

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **MACKEREL COBIA ADVISORY PANEL AND COBIA SUB-PANEL**

**Crowne Plaza Hotel  
North Charleston, SC**

**April 16-17, 2018**

### **SUMMARY MINUTES**

#### **Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Members**

Ira Laks	Stephen Swann
Keith Bowen	Stephen Donalson
Dr. Christopher Elkins	Steve English
Captain Skip Feller	Ryan Howard
Bill Kelly	Randy McKinley
Robert Olsen	Greg Peralta
Gary Robinson	Tom Roller

#### **Cobia Sub-Panel Members**

Wes Blow	Collins Doughtie
Bill Gorham	Patrick Link
Bill Weeks	

#### **Council Members**

Mel Bell	Ben Hartig
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#### **Council Staff**

Gregg Waugh	Kimberly Cole
Dr. Chip Collier	John Hadley
Kim Iverson	Cameron Rhodes
Christina Wiegand	Julia Byrd

#### **Observers & Participants**

Tracey Smart	Lt. Jerry Brown
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Other observers & participants attached.

The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel and the Cobia Sub-Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, North Charleston, South Carolina, April 16, 2018, and was called to order by Chairman Ira Laks.

MR. LAKS: Thanks for being here. We are going to start out by introducing everybody, and we're going to start here in the inner circle here, and we will start over with you. We will just give a brief introduction about where you guys are from and what you do, and then we will go around the inside of the table, and then we're going to go around the outside of the table.

MR. LINK: My name is Patrick Link, and I'm from Virginia. I'm a recreational angler, and I work for an environmental consulting company. I have a degree in environmental science, and this is my first meeting, and so I am looking forward to just kind of seeing how it goes.

MR. DOUGHTIE: My name is Collins Doughtie, and I'm from South Carolina, down near the Hilton Head/Bluffton area. I've been in advertising, but I'm also a long-time recreational angler, and I guide people on their boats, and I'm very involved in -- I'm also an outdoor writer, and I have multiple -- I've been doing that for years, and I'm very involved with the Waddell Mariculture Center down in our area that has done a lot of cobia research, and I think this is great that everybody is getting together, and hopefully we can change a few things.

MR. WEEKS: Bill Weeks from Brunswick, Georgia. I'm a recreational fisherman and charter boat captain as well as a marina operator, and I have fished the coast of Georgia and South Carolina for cobia and kings probably for the last twenty-five years.

MR. BLOW: Wes Blow from Virginia. I'm a recreational fisherman, and I've been fishing for cobia there for about fourteen years. I've been fishing for other species longer, but cobia for about fourteen years.

MR. KELLY: Bill Kelly from Marathon, Florida. I represent the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association, and it's a combination of recreational, charter/for-hire, and commercial fishing, and I have fished for kingfish, mackerel, and cobia for forty years in the Florida Keys.

MR. OLSEN: I'm Robert Olsen, charter captain, former commercial fisherman here in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina for the last thirty-five years.

MR. PERALTA: I'm Greg Peralta, and I live here in Charleston. I live on Daniel Island, and I was in the software business, and I got lucky and sold the company, and now I fish pretty much every day for fun.

MR. MCKINLEY: My name is Randy McKinley from Topsail Beach, North Carolina. I caught my first king on the end of a pier in 1974, and I started commercial fishing in the mid-1980s. I got my federal king mackerel permit and South Atlantic grouper snapper permit in 2002, and I became a federal dealer in 2004. During that time, I owned and operated a convenience store that sold fishing tackle for commercial and recreational, and I sold that last year, and so finally I can fish on my own boat a lot more and hopefully become more involved in this process.

MR. HOWARD: Good morning. I'm Ryan Howard, and I'm a charter captain out of Savannah, Georgia. I've been in the for-hire sector for about eighteen years, and so let's get it done, guys.

MR. SWANN: Steve Swann, and I'm from Atlantic Beach, Florida. I'm a recreational fisherman, and I'm a coastal marine consulting engineer in that area, and I grew up there, and I've been fishing for cobia, kings, and Spanish out of Mayport since the late 1970s, probably.

MR. LAKS: Ira Laks, and I'm a charter and commercial fisherman out of Jupiter, Florida. I've been fishing for approximately forty years.

MS. WIEGAND: I'm Christina Wiegand, and I'm South Atlantic Council staff, and I am the lead for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP.

MR. ROBINSON: Gary Robinson, a commercial fisherman from Jupiter, Florida. I pretty much just chase king mackerel all over the southern U.S. these days, and that's about it.

MR. DONALSON: Steve Donalson from St. Augustine, Florida. I'm a former SKA professional king fisherman, and I'm now strictly recreational. I've got a degree in marine affairs business and marine science from the University of Miami and Eckerd College in St. Pete. Currently, I work for WW Grainger in ITS and operations, and I'm just a concerned recreational fisherman wanting to see if I can help.

MR. BOWEN: I'm Keith Bowen from Sebastian, Florida. I'm a commercial king mackerel fisherman, and I'm doing the same thing as Gary over here. I just chase king mackerel around, and that's about it.

MR. ROLLER: I'm Tom Roller, and I live in Beaufort, North Carolina, which is smack-dab between Wilmington and Hatteras, if you don't know where that is. I'm a full-time for-hire operator, and I've been doing it for seventeen years.

MR. ENGLISH: Steve English, and I'm out of Port Salerno, Florida. I've been a commercial fisherman for forty-five years. I do a little bit of everything. I travel between here and North Carolina, and so I kind of know a little bit about a little bit of stuff between the two places, and so that's it.

MR. FELLER: Skip Feller, and I operate a fleet of headboats out of Virginia Beach. I've been fishing for my whole life.

DR. ELKINS: Chris Elkins, and I'm a retired scientist from UNC Chapel Hill, and I moved to a tidal creek near Cape Lookout, where I build boats and fish and do marine conservation, including a stint on the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission and a nine-year sentence on the South Atlantic Habitat AP and others, and this is my first meeting here, and I am happy to see all of you all here.

MS. WIEGAND: Good morning, Bill. I have unmuted you, and so if you want to go ahead and test and introduce yourself, and I will leave you unmuted, so you can self-mute as needed, whenever you would like to talk.

MR. GORHAM: I'm Bill Gorham. I'm a lure manufacturer from Southern Shores, North Carolina. That's located on the Outer Banks. My little company specializes in cobia bucktails,

and we have more recently moved into bluefish, Spanish, and now king mackerel trolling spins, and I'm glad to be here.

MR. LAKS: Guys, before we get started here, and I know it's something that I usually forget to do, but, if you're going to speak, please state your name before you speak, and I know it's a little weird to do, but we have to do it for the record. All right. We are going to approve the agenda. Does anyone have any objections to that? Okay, and so the agenda is approved.

We also have the last year's AP meeting from April of 2017, and we have the minutes. Has anyone seen any problems with those minutes or any corrections that need to be fixed? Okay. Then we have approval of the minutes.

MS. WIEGAND: Then I will go ahead and jump in and update you guys on the two CMP amendments that are currently under development. The first is Framework Amendment 6, and so just a quick little background. If you guys will remember, Amendment 26 became effective in May of last year, and one of the things that happened in Amendment 26 is we set up this trip limit system for the Atlantic Southern Zone for commercial king mackerel, and it set it up so that there is a line at the Flagler/Volusia line.

North of that line, the trip limit is 3,500 pounds year-round. South of that line, it's fifty fish in March, with a step-up to seventy-five fish from April to September. Then, from October to February, in the second season, the trip limit is fifty fish until February, and, if less than 70 percent of the Season 2 quota has been landed, it bumps back up to seventy-five fish.

Stakeholders, as well as this AP, expressed some concerns about those trip limits south of the Flagler/Volusia line. Apparently, from what we've heard from you guys and from stakeholders, those guys are going further offshore and making multi-day trips, and so they need a bit of a higher trip limit in order to make those trips worthwhile, and so the council began work on this amendment back in September.

They approved it for scoping in December, and we did that scoping at the March 2018 meeting, and, based on comments we received in that meeting, the council decided to go ahead and move forward, and so staff is currently working on putting together a draft amendment, which the council will then see in June, and they will approve it for public hearings, and we'll sort of go down the line of amendment development, and we would be looking at implementation in late 2018 or early 2019. I know the goal of the council is to try to get this in place prior to the start of the March 2019 season.

Here are the current alternatives, and I'm going to try to get through this without getting tongue-tied. We've got the no action alternative, which will keep things as they are in Amendment 26, and Alternative 2 would adjust the Season 1 commercial trip limits for the Southern Zone so that in March, still north of Flagler/Volusia, it would be 3,500 pounds. South of Flagler/Volusia would be fifty fish, and then, in April, from April to September, that line would shift down to Volusia/Brevard. Then, north of that line, everyone would have access to the 3,500-pound trip limit. South of that line, it would be seventy-five fish.

Alternative 3, which is currently the council's preferred alternative, would, again, change the Season 1 trip limits for the Atlantic Southern Zone. In March, south of the Flagler/Volusia line, it

would be seventy-five fish instead of fifty fish. Then, from April to September, that line would shift down to Volusia/Brevard, and you would have 3,500 pounds north of that and seventy-five fish south of that. Then the fourth alternative would shift the line down to Volusia/Brevard for the entirety of Season 1, and so, March through September, north of Volusia/Brevard would be 3,500 pounds. South of Volusia/Brevard would be fifty fish in March and seventy-five fish April to September.

Those are the alternatives. As it stands now, this is the only action in this amendment, and so I will gladly take any questions on this amendment, and, of course, the council is always interested in input from the AP.

MR. LAKS: I just want to add one thing. When we were doing Amendment 26, part of this was a little bit of an oversight. There was a lot of information that was going into Amendment 26, and, through timing, we had a short AP meeting that year, that we didn't really get to flesh all of it out, and, also, our AP meeting was before the council set an ACL, and so this is just trying to put back what was historically done and get it to where it was, where these guys can get the fish they need to make a trip, and I will let some of the gentlemen who fish on that -- If they would like to comment on it.

MR. ROBINSON: Did you say Number 3 was the recommended? Can you reread that to me?

MS. WIEGAND: Number 3 is the current preferred, and so this would have the line set from March at Flagler/Volusia, and so, north of Flagler/Volusia, it would be 3,500 pounds. South of Flagler/Volusia is seventy-five fish, and then that line would shift down to Volusia/Brevard, and you would have 3,500 pounds north of Volusia/Brevard and then seventy-five fish south of the Volusia/Brevard line, and it is my understanding that, sort of based on stakeholder comments, they wanted the seventy-five fish in March, and so a little bit higher than fifty fish, but they didn't necessarily want the 3,500 pounds. There was concern about exceeding the ACL quickly, but you guys certainly know more about that than I do.

MR. DONALSON: This is probably a stupid question, but I'm just still trying to learn. Why is north of one border in pounds and south of the border in number of fish, or vice versa, and I thought the goal -- It sounded like the goal of this was for people making multiple day trips, to try to solve that problem, versus moving a line, an imaginary line, for number of fish.

MR. ENGLISH: This is commercial is what we're talking about, and I can tell you that the reason for the line is the Flagler/Volusia line is the Daytona area, and so, right off of Daytona, they catch fish south of the Flagler/Volusia line. It's complicated, but what it is, it's, north of that, you have to go so far offshore to catch the fish that you have to have 3,500-pound trip limits, because it's only periodic and sporadic that they catch the fish, and, when they catch them that far out, they need to be able to go ahead and catch them a good bunch.

Right off the Daytona area, what we're talking about is, during the winter and fall months, of course, you want the seventy-five or fifty-head limit, because that ties in from Daytona south. It constitutes the whole Cape and Sebastian run of fish, and what happens is, in April, the fish leave, and that run is over, and now you're talking your little summer run of fish that comes in, and they are scattered and sporadic, and you don't catch that many, but the boys run out of Sebastian and the Cape, and they will work north, and they will end up in Daytona catching the fish.

Well, they will fish for two days, and so they want at least seventy-five fish to fish on, and, during the summer months, they want to be able to catch a two-day trip limit if they want to, and so that's what the whole purpose of -- What this does, the only drawback to it, possibly, that I see that could happen is in the month of April, for the first week of April, they might have a day or two that they actually are on a larger trip limit than what we want, but, other than that, this is what's necessary for the boys in that area, to be able to -- It's not going to impact the quota that much, because, if it did, the rest of us wouldn't stand for it, because we fish the south end of it, and so that's why we all -- There has been a big discussion amongst all the commercial guys, and this is what they came up with as the best for the entire south coast.

MR. LAKS: I think I can add a little bit to that. As Steve was saying about going offshore, it's very rare that someone is going to catch 3,500 pounds. It's just, if you go offshore and you catch fifty-five fish, you're not going to stay overnight to catch another twenty. It just doesn't make any sense financially, and so it gives these guys an opportunity to catch a few more fish and make a trip out of it, because it is such a long way offshore, and I'm sure some of these guys can speak better, but I think it would be a long time to remember many 3,500-pound trip limits coming out of that area.

MS. WIEGAND: Any other questions or comments on this amendment?

MR. ROLLER: Just a basic question. For you commercial guys, what would the weight of a -- What would you expect the weight from a seventy-five-fish limit to be?

MR. BOWEN: It varies. I mean, we catch fish that are, at certain times of the year, twenty-five - - Just barely legal, and sometimes we don't try to catch it, but that say five-pound fish at seventy-five pounds, or you catch your fifteen-pound fish at seventy-five, and so it varies. It's just different times of the year. It's a big difference there, if that helps any.

MR. HARTIG: Just one more thing about king mackerel and why the regulations are like they are. I mean, seventy-five fish doesn't seem like a lot of fish compared to 3,500 pounds, but you have to remember that, in the wintertime, the fish are in those tight schools and they are much more accessible than they are at any other time of the year, and so, about April, they start to split up.

They start to move back to the north, but it gets more complex than that, because you have one group of fish moving back to the north and then you have fish actually that overwintered in the Carolinas, offshore, coming to the south. These fish are coming south to spawn down in south Florida, and along the Florida coast as well, and so it's pretty complex, but the fish are much harder to catch after April, and that's why we're trying to give those fishermen access in the Brevard/Volusia area, a few more fish to be able to make their summertime trips.

Most of the fishermen actually leave and go to the Gulf at that time, and so it's not a lot of fishermen that fish on those 3,500 pounds, but it will help. It will help the guys that traditionally want to stay home, and our stock is getting better. I know those of you who king mackerel fish have probably seen that. I mean, we have seen a pretty significant increase in the number of small fish in the population now, and it's going to take a while for them to get bigger, but the stock itself

looks pretty good, for a change. We were really alarmed five or six years ago, but the stock looks better, and so we don't have a problem with that line.

MR. SWANN: Just out of curiosity, how close to the ACL are the commercial guys getting on the east coast?

MR. LAKS: I don't have the exact figures, but I think we're probably under 50 percent.

MR. BLOW: A similar question. Say the last ten years, has the ACL been over that or below it?

MR. LAKS: Off memory, I think, in a ten-year timeframe, the first three years was close to the ACL, but, in about 2010 and 2011, that has dropped down, but we're slowly increasing our catches, and so it's definitely showing a better trend in the fishery.

MS. WIEGAND: We will get into some of those trends in the fishery when we start talking about the fishery performance report for king mackerel. If we don't have any more questions on this, I will dive into cobia. There are a lot of different moving parts with cobia, and I'm going to try to go over it as briefly as possible.

I think most of you are aware that the recreational cobia fishery has been having some overages, recently. There were overages in 2015 and 2016 that resulted in shortened seasons in 2016, and I believe it closed in June, June 20 specifically, and then, in 2017, it closed at the very end of January, and this has caused some concerns about access to the resource. When federal waters closed, South Carolina closed state waters, to track the federal closure. Georgia did not close state waters, but cobia are primarily caught in federal waters off of the Georgia coast, and then North Carolina and Virginia, while they didn't close their state waters, they did implement some management measures to try to help reduce the rate of harvest, and so the council tried to do two things to address this.

First, they began work on Framework Amendment 4, which was implemented in September of last year, and that reduced the recreational bag limit to one fish per person or six per vessel, whichever is more restrictive, and upped the minimum size to thirty-six inches fork length for the recreational sector.

Additionally, they asked the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to consider complementary management of Atlantic cobia, and the commission began work on their plan, and, in May, they send a letter to the council requesting that we consider transferring full management to them, and so Amendment 31 looks at different options for removing cobia from the federal management plan as well as complementary management with the commission.

What's currently in the commission's plan, it tracks those regulations that were implemented in Framework 4, and so you've got that one fish per person or six per vessel recreational limit and the thirty-six-inch fork length limit. They also allocated the recreational harvest limit, which is based on the federal ACL, to the four key states of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. They did leave 1 percent of that regional harvest limit for *de minimis* states. In order to qualify for *de minimis* status, states have to show that their recreational landings over the last three years don't account for more than 1 percent of the coastwide landings.

If cobia is maintained in the federal management plan, those allocations will continue to be based on the federal ACL. If cobia is removed, the commission can choose to base those regional harvest limits on a different overall level, but they are still required to use the most recent stock assessment and the best available science, and so one of the questions we get a lot is can a species even be removed from the fisheries management plan, and the answer is, yes, it can. Not all species require conservation and management, and the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that councils consider these ten different factors when considering whether or not to include a species or a stock in a fishery management plan, and so these ten factors are really the crux of this amendment.

You need to look at whether the stock is an important component of the marine environment, whether it's caught by the fishery, whether a federal FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock, the stock is the target of a fishery, it's important to commercial and recreational users, important to the nation or regional economy, whether an FMP can resolve competing interests or conflicts, economic condition of the fishery, the needs of a developing fishery, and the extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by the state.

What happens if cobia is removed and what happens in federal waters? The commission does have a number of ways to institute regulations in federal waters. The Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act allows the commission to request that the Secretary of Commerce implement regulations in federal waters, and the council has sent a letter to the commission asking what they intend to do with federal waters upon removal of cobia from the federal management plan, and that issue is on their agenda for their spring meeting in May, for them to discuss, and I anticipate us having a response from them before the June council meeting.

The other moving part with all of this is the upcoming stock assessment for cobia and the stock ID workshop, and I am not going to get too into detail with this. Julia is going to give you guys an update in a little bit about where that stands, but what's important to know is that, if the stock ID workshop indicates that there should be a change in the boundary, the councils would both need to go through an amendment process to decide whether or not they want to move the management boundary based on the biological results of that stock ID workshop.

That would be a full amendment process, and the commission would also need to go through an amendment or an addendum to their management plan to address any shift that the councils see is appropriate, and that process would involve numerous opportunities for stakeholder comment, and so I know the guys in Florida are a little bit concerned about immediately being involved in commission management for cobia, and it would be a process, and there would be a significant amount of time for public comment.

This is where the council is currently, and we took it out to public hearings in January and got public comment. The council reviewed the document at their March meeting, and there were concerns about that it was still a little bit up in the air with the commission's decision to implement regulations in federal waters as well as a couple of other legal concerns about how quickly states could adjust their management measures, if needed, and so the council decided to delay final action until June, when they would have preliminary results from the stock ID workshop, and they would also be able to get comments from you guys as well as have a better idea of what the commission plans to do without federal management of cobia.



That's where we are right now, and there is just the one action in this amendment to revise the management system for cobia. The no action alternative would mean that the commission manages cobia in state waters and the council manages cobia in federal waters, and it's as simple as that. The current preferred alternative is to remove Atlantic cobia from federal management. In this case, cobia is managed by the commission entirely. States can regulate state-registered vessels out into federal waters, but we do anticipate the commission establishing regulations or requesting that the Secretary of Commerce establish regulations in federal waters.

Alternative 3 looks at a more complementary approach. It would establish a policy in the CMP FMP for complementary management with the commission, and, under this, the South Atlantic Council would continue to manage cobia in federal waters, but it would consider implementation of state regulations on a case-by-case basis, and, in order to do that, they would need to go through the council's full amendment or framework amendment process.

Alternative 4 looks at establishing a framework procedure for an enhanced cooperative management system, where the commission could request changes to Atlantic cobia management directly to the National Marine Fisheries Service. If you are familiar at all with how spiny lobster is managed with the FWC, this is set up to be similar, and so the commission would be able to propose rules directly to NMFS without formal action from the councils. However, those rules would still need to meet the FMP's objectives, as well as Magnuson-Stevens Act standards, and the council would still be able to adjust Atlantic cobia management through the normal amendment process.

Those are the alternatives being considered in this amendment. Like I said, the council has chosen their preferred alternative to remove Atlantic cobia from the FMP, and I will answer any questions that you guys have, and we welcome comment, and I know we also have Shepherd Grimes, who is the lawyer associated with this amendment, online, if you've got any questions about the legal ramifications.

MR. BLOW: Just one question on one of the first things you said, and I haven't heard any more about it, was it had been requested that 2015 and 2016 be recalculated several times, and I just don't know where that stands.

MS. WIEGAND: The council has requested recalculation of, I believe, the 2015 and 2016 recreational landings for Atlantic cobia, and the Science Center is working on it. It's a long process that requires quite a bit of review and staff time, and so the council sent a letter requesting a timeline, and we were told that it's in the works as time allows.

MR. LAKS: One thing that I have a little fear with this is I don't see any plans for commercial fishermen, especially in federal waters. I know it's not a directed fishery, but, if you get a few cobia on a trip, it can add up to some money.

MS. WIEGAND: The commission's plan does follow the current federal regulations for the commercial fishery, and so it's that 50,000-pound limit, two fish per person, or six per vessel, and a thirty-three-inch fork length, and so there are regulations in place for commercial fishermen, and I apologize for just sort of glancing over them.

MR. LAKS: Another issue that I know we brought up last year was the ease of availability of buying commercial licenses in some of the states and having a de facto separate recreational bag limit if you learn the system and how to purchase one of those commercial permits, and I believe, in some of the states, you can, for twenty-five bucks, buy a permit, and that would access you to cobia in federal waters and not have to fish within the state recreational limit and the season limit, too.

DR. ELKINS: To speak to that, for North Carolina specifically, we have about 5,000 commercial fishing licenses. About 60 percent of those licenses do not report trip tickets, and so we have 3,000 licenses out there currently, and why are they out there? Some of them are recreational fishermen who want commercial bag limits, trip limits, especially for flounder, which is now only four for the recreational in North Carolina, and, with cobia going to one, I suspect that some of them are for cobia, and, if you just go to Craigslist, you can buy one off the internet very easily.

MR. ROLLER: I just want to reiterate that comment. We do have a lot of latent licenses in North Carolina, and, over the last few years, with the federal closure, there has been a lot of discussion about this, and a lot of license holders, whether they are recreational or for-hire, were using this as a way to get around the federal closure.

I can't tell you how many fishing reports from for-hire boats I saw who were offshore bottom fishing and came in with two cobia that they claimed to have caught in the inlet on the way in, and we all know that wasn't really the case, and so, as long as you were in possession of our North Carolina standard commercial fishing license, it was used as a loophole to get around some of the closures, and so just to reiterate what Chris said.

MR. LINK: You guys mentioned earlier that Florida has some concerns, and I just want to voice some concerns about Virginia. You know, the biggest concern that I have heard from the stakeholders of Virginia is that we lack representation at the council level for the South Atlantic, and we have the entire time, and so, as far as a -- We're the largest stakeholder, if you saw the poundage, and we have no votes from Georgia through New York, and so I just wanted to kind of let everyone know that that was one of biggest concerns that I heard from the folks of Virginia.

MR. DONALSON: In any of these alternatives, there is no mention of moving the line from the Florida/Georgia border south and then the Gulf versus the Florida/Georgia border north, and is that correct?

MS. WIEGAND: That's correct, and so the stock ID process to identify where that line might be is currently going on now, and Julia will give you guys the update on that, but any movement to that is not included in this amendment. If the results of that workshop do indicate the need to move the line, then the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils would begin an amendment process to consider moving the management line based on those results.

MR. DONALSON: Okay, because I know there's an ongoing project that I'm working with a few folks on with skin-tagged genetic ID, and we've got a ton of samples out there waiting to be submitted, and so, if there's going to be any change to those lines -- I just wanted to make sure that wasn't part of this.

MS. WIEGAND: No, it's not a part of this specific amendment.

MR. ENGLISH: I guess I've got a question, and then I will raise my concerns a little bit for the commercial sector. If it goes to the Atlantic States for management, do they then set the quotas and all and decide -- Can they then say, well, we're going to have no commercial catch and it's going to go strictly recreational? That is one of my main concerns. Are they going to do away with the commercial sector, or can they? Are they even able to, and, of course, the other concern is we need to make sure that the commercial sector is the commercial sector and not the recreational using our quota for their purposes.

MS. WIEGAND: I don't want to speak to what the commission may do in the future with this amendment, but, currently, the way their interstate fishery management plan is written right now, it does include both regulations for the recreational and commercial sector, and it bases everything off of what we've established in Framework Amendment 4 in federal waters.

MR. ENGLISH: That's my concern with it, is that we take the South Atlantic Council out of it, because that means we have to go to each state to represent the commercial sector, and that could be a problem that we could run into, and so that's my concern, is that somehow we need to stay in it and regulate the commercial end of it, if nothing else.

MR. WAUGH: If the commission makes any changes, they have to go through an amendment process, just like the council does, and so they would prepare a document, and it would go through hearings, just like we do, and it's just a different forum. There are commissioners, representatives, who vote from each state on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and this would address Patrick's concern, because then Virginia would have votes in that process.

It would be up to the commission, but they have standards and procedures that they have to follow as well, and then fishermen would be able to comment on any changes they were to make, but Christina is right that we don't have any influence then on what the commission does once that's transferred to the commission.

MR. GORHAM: This was a topic in reference to the commercial sector. After the last South Atlantic meeting, I reached out to the Atlantic States and a couple of representatives of different states, because it did feel like the conversation was leaning towards it would be easier, or maybe faster, if the commercial sector wasn't a factor, and I just had made the point that it seemed like the general agreement was, especially that offshore fishery, is that the cobia is a bycatch fishery, and I know Virginia is more of a directed fishery with the hook-and-line, but, if there ever was an effort to get rid of the commercial cobia, I would be very, very against it, just even from a waste standpoint.

Those guys commercial fishing, in the winter off of North Carolina, it's hard enough for them to get out there so they can get their two fish, and say it's \$600, especially at that time of the year, and that's huge. The ACL is already so small, and I think it's an extremely smart management move to have that ability for the commercial sector to sell it, instead of it just being waste.

To Ira's point, I wasn't aware, until more recently, of how easy it was in the other states to get a permit and to kind of circumvent those regulations. In North Carolina, I hear often that it's easy and you can go to Craigslist. Well, there's a people that I know that don't have \$1,000 or \$1,500 or \$2,000 to just go out and do it just to go cobia fishing. From the standpoint of using this year's

regulations, I know it won't be popular to say, but God bless -- This year, we're going down to one fish for our recreational sector from June onward, and that's absurd.

Again, to the commercial topic, it's something I worry about, but, from a recreational person, I would be totally against getting rid of it. Is there any possibility to have the commercial sector stay under the umbrella of the federal management and the recreational go to the Atlantic States? Is that even a possibility?

MR. LAKS: Bill, I think a problem would be is the council never chose to put a permit for cobia, and so it would be hard to manage something they really don't manage. That's why I think, at this point in the process, that would be hard to get back to.

MR. GORHAM: I see the issues, and the other thing that I think needs to be looked at, from the commercial standpoint, is, going back through SEDAR 28, I am not even sure if the Virginia commercial catch was even in there. I know, at this last stock ID, it was, but, again, it wasn't a data workshop, and that may have been why, but I don't think the commercial side -- I think one year, or two years maybe, they have exceeded that 8 percent ACL, which is around 50,000 pounds.

MS. WIEGAND: I was talking with Gregg a little bit, and it's separating the recreational and commercial sector so that one was managed by the commission and one was managed by the council. Feasibly, something like that could be set up. It would be some form of complementary management, and it would likely be very challenging to work out a system like that, and, sort of where we are now in the process, the council has decided that removing cobia completely from federal management is the best direction forward.

MR. LAKS: I did have one more comment. I had a fisherman reach out to me, and he was concerned about the state commercial trip landings and shutting down the fishery early because they had to estimate the state commercial fish landings, and that seems to be a problem, and maybe it's something that can be addressed by the states moving forward, and some of those state stakeholders can maybe ask for something better.

MS. WIEGAND: Does anyone else have any questions or comments about this amendment?

MR. MCKINLEY: Why was it determined, and I read last year's things, that the federal permit was not going to be required for the cobia commercial fishing?

MS. WIEGAND: The council did begin work on an amendment to address the lack of a commercial permit for harvesting cobia in federal waters, and they postponed it to see the outcome of the commission's plan in this amendment. If no one has any questions about this, then I will turn it over to Julia, who is going to give you an update on the stock ID workshop and a few other SEDAR activities.

MS. BYRD: Hi, everyone. I am Julia Byrd, and I'm one of the SEDAR coordinators, and I will be the person who will be coordinating the upcoming cobia assessment, and so what I wanted to do is first give a brief overview of what SEDAR is. I know I did this at your last meeting, but there is some new faces, and so I just figured it may be helpful to make sure everybody is on the same page.

Then I want to go into a little bit more details about the cobia stock ID process and assessment and then also give you guys a very brief update on a king mackerel assessment that is tentatively scheduled for 2019, and so let me pull up the first document. This was Attachment 2a, and I updated kind of the last slide on this, and so I can resend it to Christina if you all want the updated version.

To start off, SEDAR is the cooperative process that is used to conduct stock assessments in the Southeast, and so it's a cooperative program. We work with the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean Councils as well as the Atlantic and Gulf States Commissions, the Southeast Regional Office, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and the Highly Migratory Species Division of NOAA.

It's a cooperative process, and all of these different entities, or what we call cooperators, are kind of involved in coming up with policies and procedures for the program, and they're involved in the kind of different assessments that we do. There are kind of different types of assessments that are conducted, and I can go into more detail if you guys want me to, but the benchmark process, which is going to be used for cobia, typically has three stages.

There is the data stage, and that's where all of the available data are reviewed and evaluated and compiled, and participants in this stage include kind of state and federal agency scientists, university researchers, other data providers or data collectors, members of the South Atlantic SSC or the commission's technical committee, assessment analysts, and fishermen representatives from the AP or other stakeholders. At the end of the data stage, you get the recommended data inputs that should be going into the assessment.

The second stage is the assessment stage, and that's where the actual assessment model is developed, kind of, and refined, and so participants, again, including analysts, SSC representatives or other kind of analytical folks, and then there are fishermen involved as observers at this stage as well.

The third stage is the review stage, and that's when an independent peer review takes place, and this kind of independent group of scientists is reviewing kind of the data inputs as well as the assessment model, and so that will involve kind of -- Reviewers typically include councils, SSC representatives, or it could be the commission's technical representatives, and also CIE representatives, and those are -- "CIE" stands for Center for Independent Experts, and so they're kind of outside, independent scientists who haven't been involved in the process at all, in developing that model, and so they're kind of considered kind of an independent review body. Also in the review stage, in addition to those kind of reviewers, the analytical team is presenting the model, and then there are also fishermen who participate as observers in that process.

Again, there are fishermen who participate in kind of each of those stages of the assessment, and so fishermen are appointed to participate in SEDAR projects by the different cooperators, and so that means a council or a commission would appoint you to participate in the process. In the South Atlantic Council, to be appointed, you have to be either on an advisory panel or part of the SEDAR Pool, and so, since you guys are all on the advisory panel, the council would be able to consider appointing you to an assessment process.

You could be appointed to one stage or all of the stages, and, if you are appointed and there is kind of travel related to that, workshops or something like that, SEDAR will pay for your travel and for your per diem, and so, at ASMFC and with our other cooperators, the appointment process is a little bit different. Each of the councils or commissions kind of does that in a slightly different way, but, in general, if you're appointed by one of those bodies to participate, SEDAR will pay for your travel and per diem.

Time commitment, the time commitment for your participation in a SEDAR assessment is kind of dependent on what stage or stages you're appointed to. Each stage typically either has an in-person workshop, which would be anywhere from three to five days, and/or a series of webinars, and so it may be four or five webinars that would be two to three hours each, and so the question we normally get when we kind of reach out to kind of stakeholders and fishermen to get them to participate in SEDARs is what does that mean? What do I actually have to do when I come to these workshops?

I guess the most important thing is to kind of commit your time to attend the workshop or webinars and share your knowledge of the fishery. You guys are seeing things on the water that the scientists may not know, and so it's really helpful to get input from you guys on kind of if behaviors have changed. Have regulations change how you fish, or we might see a trend in the data that may be explained by a change in your behavior or something like that, and so it's really important to have fishermen involved in this process, because you guys know things that we may not know by just looking at the data.

The other thing I will say about SEDAR assessments is that all SEDAR meetings are open to the public, and so, even if you're not appointed to participate in an assessment, you are welcome to come to the workshops or listen in and observe the webinars, and we typically have email distribution lists for every single assessment, and so, if you kind of want to stay in the loop as to what is going on with an assessment, you can always either send me or the other coordinator, Julie Neer -- You can send one of us an email saying will you add me to your email distribution list, and so that, way, you will maybe get more emails than you want, but you will be -- I will be sending out periodic emails to keep you updated on kind of what's going on in the process. Any questions about SEDAR in general or the fishermen's role or anything like that before I move on specifically to cobia? Okay.

For cobia, there is an additional process that is taking place in advance of the typical assessment process, and it's called the cobia stock ID process, and so it's being held in advance of the data stage of the assessment, and, again, the data stage is when all the data is compiled and kind of the assessment data inputs are kind of evaluated, and so this is happening before that, and it's a multi-step process that was designed and developed by the SEDAR Steering Committee, and that's kind of the group that kind of oversees SEDAR policies and procedures, and it has representatives from the commissions, the councils, the Regional Office, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and the HMS Division. I thought it may be helpful to kind of just walk you guys through this multistep process and kind of what's happening at each stage and then update you on kind of where we are in the process.

The first stage is this stock ID workshop, and that was actually held last week here in Charleston, and I guess the goal of this workshop was to review all of the available data relevant to cobia stock structure and to come up with recommendations on biological and assessment unit stock, and I

will say more about this workshop in just a few minutes, after I kind of give an overview of the process.

The second stage is the stock ID review workshop, and that will occur in June of this year, and the role of that workshop will be to have an independent review panel review the recommendations that are coming out of this April stock ID workshop, and they will determine whether those are kind of reasonable and appropriate to use in the assessment.

The third stage here is a joint cooperator technical review, and that will be held via one webinar, and that will probably take place in two to three hours, and it will be in late July or early August, and the folks who will participate in that webinar are representatives from the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs as well as members of the Atlantic States Commission's Technical Committee, and what their job is, it's to review the recommendations and findings coming out of these first two stages, and so the recommendations coming out of the stock ID workshop and the stock ID review workshop, and then evaluating those, and they will be determining kind of the assessment unit stock that will be used in the upcoming SEDAR 58 Atlantic cobia assessment.

Then the last stage is what we've called the science and management leadership call, and the people who would participate in this call, if it is necessary, are kind of the head of the Science Center, the Regional Administrator, the Chairs and Executive Directors of the councils and the Atlantic Commission, and, if this stock ID process recommends that a stock is going to cross cooperator jurisdictions, this group will then meet to determine how to resolve that discrepancy and then provide guidance on making sure the appropriate kind of -- The appropriate management measures would come out of the assessment, and so they would be able to use information from the assessment to manage, basically.

The final stock ID process should be resolved at the end of August of 2018, and then the rest of the assessment will get underway, and so I know that is a multi-step kind of confusing, lengthy process, and so, before going on, I wanted to make sure -- Does anybody have any questions about what happens when in the process? Okay.

The next thing I wanted to do is just give a quick update on what happened last week at the stock ID workshop, and I guess the first things that I want to say is the information that I'm sharing with you is kind of preliminary information that is based on the discussions that happened last week. The panel is still in the process of drafting the actual report, and so I'm just going to give a brief overview.

That final report will be available around May 18, and so, if anybody is interested in getting access to that report, it's going to be posted on the SEDAR website, and I can make sure that Christina knows when it's available, so she can notify you guys, so you're able to kind of get to that document. Then, also, I know a few of you have already contacted me, but, if you're interested in staying up on the cobia assessment, send me an email, or you can contact me through Christina, and let me know, and I can add you to my email distribution list. When this report is available, I am going to be emailing everybody on the distribution list as well.

The other thing I will note, kind of as a caveat, is this is the first step in the stock ID process, and so what I'm telling you should be considered preliminary information and it shouldn't be considered final by any stretch of the imagination. We have multiple steps to go through, and so

I just kind of say that before I get into what happened at the workshop, and so, as many of you guys probably know, or are aware of, the last SEDAR assessment for cobia was SEDAR 28, and the assessment unit stock for the Atlantic stock went from the Georgia/Florida line north to North Carolina, and, for the Gulf stock, it went from the Georgia/Florida line south throughout the Gulf.

At this workshop, the participants were tasked with reviewing all of the available data relevant to cobia stock structure and seeing if that boundary needed to move, and so participants in the assessment, in this stage of the stock ID workshop, included federal and state agency scientists, and we had a number of university researchers, and we had council SSC members and commission technical committee members. We had advisory panel representatives, and so Ira was there, and Bill Gorham was there, and then we had another fisherman from North Carolina who participated in this stage. Then we also had kind of commission and council staff and council members there as kind of observers as well.

I think many of you are probably aware that there was a lot of new research that's been done since SEDAR 28. There are multiple genetic studies, and there was a lot of kind of acoustic telemetry work that's been done, some satellite tagging that's been done, some additional kind of conventional tagging that's been done, and we also looked at different analyses looking at landings data or some kind of larval data from the Gulf of Mexico, and so there was a lot of new information that this group kind of went through.

Another thing I will note is that all of the working papers and reference documents that were reviewed and used at this workshop are up on the SEDAR website, and I can walk you through how to find those, if you all aren't aware. The SEDAR website is [sedarweb.org](http://sedarweb.org), and it's SEDAR 58 is there the Atlantic cobia assessment information can be found, and, after I kind of go through this, I can pull up that website and walk you through how to find it, if it's helpful.

I guess the outcome of the workshop is the data that we have suggests the existence of two to six stocks, a Gulf stock and an Atlantic stock, and the data suggests the Gulf stock starts south of Brevard County, and the Atlantic stock starts kind of north of Brunswick, Georgia, and there is this transitional zone in between. Both the tagging and genetics data had strong evidence for kind of this transitional zone that separates the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic stocks. However, with the existing data we have, they couldn't kind of further refine the width of that zone, and so they couldn't shrink that zone down at all, and so what that means is that the current data we have don't refute the placement at that kind of assessment unit stock separation at the Florida/Georgia line.

That is kind of the recommendation that will be coming out of that workshop. Again, I want to say this is the first step in a multi-step process, and so, if you guys have any questions, I will do my best to answer them. Again, I think it will be helpful once we have the actual report that has come out for folks to review, and, in that report, they will get more into kind of all of the different data sources that were reviewed and that sort of thing, but I just wanted to kind of give you a quick overview, and does anyone have questions for me about this before I start talking about the later stages of the assessment?

MR. BLOW: Was there any indication that there were any sub-groups?

MS. BYRD: Yes, and that's something that got some discussion as well, and, yes, there is some information that suggests there may be some sub-structure, but I guess, overall, the panel felt that



the evidence for that is still kind of developing. There was kind of a South Carolina and a North Carolina/Virginia inshore stock, which seemed to be different, and the data sources showed inconsistent findings for whether there was a separate North Carolina/South Carolina offshore stock, and then I know a lot of the tagging data suggests that there could be kind of sub-structure as well, but, at this stage, since they felt that kind of the understanding of that sub-structure was still kind of developing, it wouldn't -- It's not kind of ready to be used in an assessment yet, if that makes sense. Again, I think there will be more details on that within the actual report itself.

MR. LAKS: I just want to make a comment. I sat through it, and it was pretty fascinating. There was a lot of smart people that did a lot of hard work that were very receptive to what us fishermen had to say, and I think Bill will back me up on that, and so it was an impressive project that they did, and a lot of hard work went into it.

MR. LINK: I read over the papers, and I kind of came away with an understanding that there was somewhat of a black hole in the east coast of Florida, which is the area that we're the most concerned with where that line is, kind of a lack of samples and also a lack of acoustic transmitters available to catch these fish and figure out where this line should really be. My concern is that that was the area we were concerned with the most, and there was really no data that came out of that area, and was there any talk about trying to maybe fix that issue and get some samples and add some acoustic transmitters?

MS. BYRD: Yes, and I guess one thing I will note is that was kind of the area of interest last time, and there is a lot of new information available since the last assessment, and people really -- A lot of the data providers who did a lot of the kind of tagging work tried to get samples from that area, and we still have kind of minimal sample sizes, and so, yes, there are going to be research recommendations coming out of this workshop, and, I mean, I haven't -- They will be drafted in the report, and I think they're going to be very specific, and I think many of them will concentrate on that specific area, whether it's getting more tags in fish down there, whether it's trying to get more acoustic arrays in that area, so you can detect fish, and so, yes, that was something that was definitely discussed by the group, and there will be research recommendations coming out.

MR. DONALSON: I can speak a little bit to that. Last year, we had a number of weather issues trying to get out and put some of those tags on the fish. We have over a hundred vials out for genetic tags right now, and our cobia season is about to kick off, where the fish are moving up from Canaveral up towards St. Augustine and Jacksonville, and so, again, I know we're kind of behind on getting all that data to you guys, but we're working on it. I mean, I've got five or six captains that are actively getting me skin tags or fin tags, whatever you want to call them, as well as trying to schedule those trips to get the kind of tags in there, and there is a misconception out there about what tagging of cobia is versus like tagging of billfish.

I mean, it's a whole process, and I'm sure you guys know. You take the fish out of the water, and you measure it, and you figure out the sex, and you take a DNA sample. I mean, it's more than just popping a tag into a fish, and so, to pick the right weather day to get out there to do that is not as easy as you think, and so, in our area anyway, that northeast Florida area, we're working on that.

MR. PERALTA: If the preferred alternative for cobia management is to relinquish control to Atlantic States, are they at all obligated to take advantage of our data?

MS. BYRD: I am not sure that I understand that question. So, the Atlantic Commission isn't -- They are involved in this assessment, and so this stock ID process is including the Gulf Council, the South Atlantic Council, and the Atlantic States, and so we were trying to include anyone who may be affected by the outcome, and so the Atlantic Commission is one of the entities that is involved in this, and does that answer your question?

MR. PERALTA: That answers the question. Thank you.

MR. GORHAM: I was a part of this process, and I will tell you that I was blown away by all of it and the level of involvement and access we had as observers and how they listened. Cobia may be unique, but I imagine there is a lot of feedback on a lot of fisheries, and I have gone back and already spoken with several captains and people that they make a living off of different fisheries, and this is just a part of it. They've got to take the time, and it's an investment to be at these stock assessments and be a part of the research, because you can make a difference and fill in the gaps.

As Ira knows, there was some things with the data that was frustrating to see, and the sub-populations appeared to be there, and we kind of had inshore North Carolina and inshore Virginia looking the same, and then you mix it with the tagging information, and maybe that didn't make sense, but there was just a lot of information that could be interpreted in different ways, but then it was clear that, when these fish move offshore, it's really hard to monitor their movement, because there really is no fisheries -- With the popoff in South Carolina, at least that's been captured with tags.

In Virginia, the satellite popoff tags, it's very, very interesting to see, very informative, and then even the acoustic stuff out of South Carolina and Georgia and southeast Florida was interesting, but, again, it was limited as far out as they were, how many there were, and when the fish were tagged.

Then, for someone like me jumping around to each working group, it was like, wait a minute, how does any of this make sense to gel it together, but they definitely spent a lot of time trying to come up with something that was defensible, and it's a process for anybody in the room that, if you can make it, or definitely if you make a living off the water, you and the people in your community, they need to be at these things, and they need to do work to get the funding and work with the researchers to provide those days and to gather that information. It's like that north Florida, and that was the hot-topic area, and it's a black hole. You've got to get to these assessments, and you just kind of have to pick which one can you really and truly stand behind.

As I said, it's unfortunate, but it's good to hear that a lot of work is continuing, but, also, going through this process, looking at the current federal management and then the Atlantic States management and what they can offer, it was very clear to me that we're going to have to go to the Atlantic States, or it's in the best interests of the stakeholders, and probably the fish stock. Looking at the movements, it would probably be the most appropriate management.

MR. ROBINSON: I was just wondering if you guys are going to do king mackerel in the future, or what other fish are you going to study like this, or is there already king mackerel going on for tagging and stuff?

MS. BYRD: What I can say is this -- I am not sure of all the data that's available for king mackerel, off the top of my head. I can kind of go and look back through the last kind of stock assessment and see what I can find out and then maybe follow back up with you, but the -- I will say a little bit about this more after we get through cobia, but there is going to be a king mackerel assessment that's coming up. What I will say about this kind of stock ID process is that there was a workshop that we held, and I guess it was in 2015 maybe, and it was called SEDAR data best practices, and it was to kind of come up with best practices for some of the data compilation methods used in assessments.

One of the things that came out of that was stock ID was something that was important and needed to be kind of resolved in advance of the data compilation stage for this assessment, and so I know, for the last few assessments that have been done, we have held kind of either a stock ID workshop or a stock ID kind of series of webinars, and so I anticipate that going on. However, this cobia stock ID process, this multi-step process, is really resource-intensive, and it's very expensive. It's very labor-intensive for all of the different people involved, and so I'm not sure that this same exact model will be used in the future, but stock ID is something that will be kind of investigated for each of the assessments that are going through the benchmark assessment process in the future.

MR. HARTIG: Gary, that's a great question, and it's not for lack of trying for the acoustic tagging from the State of Florida. The State of Florida has put in at least three grant proposals that weren't funded to do that type of work. The acoustic tagging would be very valuable for king mackerel, and I think what I intend to do is go to the state and say, listen, I am willing to give you my boat for free, and we'll go out and put some tags in if you can put the manpower on to do it, and we'll start the process. If we can get different fishermen up and down the coast to do that for a day here and there, to get these fish tagged, I think we could really increase that information on king mackerel in the future.

MR. ROLLER: I just wanted to make a brief comment, and I will make this more times than one if I need to, but, in regard to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission exclusive management, as a North Carolina angler, I am awash and surrounded by ASMFC-managed fisheries. I don't need another ASMFC-managed fishery, basically because their track record of recovering these stocks, or retaining their abundance, is not quite very strong, and it definitely isn't as strong as Magnuson-Stevens-managed fisheries, and I will bring this up multiple times if I need to, but, being involved within that process is difficult, and I would rather argue over a lot of fish in the water than argue over no fish in the water.

DR. ELKINS: I will have to echo Tom's assessment of ASMFC management. Most of the North Carolina-state-managed fisheries are co-managed by ASMFC. Only four North-Carolina-state-managed stocks are listed as viable. All others are listed as depleted, of concern, and a couple are unknown.

A friend of mine once told me this about ASMFC. If ASMFC were your babysitter, would you leave your kids alone with them, and, on face value, Bill and others are absolutely correct that cobia should be managed by ASMFC, for the reasons we all know about, but, in the absence of MSA regulations -- The stocks that ASMFC co-regulates with the council, they're all doing fine. It's the ones that are not regulated by MSA that are not doing so well. I am a little bit reticent, first of all, to do anything before we have the stock assessment and a whole lot more information,

but to turn ASMFC loose with cobia without council supervision, I guess, I'm a little bit wary about that, although I think, in time, perhaps it can be done.

MR. LINK: Just from the stakeholders of Virginia that I have spoken with, they kind of feel the same way about the South Atlantic right now. No one was very happy with the way that things have kind of progressed, and so it would be, I guess, a similar sentiment from the folks in Virginia about the South Atlantic Marine Fisheries and the management of cobia thus far.

I think, at this point, they're hoping something different will be better, and that may not be the case, but I would say that a lot of the folks there are just very, very concerned with how it's gone so far, and so the support for Atlantic States is that there's a little bit more flexibility, potentially, or at least that's what we've been told from our folks at the state level, and I think that we're hoping that there is an ability to maybe have more input on how things are managed, and so I just kind of wanted to put in that.

MR. LAKS: I think we're going to let Julia finish with her thing. Since the Civil War started a hundred-and-fifty-something years ago, I don't want to start another one now.

MS. BYRD: Okay. Any other questions on stock ID before I move on to talk about the next stage of the assessment? Okay. This is the new slide that's been updated, and so this wasn't available in your briefing book, and so, since the briefing book was posted, we now have a preliminary assessment schedule for the remainder of the cobia assessment, and so I will say that these dates are tentative. Both the Atlantic States and the South Atlantic Council will be reviewing this schedule at their upcoming meetings, and so these are tentative dates. They may shift around a little bit. I don't expect the overall timeframe to shift, although that will be up to the council and the commission.

The data workshop is tentatively scheduled for the week of November 27, this year, at the end of this year, and the assessment stage, and so that's the model development, will take place over a series of webinars, and I think it's four or five webinars that will take place between March and June of 2019, and the review workshop is tentatively scheduled for the week of July 30, 2019, which means the assessment should be complete late in 2019, and it will go to -- Depending on who is managing cobia at that point, it will either be reviewed by South Atlantic Council SSC or ASMFC's Technical Committee or both.

What I was hoping to do today is identify if there are any AP members who are interested in participating in the remaining stages of this assessment, and so what will happen is I will, ideally, get a number of names from you guys, and then I will give you names to the council for their consideration or ASMFC for their consideration, and then they will be the ones who will be making appointments. Then, once appointments have been made, I would reach out and let you know who has been appointed. Are there any folks who are interested in participating in the remaining stages of this assessment? Patrick. Wes. Robert. Skip. Bill, are you?

MR. GORHAM: Absolutely.

MS. BYRD: Okay. Thank you, guys. I think it's really helpful and important to have fishermen involved in the process, and so, again, I will be providing your names to the commission and the council, and they will be making appointments, and then I will let everybody know what the

outcome of that is. That is all I had to say about cobia, and then I'm going to go into other SEDAR updates, but are there any last questions on cobia before I move on? Okay.

Then I'm just going to quickly pull up -- This is Attachment 2b, and so we have started trying to provide just kind of an update on what's going on in the SEDAR world that may be relevant to the different APs, just to give you an update on what's going on, and so that's what this document is for. I am going to kind of skip over cobia, because we just talked about that a fair amount, and so the next thing that I wanted to mention is there is a king mackerel -- It would be a Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic king mackerel assessment that is tentatively scheduled to take place in 2019.

This was originally kind of scheduled as kind of a benchmark, but there is talk of moving it to a standard assessment. Originally, when this assessment was being planned, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center was kind of working cooperatively with scientists from Mexico, and so I think some of the Mexican scientists are going to kind of observe the assessment process this go-round, but the assessment will just include U.S. data, in the hopes that, kind of next time the mackerel is assessed, some of the Mexican data may be able to be incorporated into the assessment.

We don't have a schedule yet, and so we're not kind of asking for folks who are interested to participate yet, because we can't tell you when workshops or things are going to occur, and so I just wanted to make you guys aware of this. Julie Neer, who is the other SEDAR Coordinator, will actually be coordinating this assessment, and so, once there is a schedule in place, we'll probably be asking Christina to contact you guys, and so we'll be able to pass on a schedule and hopefully identify some folks who may be interested in participating in this assessment, but I just wanted to make sure that you all were aware that one is coming up and that we'll be back in touch once we have a little bit more details on the timeline regarding that assessment. Any questions there?

MR. LAKS: I have one question. When is the Gulf going to do their cobia assessment?

MS. BYRD: The Gulf cobia assessment is scheduled to take place in 2019. We don't have the exact timeframe yet, but I have a feeling it's going to be discussed. There is a SEDAR Steering Committee meeting in May, and so, after that, I'm assuming that we should have a better handle on what time of the year in 2019 it will get started.

MR. LAKS: If I could just make a suggestion that we get a fisherman from south Florida on that, because that group of fish that sits off of south Florida is technically Gulf stock.

MS. BYRD: We may be following back up with you to try to identify someone who may be good or willing to serve on those panels, and we're happy to reach out to them, if you can kind of connect us to them.

Then the last thing I just wanted to make you guys aware of, and I'm not planning to walk you through it, but I also included a table in this document that just kind of shows you what has been kind of prioritized for assessments and what's on the schedule in the upcoming year, and so, for 2018 and 2019, the species are kind of set in stone, and then anything from 2020 and beyond is what the council has identified as kind of a priority, and so, if you guys have any questions or concerns about that, you can kind of pass them on to kind of council representatives. How it works is that the council provides their list of priorities to the SEDAR Steering Committee, and that is

who sets the schedule, and so that's all I had, as far as SEDAR updates, unless you guys have any other questions for me. Okay. Thank you.

MR. LAKS: Okay, guys. I think we're going to take a fifteen-minute break here and meet back at say ten after. We will meet back in here.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. WIEGAND: I just wanted to -- There seems to be a bit more discussion about cobia, and so we are a little bit ahead of schedule, and so, if you guys do want to go back and revisit Amendment 31, that's something we can do, the will of the panel, and I just also wanted to remind you guys that you can make motions in support or not in support of these amendments that we discuss, and we will then take those to the council as part of the AP report.

MR. BLOW: Just to comment about the management of cobia. I got involved in it because I fish a lot, and, when I started looking at what was going on, the South Atlantic Council managed a fish that isn't in their management zone, and so that never made sense to me. The majority of the fish are caught inshore, and so I never understood why the South Atlantic Council was managing it to begin with, and that's just a comment.

MR. ROLLER: On that same note, most bluefish and Spanish mackerel are caught in state waters, and most Atlantic croaker are caught in federal waters, and the latter are managed by the ASMFC.

MR. SWANN: Just a question, because I don't really understand. If the area between the state line of Florida and Georgia and Brevard County is -- I guess it turns out to be some type of transition zone, but is the default to keep that within the council or is the default to turn that to the commission?

MS. WIEGAND: That all depends on where the council decides to set the boundary between Gulf and Atlantic cobia, and so, out of the stock ID workshops, they will identify an assessment boundary, and then the council can choose to set the management boundary in line with that or where National Standard 3 says that they can set that based on biological as well as economic, social, and management considerations. Given that transition zone, which was similar after SEDAR 28, the council decided to stick with the Florida/Georgia line that they used in the assessment, and so, if something else comes out of the stock ID workshop, it would be a full amendment process for the council to decide whether or not to move that management boundary.

If they do move it south, then we do have a situation where the commission is managing part of Florida state waters and the councils are managing the other part, but, again, that's going to be a full amendment process, and it would allow a lot of time for stakeholder input, and it's very much a what-if scenario at this point, given the preliminary results of the stock ID workshop.

MR. KELLY: I just wanted to bring this information to the floor here, but we're seeing some significant trends in the Florida Keys and extreme south Florida there. Shark populations of all types have literally exploded, and I don't know what your experience is up further north here, but the impact that we've noticed on cobia in that regard is that, while we had fairly robust populations on both sides of the islands, we noticed a significant drop about two years ago on the South Atlantic side.

Last year, it was still quite good for cobia, but it too has declined into this season, and the major shift that we've seen is the hundreds, thousands, of rays that used to come through the Keys in shallow water with major groups of cobia following them, they have virtually disappeared. Only rarely do we see those rays come through now, and the cobia have actually changed their habits. Now they are tailing behind bull sharks, and that is most noticeable, but those fish are also smaller in size and far fewer than we had seen two years prior to that, and so there appears to be a definite trend, and I just want to share that with you, in case you're seeing the same thing further to the north.

MR. LAKS: Yes, I would definitely agree with you, Bill. Off of the southeast coast, the fish seem to be pulling off the beach from following different things and staying in deeper water with the sharks, and, as a matter of a fact, I do believe we have a problem with people continuing to fish for cobia, to try and fill their bag limit and having sharks eat so many. I know it interacts with me all the time, and the sharks are just crazy, and you almost can't catch a cobia, because a shark is going to eat it.

MR. LINK: I would just like to speak for a second about what I'm seeing in Virginia. I've been fishing up there for I guess about ten years for cobia, and I would say the average trips per year are maybe thirty-five to forty, and so a few, and not a ton. Not as many as some of the charter guys, I guess, but we're -- I am seeing more fish of maybe a little bit smaller size class, but definitely more fish than we ever have, and, when we started fishing up there, if you went out to catch one or two fish a day, that was a pretty good day of cobia fishing.

My expectation now is seven, eight, nine, ten fish in a day, and that's a good, but average, day, and so I am thinking that maybe we're seeing a shift of some sort with these fish moving a little bit further north, and I have nothing to base that on, other than that we're seeing more fish, and, if it's a stock that's being overfished, like we're saying, it doesn't really make a whole lot of sense to me that we're seeing that many more. I mean, it's a significant increase, and all the folks I've talked to kind of feel the same way, more fish, but maybe less in the larger size. That extreme trophy-class fish, less in that size class

MR. DOUGHTIE: I kind of have a unique perspective where I live, which I'm sure that a lot of you have heard of Port Royal Sound. For years, it was called the cobia capitol of the east coast, and we knew that it was full of cobia, and you're sitting here saying that you're seeing more and more cobia, but I think a lot of it has to do with, for years, nobody targeted cobia, and, the means that they did, it was live eels or whatever and going around buoys and looking for them, and then, as techniques improved, of course, all of a sudden, it was like we'll catch sixteen in two hours, and that was actually the norm.

Then, as their popularity increased -- I have lived there my entire life, and I actually grew up on Hilton Head, when there were five homes in the major development there, and, as I started seeing more people targeting them and the techniques getting better, I started -- As I said, I'm an outdoor writer, and I started saying, guys, we've got to do something here, because it was a city out there, and you can look at charts of Port Royal Sound, and it got pretty easy to tell where they would be staging, and most of them -- I mean, they were saying, well, there's no proof that these fish are coming in to breed, and I would be sitting there seeing females with males rolling on them and everything like that, and I was going -- People were just massacring these fish, and it crashed.

All I'm saying is I have warned North Carolina and Virginia, because they have similar bodies of water, the Chesapeake, which is the larger body of water, where now the popularity in targeting cobia in particular is growing and that they, I believe, unless they realize the same thing, because we started doing research and found out that it was the specific DNA group coming into Port Royal to spawn.

When that crashed, then we started actually catching those specific fish. The females, I've got two here in Charleston that we have tried to breed, and we have released lot of pure -- That pure DNA strain, but I really caution the northern states that -- They are kind of where we were ten years ago, before all of this started falling apart, and even though the Chesapeake is a larger body of water, but I can see that they -- I am just saying caution, because I can see the same thing happening to some of these bodies of water where these fish are being targeted, and I don't know yet whether they too have that specific DNA strain that brings them into that group of water, and I don't think it's an environmental change. I think it's an awareness change and technique change that is making people see a lot more cobia.

That's just my personal opinion, and it's from watching what has happened in our area for years, in our offshore waters, on our artificial reefs and stuff, and there are still quite a few fish, and since we close our state waters in the month of May to allow these fish to come back in and try to get that population back up to somewhat of a level that is acceptable, and I'm watching the offshore, during the month of May in particular, and hundreds of boats are hitting these reefs, and you will have a big tiger shark come up with thirty cobia on his back, and you will see literally fifty cobia riding waves down, and cobia is not a real difficult fish if you're a pretty good angler, or even an average angler, to target and to catch.

From the people I have talked to, and I've talked to a lot of people before I came up here, when the regulations came out this year, allowing for one per person and six per vessel, the common thread that I was hearing from -- I mean, I was hearing this from charter guys, and I was hearing it from recreational fishermen, but six per boat is -- To us, it was insane, because of the popularity of this fish, and nobody needs six cobia per boat. I mean, two cobia, everybody seems -- That was the number that seemed most logical, especially with the popularity of these fish. That's a lot of meat. I mean, two cobia is a lot of meat, and, in particular, that time of the year --

MR. LAKS: Collins, I'm going to jump in on you, because Bill has been waiting online to make a comment.

MR. DOUGHTIE: I'm finished, but I was just saying that most of the big fish were all loaded with roe, and I am just cautioning people about these inland bodies of water, and that's it.

MR. LAKS: I just want to add that I agree. Between Facebook and YouTube, it has definitely pinpointed the effort and techniques.

MR. GORHAM: I sell lures throughout the Gulf Coast and all the way up to Maryland, and even now into Jersey, and people even in New Jersey and New York -- The common feedback that I'm getting is that it seems to be something that is happening within the last three years, and I kind of thought the same thing, that maybe they had a tower boat that they took out billfishing or they put a tower on them to come down to the southern states to cobia fish and then went home, but what



really hit home is the guys that flounder fish and bottom fish. They're catching cobia where they have never caught them before, especially up in Maryland, like Chesapeake Beach. Guys that have lived there for fifteen years -- As a lure manufacturer, in the past couple of years, it has just exploded.

I know in the bay, and I have fished there a lot, we don't have a cownose ray problem at all. You can almost walk on them, and, going through this process, listening to the AP guys, you see uniqueness almost in every state. Every state is a little bit different, and every state has a different fishery.

I have always voiced extreme caution when looking at South Carolina and that relatively small fishery as far as the size of the water and the ease of accessibility. In the Chesapeake Bay, it is definitely -- It's important to take note, and, in Virginia, if I'm not mistaken, they went to one per person ten years ago, if not more, and now they're down to three per boat with protecting those big fish, and so they've been very proactive, and they did that through their state. North Carolina has that same ability, and with the Atlantic States managing it, because, in theory, it's state-by-state, with Atlantic States having final approval.

It actually gives you, or gives us, that ability to manage this species based upon changes. You would have Maryland with a fishery and Delaware a little bit and New Jersey and New York, and they're not on the South Atlantic, and how can we really reign them in or have any true flexibility to properly manage these fish and the fish stock when there is large fisheries, or even Virginia, and, as far as our fishery performance, just to touch on it, last year, we saw the main body of fish push through Hatteras earlier than I can remember in the last thirteen years that I have cobia fished.

May 1, there was pods of fifty to a hundred fifty-plus-pound fish that were caught up, and it tends to change. People that have fished since the late 1970s, when they were chumming at Ocracoke Inlet, they were sight-casting more often, and we're saying that, based on some of the largest class of fish on the shoals of Hatteras, and there was multiple 100-pound fish caught in and multiple not caught, seen, but not caught, but the fishery did blow by a lot sooner. We did still get those smaller waves, but the popularity has increased in the fishery.

I think that's just the way it is. When there is an abundant species, that's what people are going to go after, and I definitely agree that looking at South Carolina, and they've been great. The researchers, the managers, and Mel, and I've had several conversations with him, and I understand the struggles that they have with their regulations. I too would have been jumping up and down if I would have been seeing a problem over ten years, but, at the federal level, with federal management, it's almost impossible -- It's not impossible, but it's tough, and I don't think proper, to continue to manage this fish that way.

Even the MSA is fish stocks and overfishing, but you also have to take into account the coastal communities and the needs and what suits that the best, and, again, I think that's the Atlantic States. Last year, at the AP meeting, I pushed for the emergency action, because I thought it was more than justified, given the circumstances and the shortcomings at that time of the stock assessment and the change in the fishery, and it just couldn't be done.

MR. LAKS: Bill, I'm going to jump in on you, because Steve Donalson has been waiting, and so I'm going to turn it over to Steve.

MR. DONALSON: Again, I apologize if we're getting off agenda topic, but I threw this out last year, and I just wanted to have it on the record again this year, but something that I'm not sure that the panel thinks about or the commission is, in our area, in Florida especially, the popularity of cobia fishery has spawned out of our lack of ability to catch red snapper. They took away that fishery completely from not just recreational fishermen, which I am here representing, but also the commercial guys and from a charter perspective, and so all those captains who spent their summers chasing red snapper can't do that anymore, and so they're filling their charter days chasing cobia.

That has really spawned it, that coupled with the socioeconomic growth of St. Johns County and Duval County and Flagler County. A lot of people with a lot of money are moving into that area, and they can't bottom fish anymore. I mean, all you catch is red snapper, and so people have stopped bottom fishing, but, the spots where we bottom fish, the cobia also show up, and so it was kind of the perfect storm of events that spawned the cobia fishery where we live and its popularity, and so I just wanted to -- It's an unintended consequence for the closure of red snapper. It proliferated the cobia fishing boom that we're seeing, and so I just wanted to throw that out there again. Again, if it's off-topic, I apologize, but it kind of goes with what we're talking about right now.

MR. LINK: I just have another quick thing. Just to kind of echo what Mr. Gorham was saying, I know a lot of folks in Maryland these last couple of years, and they have had zero regulation, and there is pictures of thirty or forty eighteen to twenty-four-inch cobia in the bottom of Carolina skiffs, and that is a problem, and we believe that having Atlantic States involved will help to mitigate some of that issue. To the red snapper issue, I think that's a perfect example of a South Atlantic Marine Fisheries Council managed species that is not really. It's failing. Most recreational fishermen would say it's a failing fishery, and so, anyway, that's all I have to say.

MR. LAKS: The only thing that I have to say on this is we're going to get a resident population off of New York and New Jersey, and, when those fish get older, they're going to move down to south Florida, and so we might have more problems.

MR. GORHAM: I agree, and I am glad that you acknowledged that.

MR. WEEKS: Just for clarification, in light of the comments by Tom and Chris about the need for a watchdog on southern states, what are the differences between Alternatives 3 and 4 in Amendment 31? Can you help me a little bit with that, Christina?

MS. WIEGAND: Absolutely. Let me go ahead and pull it back up. The main difference between those two alternatives is how much involvement the council wants to have in management into federal waters in terms of the amendment process. Under Alternative 3, we are updating the FMP to acknowledge the commission's new role, and the council would be deciding on a case-by-case basis whether or not to implement state regulations in federal waters, and so, in order to do that, they would have to go through either the full amendment process or the framework amendment process, depending on what the regulation was, and that can be time consuming. A full amendment can take anywhere from one to three years to implement. A framework amendment typically takes a year or less, but it would be a process, and one of the concerns with that is that you could end up with sort of inconsistent regulations.

Alternative 4, on the other hand, allows the commission to propose rules directly to the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the council would get an opportunity to comment on those proposed rules and comment on whether or not they meet the FMP standards, whether they meet Magnuson-Stevens Act standards, but they wouldn't need to go through a full amendment process to get those regulations implemented, and so that's the key difference between those two alternatives.

MR. WEEKS: So they could comment on them, but they wouldn't really have any control on the outcome?

MS. WIEGAND: I don't think Shep is -- My understanding is that the council would be able to provide comment, but NMFS would be the one implementing the rules, but let me get a little more information for you about how exactly that process would work. It's based off of spiny lobster, which hasn't been used often, but I will get more detail on how exactly that process would work should the council disagree with proposed regulations by the commission.

MR. MCKINLEY: I wanted to shift back just to -- From a dealer standpoint and stuff, that's a lot of meat coming into some of these areas where these things are -- It is still that they can sell to anybody? Are these fish being sold, or are they just -- They don't have to go through a federal dealer, do they, in Virginia or --

MR. LAKS: I don't believe most cobia have to go through a federal dealer to be sold.

MR. BELL: That's kind of a Shep question.

MS. WIEGAND: It's an odd gray area, because there is currently no federal commercial permit for cobia.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and that was -- I have had fishermen, and I didn't know the answer to that, and I wasn't aware of that, but that seems like a big problem there, if people can sell it. If you took the ability to sell it away, that seems like that would cure a lot of things.

MR. LAKS: From what I have seen, the only person required to sell to a federal dealer is someone who has a charter/for-hire CMP permit and catches that fish on a charter boat in the EEZ. They would be required to sell it to a federal dealer. Other than that, I don't know of any other requirements.

MR. OLSEN: It's my understanding, when they closed it, that a lot of people in Hilton Head -- They got together and tried to go through the loophole to buy the commercial permit, but then, immediately, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources says you have to sell it to a federal dealer, and, in Charleston, there is only one that can purchase it from you, and that kind of closed the loophole for anybody to even catch any cobia, as far as trying to commercial, and, for the for-hire, which I am, they basically said -- I am going by several people, one of them sitting behind me, that they made it impossible and that a charter boat captain could only go out by himself to specifically target the cobia and catch them and bring them in to make it saleable. Now, if you caught them on the charter, you cannot sell them at all. There is zero chance to sell, and they are the ownership of the charter itself, and that would classify them as not able to fall under any of the guidelines to sell them.

MR. LAKS: I am not really sure what South Carolina -- Maybe Mel can come up here and speak to that, and then we're going to go to Patrick and then Collins after that.

MR. BELL: I wouldn't focus on what South Carolina did or didn't do or how we're doing it. It really is a point, and I'm not speaking for the Service, but, if Shep or Monica were here, it's kind of a fuzzy area of the law, but that's what we had told our fishermen. It's a federal fishery, and, based on opinion of at least one federal attorney, we went that way, with federal dealer, but I don't -- I wouldn't worry about that right now. That's something that has got to be fine-tuned, in terms of the federal. I am not speaking for the federal attorneys here or whatever, but I will just tell you that it was an area of confusion, a little bit, last year and fuzziness.

MS. WIEGAND: That's what the council was looking to address with I believe it was Amendment 30 that was looking at the commercial permit for cobia that was postponed in light of what was going on with the commission's plan and Amendment 31.

MR. LINK: In Virginia, the majority of the commercial fishery is a hook-and-line fishery, and it's generally charter captains that also have a hook-and-line license, and the rule there is very similar to what you guys were just talking about. If they run a charter, folks on that charter would have to have their names on that commercial card for them to get the extra fish, and so it would be a two per person or two per license holder limit, and then you have a list of I believe it's six individuals that you can put on that. That's what it was prior.

Now, with the new framework amendment, that's not going to be the case, and so it was two fish per vessel, and so it was not a very significant number of fish, but I don't know how -- As far as the requirement, if they had to sell it through a federal dealer or not, but it wasn't necessarily a loophole as much as I think it was folks, on their days they didn't have charters, they would go out and try and make money doing it that way, and, as far as selling it, I am not really sure.

Now, with the new laws in place, that list is no longer, and they're kind of wound up about it, but they're only allowed that two fish per commercial card license, and so it's going to ultimately end that hook-and-line fishery, because two fish is not going to be worth them going out all day to catch two fish and sell.

MR. DOUGHTIE: Mel Bell kind of answered it, about the fuzziness, because I know, in the Hilton Head/Beaufort/Bluffton area, during May, you can go to about any restaurant and cobia is going to be on the menu, and I don't know where they're all coming from, but I can guarantee you that there's a lot of under-the-table trading going on.

MR. LAKS: I just want to comment to that real quick, and no offense, Bill, but I see a lot of clarity in the fuzziness.

MR. FELLER: I just wanted to maybe clear up the Virginia thing. In Virginia, you can't combine a for-hire and a commercial trip. It's either one or the other, and the fish has to be sold to a fish house, where the reporting is happening. Now, as far as a federal fish house, it doesn't -- I don't know how many of the fish houses there are, but it does have to be sold to a licensed dealer, and they have to report, and there is quite a bit of commercial, and it's hook-and-line. They catch some in the pound nets, but the majority of it is hook-and-line fishing, but it is kept up with for reporting.

MR. LAKS: All right, and so we see the different plans, and I don't know if anyone wants to make a motion to back up one of these amendments or if you guys just want to leave it the way it is.

MR. BLOW: **I will make a motion that we do the preferred alternative.**

MR. LAKS: Is there a second for that?

MR. LINK: I will second.

MR. LAKS: Is there any discussion on the motion?

MR. ROLLER: I am not surprised we're at this point so quickly, and this is how this whole process has felt to me the last year, is that we are moving forward so fast to hand this species off to the ASMFC. I think it's very clear that we've had a very big year class of fish that we are fishing on, but I am very concerned for the future, for a lot of different reasons, and, a lot of that, I can reiterate Collins's comments from earlier. There is a lot we don't know about this stock, and I think that the stock ID and the upcoming stock assessment could show a little bit more light on that.

Comments I made last year were that -- Well, South Carolina has done more for its stock, and particularly like the Port Royal Sound, in identifying this different genetic population, and we have a lot of fisheries like that in North Carolina, and what I mean is we have a lot of traditional fisheries, where fishermen are catching these fish way back in the sounds, way up in the rivers, and they're clearly spawning fish, or I shouldn't say clearly spawning fish, but very likely spawning fish, and these are the populations that have declined in recent years, because they have had a lot of pressure for a long period of time, and some of those particular areas, like at Cape Lookout and Bogue Sound, we still catch big fish in there. It wasn't what it was like ten to fifteen years ago, and other historic inshore fisheries like that have also disappeared in North Carolina.

Particularly given my experience with the state process, there is at no point in time at which the state couldn't have done more with these fisheries, but they haven't, because it's a struggle to meet the requirements for all the other stuff that our state does, and so I understand that a lot of people have been frustrated, particularly because there's been a lot of fish in the water with these big year classes, but I am just very, very concerned that we're moving very, very quickly to hand this off, and it makes me very concerned about some of our other species.

MR. OLSEN: I definitely want to agree 100 percent with what Tom Roller just said. He's in the for-hire sector, and I would like to see us slow down a little bit and wait for the assessment to finally -- For everything to be done, because the last thing we want, as a for-hire sector, is for the species to get closed, because it puts a damper on us when you close something.

I would rather see it regulated a little bit more, and then we'll see how it goes, and then, if they can open it up again, they can. Now, some people are going to say, well, that's ridiculous. They closed the black sea bass for a little while, and now we get to keep more -- I know it's hard to open it back up again, but I would rather have them open it back up again rather than have nothing to fish for, and I have done a lot of fishing on the east coast, and our fishery in South Carolina and Georgia, and I would say half of Florida, is nothing considered near the pressure that is put on those fish when you go across that South Carolina/North Carolina border and you run that stretch

of beach all the way up and see how many fishing rods and how much pressure on every single inlet that comes through.

He will tell you that the mentality, once you move up a little higher, and I'm not blaming it on old-timers, but I see more and more fish never having a chance to reach maturity, because everybody is putting everything in every cooler, and that's beside the point, but the pressure on those fish -- If any of you all would go to any pier, and I fish a lot of king mackerel tournaments, and we fish by these piers, and there is 300 people on every single pier in North Carolina every single weekend, and if not most every single day of the summer, and it's just the pressure on those fish.

Like I said, I would like to stress to slow down a little bit. Like someone said earlier about -- I agree that two or three fish a day would be plenty, but six fish, one per person, is great, but I would like to see it a little bit less, but, if that's what we can come to an agreement on, and I definitely don't want to see it raised any more at this time.

MR. ENGLISH: My concern is that we give it all over to the Atlantic States. I think the South Atlantic Council ought to have some input on it, because of the federal water aspect of it, and, contrary to what some may believe, I have watched this council over the years here, and I am pretty impressed with what the South Atlantic Council has done. They have done some pretty good management. If you look at the kingfish fishery alone, that tells you just how fine-tuned -- We have put the effort in and how fine-tuned we've got that, down to where, if we close the kingfish fishery in Florida, it's for a day or two, or a week, but that's rare, and it's rare that we don't catch right up to the limit, and so I am pretty impressed with the South Atlantic Council, and I would like to see them stay in it.

MR. GORHAM: As far as being rushed and the difference between these councils, I've been battling this for three years, and it's also important to look at what science is out there and what suggested management came out of SEDAR 28, and it suggested more of an Atlantic States style of management, and so I don't think it's being rushed.

I think it's just playing out the way that they envisioned it, and then you add in the changes in the fisheries, as far as Virginia northward, and then you also have to look at the management that is in the South Atlantic and what can we do with it in order to keep these fisheries viable and have access to it, and I think that's really the sticking point, is that we're at an ACL, and we can debate it or argue it, but it's right there, and that is not meant for the entire fishery. One state, or two states, aren't going to have the fishery and some states are, or somebody is going to lose. This year, North Carolina is going to lose, and, even from the research standpoint, this last year, the life history for cobia in North Carolina wasn't funded.

The assessment, from what I understand, and I will be shocked if it changes, is that we're going to end up in the same situation as last time, and we're going to be using primarily South Carolina data, because they have really put the time and effort and resources into it, but what's going on in South Carolina, per the movement and per the genetics, isn't what is going on in Virginia or even North Carolina.

I fish Hatteras north, and, historically, that's been the highest landing area for North Carolina, and there are plenty of places, and I am talking miles upon miles, that these fish can go that is unfished. There is a small fishery in Hatteras, and small, and there is no fishery inside of Oregon Inlet, and

so they are extremely protected, and we see that in the age of the fish and the size of the fish. As far as year classes, I know that northeast North Carolina and Virginia will tell you there was an explosion of fish under that thirty-three and smaller, and so we've got a year class coming, and I think it's time that we take everything into account and look at cobia and make our decision based upon all the circumstances for cobia. To not move forward, I think there needs to be many more motions to correct the current management at the federal level, if that's what people are -- Even our group thinks it should stay under, but I support moving forward, given all of the circumstances that we're in.

DR. ELKINS: Two issues. One is effort in our area. As I mentioned, and people from Florida mentioned, when other fish become scarce, and you were talking red snapper, and I am talking about nearshore, state-managed fish, they target what's available, and cobia are a large fish found inshore, and they're not hard to catch, and there's been an explosion of effort in the Cape Lookout area of tower boats, and it probably has happened all up and down the coast.

I would make that as a note, and I don't expect it to decrease, even though we've gone to one fish. In fact, it's a tragedy of the commons, and it has played out in many fisheries, and then the science. I know a lot of people from the northern Outer Banks and Virginia have questioned the science, and, being a scientist, I know that, as the science becomes weaker and the small N, the numbers of data points, becomes smaller, the uncertainty grows, and I am of the opinion that we are moving too quickly and that we need to get the science in order first before we can make any informed decision on where to go, both so far as the biology, which will drive the management, and the ID workshop apparently has identified possibly sub-groups, and perhaps a North Carolina stock that winters offshore, which would make it a federal managed fishery, for example, and there's one.

Also, I have heard other Virginia anglers complain that they didn't catch that many fish and they question the science, and I'm wondering now if -- The science is now being used for allocation purposes, and I am wondering whether they are also backing the use of that questionable data for the allocation for Virginia to have the largest allocation.

Lastly, Virginia, I do get it. You're not represented on the South Atlantic, and that's not right, and we need to offer Virginia and other states the ability to regulate these fish, but I am just afraid that, without the accountability measures that are implicit in the Magnuson-Stevens Act that we're going to see something happen to this fishery.

MR. DONALSON: Chris, just to clarify, there is not a scarcity problem with red snapper in northeast Florida. There is plenty of red snapper, but we're not allowed to catch them.

MR. LINK: A couple of things. I would like to clarify. From an overarching standpoint, I think the South Atlantic does a great job in a lot of things they do. I think that you're put in a situation where you're not going to make everybody happy, and there is always situations where somebody is going to feel like they're losing out, but, once again, I would like to just reiterate, like Dr. Elkins just said, that one of my largest concerns is the lack of representation that not only Virginia, but the states north of Virginia, have in a fishery that is an expanding fishery, and I don't see how, under the current management, we can correctly implement regulation on Maryland and New York and New Jersey.

I mean, I have spoken with folks in New York that had never caught a cobia in their life, and, over the last three years, they are catching twenty or thirty or forty cobia a year in New York, and that change in fishery has to -- A change in regulation has to go with a change in the fishery. I mean, if there was an option to manage this correctly, I think that you would have more folks open to it.

I also somewhat question kind of the legality of managing a species without the correct representation that should be there and is not currently, and so that is why I am backing the ASMFC and their involvement, just because that's the only mechanism that I can see for fair representation, but also management of the species throughout their entire boundary.

MS. WIEGAND: I just want to make a quick note about representation. Our Mackerel and Cobia Committee does have representation from the Mid-Atlantic. The Full Council does not. In order to get a Virginia seat or a Maryland seat or a New York seat on the Full Council, that requires an act of Congress, and so it's not something the council currently controls.

MR. ENGLISH: To me, that alone says why both entities should -- You should have both entities involved. The South Atlantic -- You are speaking about the fish moving north and there is no regulation on them, and the South Atlantic could impose those regulations, and they could put them right on those fish up there. I have to get a bluefish permit from the Northeast Region to catch bluefish in south Florida and land them, and so I know that we can do the same thing in the northern end, and, since it's been brought to their attention, I'm sure that that will be done.

MR. ROLLER: I think we've made a great argument for co-management. I mean, based off of my previous comments, I want to clarify that I am not opposed to ASMFC management. I am opposed to exclusive ASMFC management. I think this is a fishery that needs to be managed by both the states and on the federal level. My concern is the lack of accountability on the state and interstate level. I am awash in too many depleted and disappearing fisheries, and, like Dr. Elkins said earlier, the last few years, a lot of the pressure on this stock came from a lot of our state fisheries being really far down those years, and these were an abundant, available fishery, and people jumped in on it.

MR. LINK: I just wanted to clarify what Christina was saying. At the cobia and mackerel level, Virginia currently has one vote in a species that is managed from Georgia through New York, and Florida has three votes, and they're not even in that current management area, and then, at the South Atlantic, the major council level, we currently have zero votes, and so I just wanted to throw those numbers out there for you.

MR. SWANN: It seems to me that, with the uncertainty with where this transition area is, or if it even exists, and with the uncertainty with the stock ID and comments I'm hearing from people about cobia changing habits and being found in different places now than they used to, for the council to permanently give up management of cobia doesn't really make a whole lot of sense to me, but what is the reasoning the council is willing to give up total management north of the Florida/Georgia state line?

MS. WIEGAND: I don't want to speak too much on behalf of the council members, but my understanding is that this is based, one, on a lot of stakeholder input during the public hearing process as well as concerns with MRIP. As Wes mentioned, there are concerns about how MRIP is able to estimate landings for a pulse species, and the council is currently bound by using MRIP



numbers as the best available science. However, the commission has a bit more leeway in data sources they can use to monitor recreational landings, and I know that was one of many of the things that the council considered.

MR. WAUGH: Also, there is so little harvest in federal waters that there is really a very limited role that the council can play. The vast majority of the harvest is in state waters, and so we really need a state plan. If the council stays in it, we're stuck with the ACL, and if that ACL is going to be harvested or exceeded with the state harvest, then our only action and option is to keep federal waters closed, and so this is similar to what has happened in red snapper in the Gulf, where there is a very short federal season because of the harvest in state waters.

We've got two council members over here, if they want to elaborate any more as well, but the council just feels that this is a fishery that the vast majority, and I think it's over 80 percent of the harvest is in state waters, and the role for federal management in this one just isn't that big. It's much better handled at the ASMFC level. Fishermen then have their state agency and ASMFC to go to versus having to go to the state agency, ASMFC, and the council, and so that's just a little more background on why the council feels there just isn't that much of a role here for the federal council.

MR. SWANN: That makes a lot of sense, and I appreciate that. My perspective is coming from southeast Georgia and north Florida, where it's -- Other than a spring run, it's primarily a federal fishery.

MR. BLOW: What Gregg was saying about where they're caught is the main reason I want to see it put over to ASMFC. They can control what happens in state waters, and what Tom mentioned, that he was concerned about the fish there, and they can make rules in state waters. The South Atlantic Council can't. Currently, if the South Atlantic Council and National Marine Fisheries just decides to close the fishery, like they did last year in January, South Carolina and Georgia missed all of their fishery, all of it, because theirs is in federal waters, and so, with ASMFC involved in it, that shouldn't happen. They're not going to just close down everything, and like South Carolina has to follow federal rules and close down. The other thing that I wanted to bring up is that Atlantic States Marine Fisheries took over the red drum fishery years ago, and it's a tremendous success. There is more large red drum than ever, and that's a tremendous success. Thank you.

MR. ROLLER: I have to disagree on red drum being a tremendous success. Our fishery would not be a tremendous success in North Carolina, for multiple reasons.

MR. LAKS: If there is no other comments, I think it's -- Go ahead, Bill.

MR. GORHAM: I would just like to make a comment. Again, if you look at the science, it would suggest that Atlantic States management would be more appropriate, and you have Virginia and North Carolina and South Carolina and Georgia fish that winter offshore, and the only fishery that's out there is a very small commercial fishery.

Again, you have the largest allocation going to the state that, in the current federal management, has zero representation, and you have another one -- Then on up the coast. If you want to manage -- I have heard this so many times, as far as sight-casting and towers out on the water, but we don't

manage based on outriggers that we see, and we don't manage based on trolling motors, and, looking at this particular species, it's a batch spawner, and it spawns multiple times in a given year in areas that are unfished.

I go right back to those species that are being hammered, and, with Atlantic States, there is accountability. If you go over, you are constrained within a certain harvest, and it's not open season, and I have been adamantly opposed to the current complementary management, and I think it's only there, and I hope it's only there, for the transitional period, because we have an ACL that is nothing more than average catch. It's 50/50 over or under, and so the perception of us being open and having anything to do with it within our states is wrong, because you still have the accountability measures that are not at all consistent with how MRIP is. We could have low catch one year with less restrictive regulations, and then, with more restrictive, we blow it out of the water.

Factoring all of that in, I think it's a win/win. We're better managing the stocks, and it also accounts for MRIP, the current ACL, and the challenges with the research, and, again, I would caution you to think that we're going to go through the stock assessment and we have a whole bunch more information. The stock ID I went to, we still have a black hole in that area, and I know, again, North Carolina doesn't have life history, and Virginia has very little life history, and I just don't think -- If we wait, we may really have our hands tied and not be able to do anything with this fishery or the management and access to it.

MR. LAKS: I think we've had a pretty good discussion about this, and, unless there's really something else that someone has from a different angle, I think we should go ahead and vote on it. All those in favor of the -- Go ahead, Bill.

MR. WEEKS: Just one quick comment. From Georgia, we are primarily a federal-waters fishery down there, and one of the things -- I am kind of hung in the middle, but one of the things I would like to know is Christina said earlier that the council has a query out to the southern states as to how they would intend to act in our kind of situation, and so, in terms, very selfishly, from Georgia, I would like to hear more of that before making a final decision.

MS. WIEGAND: That is on their agenda for their spring meeting in May, and they will be discussing what they intend to do in terms of requesting regulations for federal waters, and so we should have that information by the June council meeting.

MR. WEEKS: I just hate to buy a pig in a poke.

MR. LAKS: All right. **All those in favor of the motion, please raise your hands, I see four in favor; all those opposed, I see ten opposed; anyone abstaining, one. The motion fails.**

DR. ELKINS: **Motion to adopt Alternative 4.**

DR. LAKS: Is there a second for that? Tom Roller seconds it. Is there discussion?

MS. WIEGAND: Alternative 4 is the one that's built a little bit like the way spiny lobster is, in which the commission would be able to propose rules directly to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

MR. LAKS: Do we have any discussion on that?

MR. LINK: To me, this looks like the best option, but a lot of our issues come back to the bad MRIP data that drives these catch numbers. In Virginia last year, they basically extrapolated out seventeen intercepts to turn into 300,000 pounds of catch. With that low of a sample size, the degree of error, like Dr. Elkins was talking about, is just so great, and so my concern with still being required to use that data is that we're throwing darts at a wall, and we have no clue what our catch numbers are, and we're just going to be back where we were last year and the year before with everybody being concerned about how poor these catch numbers are.

I understand the common sense of it, but, if we can't do anything to better capture a pulse fishery, we're going to be in the same place we were a year or two ago, and I think that's the reason that the council has said that they think that the Atlantic States should take over, and obviously that didn't pass, but that is my concern with this alternative.

MR. ENGLISH: Just because I didn't vote for just the Atlantic States, that's doesn't mean that I don't think the Atlantic States shouldn't be in it. I think they should, and, as a matter of a fact, I think they should be the lead in it, but I think that they shouldn't be the only one in it. I think that the South Atlantic Council, the federal side, should have some input, and that's my concern, and, from listening, we don't have all the information yet to make this decision, and I think we ought to wait until we have the information to make the proper decision as to which way we want to go, and that's why I'm where I'm at.

MR. LAKS: Is there any more discussion? All right. Let's vote on this. **All those in favor of the motion, please raise your hands, I see eight in favor; all those opposed, six opposed.**

MR. GORHAM: I am opposed.

MR. LAKS: **Seven opposed; anyone abstaining from the vote, one.**

DR. ELKINS: A question. Is there a point within this meeting where the committee can suggest research, future research, priorities, or should we go through MARFIN or something?

MS. WIEGAND: If you guys would like, you can make a motion, and that information would go to the council, but research priorities is typically something that is directed towards SEDAR.

DR. ELKINS: Okay. I think I will wait to formulate a cogent remark.

MR. LAKS: That is something we could take up in Other Business, too. **The motion is approved.**

Guys, I think we're going to go back to the king mackerel trip limit amendment, just to see if we want to make a motion on that. That was the one where increasing the trip limits to 3,500 north of that line, and we had not a whole lot of discussion about it, because I know it does get a little bit complicated, but does anyone want to make a motion supporting it?

MR. ENGLISH: **I will make a motion that we go with Preferred Alternative 3.**

MR. FELLER: I will second it.

MR. LAKS: Skip seconds it. Is there any discussion? I think we kind of covered a little bit of discussion before, and so let's go ahead and vote on this. **All those in favor, please raise your hand.**

MR. GORHAM: I am in favor.

MR. LAKS: **Fifteen in favor; all those opposed, one opposed; anyone abstaining, two. The motion is approved.**

MR. GORHAM: Ira, I have a quick question. Under the current complementary plan for cobia, if the ACL is exceeded, the federal accountability measures have to be applied the following year, correct?

MS. WIEGAND: The accountability measures would allow for -- I wrote it down, because I knew I would get asked a question about accountability measures. For recreational cobia, for the Atlantic group, if the recreational and the stock ACL is exceeded, then the Regional Administrator can reduce the following season, and he also has the option to reduce the vessel limit to no less than two per vessel.

MR. GORHAM: I think the current MRIP has it at one per boat, and so it will always default back to the season length, and I think that's something everybody really needs to think about, if we want to vote again. When we go to an overage, depending upon how much it is, we will be shut down.

MR. LINK: I just wanted to say that I abstained, because I am a Cobia Sub-Panel member, and so I'm assuming that the folks in the Cobia Sub-Panel are not supposed to vote on that, and that's the only reason that I abstained from it, but I just am clarifying that.

MS. WIEGAND: I believe, at the last meeting, you guys voted to allow the Cobia Sub-Panel to vote as a part of -- Since you guys also have knowledge of that, and so you're welcome to abstain or vote.

MR. LAKS: We're a very inclusive group.

MR. LINK: I guess I would then for, just based on my limited knowledge of what I have learned today, and so thank you.

DR. SMART: I want to thank you guys for giving us some time today. I work with the two fishery-independent offshore surveys that are run through the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, both our regional reef fish survey as well as our coastal trawl survey, which I will address today. We give a similar update to the Snapper Grouper annually, and so Christina talked about perhaps this would be useful for you all as well to see, to see what sort of data we get for mackerel. We will be willing to do this again, if it's useful for you, each year.

The SEAMAP South Atlantic coastal trawl survey is a long-term fishery-independent annual monitoring survey, and it focuses on nearshore, shallow-water, trawlable habitat, and so primarily soft bottom, a little bit of eel grass and kelp areas, but mostly sandy bottom, and you can see it

hugs the coast pretty closely. They sample with paired seventy-five-foot falcon nets, and we run surveys during three seasons throughout each year, the spring, summer, and fall. Currently, this is technically our second week of sampling, but, with the system, we're in port today, until tomorrow morning, and we cover six regions from Cape Canaveral to Cape Hatteras. The survey design is stratified random sampling within each region, and so the goal is to just spread out sampling and make sure we don't have any bias in how we're collecting our data.

In the survey, all net contents are sorted and identified, and we measure aggregate weights for all species in each net, and so, at the very least, we have biomass data available, and, for priority species, particularly those that are economically valuable, we get estimates of numbers caught as well as length frequency, and so how large they are, what our size distribution is, and we also have a subset of these that are life history priority species. We measure individual lengths and weights, and we often collect ageing structures, such as otoliths, for getting age distributions to support assessment as well as reproductive tissues. Particularly, gonads are collected.

King and Spanish mackerel are two of our life history priority species, and we've been collecting ages from both of these species since about 2009 or 2010, and the king and Spanish that we collect are primarily juveniles. With kings, we seem to see ages ranging from about zero to one years, and they're mostly immature fish and not part of the spawning. Spanish are a little bit older, from zero to two years of age, and, again, very few we have ever noticed have any indicators of spawning.

The survey itself isn't sampling fish that you guys are seeing in your fishery, but it's working a little bit different, and so it's only collecting those younger fish, and so it's not mimicking what you see, but rather what you might see in a couple of years, about two to four years, down the road, and it's been used in stock assessments, in terms of helping estimate what we expect for recruitment.

Trawl survey data for mackerels has been used in SEDARs several times. For king, it's SEDAR 5, 16, and mostly recently in 38, and we have provided data for life history working groups as well as an index of abundance for the juvenile stage, either presented as age-zero or a combination of age-zero and age-one. Then a method they use is called a delta-GLM standardization, or delta generalized linear model, and I will talk a bit very briefly about that in the next slide.

For Spanish, the trawl survey data was used in SEDAR 17 and 28, and, again, it went to the life history working group as well as the indices of abundance working groups, and, for Spanish, we divide the survey up into an age-zero or young of the year index, using summer and fall data, using the same type of standardization methods as king, and also an age-one index of abundance that utilizes spring data only.

The way the delta-GLM standardization works, very, very briefly, is essentially two linear models are developed and then you combine the results of both of those, and so one looks at whether or not the fish are present or absent, and then a second is, if they are present, how many are there and what affects whether or not they are present as well as how abundant they are, and so we tend to include factors in the models that can vary among the tows, such as years, season, region, bottom water temperature, as well as depth at which we sample, with the hopes that the modeling can somewhat correct for variability in our abundance estimates related to the above factors, because

there is some variability in what we see from year to year and season to season and region to region.

Both of the graphs are going to look very similar to this, or all three of the graphs, rather, and so this is the king mackerel data. You have year along the horizontal axis and our normalized abundance, or number of fish, along the vertical axis, and so what we've done with this data is the dashed line is just the nominal data, or rather the counts, coming straight off of the boat. The solid line with the error bars is the standardized results from the two generalized linear models, and then both have been normalized to the long-term average of the dataset, which is a horizontal line that runs right through one. The take-home from these is which years are we seeing higher than normal abundance, normal type abundance, or lower than normal abundance, less so than what the actual values are, and so the --

MR. LAKS: Is that three fish or is that 300 fish?

DR. SMART: Normally, in a full tow, our range is between -- I think our maximum was about 150 mackerel in a tow, and one to twenty is more common, and these are only twenty-minute tows, and so they're fairly short. If you know James Island, they cover a region from Fort Johnson Road to about the Harris Teeter in that twenty minutes, and so we don't expect to see extremely high numbers per station.

MR. LAKS: I was just trying to read the left side of the graph.

DR. SMART: It's sort of standardized to three fish, and so, in this case -- For example, in 1990, we had three times more fish in the tows than we would normally see. In 1991, we had half the number of fish in the tows that we would normally see. You can see there is quite a bit of variation from year to year, and we have had some periods of higher than normal abundance, for example in the mid-2000s. The early 2010s was lower than normal abundance for kings, but, recently, we've had an increasing trend. In 2016, we had about one-and-a-half times as many fish as we would normally see, and then we were right around average in 2017, and so some positive signs for king mackerel in the last couple of years, and we expect that those fish will be coming into the fishery in a couple of years, hopefully.

What we have found from this modeling and some of the other work that we've done in our lab is what really affects presence and absence are almost everything that we measure with the survey of year, region, season, depth, and even temperature. The things that most affect abundance, if they are present, seem to be year, region, and season. In particular, for our kings, we see them off of Florida, and a little bit more so in Georgia, but the highest numbers are certainly off of Florida and in the fall following the spawning season.

We have two graphs for Spanish mackerel, because they are divided into those age-zero and age-one groups, and so the same setup. The top of the graph is about three-times what our normal catches would be. This is the long-term average right here along one, and the very early 1990s were higher than normal, and a little bit of peaks and valleys in between.

The mid-2000s were higher than normal, and our most recent years, unfortunately, have been lower than normal, with one year right at that long-term average, in 2016, and 2017 was a little bit lower than normal for the age-zeroes, and then very similar trends for the age-one. The age-zeroes

seemed to be spawned, in particular, late spring into summer, and we pick them up in the survey in summer, and then these are the ones that survive through the winter to the next spring, and, unfortunately, our last five years or so have been lower than normal.

Again, we have done quite a bit of work on looking at how these fish are distributed, and we find that year, region, depth, and temperature affect the presence of both age-zeroes and age-ones. Year and season seem to affect mostly the age-zero abundance. Like I said, we typically see Spanish mackerel age-zeroes in summer, in particular, and they are a little bit more evenly distributed across the region, with our highest catches in Florida and Georgia, and then they sort of trail off as you go further north. The factors that affect the abundance of age-ones seem to be year, region, depth, and temperature.

Just to summarize the general trends that we've seen recently, for king mackerel, the abundance of juveniles seems to have been on an increasing trend in the last five years, and our last two have been at or higher than the long-term average. For Spanish juveniles, we've been more on the lower than the long-term average in the last five years, and, because these are juvenile fish, these trends could indicate some changes in either the spawning effort, the number of spawning fish that are contributing to the population, but it also might be the survivorship of those fish that are spawned, and it may be an early indicator of what we expect for recruitment in a couple of years, and that's about all I have, and so it's a very short presentation, but, if you all have any questions.

MR. SWANN: Just a question, out of curiosity. Do you trawl in the same place in the same time every year?

DR. SMART: Yes and no. There is at least four stations per small area, and we randomly select at least two to three in there, depending on how big that area is. We will definitely hit the same grouping of stations, but we may not hit the same individual station, but our region-wide coverage, as well as our sample sizes, are pretty consistent from year to year.

MR. MCKINLEY: Just out of curiosity, it is depth of water that you trawl or certain miles offshore? Where is it usually at?

DR. SMART: It is primarily depth, and we're centered right around the ten-meter mark, maybe five meters range on either side of that, fifteen feet or so.

MR. WEEKS: I just wondered, with the kind of winter and spring we've had this year and some very, very cold temperatures that have affected, at least in Georgia, our shrimp population and also some of the inshore species, what effect do you think that would have on juveniles in the upcoming season?

DR. SMART: We got a few stations in last week before the weather turned bad, and, so far, our general catches have been fairly low, probably because of the cold temperatures. I am a little bit concerned about how cold this winter has been, and it's very unusual. The water temperatures haven't come up as quickly as they normally do for this time of year, and our kings in particular seem to do pretty well when it's a warm, but not terribly warm, year. Actually, when was the last big snow event, and we had another one about ten years ago, and so we haven't looked at that, but our numbers in 2010 fall in that event. For Spanish, we're pretty low, which was pretty consistent.

For age-zeroes, they were low. Then even for king, and so it's possible that that cold shock may have actually increased the mortality over the winter.

MR. BOWEN: Something I see too with this is that, in 2010, it's the first year we had a huge upwelling from the Keys, all the way up north, and that stayed, I think, every spring for like almost four years that we were dealing with it, and we're still dealing with it now, which Ben can tell you, but it seems to mimic what you have up here on this chart, like the lower numbers anyway, and I don't know if that has an effect, and I'm just throwing that out there.

DR. SMART: Yes, that's a great thing, and we've really just started to get into the details about this. We have a graduate student who just finished her masters working on king mackerel, and so that project should be available soon, and certainly for the next SEDAR, because we don't know if those low numbers are because they're getting shifted further offshore from the survey or that cold water is just changing how well they do. In theory, when there is a lot of upwelling, there should be a lot of food for them, and maybe they're just not around for us to catch.

MR. LAKS: Forgive me if I didn't hear it in your presentation, but are you encountering other species and you're just going through them, and I hate to bring up that word "cobia", but we're interested if there is -- Are you getting any cobia while you're sampling, and are they similar in their juvenile stages?

DR. SMART: Luckily or unluckily, we do not catch cobia. The few that we have encountered have been pretty decent sized, maybe twenty-four inches or so, and I think those might be the ones who were like, oh, there's a lot of food in this net and I'm going to go in there and eat, and so we certainly don't encounter them very frequently. When we do, we've been able to pass along samples to our genetics group, for example, and so, luckily or unluckily, not. We do catch quite a few of the other species that are ASMFC related, and so things like spot and croaker and whiting.

MR. HARTIG: I would just like to thank Tracey and their group for coming in here and doing this. This is really good, and I really appreciate you putting together this for the assessments. I mean, some of the things we see may be a little bit different, but your king mackerel, in particular, tracks what we've seen in the fishery.

We have had sub-legal fish in the fishery every year since 2012, and the only thing it doesn't show in yours is 2012, and it's interesting that in 2012, in the area where the king mackerel spawn, off of Jupiter, the Gulf Stream was eight miles off the area where they're spawning, and so the larvae would not have gotten entrained in the Gulf Stream at the time they were spawning, and the interesting thing we saw is, in October of that year, we saw age-zeroes, about ten or eleven inches, in October, which would have been spawned in May, in an area much farther south than I have ever seen them.

I mean, in Salerno, in that area right by the inlet, we could catch them five at a time on these small jigs that we were fishing for jacks and blue runners and things of that nature, but it was an unusual event that we saw, and it was an unusual Gulf Stream influence, and you try and track this back, and it was unusual in that they didn't get to where you sampled. They occurred probably farther south of the Cape, between the Cape and Fort Pierce, and then we saw those animals in the fall.



As we go through the assessment and we look at these different peaks, I mean, it's important for fishermen to be able to point out these different observations as we go through time, because you guys aren't going to capture everything that we see, but it's really interesting that king mackerel tracks really, really well.

Unfortunately, the Spanish isn't tracking that great, because, this year, we have a tremendous increase in the Spanish mackerel juveniles, the twelve to fourteen-inch fish. I mean, there is a whole other group of fish. There is two groups of fish, and one stayed off of Vero Beach and the other one stayed down off of Salerno, in their overwintering areas, but the ones that were up to the north were smaller fish, and they seemed to stay up there, except for that one weather event we had where the cold fronts pushed everything together, and we can bounce this off though, when we look at it.

We can look at how the cast-net fishery -- It works when mackerel are abundant, and so we go back and bounce your index off -- Is the cast-net fishery able to catch a lot of fish, and that means their abundance is up, because it doesn't operate unless the abundance is up, and so, I mean, it's all really, really useful information, but you still have to have the fishermen in the system to bounce this off of to make sense of it all, and that's where -- You know, we'll talk about the fishery performance reports, and that's where it's critical for you all to get your observations in on what you all have seen about Spanish and kings and cobia as we go through this, because the intention is to use the information that Tracey has and the information now that you guys will provide in your fishery performance reports on a yearly basis to get yearly snapshots of how our stocks are going to be doing in the future.

The council is in a real change of how we're going to look at our fisheries in the future. We're going to be able to identify when we see changes in the population much earlier than waiting for five-year assessment results, and so it's all good. I mean, we're going to a good place with this, and this is really, really helpful. Thank you.

MR. LAKS: Is there any other questions for Tracey? Thank you very much.

DR. SMART: Thanks, guys.

MR. LAKS: I think we're going to do lunch.

MS. IVERSON: I think most everyone is here for the AP meeting, and I would like to take a group picture.

MR. LAKS: What do you guys think? Can we be back by quarter after one? Does that sound good? Go ahead, Wes.

MR. BLOW: One quick comment, Ira, because Tracy made me think of something, and I will just share it. The 2010 cold and snow event, just as it relates to cobia, which nobody wants to hear about any more, but, in 2010, at the Hatteras line, because of the cold Labrador current and the warm water coming up, those fish got trapped there, and they were just hammered for weeks, and I've been watching the weather, and I hope that doesn't happen again, but, with this year's cold weather, that is something that I have kind of been watching. Two weeks ago, I looked at the

water temperature at the mouth of the bay, and it was eight degrees cooler than the same period a year ago, and so that's just an observation that I've been looking at.

MR. LAKS: Thank you.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. WIEGAND: All right, guys, and so, next on the agenda, we've got the United States Coast Guard enforcement priorities, and so I'm going to turn it over to the Lieutenant to talk to you guys a little bit about that.

LT. BROWN: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Jerry Brown, and I'm going to give you a little introduction as to why I'm here and why this guy in the Coast Guard uniform is speaking to you today. I've been in Charleston for two years right now, coming up on two years, and one of my jobs is that I oversee all of the Coast Guard law enforcement for Georgia and South Carolina specifically, but, that being said, I also work with my counterparts all across the South Atlantic, North Carolina and all throughout Florida, and so we do talk and we do work with each other, but now we're getting into the days where we're joining Coast Guard law enforcement into the council and advisory panels, and so I wanted to come to you today and just have an open discussion as to what you see with the Coast Guard.

I'm sure you've all dealt with the Coast Guard in one aspect or another, and hopefully it wasn't for any SAR cases or taking on water or the vessel was on fire, and hopefully it was for other reasons, but I'm sure you've dealt with us before, and so I do want to thank you for all the efforts and all the compliance that you've worked with us. It's been very helpful to come onboard fishing vessels and you guys be respectful and cooperative for us to get on with our jobs.

With that being said, with this cobia and mackerel, I know it's not quite as common in South Carolina and Georgia, and I know it's mainly in the North Carolina/South Carolina border and down to Florida, but, like I said, I do work with officials and my counterparts all throughout the South Atlantic, and so I want to keep an open discussion as to what you've seen from us and any good and any bad and any feedback you may have or anything that you want to see out of us, because we have assets throughout the entire South Atlantic, usually smaller stations that go out a couple of miles and do ICW in the harbor, and we also have patrol boats that go out a couple hundred miles and be out there for a few days.

I know you guys are involved in a lot of tournaments, and so this is kind of an open discussion as to any feedback you may have or anything you want, and we see a lot of stuff, but, then again, you guys are the subject matter experts when it comes to species and these fish and anything that a normal person may not see, because we're doing this for one aspect, and our priority is safety at life at sea. That is our number one, by far. This fisheries enforcement is number two for us, but we have cases that go all throughout.

Just for the month, we came across a massive illegal black sea bass operation, and we happened to be very lucky, and we noticed that a guy was coming up there at midnight on radar, and he was there for about four or five hours and then came back outside a prohibited zone, and we had a cutter go darkened ship, completely blackened out, and then, as soon as it was sunrise, this fishing

vessel came back to their pots, about 7:00 a.m., and it was a prohibited area, and then we caught about 800 pounds of illegal sea bass onboard this boat.

The fines are going to be between \$10,000 and \$20,000, and so we do catch these operations all throughout the South Atlantic. That being said, this still goes on, and I'm sure you've seen some pretty sketchy stuff throughout your time here, and that's to say the least, and so, with that being said, I also know that you guys host a lot of tournaments throughout, and not necessarily right here in our backyard, but I think cobia is in South Carolina every once in a while, but the mackerel is on that North Carolina/South Carolina border, and so I want to open it up to any discussion you guys may have and any advice. This is kind of free range to the Coast Guard, and these are baby steps as to what we're going to involve in our relationship, and I'm not trying to rat anybody out, but any advice you may have for fisheries law enforcement officers.

MR. LAKS: First of all, I just want to thank you for being here, and I know you guys do a great job, from national security to fisheries to first responders, and so thank you.

MR. DONALSON: Thanks for being here, and obviously thank you for all the stuff that you guys do and the help that you give us, I mean literally, and you guys were involved in a life-saving effort for some of my friends last summer. The only feedback that I would give you, when it comes to tournament fishing, is -- Again, this is going to sound very petty, because you guys are doing such an amazing job, but, when you're out there and there is thirty boats around and you've got six lines in the water, and we've paid all this money to be in the tournament and our licenses and everything, and, inevitably, I get pulled over for a safety inspection or something, and I've got to bring in all my lines, missing thirty minutes of fishing time, and I feel like I'm not the guy you're looking for.

I mean, I'm fishing for one fish today, and that's it. I'm not keeping ten or whatever, and so I don't know if there is a better way to communicate during tournament time, and I know the Coast Guard always does a briefing at the captains' meeting, and so I think they know it's a tournament, and so maybe something like that, to where -- Maybe not tournament hours that you're pulling people over to do these safety checks, and does that make sense?

LT. BROWN: Yes, absolutely. Also, our presence out there for tournaments is because as a presence in safety regulations, and sometimes they get a little out of hand and we have the guys who are not lucky at all, to where this guy doesn't know what he's doing, and he's a little out of bounds, and he might not have the proper lines and regulations and permits and all of that, and that's why we're also there too, to ensure that people are checked.

Unfortunately, the bad guy is not going to throw up a flag and say, yes, pull me over and I'm illegal fishing. I wish it was that easy, but, just to be fair, we do want to check as many people as possible, but we are trying to find a balance of not hindering you guys, but also performing our mission as well, but I can obviously pass that along, because, in most tournaments, you guys are straight shooters, and you guys know what you're doing, and you guys are experts in fishing with this species, but I can definitely pass that along. Thank you.

MR. ROBINSON: When we're king mackerel fishing, we're in a fleet of boats, normally, and we've got a limit that we can catch. Like, on the east coast, we might bring up fifty head. I noticed, in Naples, when we're -- We're on 1,250 over there, but, still, the Coast Guard pulls in shore of us in their big cutter and waits and just -- As we catch our limits and we're leaving, and we're all

going to the same place, and I'm just wondering -- On the east coast, I noticed they will come right into the fleet with their little rubber boat off the big boat, and they will start making their safety inspections, which it kills us that we have to stop fishing for that long, just like he said, but, when we're on fifty head, if the cutter could just sit inshore of us, and we're all coming that way.

I even -- The day I did it in Naples, I wasn't getting stopped or nothing. They had two boats already there, and so I just pulled over to them and waited my turn, because I knew they were going to come get me eventually, and that would be really a good thing when you see the big fleet of king mackerel boats. You know what we're doing, and we're on a limit, and we're going to be -- You're either stopping at dark or we're going to be stopping when we get our limit, and we're going to come right by you. Flag us down, but, man, stopping us when we're fishing, it hurts us. It does hurt us, and that's all. Thank you.

MR. OLSEN: You look very familiar. I've been boarded probably eight times in the last four or five years. Here in Charleston, it's more prevalent, because I know Charleston is a big training area for a lot of the guys. They learn how to put in the boats and run the harbor and do all your training. I love what you all do, but a lot of training is going on with the wrong boats that you see coming in. I mean, we have a big population of boats.

Now, if you see me, I am in a thirty-five-foot Contender, and I get the little -- I have one or two of them with me right now, where you've boarded me before. You actually boarded me on two different boats, and I tried to tell you all, but I have actually refused training a couple of times, and you all have pulled off of me, where I would say, look, no training and you all have pulled me before, and I am just wondering why is it so prolific here in Charleston to do that much training?

I have actually been boarded by the cutter also, off the coast, where they drop the zodiac out, and then they've come aboard and pretty much tore my boat apart, and then they've measured some fish, and then they didn't know what kind of fish, one of the ones, and there were two or three of them that they were trying to measure on my boat, and I'm just wondering what kind of training do you all do before you all go, as far as enforcement, like the fishing stuff, and what kind of training do you all do?

LT. BROWN: First off, thank you for reaching out to me on that. Something I do want to keep in mind though is that you guys are the experts when it comes to this. You guys have been doing this for your entire lives, probably more than I've been alive, frankly, and fishing is -- Unlike narcotics and search and rescue during a hurricane, it's not as sexy as -- It's fisheries, and it's extremely important, and the public does not realize how important it is to not only locally, but also the economy.

It's hard. There are so many fish out there. The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel -- There is, what, eighty species of snapper grouper or something like that, and it's hard to figure out, and we, unfortunately, get very limited training to enforce such a large aspect, an entire fishing fleet of the United States, and so we try to do the best we can, absolutely, and sometimes we have to make people have patience in regard to having our people train onboard, because we rotate out. You have a guy that is here for two or three years, perhaps, doing fisheries. Then, for his next tour, he's doing drug interdiction missions off the coast of Columbia. That's where I was before this. I was off in Alaska doing crab fishery boardings, and then, before that, I was off of Columbia.

We try to train as much as possible, because we do have a very limited time. We need to get someone up to speed, and as soon as they're proficient, they're then transferred out to go somewhere else, but, if you do have concerns with people and you show proof -- You could say, Officer Brown, I have my form that I was boarded two months ago, and I understand this is a training environment, but, however, I am trying to get back to do X, Y, and Z, and if you are cooperative, nine times out of ten, they should be doing that.

You probably haven't seen me. I am mainly more managerial, but there are guys that have boots on the ground. I would like to be out of the office and boarding vessels, but, unfortunately, I am kind of backseat, but, for training, it is just part of the nature of the Coast Guard, but definitely please pass that concern as they're onboard, please do. Thank you.

MR. ROLLER: I am up in North Carolina, at Beaufort, and Group Fort Macon is my closest Coast Guard, and I can't say enough about the Coast Guard in my area. They've been great. I just have two comments, one kind of more general. One issue I deal with with boarding is some of the boarding parties aren't too familiar with the for-hire safety requirements, and I would like to just see a little bit more familiarity with that, because I spend a lot of money on my safety gear, and some of my competitors do not, and so it would kind of help, I think, just to -- Anyway, I would like to just see a little bit more familiarity with that.

Specifically, up my way, what I would like to see more enforcement of is North Carolina presents a unique problem, because we don't have joint enforcement authority with the National Marine Fisheries Service, and so our state marine patrol can't enforce federal fisheries requirements in federal waters, which means they also can't enforce our South Atlantic permits.

A lot of for-hire boats don't have those permits, and I would like to see some effort to try to get some better compliance, because I think it puts our fleet at risk, because joint enforcement authority is a whole other argument, which we take through our state legislature, but I would just like to see that, and that's kind of more of a general thing that I would love to see the Coast Guard look at in my area.

LT. BROWN: Are for-hire people fishing out of compliance, you're saying?

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and so they don't have -- They're a for-hire boat, and they don't have their grouper snapper permit or their coastal migratory pelagics permit, and they will be in possession of those fish in federal waters, and a part of it is, since our state marine patrol can't go into federal waters and can't enforce it, a lot of people just don't know, or a lot of people say, well, why do I have to buy these, because no one enforces it, and so do you see what I'm saying?

LT. BROWN: Like I said, I work primarily in South Carolina, but I can definitely pass that on to my partners in North Carolina. That's something that we don't have as much visibility or think of, but absolutely.

MR. LAKS: Tom, it has nothing to do with the joint enforcement thing, because I live in a state that has it, and there is nobody checking them there either, and so I would reiterate that, if you could talk to some of the Florida Coast Guard guys about checking for federal for-hire permits. It really changes what -- The ability we have to do or can catch compared to a boat that's fishing illegally next to us. We can't throw the same fish on the dock, and so it's an important thing.

MR. MCKINLEY: A couple of things with that, too. In North Carolina, I know the state marine fisheries can't go in and search a boat unless -- They can't go down into a cabin unless they see blood or guts down there, which they're not going to see that, and so they can't search them, and, as a commercial snapper grouper fisherman, it hurts our price when all these fish are coming in and put on the market, and so I do wish the Coast Guard would check these boats offshore, recreational boats, a lot more in their cabins and stuff, where they would be hiding these fish.

Another thing is the safety requirements on the federally-documented boat offshore, with the life raft and the hydrostatic release, and the flare kits are so expensive, and the expiration dates are so short. I mean, we spend a lot of money on that, and, personally, I am afraid of that hydrostatic release. I mean, it's supposed to work when it gets eight feet under, but that's too late to -- If it doesn't work, you're in trouble.

Then the vessels that are not federally documented don't have to have those requirements. It's just a big difference between the same sized boats but whether they are federally documented or not, and the expiration on those rafts are just -- I mean, it's crazy. You buy a new one, and then you've got two years, and then you have to have it inspected, and then every year after that, and there's just no way that that raft goes bad that quick, but I know that's probably not just the Coast Guard. It's probably the manufacturers and everything else, but it kills us with the price on that stuff.

LT. BROWN: Unfortunately, that is a little above my paygrade, in regard to the safety regulations. If I could change that -- I understand that it is a pain and how it expires in twelve to twenty-four months, and then you have to recertify it or renew it, and it does come out of your pocket, and I do understand that. I, unfortunately, like I said, can't really change that at my level. Give me about five or ten years when I'm a different level.

In regard to the cabin, that's where you get on very touchy subjects. When you go onboard a boat, you can probably tell that something is not right. However, you need probable cause and reasonable justification in order to do that. As soon as we go into the private space, that's where we violate certain amendments, and we can't do that. However, we do have the ability -- Being a mobile -- We're out of twelve miles off, and we can't call for backup if we realize we're handling someone who might be an aggressive subject, unlike what might be on the streets of Charleston, and so we do have more flexibility that way.

However, if we do see something -- That's actually what I'm here to ask you about. I mean, if we notice that we're onboard, and we see things that you guys either have seen or know about -- If we go onboard to check the fish holds and what they're catching and all the regulations and all of that and realize that -- For example, my buddy down in -- I told this story during the Snapper Grouper AP, but one of my buddies was off the coast of the Keys, and there had been reports of a lot of illegal lobstering down there, a lot of undersized baby lobster tails, and so he was on a boarding of scuba divers, and they were nice and friendly mom and pop. They were friendly people, and you had no idea that they were doing this illegal operation.

It took a slight roll, and my buddy accidentally hit the scuba tank, and it was ice cold, freezing cold, and there was no way a scuba tank could be ice cold like that. With further investigation, all their tanks were completely filled up with illegal fish tails, all of them, and the courts definitely

take that as serious as possible, thousands of dollars, and these guys had been doing this for months, if not years, and so that's just one example that we wouldn't really think of.

I mean, criminals are very creative, and it's a cat-and-mouse game, and so that's just one example, but we've heard stories of batteries -- Fillets in batteries or under radar domes, all sorts of unique techniques, but those are things that we don't really have -- People who are illegally fishing, they're not going to say all their hidden tricks up their sleeves. 90 percent of the people that we board, they are compliant, and they're friendly, and they're following the regulations.

They know what they're doing, and we thank you for all of that, we really do, but, in order to actually catch the bad guys, we have to board everyone as much as possible, because the people that we see that look the nicest, they're the ones actually doing the illegal fishing. It's the guy on the nice, brand-new forty-five-foot center console coming inbound -- He's the guy that usually has all the illegal catch onboard. He thinks that he's kind of above the law and can do whatever he wants to, and those are the kind of guys that we see mostly are in violation. If you guys have any tips for us in regard to that, to ensure compliance by the fisheries, I am all ears. By all means, I welcome that feedback, if that answers the question at all.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, that's fine. I had a retail store that I sold bait and tackle, and it wasn't just commercial. It was a lot of recreational, and so, I mean, you even hear people -- They make their boats with special hidden compartments just for the fish. I mean, you hear it all the time, and it happens, and it would be very hard to catch.

LT. BROWN: If it was drug boats, we would be turning that thing over top to bottom, every inch, but, of course, we don't have that flexibility when it comes to fish. It's just laws and regulations.

MR. KELLY: A question here. In Florida, in particular the Florida Keys, our Fish and Wildlife Commission officers are all cross-deputized with Customs and Immigration and Border Patrol and NOAA Law Enforcement, and they do have enforcement authority in federal waters. Is that not true for Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina? Then I have a second follow-up on that.

LT. BROWN: You're saying that the OGAs are deputized to enforce in federal waters locally in Georgia and South Carolina, and is that your question?

MR. KELLY: The question is are state law enforcement officers not cross-deputized so that they can enforce issues in federal waters?

LT. BROWN: That really is agency specific. If we're working alongside another government agency, whether it be local, state, or federal, that's when we have shared jurisdiction, shared authority, and so it can overlap, but each area is different in regard to that. It might be in federal waters, because there is a lot of drugs, and also other operations to enforce, but, here, it's all dependent across the entire country.

MR. KELLY: All right. The second part, if I may, is, about eight years ago, we started a cooperative law enforcement program with our industry, and it has paid for itself over 10,000 times. What we did is establish relationships with our law enforcement officials, the Coast Guard, the Fish and Wildlife Commission, NOAA Law Enforcement, and the sanctuaries and so forth, and we wanted to get them to know us, and we wanted to know them, so that we could differentiate

the good guys from the bad guys, and that familiarity is now commonplace, where, when they're out there on their patrol and so forth, if they want to stop one of our guys, they are welcome onboard.

It accelerates the inspection process and so forth, and it just reinforces our commitment to work with them to be abiding by rules and regulations and so forth, but it has certainly lowered the number of inspections, because they can now differentiate between who is good and who is bad, and so it has worked well for us. We have also encouraged the charter boat associations in our areas to do exactly the same thing, and that might limit the frequency of boardings and so forth that you are experiencing.

MR. LAKS: Mel, did you want to speak to South Carolina?

MR. BELL: To answer your question, Bill, I believe North Carolina is the only state that doesn't operate under a joint enforcement agreement, and so, in South Carolina, I know for sure that we do have a JEA in place, and our guys actually patrol offshore and can enforce the federal regulations offshore, which, the way South Carolina law is actually set up, it's our law or their law. It's the same. We basically adopt the federal regulations by reference, and so they can choose how they want to deal with a violation. They can write a state ticket or they can go the federal route, but, yes, we do operate offshore. In North Carolina, I know that's been kind of an issue up there, but they don't have a JEA up there, I don't believe.

MR. KELLY: Thank you, Mel, and, for example, in our area, that's critically important. We have a Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary down there with 2,900 square miles, but we only have two law enforcement officers to enforce that entire area. The Fish and Wildlife Commission, through a subsidy from NOAA, picks up the bulk of that, but we've only got fifty-five officers that not only are charged with state waters, but they also have to extend their efforts into the federal zones down there, and they are stretched incredibly thin, and we certainly have to salute them for the outstanding job that they do.

MR. LAKS: I have a few questions of my own. As a charter/for-hire operator, I have noticed in the past years, with the expansion of forums and social media, there is this want to fish or help me chip in to fish kind of thing, and now I know the Coast Guard, years ago, had relaxed their regulation on what they considered a for-hire trip. If your neighbor wanted to jump in and buy the sandwiches, it wasn't considered a problem, but there is actively people out there soliciting people to go on their boats and telling them how much they cost, and, as far as I'm concerned, that's a charter, if you're going out of your way.

I happened to look last night, just on the Charleston fishing forum, and, 227 and 218, I have a fifty-two-foot sport fisher in Charleston, and I'm looking for a couple of people to call on sometimes, or more if you're good, and typical cost for a day of fishing is around \$200, and 99 percent of what we do is trolling. My fuel burn is about 320 to 350 gallons a trip, and then he gets into more of that, but that's a charter. I mean, if I can do that, I don't need any of my regulations, and so I would advise that maybe you guys jump on some of these and show up and say, hey, we're ready to go, and you don't even have to leave the dock. It gets to be -- If you go throughout these, it's a problem, it really is.



Another issue is with the drug testing. All of us captains have to be in a drug testing program, and there are websites, like Fish Booker, that don't require these people to show their drug testing cards. You guys can go on that and go down to the dock and ask them if they have it. I mean, I have to go outside at a lot of parties that I go to so that I don't fail a drug test.

LT. BROWN: Go on.

MR. LAKS: It's just one of those little things. You start getting all of this, where these people are picking into your pool of customers, and especially these people aren't going through a drug test. I mean, I had to take my drug test the other day, and it was one of the few tests that I studied for. I drank like four iced-teas, and then they were late taking me in, and it was stressful, if you know what I mean, and so it's just one of those things, and I would like the other for-hire operators, if they are experiencing the same thing -- These guys are all over every forum, that take me fishing, and this is what it costs. Again, I understand if your neighbor wants to buy the sandwiches or the beer, but when you're actively soliciting people, that's got to be a for-hire trip.

MR. FELLER: For starters, I operate five inspected headboats out of Virginia Beach, and we have an excellent relationship with our Coast Guard up there. The boats are different ages, and so, for example, we have different fire systems, and they are always calling and asking if they can bring trainees down to show them the different fire systems on the boat, and so we have a good relationship with our Coast Guard, but it is the same way up there.

There is a forum, and any for-hire guy can't even go on this site, because it will make you throw your computer against the wall, but there is always -- They call them hoes, that they're looking for a ho to do the fuel, and that's -- As soon as you pay money for fuel, it's a charter.

DR. ELKINS: Ira, you are more familiar, and maybe you could say a few words about the impact of these types of trips on our fisheries management system, so far as reporting and charter boat reporting requirements.

MR. LAKS: Well, I mean, I couldn't speak exactly, but I would imagine that people who would be doing those kinds of things weren't following any other rules. I mean, if they're already starting to break a rule, you might as well break them all, and so I imagine it's not a great thing for the fishery to have illegal charters, especially with our reporting system coming up, and what are these people? Are they charter or are they just chipping in, because, again, it opens -- It doesn't pry into Pandora's Box, but it rips it open.

If you're telling all of us charter guys here that, okay, you no longer need your captains license, and, for that matter, as a dual-operated permit holder, so that I can commercial fish too, can I charge people to chip in for fuel to take them out hook-and-line king fishing? I mean, now I'm getting into cha-ching-cha-ching. When you let this go on, it really affects a lot of different industries.

MR. ROLLER: I just want to reiterate the drug consortium thing, and I have been a member of the drug testing program for as long as I've been in the industry, which is now almost seventeen years, and I have never once been asked to show that, and, even when you renew your captains license, if you -- You can just claim that you weren't running for-hire trips, and so it's not mandatory to renew your license, right, and the only time I was ever asked to show it is when I

had a voluntary OUPV inspection, and the reason I stopped getting those voluntary inspections was because my state marine patrol wouldn't honor it, and so I wasn't going to go through the extra headache of having that inspection that no one else cared about. Does that make sense? I am just saying there is a lot -- I would say most people I know don't actually belong to a drug testing consortium like we're required to by law if we're actively running for-hire trips.

LT. BROWN: I have quite a few questions to answer here, too. I guess, initially, to the for-hire and the charter, that is something that has been a concern for us, and that's not necessarily my division, but that is my coworker also at Charleston, who is a marine investigator, and he, for example, looks into those type of avenues as well as things like accidents, and that's where the drug card comes into play.

If you are a captain and you have six people onboard and you run aground and two people are injured and one dies, that's when we go through the entire process of where are your credentials, are you legal, are you lawful, and, if not, we prosecute criminally and civilly.

For the fisheries, just in general, but it also applies to the for-hire, the best thing we can do is catching subjects red-handed. I mean, if you have a guy who might be in a prohibited area and you call us right now and say I see this guy right now and he's hauling up a thousand pounds of illegal catch right now, by the time that we get that phone call and we get on scene, that guy, chances are, he'll be in legal waters, or he'll even be inbound, filleting the fish, and selling them to the fish house.

I know it can be very frustrating, not only for you, but also for us, too. We know this stuff is going on, but just getting out there during the proper time can be a headache, too. The best thing we can do is, when we find trends -- We realize that, if we get consistent intel of a fishing vessel or whoever is going out there every Tuesday in a certain area and constantly going, that's when we find the biggest hits. Then, next Tuesday, we're out there, and we find him in prohibited waters, and we'll catch him for a thousand pounds of illegal catch. It can be frustrating just as much for you as for us as well.

In regard to that for-hire, we have another division that does investigate services. I don't really have quite the authority that I can go online right now and tell this guy that if you do this again that I will fine you a thousand dollars for that, and I don't quite have that authority. If he is out there on the waters without those permits and without the proper credentials with those people for-hire, then absolutely.

Typically, and I'm sure you've read stuff before, but, if you have a guy that's that sketchy, he will have a story for every one. He will say, hey, by the way, we're all friends, and I've known you for ten years, and you live next doors, and they will make up stories, so that, if they get pulled over, they all have the same story, but, when we do some questioning, that's when we find the holes. Then, when you start pulling back the layers, you know this guy is full of shit, and so I'm sure you've seen it before.

MR. LAKS: Yes, and I understand that, but the problem is they don't consider themselves as running a charter, and so they're not even hiding it. They are considering what they are doing is legal, and they believe it's legal that they can have people chip in, and, like I said, I'm not 100 percent up-to-date on all the Coast Guard rules, but I do know there was a change that, at one point,

you couldn't donate anything to a trip and it was considered a for-hire trip, and now I think they allow a certain amount.

That was more so, if you took your neighborhood out and he bought you a beer that you weren't running something illegal, but these people are actively soliciting, and so this is something that can be done at the dock. If I had me a little investigator's pad, I could call this guy up and show up there, and, if he takes my money, that's a charter. I don't even have to leave the dock, if he doesn't have a captains license or the requirements, and so I understand about the fisheries inspections offshore and that's very hard to catch someone. If it's not enforceable dockside, it's almost not enforceable, but this and the drug testing consortiums are definitely dockside enforceable items.

LT. BROWN: So these guys just have the ignorance that they don't realize what they're doing is illegal, or are they trying to just get away with -- They're getting a hundred bucks and they're torpedoing you as competition or both?

MR. LAKS: I don't think it's a malicious thing. I think people just -- That's a way for them to offset the expense of having a boat. Like I said, if this wasn't illegal and I can do that, what's the point of me having the drug consortium, and what's the point of me having a captains license, and what's the point of me following charter rules?

Why not just ask people to chip in? This guy is giving a set price of what it's going to cost me to go fishing, and that's what I do. I give a set price of what my customers need to pay me, and, if there's no guideline of what that set price can be, then there is no differentiating a recreational person taking money to offset his trip and a for-hire charter.

LT. BROWN: Kind of what Robert was saying is he's been boarded eight times in the past couple of years and --

MR. OLSEN: Yes, several different times, but with different various -- I have actually refused a boarding about fifty miles offshore about three or four years ago, due to the fact that it was three to four-foot seas, and the cutter pulled up alongside of me, and I said that I don't really suggest it being very safe for you to come out with the little boat, and I said I would be more than welcome to meet you back at the dock, at the port of call, which they were from Charleston, and, after three or four minutes of radio silence, they agreed that that was the better thing to do, which was great.

I mean, most of the time, they're understanding. Like I said, if I feel like it's not the safest situation, I am going to let them know beforehand, and I'm not going to attempt to try to hide anything, because we know we can't run, but, other times -- Like I said, it's several occasions that I have had them, and I have waved them off, and it hasn't been a problem, but I just know that Charleston is a big training area. I see them all the time, because I fish out of Shim Creek. All the time, I just see them all over, and I just see them pulling people, and that's all. I was just making a comment about that.

MR. DONALSON: Ira, just to kind of throw it out there, if you think that's bad, I had a meeting with the people from Uber for a totally unrelated issue, and it's coming, and I said that -- You guys know your business better than I do, but that is going to be next to impossible. I mean, anybody can get an Uber license to drive a car, and imagine when you can go Uber fishing. Just, hey, turn

my app on, and I'm at the boat ramp, and, anybody that wants to come, hop on my boat, and I will take you fishing. That is coming, unfortunately.

LT. BROWN: Uber boat or Uber -- That is something that we've been looking into lately, and I know it's in the process of getting through, especially in Charleston, being a very marine recreational heavy place, more so than anywhere in the country, but that is coming to us, and we are making preparations, and it's going to be an absolute headache for us as soon as that comes on, and so we're not very excited. Not at all, but, yes, that's a good point.

MR. LAKS: That is the death knell of the for-hire industry. I mean, that would be something that the Coast Guard really needs to have a policy on, because, if people -- Again, why would I do any of this if I can just say this is what I charge? There is not a flat rate for Uber. Everyone could say that I am charging different, and it's over. The for-hire fleet is over if that comes in, and so that's something that you guys probably need to jump ahead of and see what the policy is going to be. Patrick, you had something?

MR. LINK: I just actually had a quick question. You were talking about kind of ignorance of it, and what is the difference? I mean, is it not making profit? Is that what defines it? I mean, I just don't know, and I'm asking, I guess, Officer Brown there, but I just don't know -- If people are chipping in, at what point does it become a charter and that type of stuff?

I will be honest. I'm a recreational fisherman, and I have friends that come with me, and I don't ask them for money, but, if they throw me twenty-bucks for gas, then I take twenty-bucks for gas, but I just don't set it in front and say, hey, you have to pay me this to come on my boat, but, if they want to bring the chicken, then they brought the chicken that day, and that's fine, but I just don't know, and I don't know that that information is out there for recreational fishermen to know, and maybe just an educational tool would be the way to approach some of that.

MR. LAKS: I agree with that. Again, I am not suggesting that you can't go out and your buddies buy you chicken and beer. I think the fine line between it is the actual soliciting it and putting a price on what it's going to be. To me, that's a wide gulf that you have crossed. Once you're looking for strangers -- If you don't know the person on a first-name basis, that crosses that line, I think, and I know it's a fine line enforcement-wise, but, with all the stuff that's coming down the line with ride sharing and -- I mean, I don't see how you can do a ride-sharing thing. From everything I have ever been told about my captains license, you have to have a captains license to take passengers out on your vessel. How does that work with an Uber? If it's not something that you guys don't jump in front of now, it's going to be the death knell for every tour boat and every little guy that goes in there, and, of course, it's going to hurt the charter fishermen.

MR. BELL: I am not speaking for law enforcement, and I am not a lawyer, but I will just tell you, in terms of South Carolina law, that the act of buying or selling fish or deriving income from a fish or other considerations, trading or bartering, any type of deriving a benefit from, that's considered a commercial activity.

If you look at that as a commercial activity, then you would ask yourself, okay, what's the proper licensing for that commercial activity, and you're either a commercial fisherman that sells the catch, or is a charter operation a commercial activity, in terms of deriving income from it, and so maybe one way to look at it is to just look at the activity itself that's occurring and ask yourself if

that is definable in law, and I am just speaking for South Carolina law, as a commercial enterprise, commercial activity, and, therefore, do they have the proper licenses for that or don't they, and that's just a thought.

MR. LAKS: I understand that, Mel, but it's just I think, when you're trying to define it, there is money coming across the table, but, if it's not saying it's a business, it's the same as me and you going out and I buy a six-pack of beer and we sit on a bench. I paid for it, but there is nothing -- I am not breaking any other rules. There are specific rules as to determine what is a charter and what isn't a charter.

MS. RHODES: I have more of a question, and this might be a silly thing, but does the Coast Guard have a policy on how to monitor social media or how to monitor websites like what Ira is talking about, so that, if you see somebody engaged in illegal activity via social media, or if you see somebody soliciting a charter vessel, does the Coast Guard have any policy on that?

LT. BROWN: We are starting -- In the past five or ten years alone, as I'm sure you can attest, social media has definitely exploded and become a much bigger part of our lives. Social media, primarily, we use that, but not in the way you think of. We use it, honestly, for search and rescue purposes, and you would be shocked at how much that helps us out. Realize that the wife calls up and says my husband has been gone for twelve hours, and he should have been back two hours ago, and we look on iRoger, and we pull up social media, and we realize that there's a picture of his boat and its name and what exactly it is, and that's where we find it.

In regard to for illegal activities, yes and no, almost. We do have insight of there are operations on people on, especially for-hire, that think they might not be doing it illegally, but, in reality, that's completely against the law and unlawful, and so that's something we actually are -- That's the marine investigators that take on that lead. I am not scrolling through Facebook in my job and realizing and seeing who is for-hire and all that. I wish I could, but that's not quite my job.

Frankly, not right now. That's not what we're doing. We're not doing that, but we are getting in touch with looking for illegal charters, especially nowadays, with this Uber boat coming along in Charleston, and so I think some law was approved, passed, very recently for it to be set up throughout the area, but not -- I am not forensically looking for all that stuff.

MS. RHODES: Does that mean that's up to the men in this room and other fishermen to report those kinds of activities if they see it online? Is that the responsibility of the community then to report illegal activity that they may encounter on social media?

LT. BROWN: That's where we're diving down a hole. We have tried in the past, and I will probably be opening that up in a very slow manner. If I say, hey, here is my hotline for illegal fishing, any reports that they have, whether it be that you see forums online or you might notice illegal activity in a certain area, but, if I put that on there, I would say that would be more detrimental and a waste of assets. It would be more harm than good, because we see more to where there is these guys who will rat each other out just so the Coast Guard will pull them over and stop them and prevent them going on for another hour or two, just so that they can make more money.

I am sure you have witnessed that before, and that's been more -- Like I said, that's been more harm than good. With that being said though, coming from reliable sources, such as council

members in this room right now, that takes on a lot more credibility, but, the hotlines, we haven't established them yet. When we do dockside inspections and we do marinas and we do shoreside patrols, our ears are open, absolutely, but there have been times when people have tried to mislead us on purpose, hoaxes, as we call it, and that's when it gets very dangerous, and not only dangerous, but also unlawful as well, and so that is a very touchy subject for us, but thank you though. Any other questions in regard to that?

MR. LINK: I actually just have a comment. I just did a quick Google search and found a little information that might shed some light on it a little bit, or at least it did for me. Federal law, Title 46, U.S. Code Section 2101, defines a passenger for-hire as a passenger for whom consideration is contributed as a condition of carriage on the vessel, whether directly or indirectly flowing to the owner, charter operator, agent, or any other person having an interest in the vessel. A passenger is basically anyone aboard who does not have any crew responsibilities or any responsibilities relating to the operation of the boat. The statute further defines consideration as an economic benefit, inducement, right, or profit, including payment accruing to an individual, person, or entity, but not including a voluntary sharing of actual expense of the voyage by monetary contribution or donation of fuel, food, beverage, or other supplies. That's what it says anyway, and I didn't know. I am learning something new.

MR. DONALSON: Cameron, I can talk a little bit about that, because a panel member quickly called me out last year for holding a tarpon out of the water. I took a picture of it on Facebook, and so I know that people do try to keep us accountable, and I just saw a story last week of an NFL player down in Miami caught a hammerhead shark, and he had pictures of it, and he is pending prosecution for that. They can't prove that he didn't release it, but they can't prove that he killed it, and so there's a gray area there, and so I know someone is watching it, but I think it's got to be pretty blatant, like the guy dragging that shark backwards, and I'm sure we all saw that video. Those guys went to jail.

MR. ROLLER: People have mentioned this a couple of times today, that some of these new online booking services for charter boats, like Fishing Booker, and there is one called Open Boat, and they have really exploded in recent years, and I have experimented with them a little bit, and it's been -- For some of the newer guys, it's been a good thing, because it's easier for a guy who doesn't have a big clientele base to go in there and pay a commission for them to book trips.

Where I am getting at is that there is a -- When you have no communication between the charter captain and the clients, one thing I have heard from multiple people is you are ending up -- They will book you the trip, and then this person shows up with five or six people, and that may be more than you're allowed to take on your boat, or you have more safety gear, and guys are ending up taking these trips, because some of these guys are desperate to get some income and money, and they're taking out seven people on a six-pack license and whatnot, which is a liability, and so that's just something I've heard a lot about, and I just wanted to get that comment forward.

LT. BROWN: We see it all the time, as you guys have, the little social media ad of come on and bring your party, your bachelorette party, on here, as many people as you want to, and that is, of course, violating the six-pack and uninspected versus inspected vessels with the Coast Guard, and absolutely we see that. We do catch those people every once in a while, and we do illegal charter operations more so than people think. We don't obviously talk about that, but, yes, we have seen

that a lot, but it is so common out here that it's hard to nail that down sometimes, but you're absolutely right. That has been seen before, and that is being enforced.

MR. FELLER: As far as the Facebook stuff, NOAA watches that, and our NOAA guys, the federal guys, back in Virginia, they will flat out tell you not to catch a white marlin and pull him out of the water and hold them up, because they do -- They look at Facebook, and they look at everything, and they will write you a ticket in a heartbeat, and so the NOAA guys do all of that.

MR. KELLY: I just wanted to reinforce what Cameron threw on the table here, and that is the using social media as a law enforcement tool is very effective. We have seen that repeatedly in our two-day mini lobster season in the Keys. It's amazing how many poachers will offer lobster for sale on Craigslist and other locations there, and we also -- Our fishermen will routinely search these sites and so forth and report it to law enforcement, whether it's selling bogus commercial permits or things of that nature, and so FWC, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, certainly uses that as a law enforcement tool, and that might be something that the Coast Guard could adopt as well.

LT. BROWN: Thank you very much.

MR. HOWARD: I am not kicking a dead horse here, but, I mean, the social media thing runs rampant, and I'm in Savannah, Georgia as well, and I've got a perfect example right here. A guy that I grew up with working the back of the charter boats, and he knows better, and he is posting ads on social media like we offer offshore fishing trips on the best charters across the eastern seaboard and book your trip today. I caught him the other day, and I said, who is running that boat for you, because I know he doesn't have a captains license. It was like, oh, I'm probably just going to take friends that are going to pitch in for fuel. Okay.

I'm not throwing him under the bus or anything, but I know for a fact that the boat that he borrowed to run these trips doesn't have federal permits on it, and he's advertising for bluefin tuna, blue marlin, white marlin, yellowfin, and I honestly told him -- I just commented on it, and I was like, well, I will book a bluefin charter. If you can put me on one, I will book one, but it's just happening everywhere. I mean, it's like in your face. It's like a slap in the face to those of us who have the permits, who have the licenses and all that, to deal with some jack like this.

MR. LAKS: Ryan, if you throw him under the bus, I will back it up over him.

MR. ROBINSON: What's it called when you pull us offshore and go through our safety gear? Is that called a courtesy safety inspection, and can we refuse that? If we're in the act of catching fish and we don't want to stop fishing, can we refuse and say I don't want you on the boat, or is it not in our best interest to ever do that?

LT. BROWN: By all means, you can do that, yes. I would not do that. That would be impeding a law enforcement boarding, and people are kind of -- They don't realize how much authority the Coast Guard has, and that is a regulation. We have the authority to go on, and I can spout off authority all day long, but we can pull you over search and examination, seizure, inspection on the high seas and waters, and I can go on, but, absolutely, yes. It's primarily for safety of life at sea, and, yes, we can, and, yes, we do.

MR. SWANN: Just out of curiosity, do you have the same authority when a boat is sitting on the trailer as it is on the water?

LT. BROWN: Not quite, no.

MR. SWANN: I mean, it would seem to make a lot more sense, for the dollars you're spending and the manhours, to spend a lot more time at the boat ramps than it would boarding people out in the ocean, or at the marinas rather than in the ocean. I am just curious if you all thought about that or if you do more of that.

LT. BROWN: We do some dockside boardings, absolutely. I also deal a lot of with post-search and rescue cases. After we go onboard a vessel, if it's taking on water or is on fire, we bring it back to a safe haven, and then we go through an inspection right there. The reason for that is that probably most of the boats -- A lot of the boats that are moored up at marinas are not in regulation at all, and the reason for that is because some guy, some snowbird, might be coming down here and leaves his boat moored up or tied up, and chances are his PDFs and flares are expired and all that. We can't really -- Just like when we catch someone red-handed, and, if they're in operation, the actual operators are owning and operating the boat, that's when we actually catch that person in the act of being on the water. That is something that we don't really touch upon, is going on dockside boardings for that kind of stuff, and so we may board, but that's something that we, at least not yet, have the scope of doing, but I do understand.

MR. LAKS: Do we have any more questions? Thank you very, very much. I mean, is there anything else you would like to impart to us?

LT. BROWN: Chances are, if you've been boarded in Georgia or South Carolina, I guarantee you that I have either worked with or managed or trained those guys. I have been onboard, and I think one of you all touched on this beforehand, how it can be a little frustrating for training, absolutely, but keep in mind that we also welcome training from you guys as well. If we're onboard, and if we're actually having trouble identifying species, say, by the way, look at the gills or count the dorsal fins, and by all means, because you just every day -- You guys are very good at this, and we do search and rescue and homeland security and patrol waterways and do coastal security missions and search and rescue, and this is one tiny fraction of our job.

We welcome all the help that you guys give us with training, because it's not you guys we're trying to nail. It's everyone else. It's the guys who are doing the illegal sea bass operations and the lobster tails and all of that. We're trying to find those people, but we do thank everyone for the cooperation that you guys have, we really do. Everyone mostly is compliant and cooperative and friendly, and that makes our job so much easier, because, the faster you're helping us, the faster you can get on your way to catch more fish and make more money.

MR. FELLER: I don't know if you know the answer to this, but, on an inspected boat, on a trip over twelve hours, we have to have two captains and two mates. Is that the same on a six-passenger boat, on a trip over twelve hours?

LT. BROWN: I haven't looked at the regulation on that one. Off the top of my head, I don't know. I could easily find that answer out for you. Thank you though.



MR. LAKS: Skip, I am not 100 percent sure, but I think you can't operate for over twelve hours, and so I know like there is -- I think there's some guys in the Keys that run some of those six-pack trips, and what they get around is they anchor up overnight and say they're getting some sleep.

LT. BROWN: This would be a liability issue, too. As you know, with crew fatigue, that's where we have most of the causalities, these guys have been out there for fourteen or sixteen hours straight and runs aground.

MR. LAKS: I don't see any other questions, and I personally want to thank you for putting up with some of my crazy questions, and thank you for all that you guys do. We do appreciate it.

LT. BROWN: Guys, thank you very much for your time, and I appreciate all the feedback you've given me. I will be passing this to my coworkers and taking it on actually myself. There is only so much I can do, unfortunately, but, if I'm Admiral one day, I can promise you that I will make a lot more changes. Thank you very much for letting me speak today, and, hopefully, if I see you guys on the water, it will be in good terms and not in bad terms, but, once again, thank you for everything you guys do as well. I appreciate it.

MR. LAKS: I think when you make Admiral that I will be calling you from the nursing home. Okay. We have a few seconds here, and Brian is going to bring a document up for us, and we're going to move on.

DR. CHEUVRONT: I know you all wanted to talk about cobia some more. This actually may be fairly short, and it all depends on how much you all want to talk about some of this, but you may be aware of the fact that, about a year or so ago, President Trump signed into law that two-for-one regulation thing with the government, and so that has filtered its way down through government levels, and the National Marine Fisheries Service had asked all of the councils to put together listings of regulations that they deemed to be unneeded, unnecessary, or outdated.

Now, in this two-for-one regulation thing, there is a dollar amount that's associated with it, and I believe it's \$100 million. I mean, it's a lot. We would have to like completely shut down the snapper grouper fishery, something like that, to affect that. However, what the Department of Commerce can do is that, if they have got something that is happening over under the National Weather Service or something, they can offset that cost using regulations say from Fisheries, and it doesn't have to stay within the same agency.

Anyway, what we have been asked to do is to come up with a listing of any kinds of regulations and things that we think that the council could recommend be gotten rid of, either because they are unnecessary, unneeded, or outdated, and so each council had to file its plan of how they were going to determine this by the end of December, and then they had until the end of June of this year to get that list to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Part of what the council decided that they wanted to do was, at the spring advisory panel meetings, is ask the AP members if there were any regulations that they were aware of that they thought ought to be considered for removal. Now, it's not necessarily that I don't like that one, because it's a regulation that you don't like, but it has to be for a particular reason why it's unneeded, unnecessary, or outdated, and so, if you know of something, this is the time that we can talk about

it, but I also need to know the reasoning behind why you feel that it falls into one of those three categories.

Right now, the council staff went through and identified what regulations we thought fell into these categories, and then the Southeast Regional Office for the National Marine Fisheries Service in St. Pete went through and gave us their list, and all that we have come up with for coastal migratory pelagics at this point, and I believe this was a document that was in your briefing book, and so, not terribly surprisingly, is, if the council does decide to shift management for cobia to the ASMFC for the Atlantic migratory group of cobia, then there's a whole bunch of regulations that would go away that are associated with that.

That is all that I've got in here at this point for CMP species, but I am putting it out there to you guys now and asking you if there is anything else that you can think of that are regulations in the mackerel cobia fishery that fall into that category of being unnecessary, unneeded, or outdated. I am not asking you to give me what new regulations do you want, but I'm saying which ones do we want to get rid of.

MR. LAKS: Well, I don't see anyone talking, and so I will, Brian. This might be a little difficult, because it's kind of intertwined with maybe some the commercial rules, but I am not sure, but it's 622.381(b). It has to do with to be able to retain a recreational cut fish, and so, right now, for example, if I catch a king mackerel that's cut by a shark, and say it was a thirty-two-inch fish, and seven inches of the tail, or ten inches of the tail, got eaten off, I would have to throw that fish back, because he wouldn't make the twenty-four-inch limit.

It just seems crazy, because that's part of -- Especially on a king mackerel, that's part of the fish you pretty much don't even care about. It's the tail and the little sliver, and so it would just make sense, to me, and it's not a rule that can really be taken advantage of. I mean, I'm sure someone could cut a twenty-one-inch kingfish and go, oh, look, he got bit, but it's not something that would be really taken advantage of. It would count towards my bag limit, but it's just I've had this situation, especially with the explosion of sharks, where I'm catching a lot of these fish, and then I have to throw it back and catch another one when it's a perfectly viable fish to eat. As a matter of fact, it's probably better, because it's bled. That would be one that I would look into.

MR. DONALSON: Ira, how does that work for bag limits? Do you know? In waterfowl hunting, if you cripple a duck and you can't find it, that goes towards your legal limit of birds. Is it the same thing for fish?

MR. LAKS: Yes, it would still count towards my bag limit, and so, if I had four people out, we still could only catch eight, but what happens is, if you're below your bag limit, I have to throw that fish back, which is just a total waste, or, if I could include it in the bag limit, where people wouldn't care, I have to kill a good one to replace that, and so, whatever would be offset by some people trying to take advantage of it, it would be offset by those people like me, who are going to go, okay, I don't have to kill another fish.

MR. DONALSON: I guess my question would be, if you had eight, and if you threw one of them back, doesn't that put you at nine, if you threw a half-fish back?

MR. LAKS: Well, no, because, if I threw it back, it wouldn't count towards my bag limit.

MR. DONALSON: Okay. That was my question.

MR. LAKS: It's only landed fish.

MR. GORHAM: I just want to start out and go back to what we talked about previously, that I am going to block all of you all on Facebook, to begin with, but would it be possible to bring back up the list of suggestions? There were some public comments from May and June, and I think it was the last slide that I just saw.

DR. CHEUVRONT: I haven't shown any slides, and so I'm not sure what you're referring to.

MS. WIEGAND: I think what Ira, and maybe Bill, is talking about, in terms of those cobia regulations that were recommended for removal, there is some funky language in the CFR, where sometimes it refers to the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic EEZ and sometimes it refers to Atlantic migratory cobia versus Gulf migratory group cobia, and there are concerns about what happens with the Florida east coast, since that's Gulf cobia, and so we wouldn't want to remove regulations that were for the South Atlantic EEZ, and that is something that the regulation writers and the lawyers are aware of, and we're looking at adjusting those regulations to make sure that, whatever happens with cobia, no regulations are removed for the Florida east coast.

MR. LAKS: Is that what you were talking about, Bill?

MR. GORHAM: Yes, I will go with it.

MR. LAKS: Is there anyone that has anything else, before I make this my own little party? I will continue then. Tournament sales, let's eliminate them. Florida is not enforcing it, and it's just North Carolina, and, if Florida is not going to enforce it, there is no point in having any, because there is some kids down in south Florida that are coming to the tournaments and collecting some fish and cutting them up and bringing them to homeless shelters, and that's a viable way to handle that problem.

This goes for CMP as well as the snapper grouper and dolphin wahoo, and that's for dual-permitted vessels and to remove the crew restriction on when you are considered a charter, and so I believe, in the CMP, if you have over three people on your vessel, if you're dual-permitted, you are automatically considered a charter, and you have to adhere to recreational limits. I believe it's four people for the snapper grouper fishery, and I still think it's three for the dolphin wahoo fishery, but it's an unfair regulation. If I was to take three of you guys out fishing who are my buddies and the kingfish were chewing, I would have to stop at eight kingfish, even while I have a federal commercial king mackerel permit.

DR. CHEUVRONT: Can you help me come up with reasoning for this? It's unfair in terms of the --

MR. LAKS: Well, since the federal for-hire permits are not being enforced anyway, it's very unfair to have people who do have both permits and are trying to obey the law to be penalized for having both permits by automatically being put into a category of a recreational trip even when we might not be. It would be federal and commercial, a federal for-hire permit and a commercial

permit, in the same species. It automatically, depending on the people onboard your vessel, it would throw you into another category.

AP MEMBER: Ira, is what you're saying is, if you are out there with three of your buddies, and the kingfish are chewing, you want to be able to keep a commercial limit versus a recreational limit?

MR. LAKS: Exactly. I'm a professional, and, if I'm on a charter, I'm on a charter. If I'm not, I shouldn't need a regulation to tell me that I can't make a living. Are you sure you guys don't want to join in? Does anyone have anything else? I think I got about all I wanted.

MR. ROLLER: I just want to kind of reiterate your comment on the cut recreational fish. I've had some issues in my state with that, with just inconsistent enforcement of it, and I know that's not really a reasoning for it, but I can just say that I agree with your reasoning on that.

MR. LAKS: You are one of the few who does agree with me.

MR. KELLY: I wanted to comment on that tournament sales, and you brought up a very good point. In Florida, there is a group down there called Fillet for Friends, and what they did is they developed a not-for-profit organization, and they take fish from tournaments, rather than them being sold, and they fillet them and clean them, and they set up a tent at so forth at various tournaments, and they contribute these fish, and they're properly cared for under HACCP protocols and so forth, and they're vacuum packed, and they're donated to homeless shelters. For example, in Boca Raton, they have provided over 4,500 dinners to an institution called Bocas Helping Hands.

The interesting thing about this though, and the concept is fantastic, is Fillet for Friends was started by a group of thirteen-year-olds three years ago, and they come from affluent families that daddy has a nice fishing boat, and they were catching their recreational bag limits, and they thought, well, what can we do to help others. Since then, they are now sixteen-years-old, and they are a Florida-registered not-for-profit corporation, and they have sponsors, they have tents, they have t-shirts, and they are now affiliated with a number of major tournaments in south Florida and the Keys, and this is absolutely amazing that these young men and women came up with this idea.

They are growing day-by-day, and so, if you any of you are affiliated with any tournaments, and I have helped them and their connections and so forth, and I would be interested in getting your business cards, so that I could get you connected with them. On the twenty-fifth of this month, they will be recognized by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at their meeting in Fort Lauderdale, and they will receive citations and other awards for the citizenship that they have displayed and the outstanding work that they are doing as young men and women. Thank you.

MR. LAKS: Bill, those are the kids that I was talking about, and I came in from a tournament, and, of course, I was miserable from fishing offshore in the middle of a tournament all day, and it was very hopeful to see young people doing such good things, and so they really do good work, and that could be the model, and it's probably something the council can maybe work with organizations like that, so that we don't have to sell these fish and put them on a commercial quota.

In south Florida, some of the tournaments, well, I would probably say 50 percent of them that I fish, if you weigh it in, they keep it. You can't even get your fish back. They mandatorily take it, and, to me, that's telling me that they're selling it, and it's not just king mackerel that you need a permit for. It's dolphin and wahoo also. I would just -- Again, just get rid of tournament sales. This is a much better way to do it and directly to needy people.

MR. BLOW: What you just said, I would be curious where does this poundage count against, what ACL?

DR. CHEUVRONT: If it enters into commerce, it counts against the commercial. If those fish are sold by somebody with a commercial fishing license, that goes against the commercial quota.

MR. BLOW: Then where would it go, if it's not counted against that?

MR. LAKS: Well, if it got intercepted in MRIP or something, it would just be part of the recreational catch, which it already is, and it's a recreational fishing tournament.

DR. CHEUVRONT: It could be counted against both, actually.

MR. LAKS: If it's sold. Right. It's possible. I just want to make one point, too. A lot of times, what's happening with these fish is there is one guy going down there with a fish box and a permit and throwing these fish in his box, and he is selling them without the tournament sales thing, and he's putting a little pinch in his pocket too, and so that's a pretty unfair thing.

MR. ENGLISH: This was an issue that I actually raised with the council five or six or seven years ago. We were talking about this. The recreational fish caught on that tournament count against the commercial industry, and so this would eliminate that problem, because the commercial industry didn't catch those fish. The recreational industry did, and so it puts it back to a fairness issue. They wouldn't get counted against us, and they wouldn't get double-counted.

MR. KELLY: It's my understanding that any of these fish, once you put in the word "sold", it's counted against the commercial quota, and, in many instances, these tournaments and so forth are affiliated with restaurants or country clubs, things of that nature, where they are taking these fish and then they are using them and selling them to their customers and so forth, and so they are realizing profits.

I think that's totally inappropriate when you have commercial fishermen that are properly licensed that are being deprived of that income while they are fishing other quota restrictions and things of that nature, and then I do have a question for Brian, and for this committee, and that is, these promulgated changes to these rules and regulations now, this is recommended by staff, but are they subject to Magnuson review, or what other higher agencies, because I noticed, for example, something that we have in Magnuson reform is elimination of an annual catch limit for spiny lobster, based on external recruitment, and I see that in these regulations, but that is a Magnuson action, and is this outside of Magnuson?

DR. CHEUVRONT: This is not specifically a part of Magnuson. What's going to happen here is the council will see all of these in June, and the council will then decide which ones they want to move forward to offer up to the National Marine Fisheries Service, and then it's up to the National

Marine Fisheries Service, going through the Department of Commerce, and I believe the Department of Commerce level is the one that will make the decisions about this two-for-one specific issue.

Now, many of these regulations, the council can decide to go ahead on their own and deal with them. They are not bound by just this one presidential decree here about this two-for-one issue, and so some things have been identified by talking to the APs that we haven't really talked about before at the council level, and so the council is going to review these things. They're going to have this report, and then they can look at it and decide later that, okay, we're fulfilling our requirements that were given from the Department of Commerce, but some other things have come up that we might need to look at again later, and so, in essence, this is a regulatory review is what we're doing here, and it just happened to come under this purview of the two-for-one regulations.

MS. WIEGAND: I just wanted to speak for a second towards the tournament landings. This is something that the council has discussed. In March, they were presented information on tournament landings and how much of the commercial ACL tournament landings were accounting for, and I do not remember the exact percentages off the top of my head, but it was a very small amount, and one of the things the council did express concern about was how tournament landings are being considered in MRIP and are we getting double-counting, counting them as recreational and commercial landings, and so that is something that, as staff, we have reached out to MRIP to get clarification on.

MR. LAKS: Just to that, I think, from what I heard from that, Florida reported about twenty-five total permits to sell fish in three years for the whole state, and so it's not really being used like it should be. This is the official cookie break, and we will have ten minutes to go attack the cookies.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so the next thing we're going to get into are fishery performance reports, and we're going to do one for king mackerel and for Spanish mackerel. If you will remember, you guys did one of these for cobia at your meeting last April. These fishery performance reports are sort of a new idea. We've just started doing them here at the South Atlantic Council, and the goal is really to sort of be able to assemble information from our advisory panels about what's going on in the fishery from you guys who are actually out on the water actively working in these fisheries.

We have this information both online, on our website, for people to access, and it's also provided to our SSC, our Scientific and Statistical Committee, as well as our Socioeconomic Panel, and it's often provided to SEDAR, when they are getting ready to do assessments. I know the one you guys put together for cobia was one of the working papers used for the cobia stock ID workshop as well, and so that's what we've started doing these for. Since it's sort of a new process, we definitely welcome any comments you guys might have on how we're putting this information together and sort of the way we're going about doing this and presenting it, and so we're going to start with the one for king mackerel.

The general biology of king mackerel, which I'm sure most of you guys are already aware, you can find them from Maine to Brazil and throughout the Gulf and Caribbean. It's typically anywhere coastal all the way out to the continental shelf. Adults are found in the southern climates

in the winter and northern climates in the summer, and there is some known overwintering in North Carolina. They typically live up to twenty-six years for females and twenty-three years for males, and we see spawning from May to October, with a peak in September. There is a big spawning area in the Carolinas as well as Cape Canaveral and Miami. Females typically mature around thirty-five inches, or around age-four, and males are typically mature around age-three.

The last stock assessment for Atlantic king mackerel was SEDAR 38, and that stock assessment determined that king mackerel were not overfished and were not experiencing overfishing, and so what we've done here is put together some information based on commercial and recreational landings, and these come from a variety of sources, including the Accumulated Landings System, which is used by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to track commercial landings, and these are based on dealer reports, and this is the information that is provided to the council each year.

There is also recreational data from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and these data come from MRIP as well as the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, and the MRIP data is provided in numbers and then converted to a weight using a method that is specific to the Science Center, and then MRIP data are collected via intercepted trips as well as a phone survey, and those do not include headboat landings. We've also got information here from ACCSP, and commercial dealers and fishermen also submit reports to the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program as well as information that is reported by dealers.

First, we decided to do, this time, this interactive tool, as sort of a different, more interactive way to look at this landings information, and so you can go through here and pick the species. We've got king and Spanish mackerel in this one. You can identify what information you want to look at, say yearly landings, and then pick which range of years you would like to look at, and so this is something new we're trying. If you guys have a preference for the data being presented in sort of a web-based app like this versus these large documents, we definitely welcome any input from you guys.

We have tables with -- These are the commercial landings compared to the commercial ACL, and we've got them broken up into the Northern Zone and the Southern Zone. If you remember, the Northern Zone for king mackerel is everything north of the South Carolina/North Carolina line, and then south of the North Carolina/South Carolina line to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line is the Southern Zone, and we've got them broken up like this instead of by state to keep everything confidential. The Northern Zone landings are primarily accounted for in North Carolina, and the Southern Zone landings are primarily accounted for in Florida.

One other thing to note is that, for the 2016/2017 fishing year, we did not have data available for January and February of 2017, and so those landings are estimated using average landings for those months for the previous three fishing years. Also, these were put together using the current management boundary, and so the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line, and so keep in mind that, years ago, you guys would have been fishing on what is now Gulf fish.

Here are the commercial landings of Atlantic king mackerel from 2000 through 2016, and you can see we had sort of peak in 2009 and 2010, and it sort of decreased from there, and so we would be interested to hear from you guys about sort of that dynamic and what's going on there, and, if you look at these, it shows that the Southern Zone is accounting for a slight majority of the landings.

Here are total commercial landings in comparison to the ACL, and so you can see that, given the ACL, we haven't been, especially recently, getting anywhere close to exceeding it.

Here are the average monthly landings over the entire South Atlantic region, and so you can see that you see a peak in April and May and then again a slight peak in the late fall and early winter, but, if you break them up by zone, you can see that there are definitely some seasonal differences. We're seeing the Southern Zone peak in the spring and into the summer and then, up in the Northern Zone, you're seeing a peak in the late fall and early winter.

If we move into the recreational sector, again, we've got another table. Then, with the ACL, it assumes when they were implemented in 2012, and, again, for the 2016/2017 season, we did not have recreational landings for that first January/February wave from the Southeast Science Center, and so those are based on MRIP numbers, since they don't include headboat landings, which is important to remember when you're looking at these numbers.

Again, you can see that we're seeing sort of a decrease in landings over the last five fishing years or so, and you can also see that landings tend to be a little bit higher in the Southern Zone than the Northern Zone, and, again, here are recreational landings coast-wide throughout the South Atlantic, and, again, you see that decrease, in that recreational landings haven't come close to exceeding the ACL either. Here are landings by MRIP wave, and, again, as you can see, we see the Southern Zone peaking in the May/June/July/August and then a peak a little bit later in the Northern Zone, around September or October.

Here are the number of directed trips for Atlantic king mackerel, and, again, we can see this large decrease and then slowly starting to decrease as of the 2011 season, and so, again, we would be interested in the dynamics of why we're seeing fewer trips directed at king mackerel, and then we'll jump into the economic performance, and so you've got the ex-vessel price, and you can see that things mostly line up throughout the regions, except for the Mid-Atlantic, where it fluctuates a little bit more. Then you've got the ex-vessel value for king mackerel landings.

That is sort of the information that we've put together for you guys, and, if you have any comments about what should be added or was maybe not necessary, we would welcome that. Otherwise, we can dive into the questions we have for you guys, and I'm going to ask you to do a favor for me, since I'm new. While I'm typing up these notes, if you when you make a comment, if you could remind me of where you're from, so I'm making sure that I am noting the correct regional differences, I would greatly appreciate that.

MR. LAKS: All right, and I see Collins over here raising his hand.

MR. DOUGHTIE: This is something I just wanted to ask from the very beginning, but, when I was looking at the commercial king mackerel -- Where do you sell those? I mean, who is buying those fish, because it's like I never see them in fish markets.

MR. LAKS: It's several people from the Caribbean really like it, and so you have some of the people that have moved up to the northern cities from the Caribbean, and it's a big fish they really like to eat, and somewhere I just saw it in a restaurant, too.



MR. ROBINSON: It's going to Boston, and it's going to California. California loves our big fish, and it's going to Canada big time and New York big time, and it's getting eaten by all different races of people. They love it, and I love it. When people say who eats kingfish, I say only people that like good fish. That's what I tell them.

MR. DOUGHTIE: I'm from Beaufort County, and the thing is, ever since when the scare came out about mercury content and whatever on the larger fish, it seemed like a lot less people were, in our region at least were -- They were saying, well, I will eat a small one, and, believe me, in my lifetime, I would have four arms and three legs with as many kings as I have eaten, and maybe it has something to do with why my memory is gone, but I was just curious, because I rarely see them in any of the fish markets in our area. I mean, recreational fishermen -- Of course, I will grab a chunk of kingfish and stuff, but you've kind of answered my question. I just had no idea where they were going.

MR. LAKS: Guys, we have these questions we're going to go through, and if we can try and get through these questions. If there is something that is not addressed as we go through these questions, just write it down, and we will bring it up after the questions.

MR. KELLY: In terms of marketing, we see significant spikes during the Lenten period for Catholic purchases and so forth. We do a number of bulk sales to Puerto Rico in particular and up through the northeast corridor, where there is large Catholic populations that don't eat meat during the Lenten period. We also do a number of institutional sales also to cafeteria-type businesses and to major food suppliers for smoked fish and things of that nature. They have to get their Omega-3 as well, and, yes, we're talking about penal institutions, et cetera, and, yes, that is actually a significant part of the sales routine.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so let's start off -- I want to keep us sort of in order and not jumping around to these different questions, and so let's start off with catch levels over the last five years or so and where the fish are available and how that has changed over the last five years or so.

MR. OLSEN: I'm a charter captain here in Charleston, and I fish a lot of tournaments, I mean a lot, and I can say that, since 2010, it was our last beach fishery for I would say Georgia and South Carolina. Most of those fish have seem to be migrated to certain spots way offshore, and I would see why our recreational catch landings left, because those fish -- You can't target them like you did in the early and middle 2000s, 2007, 2008, and 2009, and 2010, where you could readily go out to our inlets.

Our fishery is just so different on Georgia and South Carolina, and then, of course, when you go to North Carolina, it has totally changed, just because of the flow of the depth of right offshore of the beach and stuff like that, but last year was the first year that I started to see a lot of those fish come back closer to shore. They have spread out a little bit, but in 2011, 2012, and 2013, all those fish were congregated thirty to fifty miles offshore in just a certain few spots off of here, and I did real well in tournaments, because I found them, and then everybody else found me, but the fishing was real good in those spots, I mean very good.

It was thirty to fifty fish a day kind of fishing for tournament fishing, and that's pretty good. Close to shore, you would be lucky to get a bite, and, in bad-weather tournaments, all you had to do was

catch one to get a check here in South Carolina, and I'm just giving you my basic opinion on that, but that's what I have noticed. Last year, I was telling him -- He had told me, a couple of years ago, or two years ago, that they got a bunch of small fish, and, last year, I saw a humungous population of small fish off of Charleston close, starting pretty much from the middle of June and definitely all the way through November, lots and lots of five to eight-pound fish. You can go out and catch a hundred of them, if you wanted to, but no one wants to catch that many.

MR. KELLY: In south Florida, we are noticing declines in the number of fish, primarily because of weather conditions. We are not seeing the cold fronts that we traditionally do, and these fish, to the best of our knowledge, are staying to the north, and we don't see those migrations on both coasts of Florida, because of water temperatures.

Something that I would like to ask the group is it appears that there is an effort shift on the commercial side from northeast Florida to southwest Florida during the months of December through March, and, I don't know how many of you are trailer fishermen, but are you not finding fish up here? Are you restricted by catch limits and so forth that you make that migration to south Florida, or southwest Florida, during those months, because there is a substantial presence there, along with refrigerated trucks and so forth, that fish that quota out rather quickly. Is there anyone here that can shed some light on that and help us out?

MR. ENGLISH: I can shed a little bit of light on it. Of course, whenever they increase the quota -- When they increase the quotas on the southwest region and the northeast region, those quotas increase at the same time that we used to get good money for the fish in North Carolina and the east coast of Florida, and so, when the quota is increased and they're able to catch more over there, the fishermen on the east coast are looking up and going, well, we can catch fifty fish at \$1.80 a pound, and I can go over there and catch 1,250 pounds at \$1.80 a pound, and I'm going to southwest Florida, and we had spoken just amongst the group. When you change a system in one place, that affects another, and so, when they added more fish down there, at a different time of the year, that's what affected the price, and, when you affect the price, then you affect how people fish.

MR. KELLY: Then would you say that allocation and quota are hurting your business? If you had increased trip limits and so forth, would you stay, or would you still make that migration?

MR. ENGLISH: No, it hasn't hurt, but it's just hurt the price, and it just changes the effort. It changes the effort from here to there. A fisherman is going to look at his pocketbook, a commercial fisherman, and he's going to say that I can catch fifty fish here and make \$600 for the day or I can go over there and make \$1,800 for the day, and it costs me two-hundred-bucks to get there, and I'm going to go make the eighteen-hundred-bucks, and that's the difference.

MR. BOWEN: Another thing is the weather, too. It's a lot of northeast winds in the wintertime, and so, over there, it's offshore. Here, we can hardly even fish, and it's rough a lot these last three of four years, and it's been -- That's another thing. The winter is when we caught a lot of our fish, and it's getting harder and harder and harder to get out there and actually have stretches to catch the fish.

Then, in the summer, since 2010, we've been dealing with thermoclines real bad, and it's getting a little better now. I think it's slowly starting to work out, but I think that's got a big factor on --

The fish aren't going to sit there in the cold water. They move, and they're not like groupers and snappers. They will leave if it's not what they want temperature-wise. Anyway, that's just what I've seen.

MR. KELLY: I just wanted to get a better understanding of what's going on, and I understand Mother and Nature and so forth, and I was just curious as to whether or not quota and trip limits are triggering that move and if, you had increased quota, would you stay in that area, because we see a lot of unused quota on both sides of the peninsula in Florida, where allocation seems to be always problematic for both the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf Council as well.

MR. LAX: Maybe Gary can speak to this, but, from what I've always understood, your fish in the Gulf are much hungrier, too. They tend to be a little easier to catch, and so, if you're in Jupiter, Florida, and you're a trailer boat, to drive up to the Cape or Daytona, it's almost the same ride, and, when you have the availability of fish houses picking up there at a higher trip limit and they're easier to catch, you're going to have guys moving. You will have three boats circling in this room, and that's how tight we fish, and so, if you can find fish that are going to bite easier for the same travel time, you're going to see people bleeding into that fishery.

MR. KELLY: Right, but, when you make that move to southwest Florida though, obviously there are costs that are associated with that, the travel time back and forth and the refrigerated trucks that are there, and housing or however you're handling that, because, in most instances, I would say this is a two to three-week trip that these fishermen are engaged in, and so would an increased quota, in spite of the weather or other factors like that, keep you in those areas, and obviously, with the response that I am getting, no, it's not substantial enough, because of the price factor, and so that's why you're making that move, and is that correct?

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, basically. I mean, what you would have to do is, on the east coast, to keep the fishermen there, is you would have to have the proper weather, and you would have to go to a 1,000 or 1,200-pound limit on the east coast, and we're not going to do that. I mean, I don't believe it will happen.

MR. KELLY: Maybe those are some of the things that need to be addressed, quotas and allocation, so that you can correct that, if in fact you feel that that's important to your business.

MR. LAKS: I will let some of you guys also speak to it, but I think part of the ease of the catch of the fish in the Gulf is very appealing. I mean, it would be hard in the winter, and Keith and Gary and Steve can tell you, to catch 1,200 pounds off the east coast of Florida. That would be a colossal bite for that day.

MR. BOWEN: I mean, obviously it does happen. There are a lot of days where you catch your fifty head in forty-five minutes and you're going back to the dock, which it would be nice, and this is something for the future, and so I don't even know if it's worth bringing up now, but, going on, with the fish stock being healthy and stuff, it would be nice to possibly look at other ways, maybe a 600-pound trip limit a day, or -- Because fifty head is just not enough. It's so hard with the amount of days that we actually get to fish throughout the winter.

We fished one day in January, I think, and that's it, one day, and we had maybe a week-and-a-half or two weeks in -- Actually, I think we had two weeks in December, but it's like the weather is so

bad now, and it's like trending that way, and it could stop. I mean, it could be flat the whole winter, but, these last three or four years, it seems like it's getting worse and worse, and so, if we actually had something to go out there and the fish are there and we can catch them, because we might not have a chance to get out the whole rest of the month, and I don't know. I'm not even sure if this is the time to bring that up.

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, and I agree with that, and, like I said, what it is, it's, on the east coast, the reason we have fifty head and seventy-five head and a split season and all of that is we tried to extend the fishing year all year long. We didn't want to catch our quota up and then be shut down for that particular time or whatever, and we did that prior to the west coast thing showing up like it has over the last several years, and I have heard talk, and I have talked about it with others, that we may want to rethink that east coast fishery now, since we have the west coast doing what they're doing there, and so we may want to think about the same type of system, that we open the quota up and catch them up and shut it down and then move on to the next place. That may be something.

On the east coast, we're broke up more, and a lot of us, myself included, fish them just periodically close to home, and so that's why we fought hard to get them all year long, because we catch them all year long, and we don't -- A lot of people don't travel fishing like they do in other places, but, like I said, once the price -- That affects price, and, once you affect the price, now you start having to look at redoing what you've already done, and we spent a lot of time getting this east coast right, but we may have to spend some more time changing a little bit.

MR. LAKS: I think tomorrow, in Other Business, we're going to address some of those options for trip limits.

MR. ROLLER: I was just going to switch gears a little bit here and talk about North Carolina, if that's all right, and so it's really interesting. In my area, we have a long, rich history of king mackerel fishing, and it's a really, really important fish to us in southeastern North Carolina, which it was really kind of difficult, particularly from about 2009 or 2010, and these fish really just weren't available. I don't know if they were just offshore, and I know more were than they were inshore, but they were very omnipresent in my area.

For as long as I can remember, we caught them, and they were a huge fishery in the fall, and they were a really important fishery in the summer, and we caught them in the spring, as early as April, mixed in with the Atlantic bonito schools, but, for a very long period, there really weren't any king mackerel, and that has changed in the last three years. We have started catching the really small juveniles while doing Spanish mackerel trolling trips, where you're trolling Clark spoons, and now you're seeing a lot of eight to fifteen-inch king mackerel, and those were almost nonexistent for a long period of time.

Now the summer fishery is much better, and the piers are starting to see fish again. In our fall fishery, the last three years in particular, it's been really good again, where we're catching bigger fish, and there's been pretty good concentrations of them, and so it's been a big reversal, but it was a little scary. They were one of my most important fish, and they were really not available for a five to ten-year period.

MR. KELLY: What you just said, Tom, I think would coincide if we looked at the weather patterns and so forth from 2009 and 2010, those extreme cold fronts that probably pushed those fish down to the south, and now we're seeing the reverse on that, and, with the lack of those cold fronts, those fish are staying up further north on both sides, both in the Gulf of Mexico and in the South Atlantic.

MR. ROLLER: Yes, I can't dispute that. I think what was interesting for me was such a long -- Up our way, there is so much Spanish mackerel fishing, and there is always some really small king mackerel mixed in with them, and we did not see many of those for a long period of time, and, when you're not seeing those juvenile fish, that was worrisome to me. Now, last year, they became a nuisance, because there were so many of them, and it's always good to see that.

MR. MCKINLEY: I'm in North Carolina, and, Tom, I think you're talking more the northern part of North Carolina and not the southeast.

MR. ROLLER: Cape Lookout.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and so I'm in the southeast. I am down there in Topsail Beach and stuff, and so it's a little different than that, and it has shifted. We don't have them on the beaches anymore, and that's for sure, but our whole place we catch them is offshore of Frying Pan Tower, and that is that just our -- That's where they are at in the wintertime, and they have been there for thirty years or whatever, and some years are better than others. I think sometimes, if the water is too hot, they disperse inshore, and so they're not concentrated to catch them. Sometimes, if it's too cold, I think they push further south or something, and we don't see them.

The last couple of years has picked up. It has shifted though. January, February, and March was always good, and now it seems like April is our better month, and last April was really strong, and, this April so far, the last ten days has been good. There is one guy that has had three back-to-back fifteen-box trips. All the guys that went down there did.

I think that happened because I pulled my boat two Saturdays ago. I had to have some work done, and so that always happens. We didn't catch any in January and February and March. There's a lot of small fish mixed in the last couple of years, and that's not good. The dealers, they don't want them that small, but it has changed. The last thirty years, it's always different, and I think weather has a lot to do with it, but sometimes I think in the fall they stay further up your way, and there is a big fishery up north that is -- I don't know if it has always existed or there's a lot more effort, but a lot of big fish are caught on the beaches up there, and I don't know if that's something that people didn't know about twenty or thirty years ago or if it's something that has just started, but I don't know.

MR. ROLLER: Can you be a little bit more specific? Where you say those big fish, are you talking up near Hatteras or my way?

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes.

MR. ROLLER: I mean, that's a historic fishery, and so --

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and it was one that I don't think as many people -- We didn't know about it as much, but then I think some of the guys went up that way after them.

MR. ROLLER: I think you can still make the argument that ten years ago it was much weaker than it had been, and I'm not trying to make a testament to the health of the fishery, but just to the fact that that fishery wasn't historically as good as it had been, but it is getting a lot better.

MR. MCKINLEY: It is improving, I think. I would agree.

MR. DONALSON: I would like to give kind of recreational feedback and what I'm hearing from some of my peers in the St. Augustine area. When I look at those numbers from 2010 on, a lot of things happened between then and now with the economy. A lot of the feedback that I'm getting is that it's almost coinciding with a lack of participation, from a recreational perspective. As fuel prices go up, it's not as affordable for someone like me to spend three-hundred-bucks to go chase kingfish around, or whatever that is, and so I would be curious to see, if you laid down some other financial data points on that chart, the price of oil, boat sales, and I know I'm pretty tight with that industry, and, in 2010, the boat market took a dip. Recreational anglers just weren't buying as many boats.

I know that participation in kingfish tournaments in the northeast Florida area has significant decreased over the last five to six years. I think, if you've got less boats out there chasing them, you're going to have less catch, obviously, and I also think that there are a lot less people going way offshore off of northeast Florida, because we can't catch bottom fish anymore, and the sea bass fishery is all but gone, and we can't bottom fish without catching snappers, and so what we would do is we would go out and catch our two kings and then bottom fish.

Well, I'm not going out thirty miles anymore to catch my two kings, because I can't bottom fish, and so I think that it's kind of a perfect storm over the last ten years of those things. Again, this is in my opinion, and I sit with a panel before I come here, with some other recreational fishermen, to get their input, and so, for what it's worth, I think that's part of what is going on in our area.

MR. LAKS: Steve, I would agree with you, but one thing that -- If you do see the line between commercial and recreational, it's almost the same, and so I know that the economy was terrible then, but, also, in south Florida, we just didn't see the fish, and so, like the headboats and charter boats that used to pound kingfish, we didn't catch them, and so there is definitely something to the economy, but there was also something that was parallel, if you look at the lines between the commercial and recreational fishery. I don't know how much economics would follow that.

MR. SWANN: I'm from Jacksonville, and I would echo what Steve Donalson had to say. It seemed like, along with the recession, that, at about the same time that people started feeling more comfortable and started to fish more, it started to be a lot more inshore fishing and not as much offshore fishing. I don't see the kingfish runs on the beach like we used to have twenty or thirty years ago, and maybe that's got something to do with people not wanting to spend the money or the time or have the boat to go thirty miles offshore anymore, and so that could be partially one of the reasons for the decline in the recreational catch, at least in our area.

MR. LAKS: I have one other thing to add to Florida. Our spring run of fish that we have in May, we have to acknowledge the shark problem. It's tremendous. There is a lot of fish that are getting hooked and eaten, and it's an unknown amount. There is no real way to count them, but you have seen those catches drop just because, I think, of the sharks. If I was to eliminate the sharks from

the water, you would see the live bait catches would go significantly higher, probably close to what they were. As a matter of a fact, you're seeing more of a trolling resurgence in our spring fishery, just because the sharks don't interfere as much as they do with the live bait fishery.

MR. GORHAM: Just to fill in from up in the northeastern North Carolina, we've always had a pretty good winter king fishery, and I know, the commercial guys that have done well in the past, this past year, they were telling me that it was the weather. As far as the beaches, inshore, this past year was the first year in at least the last five years that we caught really any type of king fishery that was worth booking trips, and, from seeing pictures on the dock, it was mixed sizes, but it was very good to see. It's always interesting to us that the nearshore guys -- They get them in Hatteras, and I know they were fishing off of Virginia Beach for them, and you see them around menhaden pods, but it was definitely a good year this past year.

MR. DOUGHTIE: One other thing that is a factor that I am seeing -- I have king fished, and I don't do as much as I used to, but I still see a fair amount of big fish in close, not real close, as close as they used to be, but I get out to about 110 feet of water, and, even if I'm not king fishing and I throw a top bait out, it doesn't last five minutes before it takes off, but another thing is, with so many people moving to the coastal regions, and you're getting a lot of storm water runoff and a lot of human factors going into the water, and it's right there along the coast, and that could very well be a reason why these fish are moving out, because the waters just aren't as clean as they used to be.

MR. LAKS: I would agree with you, Collins, about water quality, especially off of south Florida. It's a major issue, and it probably has something to do with our baitfish, and that could be another reason those fish are finding deeper water, because the inshore bait is just not available for them.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and you guys have already gotten into these last two questions a little bit, but how has the size of the fish changed over the last few years, if anyone wants to add anything to that.

MR. BOWEN: I am a third-generation king fisherman, and my dad told me they have seen, on average, them to be a little smaller throughout these last couple of years, but there is a lot of factors that go into that. Like, in the wintertime, when they're moving down, right in the beginning of the season, there is generally bigger fish, and it's the weather. If you can't get out to get the bigger fish when they are pushing through, obviously you're not going to see those numbers of bigger fish being caught.

Also, another -- There was a lot of bigger fish being caught from the Cape on live bait, but they can't catch them anymore, because the sandbar sharks are so bad, or all the sharks, but I always hear sandbar sharks, sandbar sharks, and they stopped doing it, and so that's another cause for if you do see less bigger fish, and that could be something going in there, but there's a lot of factors that come into the sizes of the fish at certain times of the year or whatever, and I don't know if that has anything to do with this.

MS. WIEGAND: Again, you guys have already gotten into this a little bit, but effort shifts to and from king mackerel, if anyone wanted to add any more information.

MR. LAKS: I know, in our area, off of south Florida, the east coast of Florida, the availability of the fish is the effort. If they get easier to catch and more abundant, people tend to come out of the woodwork, and so I think you've seen some limited effort in the last few years, but, if you see the fish come back, that effort will find its way back into the fishery, and some of these guys that fish through there might want to comment on that.

AP MEMBER: I don't know what the question was. I was doing something else, and so what was the question?

MS. WIEGAND: Effort shifts to and from king mackerel.

MR. ENGLISH: I agree with what Ira said. When the fish show, you will find the fishermen, and they will catch more.

MR. WEEKS: I sort of tend to agree with Steve Donalson and with Ira. I think most of the fishermen I've seen, at least along the southern Georgia coast, do not specifically target king mackerel as the sole target. A lot of these people are snapper grouper people that can combine trips or get out and search for all of these, and so, with the snapper grouper fishery, in the state it's in, you don't find many people, charter captains anyway, that are going out specifically for king mackerel, and so that's been a reduction in effort. Also, somebody mentioned bait earlier, and we've seen, I think, a decline in the poggy pods population, at least along the Georgia coast there, and the availability of inshore bait has also sort of discouraged people from heading offshore quite a bit.

MR. MCKINLEY: In North Carolina, our effort shift is with the snapper grouper, but it's mainly the price. I mean, for some reason, in November and December, we're just not getting a good price on king mackerel, and, in January, February, and March, if the black bass price is good, or the triggerfish b-liner price is good, we're going to go after that if the kings are only \$1.75 or so, and, for some reason, the last couple of years, April has been real strong money-wise for them, shipped to Canada and stuff, and so that puts up back into fishing for those.

MR. DONALSON: Steve Swann and I were talking about this at the break. Just for what it's worth, bait off the northeast Florida area last year never went away. I mean, it was there all year, and I have yet to find it in any significance after this winter, but I haven't heard anything weird or anything about our bait situation versus last year, and so hopefully it stays again.

MR. LAKS: There is one thing that I want to add to the effort. Florida calls every once in a while to get a charter survey, and they ask me what did I target, and I don't always target anything. I'm lucky if I bring my coffee in the morning, and I'm happy if it's on the boat. Where we fish, you just kind of go fishing, and, every day, you assess the conditions, and so, especially in south Florida, at this point, with the clientele we have, to say you're targeting king mackerel is not exactly the thing you want to tell them. You might end up with some king mackerel, but they all want something else, usually.

MR. ROBINSON: Does the council keep in mind that the bulk of the trolling fleet goes to the Gulf of Mexico in the summer and spends their fall up in the Panhandle, as far as effort goes? We're not here, and, I mean, that's the bulk of the fleet.



MR. LAKS: Yes, I think they track the effort, especially in your logbooks.

MR. WEEKS: By bait, I meant pogies, just to make sure it's clear, and not mullet or anything like that.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. We'll move on to some questions about the current management measures. Is the twenty-four-inch minimum size limit for the commercial and recreational sector appropriate? If not, why?

MR. ENGLISH: I will say, from my point of view and from several people I have talked to, we depend on the scientific community for that answer. We kind of hope that they say this is the reason we need this size limit, is for the spawn and the stock, and so we hope, with all the data they collect, that they give us that answer.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. What about how the ACLs are broken up for each sector? Currently, for king mackerel, it's 62.9 percent recreational and 37.1 commercial.

MR. LAKS: I know, for the South Atlantic, probably everyone is good with it. I do know there's been talk about quota sharing and stuff like that in the Gulf, but I think we have plenty of fish in the South Atlantic right now in the commercial and recreational.

MS. WIEGAND: What about the quota for the Northern Zone and the Southern Zone? Currently, the Northern Zone gets 23.4 percent of the commercial quota, and then you've got about 76 percent to the Southern Zone for the commercial quota.

MR. BOWEN: Are you talking about the Northern Zone as like --

MS. WIEGAND: The zones are -- This is how it's broken up for management. We've got the North Carolina/South Carolina line, and north of that is the Northern Zone, through the Mid-Atlantic Region. Then it's south of that, to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line.

MR. BOWEN: Okay. I thought you were talking about like zones down here, because that, I think, could possibly be tweaked a little better.

MS. WIEGAND: It's specifically those two zones. Are there new management measures that the council should consider?

MR. LAKS: I have to say it. Limited entry in the for-hire fleet.

MS. WIEGAND: Are there any management measures you guys think should be changed, and why?

MR. BOWEN: I am not sure if this is the same thing that you're getting at here, but I think it's a 60/40 percentage on the northern and the southern in Florida, and I think that that could --

MS. WIEGAND: I think you're talking about -- There is no specific quota allocation, but are you talking about like the Flagler/Volusia line?

MR. BOWEN: The summer zone and the winter zone, the seasonal zone, and is that not what we're talking about? If we're not, don't worry about it.

MS. WIEGAND: I think what happened in 26 is they set the management line at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County year-round, and so you don't see that shift anymore. It's that line year-round now, and then we've got two different seasons. We've got Season 1, which runs from March through September, and that is allocated 60 percent of the quota, and then you've got Season 2, which runs from October through February, which is 40 percent.

MR. BOWEN: I think that, with the rollover that I think was in place, if we had that switch to 70 percent, possibly, in Season 1, and then 30 percent in Season 2, you wouldn't be worried about shutting it down in Season 1. There would be like plenty of fish, or 75. I mean, 75 or 70, something in that range, and, right now, you have the possibility, if you have a really good March or April, there's a chance of that, but there is no reason to have a chance. When it's 70 percent, or 75, you can still have a good March or April and you don't have to worry about shutting down, is what I'm getting at. Then, whatever is left, you can roll over into the winter. Anyway, that's just something that a lot of people have talked about, and it makes sense, and I think Ben -- Did you agree with that, Ben?

MR. HARTIG: I mean, I would rather see another year or two, Keith. Let's go through this and not trying to make hasty changes on one year of what we've gone under and then go ahead and see what the next year or two brings, and then I would certainly like to revisit it.

MR. ENGLISH: I would agree with Keith, and I understand what Ben says, that we give it a year or two, but, to me, if you put 70 percent on the frontend of it, you can catch -- If you don't catch those, you can catch them on the backend. If you put 60 percent on the front and you don't catch them, on the backend, you've got 40 percent, and, if you don't catch that 40 percent, and you only catch 30 of it, then you have lost that 10 percent, whereas, if you put that on the frontend, then you can catch them in either season, and so I thought the 70/30 was the appropriate number when we first did it, and the council chose 60/40, but I still think 70/30 is the appropriate number.

MR. KELLY: Ira, with regard to limited entry for the charter/for-hire, the fishery is not undergoing overfishing, and it's not overfished, and you're not anywhere near exceeding your ACL, and what's the rationale for limited entry?

MR. LAKS: How much time do we have?

MR. KELLY: Let it rip.

MR. LAKS: Just, basically, we're going to be falling under a reporting requirement, and there is a large fleet of boats right now that aren't federally permitted. It's rampant through south Florida especially that don't have their federal for-hire. It's not an enforcement priority, from what I have seen. Most open access permits aren't an enforcement priority, because it's hard to make a case. You go to court, and the judge asks you, well, what do you need for this, and they're going to be like, well, twenty-five dollars. With the reporting requirements, I know I fish next to thirty or forty boats that don't have the permits, and so I don't know how you get around any other way enforcing people to have them, unless one day you say we're not going to hand them out anymore.

MR. KELLY: Isn't this more of a law enforcement issue? The other thing is would you still support that if there was a no-sale provision in there for limited entry?

MR. LAKS: Well, I know there are some plans in all discussions of for-hire limited entry of possibly having two control dates, where you have a control date in the past that they have now where, if you have been following the rules, like I have, that you can maybe have a transferable permit. Then you make a control date for the future, and so all those people who have been fishing illegally can get right, and you just make that a non-transferable permit.

When those people get out of the fishery, you can put it into a new entrant pool, and so you give the opportunity for everyone to get right within a certain amount of time, and then you also have a way for new people, without having to expend out of pocket, to get into the fishery, but those of us who have been in the fishery and doing it right all these years can have the opportunity to sell those permits to people who have the money and the availability.

Let's face it. If you're going to be in the charter boat business, you ain't getting into it without \$150,000 or \$200,000, and the price of a permit -- If you can't afford that, we're doing you a favor of not to get in that business, because that will be the only thing left after you quit, after your marriage fails, after your health fails, after your hair falls out. The only thing that will be worth anything will be your permit. Not your boat and not your tackle, and so there is ways to have it for those who have been doing it right to stay in it and for new entrants to come into the fishery.

MR. KELLY: I certainly respect your position, and I'm just trying to get the broad picture for down the road here. Whether you're a commercial fisherman or charter/for-hire, or even a recreational fisherman, the cost of doing any of the above has just grown exponentially, and, if we're going to bring generational fishermen into this business, whether it's charter/for-hire or commercial, we need to think about a potential burden that we're putting on new participants in the fishery.

MR. LAKS: I agree with you, Bill, and that's why I see a way where there is a potential avenue for people not having to spend money and to have a pool of permits that go back into it, but, to your point of making a living and being professional, if you have a bunch of people out there who aren't following the rules, chances are that they are not going to be charging the same.

You're going to have boats -- If you make the whole fleet professional, your revenue can come back. For example, if I was to take the commercial king mackerel fishery and say, okay, we're not going to enforce limited entry permits, there is going to be a lot more fish coming to the dock if you didn't have to have that permit to sell the fish. It's the same thing in the recreational fishery. If you have a bunch of charter boats that aren't regulated, because they're not regulated if they don't have the permit, you are eventually going to lower the price of a charter, and that's not good for anybody.

MR. KELLY: But if breaking the law is that egregious, do you think that more and reasonable law enforcement would alleviate those problems?

MR. LAKS: Bill, I have tried to work with law enforcement, and, to paraphrase what most law enforcement officials have told me, if the council doesn't think it's important enough to be limited entry, it's not a priority for us. These permits have never really been enforced, and there is a whole

fleet of people out there that don't even know you need one, or care to know if they need one, and that is why I think having a permit that you can have a control date for the future, and not to eliminate anybody who is in the fishery today, but to get them right within the regulations and report, I think that would be a really good thing to have.

MR. KELLY: All right, and, also, I appreciate your comment that perhaps the council needs to have a greater interagency exchange of information with law enforcement that might help in the immediate near future here, and so thank you.

MR. LAKS: Thank you, Bill.

MS. WIEGAND: Any other existing management measures that should be changed or considered?

MR. ROBINSON: Are we going to talk about changing our fifty and seventy-five head? Are we going to talk about that at some point and going to poundage? That's what most of the guys want, especially in the wintertime. They want to go to poundage, and so we need to come up with a number, and we need to come up with a number that the fishery can sustain.

MR. LAKS: Do you want to get into that now, Christina, or do you want to wait for Other Business?

MS. WIEGAND: That is a management measure, and we can discuss it here if that's where you guys would like to discuss it.

MR. LAKS: Knock it out of the park, Gary.

MR. ROBINSON: That's what I'm asking. How do we figure out what kind of numbers the fishery can sustain? Is it 500 pounds per day, per trip, or 1,000? I mean, I would like to see 1,000 myself, but I would like to make a trip out of it.

MR. LAKS: That is an alternative, and Keith can jump into this conversation, and Steve and anyone else who commercial fishes or has any ideas. Jump into it.

MR. ENGLISH: We had some meetings on this, and everybody was trying to come up with a number that would be feasible and sustainable, and the 500 to 600-pound range is what came into it, and that's the number that came out of the meeting. Of course, the question to be answered is what impact is it going to have on the smaller fish, and so that's the question that we'll need to put a 500 or 600-pound number to and then the size of fish we're catching with that, because, obviously, a fifty-head trip limit catches 250 pounds of small fish. If you go to 600, now you're catching 120 head of the same fish, and so that's the only thing that we would need some input from that, so that we know how to set that poundage limit instead of a head limit, but 500 to 600 pounds seems to be what I heard that everybody would be kind of happy with.

MR. GORHAM: To go back to the limited entry topic, I just wanted to give comments, and I spoke with Ira about this, and I can see that there is a real need for attention. My best input really is the council start looking at different scenarios or things that can be done to alleviate the issues that Ira has brought up with the federal permits and how it's affecting them and how you've got

the reporting requirements, because I think, if you don't, you're kind of cancelling out the mandatory reporting, but, again, I just wanted to give comments that I am not sure -- I think limited entry is a great thing, but I do think that it really needs to be looked at, so there's not a knee-jerk reaction in the future. That's all I have on that.

MR. ROLLER: Since we're going to discuss limited entry, I just want to thank Bill for his comments, and I agree with Ira's rationale on this. I've been really frustrated with the discussion of limited entry, because there is just so many knee-jerk reactions by some of the recreational groups in thinking that this is going to lead to some sort of catch share scheme or something like that.

I look at this through the narrow window of I want to see an easier way to enforce electronic reporting. We have been sitting here for so long complaining about MRIP estimates and extrapolations. Well, for-hire logbook reporting is one of the answers to that problem, and, if we can't enforce it between a small group of people, which is the for-hire industry, how are we going to look at a bigger picture with recreational anglers and whatnot? I am not trying to open that can of worms here, but I just don't see, without some sort of limited entry, how we're going to be able to adequately enforce it.

MR. LAKS: I think Skip is going to talk to that point, but I'm coming back to you, Keith.

MR. FELLER: In the Mid-Atlantic, as of March 18, we have mandatory electronic reporting if you have a federal permit.

MR. ROLLER: As we will hopefully down here, but how are we going to enforce that if we can't already enforce the permits for it?

MR. FELLER: Our VMRC have been to all of our meetings, and they are showing a strong presence at the dock every day, when we get in, and they're checking, and, if you don't have -- That's part of the mandatory reporting. You've got to have them filled out when you get in, and you just hit send, and it also -- Because we have some separate state permits, and, for us, with the federal permits, with the for-hire, we don't have to do state now, and the state can get what they need from the VTR, from the electronic, but it is mandatory.

If you don't have a federal permit, then it doesn't include you, but it's the Northeast, and it's basically -- It's almost everything. It's basically sea bass, tilefish, flounder, mackerel, squid, butterfish, anything that's on that Northeast permit list. I think it's definitely a start in the right direction, just from what you're saying, trying to get a handle and get away from -- Anything you can do to get away from MRIP is a step in the right direction.

MR. LAKS: Skip, to that point, your fishery is a little different than our fishery. We have a lot of trailer boats, and we have a lot of boats that leave out of backyards, and we have a lot of different docks that they go to. Also, our species are -- If you come in with a tilefish, they know you're fishing in federal waters. In south Florida, we have a problem where there is no dockside enforcement if you have a federal permit. You can't come to the dock and see what I caught, and, also, I don't want to get into different fisheries, but -- There is no way to tell who was actually fishing in federal waters. There is no way that -- You have much more dockside enforcement.

Our charter boat fleet is scattered all over the place. We don't know what inlet we're going out of, and our times are different. You know, we're not going to have any call-out or hail-in requirements in our thing, and it's just going to be a free-for-all. I fish around thirty to forty boats that do not have federal permits, and there are famous charter boat captains in south Florida that do not have federal permits, and it's a stick in the eye to everyone who does.

MR. FELLER: Until you can -- Like you said, your state guys are saying, if the council is not, then we're going to enforce it, and, until you can get them all onboard, which I don't know -- I do know that New Jersey almost has the same thing, where you have so much water and where there is so many houses and everything, and a lot of charter boats up there operate out of houses and everything, but I don't know. You've got to start somewhere, but you've got to start enforcing it, whether it's the state boats out on the water boarding the boats or --

MR. LAKS: I don't want to corrupt any more time on this, but there are a lot of regulations that I don't know if you guys have that we have between what a federal boat can do and a state boat can do on the same fisheries, and it makes a big difference.

MR. FELLER: I can tell you, and this is an example for sea bass. We have to have a federal permit to catch sea bass, and this happened a few years ago. If they close sea bass federally, but the state leaves it open, us with a federal permit are not allowed to catch them in the state. I have to relinquish my federal permit in order to catch them in the state, and so I don't know if it would be the same thing for you all.

MR. LAKS: Yes, it is, and it's frustrating, but I'm going to go to Keith to go back to the king mackerel conversation.

MR. BOWEN: I am just going to touch on what Steve already said about the 600-pound trip limit. That was definitely well-liked by a lot of the fishermen, but the flip side to what he was saying is you will also be catching less of the bigger fish to catch that weight, and so you'll be catching more of the small ones and less of the bigger ones, and I'm not sure which are the breeding sizes and all that kind of stuff, and I have caught fish that were really small that had roe too, and so I'm not sure which ones are the -- Anyway, I just wanted to throw that in there and touch on that real quick.

MR. LAKS: I think some rationale for that, when you're talking about the weather that we've been talking about, is, the weather we've had this year, it just doesn't allow the guys to get out and fish, and so the days that they could catch 600 pounds -- I know you guys were catching fish in December, but a lot of fish were coming in from the west coast too, and so their price was down, and, as they were saying, at a low fish count -- You're surviving, but you're really not making it, and they need to be able to, the way the weather patterns seem to be happening, they need to be able to get out and make a trip when they can fish.

MR. HARTIG: The only thing that I would add to this conversation is that Jim Busse at Seafood Atlantic has a number of years of each fisherman's tickets, and, on each ticket, he has the number of fish for the week. We could go back and look at these over time, and he covers between the Cape and all the way to Jupiter, and so he covers a really broad area, and we could say that that represents the fishery as a whole, and then you could look at those numbers and make an informed judgment about the extra mortality on the small fish and how many big fish you're going to save.

That way, you would have the data in front of you to make that decision, and I think that's fair, to look at that information and bring it back to the AP.

MR. LAKS: Thank you, Ben.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Let's move on to the environmental conditions, and, again, you guys have commented on a lot of this already, but, if anyone wanted to elaborate any more on how environmental conditions uniquely affect king mackerel.

MR. BOWEN: This is kind of stuff that I already hit on before, but it is very interesting, with the graphs and stuff, that almost all of them that I've seen with -- I started in 2010, and, prior to that, my dad and all the other fishermen on the Atlantic side were really doing really well, and I was actually in school when I got my permit, but, as soon as I started, the really bad upwellings -- Like I was saying before, all the way up the whole entire coast, but that -- It completely changed. I mean, we had to go to Daytona, which we generally were fishing in Sebastian, and you would be out there making trips for twenty fish in three days. It was terrible.

That definitely -- The cold water, the kingfish obviously don't want to be in that. They move to wherever they want to go, wherever there is warm water, wherever there is bait, but that's definitely something that you can see even with your graphs, and that span of years right there almost coincides exactly, to me, and, I mean, I fish every day that I can, the whole entire time, on this east coast, and it's pretty interesting, and then, obviously, the wintertime has been just getting worse and worse. That's just the stuff on the weather.

MR. LAKS: Again, you have to add the amount of sharks that are in the environment now too, and not to beat a dead shark, but it's --

MR. SWANN: I've got a question for Ira and the south Florida guys. Are the releases from the St. Lucie River over the past few years that they have been tearing up the Indian River Lagoon, is that affecting the nearshore fishery for you guys?

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, that had a huge impact on our early Spanish mackerel this year, and we lost two months of them completely, and it affected the kingfish. It was out to the Six-Mile Reef, the fresh water, and it shut down that last two weeks of kingfish in September that the boys usually fish on. It wiped that out. When they turned it loose, it was over, just like you flip a light switch, and so it affects it out that far, and Keith was there, and he knows, but, yes, it makes a -- That is a huge problem.

MR. LAKS: Steve, not being a water quality scientist, but, when you see that water, it has to be affecting something.

MR. DONALSON: So Jacksonville and St. Augustine both have two extremely large dredging projects ongoing and about to start, especially Jacksonville's inlet, and I think it's going to be interesting to see, next year at this time, what that's going to do. They are basically deepening the inlet for a new set of Navy ships that will be able to dock there, and so there is a lot of concern about that from an environmental perspective, and we'll see what happens. In St. Augustine, they're just doing a normal dredge project, but the water is nasty looking coming out of there.

MR. ENGLISH: I will add one thing to what I was talking about water quality. We had the hurricane this year, and it dumped massive amounts of rain, and we thought just our area was bad. I mean, it was bad. It was horrid, but the boys that fish the Cape for Spanish mackerel with the gillnets in the fall, the first couple weeks, they caught fish within three to four miles of the coast there, and that water that came out of apparently the St. Johns River and came south turned that water just as nasty as it's ever been, and the fish left immediately, and they didn't come back to it. They lost the last two to three weeks of the gillnet season off the Cape and quit catching fish, and so the water quality was definitely a huge factor this year, and it wasn't just us with Lake Okeechobee, but it affected us all the way up to Jacksonville.

MR. DOUGHTIE: You brought up about the dredging and whatever, and, in our area, where we're located, we're kind of in a safe zone, or we've always thought we were in the safe zone, because we're kind of an indentation in the coast, but we've had Matthew hit us head-on, and we had that massive -- Last year, with the full moon and the tides, I've never seen so much water, and I've lived there all my life.

Then you've got the Savannah River right now that they're getting ready to dredge that further up, and saltwater intrusion is going to -- It's going to be a mess, and, also, just to get it back on the record about the number of people moving to the coastal areas and the impact that's having with not the proper infrastructure to handle it, and a lot of people still have septic tanks and drain fields, and all that stuff is being flushed out there, and it's no surprise to me that things are changing, especially closer to shore, with so many people and so many issues that people are -- The almighty dollar is trumping taking care of what we have that brings them there in the first place, and I just wanted it on the record.

MR. LAKS: Yes, I would say that any dredging project could be a potential problem, any project they do. I mean, some of these guys that have fished out of Jupiter Inlet, before they changed that inlet around slightly, there used to be bait all over the tide line. I mean, a slight little change in the inlet, and that bait will not show back up there, and it was not a big change. It's a tiny little inlet to begin with, and so we definitely have to be concerned about what widening inlets and changing inlets might do to forage fish.

MR. ENGLISH: I will add one more thing, and, of course, this is not a very popular thing anyhow, but beach renourishment, and they're doing massive amounts of that, and you don't have any idea how much forage that that's covering up. We fish the beach a lot, and we can see it just turn to nothing when they renourish a beach. That beach is done for two to three years. They cover all the sand fleas and all the forage stuff that the whiting and pompano and everything feeds on on that beach, and they move. They leave it. It's just that simple. If you don't go find the hard sand, you don't find the fish.

MR. LAKS: Steve, I will add to that, too. They pull that sand from off the shoals offshore, where that bait would sit at night. I remember that I used to leave the beach and go out there to sit out in deeper water, and those shoals are not there anymore for the bait to sit on.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Have you guys noticed any changes or observations about the timing and length of king mackerel spawning in your area?



MR. BOWEN: I think that -- It almost seems like I've been seeing fish with roe earlier this year than I normally would, and have you guys been catching fish with -- No? Those big fish on the high bar a couple of weeks ago -- I don't know if that's early or not, but they were all roed out, and my dad has been catching fish squirting all over his box, and I don't know if that's something to say on this, but it's like all filled out with roe. They're getting pretty close already, but that was a couple of weeks ago too, and so I don't know if that's earlier or not, but I just figured I would put that in.

MS. WIEGAND: Have you guys noticed a change in abundance of king mackerel over the last five years, and I know we've talked about some of this already.

MR. ROLLER: In North Carolina, I just wanted to say, over the last five years, abundance has increased pretty much at all levels, to the juveniles to the snakes to the big fish, and over almost all seasons. It's not quite at where it was in the 1990s or the early 2000s, but it's much, much, much better.

MR. LAKS: From my perspective, especially last summer, I saw more kingfish off the beaches, and finding them back in places where I hadn't seen them in a while.

MS. WIEGAND: Then, in terms of recruitment, where you guys are seeing the small fish, does anyone want to add anything else to that, other than the conversation we've already had?

MR. ENGLISH: I will say that we're seeing a lot better recruitment in the last three to four years on the small kingfish. The Spanish mackerel fishery at the Cape, of course, use gillnets three miles out, and, two or three years ago, for a five or six-mile stretch, they couldn't fish for the small kingfish. They would run a little piece of net over to see if the Spanish were there, and they would get fifty or seventy-five juvenile kingfish, and they would leave it, and they would move two miles and do the same thing, and, of course, that was documented by other people, too. This year, it wasn't as much as that, but they're still seeing it, and so, I mean, we're still seeing it with our samples, what we're doing.

MR. HOWARD: I know it's already been said, but I will go ahead and reiterate that, this past year, we have seen more -- It was the first year in several years that we have seen more twenty to twenty-four-inch king mackerel on our beachfronts than we have in many, many years past. I mean, there were charters that you can go out four miles off the beach and catch hundreds of them. You can sit there and catch them all day long with two lines in the water, and so the recruitment is coming up.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and then we will move in to the social and economic influences, and you guys started talking about this a little bit, but, for the commercial sector, how has price and demand for king mackerel changed over the last few years?

MR. MCKINLEY: Demand is has definitely gotten better and better, especially in the northern markets. It seems like our bottom price, when you just don't want to go fishing for them, has come up. We are not getting that dollar a pound or dollar-fifty a pound. It seems like we've been fortunate, the last two or three years, that it has stayed maybe \$2.50 or better, and so it's definitely better.

MR. ENGLISH: I will say that, this year, with the changes in the added fish to the west coast, the overlapping fisheries, where fisheries used to close and another one would open up, that those overlapping fisheries, where they got more fish on one, and so it overlapped into another fishery that opened, did cause a -- I believe it will show a smaller average on price for the fish during those times. Now, right now, when there are not that many around, the price is absolutely sky-high right now, everybody will tell you.

MR. LAKS: I guess I would say that, when there is demand and no supply, the price goes up significantly, from the highest I have seen in the past. It's almost to counter what Randy said, and the bottom is the bottom, but the top is going up and up on the price.

MS. WIEGAND: Again, I know we talked a little bit about this, but how has demand for charter and headboat trips targeting king mackerel changed?

MR. ROLLER: In North Carolina, if they're there, you book more trips, or there is trips you're targeting mahi and catch nothing but king mackerel.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. What communities are particularly dependent, engaged in, or reliant upon the king mackerel fishery, both commercial or recreational?

MR. LAKS: Are you looking for like individual geographic areas?

MS. WIEGAND: Individual geographic areas or specific communities. I was the one that added this question to the fishery performance reports, and so I can sort of elaborate on my reasoning for this. When we're looking at what communities are highly engaged or reliant upon the king mackerel fishery, we're using landings, and so it's often proportional, and so it's possible that we're missing some of these smaller communities that may not have high landings compared to other communities in the region, but are nonetheless reliant upon the king mackerel fishery, and so making sure that we're not missing any of those and then making sure that the communities we are identifying are communities that you guys see as highly engaged, and so we need a little more information on that, and that was my reasoning for adding this.

MR. KELLY: Well, I think some of my comments are going to have to be generalized now, because we're not fishing under South Atlantic stocks anymore, and the boundary line has changed again, but I think what's important and would apply to almost everyone in this room is the importance of the commercial fishing industry to small fishing communities.

In the Florida Keys, for example, the commercial fishing industry is the second-largest economic engine in our hundred miles of islands, and we're also the second-largest employer, and I think that that would prove true for many of the communities that the men and women represent around this table, and so much of it is multi-species fisheries, and, obviously, especially with coastal migratory pelagics, we're all catching them, and it's mackerel, it's kingfish, it's lobster, it's snapper and grouper, all of which contribute to a healthy fishery, and that's very important not only economically, but the social side as well, because, in many of these small communities, we are fighting hard to maintain generational fishermen and so forth.

That is important in the makeup of the towns that we live in, and it's important to our churches and our schools and our tax base, things of that nature, because of the turnover in those dollars,

and most marine economists will tell you that the ex-vessel value is -- The turnover in our communities is times six, and that makes it a very big number, and that's why it's so important that we maintain healthy and sustainable fisheries.

MR. DONALSON: The northeast Florida area, as far as economic impact with king fishing goes, and I don't know if this is a recreational viewpoint or not, but it's pretty significant. At one time, we hosted the largest fishing tournament in the world, as far as number of boats go. The Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament used to have a thousand boats, and I read a statistic one year that the economic impact was second only to the Jacksonville Jaguars, and so it's pretty significant. Now, again, where that is today, I don't know, but there have been businesses that have been built around king fishing, lure manufacturers and stuff like that, in the Jacksonville area, and so it's pretty important to the economy of the city, and so I know Jacksonville is big, but for what it's worth.

MR. LAKS: Kind of adding, maybe outside of the Keys, because I think Bill experiences more of a community in the Keys, but, along the coast of Florida, there are communities within the community that are very dependent on the fishery. Unfortunately, that will merge into the next question, that they're getting squeezed from every side, but it's hard to say, in that giant area with the heavy population in south Florida, that you can say that it's dependent on king mackerel, but there is a significant amount of people within that community that are dependent on it.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and how have changes in infrastructure, and so access to docks and marinas and fish houses, affected fishing opportunities for king mackerel?

MR. ROBINSON: It's like the west coast of Florida, the Naples area, I can't go over there and fish, because I can't find a dock to tie up or sell my fish, and so I don't go. There was one little place there that takes about five boats, and, when that got built up, now I can't even go over there and fish no more, because there is no dealers to pick the fish up, and I would be there, absolutely. I wouldn't miss it. I fished there for three years, and then we lost that place, and it affects it big time.

MR. ENGLISH: To add to what he's saying, it seems like, since, like I said, the overlap of fish and the more fish over there this year, that there was some interest by several fish buyers to add infrastructure over there, and, from what I'm hearing, next year, it's going to be available, and so, Bill, you may have more fishermen over there next year than what you did this year, but, if it becomes practical to fish there, then you will have more fishermen.

It's just that simple, and, for the local people that live there, that's a bad thing, because it was theirs, and they had access to it and went out and easily caught their fish and came home. Once you started adding the traveling thing, then that totally changes the entire community system and the fishery, but that's the changing fishery we live in now, and it's not just kingfish. It's all fisheries are like that.

MR. LAKS: I would say especially in the area where Gary is from and Steve fishes and Keith comes to fish in, Palm Beach County and Dade and Broward County, there is nowhere to tie a commercial boat up anymore. There is no infrastructure anymore. To unload fish has become a project. It used to be go to the fish house and unload your fish, and it's now transfer them to here and transfer them to there, and is someone there, and it's hard to get ice. I don't know, in Palm

Beach County, in northern Palm Beach County, where anyone is going to dock in five years. They are tearing everything down and building up places they ain't going to let you walk down if you don't have the right shoes on, and so it's a scary future looking into what's going to happen.

MR. MCKINLEY: In North Carolina, the same thing. I just got booted, and I tried so hard. I went through three different owners, and I got booted out of my little fish house. I was renting the back part of a place, and I maintain the ice maker, and they are leveling everything to get ready to put up three stores of dry stacks, and I got real fortunate, and I moved down to -- A guy bought an old turtle hospital south of Topsail Beach, and I am allowed to pack fish down there, and so I'm still doing that, but you've got about a forty-mile stretch, and there's about four fish houses, and, if any of them goes, it's just going to put a lot of pressure.

You've got to have ice, and you've got to have a place to unload, and anytime the money could be right. The Wrightsville Beach area and the Wilmington area is growing so much that the big money is going to come in and possibly buy these places up, and it's bad. I mean, I worked hard to preserve that place. Like I said, I went through three owners, but, in the end, I couldn't save it.

MR. BOWEN: I was just pretty much going to say the same thing you guys are. We're up in the Daytona/New Smyrna area, and it's a place that we fish a lot, and there is one fish house there, but parking and trying to find places to actually have commercial boats is almost impossible now, and so there was a -- A while ago, you were able to, but it's getting harder and harder and harder to find places to unload and tie your boats up, period.

MR. GORHAM: I would just add, for northeastern North Carolina, that fishery, any fishery, we're running into real issues about inlets and being able to get in and out of them. I know that is changing fishing effort across many fisheries.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so, sort of along those same lines, how have fishermen and communities adapted to changes in the king mackerel fishery as well as to these changes in infrastructure?

MR. ENGLISH: The king mackerel fishery has turned a lot to a trailer boat fishery. People have gotten rid of their big boats and went to thirty-foot and less boats, twenty-six and twenty-eight-foot boats, to be able to trailer them, and so that's been a huge difference in the kingfish fishery. The guys with the big boats that just strictly kingfish, they have to search and watch what they do to be able to find a place to dock and unload and all that, where a trailer boat can -- If a fisherman is in Sebastian this morning, he can be in Daytona the next morning, when he hears via the internet or whatever that the fish got caught there, and, three hours later, he's fishing a hundred miles away on the fish. That's a big difference in the fishery.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Last, but not least, is there anything else that is important for the council to know or understand about king mackerel?

MR. KELLY: Without question, king mackerel are one of the biggest success stories there is in fisheries management, both in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. We have gone through a lengthy rebuilding program. In the Gulf of Mexico, it's almost an underutilized species. We need to encourage the councils to address one of their primary responsibilities under the

Magnuson-Stevens Act, and that is appropriate allocation of all species instead of treating it like the red-headed stepchild.

They avoid it at all cost on almost every managed species that's under their jurisdiction, and we need to get them to correct that. I am surprised that no legal action has ever been taken against either council, probably limited only due to the financial costs involved, but, as I mentioned, it's one of the biggest success stories that there is, and we need to allocate appropriately, and we need to keep the reasonable management measures in place, because it's really critically important to all of us both in the Gulf of Mexico and in the South Atlantic here.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. If no one else has anything to add, that is all I have for the king mackerel fishery performance report.

MR. LAKS: Guys, we're going to call it quits here for tonight, because it's getting late, and we will pick this back up with Spanish mackerel in the morning.

MR. HARTIG: I was just going to say that this is the first time you guys have been exposed to these fishery performance reports, and it's the first time you've seen the questions. If anything comes to your mind, go ahead and send us an email or a letter, if you have any more information that you want to impart, because I really appreciate you guys delving into this and giving us some good information, because this is going to be really important in the future, because this will fit into the stock assessment process, and so I really appreciate it. Thank you.

AP MEMBER: This is part of our packet, right?

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and all of the questions, as well as the information, were all in the briefing book. The cobia one is actually up on our website, and I can even show you guys where to find them.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on April 16, 2018.)

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APRIL 17, 2018

TUESDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel and the Cobia Sub-Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened in the Crowne Plaza, North Charleston, South Carolina, April 17, 2018, and was called to order by Chairman Ira Laks.

MR. LAKS: Good morning, everyone. I think, first thing this morning, we're going to touch back a little bit on the king mackerel fishery performance report, just because I think there might be a few things that we missed, specifically how important that fish is to certain local communities and how valuable of a fishery it is along the east coast of Florida. Is there anyone that would like to comment to that?

MR. ENGLISH: I will start. Of course, kingfish in our area, it's something that we've always fished. We have boats that do nothing but kingfish, and we have boats that kingfish two days a year and boats that kingfish half the year, and it has to be -- We have to have that to substitute all the other fisheries.

Most of our fishermen are diverse, and we'll fish mackerel a certain time of the year, and we'll fish kingfish a certain time of the year, and we'll fish river fish at a certain time of the year or bottom fish, whatever it is, but, if you take one aspect of it away, it all combined makes your income, and you take a percentage of that away and now you're at the point of not making it then, and so kingfish is a necessary thing for us, and that's why we stretch the season out like we do, to accommodate everyone, and that's the reason that we fight to stretch the seasons out like we do, because it's not only for the boats that just kingfish can move from place to place, but the local people depend on it as a small part of their income at a certain time of the year, and so, from our end, that is how kingfish is important to us, and it's a pretty valuable commodity at our docks.

MR. MCKINLEY: I am not speaking for all of them, but I think most of our snapper grouper fleet in North Carolina are dependent on king mackerel to fill in the gaps too, because we can't target any one thing. I mean, our weather is so bad and we get so few trips that whatever is out there we've got to go catch, whether it's bass or b-liners or triggerfish or grouper or king mackerel, and it's just an important part of it, and I know all the guys don't have the mackerel permit, but most of them do.

MR. HARTIG: To the point that both of you all were making, our last staff person for king mackerel, Kari MacLauchlin, did a portfolio analysis of all the fisheries together and how they fit in through the different areas of the South Atlantic, and I think one of the interesting take-aways from that was -- Steve, in our area, we fish for everything. You can't really narrow it down to any one group of fish that supports that particular area, and it was really interesting. It highlighted the different areas of North Carolina as well and South Carolina and how the different fisheries were so important, but those groupings were really interesting, and you can get a copy of that through the --

MS. WIEGAND: It was in the Snapper Grouper AP briefing book, and so, if you go to our AP meeting website and look at their briefing book, you can find it there, or, if everyone is interested, I can send that link out to all of you guys.

MR. HARTIG: Yes, and I think that would be great, if you sent that link out, because then they could take a look at that. That was really well done, and it's in the briefing book from the last council meeting as well. The one thing from yesterday's discussion, and I know this was the first time we looked at that, but one of the more important things in the assessment process is the recruitment information, the small fish information, and I don't know that we got enough information on those small fish, because, where I fish -- I am a mackerel fisherman, and I have been for fifty years, and I fish for both king and Spanish. They have been a big part of my income for quite some time.

From my perspective, I mean, we've seen juveniles, at least sub-legal fish, in the catches over the last five years, and so that means, every year, we have had more fish entering the fishery over a five-year period, where, in the six years before that, we didn't see any of that. We didn't see any

of that recruitment, and, Tom, your observations of catching those juvenile kings and Spanish was a good one, because, when I fish Spanish for five months of the year, I see that as well, and I had not seen that for five years in a row, and so it was alarming when we went into the assessment at the lowest recruitment level that we've ever had.

It was alarming to go through that assessment process knowing that the seine waves in the fishery in the past -- There has always been that seine wave. There has always been that decline in recruitment over time and that we were right on the cusp of possibly having a good recruitment year, and that's exactly what happened. In 2012, the year we did the assessment, it was the first year that we saw significant recruitment in the fishery, and so it's really important to get the perspective throughout the range.

I mean, I can tell you that, where I fish, we saw recruitment, but that doesn't tell you a whole lot, because that's a localized event. Now, if you -- If Tom says, yes, we saw it in North Carolina, and we saw it in South Carolina, and we're catching these small fish all up and down the coast, then that's a really significant event for the assessment to -- For them to bounce that off the SEAMAP index that you saw yesterday.

I was heartened to see that that index for king mackerel was right on. I mean, it showed -- Now, whether or not the magnitude is correct is hard to know, but it did indicate recruitment in each of those years, and we saw it in the fishery, and so that was great, and so, if I could get a little more information, Keith, of like what you've seen and, Gary, what you've seen on those small fish and what you guys have seen up and down the coast, I think that would help, as far as going into the next assessment, which will take place next year.

MR. ROBINSON: First, I wanted to say that I hold a snapper grouper unlimited permit, and, in my area -- I am only home two months out of the year, because I travel for the king mackerel, but I used to snapper grouper fish, and the goliath and the sharks are so bad there now that I don't even bother. It's not even worth it, because it's going to make you really miserable, and they're going to run you off of every spot, and I just wanted that to be on the record, that sharks and goliath are really bad.

Then the hundred-mile stretch of beach that I fish in Louisiana in the summer, the recruitment has been really good the last five years, and that's the only stretch I know of, and then the stretch on the east coast, about a hundred miles between say Daytona and Jupiter, the recruitment has been really good. Sharks and goliaths. Have you got that? Please, let's talk about that someday.

MR. BOWEN: It's kind of just the same as what everybody else is seeing. I mean, when you're driving inshore, you're running across big marks of little tiny small fish, and that's been -- Like you said, that's the last five years, but it's good to hear from the guys like you, and Brian over there was saying that you're catching a lot of small fish up that way now, and so it's all the way up and down the coast, which it really sounds good, but, anyway, the last five years, you can run across some big areas of small little tiny fish, and it kind of drives you nuts, because you think you're on them, but, anyway, it definitely looks good, for sure.

MR. ROLLER: I just thank Ben for pointing out the importance of all that, and that's one really great thing about this AP process for me, is learning about how different the importance of these

fish are to so many different communities, but, back to the juvenile abundance, one thing I thought about was we have such a -- Spanish mackerel is such a popular fishery in our area.

It's very common in some years to see the small king mackerel mixed in, and what the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries will do is they will start getting so many recreational fishermen with undersized kings some years that they start putting out posters to try to get people to tell the difference, using the lateral line, and I hadn't see those posters put out in close to a decade, and then, last year, they were frantically putting them up at every boat shop and tackle shop and everything, and, if you wanted another index, you could probably look at the amount of tickets issued by the Marine Patrol to recreational fishermen.

More specifically, in the communities, one thing we were talking about last night, and it's going to pain me to say some of this, but given, I think, a combination of economic factors as well as the lack of accessible king mackerel for a period of time, is the tournament fishery in my area really declined. We had a couple of tournaments completely close shop, and most of them really saw a lot -- There was a lot less boats entered, and, as much as it pains me to try to catch bait on those tournament days and to go through the inlets some of those mornings, those tournaments had a huge economic impact to our communities. Seeing some of them go away or be a lot smaller is not a good thing for us, and so it's kind of nice to see them get a little bit more popular, as much as it's going to hurt my pogy catching on a Saturday morning.

MR. MCKINLEY: I wanted to talk about the smaller fish. It's the first time ever as a dealer that a guy calls me up and says he's got two boxes of kings and I have to ask him -- It used to be if they were too big, and they don't want big fish. Anything over about twenty-five pounds is just - - You know you're not going to get paid the same, but they don't want the small ones either, and so it's the first time I've ever had to ask them what size it is, because you can't move those small fish. In our area, we just couldn't move them.

Tom is right about the Marine Fisheries. They wrote most of their tickets for those small fish. I mean, they were laughing about it. Everybody had their limit of Spanish, but they were kings, and that just didn't used to happen. It didn't used to happen, and so, anyway.

MR. BOWEN: I just have one more little thing to put in there. There is a lot of reports of -- Like way offshore of St. Augustine and Jacksonville and that area, I have heard it over and over and over again of these big boats just getting ran off by just massive schools of little tiny fish, and I know I don't have proof right here to back it up, but it's a lot of the guys that we talk to, my dad talks to, up there, up in the north, but it's pretty interesting. There is areas that we don't even fish, like commercially kingfish, but these big schools of these small fish are -- We don't even see them, but these other big fishing boats do, and so, anyway, there is still other places up and down the coast that aren't even fished commercially, and I'm just throwing that out there.

MR. LAKS: I just want to add one thing to what Tom was saying about the tournaments. In south Florida, we're really starting to see them ramp back up, and the capacity of the fleet now that fishes the tournaments is incredible. I mean, the boats have probably more value in the rod holders they have on their boats than my boat is worth. I mean, there is probably seventy-five rod holders on the boat, and it's something that we need to look at, because I don't think we're getting quite the handle -- I don't know how the MRIP is intercepting them, but it could be something for a citizen science project of someone going around and checking out tournaments and just having an idea of



how many people are actually entering them and maybe some sort of catch, but it's really -- The boats that are involved now are just so impressive. They are fishing with like eighteen or nineteen lines in the water at one time.

MR. FELLER: Almost all of them are six lines per boat, unless they're billfish, and then they still limit it to nine most of the time, but the reason why the rod holders are on the boat is all those guys kite fishing, on the big Freemans and the Contender, and like I have a big one, and I've got forty rod holders on my boat, and I only use eight of them, but, with kite fishing, you've got to keep moving around, and that's the reason why you see a boat with a hundred rod holders.

When those guys are flying kites, they are moving that boat around, and they've got one or two guys that are fishing the whole time and moving the rod holders around. It's not that they have that many rods king mackerel fishing. I don't like to troll more than four or five lines, just because -- Unless it's slick calm and there is no bite. Then you can add an extra line, but, if they're biting, three or four lines, if you've got a good bite on, you don't really -- As far as tournament fishing lines, I am talking, and not like commercial fishing, and so I'm just giving my opinion on that.

MR. LAKS: Yes, and I didn't want to make the impression that they had nineteen lines in at one time, but I'm just -- The rods are ready to roll after they hook another fish and throw another rod out. The amount of lines that hit the water are just becoming incredible in the tournaments, and it just would be nice to see if maybe we're under-capturing some of the recreational catch, because nobody is checking that out.

MR. ROBINSON: Whose quota does the tournament fish go under?

MR. LAKS: The tournament fish that aren't sold go on the recreational quota, and some of the problems we could have is they could be counted against the recreational quota, and then, if they're sold, they go against the commercial quota.

MS. WIEGAND: That is an issue that the council has identified, and we're working on getting more information about how MRIP handles tournament landings.

MR. SWANN: I think Steve Donalson touched on this yesterday, but, in north Florida, after the recession, the tournaments really got whacked. I mean, the Jacksonville tournament used to cap it at 1,000 boats, and King Buster in St. Augustine capped it at 400 boats. I think the King Buster has essentially gone away now, and the Jacksonville tournament is slowly starting to come back. I think it might have had 250 boats last year, or 220, something like that, but you don't have that tournament pressure that you used to have. It may come back again, and I don't know, but, as far as kingfish being important, it's a super important recreational summertime fishery in north Florida. Everybody with a boat seaworthy enough to get out into the ocean is chasing kingfish at one point or another in June and July. One last thing is a lot of the females are all full of roe, too.

MR. LAKS: All right. Any other comments on king mackerel? Then we're going to move on to Spanish mackerel.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so, again, we're going to do almost exactly the same thing that we did for king mackerel, but just now for Spanish mackerel, and I will briefly go over the informational document again. As most of you guys know, Spanish mackerel is found in coastal

zones from southern New England all the way down to the Florida Keys and into the Gulf, primarily around a depth of sixty feet, but anywhere up to 225 feet. They spawn around one to two years of age, typically from April to September, and they are typically wintering in Florida and then moving north in the spring and summer.

Data for this fishery performance report comes from the same sources as with king mackerel. Again, you've got the Accumulated Landings System from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, which is tracking commercial landings, and the Science Center also tracks recreational data, and they do a combination of the Marine Recreational Information Program as well as the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, and so the MRIP data is provided to them in numbers, and they convert that into weight using a method that is unique to the Science Center.

MRIP puts together their landing estimates based on intercepted trips and a separate phone survey, and they use a different methodology to convert their catch into weight, and it does not include headboat landings. Then, finally, you've got ACCSP, which commercial dealers and fishermen also submit reports to.

Here, we've got landings for the commercial sector in a table, and, again, just like with king mackerel, for the 2016/2017, we did not have landings information for January and February of 2017, and so those numbers are estimated using the average from the previous three fishing years, and then it's important to remember that, from 2000 through the 2004 fishing season, the fishing season started on April 1 and went through March, and then, in years after that, the fishing season started in March and went through February.

Here, we've got landings in the Northern and Southern Zones, again, and they were combined this way to preserve confidentiality, and so the Northern Zone is the North Carolina/South Carolina line north, and then the Southern Zone is the North Carolina/South Carolina line south to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line in Florida, and so, as you can see here, the Southern Zone is accounting for most of the recreational landings. You can see that Spanish mackerel has, on occasion, exceeded the commercial ACL, but it has been down since about the 2013 year.

Here are average monthly landings, and so you can see that you are definitely peaking in the wintertime for Spanish mackerel, from about November through February and March. However, if you break it out by zone, you can see that it's the Southern Zone that you're having these wintertime landings. Then, in the Northern Zone, you are seeing landings higher in the summer.

We move on to the recreational sector, and, again, we've got this table here, and it's important to remember that, for 2016, we didn't have Science Center data for January and February of 2017, and so those are using MRIP estimates, which is a different weight conversion and doesn't include headboat numbers.

Here, we've got landings over the years for the Northern and Southern Zone, and you can see this is a bit more of an even split for recreational landings between the Northern and Southern Zones, and here we've got total recreational landings, which have been relatively stable, with maybe a slight decrease since 2009-ish. Similar to the commercial landings, you've got a peak in recreational landings in the Southern Zone in November, December, January, and February, and then you're seeing higher landings in the Northern Zone in May, June, July, and August. Here are

the directed trips for Spanish mackerel, and you can see they've been relatively stable and increasing a little bit over the last few years.

You've got your ex-vessel price for Spanish mackerel landings, and, again, it's relatively consistent over the last few years, perhaps a bit more fluctuation in the Mid-Atlantic region, and your ex-vessel value for Spanish mackerel landings.

That's what we've put together for you guys, and, again, since these fishery performance reports are something new that we're doing, we definitely recommend -- We would love recommendations from you about how we're presenting this data and if there is anything that's not needed or something that might need to be added to these information documents. If no one has any questions, we can dive right into the performance report questions we have for you guys. We will start with where the fish are available and has that changed over the last five years or so.

MR. DONALSON: Maybe I just learned something about how to catch more Spanish mackerel, but those numbers were -- I kind of raised my eyebrows. I have never caught a Spanish mackerel in November and December out of St. Augustine. I mean, we just don't fish for them then, and so that was interesting to me.

MR. LAKS: What time of year do you see them there?

MR. DONALSON: They just started showing up now. I heard some reports on the pier in St. Augustine and Jacksonville that they're catching a few, which means the beach fishermen probably are too, and that usually signals us to go out and see if they're out there. Again, in my world, Spanish mackerel is more of a fun fish. If they're out there, we'll go try to catch them, but I don't get up in the morning and go, yay, we're going to go catch Spanish. It's just, if they're there, we'll go get them.

MR. LAKS: I am going to let Steve speak to this in a second, but it's probably -- You seem like you're catching them on the way up north, as they're moving north, and they might come through your area faster or something, and I will let Steve speak to that, because he fishes those fish.

MR. ENGLISH: I can tell you exactly what's going on there. In the fall, your fall run, they come down offshore. When they leave North Carolina, they go way offshore, and they start coming back in. They will come in some around Jacksonville, but mostly it's the Cape, and they will come in offshore of the Cape, three or four or five miles, and that's where they will start back ashore, and, by the time they get to our area, they're within a mile of the beach. Then, in the spring, the reason you catch them is they go back up the beach. They don't go back up offshore. They go back up in a slow trickle up the beach, and so that's why you see more fish in the spring and, in the fall, you don't see them, because they are offshore, in the deep water.

MR. ROLLER: Everyone wants to talk about the sexy pelagic fish and reef fish, but, if it wasn't for Spanish mackerel, the North Carolina for-hire fleet would not exist. I mean, they are probably the most important summer fishery for our fleet. A lot of the availability of those fish, particularly I think in relation to our catches, has a lot to do with weather conditions, and that can specifically be attributed to how much rain we've had.

What we normally see is a wave of fish come in May and June, when the water tends to be -- We tend to have clearer, cleaner water close to the beach, and, if we have a lot of rain or a lot of wind in June, it gets muddied up, or the salinity drops, and the fishing won't typically be as good in July, even though there's a lot of people there in town, with the peak of our tourist season.

Now, once you start getting in August and September, as long as we don't have a lot of tropical events, that's when we'll have a huge abundance of these fish as well, and so we're also starting to see some effort shifts for the recreational to the larger fish, but I will save that for one of the following questions.

MR. LAKS: Speaking for the charter fleet off of south Florida, it's probably more of a staple of the inshore boats that fish those fish. I think your offshore boats that are federally permitted opportunistically fish those fish, and so, in south Florida, it could be blowing forty out of the southwest, but you can get somebody on the beach and still get a trip out and catch them some fish, but, as far as your federally-permitted boats down south, I wouldn't say it's a staple of the charter fishery.

MR. MCKINLEY: I will second everything that Tom said. I know, when I was young -- I grew up on the end of the pier, and we used to kill the Spanish, and that don't happen anymore. The piers aren't catching them in North Carolina. They are just not catching them, and I think that may be that -- One is a lot of people now don't know how to fish. They don't, because there is not enough fish out there to catch, and so they don't know how to do it, but I think the beach renourishment that was spoken of, I think that has something to do with it. They are not right on the beach anymore. They used to be on the beach.

There is still not as many offshore. We used to see schools and schools and schools of them, and we don't see that like we used to. I mean, I didn't ever target them. I do know the net fisheries and stuff -- I don't know that much about it. I'm not a net fisherman, but they still catch them some, but it's not like it used to be, but I think that they are coming back a little bit, it seems like, but, anyway, it's definitely that they're not in the same place they used to be.

MR. LAKS: Wes, I'm just going to speak to Randy's point real quick, and then I will go to you. Randy's point made me think of something. In south Florida, especially around Palm Beach, when I was a kid, it was an inshore fishery. It was in the Intercoastal. You would have the causeway down there, Rivera Beach, that people would line up, and it was a staple of people for their spring run of mackerel and through the winter months. You would have people lined up, and you would be elbow to elbow on the bridges, people fighting for spots. It was a source of food for a lot of people, and those fish don't seem to come in to that area anymore, and I'm not too sure about down south of there, but I don't think they get the fish on the beach and on the piers like they used to either, from Palm Beach to Miami.

MR. BLOW: I am not a Spanish mackerel fisherman, and so I don't really know a whole lot about that, but I can tell you that the charter fleet in Virginia is very dependent upon Spanish mackerel. I've got a friend that is a mate on one of the boats, or a couple of the boats, and the families that come down to Virginia Beach in the summertime that want to go offshore fishing, when the boats pull out of Rudee Inlet and go 200 yards and take right and they go catch fifty or a hundred Spanish mackerel, it's very important to the charter fleet there.

MR. DOUGHTIE: Down in our area, a lot of your places, when you go off the coast, it drops off, and we have kind of a plateau that is pretty shallow for a long way, and I grew up Spanish mackerel fishing with my dad, and you could literally walk on the schools of Spanish, and, for years -- I mean, I don't target them that much anymore.

I do more light tackle and live bait, but the charter fleets -- There is so much hardware going through the water that I'm surprised that they just don't knock out a Spanish mackerel. They rely on it a lot, because they're running two or three trips a day, and you don't have to go that far, but what I have been noticing is I'm seeing a lot of small fish in our estuaries, which is kind of cool, but then, where I fish with live bait, it's about two miles off the beach, and I've been seeing -- I mean, these are some monster Spanish that I have been catching. I mean, just the biggest ones that I have ever seen in my life, and it seems to be the last four or five years. It's maybe not quite as many, but they are just big fish.

MS. WIEGAND: Again, we've already touched on some of this, but does anyone else have anything to add about how the size of the fish has changed?

MR. ENGLISH: I will speak to that, and, really, all these questions, you can just about speak to all of them at one time, but it goes along with everything. Back in the days of the roller rigs, of course, they devastated the mackerel populations, and we know that all happened. I mean, they were catching ten-million a year with no problem. We saw that that was wrong, and we've gone through that, and we've rebuilt stocks.

When we did the net ban in Florida, all our effort shifted to Spanish mackerel, because that was what was available to us, either hook-and-line or cast net. Right after it, and it took us four or five years to get the cast nets tuned in and figured out how to use them and all that, and, for six or seven or eight years, I would say, we could go down there in the Hole and pull to the south end of the fish and shut the boat off and drift through them for half a mile or three-quarters of a mile and never crank the motor up and just throw the net. Every time you throw the net, you would fill it up.

You could sit there, and, by noon or one o'clock, we would have 2,000 to 3,000 pounds on the boat, and we had twenty boats doing it, fifteen or twenty boats doing it, and there was a hook-and-line fleet of fifteen or twenty boats off to another side catching the bigger fish, and the fleet has grown and grown, and, with that, you can see that it totally changes the habits of the mackerel. It totally changes them.

You can no longer do what you did. We went from twenty boats down there, or sometimes there would be seventy-five boats out there trying to throw cast nets at the mackerel, and they're all running wide open, and they're bogging through the fish, and the fish won't stay put. When you get on the fish, you've got about thirty minutes to catch them before they run them outside the reef. They're gone.

When you do get down there on a short day, if it's not the sharks, it's the porpoises in the mackerel, and, when you throw the cast net, the porpoises will come to you, and they will eat your mackerel out of your net. If it's not that, then you will go down there some days and you will throw the net and you won't get but a piece of it back, because the sharks will eat it, and so everything has changed. That Hole has completely changed. The sharks and porpoises have filled into it, and

there is three-times or four-times the boats, and the pressure got so hard on them that the fish act totally different than they did when we first started.

With that, the fish that we're catching are smaller, because the smaller fish are not as smart as the bigger fish, and it's just that simple. With that, everybody went to smaller and smaller meshes to catch them, and they're catching smaller fish on the hook-and-line, a lot of days, and the big fish just won't stay put for that pressure. They will go, and so that's something that I think that I am going to speak to later, is the size of the fleet and the amount of pressure that they have on them, but all of that changes your fishery habits is what I'm trying to say, and it changes the size of the fish you're catching, and it's all combined. It's not that they're not there, but it's that they're somewhere else out of that mess.

MR. LAKS: To speak to some of the size of the fish too, down off of Palm Beach County, we used to have like a little weird phenomenon in the winter where we would get a bunch of jumbo Spanish mackerel that would sit off the edge of the reef in 110 foot of water. In some years, there would be a few of them, and other years it was just a phenomenal fishery. You would catch forty five to seven-pound mackerel on a charter.

I don't know if it's the sharks, or maybe even the goliath grouper, but they don't seem to -- They don't seem to sit there like they used to. I haven't really encountered them in probably close to ten years now. I don't see those large fish show up at all anymore. Like I said, it's probably the mass of sharks there, but it is something that doesn't occur anymore.

MS. WIEGAND: Does anybody want to add anything else to talk about effort shifts to and from Spanish mackerel?

MR. ROLLER: Specifically, when it comes to the larger fish, I want to kind of go on to what Collins was talking about, these large fish that we catch nearshore. Over the last decade, particularly the for-hire guys, and now a lot of just regular recreational guys, since there was a lot less king mackerel nearshore, have started targeting these large, four to nine-pound, Spanish mackerel in the nearshore reefs.

It's something that I do all the time using light tackle and live bait. When that water gets over eighty degrees, they get very, very selective, and you need to use very good baits and as very light wire and leaders as you can do, but the amount of pressure on them is getting quite extensive, and I don't know a ton about Spanish mackerel life history, but I will say they are -- I'm not going to say they're getting harder to catch, but there is less wrecks where you can reliably catch a bunch of them, because there seems to be a lot more pressure on these big fish.

We have a tournament in my area, and it's a Spanish mackerel charity tournament, and it's extraordinarily popular. Unless the weather is really bad, if you can't top seven pounds, you're not going to be in the top five, and so the fish are hard to catch. There's a lot more skill out there, particularly in those local fisheries.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Is the twelve-inch minimum size limit for the commercial and recreational sectors appropriate? If not, why?

MR. ENGLISH: The twelve-inch minimum size is the proper size for what we do, and here's the reason I say that. We have a bait mackerel fishery for the charter fleets that catch the marlin and stuff with them, and they want a twelve to fourteen-inch fish for their bait. That's what they want. It's not a huge fishery, but it's a necessary fishery, and I would say there is probably -- Just judging from all I know about it, 20,000 pounds a year is taken out of it for that, if that, or maybe 10,000, 10,000 to 20,000.

The commercial sector, they don't want fish that are twelve inches. They want a sixteen-inch fish. They want a pound fish, which is a fifteen to sixteen-inch fish, depending on how fat he is, and so the commercial sector really -- For the food market, they want a fifteen or sixteen-inch fish, and, the smaller ones, they really don't even want those for the market.

A gear change is what I am going to lead up to. I'm going to be talking about a gear change on it and what we need and why we need specific gears in the commercial industry to catch the proper-sized fish, and that will be later on in the discussion, but, yes, the twelve-inch minimum, we have to have that, because we have to have it for the bait fishery, but, as far as the food fishery, we could go to fifteen inches and be fine, but we can control that with gear and don't really need to do that.

MR. LAKS: I think probably for the recreational fishery, being that there is such a big pier fishery up and down the coast for them, I would say the twelve-inch is probably something that allows people to harvest some fish and take them home. I don't think anybody really goes out and targets them, but I think it's probably the right size.

MR. ROLLER: I agree with the twelve-inch size. I mean, I don't think anybody goes out trying to catch fish smaller than that. The only thing I will add is, and I hear this from some of the charter boats in my area, is a lot of the Spanish mackerel fishery is done with Clark spoons and planers and heavy tackle, and no one wants to catch eight-inch Spanish mackerel or ten-inch Spanish mackerel, and sometimes you catch all eighteen-inch ones, and sometimes you catch fish in the twenty to twenty-two inches, but, if you catch a ten-inch fish, its head is ripped off and it's dead, and so you hear a lot of people just saying that I can't believe that I had to throw back ten dead Spanish mackerel today. I am not advocating for lowering the size limit, because I don't think that will do anything, but I just wanted to add that that's a complaint I often hear, and it does really kind of stink to throw back those fish that your tackle kills.

MR. SWANN: In northeast Florida, it's mostly a spring fishery, about this time of year, April and May, and most of the fish are bigger than twelve inches. You don't see many fish smaller than twelve.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Are the current ACLs for each sector appropriate? It looks like, currently, recreational gets 45 percent and commercial gets 55 percent for Spanish mackerel.

MR. ENGLISH: I mean, they appear to be good. We have certainly not had a problem with it. From what I saw in there though, the recreational sector doesn't nearly catch what they could, and so, if that wasn't something that wasn't such an argument amongst folks, worrying about swapping from this sector to that sector when necessary, that would be something that I would think should be considered. You might as well harvest the resource and use it, utilize it, as best you can, but, the commercial side, I will say this. I don't believe there is enough market there to really add that much to it, and I'm hoping the market improves, to where we do get more demand for it, but our

market pretty much is in demand for what we catch now, and so we're pretty close on what we need to be doing.

MR. SWANN: Steve English, a question for you. Do the prices stay pretty steady for you guys all winter?

MR. ENGLISH: No, this has been a horrible price year. We either have a glut or none. If you hardly catch them, then, yes, the price will go up, but, the minute you get the glut, the price is down in the dumps, and they went to fifty-cents this year, and fifty-cents is just ridiculous.

The price in North Carolina during the summertime averaged \$1.50 to \$2.00 a pound for medium mackerel, and that's what they averaged. In the wintertime, in Florida, if we hit a dollar, we're happy, and we go from there. We will average seventy-five to eighty-cents a pound through the winter, where North Carolina will average probably \$1.50 throughout the year for the same fish, and our fish are a lot better in the wintertime down there. They have the cold water in North Carolina and not the hot summer water.

MR. MCKINLEY: I will back him up on that. I know our guys -- I mean, \$1.50 is max. Most of the guys that are doing it off of our beaches are young guys that are doing it, and they're not really making much money, but it seems like any time they get any amount at all that it goes to a dollar a pound, and, like you said, they're a soft fish, and it's not a marketable fish. You don't ship them much, and, commercially, it's just not a very strong fish.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. What about the quota between each of the zones? It looks like, right now, the Northern Zone has got about 20 percent of the quota and the Southern Zone gets about 80 percent of the commercial quota.

MR. ENGLISH: I would like to talk on that one, because I am familiar with both. I fish North Carolina and I fish south Florida, and so I know both. North Carolina thinks they want more of the quota, and the reason being is the effort is increasing in North Carolina tremendously. As they take away their other fisheries, and their flounder fishery is under fire right now, and so the fishermen are moving from flounder to Spanish mackerel to crabbing, and bait is tough to get, and it's expensive. A lot of the crabbers are moving to Spanish mackerel, and they have a fall fishery for Spanish mackerel that is just -- Everybody gets into it.

Of course, when we set this up, we went on the landings at the time we set these quotas up, and North Carolina didn't catch them then like they do now. They didn't target them like they do now, and we did. We always did target them, and so North Carolina, this year, met their quota and shut down early, and we actually gave them some of our fish, and then we almost shut down early. We were right on the point of shutting down early, and so, yes, there's some things we need to do and some changes we need to make to correct this.

Changing the amount of fish that they get at this time is probably not necessary. I am sure the folks in the Carolinas would differ with that, and, if more fish become available, then North Carolina should get some more fish, but I think there is other things we can do to mitigate the problems with gear and other things we can do, and I will speak to that later on.



MR. ROLLER: Just as a North Carolina fisherman, I can reiterate Steve's comments there. I don't necessarily agree with some of the people I hear from, but, over the last several years, guys in the for-hire sector, as well as the commercial sector, are complaining about the shifting of effort to that fishery, and so everyone has got a different reason to complain about it, but it's definitely a very real thing, and so we see a lot more people out there targeting them.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Are there any new management measures that the council should consider?

MR. LAKS: Steve, did you want to speak to some new management measures the council should consider?

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, and is this where we ought to go into what we're looking at?

MR. LAKS: You can bring it up now, and we can flesh it out later.

MR. ENGLISH: Okay. Yes, there are some new management measures, quite a few, that we need to consider. I brought this up before, and I will keep bringing it up, but, first of all, we have a quota system on these fish, and so, anytime you have a quota system, there is a limited amount to be caught, and there should be a limited number of people that are allowed to catch them, and I am speaking from the commercial sector now and not the recreational sector.

In the commercial sector, of course, you're trying to make a living at it, and so, anytime you have a limited resource, it seems like you would have a limited amount of fishermen to also catch that resource so that everybody makes a good living, and so I believe that we should do a limited entry on the permits for Spanish mackerel. I think that's one of the main things that we should do. That's one of the first things we should do. We should get control of it.

Not only would it limit the number of boats out there, which I explained earlier that it devastated our Hole down there, and North Carolina is starting to experience some of the same stuff with the gillnet fishermen, but it would professionalize it, and you would have people that were supposed to be in it, number one, and it would control the numbers of people in it so that it doesn't get out of hand. We should head it off before we have a crisis and have to do something about it, like we have in all the other fisheries, where we went to IFQs and different things.

That's one of the first things that I think we should do. Also, I think we should -- From the commercial sector, we should do a gillnet boat permit, once we do the limited entry, and I think that's a separate sector on itself, and I think that's a necessary measure, in North Carolina, in particular. In Florida, the way our system works is we do -- Our quota, when we reach a certain point, we go to 1,500-pound trip limits. Then when the quota is caught, we go to 500-pound trip limits for the remainder of the year.

In North Carolina, we should do the same thing with them. What they should do is, even at some point, go to a 1,000-pound or 1,500-pound trip limit, just so you can get an accurate count of it towards the end, 90 percent or something. Then, once our quota is met, allow them to catch that 500 pounds after their quota is met, just like Florida does, because, this year, where they shut down, it's at the end of the season this year, and what it is is the other guys go out and they shark fish and they king fish, with their nets and all, and they catch the Spanish mackerel incidentally,

and, when the quota is closed, they have to throw them overboard. They can't sell them, and they will catch 400 or 500 pounds, and they are usually the big fish, and so they need a 500-pound allowance after the quota is met also, and I think that will cure a lot of North Carolina's problems.

MR. LAKS: Steve, let me ask you a question. I know that the states don't always like to go along with having to get a permit to purchase the fish, and that's correct?

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, that's correct. In North Carolina, they don't. Florida almost always does, and North Carolina doesn't.

MR. LAKS: Would you suggest then that going to a limited entry on the federal permits that federal dealers only be able to purchase from federally-permitted boats?

MR. ENGLISH: No, I wouldn't go for that, and the reason I say that is because, right now, in the State of Florida, you don't have to have the federal permit in the State of Florida to land Spanish mackerel, which, to me, seems like a nightmare to count the fish, number one. If we went to a limited entry permit for Spanish mackerel in Florida, I believe Florida would then go along with it. Unless you have a mackerel permit, you can't commercially land Spanish mackerel, and so that would help in that manner, but I don't see why you would have to have a federally-licensed dealer. You should be able to sell to any fish dealer.

MR. LAKS: Well, that's kind of what I am getting at, if a state wouldn't comply with that, if you were required to sell to a federal dealer, which moved most of the Spanish mackerel.

MR. ENGLISH: I don't know. I would have to thank about that one, but I don't believe that would be -- Probably, in North Carolina, Randy could probably answer that more, because I don't know if he's a federal dealer.

MR. MCKINLEY: Are they sold on the local market?

MR. ENGLISH: They are sold locally, but they go north. Most of our fish go to New York and Boston and Canada and all those places.

MR. MCKINLEY: Right, which is what ours do too, because there's just not a big demand in North Carolina for them.

MR. ENGLISH: Right, and so do North Carolina fish. They go north also, the commercial sector.

MR. MCKINLEY: I am a federal dealer, but it's just for the snapper grouper and stuff, but I don't think that would make any difference whether or not it was a federal dealer or not.

MR. LAKS: Steve, what I'm getting at is, if the states don't comply, or if they don't want to follow the recommendation of having a federal permit, and these fish are being sold mostly, especially in south Florida where you fish, to federal dealers, if Florida, for example, didn't want to go along and require it, you're still not going to change any of your effort, because no one needs a permit then to sell, and so most of the fish that were coming out of the Hole were in state waters, and they wouldn't be required to have a permit, and so making the permit limited entry wouldn't solve some of the effort problem you are looking to solve.

MR. ENGLISH: Right now it wouldn't, but, until we do limited entry, Florida won't -- See, this is the whole point of it. Until we do a limited entry permit, Florida won't require that permit to catch mackerel, but, with every other limited entry permit we have, the king mackerel, snapper grouper, all of it, anything that is limited entry that requires a federal permit, that requires one to catch the fish, Florida goes along with that, and you can only land them with that permit.

Right now, if I go fishing in Florida, and if I go down in the hole, I have a federal permit for Spanish mackerel. When I come to the dock, I have to fill out a logbook, logbook report, the whole bit, if I'm on that boat. If I get in my little boat and go down there to the Hole and catch those same fish in my little boat and I come to the dock and I go, no, this isn't my federally-permitted boat, and I don't have to fill out logbooks or anything else, and I just sell the fish.

What that does is, when we get our run down in south Florida, in the wintertime, everybody and their brother can get in their little boat and go out there and catch the fish, which drives our price down, which overproduces out of the hole, which puts a lot more pressure on the fish and makes them leave, because there are so many more boats, and so we would eliminate some of these problems, where we have the people that just come out of the woodwork when the glut is there and drive the price down, and then they go back to their jobs, and the fishermen are left holding the bag with low prices and the fish not acting like they should. That is why my idea is, if you've got a limited amount of fish that you're allowed to catch, you should have a limit on the number of permits to catch those fish.

MR. LAKS: I understand, and so you would be requesting the states to follow along with the federal --

MR. ENGLISH: Correct. Once the federal -- If the federal permit went to unlimited from all past issues, Florida would definitely, I believe, go along with it, and I believe at some point that North Carolina would, I really do. I think North Carolina is slowly coming around to accepting the federal permits on their stuff, although you can still catch sharks in North Carolina, in state waters, without a federal permit and land them.

MR. LAKS: King mackerel, too.

MR. ENGLISH: King mackerel, too.

MR. LAKS: So you're saying let the council take the lead on this?

MR. ENGLISH: Correct.

MS. WIEGAND: We have mostly addressed this question, but I just wanted to double-check. Are there any existing management measures that should be changed? Is there anything else that anyone wants to add? All right. Have you guys noticed any unique effects of environmental conditions on Spanish mackerel? Again, I know we've talked about some of this, but I just wanted to make sure that no one wants to add anything before moving on. All right. Are there changes in timing or length of Spanish mackerel spawning?

MR. ENGLISH: I know, in Florida, we don't see a lot of the spawning fish. It seems like, that time of year, they're in North Carolina and Virginia, and they go into the sounds, and that's where you will catch a fish full of eggs, and it's usually early in the year, May or June, and that may be why your fish leave in July, and it's a fact. You get a May and June with more fish, and July seems to fall out, for some reason. Then, in August, they will start picking back up. In September, you've got your glut and they leave.

That's the way it is in North Carolina, commercially, and it sounds like it's the same way in the recreational sector, but that's where most of your spawning takes place, from what I see, and it's been consistent. Once again, that's a reason to get a hold on the number of boats that are doing it, because we have a driftnet fishery in the sounds in North Carolina, and, in past years, up until the last I would say five years, there was maybe ten boats in it, eight to ten boats, and now there is twenty-five or thirty, and, of course, a lot of them are the bigger boats, and so, instead of 2,000 yards of net, they're running 4,000 yards of net, and so you start expanding and expanding, and that's where you start having your problems, and so that's why I said limited entry and get a hold on it now and then let's get the proper things in place before we have a crisis.

MR. ROLLER: Just to speak to the spawning, those large fish that we target in the summer months, those are big, egg-laying females, and so we see them, and that's a fishery that goes on all summer, but particularly in June.

MR. DOUGHTIE: I talked about the big fish that we're seeing down there, and most all of those are full of eggs, and that's usually May and June and into the first part of July.

MR. OLSEN: Like I said about the king mackerel, the Spanish, they were, for five years, completely gone. Last year, in Charleston Harbor, it's the first time they've come back in the harbor, in the inlets, on the beach. They're real prevalent. I don't like to fish for them on charters, because they're too messy, but we did see a lot of abundance on them coming back into the harbor, and that's the first time since 2010 or 2011 that I saw them come back, and it almost coincides with the king mackerel.

I mentioned that, last year, I did catch a couple of really nice kings in tournaments, right on the beach, our beach, and I would say one to three miles on the beach, out of Charleston, because it's completely different once you go up past Georgetown, but there's a lot of them in the inlets and a lot more around the artificial reefs that are two or three miles offshore.

MR. HARTIG: The only thing that I would add about the spawning aspect of Spanish is the fish are sold in the round, and it's not like we know exactly what's happening with the gonads of Spanish in the commercial industry, because we never gut the fish. We never get to see what's happening, and so, occasionally, in the springtime, when I do eat a fish, I see the roe of a late-returning fish, and we see some fish in spawning condition even where we are, but the bulk of the fish have already moved to the north. I mean, you guys, the ones that actually clean the fish, are the ones that see what's happening with the gonads, because we don't.

MR. DOUGHTIE: One other thing I have noticed in the last few years is the food source for those Spanish is -- I've been seeing a lot more shiners coming up to the chum bags, I mean just masses of them, to where I used to not see that much, and you were talking about how messy they are

when you catch them, and they are barfing all over you, but I am just seeing a lot more of their food source which they seem to target.

MS. WIEGAND: Did anyone want to add anything else about changes in abundance or changes in recruitment or where the small fish are, any additional information?

MR. ROLLER: The last couple of years, the trolling fleet has caught a lot of undersized Spanish, really small fish, mixed in, particularly the last year.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. How has price and demand for Spanish mackerel changed?

MR. LAKS: What do you think, Steve?

MR. ENGLISH: The chart pretty much shows it, too. That caught my eye, when you had the chart up on the prices of the mackerel, and our prices were -- In the gillnet days, they were pretty stable at thirty or thirty-five or forty-cents. Then, once we did the net ban and we went to catching them hook-and-line and cast net and all of that, our prices did go up, and they went up quite a bit. In Florida, we were probably averaging a buck-and-a-quarter or a buck-fifty a pound sometimes for them.

I noticed, on your chart, over the last three years, three to four years, in Florida, and Florida and North Carolina are pretty stable, but our prices have steadily went down over the last three or four years, and our effort has increased over the last three to four years at just about the same rate that it has gone down, and so, to me, I mean, you can see how it coincides with one another. The more competition, the less price you're going to get, and it's just that simple. Once again, the chart pretty much shows it. The prices have decreased somewhat in the last four to five years.

MR. LAKS: Does anyone else want to comment on the price?

MS. WIEGAND: All right. What about demand for charter and headboat trips? I know you guys mentioned that it's not necessarily a species that is directly targeted.

MR. ROLLER: This is kind of a complicated question to answer. The demand is much greater, but that is because the economy is better. It's not so much that people want to target Spanish mackerel, but it's that people want to do a half-day trip that they can take six people on and maybe have an air-conditioned cabin. When the economy is better, there is a lot more people looking for those sort of family trips.

I doubt there is many people that really -- There are plenty of people, I'm sure, who just like the idea of catching Spanish mackerel, but there is more people that like the idea of those trips. I mean, those trips are the backbone of a lot of our charter trips in southern North Carolina, like I mentioned earlier. In my area in particular, they really hold -- A lot of guys don't want to admit this, but, our offshore fleet, they are running more Spanish mackerel trips during the dog days of summer than they are offshore trips during a lot of the year, and they're making a lot of money doing that, and I know guys now, in my area, that are buying second thirty-five-foot boats, and they are running two really nice little family six-pack trips, and it's becoming a bigger thing, which goes down into the infrastructure.

The place where I have a boat slip, there is now a lot more charter boats down there, and most of them refer to themselves as mackerel and bluefish boats, which kinds of gets into my thing with these fisheries. You know, they might be messy, and they might not be the best to eat, but they are so underappreciated, and that goes for the same with bluefish. We may not want to admit that it's a lot of what we do or a lot of what our fleet does, but they are so much more important than we give them credit for.

MR. LAKS: In an instant-gratitude world, they want an instant-gratitude fish.

MR. DONALSON: I am wondering if, to your point, and I live in a vacation area. People come from all over the world to St. Augustine for vacation, and I don't think they care if they're catching a Spanish mackerel or a whiting or a kingfish or a cobia. They just want to go out and catch fish. I am wondering if some of this isn't kind of just coincidental that, yes, people are targeting Spanish from a charter captain perspective, but I am wondering if the people that are going there are wanting to catch Spanish mackerel, versus just wanting to catch a fish.

MR. MCKINLEY: I agree with you on that. My feeling is that most people, if they had a fish given to them, they wouldn't know what to do with it. I mean, people just don't eat fish anymore if it's not tilapia or something that they are used to buying at the grocery store, and so I think the fish is just the second part of it. Just going out the inlet and seeing the views and seeing the turtles and dolphins and stuff like that, that's all they care about, and it's not like it was thirty years ago when people wanted meat when they went out there. They don't care about that anymore. Like I said, they wouldn't know what to do with it if you gave it to them.

MR. ROLLER: A lot of that has to do with availability, right? Families want to go for these trips, and maybe if the spot and croaker would be more available, which they are not anymore, which are really important pan fish, and so, since they're not as available, people are going to shift to what's out there, and what I think is really funny though, and this becomes a sticking point with a lot of my customers, is they say, if we fish with you, can we just keep two of them, and the last guy gave me ninety, and I didn't know what to do with eighty-eight of them.

MR. DONALSON: Again, I guess that's my point. Most people vacation when school is out, in June or July or August or whatever, and that just so happens to be that there is an abundance of Spanish mackerel during that time of year, I guess is my point, and so it's kind of like the stars all align when that fishery is good.

MR. ENGLISH: I will say one thing to that, and I am speaking to North Carolina, because that's where -- In North Carolina, that's where most of the fishing for mackerel goes on, the charter fishing and the stuff, but the good thing about it is -- The nice thing I've seen about it up there is North Carolina is spread out. The commercial sector seems to be out in the middle of the sound and then further down the beach, and it seems like most of the targeting mackerel from the recreational sector is around the inlets, pretty close to the inlets, and the good thing about that is there a lot of tide there, and so the fishermen may fish the inlets, because they don't -- The commercial sector kind of leaves that area alone, and they go off in the other areas, where the tide is not so bad, and so you don't have the interaction between the two and the friction that could be caused on account of it, and I think that's a good thing, and I think that it will stay that way up there, and I appreciate that aspect of it.

MR. LAKS: From my perspective in south Florida, and maybe, Steve, you can help me out with this, because I don't really do too many mackerel trips, but, from what I understand, it's becoming more of a specialized fishery, a lot of fly fishermen going in there, and maybe charter boats, if it's bad offshore, hitting on the way in to catch something.

MR. ENGLISH: Correct. In Florida, you have your people come out on the weekend, a few, and catch them, and then, like you said, fly fishing is the main thing. That's kind of a specialized thing, and, of course, it's a little tougher down there, because our fish aren't around the inlet. Our fish concentrate either on the reef, towards Fort Pierce, or on the reef of what we call the Hole in Salerno. In Salerno, it's, I would say, a two-mile area, and the fish usually are in one part of it or the other, and so now you've got the commercial, the cast netters, the hook-and-liners, and the recreational sector all bumping gums, basically, with one another, and so we see more friction there, and that's just, once again, a reason to get a hold of it.

MR. ROLLER: I agree with everything Steve said. I have heard of some conflict more down in the Wilmington area, but I can't speak to that, but I am kind of embarrassed that I didn't mention the more specialized fishery, because that is a lot of what I do, whether it's targeting the really big fish or it's fly fishing or light tackle for Spanish mackerel, and that's a big deal in our area as well, and that's growing.

This is just a little tag line that I always throw in, but what I add is that Spanish mackerel, like fish like false albacore or bonito, their importance to recreational is in their abundance. It's because there's a lot of them, and so I think that's very important with these fisheries, is that we retain abundance in these stocks.

MR. HOWARD: Kind of like Steve Donalson was saying, I'm from Savannah, and I'm from a high tourist traffic area, and, as much as I hate fishing for them, Spanish mackerel are kind of the backbone of our four and five-hour family trips. You've really got to fish for what's there, and, in the dead of the summer, you can go out and load the boat with Spanish mackerel and catch a bigtooth barracuda and the people from Illinois are loving it. It's a big fish with big teeth, and it jumps out of the water and goes nuts. For us, we kind of scoff at it, I guess, or at least I do, but it makes our summertime trips.

MR. LAKS: I think, in south Florida, the reason we don't really target them is because, like Robert was saying -- He was saying that he was catching kingfish on the beach, one to three miles. Three miles for us is deep-dropping, and so you have people that have the lure of the Gulf Stream and deep-sea fishing, and that's what's in their minds, and it's hard to sell them on catching some Spanish mackerel.

MR. MCKINLEY: I think that, also, in the recession, a lot of people got rid of their bigger boats and stuff, and you go out there now and you don't see a lot of boats in that ten to thirty-mile range, because, when they went to one gag on the snapper grouper, for our guys, if you don't go past thirty miles, you don't catch the red or scamps, and so there is no reason for those people to have those boats, and so they're getting smaller boats, and they're staying around the inlets and catching -- They are going after Spanish. There is no reason to go offshore, because there is nothing really for them to catch.

DR. ELKINS: I will just confirm what Tom said about fly fishing for Spanish. There is a Cape Lookout fly fishing club that is very active, and, in the summer -- Of course, in the fall, they are doing albacore, which is their favorite, but these guys get up at dark-thirty and they're out there, and I'm passing them. When they're coming in, I'm going out, and they are very avid fishermen, and many are affluent. I happen to be a member of that club, although I don't think they would claim me, based on my ability, but it is important to that area and to that club. I don't know how many members they have, but probably fifty or sixty or so.

MR. ROLLER: That is true. It is important to that area, but it's also important to a lot of people on the southern coast, and it's important to a lot of my clients from around the country. You get a lot of these yuppies who want to fly fish, and they say that they want to catch a red drum, and I watch them cast for two minutes, and then I say, no, we're going to go fish for bluefish and Spanish mackerel, buddy.

MR. LAKS: So you're saying it's sort of like my customers, where, if I was hunting, they probably would shoot themselves?

MR. ROLLER: Yes.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. What communities are dependent upon the Spanish mackerel fishery, specific towns or communities within communities, like we were talking about yesterday?

MR. ENGLISH: On the commercial end of it, I can tell you that Port Salerno is -- That's how we live. Our docks survive on the Spanish mackerel. We probably land a little over a million pounds a year of fish on our dock, and I will bet that 85 percent of it is Spanish mackerel, and that's the only reason that we still have a commercial dock system in south Florida. In fact, we're one of the last places that are still there, and we have three buyers that come across our docks and buy fish across the dock, and, without mackerel, we wouldn't be there. I mean, that is our total survival, and so Port Salerno, without mackerel, a fishery won't exist in Port Salerno without mackerel.

MR. DONALSON: Just the same question as came up yesterday. Just, out of curiosity, where do those fish go? Like I don't see Spanish mackerel at Publix fish market.

MR. ENGLISH: Mostly to the northern market. They go to New York, and New York is a big buyer, and Boston, and the Canadians buy a lot of them. In the past, during the big glut, the roller rig era and all, Morrison's Cafeteria, and it's out of business now, but they bought tons and tons of them. That was their staple fish that they sold in the cafeteria, and that went by the wayside, but that's the best I know of the markets, and Ben could probably tell you a little more. He might know more than I do.

MR. ROLLER: Just to reiterate again how important these are to the fishing community of my area, Morehead City and Beaufort. A lot of -- We've got a big offshore fleet there. That's where the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament is, and no one is going to tell you that Spanish mackerel are the most important, but, our offshore fleet, they went through some really hard times during this recession, and there were a lot less boats leaving the dock. That's not so much the case now, and that has a lot to do with this summertime half-day Spanish mackerel fishing. It is so incredibly important, and a lot of people won't admit to that, and maybe it's because we scoff at fishing for



them, which I agree with, but I just want to reiterate how unbelievably important it is to our community.

MR. BLOW: I would just reiterate what Tom said for Virginia. I know the mates that I know hate fishing for them, but I guarantee you that the owners of the boats that have their boats booked up with two half-day trips most of the time fishing for Spanish mackerel are very happy that they're working, and so it's very important. It's not a sexy fish to catch, but the families and stuff coming from the Midwest that want to go out deep-sea fishing, supposedly, and get on a big boat and go right out of the inlet and catch a lot of fish, they're happy with it, and so it's very important to the charter boats.

MR. LAKS: I would just like to double-down on what Steve said. That fishery is like a moat around the infrastructure. I mean, it's the one place -- I don't think we can convey to people who aren't familiar with the area the amount of development and money that comes into it, and we have watched all of our other fish houses and infrastructure go out of business, and, without that fishery there to anchor them, it would be pretty devastating.

MR. GORHAM: Particularly at Hatteras and Oregon Inlet, it's a big fishery. We have boats up here that run three trips a day and target bluefish and Spanish mackerel, and I see more and more of -- There is definitely an effort shift and abundance change from my knowledge, and we know that through our spoon sales. That Greenville, middle Chesapeake Bay, lower Maryland, and that was, last year, our second-largest market, and I know a lot of the charters have started to integrate Spanish trolling as part of their trip package, and so I would assume that we would see landings increase with the shift of effort.

MS. WIEGAND: How have changes in infrastructure affected fishing opportunities for Spanish mackerel?

MR. ENGLISH: Our fleet has turned into basically a trailer fleet. That's the bulk of our fleet, trailer boats. The bigger boats seem to target more kingfish. I mean, we do have a few that fish the mackerel, Ben Hartig for one, and he's not a trailer boat, but it seems like the bulk of the fleet is a trailer-boat fishery. They had to adapt, because we lost all of our fish houses on the water, and so our fish houses are off the water now. They might be three miles from the water, and so you have to trailer to the fish house to unload and everything, and, of course, at our docks, we do have unloading, but sometimes they're at a different inlet, but that's one thing that has changed with us. We have more of a trailer-boat fleet than we do in-water fleet for mackerel.

MR. LAKS: I just want to speak to that, about the trailer fleet. It's happening in the charter industry too, and dockage is just becoming crazy, and I am sure Steve can tell you that there is probably not enough trailer ramps and facilities, and you have conflicts between the user groups, not only on the water, but the boat ramp conflicts can be interesting as well.

MR. HARTIG: Steve, can you speak to the abundance of Gulf fishermen that come at certain times of year that fish in the Hole and fish in Vero Cove for Spanish? The reason I bring this up is because we're always getting beat up on the east coast because our fishermen fish king mackerel on their coast, and, over the years, we've had a significant number of those fishermen come over here.

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, and Ben is right about that, and this year in particular. This year, they had a horrible mullet run on the west coast. It was not what it normally is, and those fishermen are over there are -- They had to survive, and we saw a significant increase in the boats that came from the west coast to the east coast to get into the Spanish mackerel fishery.

We actually had -- In the last two or three years, there has been two to three extra boats that came to the Cape up there in the offshore gillnet fishery, which normally is about fifteen to twenty boats, and, in speaking with them, they said there will probably four or five more from there next year over here, and so that's something that -- We fish coast to coast, and we fish the west coast, and they fish the east coast, and that's just the way it is. Once again, that's where you need the permits to do it. If you've got the permit, you're welcome to fish, but we need to get a handle on it.

MR. MCKINLEY: I just wanted to add about the hot water and stuff. You've got have a lot of ice to fish, and, with the fish houses just disappearing and stuff, some of the fish houses don't want to give this guy a bunch of ice, because they don't have enough for everybody, and it's become a fight, and it's going to get worse and worse. We're at the point, as I said yesterday, that we're one fish house from closing that there's going to be a lot of people really in a mess. There's just not enough ice and space to go around.

MR. ENGLISH: We have those same problems, and even in south Florida. Most of the time, we're within a few miles of the fish. In North Carolina, you're twenty or thirty miles from the fish, a lot of times. It's a longer process than it is in Florida, but that's a problem everywhere, is the ice. That's a big problem.

MR. LAKS: I would like to add to that. It costs us money on fish prices too, because the shippers that don't have a location with an ice machine on the water are having to purchase ice from ice houses, and so that comes off the top of the fish, and so just the lack of infrastructure is reducing what we get for our fish, too.

MS. WIEGAND: How have communities adapted to some of these changes in the Spanish mackerel fishery? Anything else to add on that topic?

MR. LAKS: Steve, I think maybe you could speak to how Salerno made a change from gillnets to cast nets. I mean, that was a major community change.

MR. ENGLISH: Well, I guess I thought I kind of covered that, but, when we did the net ban back in 2005, of course, the fishing community in the whole State of Florida was just devastated, and we didn't know which way to turn, and we didn't know what way was up, and we started looking, because gillnets were how we caught fish. That's just how we caught them.

Luckily, in Salerno, in Sebastian, a couple of guys went out and said, hey, these Spanish mackerel are getting tighter now that nobody is messing with them, and they were tuck nets on them, cast nets with tucks, and it didn't take them long to figure out that they were eating the cast nets up and they were much easier to tie the tucks up and just throw the net and don't tuck it up and pull the fish through the net, and so we invented the net without tucks in it, and that's the cast net for mackerel now. It's a non-tuck net. You just throw it and let them go off in it and pick them out of it.

Of course, the size of the net is what you go by, and I can say, on that, when we adapted the -- Then the hook-and-line fishery became a thing, and it got perfected, and Ben Hartig was one of the ones that perfected it, and everybody took his lead, but, when we first started doing it, right after the net ban, and probably for the first five or ten years, and there wasn't a lot of boats in it, we threw a four-inch mesh net to catch mackerel with. A three-and-a-half was too small. We just didn't want one, because we had to pick a lot of small fish. We were throwing a four-inch net, and our average fish were three pounds, two-and-a-half to three pounds. That's what we were catching.

Now, we're down to throwing -- We throw a three-and-an-eighth now is what our base net is. It's a three-and-an-eighth, and we had fishermen in the last two years that had gone down as far as a two-and-a-half throwing on the small fish, and I am going to speak about that later, and we're going to get a handle on that, but I'm just saying, from the time it started until now, with the increased pressure, and I will say this. When we first started cast netting in the Hole after the net ban, for the first ten years, there were no porpoises, zero. They didn't bother me.

We would have a few sharks in December, for a week maybe in December, and they would leave, and the sharks would never bother you. Now we have sharks the entire fishing season. When you go down there, the porpoises are so rampant that you can't fish for them on -- If there is not ten boats fishing, you might as well go home, because they are going to get behind you, and you're not going to catch a fish.

When your net hits the water, the porpoises are running the fish out from under the net, and, what few you do get, they will turn around and pick them out of it, and so the predators have become thicker, the fishermen have become thicker, and the fish have become thinner on account of it, and you can document it by looking at how the fish size has decreased, what we're targeting, and what's there has decreased over the years, to when the pressure wasn't on them, and the big fish are there. I mean, they're out there, but they're just not getting in those concentrated numbers and staying. They are different.

MR. LAKS: Real quick, Steve, just for the record, it was 1995 and not 2005, the net ban.

MR. ENGLISH: 1995. I'm sorry. 1995.

MS. WIEGAND: Is there anything else important that you feel the council should know about the Spanish mackerel fishery?

MR. LAKS: Guys, I think we're going to take about a twenty-minute break. Let's be back at twenty after, because people might have to check out of rooms and stuff, and we're going to come back and get into the gillnets, and Steve is going to carry us through that, and so let's be back at twenty after, and try and get back a few minutes earlier if you can, but, if anyone has to check out, it's probably a good time to do it now.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. LAKS: Guys, let's sit down here. While you guys are chewing on your cookies, Steve asked if he could have a few minutes just to give us some information he has. Go ahead, Steve.

MR. DONALSON: I don't need a few minutes, but I'm going to just -- I am going to find a link to this article that I read, and I keep hearing a recurring theme about sharks and cold water and stuff like that, and I read a really good article about -- Again, not to open up a global warming debate or anything, but about the temperature changes and the Labrador currents with the fresh water from the hurricanes, coupled with what we're seeing with temperature changes in the Gulf Stream, and we're seeing the same thing in St. Augustine, with water temperatures being lower historically and a lot of sharks.

The article really had a lot of cool information about why that might be happening, and that might explain one of the reasons that we're seeing all those sharks move in that we haven't seen in years past, and so I will try to find that article and send everybody a link, or send it to you to send to everybody or however. I just wanted to throw that out there, and it was interesting, is all, and that's all I wanted to say.

MR. LAKS: Yes, definitely I would like to see that.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and I just wanted to have the briefest of discussions about Spanish mackerel gillnet size, and you guys discussed this quite a bit at your last meeting and passed this motion, and the council wanted to have some discussion with the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel about it, and so they're meeting next week, and it is on their agenda, and so I will be talking to them about this recommendation. I just wanted to bring it back up again and get a little bit more background from you guys, to make sure that, when I'm sitting in front of the Law Enforcement AP explaining the situation to them, that I am expressing it correctly.

MR. LAKS: Go ahead, Steve.

MR. ENGLISH: I guess I am the one that brought this up, and what happened, to give you a quick overview, what happened is, prior to the management measures we have now, when they first tried to get a handle on controlling the amount of Spanish mackerel caught, they were going to do it by mesh size, because it was all gillnet stuff, and we had the large roller rigs in it, and the market demanded a certain sized fish, and so they used a three-and-a-half is what caught their pound-fish for the market, pound or pound-and-a-quarter fish.

They came up with a way to measure the nets, and it was a three-and-a-half minimum size, but you had to stretch it to eleven foot pounds. Well, that meant that, if you had lighter web, the 139/104 webbing, it would stretch to -- You could take a two-and-seven-eighths net and stretch it to three-and-a-half, so it was a legal gear, and so the small-boat fishery was covered, and the big-boat fishery was covered, and we were all covered.

Since then, of course, we now have a twelve-inch minimum size, which a three-inch net won't catch, and it has to be bigger than that to even catch it. With all new -- Now we're on a quota system and all, and so this is basically an outdated means of trying to control the fishery, but what we need to do -- What this would allow us to do is to control the size of fish that are put on the commercial market, is basically what this would do. If we went to a three-inch minimum mesh, it would still allow the fishermen to use the gear they needed to catch all of the -- Catch your blue runners and jacks and croakers and everything else that goes along with it and allow them to catch the mackerel, but most of them, like I said, with the three-inch mesh, they're fifteen-inch mackerel and up is what they are, and so you're still catching your pound-fish.

If we allow them to go below three-inch mesh in the mackerel fishery, that's when you're going to start catching the smaller fish, which the market doesn't want to begin with, and so they're wasted anyhow. A three-inch minimum mesh size would be the way to go, and it would clarify it for law enforcement. When law enforcement pulled up to you, they could pull their tape out and pull the mesh taut and measure it and say, yes, you're in compliance and it's three-inch or greater.

The reason that we did the three-inch up to 277 and then three-and-a-half-inch over 277 was because, the heavier the webbing gets, the less it stretches, and the smaller the fish it catches, and, with three-and-a-half, we were thinking there is still a possibility of a roller fishery in the Keys and in the south, and so we were wanting to cover that, so that they didn't use three-inch mesh, which I've spoken with Bill, and Bill doesn't think that's a possibility anyhow. That is the Gulf region too, and so we maybe can simplify this thing even more and go to strictly three-inch minimum mesh size or greater for catching Spanish mackerel and then, if the Gulf region wants to do something different on their part, they could do something different. If we went to three-inch, then it should be strictly for the southeast coast and then let the Gulf handle their size if they want something different.

MR. KELLY: Just for a point of clarification, we certainly understand the position that our fishing partners and brothers are taking north of the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line. Our interest though would be to maintain -- South of that line, to maintain a three-and-a-half-inch mesh, and we're talking a major difference from a temperate to a sub-tropical environment there, and we would like to stay at three-and-a-half, which has been proven to be very successful with that and to minimize any issues regarding bycatch.

The three-and-a-half stretch mesh, from a law enforcement point of view, if they have a hard object that has been checked out with a micrometer, it would be three-and-a-half inches to pass that through the mesh, and the other thing that we would encourage anyone that's engaged in the net fishery to do is to make sure that they maintain a receipt onboard that has the manufacturer's stated mesh size on there, so that, if there is any variations in that mesh size, that the burden is placed on the manufacturer and not on the fisherman that has bought it in good faith.

MR. LAKS: Thank you, Bill. That's a good suggestion. Would someone like to make a motion?

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, I will make a motion that -- I guess this is fairly simple. **I mean, to me, it's simple to understand, and, if the council and law enforcement agrees with that, I would make this motion that we have presently on the board.**

MR. LAKS: Does anyone want to second the motion?

AP MEMBER: I will second it.

MR. LAKS: Would any of you guys like to --

MS. WIEGAND: Just to clarify, did you want to keep that anything greater will need to be three-and-a-half-inch, or did you want to go just to the three-inch?

MR. ENGLISH: No, anything greater than 277 needs to be three-and-a-half-inch mesh.

MS. WIEGAND: The three-and-a-half-inch, and you want to suggest this for all Spanish mackerel gillnets or do you want to be specific to Atlantic spanish mackerel gillnets?

MR. ENGLISH: Well, I mean, the South Atlantic Council is just for us, but we could put it for both, and then, if the Gulf Council wants to agree with it, then you would have it statewide and everybody would be happy, and so either way you want to do it. This is brought up to clarify it for law enforcement, so they don't have an enforcement problem. That's the only reason we're doing it.

MR. LAKS: Steve, I think you might muddy the water a little bit. I think you might want to just make it for the South Atlantic jurisdiction.

MR. ENGLISH: Then that's what we'll do. The other thing I would put in there is that they might question as to how they measure it, because now they measure the mesh by stretching it to eleven foot pounds, and that would no longer be the requirement. The requirement would be that -- I tried to come up with a way to put it in words, but the requirement would be that you would pull the mesh taut until the two center knots touch one another, and then the distance between the two end knots would be your measurement, and does that sound right, Bill?

MR. LAKS: I know this is fairly specific, but does anyone else have any comments to it? I don't see any comments. Let's take a vote on this. **All those in favor, please raise your hand; all those opposed; anyone abstaining, two. The motion passes.**

MS. WIEGAND: Thank you. I appreciate getting that extra detail for talking to the Law Enforcement AP, and, with that, I will turn it over to Amber to talk to you guys about citizen science.

MS. VON HARTEN: Good morning, everybody. I am Amber Von Harten, for those of you all that don't know me, and I am the Program Manager for the council's newly-developing Citizen Science Program, and I think I haven't talked to you guys about the program yet, because it's just been in development in the last year or so, and so I do have a couple of slides that I just want to show you, just to kind of map out the development of the program and kind of what we've been up to.

The council began this really back in, I would say, mid-2015, when some of our council members, and Ben was one of them, kind of got an interest in looking at citizen science as another way to help supplement some of the data that the council needs to help make management decisions, and we went down this process of trying to understand what a program might look like for the council, and we had a workshop back in January of 2016 that brought together over fifty-five participants from throughout the fishery, whether they were fishermen, scientists, managers, researchers from academic institutions, our state fishery partners, Sea Grant staff, to come together and kind of brainstorm what we were talking about for use by the council and what a program might look like.

Out of that workshop came a citizen science program blueprint, which kind of is the framework for how a program could be built, and so you kind of see the timeline here. After the workshop and over the summer, we kind of were promoting and talking about what we were thinking we were going to pursue for the council, and then, in the fall of 2016, the council went ahead and

decided to elevate this whole effort to a council-level committee, which is kind of how things started to get rolling in the process, and so they formed a Citizen Science Committee to kind of start discussing and planning how to actually make a program happen. Then, in December of 2016, they decided to go ahead and hire a full-time person to help get the efforts off the ground, and that's where I kind of transitioned from the Outreach Specialist into this new role.

In January of 2017, we actually kicked off the program development efforts, and so, last year, we spent a lot of time kind of building that initial program infrastructure that we felt we needed to build the program, and that was through the creation of a Citizen Science Advisory Panel Pool, which Ira is on one of our Action Teams, and Tom is as well. These folks were tasked with helping the program develop the different components that were needed to successfully carry out the program and also support projects that would focus on fisheries data collection that would address specific research needs of the council and any data gaps that we may have in the information that we need to make management decisions.

There is five Action Teams, and I will get into that in a second, but we have been focusing on trying to develop program partnerships, because one of the challenges the council has is we are not able to apply for most grant opportunities. Just the way we're set up, we are not usually an eligible entity to apply for grants, and so we're going to have to be really creative in the types of partnerships that we develop with different industry groups and other academic institutions and other researchers and NGOs and non-profits, all these different types of groups that we hope to partner with, and we also hope to partner with them on project funding opportunities as well.

We also have just recently secured the funds to start our first pilot project, which I will talk about in a second, and it's going to address scamp discards, and then, coming up, we're going to be taking the program development to the next level by activating an operations committee that is going to help us actually develop standard operating policies and procedures, SOPPs, and that's kind of boring kind of things, but things that you need to have in place to successfully run the program.

Then, today, what I would like to run by you guys is the group has come up with some citizen science research priorities that I would like to get your feedback on, to see if you have any additional ideas or things that are mackerel and cobia related that could be addressed through the program and any other feedback you have on those priorities.

Just real quickly, these are the five topical Action Team areas. We have one that is Projects & Topics Management, and so what kind of projects or topics is the program going to be interested in pursuing to address different data gaps in research needs. Once you have projects in place, we're going to need to figure out how we're going to manage any data that's coming in, and so really developing data partnerships with our existing data partners is going to be really important and making sure that we address all the different points in the data life cycle and how the data for these different projects under the program could actually be used.

Volunteers is how we're going to engage with and work with our fisheries volunteers on different projects, how we recruit people, retain them in projects and train them for different projects, and, of course, Communication, Outreach, and Education is another important role there, to make sure we're communicating about the program as well as about the projects and making sure there is some kind of feedback and recognition loop that participants can get information and feedback to

the program. Then probably the most important one is the Finance & Infrastructure A-Team, because we are still trying to figure out a long-term funding model for supporting the program and the projects.

These A-Teams have been working since August of last year, meeting on a monthly basis via webinar, and there is about fifty people total in all of the A-Teams, and they are made up of mostly fishermen as well as some of our Sea Grant partners and Science Center partners from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and other NOAA folks and researchers, just the whole gamut of all the different stakeholders that would be involved with our program, and that work that they've been working on -- They've been developing specific program recommendations that then are reviewed by the Citizen Science Committee and then adopted by the council.

A little bit about our pilot project. Again, we're going to be developing a mobile app that will help collect very specific data just on discards of scamp grouper. We will be collecting lengths and depth and also hopefully capturing some images of these fish, and, again, all we're focusing on for this project is just discards. We are not as concerned about catch, and the reason for that is because there is an upcoming stock assessment for scamp, and this is one of the gaps that was identified that could be really helpful for that stock assessment.

This is going to involve all sectors of the fishery, and so not just recreational. I know there's been a lot of focus on developing recreational types of apps, but this is going to hopefully involve the for-hire fleet as well as commercial folks to collect information about scamp discards, and so, again, it's going to fill a known data gap, and we think that the app can be developed pretty quickly and simply, as a good, simple data collection tool. You don't need any special costly equipment to do this, but it's just, if you catch a scamp and it's out of season, too small, or whatever reason you are discarding it, you can record the information. It can take place over a pretty wide -- Go ahead, Ira.

MR. LAKS: I would just like to say, if any of you guys do fish for scamp or know anyone in your area that is what we're calling a scamp champ, please tell them to look on the council website, and maybe they can participate in this.

MS. VON HARTEN: It can take place, hopefully, over a wide geographic area and collect as much data as possible. Right now, we do have a project design team in place that are meeting to kind of help us work with the app developers and map out what the layout of the app should look like and what works for fishermen, what is feasible, and that's been really helpful to have fishermen on this planning team.

Then, in coordination with the design team, each of the Action Teams is actually helping us develop some of the materials for the project, which includes a communication plan, a volunteer training plan, and that also will include just a basic orientation to who the council is, what is the science behind the project, why we're pursuing it, and then also a data management plan with our data partner, which is the ACCSP.

Then, simultaneously with the actual citizen science project, there is a research study that's going to be happening with the some of the folks from the Citizen Science Association and Cornell University to document our process and how well us building a program supports projects, because this is kind of a novel thing that we're doing. A lot of times, citizen science is started just from a



project, and what we're trying to do is build a program, an overarching program, that can support projects, and so it's a little bit different, and then they're also going to work with us on developing some evaluation metrics for the specific scamp project, so we can evaluate how successful we are with our efforts. Any questions about that before I get into the research priorities? Ira or Tom, I don't know if you want to add anything at all.

Again, this is the draft research needs document, and, just to kind of explain to you where this came from and how it was developed, this was developed with the Projects & Topics Management Action Team, and one of their first tasks they worked on was trying to understand how should we develop the different research or topics that the program wants to even address and what's important and what kind of mechanism should be in place for soliciting ideas from the public and also making sure that there are ideas that are feasible and can address some kind of science or management need, and so the council does have a three-year research and monitoring plan that's updated every three years, and it's very technical in nature.

It's very detail-oriented on specific species and specific techniques that are needed to be used to address those different research needs, and that's great, but it was not really formatted in a way that we felt was going to be useful for thinking about citizen science and how some of these topics could be addressed for citizen science, and so the group decided to develop a separate document that was informed by that research and monitoring plan but also incorporated additional input from folks like you guys, the AP, which that research plan is as well, but more in the realm of citizen science.

For the first time, I guess last year, when the research and monitoring plan was reviewed, they did actually highlight some of the areas that they thought citizen science could be used to address some of those research needs, and so we're kind of expanding on that into a separate document that is more topic-based, so that, whether it's a researcher and a fisherman trying to develop a project together or a funder that wants to support the council's efforts, they could look at this document and say, oh, okay, they're interested in this topic and we would like to develop a project based on that topic.

What I'm looking for from you guys today is any feedback on the topics, if you think there's anything missing, if you think any of the species that are under the purview of this AP need to be added to any of these topics, and this is all just in draft form, and the Snapper Grouper AP looked at it last week, and they gave us some feedback, and the council will be looking at this in June to adopt, and so will just go through this quickly. Feel free to jump in any time.

MR. ROLLER: Regarding the target species for age sampling, my state, NC DMF, has been asking me specifically for large Spanish mackerel the last few years, and is there any interest for that? I just wanted to pass that on. Those guys can rip an otolith out of those fish mind-blowingly quickly.

MS. VON HARTEN: Yes, and, if you know of any state efforts or other researchers that are working on stuff that we could get in touch with to coordinate a project, throw that out. That's helpful to know. Yes, the first one is age sampling.

MR. LINK: Virginia is already doing an otolith collection of cobia, and I believe Old Dominion University is heading that up. They may be someone good to reach out to.

MR. BLOW: That was basically what I was going to say. That information has proved to be very important to us recently when ASMFC was developing the plan and what our season could be in Virginia. They used samples from these collection bins, and we were able to get something a little bit better than what they originally approved because of those collection places, and so that was very helpful.

MR. KELLY: Our association is strong supporters of this type of action, along with cooperative research projects. When you have individuals, fishermen, in our area, the charter/for-hire guys, that are fishing 250 and 300 days per year, because the weather allows it, and commercial fishermen that are operating in an eight-month season, fishing six or sometimes seven days a week, the repetitive nature of what they're doing and the anecdotal information that they're collecting that could now be done in an organized fashion really saves the National Marine Fisheries Service and NOAA substantial amounts of money and provides credible evidence on a real-time basis of what's happening out there day in and day out.

I think it's very important that we engage in these kinds of programs, because I have always said, when fisheries management issues or measures disagree significantly with what fishermen have on ice, you need to take a closer look, and this fulfills that promise and solves that issue, and so I really salute the effort, and you would have our full support. We have a Keys History and Discovery Center that is heavily engaged in oral history and things of that nature, and so, if I can provide contact information and so forth, I am more than happy to do that.

MR. LAKS: Thank you, Bill.

MR. DOUGHTIE: Amber, I'm sure you know, but South Carolina has kind of been on the forefront as far as cobia research, and I know you all hate the word "cobia", but we have -- DNR has collection freezers, and it does a lot of studies on the carcasses, and plus a lot of research up here in Charleston and the Waddell Mariculture Center, and anyway I can help you with the scamp thing, because I catch a lot of scamp, and I release a lot of scamp using the Seaqualizer, which DNR will provide to anybody that wants them. It's hard to tell if it's effective or not, because you're sending them down, but I have yet to see one come back up, but I don't know if the rest of you all have ever tried that device, but it seems to work pretty well, and I think the mortality rate is a lot less.

MR. OLSEN: I am going to go ahead and throw my hat in the ring for the greater amberjack. Unfortunately, I am probably the undisputed king of catching them in South Carolina. I do about eighty trips a year, and we average anywhere from twenty to fifty-pound fish, and the only time we have a problem getting any fish is as soon as it comes around September 15. All the places that have amberjacks, you can't get one in, because there is thirty or forty big sharks that will eat every one of them, but amberjack fishing is a big part of my business.

MS. VON HARTEN: That's great. Yes, age sampling, and, again, a lot of these projects, we recognize that there is other states and federal agencies that are doing some of this work, and so, yes, that's just the kind of feedback we need and we should be seeking out partnerships with and how we can supplement their efforts as well, because we're not trying to duplicate efforts, and we just want to get more data.

The second one is maturity data, and that's primarily looking at gonad collection, but there are some ways that you can actually take pictures to look at the different stages of reproduction that maybe fishermen could be trained on how to do, and so we had these main species, and, again, this is just from the research and monitoring plan, and so, if you think there is other species that could benefit from this type of work, and then we also have a potential cost as the last item under there. We're kind of just using a range of a one dollar sign to three dollar signs, meaning one would be a lower-cost project and three would be a higher-cost project. A lot of these, especially these first two topics, the bulk of the money would come in the actual analysis of those biological samples.

The third one is discard information, which seems to be the topic of the day for lots of different species, and there is lots of different target species there, and obviously we just need improved discard removal estimates and also to look at the size composition of discards and things like that for stock assessments. Genetic sampling, and so simple fin clips, and I think you guys might have already talked about that some.

MR. ROLLER: I think there's a lot of potential for this, and I've been doing fin clips for years in North Carolina for striped bass, and summer flounder in particular, and it's so simple. It's so easy to get fishermen involved in this stuff and even if it's ethanol vials on your boat, and they're good for a really, really long time, and so I have never understood why, when they need it, why it seems so difficult to get people involved.

MS. VON HARTEN: Okay, and so that's kind of like the biological side of things, but we also are hoping that we can touch on maybe some of our habitat and ecosystem types of needs as well, and so one of the things is bottom habitat mapping and working with technology companies that might be willing to loan certain types of equipment to get out there and try to map some of our bottom habitat, to get better resolution and improve our habitat maps. Again, as far as target volunteers, this was just kind of our initial ideas, and so if you think commercial would be willing to do this or whatever, please feel free to give us feedback on that as well.

Then, of course, the council has our series of managed areas, including our deepwater MPAs and also spawning special management zones, which also have a system management plan that is getting ready to kind of get kicked into gear in terms of outlining -- I mean, we already have an outline for the research and monitoring that's needed in those areas, and so we thought perhaps citizen science could be used with some of those research needs in those areas, especially the deepwater snapper and grouper species.

MR. OLSEN: I have a different question, and this pertains to South Carolina. We have two areas that were secret reefs that were under the radar for a long time, and I noticed you have the recreational target volunteers, and they're just going to be top-water fishing on these, and those numbers are still 98 percent unknown to 99 percent of the anglers. By opening up a volunteer to do any recreational data on those two specific sites, I don't think that would be a good idea. They are closer to shore, and there is a lot of fish on them, and they have been kept under wraps for a long time, and I just wanted to let that out there.

MS. VON HARTEN: Okay. Then, also, we hope to maybe look at some of the socioeconomic needs and data gaps that we have, and so one of the things that -- Fishing infrastructure is one of them, and there is this thing in the citizen science world called bioblitzes, where they use apps,

like iNaturalist, to go and take a targeted area and have volunteers go to this targeted area, and they record every single like marine invertebrate that they see in that area.

One of the project ideas was possibly doing like a blitz of some sort, where we have an app that people can record all the fishing-related infrastructure in their community, everything from boat ramps to tackle shops to commercial fishing facilities and ice houses and fuel docks, everything that's there, and maybe do this like on a seasonal basis, so that it could be documented how things change throughout the seasons based on the fishing that's happening there, and so that type of information.

The next two are kind of linked together, and one of them is historical fishing photos, and so, as I'm sure you all have seen, there is tons of fishing photos from the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, prior to when any fishery-independent surveys or fishery-dependent surveys were actually implemented for MRIP and for all of those different surveys, and there is actually really useful information in those photos.

There is species, and you can actually get lengths from those fish that are in those photos, and so really trying to take a look at some of these historical fishing photos for helping fill in the longer time series or the data gaps that are in the time series from prior to when these surveys were in place, and we did just actually submit a -- We partnered and submitted a grant to get a project like this funded for a community in Florida, and so kind of testing how that might work and actually using crowdsourcing to actually do some of the analysis of the photos through a citizen science online platform, and so cross your fingers that that one gets supported.

Then, to go along with the fishing photos, obviously those photos have lots of stories behind them, and so getting some of the oral histories behind these different fisheries that may go along with the photos or just oral histories in general, because a lot of the old-timers are passing away, and we need to capture their stories before they are gone.

Then, also, the kind of environmental conditions side of the house and looking at things like weather, bottom temperature, any kind of oceanographic conditions that people could go out and report that could be useful for looking at climate change issues and how the fishery has changed. For example, MyFishCount, over the fall, was able to capture how little fishing was able to take place during that red snapper mini-season because of the crappy weather that there was, and that information was really useful for giving the fishery a couple of extra fishing days.

Then, also, some ideas have been floated around of rare species observations. A lot of strange things are happening as we have these major hurricanes that keep swirling through our ocean basins and fish showing up where they haven't been seen before. We've heard reports of mutton snapper being seen pretty regularly off of Charleston here, and so being able to document those, and there is already existing platforms to collect some of this information, and so a project like this probably wouldn't take too much to get up off the ground.

That's all the topics we have, and, if you want to think on this some more afterwards and get in touch with me, by all means shoot me an email, if you have some additional ideas or thoughts on species or different topics, and then you guys brought up a topic earlier about documenting tournaments and how that is kind of changing, and I think that possibly could be done through a citizen science approach, and there was another one that the Snapper Grouper AP suggested too,

or, actually, it was when we were talking the other day about forage fish and following the bait, especially as it relates to mackerel, and seeing where the bait are and if that's influencing where the mackerel are.

DR. ELKINS: Can you scroll down to Number 5, please? Can you help me understand how this differs from the bottom mapping that's already been done or is currently being done? MARMAP and actually private companies are doing that.

MS. VON HARTEN: Sure, and I think the idea was we have this whole fleet of for-hire captains, as well as just the recreational fleet, that's out there, and they may not even be bottom fishing, but they're targeting billfish or things like that, and why not have them equipped with some of this high-tech equipment on their boats that could, as they're out there trolling around for hours at a time, be able to map some of those areas that may be outside of what is already being mapped from some of the other surveys that are in existence, and so, again, it's just a way to supplement what's already going on out there, and, obviously, we would need to work with those surveys that are doing that type of work to make sure we're not duplicating or figure out areas that are high-priority that aren't already mapped.

DR. ELKINS: I think the possibility for redundancy is here, and we need to look at what's already been done before we invest a lot of money there.

MR. KELLY: I just want to mention that things like bottom habitat mapping can be particularly important. For example, in the wake of Hurricane Irma down in the Florida Keys, a number of the different chart plotter manufacturers and so forth have been in the islands recruiting support from commercial fishermen and charter/for-hire guys, because of their intimate knowledge of the topography down there, and we have had sandbars that have disappeared, and we have islands that have grown, and we have islands that have shrunk, and it's been substantial.

For example, in one section of upper Florida Bay, between the mainland and the islands, we had a stretch of six miles -- A six-mile stretch of the bay that was pulled dry for ten hours. Now, you think about the dynamics of the storm holding that amount of water back, but what it moved, in terms of sand everything else, substantially changed the topography back there, and so, with lags in geographical or oceanographic surveys and so forth, we have immediate access to this kind of information when we can implement programs like this, and I think they're very important, especially when we have tropical storms and hurricanes and things of that nature that are real game-changers.

MR. ROLLER: Back to genetic sampling, for cobia in particular, one idea would be to look towards not just the recreational and commercial, but look towards the tackle shops. Cobia are this fish of a bizarre fascination with people, and it seems like any legal fish gets taken to the tackle shops, so they can get their photo put on Facebook. I think it would be pretty simple to get some of those shops to take little clips of the fins. I know that the shops that I work with would probably do that, and you're getting a lot of people in one spot.

MR. BLOW: You probably already know that VIMS has done a lot of fin clips, and I have helped them with a lot. As far as the gonad collection goes, we had a fishing tournament with my fishing club, and VIMS had come out to take samples of the gonads, and so there is starting to be more and more cobia tournaments up our way, and so that would be another source of that information,

and I know there's quite a few tournaments down in North Carolina that I've been seeing advertised, and so there's lots of opportunity for samples and collections.

MR. LAKS: I just had a little brainstorm here, Amber, especially to mackerel, but maybe we can model something almost after the scamp project, where, from what I'm hearing from these guys seeing a lot of juveniles in the king mackerel and Spanish mackerel, maybe we can just do a how many are you releasing of undersized or sub-legal mackerel. Of course, it would probably be hard to do, and you know I caught seventeen, but you can do zero to ten and ten to twenty, and that might give us another data point to match along with some of the recruitment studies.

MR. WEEKS: Amber, I just wondered, and a lot of these -- I think there are some great topics and they're valuable to a lot of folks for a lot of different reasons, but all of them have some dollar signs associated with them, down there at the bottom, in varying degrees, but what do you see as potential funding source for some of these, and your relationship with ACCSP as a partner, is that in funding, or is that just in integrating your data with the other east coast databases?

MS. VON HARTEN: Well, as far as finding funding for projects, there is lots of sources, but it's just finding the right partners to get together to build the project. Obviously, like I said earlier, the council can't apply for these funds, necessarily. We can apply for ACCSP funds, and so that is one source of funding that we can, and I think we all foresee ACCSP being our major data partner on all of this. They have the infrastructure in place, and they have everything that we would need to store data, house data, make it secure, all of those things, and so we were really excited that they signed on as a partner for this pilot project, so we can test this out, because this is a new type of data stream that's going to be coming in to them as well, because it's citizen science data, and figuring out how that can be handled is a new area that we're all trying to figure out.

Yes, I think they're going to be both. I think they're going to be a program partner and a project partner, but there is other NOAA federal grant opportunities also, like NFWF, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, just released their RFP that has overlapping research needs and priorities of what we're trying to do, and so we feel that there is lots of grant opportunities that we will have to just partner with people on to produce these, but we're also looking at some things that are kind of outside the box.

Like we're trying to figure out if the program can do crowdfunding. Can we raise money for equipment needs? For example, if we needed to get vials of ethanol and things like that to go out and collect fin clips, can we raise funds just for that specific thing, if that's all we need, and working with other types of non-profits. There is also the National Marine Sanctuary that has a foundation that kind of oversees funding and projects for all the different sanctuaries, and that's another possible partner, and so we're exploring all avenues. That's what that Finance & Infrastructure A-Team is working on. They have kind of developed a really nice inventory of partnerships as well as funding as well, and so we're looking at it all, but, if you have ideas, please pass them along. Thanks, guys. I appreciate it.

MR. LAKS: Thank you, Amber. All right, guys. That's the last thing on our agenda, and we're going to jump into some Other Business here. With the Spanish mackerel limited entry, I think Steve has pretty well given us a real good explanation of it, and it's just a question of do we want to make a recommendation, do we want to make a motion, and, if so, if someone would like to make a motion on that, go ahead.

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, I spoke about the reasons that we need the limited entry, and, like I said, it's just for the commercial sector. Obviously both sectors want the abundance of Spanish mackerel, and a limited entry would give you greater control of the commercial sector and more professionals in it, and it would just be better all the way around on the commercial sector, and it would enhance the recreational sector to have a professional commercial sector and not have a free-for-all like we have down in -- If you all could see the hole, you would understand where I'm coming from. **Yes, I would like to make a motion that the federal permit for commercial Spanish mackerel be a limited entry permit.**

We looked at this once before, and the council said, well, there is no reason to do it, because we don't catch the quota every year. Well, this year, the quota got caught, and that was the reason that we had proposed it a couple of years earlier, because, as fishermen, we see what's coming down the pipe. We see it, and we know, and I can tell you now that it's growing every year, and there is a point to where it grows so far that it's out of control and now we've got a problem we have to solve, and so this would be a way to start heading the problem off before it gets out of hand. It's already getting to that point in some places, but, with this one headed off, this would give the states and the federal councils, I think, an easier way to regulate things, and it would help the fishermen out too, and so that's why I would like to do it.

MR. LAKS: Is there a second to the motion? Would anyone like to second the motion?

AP MEMBER: I will second it.

MR. SWANN: Steve English, if it's a limited entry, is that going to help the council get better data? I think you alluded to that yesterday a little bit.

MR. ENGLISH: Well, it will, because, I mean, if you think about it now, in Florida or in North Carolina, either one, you can land Spanish mackerel without the permit, and so most of the people don't have to report the landings and all the data to the South Atlantic Council. They go to the state, and they don't collect the data, and so it would be better in all things, in that manner.

We have limited entry in every other fishery, kingfish, snapper grouper, sharks, any of it, we have it in it, and this is the only one left that doesn't, and, to allow this fishery to be inundated by everyone in the world, when we know that there is a limited amount of commercial activity that should take place in this, it just is beyond -- I just don't quite understand that. We have seen the success in all the other fisheries, in the commercial side limited entry, and I think this is just a no-brainer that this is something that we just need to finish it out.

MR. LAKS: Steve, to that point, I think, anytime you can define the universe of participants, it's easier to get better data.

MS. WIEGAND: I just wanted to make quick note to the discussion we had earlier during the Spanish mackerel fishery performance report. North Carolina does require limited access permits that the council has required, and so sharks is a bit of different situation, but, for council permits, North Carolina does require them.

MR. WEEKS: Just a quick question, and it's somewhat out of ignorance. I'm in the recreational sector, and I'm not real familiar with limited access permits, but how are those allocated? Who determines who gets the permits and who doesn't? How does that all work?

MR. LAKS: Well, it's not hard rule, but, basically, what has happened before is that, if you've held that permit for a certain number of years, you would be given the opportunity to maintain it in a limited entry form, but there are other ways to let other participants in who haven't had the permit and showed they fished, but that would be specific on how the limited entry system was crafted.

DR. CHEUVRONT: If the council wanted to decide to go towards limited entry on a permit, it would have to go through the amendment process that they go through, and they would have to stipulate all sorts of things about this, about who gets a permit and who doesn't, an appeals process, how do we get new entrants into the fishery, and all of that would have to all be worked out, and so this is not something the council can decide just real quickly. They have to work through all of these things to be able to make it happen, should they choose to go that route.

MR. KELLY: In the couple of other things, some of the major deciding factors in this limited entry would be control dates and landings, and that can eliminate a lot of players from their ability to get into that fishery. I respect what Mr. English has put on the table and the motion, but I just want to clarify that this pertains to the South Atlantic north of the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line and that the fishermen engaged in the fishery south and west of that, into the Gulf of Mexico, should be free to address that issue themselves.

MR. LAKS: I don't know if we need some expertise on that, because isn't it one permit? Would it be more of an endorsement? Maybe we want to switch that to a South Atlantic jurisdictional limited entry endorsement? Someone can maybe give me some help of how we could get that better to convey what we're looking for.

MR. ENGLISH: If that would be the better route to go, that would be fine, because that's where we're having the major problem. The Gulf is not experiencing it, because they have an abundance of mackerel that they have no problem with. The Gulf just has no problem with their mackerel fishery, but ours is starting to get out of hand, and we can see where it will get out of hand, and so the Gulf doesn't have that problem yet.

MR. OLSEN: The problem you're having, is it with North Carolina?

MR. ENGLISH: No, not just North Carolina, but this would address North Carolina and Florida. This would address both. South Carolina and Georgia really don't have a Spanish mackerel fishery. They really don't have a dog in the fight, from what I have seen and heard, and so I don't think it would hardly affect any of their fishermen.

MS. WIEGAND: I am not sure how the dynamics would work if we wanted to do this just for the South Atlantic Spanish mackerel. That might be a better question for General Counsel, but, right now, it is one commercial Spanish mackerel permit for Gulf and South Atlantic. It's just one permit.



MR. LAKS: Maybe we can just word it as something like a limited entry system for the South Atlantic jurisdiction, and I don't know if that would cover it. I don't know exactly if anyone can -- What do you think, Ben, just an endorsement or --

MR. HARTIG: I don't think you need to get into the weeds on what exactly you want. I mean, I will bring this before the council, and we'll talk about it. I see it setting up in a number of options, the Northern Zone and Southern Zone options, and you do it in the Northern Zone or you don't do it in the Southern Zone, and it would have to be some kind of endorsement on a permit, the way I see it working, the way we have things set up now, and so don't get too far into the weeds on this. Just tell the council you want them to explore limited access in the Spanish mackerel fishery and leave it at that.

MR. LAKS: Maybe we just add "South Atlantic jurisdiction" or something.

MS. WIEGAND: Does that appropriately capture what -- Are you comfortable with that, as the one who made the motion?

MR. ENGLISH: I mean, we can do that, but I don't want to confuse it to where they just throw it out because it covers both areas and they go, well, we can't do it like that. We should have the discussion of whether -- If we have one area that has a problem over a full permit, then somehow we need to address it, and so let's just make sure that they at least address it.

MR. LAKS: I think that gives them a lot of leeway in how they can address it. Is there any more discussion on this? Okay. We're going to go ahead and vote on this. **All those in favor, please raise your hands, eleven in favor; all those opposed. The motion passes.**

Guys, we're going to go into -- We discussed it a little bit, I believe, yesterday, about increasing the trip limit for king mackerel off the South Atlantic coast of Florida. I think, if you remember, we heard they were talking about, at certain times, we're under a fifty and seventy-five-fish limit, and, with the weather this year, the guys just haven't had the opportunity to catch the fish. Also, the way the fishery has changed, with more fishing coming into the market at certain times, the price is down, and so, when you're limited on your trip limit and the price is down, it's hard to make it a profitable trip. There was a request to do a 600-pound limit. Keith, would you like to speak to that?

MR. BOWEN: It's just, with the weather the way it is, getting out limited days throughout the winter, it makes it very difficult to just make it profitable when you've got, a lot of times, the limits are smaller. I mean, if you have fifty head throughout the winter, catching six-pound fish, it's pretty tough when you can only get out even just for a week. I mean, it's pretty hard, and so 600 pounds would give someone -- When the days are there, you could actually go out there and make something worth it. I don't know, but it just definitely would help us out a lot with the weather trends are coming.

Even if it was good, we're still -- We're not asking for 1,200 pounds, which everywhere in the whole entire country that has kingfish -- It's like everyone has 1,200 or 3,000, and we're not even asking for that. It's only 600 pounds, and so it's not really -- Anyway, it would just help us out a lot in our area throughout the winter months. I don't know, but what do you guys think?

MR. LAKS: I would like to comment to that. Probably, on average, it would only be -- What would you say, Keith, like 150 pounds more a trip? It's not like you're really loading a lot more fish, but it's just that 150 pounds makes a big difference when the price is really low and you can't get out.

MR. BOWEN: Exactly.

MR. ENGLISH: Everybody needs to understand that the reason we did the fifty to seventy-five head was to stretch the season out. That's why we did it, and that took years and years of development to come up with those, and then, like I said, once we add fish somewhere else and overlap seasons and all, that changes the outlook of how a commercial fisherman looks at his wallet in this, basically, and so we've changed that.

The fifty head, in a lot of cases, doesn't fit now. It just doesn't fit. Our equation has changed since we've added and changed seasons and all, and we had a discussion amongst the fishermen, and we thought a minimum of 500 and up to 600, and 600 would probably be a good number to try, because it only affects the landings. It won't affect the quotas or anything else. The quota is the quota, and we're only going to catch -- It's just going to affect how fast we catch it.

Basically, what we're going to be doing is saying let's try 600 pounds, and, if we catch the quota up too soon, we'll be right back here again saying we need to reduce this by fifty pounds to make it do what we want it to do or we need to increase it by fifty or whatever it may be, but I think this is a good starting point, with all the discussions amongst all the commercial industry, and I would agree with the 600 pounds.

MR. LAKS: Again, that's not going to allow us to go over what we're allowed to catch. It's just going to allow us to profit more per trip. By us changing our limit, it doesn't mean that we're going to exceed an ACL. We're still way under, but it's just maximizing the opportunity that we have to fish.

MR. BLOW: I just have a question for you, to understand. You just said that this will help you when prices are low, but won't bringing in more fish lower the price even more?

MR. LAKS: Wes, they sort of get to a floor, and that few extra fish is probably not going to penetrate that floor of the price, and so it's still going to help make a trip. Instead of maintaining and just going out fishing and catching so much, it adds a little profit to your trip.

MR. BOWEN: With the very few days that we have, a lot of times, the price is a little higher, and so, if we can actually go out there and catch 600, it helps us a lot throughout the month to actually make it worth it, and so, anyway, I'm just adding that.

MR. ENGLISH: Yes, and, to me, I represent a lot of the guys that fish these things when they're in their area and at certain times of the year, and, the way the season is set up now, I don't believe it would impact those who depend on them at a certain time of the year and a certain thing as much as it would have in the past, and so the 600 pounds -- I mean, an average trip on kingfish, if you're catching the big fish down in the spring, like we're fixing to come up on, sometimes it's a 900 to 1,100-pound trip.

You would be reducing that. You're only going to catch 600, and so you're reducing the big fish you're going to catch, and then, in the fall or in the winter and the summer, your fish are a little smaller, eight pounds or so, and you're averaging a 400 or 450-pound trip, or maybe 500, and you would be increasing that by a hundred pounds, and that hundred pounds makes a difference in the scheme of things, especially if they're landing fish 1,200 pounds across the state. Now, they've already beat the price -- That's what is going to control the price, is where they land fish where they've got 1,200 and 3,500-pound limits. That is what controls the price, basically, and so this is not going to affect it one way or the other to an extent that it would hurt us. I think this is something worth trying.

MR. LAKS: Would someone like to make a motion? Go ahead, Keith.

MR. BOWEN: **I would like to make a motion for a 600-pound trip limit per day.**

MR. LAKS: That would be in the Southern Zone, and is that how we -- I forget how we even worded that. Do you guys want to do it Season 2, or do you want to try to do it a year-round season?

MS. WIEGAND: Again, just to be clear, you are looking at this because, north of the Flagler/Volusia line, you've got that 3,500 pounds, and you're fine with that, but we're just talking south of the Flagler/Volusia, where they've got that seventy-five fish.

MR. BOWEN: Exactly.

MR. LAKS: Is there a second?

MR. ROBINSON: I second it.

MR. LAKS: It's seconded by Gary. Is there any more discussion?

MR. MCKINLEY: I would like to say something. I don't think it makes any difference, that little bit of fish, because, I mean, our fish houses have always told us that it's always Florida why we get killed on price anyway, and so it don't make much difference.

MR. LAKS: They tell us that North Carolina kills our price.

MR. MCKINLEY: I know. I think there's a little bit of that going on, and so it doesn't really make any difference. It's really the overall amount of fish on the whole market and how much other fish is open and they've got up north and the demand and all that stuff, and so I don't think it makes a difference, and, if it helps, that's the more power to it.

MR. LAKS: All right. Let's go ahead and vote on this motion. **All those in favor. It's unanimous.**

All right. I want to bring up one other thing that kind of piggybacks this, and that is -- As you can see, we're trying to get our king mackerel fishery in some sort of a stable mode, and a problem we have is latent permits, which means that there is permits out there, approximately 500 or 600, and I'm not sure we could figure that out right now, that really don't fish, and, specifically, on that

southern group of fish, when either it's an economic downturn or the fishing gets better, you have people pour into the fishery, and it disrupts the normal flow of the core fishermen who fish year-round.

When they try and set what they're doing, and they do it year after year, all of a sudden, an influx of these fishermen come in and drive the prices down, and it disrupts the whole fishery, and so most of the fishermen that I have spoke to, and I will let these guys speak to that, would like some way to deal with the latent permits that are out there, whether the council decides to go to a two-for-one like they did in the snapper grouper or other alternatives, and some people were talking about super permits, but I think that we -- Probably most of the fishermen would like it discussed anyway, and I will open it up for these guys, if they want to say something.

MR. ENGLISH: There is always a lot of discussion on the latent permits and how to get rid of them, and, from my perspective, the only fair way to do it and the proper way to do it is a two-for-one permit, and then you set it so that you get to the level you want to be at. You don't go two-for-one until they're all gone. You go two-for-one permits until we want to reach X amount of permits, and, when we reach that, then it goes back to like it should be, a permit for a permit, but I think, if we do it, that's how we should do it. It should be two-for-one until we reach the level we want to be at of permits, the number of permits we want, and then that goes away and it's just straightforward from there out.

Like with the snapper grouper right now, it's still two-for-one. How many permits do you want in the fishery? Do you want to get to zero or one? Is that what our final goal is? We need to know. We need to identify our final goal of how many permits we want in the fishery and then go two-for-one until we reach that goal.

MR. LAKS: So basically asking the council to look at the amount of latent permits out there and deal with a way to reduce that to a limit, to a number, where the core fishermen are fishing it now, so you can have some stability going forward in the fishery.

MR. ENGLISH: Correct.

MR. MCKINLEY: I've got to comment on that. I mean, that two-for-one in the snapper grouper, and that's -- I will push that until I die, but they need to do away with it when they reach that point. I am getting older, and our whole snapper grouper fleet is aging. When it comes time for me to sell it, my permit and boat needs to be that one sale, and it will be worth money. This two-for-one kills that for the people that are having to get out of this industry, because the permit is not worth anything, and so it definitely needs to be a set time, and, when it reaches that point, then it needs to quit.

MR. LAKS: Yes, and I agree that it has to be to a point, but I have probably failed to convey how reasonable a permit is to obtain in a king mackerel fishery, because of all the latent permits out there, and so what you have is, when the fishery gets good, you have these sport fishes -- Large outboard, triple and quadruple outboard, boats that can purchase a permit for nearly what they pay in a week in fuel in a boat like that, and they enter our fishery specifically when it's good, and it is a major disruption, and so it's something that we have always -- Whether we look at this as an individual area or maybe we look at this as endorsement for the area, but it really affects us on these small trip limits and this small area. It's just something to think about.

MR. KELLY: Mr. Chairman, if you want to see stabilization in the fishery, I would be interested in hearing some additional comments about why there is so many latent permits here. Is it trip limits that have kept them at bay or what and when do you see these influxes of those latent permit holders here? Also, two-for-one, as Randy just pointed out, that's a big step, and a costly one, when we think about generational fishermen and so forth, and so I would like to hear some additional discussion on exactly why these permits are latent, and, of course, landings and control dates are always very important.

MR. LAKS: I am going to let Steve English speak to that.

MR. ENGLISH: From all the discussion, and, believe me, this has been going on for ten years, the discussion, but the latent permits -- What they're basically talking about is, if the fishery is not -- If there is not a lot of fish, and you're having to struggle to catch them, a lot of people just don't go fishing. It's that simple. They hold the permit, and it doesn't cost them anything.

They have had the permit, and so they just keep it, but, the minute the fishing gets good, or the price gets good, they go, oh, they went out there, and they showed me where the fish are, and showed me how to catch them, and the price is good, and I'm going to go out there and fish until I beat the price down, or until the fish are gone, and kill their price, and then I will go back and put my permit up until the true fishermen, the real fishermen, that are out there every day trying to beat a living out of this thing find them again and they get abundant enough for them to be successful, and then I will go out and I will break their success up again.

That is the gist behind it, and so they have discussed way after way to try and eliminate these permits, and they have talked about taking them, and landing limits to take the permit, and you've got to produce X amount of pounds or we'll take your permit, and all those things meet with resistance, because this is a diverse fishery.

Not everybody that's in the king fishery just king fishes. There will be two years that I won't use my kingfish permit, but, the year that I look up and Spanish mackerel is not right or not producing right, I will need to go and get into the kingfish fishery, or I will do it seasonal, and so, out of all the things that I have looked at, personally, the two-for-one, to me, is the only way to go to do it, and it won't achieve it overnight. It probably won't achieve it in our lifetime, which, of course, everybody wants it done instantly, and that's just the way it is, and this won't do it, but this will achieve the goal of getting the permits down to the number that needs to be in the fishery. If there is X amount of fish in the fishery, then there needs to be X amount of fishermen catching them to make it economically feasible.

MR. LAKS: I just want to speak to that, Bill. Also, with the price point of the permits, it's so easy to enter the fishery right now, and you get a lot of people that go, well, this is great. I'm going to be a king fisherman, and this is fantastic. Then they actually go do it, and they realize how not fantastic it is, and so they just let that permit sit. There is no qualification for the permit. There is no income qualification. It literally costs you, if it's the only permit, twenty-five dollars, and so you might as well let it sit on your boat.

At some point, you're like, I'm not doing this, and I might as well sell it, and so these permits get recycled over and over into the same kind of people that just want to jump in for one year or two

years or three years while it's good, and it's very hard to stabilize your fishery when you have all this effort that can come in that's unknown into the fishery.

MR. KELLY: All right. The thing I would be interested in seeing though is if staff was able to do some sort of a breakdown and give us some sense of how many permits are out there and how many are latent and where these surges might be occurring compared to pricing and so forth. The only thing that gives me pause here is, in our neighborhood, which is a long way away from here, is we have so many fishermen that are engaged in multispecies fisheries. A little bit of this and a little bit of that makes for a good paycheck at the end of the year. If we start taking a chunk out here and there, then it could cause problems, and so I don't know if those same socioeconomic conditions exist up here, but I would be interested in hearing more about it, which could be brought out in the scoping process.

MR. LAKS: Absolutely, Bill. I agree with you. I think, in Amendment 20, they did some -- They had some studies about how many latent permits, and it was surprising the amount that caught under a certain amount of fish, and, of course, we would all want to see that updated to make an informed choice of where we go from there, but there is a number of them, and we know we've all seen it in that area. As soon as it gets easy again and gets good, they will just be out there, just right there.

MR. KELLY: Right, and so just a final point here, and that is I can certainly see the point that's being made here, and I could be inclined to support it, but I just would like to see some more supporting information to justify that. Thank you.

MR. LAKS: Absolutely, and we would agree too that we would want to see the information and flesh it out as to what the best thing is and how we -- The two-for-one is something we've always said, but I think all of us would be open to any way to solve that kind of problem.

MR. ENGLISH: I would just say one more thing on it. Bill, I would never do anything to take a permit away from a fisherman. That is the last thing that I would ever do. The IFQ program was the worst thing ever invented, and that's what it did. It took fishermen and took their business away and put them out of business. I would never go for anything that does that, and everything we've discussed, of all we've discussed, this is the only thing that I see that doesn't do that. You cannot lose your permit. You cannot lose it.

You can only sell it, and that's the only way you can get rid of this, is voluntarily getting rid of the permit, but, once again, I wouldn't even go for this unless we put a number that we want to arrive at, because I have looked at the snapper grouper, and it's still in limbo. They don't know where they want to be, and they should know right now what their objective is as to how many permits they want in that fishery. We should know that in every fishery, and, once again, Spanish mackerel is the same way, but that's my objective.

MR. LAKS: I think if someone does want to make a motion to this that you could make it a broad motion to just have the council look into somehow the latent permit issue and maybe a permit reduction, without getting specific on a plan right now, since it's starting.

MR. BOWEN: **I will make a motion for a two-for-one for the permits or any other ideas pertaining to that, because there are other ideas that we've kicked around.**

MR. LAKS: We are going to let Christina kind of get some wording here and see if it's okay.

MS. WIEGAND: Let me know if this is getting at what you want, or, if you want, we can put specific ideas underneath that, if you guys want to, but this leaves it sort of broad to let the council look into different solutions, and so Keith is the one who made the motion, and let me know if this is capturing what you would like.

MR. LAKS: Maybe something to stabilize the amount of permits for the core fishery, or I don't know. I don't know if we should go to number, but I think you should just say to the core fishery. As long as we look into it. I mean, this is the very start of it, and I don't think we have to put any numbers or specifics.

MR. ENGLISH: I will second.

MR. SWANN: The only question I have comes from the recreational side, because I don't really understand the problem, and it's kind of hard. Looking into solutions is great, but I don't really understand the problem. I mean, how many latent permits are there, and what are the quantifiable impacts? I haven't seen the council produce any data that we can look at and say, okay, here's a problem that we need to find a solution for, and so I'm not exactly sure what you are finding a solution for.

MR. ENGLISH: I can answer that for you. As we stated, the number-one issue is, when the fishermen fish all the time and go out and find the fish and the fish get plentiful and your business is good, then you've got people coming in and --

MR. SWANN: I understand, but I just don't know how many permits are we talking about.

MR. ENGLISH: We are probably talking -- We have discussed it in the past, but probably 400 or 500, and there is like 1,700 permits, I think, and so let's say 25 to 30 percent, is what I am thinking.

MS. WIEGAND: I don't have those numbers on me right now. If you give me five minutes -- You guys discussed this at your last meeting, and I know Kari put together some material for it, and I can see if I can pull it up. That material will be dated at this point, because it would be probably a year or two old, but I can --

MR. SWANN: Don't do that for me, but I am just trying to identify the problem a little better, but it sounds like you all have that data, which is good, and so the council would understand what the problem is.

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and I don't have that information on me right now, but that's information that the council would be able to put together.

MR. LAKS: Steve, this isn't a one-time thing. This has been an ongoing discussion with us for as long as I can remember, and so it's not -- It's more of a stabilization. Like any other resource, if you don't know who is participating in it, how could you manage it? If every year there is a different amount of people really in that fishery, and the core group -- It's hard to manage it to the core group of fishermen when you have people -- Like I say, it's kind of a cool thing to do to go

get your permit and run out there and get in front of Gary and Steve and Keith, and, year after year, it's a different boat that does that, and it's just hard to manage the fishery like that.

DR. ELKINS: Just as an analogous situation, but maybe an order of magnitude larger, is the North Carolina gillnet fishery large mesh for southern flounder. We have the same situation, where we have a core group of professional fishermen, full time, that may fish in other fisheries, but, in the fall, when the fish move and they're easy to catch, especially the large females going out, we have people from Raleigh that are doctors and attorneys, anybody that buys a cheap gillnet and puts it out there and competes with the professional fishermen, and the results are partly due to the fact that that fishery has been overfished since 1991. I am glad to see that commercial fishermen here are being proactive, to try to get a handle on their problem here, and so that's all I have to say.

MR. LAKS: Thank you. Anyone else? Why don't we take a vote on the motion? **All those in favor, raise your hand. It's unanimous. The motion is approved.**

I think that's pretty much everything we had on our agenda and Other Business. Is there anybody else that would like to say anything or have any comments that they might like to share? Go ahead, Wes.

MR. BLOW: **I would possibly like to see the consideration for what Virginia has done for cobia. Obviously, the cobia stocks are under tremendous pressure right now, and so what Virginia has done on their boat limit of fish is they have made it so that only one fish over fifty inches can be kept, and I think that's a tremendous help to keep the breeding stock alive and well, and so I would like to recommend that maybe the commission looks at something like that, that any boat limit that there is, that only one fish be allowed to be kept that's over fifty inches.**

MS. WIEGAND: So you're recommending this for the commission or for the council?

MR. BLOW: The council.

MR. LINK: I will second that motion.

MR. LAKS: It's seconded by Patrick. The recreational fishery, Wes?

MR. BLOW: Yes, per vessel.

MR. LAKS: This is for the Atlantic stock of fish. I guess we could say this is also a suggestion if they turn over management. Does anyone have any comments on this?

MR. ROLLER: I just want to say that I fully support this. I was really happy when Virginia chose to do this, and I wish my state would have done something similar. It's something that definitely I advocated for. I asked for managing this fishery more to a slot, or whatever you want to call this, and I was told that it was a non-starter, and that was very frustrating to me, and so thank you, guys. I really support this.

MR. LAKS: Any other comments?



MR. GORHAM: This is a topic that, before I could really support it across the entire area, I would like to get some feedback from maybe even the SSC, given the extreme low data that we have across all age sizes, of how this could further limit the data stream on an already extremely poor-data fishery. I think it probably does help, but, again, we already have extremely low samples. If they turn around and say, well, you can still catch fish over that size, it's not like red drum, where you get above a certain size and then that size above it is completely out of the fishery.

I would just look back to the Atlantic States and red drum. They couldn't determine the spawning stock biomass because there is no fishery performance or fishery samples across the whole management area to determine the spawning stock, and so, from a management standpoint and science standpoint, if it's justified, I can support it, but I know the majority of those that I represent in North Carolina would not be for it.

MR. LAKS: Thank you, Bill. Any other comments?

MR. BLOW: Just a comment. When this was brought up in Virginia, and obviously they did it, it was surprising how much support from the recreational and the charter community that they gave it. They were all for protecting the fish. These fish are under tremendous pressure, and a large fish spawns thousands of times more eggs than the smaller ones, and so it was very well supported in Virginia.

MR. ROLLER: There is definitely a lot of support for this in my area. There's been a lot of conversations where people have said, well, why are we letting people keep the big fish, and, on a more practical standpoint, for those of us who catch and eat these fish all the time, these smaller fish taste so much better than these large fish.

MR. GORHAM: Then shouldn't we also lower the size limit or suggest lowering the size limit?

MR. LAKS: I don't know how that would play in with maturity and all that. I think saving larger fish would protect the breeding stock, and lowering it would probably hurt it, Bill, but that's just - I don't know the numbers offhand, but that's what I would think.

MR. LINK: I think what Bill is kind of alluding to, and the one benefit potentially could be, as you lower the size limit, the harvest of males goes up dramatically. When you're at forty inches, it's less than 50 percent harvest of males, and so that's the number you have to be kind of careful with, is that, when you start raising that size limit, you're getting to a point where you're excluding males from the harvest and you're harvesting a majority of female, which doesn't help our situation of recruitment.

I might be wrong on that exact number, but there is a line where we kind of want to stick around, and I think that's why you see most around that thirty-six-inch range, is what most folks stick to, because that's kind of that breaking point, if I'm not mistaken, and I don't have it in front of me, but lowering it could potentially have a good impact, and I think sometimes it seems like the easy way is to just raise it and it will make it harder to catch a -- The difference between catching a thirty-six-inch and a forty-inch cobia, it doesn't take more skill, and there's not that many more either way. It's you're talking about harvesting more females, and so lowering it could potentially have a positive effect, believe it or not.

MS. WIEGAND: I have a quick question for clarification, Wes. I wrote fork length up here, but correct me if I'm wrong. Is it total length in Virginia?

MR. BLOW: Yes, it's total length. That's what I am talking about, and so the equivalent fork length would be about forty-six inches.

MR. LAKS: Are there any other comments?

MR. GORHAM: Reading the research on it, and, again, with the low samples, it's kind of all over the place. Ira, you just sat through it, but you have males mature as young as six months, and I think the average, the 50 percent, was around two years and twenty-five to twenty-nine inches. That thirty-three mark was the extreme safe, and even the age-to-length doesn't seem to really correlate across the board with this species. That's just where my -- Once you lower it, the minimum size limit, and that would also have a regulatory benefit as well, if you lower your average weight, and the ACL right now is obviously based on weight and not fish.

Again, Wes, you know I'm not disagreeing for that Virginia fishery, but, up here in northeast North Carolina, it's just a different fishery. It's much, much, much shorter. It's a pulse fishery, and you're lucky to get what you get when you get it, and I supported Virginia's regulations fully, because, again, it's a three to four-month fishery, and that's all I have on the topic.

MR. LAKS: I really don't know your fishery up there, Bill, but I would have to say that some of those shorter fish would have to be females, too. They do have to grow, and so you don't -- Although you might be getting somewhat the benefit of that, you're still going to be catching shorter females.

MR. GORHAM: Yes, and I have reached out to VMRC and VIMS, and that percentage difference -- I would really like that to be studied, because, if that ends up being true throughout high samples, we should really look at that as a management measure with the increase in effort but, again, I haven't been able to view it or see it on paper. The samples were what they were, but maybe, for a research track, that's something that we all need to look at, if we're really, truly concerned about maintaining this very healthy fishery.

MR. LAKS: Any other comment? Why don't we vote on the motion? **All those in favor; all those opposed.** Bill Gorham, what's your vote?

MR. GORHAM: I think it's best if I stay out of this one.

MR. LAKS: **All those abstaining, two.** All right. Is there anything else that anyone would like to bring up? Is there any public comment? Is there anyone in the room that would like to make a public comment?

MR. HARTIG: I would just like to thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to participate in this process. I mean, we can't do this without your input, and I really appreciate the really good input we got at this meeting, and so thank you all very much.

MR. LAKS: Ben, I think we can speak for everyone here for all your service that you have done, and we know you're terming off, and I think everyone appreciates everything you've done for the council and for the fishermen, and so thank you very much.

MR. ENGLISH: You stated my comment before me. Ben Hartig has only got a month left, and let me tell you something. We are going to sorely miss Ben Hartig's input with the council, and the council needs to find a way to maintain his expertise in their grip, and so, to the council, keep Ben on in some way, because he is irreplaceable for us. Thank you.

MR. LAKS: I will second that motion.

MR. KELLY: A tip of the hat as well to Ben from all of us in the Florida Keys for so many years of service here, and I also wanted to thank you, Ira, for -- I don't know how many people in this room know that you spent the entire week up here prior to this meeting, and the time and effort that you put into this is certainly appreciated. Christina, thank you for a fantastic job here, and, staff, you obviously are very well organized. Then, quite frankly, it's a pleasure to see so many people here from the South Atlantic Council staff that can hear us and understand our position on issues, and I think, the more we interact with management, the better the outcome always is, and so thank you.

MR. MCKINLEY: I would just like to -- I don't know everybody, and this is my first time, and so I don't know all the history and all, but I would like to thank the council for allowing me to serve. There is a lot of good people here, and I've met a lot of good people, and there is a lot of knowledge in this room, and I feel like I learned a lot, and I look forward to participating in the future.

MR. LAKS: If there is nothing else, thank you, guys. I do appreciate you putting up with me. Safe travels. That is the end of the Mackerel Cobia AP.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned on April 17, 2018.)

Certified By:  Date: 4/17/19

Transcribed By:  
Amanda Thomas  
May 1, 2018

## SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

### Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel

#### ✓ Chair

✓ Ira Laks  
12698 187th Place North  
Jupiter, FL 33478  
(561)719-8857(ph)  
[captainira@att.net](mailto:captainira@att.net)  
12/14, 3/18\*  
Charter

#### ✓ Vice Chair

✓ Stephen Swann  
332 3rd Street  
Atlantic Beach, FL 32233  
(904)923-0415 (ph); (904)249-8009 (f)  
[sswann@appliedtm.com](mailto:sswann@appliedtm.com)  
12/11, 12/14, 3/18\*  
Recreational

#### ✓ Keith Bowen

✓ 365 Orange Ave  
Sebastian FL 32958  
(772)413-1029  
[fpfirelb@aol.com](mailto:fpfirelb@aol.com)  
3/18\*  
Commercial

#### ✓ Stephen Donalson

✓ 3416 Babiche Street  
St. Johns, FL 32259  
(904)888-4237 (ph)  
[stevedonelson@yahoo.com](mailto:stevedonelson@yahoo.com)  
9/16\*  
Recreational

#### ✓ Dr. Christopher Elkins

✓ 297 Sleepy Point Rd  
Gloucester, NC 28528  
(919)4173171  
[tarheelboatworks@gmail.com](mailto:tarheelboatworks@gmail.com)  
9/17\*  
Recreational/Charter-NGO Rep

#### ✓ Steve English

✓ P.O. Box 814  
Port Salerno, FL 34992  
(772)201-5408 (ph)  
[nancyenglish@comcast.net](mailto:nancyenglish@comcast.net)  
12/14, 3/18\*  
Commercial

#### ✓ Captain Skip Feller

✓ 4478 Ashwood Lane  
Virginia Beach, VA 23453  
(757)287-4153 (ph)  
[sfeller3@verizon.net](mailto:sfeller3@verizon.net)  
1/16\*  
VA Rep

#### ✓ Ryan Howard

✓ 113 Sunrest Blvd.  
Savannah, GA 31410  
(912)675-0081 (ph)  
[fishmervan@gmail.com](mailto:fishmervan@gmail.com)  
3/16\*  
Charter

#### ✓ Bill Kelly

✓ PO Box 501404  
Marathon, FL 33050  
(305)619-0039 (ph); (305)743-0294 (f)  
[FKCFA1@hotmail.com](mailto:FKCFA1@hotmail.com)  
6/12, 9/15\*  
Commercial

#### ✓ Randy McKinley

✓ 114 Friendly Lane  
Hampstead, NC 28443  
(910)612-5260  
[emckinley3@aol.com](mailto:emckinley3@aol.com)  
9/17\*

✓ Robert Olsen  
927 Kincade Drive  
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464  
(843)442-7724 (ph)  
[rjolsen2@yahoo.com](mailto:rjolsen2@yahoo.com)  
12/14, 3/18\*  
Charter

✓ Greg Peralta  
111 Beresford Creek Street  
Daniel Island, SC 29429  
(843)224-0099 (ph)  
[captgregp@gmail.com](mailto:captgregp@gmail.com)  
3/16\*  
Recreational

*Open NC Seat*

✓ Gary Robinson  
501 Circle West  
Jupiter, FL 33458  
(561)262-3790 (ph)  
[garyrobinson31@hotmail.com](mailto:garyrobinson31@hotmail.com)  
3/17\*  
Commercial

✓ Tom Roller  
807 Deerfield Drive  
Beaufort, NC 28516  
(919)423-6310 (ph)  
[capttom@waterdogguideservice.com](mailto:capttom@waterdogguideservice.com)  
3/17\*  
Charter/Rec

*Open NC Seat*

## Cobia Sub-Panel

✓ Wes Blow  
56 Cedar Lane  
Newport News, VA 23601  
(757)880-4269 (ph)  
[wesamy2000@cox.net](mailto:wesamy2000@cox.net)  
9/16\*  
Recreational

✓ Collins Doughtie  
55bb Oyster Street  
Bluffton, SC 29910  
(843)816-6608 (ph)  
[cdad@hiltonheadisland.net](mailto:cdad@hiltonheadisland.net)  
3/18\*

✓ Bill Gorham *webinar*  
25 12th Avenue  
Southern Shores, NC 27949  
(703)919-0886 (ph)  
[getbowedup40@gmail.com](mailto:getbowedup40@gmail.com)  
9/16\*  
Recreational

✓ Patrick Link  
4505 Francis Chapman  
N Williamsburg, VA 23185  
(815)931-8912(ph)  
[patricklink11@gmail.com](mailto:patricklink11@gmail.com)  
9/17\*  
Recreational

✓ Bill Weeks  
P.O. Box 503  
Brunswick, GA 31521  
(912)258-8283 (ph)  
[fishsaltlick@gmail.com](mailto:fishsaltlick@gmail.com)  
9/16\*  
Recreational

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
**2017 COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

**COUNCIL CHAIR**

Charlie Phillips  
Phillips Seafood/Sapelo Sea Farms  
1418 Sapelo Ave  
N.E. Townsend, GA 31331  
(912)832-4423  
[Ga\\_capt@yahoo.com](mailto:Ga_capt@yahoo.com)

**VICE-CHAIR**

Mark Brown  
3642 Pandora Drive  
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29466  
(843)881-9735 (ph.); (843)881-4446 (f)  
[Capt.markbrown101@gmail.com](mailto:Capt.markbrown101@gmail.com)

Robert E. Beal  
Executive Director  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries  
Commission  
1050 N. Highland St.  
Suite 200 A-N  
Arlington, VA 20001  
(703)842-0740 (ph); (703)842-0741 (f)  
[rbeal@asmfc.org](mailto:rbeal@asmfc.org)

Anna Beckwith  
1907 Paulette Road  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252/671-3474 (ph)  
[AnnaBarriosBeckwith@gmail.com](mailto:AnnaBarriosBeckwith@gmail.com)

✓ Mel Bell  
S.C. Dept. of Natural Resources  
Marine Resources Division  
P.O. Box 12559  
217 Ft. Johnson Road  
Charleston, SC 29422-2559  
843/953-9007 (ph); 843/953-9159 (fax)  
[bellm@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:bellm@dnr.sc.gov)

Zack Bowen  
P.O. Box 30825  
Savannah, GA 31410  
(912)398-3733 (ph)  
[zackbowensafmc@gmail.com](mailto:zackbowensafmc@gmail.com)

W. Chester Brewer  
250 Australian Ave. South  
Suite 1400  
West Palm Beach, FL 33408  
(561)655-4777 (ph)  
[wcbasfmc@gmail.com](mailto:wcbasfmc@gmail.com)

Chris Conklin  
P.O. Box 972  
Murrells Inlet, SC 29576  
(843)543-3833  
[conklinsafmc@gmail.com](mailto:conklinsafmc@gmail.com)

Dr. Roy Crabtree  
Regional Administrator  
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Region  
263 13th Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701  
(727)824-5301 (ph); (727)824-5320 (f)  
[roy.crabtree@noaa.gov](mailto:roy.crabtree@noaa.gov)

Dr. Michelle Duval  
NC Division of Marine Fisheries  
3441 Arendell Street  
(PO Box 769)  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
(252)808-8011 (ph); (252)726-0254 (f)  
[michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov](mailto:michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov)

Tim Griner  
4446 Woodlark Lane  
Charlotte, NC 28211  
(980)722-0918 (ph)  
[timgrinersafmc@gmail.com](mailto:timgrinersafmc@gmail.com)

✓ Ben Hartig  
9277 Sharon Street  
Hobe Sound, FL 33455  
(772)546-1541 (ph)  
[mackattackben@att.net](mailto:mackattackben@att.net)

(continued)

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
**2017 COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP (continued)**

Doug Haymans  
Coastal Resources Division  
GA Dept. of Natural Resources  
One Conservation Way, Suite 300  
Brunswick, GA 31520-8687  
(912)264-7218 (ph); (912)262-2318 (f)  
[haymanssafmc@gmail.com](mailto:haymanssafmc@gmail.com)

Dr. Wilson Laney  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
South Atlantic Fisheries Coordinator  
P.O. Box 33683  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7617  
(110 Brooks Ave  
237 David Clark Laboratories,  
NCSU Campus  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7617)  
(919)515-5019 (ph); (919)515-4415 (f)  
[Wilson\\_Laney@fws.gov](mailto:Wilson_Laney@fws.gov)

Jessica McCawley  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission  
2590 Executive Center Circle E.  
Suite 201  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
(850)487-0554 (ph); (850)487-4847 (f)  
[Jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com](mailto:Jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com)

LCDR Jeremy Montes  
U.S. Coast Guard  
909 SE 1<sup>st</sup> Ave.  
Miami, FL 33131  
305/415-6788(ph); 305/710-4569(c)  
[Jeremy.J.Montes@uscg.mil](mailto:Jeremy.J.Montes@uscg.mil)

Deirdre Warner-Kramer Office of Marine  
Conservation OES/OMC  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Department of State, Room 5806  
Washington, DC 20520  
202/647-3228 (ph); 202/736-7350 (f)  
[Warner-KramerDM@state.gov](mailto:Warner-KramerDM@state.gov)



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
**COUNCIL STAFF**

**Executive Director**

✓ Gregg T. Waugh  
[Gregg.waugh@safmc.net](mailto:Gregg.waugh@safmc.net)

**Deputy Directory-Science & Statistics**

John Carmichael  
[John.carmichael@safmc.net](mailto:John.carmichael@safmc.net)

**Deputy Director-Management**

Dr. Brian Cheuvront  
[Brian.cheuvront@safmc.net](mailto:Brian.cheuvront@safmc.net)

---

**Fishery Scientist**

Myra Brouwer  
[Myra.brouwer@safmc.net](mailto:Myra.brouwer@safmc.net)

**Outreach Specialist**

Kathleen Howington  
[Kathleen.howington@safmc.net](mailto:Kathleen.howington@safmc.net)

**Admin. Secretary/ Travel Coordinator**

Cindy Chaya  
[Cindy.chaya@safmc.net](mailto:Cindy.chaya@safmc.net)

**Public Information Officer**

✓ Kim Iverson  
[Kim.iverson@safmc.net](mailto:Kim.iverson@safmc.net)

**Purchasing & Grants**

✓ Kimberly Cole  
[Kimberly.cole@safmc.net](mailto:Kimberly.cole@safmc.net)

**Senior Fishery Biologist**

Roger Pugliese  
[Roger.pugliese@safmc.net](mailto:Roger.pugliese@safmc.net)

**Fishery Scientist**

✓ Dr. Chip Collier  
[Chip.collier@safmc.net](mailto:Chip.collier@safmc.net)

**Outreach Specialist**

✓ Cameron Rhodes  
[Cameron.rhodes@safmc.net](mailto:Cameron.rhodes@safmc.net)

**Administrative Officer**

Mike Collins  
[Mike.collins@safmc.net](mailto:Mike.collins@safmc.net)

**Financial Secretary**

Suzanna Thomas  
[Suzanna.thomas@safmc.net](mailto:Suzanna.thomas@safmc.net)

**Outreach Specialist**

Kelsey Dick  
[Kelsey.dick@safmc.net](mailto:Kelsey.dick@safmc.net)

**Citizen Science Program Manager**

Amber Von Harten  
[Amber.vonharten@safmc.net](mailto:Amber.vonharten@safmc.net)

**Fishery Biologist**

Dr. Mike Errigo  
[Mike.errigo@safmc.net](mailto:Mike.errigo@safmc.net)

**Fishery Social Scientist**

✓ Christina Wiegand  
[Christina.wiegand@safmc.net](mailto:Christina.wiegand@safmc.net)

**Fishery Economist**

✓ John Hadley  
[John.hadley@safmc.net](mailto:John.hadley@safmc.net)

**SEDAR Coordinators**

Dr. Julie Neer- [Julie.neer@safmc.net](mailto:Julie.neer@safmc.net)  
✓ Julia Byrd- [Julia.byrd@safmc.net](mailto:Julia.byrd@safmc.net)



Tracey Smart  
Lt. Jerry Brown

**MC AP Day 2- 4/17/18**

Last Name	First Name	Email Address
Bianchi	Alan	Alan.Bianchi@ncdenr.gov
Bush	David	debushjr@gmail.com
Duval	Michelle	michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov
Gore	Karla	karla.gore@noaa.gov
Gorham	Bill	Getbowedup40@gmail.com
Hadley	John	john.hadley@samfc.net
Hudson	Russell	DSF2009@aol.com
Rock	Jason	jason.rock@ncdenr.gov
griner	tim	timgrinersafmc@gmail.com
Burgess	Erika	erika.burgess@myfwc.com
Rhodes	Ray	rhodesr@cofc.edu

**MC AP Day 1- 4/16/18**

Last Name	First Name	Email Address
Bianchi	Alan	Alan.Bianchi@ncdenr.gov
Bush	David	debushjr@gmail.com
Byrd	Julia	julia.byrd@safmc.net
Davis	Sarah	sayraj75@gmail.com
Duval	Michelle	michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov
Gore	Karla	karla.gore@noaa.gov
Gorham	Bill	Getbowedup40@gmail.com
Grimes	Shepherd	shepherd.grimes@noaa.gov
Helies	Frank	frank.helies@noaa.gov
Hudson	Russell	DSF2009@aol.com
Neer	Julie	julie.neer@safmc.net
Rhodes	Ray	rhodesr@cofc.edu
Rock	Jason	jason.rock@ncdenr.gov
Silver	Charlie	Poledancincharters@yahoo.com
Sinclair	Fred	fsinclair55@aol.com
Adams	Derek	expertadventuretips@gmail.com
Burgess	Erika	erika.burgess@myfwc.com

**MC AP Day 2- 4/17/18**

Last Name	First Name	Email Address
Bianchi	Alan	Alan.Bianchi@ncdenr.gov
Bush	David	debushjr@gmail.com
Duval	Michelle	michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov
Gore	Karla	karla.gore@noaa.gov
Gorham	Bill	Getbowedup40@gmail.com
Hadley	John	john.hadley@samfc.net
Hudson	Russell	DSF2009@aol.com
Rock	Jason	jason.rock@ncdenr.gov
griner	tim	timgrinersafmc@gmail.com
Burgess	Erika	erika.burgess@myfwc.com
Rhodes	Ray	rhodesr@cofc.edu