

**PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA
SEPTEMBER 13, 2023**

MS. GUYAS: Good afternoon, everybody. I feel like I can filibuster up here for a while if I've got five minutes, and so, all right, I'll get into it. On the MRIP-FES pilot study, I'm glad to see the agency acknowledge that there is some issues with FES, that we need to investigate it, and I'm glad we're working on that. ASA's perspective is that, really, this situation presents an opportunity for NOAA to pull together the managers who use this data, both at the state and federal level, with people who are collecting this date and the anglers who depend on the data to discuss what's working, what's not, and figure out how to best move forward with recreational data collection that better meets everybody's needs.

We're seeing some of those conversations come together in the Gulf, and I encourage the agency to have similar conversations with South Atlantic states and stakeholders. As you all know, recreational fishing is incredibly important to the South Atlantic, and we have some very real recreational data issues over here that need to be addressed, many of which the council has talked about.

I appreciate the proactive motions on FES on Monday, and how to respond, and it's really important for the council, the SSC, and everybody in the council process really to take the time to understand this issue and explore potential implications that these FES issues have for management, especially considering that it's likely going to take a while to untangle these data issues and then apply those changes to management and assessment.

I'm thinking about Spanish mackerel as an example, but you all just kind of dug into this a little bit with the last conversation right before the break, and, you know, for Spanish, we know the high level of uncertainty in that assessment is at least partially driven by these FES issues, and Christina mentioned yesterday that, because of FES, it looks like that fishery is going to get a quota increase on paper, but it's really a decrease, and so, you know, I think it's important for the council to try to understand, you know, what the magnitude of that decrease really is relative to what you're working with now, given that, a few years down the road, you may have to undo some of the decisions that you're making now, based on this FES data, and all of these have potentially big implications for each of the fisheries that you manage.

You know, thinking again about Spanish, given that the recreational data currency change from CHTS, the recreational quota in the new versus the old currency, that may end up being a wash, but, on the commercial side, they stand to be allocated, you know, an increase of poundage that a real fish, you know, could be caught, and so some things that the council should be thinking about, generally, are, you know, whether the fishery can handle a significant increase in harvest while these FES issues are being hammered out, where increases are, you know, on the table.

You know, a few years from now, when we understand those impacts, is the fishery going to accept rolling back the quota increases, you know, if it turns out that lowering quotas is what we need to do here to account for the FES issues? You know, how does this all affect the recreational side of the coin, in the case of Spanish mackerel, you know, which is one of the few reliably federally-managed species out there that's targeted by inshore and offshore fishermen, and is really valued for an abundance and something that's kind of always out there to get.

There's just lots of unintended consequences to explore here. You know, I hate to play the what-if game, but probably it is worth discussing some of this stuff in-depth.

On the snapper grouper recreational permit, since you all are almost to the point of choosing preferred alternatives, I think the thing that will be helpful, at this point, is convening a stakeholder group of anglers to chew on this and flesh-out considerations for the different options from the users' point of view. I think you all kind of went there today in committee a little bit, and so I think what I would suggest is convening an ad hoc group of private anglers to do this, if possible before you pick preferreds, and I know that's coming up quickly, and certainly before you go to public hearings.

I think the work that this takes on the frontend will be worth it in the long run, and it will be helpful to realistically vet, you know, what this looks like on the water, and, you know, it may help get some buy-in from anglers.

Then, lastly, again, and I know that you just talked about this for other shallow-water groupers, and I mentioned this in June, but, again, I recommend that the council review really the rest of the snapper grouper complex species, to determine the need for council management of each species, and so the rec permit discussion is a reason to do this, and that's a lot to wrap your arms around, but, also, I think it could be considering other council government issues that are before you all, like dealing with climate change and shifting stocks. That's it for me, and so I'm happy to take any questions. Thanks.

MR. GENTNER: Thanks, everybody. I was going to make a comment about the MRIP, but I would just like to refer you to like the eighteen-million comments that I've made here, and at the Gulf of Mexico, in the past. I do want to applaud the council for spending a lot of time and giving a lot of consideration to this issue. I think we've all known for a long time that the MRIP is not doing what management needs it to do, and it isn't really making the changes necessary to get there.

The theory of change says that, often, the house has to be on fire for change to be made, and I think we can officially say the house is on fire right now, and so hopefully it presents the opportunity that we've needed for the survey for a long time, and I will stop right there on the MRIP.

I do want to take a step -- Some economics information came up in the council here a minute ago, and I just wanted to talk a little bit about allocation and economics. Economic impacts are what we call a positive metric, and they're like a temperature gauge on the side of the wall at your house. It says seventy-two degrees, but that doesn't tell you if seventy-two degrees is a good thing or a bad thing. You may love seventy-two degrees, and I may hate seventy-two degrees. It's just a number.

A good example of that is hurricanes. Hurricanes generate enormous economic impacts. Are they positive? Are they good for society? No, and I think we could all agree that hurricanes are terrible for society, and so you don't make decisions using economic impacts. They're good to gauge the distributional effects of a policy change that you make, but you don't go setting allocations based on that, and that was made clear by the Council Coordinating Committee and the information that came out of that with regard to the allocation policy.

What you do use is economic value. It's a normative metric. A benefit is a benefit, and a cost is a cost, and it doesn't matter how you draw it, who you talk to, and more benefits are more benefits for everybody, and more costs are more costs for everybody, and so, in the case of yellowmouth grouper and scamp, which is what I think we were talking about, there are no economic value estimates, and I can confidently say that on the recreational side. There's probably some numbers that are close, and, on the commercial side, I can confidently say there are none. There are no costs and earnings data in that fishery, and, if there are, they haven't been analyzed for profit or economic value.

The reason that red grouper was able -- That they were able to bring that estimate to bear really quickly is because it's an ITQ fishery, and the ITQ lease price is the economic value per pound for a commercial fishery, and that's a well-established fact. It makes it very easy to do allocation analysis in ITQ fisheries, on the commercial side. On the recreational side, it always takes a special-purpose survey, and there's really no two ways about it, but I will digress a little bit. If you use a vessel frame for your new permit, you have missed the opportunity to do special surveys to anglers, and so that's one drawback of going with a vessel permit, is you should stick with an individual if you want individual behavior, and that's pretty simple to me, as an economist.

Then the issue -- Someone brought up a multiplier for the economic impact, and it's ten. It's not whatever that number was. Looking at the State of South Carolina, if you remove imports, you shouldn't be flat, calculating the economic impact of imports in the commercial sector, and the multiplier is roughly ten for the State of South Carolina. That is including everything from the harvester all the way to the diner's plate. That's including the waiters and the guy driving the truck to get it to the restaurant. All of those things are included.

Many people would argue that's not appropriate, and, if you look at just the harvesters, the multiplier is about one-point-seven-ish, and, on the rec sector, for South Carolina, that multiplier is about 1.3. Recreational spending in the State of South Carolina generates about 1.3-times that in economic impact. For the harvesters, you know, a dollar of landed fish generates about a dollar-and-a-half, a \$1.70, in economic impact. All the way to the consumer, it generates about ten-times that, and so, anytime you hear a single-sector multiplier over two, that person is making stuff up. I will pause here, and that's all I've got to say. If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

MR. LORENZ: Hello, council. Bob Lorenz, Wilmington, North Carolina, and I'm the chair of your Snapper Grouper AP, and probably a little break today, and consider me more as a fisherman, just a normal fisherman out there, and there are parts of things that are actually very difficult to keep up with, and so I'm going to speak to that, and for understanding, and I'm going to speak again with red snapper, because, as I saw in St. Augustine -- You know, you see there's a lot of emotion among, you know, many of the fishermen, commercial and recreational.

We even -- Heck, we even had, even at the AP, where Kerry helped us out with an individual who was very persistent in wanting to participate, almost as an AP member, during our discussions, and one thing is there needs to be, and where I'm going to come to, is some kind of an education thing, or an outreach, that is cyclical and continues on, every six months or a year, and I will tell you why, because I myself, after eight years on the AP, and then watching and

coming to your meetings for seven years before that, it gets difficult for me to keep up, at least logically in my head what all is necessarily going on, because I get a little, you know, tangled up in things, including some of my own personal thoughts.

Where I want to speak is from the point of where many of the fishermen come from, and, I mean, one of the most interesting things that I think brings about emotion is that the biomass, from what everybody is understanding, has pretty much recovered, but, for the rest of us, who are trying to understand how in the, you know, past -- The recovery phenomenon is going to include things like maybe size or weight or distribution, and maybe even the historical geographical distribution of the species, on when it's being recovered, and so I periodically have to ask, and I have to ask Dr. Collier, on when this is recovered, and what's the end-all, and so, every two years or so, he gets to see me, or I talk to one of our AP members who works for NOAA, to explain some things to me.

What people are finding is that thinking that the fish are there, and you get the anecdotal evidence, and that the management measures are kind of punitive. We all understand release mortality, but, to many of the fishermen, they may look upon that, at this point, seeing how many of the red snapper they see, as that the discard mortality may be more a scapegoat than anything really true to justify the management that's going on now, and so what I would kind of ask you, or what I want to make as a recommendation here, and now I will speak as your AP chair, is to take control of the conversation and to avoid the things like I witnessed in St. Augustine.

We don't need that anymore, and we saw it even within our own AP, because people are coming up with, you know, what is the endpoint, and where are we going, and you have questions arising, even within the AP, of has the Magnuson-Stevens Act does its thing, and, I mean, for an act that came up back when there were herring shortages in the Pacific and groundfish problems in New England, and swordfish, and some of those recovered, and do they really apply to red snapper, with the way you're interpreting them with respect to fisheries management?

In the minds of the fishermen, the biomass is there, and the fish are there, and so why do we care? Why do we need forty-five-year-old fish or of a certain weight? That needs to be explained and then reintroduced periodically to us, if this recovery period -- It will probably exceed my lifetime, to get some of the goals, I have heard, and so I would like to know that in other areas.

Some of us even talk -- You know, ecosystem-based management, the fishermen, they've caught on to that, and we've caught it from the bait, and they're saying, okay, you have preferential management for a particular species, and is this causing disruptions in the biology, and so you can see, even in our AP notes, where we will have a charter captain who also commercial fishes, will speak about regurgitation of sea bass that he has seen, and that sort of a thing, and so people are making up their own scenarios on how recovered this fishery is, and I think it needs to be broken down and presented to us in a very consumer-friendly, and I would say targeted for like if your audience were pretty intelligent people, in the twelfth grade in high school, and roll that out periodically to us every year, so that, as we get a little muddled up, even some of us, like myself, that have to re-ask, well, where are we on this.

I don't know who should do that, and should that come from the council, or should that come from the Gulf Council, or should that come from the Science and Statistical Committee, or

NOAA Fisheries, and I'm not really sure, but it would be good to come up with something. Maybe, if you do -- I know you're going to discuss what you would like us on the AP to discuss, and maybe you want to run it by us once, a ten or fifteen-minute presentation on where we are with these red snapper and why you're managing it the way -- Why it's been managed the way it is, see how it works with us, and you've got twenty or twenty-five reasonable people that are going to listen. You don't have to take questions or comment from us, but, if you want, I could even run a minute here or there and just let everybody talk, so you could get a pulse-check of what's on people's minds, and, you know, I think that may help out.

I don't know who to write, and I know some of you have, and I know, Spud -- I've read things that he has explained in fisheries, and I know, with Mel, he has DNR, and South Carolina has some excellent writers, and, you know, I'm not sure, but I would -- You know, my recommendation is to get ahead of the conversation and start telling people what's going, and keep repeating it, because we need to constantly have a refresher course on it. Thank you.

MR. RAINEY: Thank you very much, and I have spent the day listening to your council meeting, and I will tell you that it was very informative. The first thing I learned is that you have more acronyms than the military, and a lot of it was hard for me to follow, because I didn't know all the acronyms, but it was a very educational day, and I appreciate the opportunity to participate this afternoon.

I had a few comments on my own that I was going to make, but our previous speaker really kind of nailed what I would like to talk about, because I am a lay fisherman, and not an experienced fisherman, but a lay fisherman, and I had some time in the Gulf of Mexico, and I went for a few years without a boat, and I've now gone to Jekyll Harbor Marina, and my greatest disappointment is the red snapper issue, and it seems to be that that's the case with a lot of us there.

It's to the point where, at least in our minds, we can't catch anything but red snapper right now, and it gets very frustrating, and trying to protect the ones you have to catch and release from a fisher person who is out with you that doesn't know how to release a fish properly gets to be tough sometimes, but education is a -- It's just a great part of it, and I want to go back and try to look at some of my notes, really quick, and one of the biggest questions we have, and the biggest complaint, I guess for the folks where I fish out of, is that we don't understand, and we need to be educated on what the difference is in the snapper season, if you can call two days a snapper season, on the east coast, versus the number of days they have in the Gulf of Mexico.

Also, a question about, if it's only two days, is there any way that it can be moved, or shifted, and not be stuck with two certain days, and like the year before -- I believe it was last year, and not this year, but last year, the weather was so rough that about five or six boats capsized in going out to try to get their one fish per person, or one snapper per person, for that day, and that's one of the things that I want to look for, you know, that I would like to see explained to the fishing community.

I do agree that the fishing permits should be by the boat, even though you may lose something on the individual not reporting, and I don't think -- I still think there could be a way for individuals to report, but not necessarily make the requirement, and I know that I have about thirteen different fishermen that go out with me from time to time, and I take about five or six guys out

with me on the weekends, and they're not interested in filling out paperwork, and I don't want to have to educate them on how to do it, because, as soon as we hit the marina, get back to the dock, like most fishermen or sailormen, they're heading for the bar and some seafood, and they're not interested in hanging around the boat.

I do think that there needs to be more accessibility online to educational videos, and I think the one that the previous speaker was talking about, about a fifteen-minute video on the snapper issue, would go a long way to educate me, and to educate those at least around the St. Simons and Jekyll area.

Let me see if I had anything else, real quick. Not really, but I would like to say that the council - I am very impressed with what you all are doing, and you are some really smart people, and thank you for all the time and effort that you put into it.

MR. BROGAN: Good afternoon. Thank you for the time. My name is Gib Brogan, and I am a campaign director with Oceana, an international conservation organization. I direct our campaigns to protect North Atlantic right whales and our federal fisheries campaigns. I'm here today to encourage the council to take action, following the Snapper Grouper Committee discussion of black sea bass tomorrow, to initiate an action to include on-demand, or ropeless, gear as an allowable gear in the black sea bass pot fishery.

Oceana is strongly in favor of time/area management to reduce the risk of entanglement of North Atlantic right whales and other large whales, and ropeless and on-demand technology offers a way to mitigate the effects of these time/area management measures on the fisheries, and this is a solid path forward for the council, and it will provide opportunity, increased value, and increased markets for this fishery, and it should be supported by the council.

If this goes forward, it will be the first fishery in the U.S. Atlantic, and possibly the U.S. overall, to allow ropeless gear as an allowable gear, and this will serve as a model for other fisheries around the country that are struggling with similar problems to the North Atlantic right whale conservation, and so we hope that, after the council considers this in tomorrow's snapper and grouper session, that the council will take action and include this in an upcoming management action specifically to allow this as allowable gear. Thank you very much for your time, and I appreciate it. Have a good afternoon.

(Whereupon, the public comment session was adjourned.)

- - -

