✓ John Hadley
john.hadley@safmc.net
843-302-8432

Staff Accountant

Suzanna Thomas
suzanna.thomas@safmc.net
843-571-4368

Habitat and Ecosystem Scientist

Kathleen Howington
kathleen.howington@safmc.net
843-725-7580

Fishery Social Scientist

✓ Christina Wiegand christina.wiegand@safmc.net
843-302-8437

Fishery Scientist I

✓ Allie Iberle
Allie.iberle@safmc.net
843-225-8135

Citizen Science Project Manager

Meg Withers
Meg.withers@safmc.net
843-725-7577

Public Information Officer

Kim Iverson kim.iverson@safmc.net
843-224-7258

SEDAR

SEDAR Program Manager

Dr. Julie Neer
Julie.neer@safmc.net
843-302-8438

Administrative Officer

WBS Kelly Klasnick kelly.klasnick@safmc.net
843-763-1050

SEDAR Coordinator

Emily Ott
Emily.Ott@safmc.net

LEAD Wed 1/21/24

Panel	Prefix	First	Last	Suff Position	Affiliation	Seat	Expertise
LEAP	Capt.	✓ Scott	Pearce	Chair	FWC	agency	state LE
LEAP	Major	Michael Paul	Thomas	Vice-Chair	SCDNR	agency	state LE
LEAP	Major	✓ Robert	Beaton		retired	at-large	state LE
LEAP		✓ Joshua	Burton		fisherman	at-large	recreational
LEAP		✓ Tracy	Dunn		retired	at-large	fed LE
LEAP		✓ Alana	Harrison		fisherman	at-large	commercial
LEAP	Capt.	✓ Chris	Hodge		GADNR	agency	state LE
LEAP		Jamal	Ingram		agency	NOAA OLE GC	fed attorney
LEAP	Lt.	Anthony	Liuzzi		USCG	agency	USCG
LEAP	ASAC	✓ Benjamin	Boots		agency	NOAA OLE	fed LE
LEAP		✓ Kevin	Roberson		fisherman	at-large	recreational
LEAP		✓ Garland	Yopp		agency	NCDMF	state LE
LEAP		✓ Bob	Zales	II			for-hire

LEAD Wed 1/21/26

	Committee	Name	State	Affiliation	Seat
1	Law Enforcement	✓ Dr. Carolyn Belcher (Chair)	GA	GA DNR Coastal Resources Division	State Agency
2	Law Enforcement	✓ Tom Roller (Vice-Chair)	NC		At-Large
3	Law Enforcement	wts Judy Helmey	GA		Obligatory
4	Law Enforcement	Kerry Marhefka	SC		At-Large
5	Law Enforcement	Lt. Tom Pease	FL	Seventh Coast Guard District	USCG

Amy Dukes

Trish Murphey - wts

Dewey Hemminger - wts

LEA Pwad
Jan 21, 2026

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
COUNCIL STAFF

Executive Director

John Carmichael
john.carmichael@safmc.net
843-302-8435

Deputy Director - Science

✓ Dr. Chip Collier
chip.collier@safmc.net
843-302-8444

Deputy Director - Management

✓ Myra Brouwer
myra.brouwer@safmc.net
843-302-8436

Citizen Science Program Manager

✓ Julia Byrd
julia.byrd@safmc.net
843-302-8439

BFP Outreach Specialist

✓ Ashley Oliver Ashley.Oliver@safmc.net
843-225-8135

Admin. Secretary/Travel Coordinator

✓ Rachael Silvas
Rachael.silvas@safmc.net
843-571-4370

Fishery Scientist II

✓ Dr. Mike Schmidtke
mike.schmidtke@safmc.net
843-302-8433

Quantitative Fishery Scientist

wt Dr. Judd Curtis
Judd.curtis@safmc.net
843-302-8441

Communication and Digital Media Specialist

Nicholas Smillie
Nick.Smillie@safmc.net
843-302-8443

Fishery Economist & FMP Coordinator

✓ John Hadley
john.hadley@safmc.net
843-302-8432

Staff Accountant

wt Suzanna Thomas
suzanna.thomas@safmc.net
843-571-4368

Habitat and Ecosystem Scientist

Kathleen Howington
kathleen.howington@safmc.net
843-725-7580

Fishery Social Scientist

Christina Wiegand christina.wiegand@safmc.net
843-302-8437

Fishery Scientist I

wt Allie Iberle
Allie.iberle@safmc.net
843-225-8135

Citizen Science Project Manager

Meg Withers
Meg.withers@safmc.net
843-725-7577

Public Information Officer

Kim Iverson kim.iverson@safmc.net
843-224-7258

SEDAR

SEDAR Program Manager

Dr. Julie Neer
Julie.neer@safmc.net
843-302-8438

Administrative Officer

Kelly Klasnick kelly.klasnick@safmc.net
843-763-1050

SEDAR Coordinator

Emily Ott
Emily.Ott@safmc.net

Jan. 2026 Law

Attendee Report: Enforcement AP Meeting

Report Generated:

01/22/2026 08:50 AM EST

Webinar ID

602-215-187

Actual Start Date/Time

01/20/2026 11:30 AM EST

Duration

5 hours 21 minutes

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Last Name

Council

Attendee Details

Last Name

Barrows

Belcher

Boots

Burton

Byrd

Cox

Dukes

Gore

Grimes

HEMILRIGHT

Hadley

Harrison

Helmey

Iverson

Klasnick

Mehta

Murphey

Oliver

Roller

Schmidtke

Silvas

Stephens

Welch

collier

o

sandorf

Brouwer

Smillie

Thomas

First Name

Katline

Carolyn

Benjamin

Joshua

Julia

Jack

Amy

Karla

Shepherd

DEWEY

John

Alana

Judy

Kim

01Kelly

Nikhil

Trish

Ashley

00Tom

Michael

Rachael

Haley

Rob

chip

o

scott

Myra

Nick

Suz

Registered

29

First Name

South Atlantic

Jan. 2026 Law

Attendee Report: Enforcement AP Meeting

Report Generated:

01/22/2026 08:50 AM EST

Webinar ID

602-215-187

Actual Start Date/Time

01/21/2026 08:03 AM EST

Duration

4 hours 14 minutes

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Last Name

Council

Attendee Details

Last Name

Boots

Burton

Byrd

Curtis

Gore

HEMILRIGHT

Hadley

Harrison

Helmey

Iberle

Mehta

Murphey

Oliver

Roller

Schmidtke

Silvas

Stephens

Thomas

Welch

Withers

collier

o

sandorf

Barrows

Belcher

Brouwer

Cox

Dukes

Grimes

Iverson

First Name

Benjamin

Joshua

Julia

Judd

Karla

DEWEY

John

Alana

Judy

Allie

Nikhil

Trish

Ashley

00Tom

Michael

Rachael

Haley

Suz

Rob

Meg

chip

o

scott

Katline

Carolyn

Myra

Jack

Amy

Shepherd

Kim

Klasnick
Smillie

01Kelly
Nick

Registered

32

First Name

South Atlantic