

**PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION
CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA
JUNE 11, 2025**

MR. ZALES: Bob Zales II, Executive Director, Southeastern Fisheries Association. The access to the rock shrimp fishery was restricted by implementation of Coral Amendment 8 in 2014, and Coral Amendment 10, which would have restored access, was disapproved by the Secretary in 2022. Both actions were under different administrations, with different parameters and goals than the current administration we have.

Presidential Executive Order 13921, that was done in May of 2020, and the current Executive Order 14276, that was done in April of this year, both provide for all agencies and administrations to work to restore the American seafood industries, which the passage of Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12 will do.

These fishers have been unable to harvest rock shrimp in this area since 2014, adversely affecting the historical multigenerational fishing families, processors, and, eventually, consumers who buy and consume rock shrimp. I suspect most of you all enjoyed the rock shrimp at Dixie Crossroads last night. They were really good. Comply with the presidential intent to restore commercial fishing and approve Amendment 11 and 12 as soon as possible and send to the Secretary to implement it.

We appreciate the effort by the Fisheries Service working on the South Atlantic red snapper fishery. According to information in the Federal Register this morning, 98 percent of all red snapper discards are recreational discards. These excessive discards negatively affect all users of red snapper fishers. We do not believe the high discard numbers, but, without accountable harvest data, these numbers cannot be argued.

We fully support recreational fishing, just as we fully support the commercial fishing industry. We all work together. We do not support the commercial sector losing quota due to excessive recreational discards and recommend that the council request the Science Center to calculate recreational discards and apply it to the recreational allocation.

At the same time, apply the commercial discards to the commercial allocation. This would eliminate the negative recreational impact on the commercial fishing industry. This issue has been brought up in the Gulf Council for the past couple of years, and I've talked to Clay, and some others with the Science Center, and apparently this may can be done, and it would be great to do this.

If we can't get a handle on the discards, let's apply discards for each sector to that sector, so that both fisheries can do whatever they need to do to rectify the problems, and so, any questions, I'll be glad to answer them.

MS. GUYAS: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Martha Guyas, from the American Sportfishing Association. I just want to say that we are very grateful to the Secretary for removing the bottom fishing closure and extraneous actions from Amendment 59.

We support moving forward and supporting the Florida EFP modifications and renewals that you all talked about yesterday. We also support looking at aggregate bag limits for snapper grouper. I know there were some letters that came out about state management by state governors. In my opinion, I think you could look at -- The council can certainly look at options in tandem with that, since that would be an exempted fishing program, and arguably attack different things.

I'm pretty excited to see the innovative management approach that came out yesterday. I look forward to working with you all on that, and then I also support the council moving, or slowing down, on SEFHIER for-hire limited entry in Amendment 46, just given all the balls in the air, and I know you all are going to talk about that more at the end of the week, and I think that's okay.

Really good conversation this morning about MSY proxies, and we're very much in support of the motions that came out of that, and we also support postponing action on the Spanish mackerel assessment. I mean, I've talked, at several meetings, about how moving forward with that amendment would probably cause some issues, and we've got some very shaky information that we would be using to make decisions there.

On black sea bass, you know, there's been a lot of discussions over the last -- It's been, gosh, I feel like at least a year that this has been batted around. We've got discard information that, you know, is really not very credible, both in terms of numbers of discards and discard mortality rates. There's clearly other things going on in this fishery, whether they be environmental, mixing with the northern stock, moving north, or the southern stock moving north, questions about the assessment, you know, whether the council can really do anything, and I really appreciate the concerns that Tim and Trish and others mentioned this afternoon.

We definitely want to see the details of that genetic stock structure report, to better understand what we're working with. I do think it's reasonable to move forward with some of the low-hanging fruit in the Amendment 56 decision document, like looking at recreational bag and size limits, but I do have a hard time with drastic measures to this fishery, when there's just so many questions about what can be done, and so I really want to also support Kerry's motion that was brought up this afternoon, and certainly support the spirit of it, and so just trying to find a way to sort this out and move forward with what we can, and I will stop there. Thank you.

MR. GENTNER: Brad Gentner, Southeast Fisheries Conservation Director for Coastal Conservation Association. CAA wholeheartedly supports the ideas in the innovation presentation. We applaud the work done by Jessica, Kerry, and John and the broad support they received from the rest of the council.

We've been advocating for alternative management for over a decade, with the release of the Morris-Deal report in 2014. With terribly uncertain recreational data and decreasing resources, it's time to think about different processes to accomplish the council's goals. Additionally, with obvious differences in what motivates and satisfies recreational and commercial fishers, it's time for different goal posts for different sectors. It's time to explore different harvest control rules, and those rules would likely work much better for recreational fisheries, due to different motivations and the uncertain data.

Even before these recent budget cuts, at least three councils on this side of the country were formally complaining that the stock assessment machine could not keep up with management needs. We were constantly forced to make decisions based on science that is multiple years old. As a result, we missed the mark more than we hit it. We're always chasing something that's already passed.

I also applaud the recognition that we're way too precautionary. We have to be able to accept more risk, move forward to increase economic benefits, and be more nimble and resilient to address conservation issues as they present themselves. It's insane that stock assessments take years, many years in some cases, to produce.

It's insane that even a simple amendment takes over a year to develop. You know, it just came up in this council today, and we've got issues we would like to address immediately, and we're being told it's five to six to seven meetings out. The problem may be gone by then. We may be actually looking at a problem that's already over, too.

I also did want to touch base on the SPR MSY proxy discussion. I really appreciated Luiz's presentation today, and the real meat about his presentation, I felt, is who gets to decide on the SPR proxies. The agency, and the SSC, is driving the bus on changing SPRs, largely without input, and, generally, the way they're doing it is to introduce more precaution. I don't think that's appropriate, as we discussed today. You know, you're headed for the MSY, and precaution comes in the dance we do about OFL and down to the ACLs.

That's where you bring in precaution, and so I really would prefer to see tradeoff analysis brought to the council, and I think a lot of that was discussed today, and I definitely support that. You know, what do different SPRs do to your risk? What kind of risk do you want to accept? What do your constituents want to see in the fishery, and are you willing to trade that off for risk, and I think we are, in many cases, and I think we need to be more open, and transparent, about addressing that risk, and looking at that risk, and what those MSY proxies do to that risk, and not just take whatever is handed to us by the SSC.

I think that's a council decision, as long as it's an informed decision, and this ties in well with the first part of my comment. We need to become more comfortable with risk in our decision-making. I think the precautionary principle is proving to be problematic in a lot of our councils. That's all I've got. I'm happy to take any questions.

MR. MOSS: Thank you for the opportunity. My name is David Moss. I come here today to speak briefly about RA 46. I'm a recreational angler from south Florida. As you may understand, I was a bit disappointed in the conversations yesterday in regard to this amendment. As a lifelong recreational angler, and both former and current member of the Snapper Grouper AP, I've seen this amendment almost since its birth.

The AP has continuously supported this amendment, if I'm not mistaken unanimously, each time we've discussed it and voted on it. I can tell you, from an AP member's perspective, there's a lot of frustration, that is going on ten years of indecision. From a recreational angler's perspective, the frustrations run even deeper. As we see issues in a variety of species in the snapper grouper complex, coupled with the issues we see in certain species that shall remain nameless, it's tough

to fathom how we can make and trust decisions being made when we truly have no idea what the participating base is.

I know, in my region, we've seen participation increase dramatically. We have no idea how much participation has increased, because we have seen this amendment constantly volleyed back and forth between the council, sent back to the AP, and then back to the council, et cetera, et cetera, and I'm sad to say, to the people that I speak with, who actually would love to see something like this happen, that ten-plus years later, we don't seem to be any closer to this being a reality.

I urge the council to move forward with this, please, and let the details that have mired this be dealt with in scoping, public comment, what have you. Please let's get the ball rolling on something that there seems to actually be support from the public for. I thank you, and, again, I fully understand the constraints that everybody is under, but, along the lines of the conversation that was happening yesterday, why not get the ball rolling now, because we have seen how long this is going to take, and so we might as well move forward with this now, please. Thank you.

DR. RUNDE: Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Runde, and I'm a marine scientist with the Nature Conservancy. I appreciate the opportunity to comment. There's been substantial discussion, today and yesterday, about the use of FMSY proxies. While the council was not involved in the FMSY revision action within Secretarial Amendment 59, I believe that the council may someday seek to follow this action's lead and set an FMSY equal to some version of so-called $F_{current}$ for some species.

In the case of red snapper, the best scientific information available, the 2024 update to SEDAR 73, showed that continuing to fish at current levels, and setting the FMSY proxy to $F_{current}$, would allow continued increases in biomass of that stock, if, and only if, recruitment continues at a high level. If recruitment reverts to the long-term average, the projections in the SEDAR 73 update show that biomass will decline.

Will recruitment continue to be high? Can we predict future recruitment? These things are far from certain. In fact, in the same assessment update, estimated recruitment declined in the two most recent years, with the terminal year of 2023 having very low estimated recruitment, and the lowest value since 2011.

In an era of lower capacity at the Science Center, we are likely to see greater intervals between assessments, even for the most important species. Therefore, the council may soon be faced with more frequent decisions, including with respect to FMSY proxies, that require broader assumptions, with greater uncertainty, and I hope that the council will seek and deploy a full understanding of these assumptions and their implications when making these decisions. Thank you.

MR. ENGLISH: Hello. My name is Steve English. I'm a commercial fisherman here in the State of Florida. I'm here to talk about a bluefish permit, which I just had a problem with. About fifteen years ago, the Northeast Region required the Southeast Region to have a bluefish permit to land bluefish in federal waters.

They came to us, and they said that we would have to have a Northeast Region permit, but we would report all our landings in the Southeast Region, which is what we've done for fifteen years. I was denied my renewal of my permit this year because I didn't report to the Northeast Region also. We have no input on what the Northeast Region does with bluefish, because we're not part of their program.

We always said that this would come to be a problem and that the Southeast Region should handle our Southeast Region bluefish permit, and, as I said, it came to a head and we were denied -- I was denied renewal of my permit this year, with no idea it was coming.

The nearest I can figure -- I made some phone calls, and, the nearest I can figure, every pound of bluefish that we land out here gets reported four times. It gets reported to the State of Florida, and gets reported -- The dealer reports it to the state of Florida and NOAA, Florida reports it to NOAA, we report to the Southeast council, who reports it to NOAA, and so I figure there's at least four reports generated on each pound of bluefish, and now they want us to do a fifth. They want us to report to the Northeast, so they can report it. This is beyond ridiculous.

I would like to get -- For the council to come up with something to let us renew our permits the way it stands right now, and keep our reporting to just the Southeast Region down here, and some of the solutions I have is -- Maybe the first thing we need to do is put the bluefish permit back in the Southeast Region. The Southeast fishermen shouldn't have to answer to the Northeast Region, since we have no representation on the rules they make or anything. We're not privy to their rulemaking.

Maybe something else that we need to do, and I've been pushing for this for ten years, is let's untie these permits to our reporting requirements. I knew this day was coming, but I just didn't know it was going to be me that got it. We knew that someday they were going to take our permit away, because we weren't reporting properly, and with all these permits -- With all reporting that's done, we shouldn't be required to lose our permit just because we didn't fill out a paper on the thing, and, by the way, this was two pounds of bluefish. Two pounds of bluefish is why they took my permit away, and maybe we should have another system. Before they can take our permit, they have to give us a hearing of some kind, an official hearing, so that, before they can take our permit away, we have an opportunity to fight it. Thank you.

MR. KOLODNY: Thank you. Daniel Kolodny, Chief Operating Officer of the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program. However, today, I'm just going to talk to you as a personal recreational angler. I had the fortunate opportunity to be able to participate in the EFP program that was issued through FWC, and it was a great program. I really enjoyed being able to collect the data. I hope you know that that will be important and impactful to the program.

One thing I noticed, that I found a little concerning, and I just want to kind of bring to attention here, is, when you're looking at the discard data that I had to fill out on the form, there was no separation between depredation and barotrauma. They were completely grouped together, and I feel like you're looking at data that's 100 percent dead discard, versus a chance of a fish that has, you know, with -- Used properly, with a descending device, it could have a chance for survival, and so mixing those two data in the same category, I think is a little troublesome, and so I just wanted to point that out, and thank you for the opportunity.

MR. HORTON: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the council. My name is Chris Horton. I'm the Senior Director of Fisheries Policy for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. I'll be pretty brief today. I want to thank Luiz for his presentations on the proxies, and the ensuing discussion following that. We fully support looking at proxies by individual species, rather than one set at 40 percent SPR, which is not going to fit many of those. It seems to be overly precautionary, and it does not provide the appropriate access.

For Amendment 46, this council has heard us push back on it many times. We don't believe a federal permit to identify a universal anglers is the appropriate way to get out of a problem that a federal survey program, MRIP, has created. We very much support defining that universe of offshore anglers, but we have a lot more confidence that the states can do that better than NMFS or a federal permit could.

We also -- I was very pleased to hear about the discussion yesterday on innovative fishery management approaches. Alternative management is something that we've advocated for for years. We're constantly in pursuit of reliable data for these increasingly complex assessment models that we constantly struggle with, as far as uncertainty. As they get more complex, we need better data. There's just more and more uncertainty. There's more precaution added to our management approach.

I would much rather see us develop management techniques that can manage to what's on the water today, in more real time, whether that's harvest control rules, which are certainly showing promise in the Mid-Atlantic region, and we fully support the aggregate bag limit for snapper grouper that was discussed, and is moving forward, and, obviously, we've been a big proponent of state-based management of the recreational sector, for those states that want to assume that management.

We went from three days in 2017 in the Gulf of Mexico to months in Alabama this year, where I fish a lot. In 2024, we were open -- Again, three days in 2017, and we were open June 1 through December 31 last year. State management is a much more viable way to get real-time information and be able to manage more efficiently. Thank you for your time.

MR. COLBY: Good afternoon. I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak, and the main thing I want to speak on is our water quality. I guess you guys realize that that's what's causing a lot of problems with all stocks of fish. The State of Florida needs to do something with what they let come into the ocean, and I don't know whether the federal government can help them with that, but we've got real, real bad water, and we're getting it more and more, and it's hurting all the stocks of fish.

That's the main thing I wanted to say, that -- I don't know what we really can do about it, but I guess another thing I would like to say is I believe that recreational fishermen should have some kind of licensing for fishing in the salt waters. Then, when they get that license, they've got to learn how to vent fish, and they've got to learn to use the descending device. You know, that will help with that mortality, I think, and that's about all I got to say. Thank you.

MR. MERRIFIELD: Good afternoon. My name is Mike Merrifield. I am with Cape Canaveral Shrimp Company, and I'm the present chair of the Deepwater Shrimp AP, and I'm here to talk about the Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12.

I'm requesting the council to choose Alternative 2 as the preferred. These are boundaries that were formulated by rock shrimp fishermen and staff. Roger, at the time, in response to the coordinates that are in Amendment -- I'm sorry. Alternative 3 to provide additions, so that the coordinates in Amendment 2 that were designed to provide additional buffer between the Oculina and fishing activities.

This would restore a historic, economically important area to the rock shrimp fishery along the southeastern boundary of the northern Oculina HAPC expansion established in Coral Amendment 3, back in 2013. This was a point of contention when it was approved, and the rock shrimp industry was told it would be addressed in a future amendment. We have vetted, re-vetted, approved, rejected, groundtruthed, and reapproved this amendment over the past eight years.

Putting a shrimp fishery access area in a coral HAPC is counterintuitive. I didn't understand this at first, when we first developed Coral Amendment 8, and why didn't we just change the boundary to separate the coral area from fishing areas? Coral Amendment 8 included multiple red shrimp fishing access areas within the Stetson-Miami Terrace coral HAPC. This area also had to incorporate fishing access areas for the golden crab fishery. This is not a new concept.

It's necessary when we create these large areas that are placed under management without meticulous scrutiny and collaboration between the interested parties and when new research or technology improves our understanding of the area and our ability to protect certain areas.

In this case, it was a mistake made when the eastern boundary of the O-HAPC was set right through the historical highly productive rock shrimp fishery access area. The VMS points, which are mandatory for the rock shrimpers' fishing vessels, recorded, from 2013 to 2011, depicted in the attached chart, what I have to my comment that I submitted, and they show two things.

One, the boundary was placed right in the middle of the fishing area, and, two, the rock shrimp fishery was already avoiding the Oculina bottom, even though it wasn't a HAPC yet. The rock shrimp fishery has been operating in that area for over sixty years. I would argue that the best scientific information available regarding where the hard bottom is, and where the soft substrate bottom is, can be obtained from the people that have been working the area for decades.

Why is their knowledge disregarded as anecdotal? We should be working together more collaboratively, like we did in the first joint Coral and Deepwater Shrimp AP meeting back in October of 2012. The Oculina coral habitat is important to the rock shrimp fishery, because it is thought to be the nursery grounds. The rock shrimp fishery has explained, numerous times, how the gear is deployed, how it's used in this area, to ensure there's adequate buffer to prevent negative impacts.

There is adequate buffer between the Oculina structure and the proposed boundary in Alternative 2, in addition to the self-imposed boundaries that they impose from margin of error. It looks like I'm out of time. Sorry about that. I have submitted that comment online.

MS. SOLORZANO: Hello. I'm Marilyn Solorzano. That came on loud, didn't it? All right. Well, if you know me, I am. Okay, and so, anyway, I'm just here to ditto Mike. I've been in the rock shrimp fishery for about fifty years, but I don't look it. Anyway, with that being said, I just want to say that I am here on Amendment 12, the rock shrimp issue. I would ask that the council -- I want to thank you all for working so hard, and diligently, along these decades to get to where we are again today.

I ask that you go to Amendment 2 and approve amendment -- Sorry. Alternative 2. All right, and so I am here working to restore the historically important fishing shrimp grounds for the rock shrimp fishery. We've spent over a decade on this little subject right here, and we've had to try to create a shrimp fishery access area where shrimpers can obtain optimum yield while minimizing negative impact.

My son, Lee Vogelsong, worked with Roger and Gregg to develop boundaries along the Oculina Bank for Coral Amendment 8, that was approved by both the Coral and Habitat and Shrimp Committees, and then approved by a council. It's been approved and rejected, and you all have been here through it with me.

However, during this process, there were some errors made. Roy Crabtree, the then director, and now we have a new one, said that we would correct this and create this new shrimp fishery access. Fifteen years, and a lot of time and taxpayers' money, has been spent developing this. My husband and I, and our family, and those who work on our shrimp boats are urging the council to move forward with the opening of the shrimp fishery access area and select Alternative 2 to the Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12, so that we can restore traditional rock shrimp fishing grounds, that I personally have been seeing the changes and can tell you where the hard and soft bottom is in those areas, from decades of experience. We appreciate the time and the work that the council has put into this and thank you all.

MR. SHEFFER: Good afternoon, everybody. I would like to start by saying thank you for not putting any closures in our oceans and keeping all of us commercial and headboat owners and crew members still working. We greatly appreciate it.

Something I would like for you to think about moving forward is to consider crew members that work on headboats crew members that work on headboats -- Crew members that work on headboats, and to consider them a part of the commercial label. These guys work, and they pay their bills, just like any commercial fisherman. I don't think anybody gets a discount on an FPL bill. They work from the ocean to pay their bills just as much as everyone else does.

When I left Georgia's meeting, I was listening, on the way home, driving home, and one thing that stuck with me is the comment someone asked, and it was what do headboats do better to keep their dead loss so low? All I can say to that is we have to respect ourselves such in a professional manner, because we have anywhere between twenty-five to sixty-five paying customers documenting us at all times, and our every movement, by recording, taking photos of us releasing the catch back in a professional way.

Just like Bob Zales said earlier, we need to be taken out of the recreational kind of dead loss. I know it's already been spoken about, but we just don't want to go towards the recreational side and get reprimanded for it.

The other two topics I'm going to hit is how headboat regulations need to be separate from smaller six-pack boats and recreational center consoles. I'm not looking for unreasonable numbers, but, for us to survive on two gags, and two cobias a day, is suffering, when we have so many people to account for it. I know you're not responsible for cobia, but it's just the point that we are limited in what we can catch and quantity of what we can keep.

Another major issue during this time is my vessel's boat safety, which I brought that up in Georgia. I participate in you all's red snapper derby every year, and it's gotten worse and worse every year, with smaller boats running without running lights at night. The amount of people on the water in a day or two span is atrocious.

I do believe headboats need their own season. I'm sorry. I do believe headboats need their own season and quota. By going in that direction, you would do so much to help us stay in business, and we could use the extra days in separate trips throughout the year, to help us make money when times are really tough. July 11 and 12, I'm already busy. That's not helping me when I need it, when you could be helping in other ways.

The last thing I'm going to say, and I know someone has already brought it up. I would like to bring to the table that if you -- I'm sorry. The last thing I would like to bring to the table is, if you are here to protect our species, reefs, and oceans, I think it would be in your best interest to get a hold of the Army Corps of Engineers, or whoever is responsible for the disruption of Lake Okeechobee into the Atlantic Ocean. I would recommend doing proper testing and more information on how more than one-billion gallons of polluted water a day are being dumped into the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Thank you for your time and considerations on these matters.

MS. LACIVITA: Hi, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Serena LaCivita. I am a member of the Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County. More importantly, I'm a mom of three. As a group, our group has spoken out, and we oppose Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp 12.

Professor John Reed, and I see him on your list of virtual commenters, and, if you read any of his research, he very much tells us. I have one of his papers here, *The Impacts of Bottom Trawling on Deepwater Oculina Coral Ecosystem*. It's a one-of-a-kind reef. The benefit of protecting the reefs is for our children, and for our future. The migration, and the migration pathways, the nursery grounds, all of that that the coral has to offer.

On your letterhead for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, it does state that you were assigned to conserve and to manage, and so I do think that you need to listen to when people are telling you that we oppose it. It would set a precedent on encroaching on protected lands, and that is very scary for me and my children. 90 percent of the reef was destroyed by 1980, due to the fishing. It is only found here. It is not found in any other part of the world, and so I think that's something very important that we need to look at.

I urge the council to do the right thing for our kids, for our future, and I have a quote here from Sylvia Earle: "What remains of the intact Florida Oculina reef system and the associated damaged areas, if left alone and protected from fishing, and especially trawling, will yield

enduring benefits now and forever. Giving a few shrimpers a green light to trawl these ancient systems into oblivion will destroy what could be an ongoing source of life and livelihood.”

I have a little bit more time, and so I just wanted to mention something from John Reed's paper, along with Christopher Koenig and Andrew Shepard. It says the recent dives of ROVs have documented reefs wrapped with fishing lines, piles of bottom longlines, discarded trawl nets, and anchor lines. Another page says, since the ban on bottom hook-and-line fishing within the boundaries of OECA was enacted in 1994, there was a statistically significant gain in live coral from 1996 to 2001 at one of the remaining *Oculina* bioherm sites. I just wanted to thank you for your time. That's all I had to say. I wanted to thank everybody that came out to speak up. Have a good day.

MR. RAPP: All right. Three minutes is not much time. My wife is behind me, and so she's going to yield her time a little bit to me. She's not going to speak. I have pleasantries in here, but, like I said, three minutes is not a lot of time, and so I'm not a bad guy. I'm not hating on you, but I'm going to fire it at you with both barrels here, okay?

Like I said, my name is Greg Rapp. I'm owner of Sea Levelers Sport Fishing Charters. We have seven charter boats. My primary business is focusing on charter fishing. Attached to those boats, we have three SG 1 permits. We have seven king mackerel permits. We have two shark direct, and two shark indirect permits, and we have every open access permit that applies to our area, times six, and so I just wanted to mention that.

I also manage the Ocean Obsession Party Boat out of Port Canaveral, and I also have a recreational boat, so I can actually go fishing without federal permits attached and keep things like red snapper in state waters when they're actually open. The reason I'm mentioning all that, and especially the permits attached to my charter boats, is that's because that's what it takes for me to keep my guys employed full-time anymore. I have to provide different ways for them to make money at all times, and so if the fishing, the charter fishing, isn't good, they can commercial fish, and we work it that way, just because we have to be multifaceted.

Like I said, I'm going to fire it at you. I really am not trying to be mean, but our fisheries management, from the public view, is absolutely failing on all levels. I think you would be hard-pressed to find a small handful of people that think -- That would vote and say that it's being done properly, and that it's a good job.

I do feel the problem is that you guys are so far out of touch with the people that use the resource, and how they actually use the resource, both recreationally and commercially, that it is no wonder why the data collection efforts are epic fails. The public has lost all trust in fisheries management, and the distrust has started to carry over to FWC from the general public, because they can't distinguish the difference.

A prime example is this meeting right here right now being on a Wednesday for public comment at 4:00 p.m. I don't know if you guys have any PR that thinks about these things, but I did a post yesterday on my social media, trying to encourage people to come out. Pretty much every single comment was of course they're going to have it at 4:00 p.m. on a Wednesday, when everybody is at work, and the people that make their livelihoods are out fishing, or whatever it is, and so that's just one step into trying to do a better job of, you know, bridging that gap.

Like I mentioned before, data collection for for-hire and recreation all together is absolutely garbage. SEFHIER is garbage, and this stems from honestly just not having a clue of the life of the people that you're mandating on, meaning, for the SEFHIER, on the for-hire captains, you guys -- Nobody ever talks to them, and, you know, tries to learn about their day-to-day activity.

The for-hire section, the recreational section, meaning in general, they have no trust in the process. Therefore, you're not going to ever get good data. You know, for the headboats, it seems to be good, and working. For commercial, it actually seems to be good. You know, you guys need to start being more respectful of people's time. Like the fellow said, he lost a permit for not filling out something.

When we're commercial fishing, the fish house fills it out. There's no reason we needed to be doing a logbook on our side of things and filling out the same thing, and, if you think we're too stupid to, if we wanted to, to work with the fish house to put false data out there, then we're not that dumb, and so it's just a waste of people's time. I think we need to start being more respectful of that.

Obviously, I think that you need to separate, or not obviously, but I think you need to separate headboat for-hire and recreational as different -- Completely different users of the resource and how they use it. Maybe work with the state, and you need to start building trust into the process. There's forums, and websites, and you guys need to work on a PR campaign to gain the trust of the public back. You've lost it. Nobody believes in the process anymore. You should do it on a smaller scale, understand the users, and then break it out from there. I could talk more on that, but I'm short on time. Like I said, my wife is going to yield her time for me, and so I have about a minute left.

Moving on to the management of the species, I'm going to focus on the recreational, because I don't have time, and commercial seems to be able to fend for themselves a little better than the recreational, or at least commercial is a little more organized, but, you know, no one is -- I think that a lot of your data comes from commercial catch rates.

I have to guess that that's where it gets pushed onto the recreational. I could be 100 percent wrong on that, but I attended a meeting, a year or two years ago, about the commercial summit, put on by the FWC, and they were worried about not being enough saltwater products licenses around, and why the -- The economic impact to the state, and the reason is that commercial fish are being regulated out of even fishing, and you guys don't realize that it's an opportunistic fishery. The same boats that have a king mackerel permit might have a grouper or snapper permit, and they might have shark direct permit.

They might have all these things, and so, if you take out one thing, if a guy is going out fishing on a smaller scale, you are taking out other fisheries that he would be going for, and, therefore, your data is coming back that those fish aren't going to be there. I would like to cover that a little more, but, like I said, I'm not trying to eat up everybody's time.

We need our fish houses. The sharks and stuff, we have a huge problem. I'm afraid that, by the time you guys get to addressing that, it's going to be too late. I do suggest that our fish houses

start helping us commercial fish -- On the commercial side, figure out, and for the recreational, figure out how to process especially these large bull sharks. I appreciate it, guys.

MS. MCCOY: Sherri McCoy, with Cape Canaveral Shrimp Company. I would like to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to address the council. I am up here to speak on Shrimp Amendment 12. Rock shrimp has become a major economic driver for boats participating in the fishery.

The latest economic data I could find was data for 2015 through 2019, that was analyzed for Amendment 10. In that report, it stated that vessels were highly dependent on revenue from species other than South Atlantic rock shrimp. Over the five years, rock shrimp accounted for about 20 percent of these vessels' revenue. Regardless of the year, most of the revenue came from other Atlantic fisheries, with the vast majority coming from the Atlantic penaeid shrimp fishery.

Thus, while still important to these vessels' operations, South Atlantic rock shrimp is typically only their third-most important source of revenue. Vessels that target rock shrimp typically have significantly higher annual gross revenues for fishing relative to vessels that primarily harvest penaeid shrimp. From 2015 to 2019, rock shrimp purchases accounted for about 10 percent of dealers' total seafood purchases.

Fast forward to 2024, and the decimation of the shrimp industry due to imports, which come with a massive human, environmental, and public health cost, as well as creating economic havoc for the domestic shrimp industry. The numbers from the FWC landings reported for 2024 tell a different story from the numbers in 2015 to 2019. Rock shrimp has not been farm-raised thus far, and so there was no imported farm-raised shrimp to compete against our domestic rock shrimp.

The numbers for the Florida east coast for 2024, from the FWC website, show the economic importance of South Atlantic rock shrimp to the domestic shrimp industry in the South Atlantic. Rock shrimp had the highest price per pound average. It was 52 percent of the shrimp landings. It was 56 percent of the revenue paid for shrimp, and it brought the highest trip average. When I look at these numbers, I say my father must be up in heaven just unbelievable that rock shrimp was actually a far better shrimp for the boats than the penaeid shrimp last year.

Rock shrimp was 78 percent of the shrimp landings at our dock in 2024. Penaeid shrimp was only 10 percent, and then we had royal reds, which were 2.5 percent. The United States now stands at a \$20.3 billion trade deficit for seafood, with nearly 90 percent of our seafood imported. Stephen Coy, with the American Honey Producers Association, has stated that food security is national security. We need to look at our domestic shrimp from a food security issue.

The council should be doing everything within their power to accomplish the goals of the Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness Executive Order, one policy being unburdening our commercial fishermen from costly and inefficient regulation. This bottom was taken away by staff error, and not by the regulatory process. It should have never been taken away, and we were told it would be given back if the amendment was allowed to proceed as written, so as not to create a delay in the other items covered by the amendments.

This was closed in error, and it has been costly to the rock shrimpers for years. We've been trying for years to get this bottom back, and now that Charlie is back on the council, I hope he's going to remember the battles that we've had with this.

I heard yesterday where it was stated that the councils are where science meets reality. I'm hoping this council will see the reality of the economic damage the staff error created, as well as the reduction in pounds to the American seafood consumer. I ask that you support Alternative 2, which was originally agreed upon between the Coral AP committee and the rock shrimpers, while recognizing that food security is national security. Thank you.

MS. THOMPSON: Laurilee Thompson, Mims, Florida, and so a lot has been said. I'm not going to go over all the other stuff that's been said. I'll try to come up with some new stuff. First of all, I want to address -- One of the reasons that the Secretary sent Amendment 10 back to the drawing board is because it didn't address adverse effects of fishing on essential fish habitat and minimizing bycatch.

Well, I showed you guys videos, from Marilyn's boat, of the clean catch that they're catching now, versus pictures from the 1970s, that showed great big flounder, and big white blobs in the stacks of shrimp, and so I don't know how you could do a better job of minimizing bycatch than what the bycatch reduction devices do now.

At a Joint Coral and Rock Shrimp meeting, it was agreed, by the coral people, that they would be happy with a thousand-foot buffer between where the boats are fishing and where the coral pinnacles are, and that's what we have. There's one little pinnacle that sticks out up to the north, but, if you look at Alternative 2, it kind of looks like the western boundary kind of jags out and misses that pinnacle.

Also, the boats themselves set a quarter-of-a-mile distance between the boundary, in case something malfunctions, and so you've got a thousand feet, and, in many cases, more than a thousand feet, and then you've got an extra quarter-of-a-mile that is imposed by the shrimpers themselves. I think that's plenty of buffer.

So, you know, the rock shrimp industry -- The rock shrimp people supported establishment of the Oculina Reef, you know, many, many years ago, and they've done -- They've gone along, and they've got VMSs, and they've done everything that they've been asked to do, and they were promised, back in 2014 that this little piece of bottom, which is so -- It's important only in some years, and like they don't fish there every year.

It depends on how -- You know, where the shrimp are and how the tide is running. There's some years that the shrimp never go offshore, and so there are some years that that bottom is never touched, but, in the years when the Gulf Stream shifts further offshore, and the shrimp go with it, that piece of bottom is really, really important to the rock shrimpers, and so it's not like they're going to be out there pounding on it every year. It's periodic, and it's necessary for their survival.

I took offense to something that I read in the report saying that all of the damage had been done to the Oculina Reef by the rock shrimpers. That's simply not true. The damage was done by scallopers dragging big heavy bulldozer blade dredges through the coral. Rock shrimpers can't do that. They wouldn't be able to do that, with the gear that they have, and so, unfortunately, the

coral people aren't around. I'm sorry. The scallopers aren't around, but they're the ones that did the damage. Thank you. I support Alternative 2, which is actually six square miles smaller than what was proposed in Coral Amendment 10, and so we've actually given you back some of the bottom. Thank you.

MR. DALLAS: How are you doing this afternoon? I'm a recreational fisherman here in Brevard County, for thirty-two years and I don't know if the council does any fishing in Brevard County, or are a license holder at all, but I'm here to do red snapper and sharks, and I think red snappers has come back very nicely.

I think there needs to be a little bit better management on it. In my opinion, when we're fishing with the commercial guys, with Mr. Rapp -- When we fish for red snapper, we're fishing for grouper also, in the same spot, and so, by closing -- When we fish offshore, we're fishing for yellowedge, and we're fishing for golden tile, and you're fishing for snowy and blueline.

Some of the species you have closed, some of them you have open, but you're fishing in the same area, and so, if you're going to close it, or open it, or regulate it, keep it the same, if you don't want us recreational people to pull up a fish that's not -- You know, that's unregulated, you know, that's closed at the time.

We do -- SAFMC has lost a lot of the residential sector as believing in you. I come out -- That's why I asked if anybody fish here locally, where we fish, what our problems are, what our problems are, and our FWC does try to help. They regulate, and they come out, and they take notes, but I wish you would do a little bit better job and listen to some of the people here locally. I don't know if each section -- This is the first time I'm speaking, but if each section is different offshore, but, specifically, red snapper has come back quite a bit, and so thank you for your time.

MR. JONES: Hello. I'm just a recreational fisherman, and I just wanted to share some of my life, living in Florida my entire life, and fishing in Florida my entire life. When I grew up here as a kid, my father had a charter boat, and it was called The Capture, and most of you all probably have forgotten that, because it was a long, long time ago, but his actual mate and captain was Ed Dwyer, which I'm sure a lot of you guys know who that is.

Anyways, my point is, when I was a kid, we used to bottom fish a lot, and we caught a lot of huge grouper, a lot of different bottom fish, but the hardest fish to catch, in the 1980s and 1990s, was a red snapper. It was a very rare fish to catch, and it was considered a privilege, when you actually did catch one, other than going to like the Bahamas, and we used to go over to the Bahamas and catch them, you know, hand and foot.

There was very little regulations on them, but we could catch tons of them in a day, whereas here, you know, maybe every ten bottom fishing trips, I would catch a red snapper that was a keeper, and my point is when -- The last time I was here in front of you guys was right before you closed red snapper, and, at that point, and I don't know, and that was like ten years ago, or something like that, and there was a lot of red snapper, to where we were catching them all the time.

We were catching big ones, and they were keepers. I had never seen so many red snapper, to where we were catching more of those than grouper, for the first time, and everything else, and

then, all of a sudden it got closed, and it went from catching quite a few of them to now it's like -
- I don't even know how to explain it.

You can't even get your bait to the bottom without catching one, and, of course, a lot of those probably don't live, between the sharks, and not venting them properly and stuff like that, but it's really hard to catch the target fish that are in season, like the grouper and stuff like that, because all you're catching is the red snapper.

I know a lot of the studies that you guys do on red snapper comes off of headboats and commercial boats and stuff like that. As a fisherman that's been fishing these waters my whole life, the headboats don't go to places where there's big breeder red snapper, because those big red snapper will scare the other red snapper, the smaller ones, off of the reef, and so they primarily go to the smaller fisheries, where, you know, they've got fifty people on there, and at least thirty or forty of those can catch a red snapper. They don't want to go to a reef where there's only one or two big breeders, that scare everything else off, and catch those.

I feel like the data is flawed, in that respect, and I would love to see, you know, a more feasible snapper season every year. Giving it two days, it basically means that there will be 200 people at the boat ramp in the morning. You know, it's a nightmare to get out, and then what I really don't understand, and this is the part that's bothered me the most about the red snapper closing, and the limited season on the east coast, is you do it during the breeding time, like in July.

That's when these fish -- Every one you catch is going to be full of roe, and why -- What would be the point of that, if you're trying to extend the species, keep the big breeders going, so they can have more babies, but yet you open the season for thousands and thousands of boats to go out there and catch their one snapper a day during the breeding season. I just I don't understand that. I don't understand, from a conservation standpoint, how that makes any sense, and, if anybody can enlighten me on that, I would appreciate it, and so that's it. My time is up. You guys have a great day.

MS. STEPHENS: Good afternoon council. My name is Haley Stephens. I am the owner-operator of a charter headboat in Ponce Inlet, Florida. I also serve on several of the advisory panels, including Snapper Grouper. I apologize for not being able to be there in-person today. I had something I couldn't reschedule, but I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak.

I would like to quickly touch on the for-hire reporting improvement plan. The purpose of the amendment is to improve data, and the need is so that it can be utilized in management. Through our continued efforts in the SRHS, headboats currently fulfill both the purpose and need of this amendment, with an over 99 percent compliance rate since 2017. I provided a more detailed rationale in a letter sent earlier this week.

It's worth noting that the draft actions in the amendment are boxes that the headboat survey has been checking for a long time. I believe the only time that you should look down on someone is when you're reaching to help them up, and my question is how do we encourage others to do the same, and, to me, one of those answers is outreach and education.

I've personally experienced it firsthand, with discussions with six-pack charter captains here around town. Once these folks learn the why behind the need for reliable fisheries-dependent

data, it's almost like a light bulb goes off. I would anticipate discussions similar to this coming up during the new Lines of Communication: Convos with the Council events. Man, I've just got to say that's a really cool name, and so good job to whoever came up with that.

Also, a huge shoutout to Florida's EFP programs. We've had the privilege to participate in each quarter thus far, with anglers who choose to utilize their permits aboard our headboat, and we've heard nothing but positive feedback from our anglers. Fishermen have said that they do not find the educational course to be burdensome, but actually enjoy learning things that they didn't know before.

They've told us that reporting is easy. If they do have questions, or problems, they can reach out to someone, and it's resolved very fast, and, of course the satisfaction that comes with the privilege of being able to harvest a few of these fish, and so I would encourage everyone to please continue to support this project.

I want to extend endless gratitude to the council and staff for the continued discussion on issues with the current recreational vessel limits and the impact that these have on the headboats. A consideration of vessel limits in proportion to number of anglers, or a similar solution, is imperative to provide fair and equitable relief to the handful of headboats that are just giving it all to simply hold on.

Thank you to the agency and staff for the withdrawal of the proposed discard reduction areas in Amendment 59. The work does not stop here, and it's just getting started. Let's get away from the us versus them mentality and try to practice some holistic thinking. I like the idea of innovative approaches, maximizing efficiency, and the chance to start thinking outside the box. Let's bridge this gap between science and reality. Some of these issues may be addressed, best addressed, closest to home.

Continue to lean on your AP members and stakeholders. You know, when I'm there at the room at AP meetings, I am blown away to know that there are centuries of experience and expertise sitting around those tables. Some of these legends are going to be aging out before too long, and our next generation is inspired and ready to carry on. There's no better time to start on a fresh path than right now. I am hopeful for the future, and I hope that you are, too. Thank you for the time, and I'll yield back.

DR. REED: My name is John Reed. I'm a Research Professor Emeritus at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, where I've worked for fifty years studying the Oculina Reefs, with dozens of publications about the coral and the fish. One of the first proposals that I made to make the Oculina HAPC was in the early 1980s, and I strongly believe that the amendments to allow shrimp trawling within the boundaries of the OHAPC must be denied.

Alternative 1, no action, which keeps the prohibitions against trawling within the OHAPC should be selected. The argument that the proposed shrimp fishery access zone should be allowed because it's historical fishing grounds is absurd. Much of the Oculina habitat was historical rock shrimping grounds.

During the first public hearing in Daytona in 1982 for the original OHAPC, the shrimpers were asked how could you trawl on the coral, and they said they would make goat trails by dragging

their tickle chains between the doors of the trawls without nets. They would widen the trails until they could trawl it and shrimp without the coral rubble.

Bottom trawling within the OHAPC has been prohibited since first enacted in 1985. The purpose of the HAPC was to protect the coral habitat and fishes from destructive bottom trawls. Why change course after forty years?

Unfortunately, only a small portion of the reefs were originally protected in 1985. By the time the OHAPC was extended to Cape Canaveral in 2000, extensive damage had been done. I've submitted separate peer-reviewed publications about the effects of trawling on the Oculina reefs. In some areas, up to 90 percent of the coral had been impacted.

The coral provides habitat for dozens of species of fish, including numerous species of grouper and snapper. The grouper use the reefs as adults for their spawning grounds, and then the juvenile fish end up in the grass beds and mangroves in the Indian River Lagoon, where they live until maturing and moving offshore. Destroy the grass beds, and you destroy the fisheries. Destroy the coral habitat, and you destroy the grouper snapper fisheries.

It makes no sense for one shrimp fishery to flourish at the expense of the habitat and the finfish fisheries. During ROV dives conducted by NOAA Fisheries in 2011, the dominant fish observed in the northern HAPC were scamp, gag grouper, snowy grouper, red porgy, amberjack, sea bass, tilefish, red hogfish, and others. Dominant invertebrates included the Oculina coral, gorgonians, black corals, but, unfortunately, the mounds had been impacted by years of shrimp trawling.

Many of these fish forage on the flats away from the reefs. If the shrimp trawling zone is opened, in spite of the OHAPC, and made closer to the reefs, it will make these fish more vulnerable as bycatch.

Per Grant Gilmore, I personally documented the rock shrimp trawl fish bycatch. The trawl bycatch was substantial. I presented these data to NOAA, about the NOAA cruises, to the South Atlantic Council, together with Roger Pugliese and members of the Shrimp Advisory Panel, the Coral Advisory Panel, and the council, and drew the eastern boundaries of the northern extension of the HAPC.

We need to keep the boundary to protect the coral. The current eastern border was purposely drawn along the 100-meter contour line and provides a minimum of 500 to 1,000 meters east of the high-relief bathymetry. This is quite a reasonable buffer. Per the Coast Guard, straight borders, and wide buffer zones, allow easier enforcement to keep out poachers and errant trawlers from the reef habitat, and it reduces potential sedimentation of the trawls on the reef. The deepwater oculina reefs are a unique coral ecosystem like no other like on earth. It's a treasure that should be protected for perpetuity. Please vote for the no change in the fishery boundaries. Thank you.

MS. HARRISON: Thank you. I believe it was premature to remove the multiday limits from Amendment 60 scoping. These limits would be a game changer for our deepwater fleet, because, just on the Outer Banks, for example, we have to go forty miles, and this takes twelve hours in our slow boats, and not only would a multitrip lower the cost for fuel, which at this point takes

all the profits from the trip, but it would also allow us to tap into the extremely limited windows of weather we have on the Outer Banks.

So far this year, our local fleet has only been able to go out a few times a month. For example, my brother fishes alone, and so he can't fish in the tide very well, and he's only been offshore once a month this entire year, and so less than six trips.

Now, if there was a three-day window of weather, where we could make a trip each day of the three-day window, we would have to go back and forth each day, burning thousands in fuel, and not just money but the pollution and the amount of diesel being burned. Instead, he could have just stayed offshore, and spent two nights offshore, and caught a double limit, and then brought them back, and so I believe something needs to change in this fishery, for it to be profitable, and I think this could be the thing, and I believe the way to do that is through a deepwater endorsement to be created to allow eligible vessels to harvest multiday limits.

We can use logbook data to verify fishing locations of the vessels, to see who fishes beyond twenty-five miles say, and they would be eligible for the endorsement. We had a deepwater closure before, and so I know it's possible for the council to zero-in and regulate a subcategory of the snapper grouper complex.

Also, I have a few thoughts on what two-for-one being reversed looks like. I believe that there's a few easy ways that we can prevent speculative buyers. We could mandate permits be held for five years before they're eligible for transfer. We could tie the permit to a vessel and operator, preventing investors from purchasing the permits to shelf purely for leasing, and I believe that doing participation standards, similar to how North Carolina does their commercial fishing licenses, would be beneficial, but, if stricter regulations were needed, perhaps a minimum number of commercial trip tickets per year of any species, to show that you're active in the commercial fishery.

In my personal opinion, one of the biggest issues going forward will be the barriers to enter the snapper grouper fishery remain too high, and people who take the path of being a commercial fisherman often don't have access to a quarter-million dollars to invest in an operation, and you would struggle to make a business plan work on paper to qualify for a loan from a bank.

I think we can use North Carolina's commercial fishing fund as a model, and add another layer to prevent speculative buying, by levying a permit transfer fee, and that -- Like say 5 percent, and this fee could be used to go into a fund, as North Carolina does with their commercial fishing license fee, to benefit the commercial fishing industry, and perhaps it could be done to buy back permits, and create a permit bank, and allow young fishermen to lease the permits at a reduced rate, and show that they're competent in the fishery, and following regulations, and filing logbooks, and then they could buy it after five years.

I think that this could also be a really good place to house any permits that, if the time comes for latent effort, that they could be housed there, and I think what we really do not want to happen in this snapper grouper commercial fishery is have our SG 1 permits being in the hands of private recreational fishermen, to circumvent bag limits, because these fish that they catch are never applied to our quota, and this bad practice will ruin our rebuilding plans. Thank you, and I apologize for going over a little bit.

MR. GRAVITZ: Thank you. My name is Michael Gravitz, and I appreciate the opportunity to give you some testimony today. I'm a Senior Policy Fellow at the Marine Conservation Institute, and I have been following this Oculina habitat issue for several years.

We continue to oppose the creation of a shrimp fishery access area within the northern area of the Oculina HAPC, which is a position most members of this council apparently do not share, but I do share the council's frustration with how long this discussion has gone on. It kind of feels like the movie *Groundhog Day*. Deliberations on this small rock shrimp fishery have taken up a lot of your time, and a lot of scarce budget, and it seems like the level of effort seems way out of proportion to its very small potential benefit to the rock shrimp fishermen.

Very little has changed since NOAA Fisheries rejected Coral Amendment 10 in July of 2022. There is very little new information with which to answer the questions posed by NOAA HQ almost two years ago. There is no new information presented, in any of your materials for this session, about bycatch in the fishery, let alone impacts on species like the snapper groupers, that are known to spawn and use the Oculina habitat to grow and feed and are under recovery plans.

Your environmental assessment for the proposed amendments does not have a bycatch profitability analysis, as requested by NOAA. The one-week cruise to a small part of the buffer area next to the Oculina coral that was proposed for opening produced little new evidence about the occurrence of Oculina in the buffer strip. The crews established that, in less than 1 to 2 percent of the buffer strip, there were no corals but what about the other 98 to 99 percent of the buffer area?

An important reason you state as an objective of these amendments is to benefit fishermen, but there is little evidence that opening the buffer strip would have a significant economic impact on the fishery or its participants. On the contrary, the draft environmental assessment of the proposed amendments concludes, on page 21, quote: "Given the likely variability and usage of the area, as well as the exhibited variability and overall participation in the regional rock shrimp portion of the shrimp fishery, these economic effects cannot be quantified."

One economic reason stated for the proposed amendments is to allow the fishermen to achieve optimum yield in the rock shrimp fishery, but I haven't been able to find a stock assessment on this population in decades. You don't know what the rock shrimp OY is or whether the fishermen are catching it or not without the new access area. Analysis of sedimentation and sediment plumes from the trawling is grossly inadequate. This is crucial in determining the true impacts of these proposed amendments that narrow the existing buffer strip.

Again, from your environmental assessment, little is known about the effects of sedimentation from trawling, and this is on page 35 and 36: "From trawling on oculina and other sensitive species in the OHAPC system. From a study examining the size, duration, and composition of sediment plumes from multiple trawl types in the Mediterranean Sea, lateral plume spreading depends strongly on current variability. The study observed plumes spreading for hundreds of meters laterally in the hours after trawling. Therefore, more information on the seafloor current direction, strength, and particle size weight aid prediction of sediment plume swath created by trawling activities, and ultimately inform decisions regarding trawl distance from known corals." End quote.

I suggest that you need to collect this kind of information before you move ahead. Finally, our advice to you is to abandon this entire process, and save your time and money for more pressing issues. The existing boundaries of the northern CHAPC were originally based on good science and judgment. There was no error made at the time on determining eastern boundaries. Thank you very much, and I appreciate your time.

MR. LOCKE: All right, guys. I appreciate you taking my comment. I appreciate -- I've been listening in the afternoon, when I get in from fishing. I've heard some frustration with some members of the council, particularly Kerry Marhefka, commercial fisherman wife of -- You know, I'm not hearing anything good, coming out of these meetings, that's going to help commercial fishermen. I heard her say that, a couple afternoons ago, if it wasn't yesterday, and, you know, I heard this some of the discussion on the executive order, you know, that Trump gave about increasing America's seafood industry.

You know, in this Amendment 59 -- I'm from Florida. I'm from Ponce Inlet, originally. I didn't want to see a closure down there, but the lawsuit that come out of North Carolina was to try to get the council to act on the discards in the recreational fishery, so that the commercial fishermen wouldn't be suffering, because we're the ones suffering, and so, you know, the trip increase in Amendment 59, the 150-pound trip limit, and going to a 360,000-pound quota, we need that.

We need some relief in this snapper grouper fishery, some way, somehow, and that could be a beneficial thing in my industry. The state management, that it's looking like you all are toying with, and I hear DeSantis down there wanting to take control of the state, and I just want to remind this council about state management. You took Atlantic cobia, and you gave it to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. When they did a new stock assessment, the quota went from 800,000 pounds to 1.6 million pounds.

What that did is that increased our commercial allocation, which was only 8 percent, and it doubled our quota, and some in the recreational side said, oh my god, that's a windfall for the commercial, and what did they do? They took our quota and cut it in half. We got 4 percent, and so I want to use that as an example.

The current makeup, in my state of North Carolina right now, we have a completely slanted commission, a completely anti-commercial commission. I would not want my state getting control of red snapper, or snapper grouper, because I don't know where it would go. That's how - - I love my state. I'm very involved in my fisheries, but I have no confidence in the makeup of our commission right now. They are not using sound science or data. It's very agenda driven, and so I fear that that would be the modus operandi in the snapper grouper fishery, if they were to take, you know, management of it.

Let's talk about charter and headboat real quick. I know headboat has very good data collection. They don't have a problem there, but how about observer coverage on some of these charter boats? How about the fact that they don't get their permit renewed unless they do their logbooks, or they carry observers? I'm subject to up to eight trips a month observer coverage, between the Northeast and the Southeast, and I hear a lot of discussion about poor data. How about let's get some observers on some charter boats and for-hire and recreational fishermen, so we can get some better data. I appreciate your time. Have a good day.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Thank you, council, for the time to speak. My name is Dewey Hemilright. I'm a commercial fishing vessel owner in North Carolina. I want to speak on the changes that the SSC made during SEDAR 32 for the blueline tilefish stock assessment. I participated in that stock assessment, over the probably a year, or a little more than a year, that it took place, and also the SSC meetings.

I've also sent the council numerous comments, written comments, on both the two-for-one and the SEDAR 92. In my opinion, the arbitrary change in models, from the ASPIC to the DLM Toolkit, took away, at a conservative estimate, 70,000 pounds that would have been divided between the recreational and the commercial industry in the South Atlantic, which is very disappointing.

Listening to this week's conversation at the council, I think that, in their deliberations tomorrow, when it comes time, that council members will be kind of scratching their head and asking the same questions, and why did you change the model midstream, when nothing -- When nothing has happened in the fishery?

The next thing is I was encouraged by comments about framework-able actions in the council in the future. I'm not very familiar with many framework-able items that have happened at the council, but the time for a stock assessment, and the time for something to be implemented, takes over two years, which is too long.

Also, I heard, earlier, talking about reporting the GARFO, and that the law is, which I've been asking the question, if you possess a GARFO permit, you have to report to GARFO, no matter where you catch the fish or what jurisdiction you're in, and so, if I land a tilefish that I fished in the South Atlantic Council area, and land in North Carolina, I have to go back and report to GARFO, and so, each year, I have to double report thirty to forty trips, just to satisfy their want. The GARFO does not do nothing to manage blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic.

They don't do the stock assessment, and it's just a real burdensome reporting, and I believe that Steve should be able to look into that, to get his bluefish permit back, but that's one thing that you have to do is double report.

Second of all, I found a little interest, and maybe some hope, in this new paper that was put together by Jessica, Kerry, and John about the innovative and comprehensive management approaches for snapper grouper. There's no doubt that things need to be done different and hopefully some of this could be a template for some change to happen in the future. Thank you.

MR. AFLALO: My name is David Aflalo. I'm a headboat captain and operator for the Reward Fishing Fleet, out of Miami, and my biggest concern is vessel limits. We have two boats. We have one boat with federal permits and one boat without, and the reason for it is we take anywhere between fifteen to twenty paying customers out.

Literally, on opening day this year, we caught nine gag groupers, on our state boat, in state waters, because we can't use our federal boat for the same reason. It's like how do I tell a guy, who spends \$125 to come fishing with us for an all-day trip, hey, sorry, man, and I've got to let this fish go, and these people save up. We all know what the economy is at, and one of the

aerial, who does our data reporting for VESL and for NOAA, he was there, and he's seen all the logs of us down in in Miami.

We need to distinguish between headboats, charter boats, and recreational, and headboats should be allowed outside the limit, and just go based on how many people are on the thing, or give us like a twelve-boat limit, or something different other than the recreational limit. Like it's that's the reason why we have one in the other, and that's pretty much about it.

MR. MARINKO: We are out here currently commercial fishing, fifty miles offshore, calling from a Starlink. I've been listening to the meetings, and I just wanted to comment a little bit on Monday's talk, when we talked about efficiency.

I own and operate a forty-five-foot, slow, two-gallon-an-hour, six-knot boat, and we operate fifty to eighty miles offshore, and I'm actually picking up a diver right now, and I apologize. It takes us fourteen to sixteen hours to get to where we're going, at two gallons an hour, and I burned eighty gallons in four or five days of diving. I don't really know how you can get more efficient than that.

Things seem to be going towards a derby fishery. I'm also on the AP Snapper Grouper Panel, and me and a couple other slow boat, you know, traditional snapper boat guys got together and put in that little proposal, or whatever you call it, about multiday boats getting different limits, and it seemed to be dismissed in I think about forty seconds, if I timed it right, and it would be life-changing for us starving fishermen out here.

Some of the pinch points, which weren't -- They obviously didn't listen to the meeting, because they were talking about beeliners, which we never talked about. Red snapper would be a big one. Seventy-five pounds for a week of fishing -- I usually get 200 pounds a season. I make three trips in the five weeks it's open. It's ridiculous. I don't even count that. The biggest one for us is gag grouper, at 300 pounds. You just can't make a living on 300 pounds. It's crazy when -- You know, anyways.

Some of the other species, that ACLs never get met, hogfish, triggerfish, amberjack, almacos, and these are ACLs that never get met, but we're only allowed to keep X amount. Gag grouper, going back to that ACL, and I know it was met last year, because we were penalized for the prior year. 180,000 pounds is what we caught when it was a thousand-pound trip limit. Now it's 171,000, and it seems like we're catching about 7,000 a week in the commercial sector. I don't see that being filled this year. Maybe it will, but next year it definitely won't, with the increasing ACL, and so I don't really see a problem with some kind of increased trip limit for multiday boats.

I guess, since I have time, the only other thing I wanted to comment on, real quick, was the Oculina Bank. I like to do a lot of deep diving, and I have friends that dive even deeper, and we've recorded lots of Oculina coral in lots of different places, in Jacksonville, the Gulf, all over the place, but we did dive Jeff's Reef, which is in the Oculina Bank, and it's been closed for years, and it appeared to us, and this is a few years ago, that coral is dying, probably from Lake Okeechobee pollution, but that's a whole other story. Anyways, I just wanted to throw that in there, but, the multiday boats, I'm a little disappointed that it was dismissed so quickly for multiday trip limits, and that's all I got for now. You all enjoy a beer tonight.

(Whereupon, the public comment session was adjourned.)

- - -

Public
Comment
Wed 6/1/11

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Public
Comments
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Comment
Wed 6/11

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Representative
TBD

SAFMC June 2025

Attendee Report: Council Meeting

Report Generated:

06/18/2025 10:23 AM EDT

Webinar ID

494-531-643

Actual Start Date/Time

06/11/2025 07:51 AM EDT

Duration

9 hours 48 minutes

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Last Name

Council

Last Name

Aflalo

Allen

Aukeman

Bailey

Barbieri

Barger

Barile

Barrows

Batsavage

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Bonura

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Curtis

DARDEN

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David

Shanae

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peter

Katline

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Heather

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Vincent

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Heather

Jack

Judd

TANYA

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| DeVictor | Rick |
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| Dover | Miles |
| Downes | Athena |
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| Harrell | Ryan |
| Harrison | Alana |
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| Helmey | Judy |
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| Klibansky | Nikolai |
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| Knowlton | Kathy |
| Larkin | Michael |
| Lavine | Craig |
| Lazarre | Dominique |

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| Lee | Jennifer |
| Levy | Mara |
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| Locke | Charles |
| MCCLAIR | GENINE |
| Mackesey | Brendan |
| Malinowski | Richard |
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| Matter | Vivian |
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| McLemore | Michael |
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| Merck | Nicole |
| Merrifield | Jeanna |
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| Muffley | Brandon |
| Muller | Robert |
| Murphey | Trish |
| Neer | Julie |
| Newman | Thomas |
| ODEN | JEFF |
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| Oliver | Ashley |
| Ott | Emily |
| Package-Ward | Christina |
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| Phillips | Charlie |
| Poholek | ariel |
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| ROLLER | tom |
| Ramsay | Chloe |
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| Riley | Richard |
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| Smart | Tracey |
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| Sweetman | CJ |
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