

**PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION
WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA
DECEMBER 4, 2024**

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Hello, everybody. My name is Dewey Hemilright. I'm a self-funded commercial fishing advocate and a boat owner. I started making some comments yesterday, and then, after listening to all the doom and gloom, I ripped them up and threw them away, because, in the commercial industry, and in the snapper grouper fishery, it could be no worse than what we have going on.

I listened to the comments around the table, and it doesn't appear -- There's some hard choices to be made that nobody wants to make. They want to kick the can down the road and hope there's some magic to get you out of this. In 1999, the South Atlantic Council implemented a two-for-one reduction of the commercial fishing industry, from about 2,500 permits to where we're at today, like 525 or something. That's twenty-five years of reduction, and the eight criteria for reduction -- I can't remember them all, but a lot of them was overfished or over capacity.

Well, everything I've heard here, for two days tells, you that the recreational industry is over capacity in ability to go catch. When you look around this room, you see a maximum occupancy on different sections of this room, and that's meaning that the managers have said this is how much this room can hold. Well, when you look at the recreational industry, and the harvest that they that they catch, I almost feel like the commercial industry is subsidizing their catching.

The commercial industry is given a portion of the pie. I wish that that portion of the pie just dealt with the commercial industry, but it doesn't. That portion of the pie deals with the recreational industry, and it deals with not wanting -- Not able to account for the catch for discards, and it also relies on the -- This is my interpretation, but the MRIP, and how much variance it has in it, and it also -- I mean the commercial industry could not be no worse in the snapper grouper fishery.

It's going to get worse, because you will not fix, or attempt to, or maybe don't want to, or don't know how to the portion of the pie of the recreational industry. There's just too many recreational fishermen. When you go look at it -- My time is up. Well, when you go look at it it's just -- When is the council going to make the hard choice of dealing with it? What is it going to take? Is it going to take other lawsuits? Is it possible to deal with it? You know, you've got some hard choices, but the commercial industry -- The numbers are going down, in looking at it.

Guys are aging out, and they can't sell their permits, because you got the two-for-one. I mean, when is when is this going to stop, you know, and this is real, and affecting people's livelihood, and we're only a portion of the pie.

The other side of the user group should be the same accountability as the portion as we are at the table, the commercial entity, and, you know, I could harp on for more, and I've got great stories to tell about it, the inequities and injustice, but I think you all know, but somebody has got to make some hard choices, and there's some pain before there's gain. Thank you.

MS. GUYAS: Good afternoon, everybody. Martha Guyas, with the American Sportfishing Association. I appreciated the headboat discussion yesterday. I thought that was really good,

and also the thorough discussion in the Citizen Science Committee about the motivations of fishermen, and trust, and hopefully that wasn't too much of a surprise, but I do think that a lot of the recommendations that came out of that discussion and trying to move forward were really good. I'm looking forward to the stakeholder engagement meetings, and we're glad to help get the word out, when the time comes, about those meetings.

I want to talk about the SEDAR discussion this morning. I thought that was really on point. I mean, we all know, I think at this point, that good data is the foundation for good assessments. We need that good data to make -- To undergo good, useful assessments. I 100 percent agree that the council should be doing a review of the species that it manages. I think you need to be realistic and refine the list to focus on what NOAA and the Science Center can realistically handle and what the council can actually manage.

To that end, I think the council should take action to initiate a review of managed species, to determine that if they are in need of federal fisheries management. This -- You may remember this also came up, or was relevant to feedback that you all got from the private recreational Snapper Grouper Angler Permit AP discussion last May. There were a lot of questions about the feasibility of creating a permit for all fifty-five species of the snapper grouper complex.

On MSE, I'm struggling a little bit, given the basis of the MSE is SEDAR 73, and all the problems associated with it, and the data that fed into that, and, because of that, I definitely think it's worth looking at changes and reference points, as part of that, and then, also, you know, assumptions about future recruitment, as recommended in the presentation that you all saw today.

Then, looking ahead on your agenda, on golden tile, when you go through that assessment tomorrow, and think about moving forward with another amendment, given the 3 percent quota allocation to the recreational sector, and the quota closure that occurred this year, after the first wave, we would ask that the council consider reallocating some fish to the recreational sector.

Then there's also a proposal open for public comment right now that would expand the Return 'Em Right program into the South Atlantic. I wanted to flag that. ASA is supportive of this expansion, and we ask that the council also support it. What this program does, and it's been in place in the Gulf of Mexico for several years, and it helps educate anglers and for-hire captains about the use of descending devices, and it does a lot of -- There's some research associated with that, tracking their use and effectiveness, and it's been really great at getting angler buy-in in using those devices, and I think would complement all of the work that you all have been doing to try to increase use of descending devices, and so I've got my three minutes, and so thank you.

MR. GENTNER: Hi, guys. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to comment today. Thanks for your service here as well. I know it's a tough job. Both the Gulf Council and the South Atlantic Councils are struggling with the issues brought up in the SEDAR discussion today, which, frankly, I find encouraging.

I would like to express my support for developing an alternative management framework to get us out of this analysis paralysis trap and towards more practical techniques and increased management effectiveness and efficiency. Our stock assessment process has largely overrun the data and the analytical capacity within NOAA, and this has led to ever more risk-averse

management advice by the SSC, and this isn't a way to maximize the benefits of fishery management for all user groups, and that's all user groups.

Everyone is being punished because of this. We have to figure out how to prioritize the most critical species. We also need to develop case studies, using historical stock assessments, and do some different techniques relative to those and see how they would have changed management advice in the past, and use that to inform how we do management in going into the future.

If the quicker, easier methods would have produced similar results, well maybe we should move in that direction. It's analogous to the issue we have with the MRIP. Sure, the MRIP may be the best survey of its type in the world, which I firmly believe, but it cannot be used for in-season quota management, which I also firmly believe, and a lot of scientists agree with me.

Likewise, our stock assessments are likely some of the most complicated, certainly, in the world, but these Cadillac models have overrun the data quality, and the analysis capacity, we have, and it has hamstrung management. Let's work together to get more practical management tools in the council's hands.

Finally, after watching the MSE presentation on snapper grouper, and being an economist, and somebody who studies human behavior, I would like to make a plug for the collection of the type of data necessary to examine effort stuffing, or this non-linearity in the effort response to season length that we talked about and that Tim asked about.

We've known this is an issue for a very long time, and yet NMFS keeps making season length projections that are flat, that don't account for this non-linearity, particularly as we move to shorter and shorter seasons, and we always miss, and we're always surprised that we miss. I mean, I'm not surprised that we miss. We'll always miss the mark on season length, when we're moving to short seasons and not taking care uh into account this non-linearity, and this is just one thing that, you know, studying human behavior, and collecting data on human behavior, and moving to more proactive use of that type of information can gain us, and that's all I have today.

MS. AINES: Hi. I'm Alex Aines. I work as a marine scientist at Oceana. Since 2019, Oceana has worked to protect endangered North Atlantic right whales from both entanglement and vessel strikes, and, since 2017, the U.S. and Canada have confirmed ten mortalities, thirty-three serious injuries, and fifty-three sublethal injuries from entanglement, and more than 86 percent of North Atlantic right whales have suffered at least one entanglement during their lifetime.

Current closed areas in the black sea bass fishery exist to protect North Atlantic right whales from entanglement, and, as part of Amendment 56, we strongly support the reopening of nearshore areas to on-demand black sea bass plots.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has an opportunity to benefit both fishermen and North Atlantic right whales by allowing on-demand gear to be used during seasonal closures. This action would allow access to areas currently closed in times in which target fish are more readily available closer to shore, and there would be no ropes that might entangle whales. This action would build upon the momentum we saw with Amendment 36 that adds on-demand pots as an allowable commercial gear for black sea bass outside the closure and has received approval from the council.

Like Amendment 36, Amendment 56 would also build upon years of at-sea trials and set the precedent that fishermen and whales can coexist. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council would continue to be an example of how to modernize fisheries, by embracing whale-safe gear, incentivizing its use, and increasing accessibility.

Oceana offers its commitment to support this action and calls upon all fishery managers facing entanglement challenges to embrace on-demand gear and hopes there will be further enticements to use it by reopening closed areas to on-demand black sea bass plots. Oceana will continue to stay engaged on this action. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.

MS. HARRISON: Okay, and so I kind of want to echo what Dewey said, but give you a like more like real-life scenario. So my dad gave my brother his fishing business, with his suite of permits, because my brother always wanted to be a fisherman. He grew up on the boat, and he thought this will set him up for his life. He'll have a business that he can work at. He'll have the permits, and it's like ready to go, and so now we fast-forward.

He's had it since he was twenty-one, and he is going to be thirty-four, and so he lasted thirteen years, and his snapper grouper permit -- He can't really use it, because it can't make a day out going offshore anymore in Hatteras, and then his king mackerel permit is probably the one that he uses the most, and so he says, well, let me put my snapper grouper permit up for sale. I'm getting tired of the commercial industry, and I want to find a new job that I know that I'm going to have a career in, that I can be able to get a house, that I can have health insurance, that I can have retirement.

He calls a broker, to put his permit up for sale, and he has -- My dad gave it to him one-for-one, right, and so it's a limited permit, because it was family, and it was one -- It was transferred. He cannot sell it. Nobody wants it, because of the mindset that you cannot find the pair, and so everybody is scared to buy it, because they fear that that investment will -- That they will lose that investment of the first permit before they can find the second permit to make the pair, and so like what are we supposed to do?

You all are the governing body of our business, and it's like we look to you for advice, and like we try to plan our business based on your regulation, and my dad told us when split seasons come up, it will all -- Like we'll finally have a chance in North Carolina, because we'll have our own season, where we can target grouper and tile, and that will like -- that will push you through, and that didn't happen.

Luckily, my dad was smart enough to say to my brother that we'll keep this Northeast black sea bass permit active, even though we don't land black sea bass, and he was able to sell that one, a couple of years ago, for like \$15,000, which was like really good, but, I mean, he never made any money on it, his entire life, nor did my dad, and so now we're at the point where -- Like what is he supposed to do? Like the permit is like worthless now, and now he doesn't have -- Like he has a boat. He has like a 1980 BHM that has been a commercial boat.

Like, sure, a collector might want it, but he's going to have to put in like a bucket load of money to make it like a yacht again, but so I just -- I want you all to think about that, that your decisions are impacting people. You know, my brother doesn't deserve that. All he ever wanted to do was

be a fisherman, since he was like a little kid, and now he's trying to figure out like can I get a job on an oil rig, or should I go back to -- Should I go to school, and try to get a job on a freighter, and so I think that there needs to be -- I know that you can't have like an exit plan for us, but I just want you to remember that your decisions are impacting people's everyday lives and their futures, and so I appreciate you for listening to my story. Thank you.

DR. RUNDE: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Runde. I'm a marine scientist with the Nature Conservancy. I wish I had some good news. I'm submitting this comment to make the council aware of a new analysis documenting the decline of large dolphinfish in the South Atlantic. I conducted this analysis with the co-authorship of Paul Rudershausen at North Carolina State University and George Stilson at North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. This paper has recently been accepted at the *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*.

We examined numbers of citations given by North Carolina DMF. This is the good kind of citation. They're given for thirty-five-pound or larger dolphin. We looked at these figures from the year 2000 to the year 2023. We scaled those numbers by effort data from MRIP to produce a trips-per-citation value.

There was a strikingly evident trend in this metric through time, with the number of offshore trips necessary to produce a citation dolphin increasing by a factor of around five from the beginning of the time series to the end. To put numbers on it, at the beginning of the time series, North Carolina anglers were weighing several hundred citation dolphin annually, with a high of 459 weighed in the year 2001.

Last year, the last year of our time series, 2023, only fifty-three dolphin were weighed, and so that was 459 in 2001 to fifty-three in 2023. I did not include the year 2024 in this analysis, because, obviously, the year is incomplete. However, as of November 15, only forty-four citation dolphin had been weighed, and so that would be an all-time low.

To test for social changes, such as how likely anglers were to pursue a citation for a large enough fish, we compared our dolphin data to similar data for wahoo. There was no trend for wahoo throughout the time series.

This result suggests a steep decline in the availability or abundance of large dolphinfish off of North Carolina. Since this stock is known to be mixed along the entire coast, we believe this result is indicative of a stock-wide decline. This finding is the latest in a series of recent papers suggesting the stock is in trouble, including another paper from the author team earlier this year showing declines in sizes of tournament-caught dolphinfish. I'm aware the council is considering Regulatory Amendment 3 for dolphin and request that this new analysis, and the results of other recent scientific papers, be considered when taking action. Thank you.

MS. BECKWITH: I'm just curious. Did you take into account when they changed the citation program, from that really pretty one that they would mail out, that was colored, to the one that you basically just print out at your house?

DR. RUNDE: So I don't work for the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, but my understanding, and we did have co-authorship from an employee of that agency, and my

understanding is they still send colorful paper citations. I know there are employees of that agency in the room, and maybe they can correct the record.

MR. GARDNER: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Dave Gardner. I run the headboat Vonda Kay out of North Carolina Beach, which is the last remaining headboat for a 150-mile distance along this coastline here. I personally have seen a steady decline in business over the last few years, and the cessation of business by nine other headboats in this area.

I believe this decline in business is due to increase in regulations, many of which I believe are unwarranted and not supported by best available science. The dead discard mortality data is flawed, as I personally see a 99 percent survival rate on my own boat on snappers and gags. The gag closure has almost completely shut down my operation. The numbers on our daily reports reflect a very healthy gag and snapper population, and, in fact, I have to avoid large areas to stay away from these two species. The best platform to assess a stock population is a headboat, although I don't see it happening, only by the post-catch reports that we file online.

My boat alone brings over \$100,000 to the local economy during the summer months, and equally as much in the fall months, but not at the present, because of the gag closure, because I'm basically shut down, because nobody wants to go, because we can't keep anything. This economic data was provided by Dr. Christopher Dumas in 2008, so that's in 2008 numbers. I'm sure that number has doubled by now.

The proposed two-gag-per-boat limit is not feasible for a boat with fifty, or even 100, people aboard, especially in light of my observations of a healthy gag stock. In my opinion, if we keep it fair, it should be two for every six people, because what are we supposed to do with a boat full of people? These people think we're making this stuff up. Thank you for your time.

MR. LORENZ: Bob Lorenz. I'm a local. I live just three miles the other side of the bridge, near the water. I want to speak today, just a couple minutes, based on my experience on having been on your AP for nine years, your Snapper Grouper AP, and also having watched this council process and participated, at my own expense, for probably the past twenty years.

One of the things, with respect to the AP, and I saw -- It triggered me yesterday, when I saw the council session that was closed, and so I don't know how you do it, and it was the review of the advisory panel, the AP policy. I would ask you, no matter what your AP policy is, to look at it for a little more diversity.

In my nine years on the AP, the overwhelming majority of the people on the AP looked like me, okay, and we were mostly male, with two exceptions. We had Kerry on for a while, until she joined the council, and we had a captain who worked for Judy. In addition, we, at one point, had maybe two men that were of color. They lasted a very short time, and so the overwhelming number of people that on our AP were basically white males, and almost everybody over fifty. You have some need to get some more younger people enrolled in that process, and you definitely have a need to get some women involved in that process.

Some of those women have actually come to me and have asked questions about getting on the AP, and I've encouraged them. Often, some feedback that was given is, well, they don't have quite enough experience in the fishery and all, and so, if they haven't gotten to fifty years old or

anything, and they aren't going to work in boots and bibs every day, it's pretty tough for them to get involved, and so I say to open your process a little more, to look at some of these who might be high-performance potential people, to add a little more diversity to your AP.

Remember, the AP, the diversity, though it's gotten a little nasty name lately, it's good for reflecting who we are, and who it is that you all are serving, and so I would like to take a little -- To make a small effort to look at that process, no matter how it's done. I don't know how it is.

One, I would just like to make a brief comment, after seeing the citizen science presentation, and it seemed pretty dour on at least transparency and openness from the various people in the scientific community and in management. In my opinion, with all the years, your transparency is phenomenal, and the ability to participate, if somebody only learns and takes the time, and it was easy for me, and I was able to do it, having retired at age-fifty, and I had enough money to go follow you around, that I could learn it, but it is more than open.

In fact, if I had one comment, it's sometimes I actually feel the managers -- You are too involved in public comment, and it takes way too long. You listen to way too many opinions. There is such a thing as a possible -- You know, an executive decision. Certain things that might make some sense, just do it. It's come up. I mean, I don't know, and maybe there's a law with the sharks, but people talk about the sharks, and they can't sell the fins, and this sort of thing.

I mean, you could open it up that people who -- Legitimate fishermen in operations can fish for the sharks. Yes, let them sell the fins. Things like recreational fishing, there were simple things, like the one-hook rig. There were things like not using electric reels. Those things, maybe you can implement without a lot of problem, and just see where it goes. It might be a little more efficient. Sorry for the time, but thank you for all the time you let me participate within your process.

MS. STEPHENS: Good afternoon, council. My name is Haley Stevens. Sometimes knowing what you are not is just as important as knowing what you are. I am not a lobbyist. I am not a scientist. I am a fisherman, here on my own dime. I own and operate Sea Spirit, the longest-running and last-standing headboat in Volusia County, Florida. I'm also the founder of South Atlantic Headboats United, a grassroots alliance with the mission to connect, educate, and empower our federally-permitted, Coast-Guard-inspected, multi-passenger fleet.

I think it illuminates an incredibly heavy message that, in a day and age when other sectors are competing against one another, the South Atlantic headboat fleet has chosen to come together as a last-ditch effort to survive. It's no secret that headboats are a dying breed.

Reasons for this include the consistent increase in costs of overhead and operational expenses, paired with the continued decline of working waterfront access. For example, in our town of Ponce Inlet, working vessels greater than sixty-five feet are now prohibited. Mandatory insurance to obtain and maintain a COI on a headboat with no claims is close to \$40,000 a year. However, in my opinion, the largest constraint headboats continue to face our federal fishery regulations.

Even with our backs against the wall, headboats continue to be held to the highest standard in the recreational sector. Reporting compliance is mandatory, as stated in 622.176 of our National

Standard, and guess what? Headboat owners, operators, and crews choose to completely accept all of this. What is difficult to accept is being regulated on the same scale as a six-pack or private recreational angler, who are not held to the same accountability standard.

How do I say this? If a component claims to favor accountability, but does not believe accountability should apply to all of those utilizing the same resource, perhaps that component actually favors privilege. As a result of stewardship practiced by headboats for several decades now, we're presented with best scientific information available, validated through MSE reports, Chip's headboat report, to further support that headboats are responsible for a very small amount of fishing effort and a very small amount of dead discards, particularly in the snapper grouper complex.

In my experience, it's safe to assume the majority of those who have no other alternative than to access deep-sea fishing by headboat belong to NOAA's equity and environmental justice plan as underserved communities. The representation of our headboat guests and crew is a matter of great importance to us, which is why we strongly advocate on meaningful involvement on their behalf.

There's no better time to turn a corner in fisheries management. I would love to see a more proactive approach. The lag time between the long process does not reflect what fishermen are experiencing on the water in real time. It becomes irrelevant and frustrating.

I thought the citizen science presentation was really interesting, that suggested trust and rapport is at an all-time low. My advice is do not view this as a way of being called out. View it as an opportunity of being called up. Yes, you're fisheries managers, but you, along with staff and so many stakeholders, are fisheries leaders. Lean on your AP members, your community, and commit to that transparent communication.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, but I truly believe we can champion our fishery, beginning by empowering those at a local level. Many have given up, but I'm just getting started, and so let's work together. Thank you.

MR. TILLEY: Greetings. My name is Captain Dave Tilley. I run the Wild River III in Carolina Beach. I go up for my thirty-five-year renewal this year, or this coming winter. I want you all to think about a number, the number \$786,000. That's what my charter boat generated in surplus income in 2023. Surplus income, and these are in 2008 dollars by the way, and not 2024 dollars, but 2008 dollars, \$786,000. That's outside the cost of the trip, mind you.

So, every day, these rules and regulations that you pull us off the ocean, that's how much money you're taking out of the local economies, up and down the coast. That's coming from Dr. Chris Dumas, at UNC Wilmington, \$624 per angler per day, once again in 2008 dollars. It's a lot of jack. It's a lot of jobs. It's a lot of people.

Every time you close gags, like they are now, I can tell you, from experience, that the majority of people couldn't catch their way out of a wet paper bag, but they won't go unless they have the opportunity to catch one, and they stop going because you close them.

My buddy Dave Gardner back here runs a headboat. Two gags per boat? Really? That's not going to work. You know, on a charter boat, that's fine, but on a headboat? Come on, guys. How about two per six people? Yes, that will work. At least give them the opportunity to catch one.

One other thing I'll point out to you is why in the world you don't have to upload a photograph of what you caught every day is absolutely beyond me. That's simple enough. You want to count fish, that's how you count them, guys. Upload a photo, take facial recognition software, and let it count the fish. Thank you.

MR. SOLANA: Hi, and I'm Albie Solana. Sorry, and I'm getting over a cold here, but I'm the owner and operator of the Fishing Vessel Orion that docks here in Wrightsville Beach, at Hodge Channel Seafood, and I'm also a fisheries liaison for the Carolina Long Bay Offshore Wind Project. I haven't been at the meeting all week here, but from what I've heard, I could give a few reports about the fishing I do.

My range is from pretty much Cape Lookout down in Georgetown, South Carolina. 95 percent of the fish that we sell are harvested spearfishing, and so I've seen a lot of changes in the whole ecosystem since 2010, when we first started. I never saw a red snapper in my life, for the first few years that we dove here, and, today, by far the most abundant reef fish that we see everywhere from Cape Lookout down to Georgetown, probably even further, even more as you go further south.

Another fish that, when I started, that would probably take that place as the most abundant, would be the black sea bass, and there was some strict measures on them. I didn't experience a commercial fishing season on black sea bass until four or five years into having my permit, and it had a chance of being a really good success story, if it had been managed correctly, but, whatever happened, the reopening back to a million-pound quota, and we only had a couple years of being able to have a nice fishery that provided some income in the winter, and now that -- I would just consider black sea bass just non-existent. Reopening and potting in waters with on-demand release gear is just ridiculous. No one's even going to go out and do it.

They're just non-existent, but you have a chance to make the red snapper situation be a success story here, and you can't just keep giving seventy-five-pound trip limits and recreational guys, whatever they get two days a year, for too much longer here, and it's just -- It's getting to the point that it's just unacceptable, the abundance of red snapper and us not getting any opportunity to have a sustainable fishery there. You could reopen it and give us a decent amount, at least a big enough catch that we could make a few dollars and keep it open for a good portion of the year, and then, you know, the mortality that you're going by, with the 90 percent mortality, is absolutely incorrect.

You need to get some better data on that. It's probably more around like less than 10 percent mortality on the red snapper that get released here in less than 100 feet of water, but that's all I've got to say. Thank you.

MR. MCWATERS: This is Mark McWaters. I'm a recreational fisherman here in Jacksonville, Florida. I'm sixty-six years old. I've been fishing offshore for over fifty-five years. I've been participating in the citizen science Release program this year, and Meg Withers has been great,

and I've been going through all the different documentation, and amendments, and trying to figure out what's driving some of the regulations, because they make no sense, from my view, and I agree with what Albie just said.

If you look at the council presentation from January 2023, it indicates that the dead discard rate is 90 percent, that 90 percent of the red snapper that are caught are dead discards, and I'm here to tell you that my observations, my data, and I don't believe anybody really believes that number, that actually gets offshore and fishes, and that data is what -- If I understand correctly, that data is the primary driver for the regulations that affect commercial headboats and recreational.

I mean, the actual -- From my view, what I see, and I'm not doing anything special, is the actual dead discard rate is closer to -- It's less than 5 percent. For me, it's under 2 percent, when I use a descending device, and so my request, for the council, is to take a look at the data that we're now getting.

I see all these different studies, there's the SciFish Release data, and the State of Florida has got a data-gathering program, and there's a South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program, with NOAA and the University of Florida and Sea Grant, and there's an Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics, and there's at least a half-dozen data-gathering programs that have been ongoing for a while now, and so it seems that the data would exist now that would enable a more realistic assessment of the red snapper population, the mortality rate, and be able to reset a more realistic and reasonable set of regulations that open up the ability for people to catch a reasonable number of fish. Thank you very much.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Guys, thanks for giving me the opportunity to address you. I want to focus in on several of the things, mainly with the recreational side of things, the recreational effort for the red snapper. I've been able to look or watch the webinar a little bit here and there for the last two days, but, you know, bad data is bad data.

When I was looking at, and watching these attempts at adjusting data analysis, to try to make up for this proven overestimation of the recreational fishing efforts, and they proved it, and they showed it in front of Washington and everything else, with this 40 percent overestimation, but then I think we're missing the original point, the original point being that it's bad data.

There is a true overestimation, and now we're trying to figure out research models, to make it look better or say that overestimation doesn't really matter, and I think that drives the recreational fishermen crazy, when we start seeing that. We would much prefer actual real-life data, versus statistical analysis and tickling the ivories at the keyboard and trying to make the computer make some sense out of it.

I also worry about when we have the Secretary of Commerce coming in, and we've got the new one hopefully coming in here in January, and all of this data -- You guys have the responsibility to put the best data out there possible, but it is so easy, with biostatistical data, to manipulate it, to show bar graphs, and pie charts, which can take somebody who -- Say the Secretary of Commerce, who is not an expert in everything, and depends upon those around him to provide the most understandable information, but then to say, well, that 40 percent overestimation, don't worry about that. That's not that big of a deal.

I also want to jump forward with a comment to the South Atlantic Council, saying that, with regard to the secretarial amendment that folks are pushing through, that NOAA is trying to push forward, I will say from the Jacksonville, Florida area, for our recreational fishermen, we very much appreciate the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's, and let's just say guts, to hold strong and not be forced to make recommendations with bad data.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act plays that game with the best available data, and you guys were able to stand strong and not be pushed into that, and we thank you for that. I know I'm at my red mark now, but I have to say we are incredibly confused that there are even grunts on the snapper grouper complex, and so please get rid of those, and then you guys have a great holiday and safe travels back home.

MR. ZALES, II: Bob Zales II, Executive Director, Southeastern Fisheries Association. Listening to all this, and looking at some of the stuff in the webinar, and, first off, I'm seventy-one years old. I'll be seventy-two in February. I've got a little bit of an education, and not a whole lot, and most of my education comes from real-life experiences, because I live in the real world.

I try to stay in the real world. I'm not a gamer. I don't play all these games and whatnot on computers, and deal with all the virtual stuff, and, where we are with fisheries, clearly today we're living in the virtual world, because what these computer models are doing, and, you know, I give the people at the Science Center all the credit in the world, because they're highly-intelligent people. They do a great job with the information that they have to work with, but clearly the information they have to work with is not enough.

This MSE thing, I'm still -- I don't know where I am on this MSE thing. I've heard a lot about it, and I understand that the Fisheries Service has gotten millions of dollars to spend to develop this stuff, to try to move us forward to be able to get a better way to assess these fish. I'm not exactly sure how this is going to work, but I think it's got potential. Clearly, from what I understand, what was presented to you all today has the potential to reopen a fishery that's been shut down.

Fishing, whether you're recreational, for-hire, or commercial, it's all about access and opportunity. If you've got no access, you've got no opportunity. You can't do it, and dealing in the real world, with all this stuff -- Like I said, the fisheries information that's out there doesn't match what's in the virtual world, and a lot of that has to do with the lack of data. You all have heard me, and I've been a big proponent of capping the for-hire effort on the South Atlantic side, like we did in the Gulf of Mexico.

At some point, you cannot manage a restricted resource with unrestricted efforts. It's impossible to do. At some point, you're going to have to realize that something is going to have to be done, and, apparently, with red snapper, a judge is going to do it. You've got to manage the effort in these fisheries. Everything that I've seen over the past year, since I've been working with Southeastern Fisheries, now coming out of the Science Center, out of Beaufort, out of other places, all the publications and whatnot, they all indicate the same thing.

The problem with rebuilding these fisheries in the South Atlantic side, and I would argue it's going to be the same in the Gulf, is recreational effort, recreational discards, and recreational discard mortality. Until you get a handle on that mortality, you'll never rebuild any of these

fisheries. I mean, that's not me saying this. That's me reading this, from the people that write these papers, and do all this, and so it's clear that efforts and discards, and discard mortality, have to be fixed.

Now, you can go back, and you can look at -- John Sanchez said on this, and I'm going to get on this a little bit, with red snapper, you start the program in the 1950s. You can look at other fisheries, especially in the Gulf, and you've got mutton snapper in 1981, gray snapper in 1945, gray triggerfish in 1945, and I've got a real problem with all of these stock assessments that's being done on all these fish, species of fish, and they're different species, but they all live together.

They all live around the same other species around the reef. They're there, all these things, and you're starting different periods of time. None of the data that you have prior to the 1980s is anywhere close to reliable to depend on, as far as fishing effort, as far as fishing data, commercial, recreational, whatever it is.

At some point, we've got to get to the point where you've got to get to a reasonable level of starting the stock assessment where data is halfway reliable, rather than not reliable at all. I mean, we've got a situation today to where, with the federal government, when you're doing statistics, when you deal with confidence levels of PSEs, and, from what I understand, and I don't know this for sure, but from what I understand, if a PSE is greater than 50 percent, it's considered garbage, and you throw it out.

So, when you look at all this data that's out there, and there's an example dealing with deepwater grouper species yesterday, during the Reef Fish -- Their recreational data, when I asked what the PSEs were, they're greater than 50 percent. Well, why are we using them? Well, that's all we got. Well, I'm sorry, but all we got ain't good enough. You've got to do something else, and so that's pretty much all I got to say here, but you're going to have to do something about the recreational efforts in these fisheries. Otherwise, nobody -- In a few years from now, we'll all be fishing, but we won't be catching very much. Thank you.

MR. HORTON: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the council. My name is Chris Horton. I'm Senior Director of Fisheries Policy for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. My comments will be brief, and they were really generated through the discussion just before the break, and the start of the public comment, and that was concerning the future iterations of the management strategy considerations.

First, John Sanchez, and Bob just hit on it as well, but they bring up a good point about our rebuilding targets are being based -- They're based on assumptions, or best guesses, as to what the population looked like some seventy years ago, and, even if they were in that ballpark, I think it's a bit naive to think that environmental changes have not influenced population carrying capacities or potential equilibriums over that same timeframe.

Black sea bass seemed to be an example of that, and, as the environment changes, the population is becoming less abundant in the South Atlantic that are double or more their biomass targets farther north, and so I was encouraged to see some thought being given to reevaluating reference points.

Second, I really encourage, and fully support, the inclusion of maximizing days-at-sea for the recreational sector as a management objective. Looking at managing the recreational sector differently than the commercial sector is appropriate, and was actually encouraged by the Modern Fish Act in 2018, when it recognized the fundamental differences between the two sectors.

In essence, the opportunity of fishing, and potentially bringing home fish, is really the MSY for recreational anglers. Yield equals opportunities in the recreational sector. Yield is not the maximum pounds that we bring to the dock.

Again, we fully support the council looking at days-at-sea as a management objective in recreational fisheries. That's always -- It's all we've ever wanted in the recreational sector, is just the opportunity to go fishing, and so thank you for your time, and thank you for all the time.

MR. GRINER: Madam Chair, could I bring Albie back up? Can we bring another guy back up?

MS. MURPHEY: Just let's stay short though.

MR. GRINER: Yes, it will be. Albie, do you mind coming back up for a quick question. Thank you, Albie. I was just curious, and, in your efforts diving this fall, could you tell us a little bit about what you saw, as far as gags, and size of gags, and what we think has happened with this rebuilding of gags, or what you visually saw?

MR. SOLANA: As soon as this year, I saw more gags than I felt I've ever seen in my life. I spent -- As soon as they closed, and that was right in the beginning of June there, every single one of my trips, we had to work, I mean, like ten-times harder than normal, because, almost every dive we dropped in -- I would try to go to spots that gags historically wouldn't be caught at, so we didn't have to deal with them, and they were just everywhere, and I know there was no pressure on them, or less pressure on them, but it was unbelievable.

Anywhere I went, we would dive down, and you would see anywhere from just a couple to sometimes twenty or thirty gags, on a lot of spots, unless they were filled up with red snapper. It seems like, when a spot gets taken over by red snapper, you don't really see the gags on there, but, I mean, historically, as far as gag grouper go, my landings have been exactly the same, year after year, since I started in 2010. I never thought that there was any problem with the landings on gags. I know the effort has definitely changed a lot in recent years, at least commercially, but I don't know. Is there anything else you wanted to know about?

MR. GRINER: What about size? Did you see any difference in size? Were you seeing small fish, below the legal limit, or were they all legal fish, or were you seeing a mixture of sizes?

MR. SOLANA: Well, most of the diving we do is in in -- We're going at least forty miles offshore, and so, typically, I don't see a ton of undersized grouper, but, when we're diving in some of the closer inshore stuff, we saw plenty of little gags.

(Whereupon, the public comment session was adjourned.)

2024 - 2025 COUNCIL MEMBERS

Voting

- ✓ Trish Murphey, **Chair**
NC Division of Marine Fisheries
P.O. Box 769
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557
(242) 808-8011 (O); (252) 241-9310 (c)
Trish.Murphey@deq.nc.gov
- ✓ Jessica McCawley, **Vice Chair**
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 South Meridian St
Tallahassee, FL 32399
(850) 487-0554
Jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com
- ✓ Dr. Carolyn Belcher
GA DNR – Coastal Resources Division
One Conservation Way, Suite 300
Brunswick, GA 31520
(912) 264-7218
Carolyn.belcher@dnr.ga.gov
- ✓ Amy W. Dukes
SCDNR-Marine Resources Division
P.O. Box 12559
217 Ft. Johnson Road
Charleston, SC 29422
(843) 953-9365
DukesA@dnr.sc.gov
- ✓ Gary Borland
422 Highwater Court
Chapin, SC 29036
(561) 290-9274 (cell)
GborlandSAFMC@gmail.com
- ✓ Tim Griner
4446 Woodlark Lane
Charlotte, NC 28211
(980) 722-0918
timgrinersafmc@gmail.com
- ✓ Judy Helmey
124 Palmetto Drive
Savannah, GA 31410
(912) 897-4921
JudyHelmey@gmail.com
- ✓ James G. Hull, Jr.
111 West Granada Blvd
Ormond Beach, FL 32174
(386) 547-1254
Hull.safmc@gmail.com
- ✓ Kerry Marhefka
347 Plantation View Lane
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464
(843) 452-7352
KerryOMarhefka@gmail.com
- ✓ Charlie Phillips
1418 Sapelo Avenue N.E.
Townsend, GA 31331
(912) 832-4423
Ga_capt@yahoo.com
- ✓ Tom Roller
807 Deerfield Drive
Beaufort, NC 28516
(252) 728-7907 (ph); (919) 423-6310 (c)
tomrollersafmc@gmail.com
- ✓ Robert Spottswood, Jr.
robert@spottswood.com
(305) 294-6100
Assistant:
Carina Primus-Gomez
Cprimus-gomez@spottswood.com
- ✓ Andy Strelcheck
Acting Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Region
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
(727) 551-5702
Andy.strelcheck@noaa.gov

Anna Beckwith
Joe Firist

Dr. John Walter
Dr. Marcel Reichart
Monica Smit Brunella
Shep Grimes
Kristin Foss
Kathly Knowlton
John Sanchez
Sonny Gwinn

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
2024 COUNCIL MEMBERS (continued)

Pub. Comm.
Wed 12/4

Non-Voting

✓ Robert Beal Executive Director
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland St. Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201
(703)842-0740
rbeal@asmfc.org

LT Tom Pease
Seventh Coast Guard District
909 SE 1st Ave.
Miami, FL 33131
(305) 415-6781(ph)
Thomas.a.pease@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
Warner-KramerDM@state.gov

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Representative
TBD

Public Comment
Wed 12/4

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
COUNCIL STAFF

Executive Director

John Carmichael

john.carmichael@safmc.net

843-302-8435

Deputy Director - Science

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

Deputy Director - Management

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

Citizen Science Program Manager

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

BFP Outreach Specialist

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

Admin. Secretary/Travel Coordinator

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

Fishery Scientist II

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

Quantitative Fishery Scientist

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

Communication and Digital Media Specialist

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

Fishery Economist & FMP Coordinator

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

Staff Accountant

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

Habitat and Ecosystem Scientist

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

Citizen Science Project Manager

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

Fishery Scientist I

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

SEDAR

SEDAR Program Manager

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

Public Information Officer

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

Administrative Officer

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

SEDAR Coordinator

Emily Ott Emily.Ott@safmc.net
937-479-6171

SAFMC Dec. 2024 Council Meeting

Attendee Report: (12/2/24 - 12/6/24)

Report Generated:

12/09/2024 09:41 AM EST

Webinar ID

887-478-187

Actual Start Date/Time

12/04/2024 07:23 AM EST

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Attendee Details

Last Name

First Name

Allen

Shanae

Atkinson

Seth

Aukeman

Trip

Barile

Peter

Barrows

Katline

Bauer

Tracey

Beal

Bob

Bianchi

Alan

Blough

Heather

Bogdan

Jennifer

Brouwer

Myra

Bublely

Walter

Bunting

Matthew

Byrd

Julia

Calay

Shannon

Carr

Matthew

Cermak

Bridget

Clinton

Haley

Crosson

Scott

Curtis

Judd

Curtis

Joe

Cvach

Sarah

Damiano

Matt

DeVictor

Rick

Dover

Miles

Dukes

Amy

Dyar

Ben

Finch

Margaret

Floyd	Brad
Foor	Brandon
Foss	Kristin
Franco	Crystal
Gahm	Meghan
Garrett	Allison
Gentner	BRAD
Glazier	Edward
Green	Matthew
Grist	Joseph
Guyas	Martha
Gwin	earl sonny
Hadley	John
Harrison	Alana
Helies	Frank
Helmey	Judy
Hemilright	Dewey
Horton	Chris
Howington	Kathleen
Huber	Jeanette
Hull	Jimmy
Huynh	Quang
Iberle	Allie
Iverson	Kim
Kalinowsky	Chris
Keller	Christian
Kellison	Todd
Kent	Russell
Keppler	Blaik
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Lara
Knowlton	Kathy
Kolmos	Kevin
Larkin	Michael
Law	Alexander
Lazarre	Dominique
Lee	Jennifer
Lee	Max
Leone	Melissa
Levy	Mara
Lock	Karolyn
M Borland	Gary
MCCLAIR	GENINE
Mackesey	Brendan

Malinowski	Richard
Marhefka	00Kerry
Markwith	Anne
Masi	Michelle
McWaters	Mark
Meehan	Sean
Mehta	Nikhil
Mendez-Ferrer	Natasha
Meyers	S
Miller	Andrew
Muffley	Brandon
Murphey	Trish
Neidig	Carole
Newman	Thomas
Oliver	Ashley
Ott	Emily
Paskiewicz	James
Pehl	Nicole
Perkinson	Matt
Peterson	Cassidy
Phillips	Charlie
Poholek	Ariel
Poland	Stephen
Potter	Caroline
Randall	Marianne
Records	David
Reding	Brandon
Reichert	Marcel
Riley	Richard
Roller	00Tom
SCHLICK	CJ
Seward	McLean
Shane	Rob
Shertzer	Kyle
Shervanick	Kara
Silvas	Rachael
Sinkus	Wiley
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Solinger	Laura
Spanik	Kevin
Spottswood	Robert
Spurgin	Kali
Stephen	Jessica

Stephens	Haley
Stephens	Haley
Sweetman	CJ
Vecchio	Julie
Vincent	Matthew
Waldo	Jennifer
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walter	John
Wamer	David
Werner	Cisco
Westcott	Lauren
White	Geoff
Whitten	Meredith
Williams	Erik
Willingham	Darrin
Willis	Michelle
Withers	Meg
Zapf	Daniel
carvalho	avelino
collier	chip
griner	tim
I	I
moss	david
murphy	allison
oden	jeff
sandorf	scott
thomas	suz
vara	mary
zales	bob
Alhale	Sydney
Baker	Scott
Beyea	Taylor
Bonney	Rick
Brennan	Ken
Coffill-Rivera	Manuel
Cox	Jack
Cross	Tiffanie
Delrosario	Leeanne
Didden	Jason
Dobbs	Jeffrey
Feller	Skip
Fitz-Gerald	Claire
Gamboa-Salazar	Keilin

Garber	Chip
Gore	Karla
Griner	00Tim
Harker	John
Hiers	Homer
Hollensead	Lisa
Hordyk	Adrian
Howell	Mary
Kimmel	Courtney
Lam	Sarah
Lenox	Scott
Long	Stephen
Martin	Rob
Mason	Gina
Mathews	Joe
Matter	Vivian
Miller	Shana
O'Malley	Rachel
Ostroff	Jenny
Package-Ward	Christina
Patten	Willow
Pelletier	Claire
Runde	Brendan
Salmon	Brandi
Sartwell	Tim
Sartwell	Tim
Schlenker	Lela
Sedberry	George
Shipman	Thomas
Smarrito	Mike
Soltanoff	Carrie
Sramek	Mark
Stam	Geoff
Stancil	Mackenzie
Stemle	Adam
Vital	Victoria
Waldrep	Megan
Walsh	Mick
Warren	Camilla
Weaver	ALWTRT -- Sierra
Yandle	Tracy
gloeckner	david

Duration	# Registered
9 hours 38 minutes	202

Last Name	First Name
Council	South Atlantic