

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SEDAR COMMITTEE**

**Doubletree by Hilton New Bern/Riverfront  
New Bern, North Carolina**

**December 2, 2014**

### **SUMMARY MINUTES**

#### **SEDAR Committee**

Ben Hartig, Chair  
Jack Cox  
Charlie Phillips  
Mark Brown

Chris Conklin, Vice-Chair  
Dr. Michelle Duval  
Zack Bowen

#### **Council Members**

Mel Bell  
Anna Beckwith  
Chester Brewer  
Doug Haymans

Jessica McCawley  
Lt. Morgan Fowler  
Dr. Roy Crabtree

#### **Council Staff:**

Bob Mahood  
John Carmichael  
Dr. Mike Errigo  
Myra Brouwer  
Amber Von Harten  
Chip Collier

Gregg Waugh  
Mike Collins  
Dr. Kari MacLauchlin  
Dr. Brian Chevront  
Kim Iverson  
Julie O'Dell

#### **Observers/Participants:**

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith  
Phil Steele  
Dr. Jack McGovern  
Dr. Nick Farmer  
Dr. Louis Daniel

Monica Smit-Brunello  
Kevin Anson  
Dr. Marcel Reichert  
Pres Pate  
Tracy Dunn

Other Participants Attached

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in the Grand Ballroom of the Doubletree by Hilton New Bern/Riverfront, New Bern, North Carolina, December 2, 2014, and was called to order at 11:20 o'clock a.m. by Chairman Ben Hartig.

MR. HARTIG: We'll bring the SEDAR Committee to order. The first order of business is approval of the agenda. Are there any changes to the agenda? Seeing none; the agenda is approved. The next order of business is approval of the minutes. Are there any changes, additions or corrections to the minutes? Seeing none; the minutes are approved. That brings us to Action Item 3, Activities Update, Attachments 1 and 2; overview by John Carmichael.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The SEDAR Steering Committee met in October. They talked a lot about process and procedures and they approved the process we've been talking about around here for a while that streamlines the assessment approach and goes with the three webinar-specific milestones for each webinar relating to logical points in assessment development; and then allowing the assessment panel and the analysts to interact as need be over e-mails and telephone calls as necessary to do the pre-decisional work to get the assessment to those stages.

At each stage it will be a webinar, so a public meeting like we're used to where the assessment can be discussed at that point and provide guidance to move on to the next stage. We're maintaining a lot of public participation in that way while giving the analysts a little more freedom to deal with the technical challenges that are going to arise during the assessment.

Hopefully, by greatly reducing the number of webinars, we'll get our participation back up. Certainly, Ben, as we've discussed, an impediment to those who wish to participate having so many webinars and such a long, drawn-out cumbersome process; so we're really looking forward to how that is going to work.

First putting it into place with red grouper assessment in the Gulf, which is underway now. We'll get some pretty quick feedback on this process. Another thing that was a lot of discussion was dealing with the update assessments and the benchmark versus update versus standard; and, really, with the committee reiterating that once you've done a benchmark of a stock, the next assessments need to be updates.

And making it clear that it is a burden on the cooperator, in our case the council, for saying if you think a stock that has been assessed recently or previously, if you think it needs something other than an update, you need to provide pretty good justification for why it does; whether there is a new model to be applied or whether there is actually new data.

And to make it clear that updates are not in any way an inferior product;, it is just that needing to get more information and more recent look at the stock doesn't in and of itself justify doing the entire benchmark process. The only way we are going to deal with this backlog of assessment work is to do more updates and get more things done over the year. Then we discussed the assessment projects for 2016 and 2017.

The table in your overview shows you the things that we have coming up. In 2014; the things we've just recently wrapped up are hogfish and mackerel; and then in 2015 red snapper and gray triggerfish get started anew, which we'll talk about in some more detail here – it is the next item

– and a red grouper update is coming sometime in late 2015; and then looking ahead to 2016 with blueline and black grouper, with black grouper being done by Florida.

Then we have the list of future priorities for 2017 and beyond, which we should talk about and hopefully get some guidance on that. The first action item coming up for you guys is dealing with SEDAR 41, which is the red snapper stock assessment; the red snapper and gray triggerfish. As you recall, they had the headboat data issue, which the Science Center is looking into, which has delayed that assessment.

You have a new schedule for approval, which is essentially a year added to all of the workshops. The data workshop is the first week of August. In 2015 the assessment workshop occurring mid-November, the review occurring in March 2016, getting to the SSC in April 2016. They will meet in late April. Then you would then therefore get the recommendations in June of 2016. I thought Bonnie may want to update us on the headboat data evaluation. I know that is near and dear to everybody, and we like to hear how that is going.

DR. PONWITH: Per our discussions, staff from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, from the Beaufort Lab, put together a prospectus of what measures they would take to do this evaluation. The prospectus was handed to stock assessment scientist experts from outside of the Southeast Science Center to review it.

They deliberated, went back and forth, discussed it, refined it and pretty much nailed down what those approaches are going to be. The approach will more or less be twofold. One will be to look at the protocols that the data collection program has had over the history of that data collection and evaluate the QA-QC procedures and basically the protocols for the collections in the first place.

Then the second one is an analytical element; and that is to take a look at the time series and do some evaluations on the time series relative to validation data that we have over the course of the history of that database and look for signs of bias and determine whether any bias that does exist; is it directional or is it random.

Then put those two elements of the work together to make some determinations on the quality of the time series and any corrections that need to be made to make that time series stable enough for use as an input in a stock assessment. The expectation is that work will be done by some time in the spring or early summer and written up so that it can be incorporated into the data workshop as one of those inputs.

I expect that the data workshop will be an abbreviated version; because, of course, we already have held a data workshop. We want to be open to the inclusion of time series data that may not have been ripe last year but could be robust enough for use next year, and also any additional one-off studies that may have arisen between the August data workshop that was held this year and next year. We're eager to be able to put the results of that analysis to work on the stock assessment coming up in the next year.

MR. BROWN: Bonnie, I have a question for you. From the past historical logbook reporting with paper logs and now that we have moved forward to the future with the electronic reporting on a weekly basis, as was made mandatory; what is the difference in the outcome of the data that

is produced now as far as the timeline on producing the data? In other words, how long before we have to wait compared to the other?

DR. PONWITH: If I understand your question correctly, it is we used to do this by paper, we used to do estimates of landings and effort on an annual basis. Because of that, is that going to change now that we have electronic reporting? Is that your question?

MR. BROWN: I would like to know that; but my question is I am trying to understand – we went to this electronic reporting and everybody is working in that direction of getting the data processed as quickly as possible; but to me it doesn't seem like it has helped.

DR. PONWITH: When we were using the paper logbooks, there was a significant lag that logbooks had to be physically collected, they had to be QA-QC by hand. They had to be keypunched in so they became electronic and could be used. For that reason, we were generating catch estimates based on those logbooks on an annual basis.

We are collecting the headboat data now electronically, so a lot of those steps are faster. Right now the activity that we're working on that is going to have a big difference from an internal standpoint – in other words, it will matter a lot to the analysts, and it doesn't show as much to the industry – is converting that database over into an Oracle database.

It makes it more limber and flexible for us to be able to do those analyses. Once that work is done, we will be able to work up to a point where we can conduct the effort and the landings estimates on a periodicity that is about the same as the MRIP waves right now, every two months.

Now you might ask the question, well, if we have weekly data, why can't you generate weekly estimates? The reason is because one of the steps that we take is to convert the numbers of fish that are being reported into biomass, into pounds of fish. The way we do that is take the data that are collected by the dockside intercepts; the samplers that are actually in the field counting and weighing and measuring those fishes.

We use those data to convert the numbers into pounds. If you try and generate estimates too frequently; when you look for information to convert the numbers to pounds, you are missing the pounds data and you have to borrow data from other time periods or other locations to be able to make those conversions.

We feel that by sticking to about a two-month wave, we'll have enough data in those fields that we don't have to borrow data from adjacent time periods or adjacent locations; and it will keep those conversions much more accurate and much more precise. That is the direction that we're heading, and my expectation is that step will happen in 2015.

MR. BROWN: If that is taking so much time, what would be the difference rather than having a conversion like that, then just using the numbers of fish?

DR. PONWITH: Well, the numbers of fish are valuable; but the stock assessments, the unit of measure in a stock assessment are biomass. All the allocations are done in terms of biomass, so

that you can maintain the books on the recreational side and the commercial side in the same units.

MR. HARTIG: We just went through this process and asked the fishermen to report on a weekly basis; and we just got an explanation of why we can't have the information any sooner than it was in the past pretty much.

DR. PONWITH: In the past you got it once a year; and it took four or five months to get those estimates. What I am telling you is different from that; and that is that we would be able to generate estimates on a two-month basis, so that is considerably different than the way it was before. It is just we wouldn't be doing estimates weekly.

MR. HARTIG: Thank you for that clarification; I appreciate that. Basically you are going to wait for the MRIP samples to come in during those waves to give you the –

MS. PONWITH: Again, we will be using the data from the Southeast Headboat Data Collection. We won't be using any MRIP data in these estimates. It is that we would be collecting those data, accumulating them for two months, and then generating the effort and the landings' estimates using those data.

MR. BROWN: Well, Bonnie, don't you provide the estimated weight along with the number of fish?

MS. PONWITH: Yes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If the council were to set their allocations and specifications in numbers, then you would be able to get that sooner, it sounds like, because of the delay is waiting to get a reasonable sample of weights to give a good biomass estimate; is that right, Bonnie?

MS. PONWITH: That is correct; and this is not unlike a discussion that we've had in the Gulf of Mexico where for other reasons the council is interested on contemplating managing some of their recreational ACLs by number. But, again, the challenge with that is that a fish is not a fish. If you catch a little three-pounder, it still counts as one just like a 30-pounder counts as one when you are looking at them in terms of numbers.

But in terms of biomass, that is a completely different thing. The point of that is that if the council does want to look at monitoring an ACL in terms of numbers, we would still need to equate those numbers to what the biomass is. Because, again, the stock assessment is conducted according to biomass; and, of course, from the management side, the allocations are managed in terms of percentage of pounds, not in terms of numbers.

MR. BROWN: As a headboat operator, owning my own boat and doing these electronic logbooks, I don't notice that there is a field on this electronic logbook reporting for weights. It does give the numbers and discards and it gives you your location and your costs of operation. You are asking for some economics, but where is the weight generated?

DR. PONWITH: Those weights are collected by port samplers in the dockside intercepts.

MR. BROWN: But they can be very random; we actually had to have ours replaced this year. We have a new port sampler because the other one became ill, so we ran through a period of time with a lack of that.

DR. PONWITH: Right; and if you are suggesting would we be open to the collection of actual weights on those fish by the operators; I am absolutely willing to discuss that. We could tackle that as a cooperative research project to test it to see how it works out. We would still have to have some dockside validation of that.

I think that kind of a collection could be very valuable if it is something that you are interested in. The thing that we would have to do, though, is make sure that we do some pilot scale testing of it to see how it performs against the current methodology and then go from there.

MR. BROWN: Bonnie, I've been filling out the South Carolina paper logbooks for years; and on that paper logbook we did have the estimate of weight on there. That was something we did for years and provided it to the Beaufort lab; and that was the way that everything was evaluated. Now that we've gone to the electronic reporting on a weekly basis, trying to consolidate the information and get it processed faster, we don't even have the weight on there. I was just wondering if this is something that we should look at in the future is trying to either fix this problem or consolidate it down to a different method.

DR. PONWITH: Perhaps the thing to do on this, just in the interest of time today, would be to suggest during the Data Committee meeting a recommendation to evaluate the merits of some sort of cooperative research for the augmenting the collection of weight data for the headboat fleet.

MR. HARTIG: All right, are there any questions for Bonnie about the scheduling? It looks like we're on schedule. I guess the next thing we need, John, if I'm not moving too far ahead of you, is to approve the revised SEDAR schedule, if I could get a motion to do that.

**DR. DUVAL: I move that we approve the modified SEDAR 41 schedule.**

**MR. HARTIG: Second by Jack. Any discussion? Is there any objection to this motion? This motion is approved.** That brings us to review of 2017 stock assessment priorities, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, it does. The table shows the initial priorities we have; and this is based on the numerical list of priorities that you guys provided at our last meeting. We have tilefish in 2017, maybe in 2016, it says, depending on personnel and whatnot at the Science Center. Then scamp and gray snapper as a benchmark, vermilion and greater amberjack are updates, and then yellowtail snapper being done by Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission also coming along in 2017.

MR. HARTIG: Who is doing the gray snapper?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The Science Center.

MR. HARTIG: Didn't I see in the schedule some time before – it seems to me I saw at the steering committee that gray snapper was listed to be done as both Gulf and Atlantic at one time; did I not see that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It was mentioned at some point, yes, as a potential.

MR. HARTIG: This is the way we have it now?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes.

MR. COX: John, we are anxiously awaiting an update on this vermilion, because there is one fishery in the commercial sector that we could really use – and we know that they are so plentiful – is there any way that we can move forward a little bit faster than 2017 in that update?

MR. CARMICHAEL: If you want to bring it in place of one of the others, but that would pretty much give you either bumping red grouper or blueline tilefish.

MR. COX: I can't speak for everybody; but I will tell you that vermilion fishery, that could really keep us going and we are just seeing so many fish out there. I would vote that we replace it with something, definitely not tilefish, but – I don't know. Somewhere I think it would be nice if we could move that schedule up a little bit.

MR. HARTIG: Yes, it is tough. We talked about red grouper and the problems we are seeing in red grouper. If you are seeing problems, you probably really want to do a red grouper assessment. I understand your reasoning on bringing vermilion forward, because everything I'm hearing, just the same as you, is good about vermilions.

Maybe we would get some increased catch of vermilion, maybe we don't; it is hard to say. To me, if you are seeing problems in a fishery, you would probably want to do that one before you did one that is doing pretty good. Even though you may get some added fish, I think you would want to take care of our problem sooner than later in any of these species that you're managing.

I understand where you are coming from trying to move vermilion. It is just that where we get into these situations where vermilion is a lot of fish; it is I think our second most common animal sampled in MARMAP as far as at least our top species go. There are a lot of otoliths; and if you start messing with the schedule, it is really going to throw a monkey wrench.

I don't know if Marcel is back there right now; but it would really throw a monkey wrench into the sampling system. These people plan on our priorities and how we're moving through the system. We've tried more recently to try and keep things within their slots. I understand what you're saying, but there are other things to consider as well.

MR. COX: I understand; so there is no way we can add it in like in 2016. Like for a vermilion update or any increase in the ACL, we're looking at least three years away. That is a long time.

MR. CARMICHAEL: No; there isn't any way to add any more. This is based on the personnel that are available at the Science Center and able to do it. There aren't any more slots to apply. If there is, right now you have tilefish potentially going ahead, so you could say, well, let vermilion

go there in place of tilefish in 2017, which is the maybe 2016 slot, which would be late 2016. The issue for those is both tilefish and red grouper are much, much older assessments than vermilion snapper.

Vermilion snapper wasn't done that long ago. Unless we have some indication of a really good year class or something that would say we're off the mark; I don't think there is really any indication that a new update of vermilion maybe will change anything versus these other assessments are really getting quite old. Red grouper being under a rebuilding plan; that is kind of becoming a priority with its age, because we need to get updated projections on that rebuilding plan and make sure we're making progress.

MR. BELL: Jack made me think of this again in bringing up something. I've said this before; we kind of live and die by these stock assessments. Very simplistically, if you look at this as sort of an output thing, and this is a factory and we produce SEDARs; we're working at maximum capacity right now given the number of stock assessment scientists we have and all.

How can we think outside the box perhaps and increase our capacity somehow, because we are going to constantly run into this stuff where this comes up or this comes up or this is a priority. Then we're just constantly frustrated. I'm frustrated, maybe it's just me, I'm sorry, but not being able to deal with, okay, if this factory can only run this fast, how do we improve capacity out of this factory?

What are our options or do we have any options or is it all a matter of just not enough money; so sad, too bad. I know Florida is able to handle some things for us and handle some workload. Are there other ways we can somehow – and I'm not saying minimize or decrease the quality or anything; but with the quality we need, what other avenues are available to increase output? I mean, we're constantly dealing with this schedule thing and bump, bump, bump and we get frustrated. I know everybody is working as hard as they can, but how do we do that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Certainly, one of the things that has been talked about over and over again at the steering committee level is relying more upon the updates, which can be done quicker and bringing in the new information. Then the other thing is recognizing that you have a schedule and you need to stick with it, because we have hurt our output in recent years by making last-minute schedule changes.

I think that has really hurt us a lot; that and trying to go to benchmarks instead of updates. The more we can rely upon updates and that system gets going; those are done relatively quickly. Bonnie might be able to have her people doing – you know, rather than having three people tied up on a benchmark like we have with red snapper and gray triggerfish; that could maybe be five updates that you could get.

DR. PONWITH: Yes, to that point; I think one of the things that John brought up as the outcome of the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting was final approval on the modification to the use of webinars and to be able to bring the assessment to a key decision point and then use that as the trigger for a webinar.

I think that is going to strongly influence the level of participation, the strength of the participation, and the quality of the decision-making that is going to be happening in those

assessments. That is going to be helpful. I agree that being as disciplined as we possibly can about differentiating between what really does warrant a benchmark versus an update is going to be really important.

We also got some feedback on ideas that we could incorporate on making the documentation process for the stock assessments more efficient and more effective. A thing that is going to happen this spring that I'm particularly excited about is the Data Methods Workshop. The notion of that is that every time we hold a data workshop, some very critical decisions are made about those data and whether we use them and how we use them in the stock assessment.

The agreement at the last SEDAR Steering Committee was to hold this Data Methods Workshop. The notion is to get scientists from both the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico and discuss some common data issues and make those decisions in framework; and then document the daylight out of those decisions; so that once those decisions are made, all you have to do is cite the decision in the stock assessment and cite the rationale for that decision. The only time you would ever have to do anything more than that is if you departed from that framework decision.

That kind of process I think adds a lot of efficiency over time to the stock assessments. Time will tell. This is sort of our maiden voyage on that approach. My view is that if this workshop is successful; we should follow suite and have similar sort of a standing working group that focuses on stock assessment methodologies where decisions that every single stock assessment panel is making over and over and over again; that if there are commonalities in those decisions, that you can make them in framework; again, refer to them if you use that concept and then document if you choose to depart from that. Those kinds of things can have some really, really long-term gains in the efficiency of the stock assessment process, which will help with the through-put.

MR. BELL: If that all works out, as we hope it will, then through increased efficiencies we can improve output without – if the stock assessment scientists and all are sort of the workhorses of all this; we don't have to beat the horses any harder to make them run faster or we don't have to hire more horses, which we probably can't afford to hire more horses. There is hope, I guess, based on what you just said.

MR. COX: Bonnie, I remember last year you lost one of your key scientists in stock assessments; did you ever fill that position?

DR. PONWITH: The recruitment package is in with Office of Personnel right now. We expect we'll see a list of viable candidates as early as early in the New Year. We've made significant progress in getting that position filled.

MR. BROWN: I've heard Bonnie say it in the past that they've struggled with not having enough analysts and not enough field work, not be able to get enough CRPs and stuff like that. What about like a third party assessment by something supported by the commercial and for-hire recreational sectors?

DR. PONWITH: On face value it sounds intriguing; but when you really think about how complicated the stock assessments are, the amount of time that it would take to get a third party assessment that was done outside of our process and sort of unwrap it and understand what was

done well enough to be able to vouch for it as if you had done it yourself takes almost as much time as doing it yourself.

That is the catch is that the very same people who would have to evaluate all the steps all the data – think about the premium that we put on transparency. Members of the council themselves go to stock assessment workshops, because they are interested and concerned about the quality of those assessments.

If you get something that comes in that is all bundled from the outside, you've potentially lost that transparency. The amount of time it takes to become familiar enough with what was done, how the decisions were made, what data were included, what was excluded and why; all of that takes time.

Again, the people that would need to be looking at that are the very people who are actively doing stock assessments at the same time. It sounds like a simple solution, but there are some strings attached to it that make it more complex than at face value. I can't say that it is impossible; it is just that it is challenging and it is also time-consuming.

MS. BECKWITH: John, just from my recollection; I know we developed a procedure for third party assessments that go through our SSC review. Can you just walk us through for Mark's benefit what we currently have on the books?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We do have a policy in place for outside non-SEDAR assessments; and it was applied when we received the assessment of wreckfish. It basically consists of somebody who is proposing to do an assessment has put forth a recommendation or proposal. It is reviewed by the SSC; and it covers the details of where they get the data and how they get it validated and methods they are going to use.

They may have the opportunity to say we would like to do a data assessment/workshop of some sort, discusses how it is peer reviewed. Then the individuals get feedback from the SSC and they can go do that assessment and then bring it back in and the SSC provides peer review. We have a whole policy and we've applied it.

Now, what I think will be interesting in this case, because we got an assessment of wreckfish and have accepted it and it is used to set ABCs, is about five years from now that assessment is going to be getting old and we may wish to update it. The big challenge then becomes how are we going to get that assessment updated?

I don't know, but it is a bridge we will have to cross, because there is an individual at a university in South Africa who did that assessment using their information and their model and all of this. We may go to that individual and say, hey, how much do we need to pay you perhaps to update that; or we find someone else who can update it and hope that they can jump in with that.

That will certainly be a challenge for any sort of outside assessments when we just hire someone to do it kind of one off. That is certainly issues that I know FWC ran into that back when hogfish was done. One of the issues with hogfish and why it has taken so long is it was contracted through a university.

It wasn't accepted at SEDAR. A lot of recommendations were made and there was like, well, we fulfilled the contract, we did the assessment, so there you go. You get in this situation where you can end up over the barrel for getting things like projections done or getting updates done. That is certainly one of the complexities that is there.

In terms of maybe a way to get more simple models done and applying some of these data-poor techniques, it is something worth considering. We have the process in place; and if we can find qualified individuals willing to do the work and work within the process a little bit, I think that it is certainly worth considering for a lot of those stocks, which are kind of far down on our assessment priority list.

MR. HARTIG: One thing, Jack, at the steering committee I did bring up vermilion snapper in the context of it is a relatively short-lived fish. It is the most important driver right now for our snapper grouper complex. It is the fish that is driving the fishery and keeping the fishery afloat. In that context I said for vermilion, short-lived, very important; we should probably put it on a three-year schedule where John gave us the information several meetings ago that everything else is on about a five-year schedule to get assessed.

I think at the steering committee level, if we make that determination that we should do vermilion going forward on a three-year-level basis; giving you the information that it is going down more quickly or going up to release more fish; that would be very important for the fishery. We did talk about exactly what you are trying to do in getting it in a timely basis; but I am talking about long term and looking at vermilion much more frequently.

MR. COX: Yes, I appreciate that information, Ben. I know that the commercial fishery in the South Atlantic is in a dire situation. That is just one fishery that we really feel we are going to see a great stock assessment on kind of like we did black sea bass. If there is one thing that we can do to help our fishery out, our commercial guys is to get that fresh assessment out as soon as possible.

MR. PHILLIPS: I agree; I understand all the problems with trying to move it up. I guess I am looking at the draft report where they had scamp and gray snapper down, but I don't see it on this one. Yes; the sizes of the fish have changed. It is not the same fishery it was five years ago. There are some changes.

DR. DUVAL: I understand we are going to need a motion to approve this SEDAR schedule or 2017 –

MR. CARMICHAEL: I would think only if you are going to make a change, because these are the priorities as they exist now.

DR. DUVAL: Then I guess my only comment has to do with the proposed update for blueline tilefish. If you recall, the SSC recommended that this be a standard assessment to deal with some of the questions that the reviewers had with regard to the geographic extent of the stock, as the assessment was conducted as an Atlantic-wide stock, some questions about the indexing.

Quite frankly, in 2015 we're going to have a de facto fishery closure pretty much. We're really losing our only data source. It seems to me that an update might not be able to address some of

those questions. I just put that out there for consideration at the next steering committee meeting.

MR. COX: One more thing here; Anna was just kind of coaching me along with this one. It makes sense, because I am looking for any way possible to get this vermilion moved around in this thing; so with red grouper, if we could do the ABC differently to 80 percent and buy some time and take red grouper and move it, be more conservative on it, and put the vermilion there; is that possible?

MR. HARTIG: That is an interesting way to do it. I would have to ask Marcel about the aging and how many fish we have to age in that assessment and if that timeline could be reached. It is really going to throw a huge monkey wrench into it in one year. I don't think it could be done.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, our understanding of SEDAR is that 2015 is set; 2015 starts in three weeks; 2015 is locked in. Changing things in 2015 right now is extremely difficult.

MR. COX: I know; I'm just looking for some wiggle room, that's all.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think the wiggle room we can offer is certainly one thing that is obvious to say is that if another slot somehow becomes available in 2016, then vermilion snapper would be the priority; in which case I would be asking, then, do you want to basically in this table we're looking at put vermilion in place of tilefish, so that vermilion becomes the one that is a higher priority and becomes a maybe 2016? Then it would be tilefish and amberjack in 2017.

MR. COX: What I would say to that is we're trying to get more data into our tilefish. It would give us more time to get some good data; but that vermilion certainly encompasses a whole lot of people in the South Atlantic that it would affect. I don't know, just something to think about.

MR. HARTIG: I think if you would rather make vermilion a priority, I am not going to give you a lot of pushback about tilefish. I would like to have tilefish done, but I know the importance of vermilion to the entire South Atlantic grouper snapper fishery, at least the subtropical portion of it. I think you would be warranted in asking for a vermilion first. I think by consensus we can do that.

MR. BROWN: Well, doesn't NMFS control the confidential data as far as for vermilion? As far as a big fishery like this compared to the blueline tile fishery; wouldn't this be a better fishery to actually move forward with as far as having the data available?

MR. HARTIG: I don't know if I am in position to speak on that. Basically there are some real problems that we dealt with in blueline and why it is where it is. I am not sure that you are privy to all the conversations we have had about blueline over the last year and a half. There has been a lot of discussion about blueline.

From someone outside looking in, that may look very attractive to do blueline; but really that assessment really impacted those fishermen in North Carolina. We really wanted to have that new assessment based on some recruitment and some problems with the assessment that we had that we wanted to see things done differently in the next one. That is why blueline dominates that slot in particular. Michelle could probably say that much better than I did.

DR. DUVAL: I think Ben hit on the major points. We're already over time, I don't want to belabor it, but the council just sent a letter to Dr. Rick Merrick last month or something sort of outlining some of the questions and concerns that we had about – it is not about the assessment itself, it is about the data that were going into the assessment. We can make sure folks have that letter. I think it was sent around to all council members; but that pretty much outlines all the concerns that we had.

MR. HARTIG: I don't know if we addressed your question to your satisfaction. I will talk to you more about it.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, since it is getting about time to break for lunch, could we maybe kind of bounce these ideas around to pluses and minuses if we wanted to consider moving vermilion in place of golden tile over lunch and then kind of get a quick synopsis of this is what you can get; this is what you are going to lose; and then we can make a better decision after lunch?

MR. HARTIG: I see heads nodding around the table. People would rather go to lunch and discuss some of these topics over lunch. That is what we'll do. We will recess SEDAR for now. We'll take SEDAR back up when we come back from lunch at 1:20.

We are going to get started back in the SEDAR Committee. There was some discussion before we left about having some conversations over lunch and what may or may not come to us after lunch. Does anybody have anything on 2017 or other changes? It could always come back at full council. That brings us to the recommended 2018 and beyond assessment priorities, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We haven't talked too much about what lies ahead of us for 2018 and beyond. I think part of it is there is a stock prioritization exercise underway with the agency. The SSC talked about that last year and then Rick Methot presented with them in April on what had been discussed at the CCC about the agency's approach to identifying priorities.

I think we're kind of waiting to see where that comes and hopefully pretty soon we'll have an idea of a method for prioritizing our stocks in the long term. That is one thing that will affect us in 2018. Another thing to consider is what is going on within the MRIP world, the recreational catch estimation.

Some of you may be aware they are looking at a change in the effort survey, which is currently conducted through the telephones. They are moving to a different approach for estimating effort. That is likely to have some pretty significant changes in the catch estimates from MRIP. Sometime around 2017/2018 we'll be dealing with those new estimates and having to consider calibration for those new estimates.

Of course, just like last time when we had a change in the survey and we did a calibration method; and we created this where you have a survey that is giving you one value, apples, and then you have assessments based on the old methods which are giving you oranges; you have to do the calibration so that you are not declaring a stock over its ACL just because you have a change in how you are estimating what they are catching today.

That will put us in the realm around 2017 or 2018 to potentially do a bunch of stock updates to incorporate revisions to the recreational catch estimates. I think that is something we need to

keep on the horizon when we consider our priorities is we may want to take some of our very important fisheries, particularly those with a large recreational focus, and prioritize those for updates in 2018.

MR. BROWN: All those estimates that are done in numbers; that is numbers rather than pounds?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes; MRIP base estimates are in numbers; and they caution you against pounds because of the difficulty in getting a good sample of all the recreational fish, getting that biological sample. Their base estimates are in numbers.

MR. HARTIG: Anything else? All right, that takes us to I guess our last item besides other business was the steering committee guidance.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The steering committee will be talking about schedules and long-term priorities and just general process and procedures, making progress on our Data Methods Workshop. I guess now it is sort of an open time for any suggestions this group wants to bring forth for Ben to take to the steering committee.

MR. HARTIG: If you don't have them right now, certainly as you think about this going through the process how you would like to think things might change – I mentioned vermilion in the realm that I thought such an important fish should probably be assessed more often to some degree to make sure if it is going down, that you catch it quickly, so you don't have major impacts on the fishery in the long term. That seems to be the fish that is driving the fishery currently, if I am not mistaken, at least in the subtropical world.

MR. COX: Is this a place to make a motion to change that?

MR. HARTIG: Sure.

**MR. COX: I would say let's make a motion to change the – so let's do an assessment every three years rather than five years on the vermilion.**

**MR. HARTIG: We have a motion; second by Zack.**

MS. BECKWITH: I just want to point out what John just said. With the potential changes to MRIP starting in 2018, it may be a time to focus on some recreationally important species; and vermilion is important to recreational, but it might be worth taking the time between now and full council to think about this motion.

We certainly can reconsider it and see if there are other species that might be imperative. We spend a lot of time focused on the commercially important species; and if there is an opportunity to reconsider new data for the recreationally important species, that is something that is fair to consider.

MR. BOWEN: Recreationally, vermilion snapper is very important, in my opinion. I think that is the opinion of some of the other recreational representatives on this council as well.

MR. HARTIG: Yes; I think that is a given, but I appreciate Anna's comment as well as other species, too. Between now and full council, if we have anything else, we can add it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If you do vermilion in 2017, then this would make it come up again in 2020, so it might jump over that window. Now, we may want to hope that we have calibration or at least preliminary MRIP calibration for vermilion at that time or you may have to deal with calibration of your catch estimates to match back to the assessment until 2020.

MR. HARTIG: Clear on that? I will cross that bridge when we get to it. Anymore discussion on this motion? Is there any objection to this motion? Seeing none; that motion is approved. Is there anything else under steering committee topics?

I don't see anything so that will bring us to other business. I do not believe we had any other business that I am aware of. Is there any other business to come before the SEDAR Committee? Seeing none; that ends the SEDAR Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting was recessed at 1:40 o'clock p.m., December 2, 2014.)

Certified By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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December 30, 2014

### SEDAR

- ✓ Ben Hartig, Chair
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Mid-Atlantic Liaison, Pres Pate/Dewey  
Hemilright  
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Staff contact: Bob Mahood

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Jessica McCawley, Chair  
Ben Hartig, Vice-Chair  
Chester Brewer  
Jack Cox  
Roy Crabtree  
Staff contact: Kari MacLauchlin

# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

## 2014 Council Membership

### COUNCIL CHAIRMAN:

**Ben Hartig**  
9277 Sharon Street  
Hobe Sound, FL 33455  
772/546-1541 (ph)  
mackattackben@att.net

### VICE-CHAIRMAN

**Dr. Michelle Duval**  
NC Division of Marine Fisheries  
3441 Arendell St.  
(PO Box 769)  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252/808-8011 (ph); 252/726-0254 (f)  
michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov

**Robert E. Beal**  
Executive Director  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries  
Commission  
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N  
Arlington, VA 20001  
703/842-0740 (ph); 703/842-0741 (f)  
rbeal@asmfc.org

**Mel Bell**  
S.C. Dept. of Natural Resources  
Marine Resources Division  
P.O. Box 12559  
(217 Ft. Johnson Road)  
Charleston, SC 29422-2559  
843/953-9007 (ph)  
843/953-9159 (fax)  
bellm@dnr.sc.gov

**Anna Beckwith**  
1907 Paulette Road  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252/671-3474 (ph)  
AnnaBarriosBeckwith@gmail.com

**Zack Bowen**  
P.O. Box 30825  
Savannah, GA 31410  
912/398-3733 (ph)  
fishzack@comcast.net

**W. Chester Brewer**  
250 Australian Ave. South  
Suite 1400  
✓ West Palm Beach, FL 33408  
561/655-4777 (ph)  
WCBLAW@aol.com

**Mark Brown**  
3642 Pandora Drive  
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29466  
843/881-9735 (ph); 843/881-4446 (f)  
capt.markbrown@comcast.net

**Chris Conklin**  
P.O. Box 972  
Murrells Inlet, SC 29576  
843/543-3833  
conklincc@gmail.com

**Jack Cox**  
2010 Bridges Street  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252/728-9548  
Dayboat1965@gmail.com

**Dr. Roy Crabtree**  
Regional Administrator  
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Region  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701  
727/824-5301 (ph); 727/824-5320 (f)  
roy.crabtree@noaa.gov

**LT Morgan Fowler**  
U.S. Coast Guard  
510 SW 11<sup>th</sup> Court  
Fort Lauderdale FL 33315  
morgan.m.fowler@uscg.mil

**Doug Haymans**  
Coastal Resources Division  
GA Dept. of Natural Resources  
One Conservation Way, Suite 300  
Brunswick, GA 31520-8687  
912/264-7218 (ph); 912/262-2318 (f)  
doughaymans@gmail.com

**Deirdre Warner-Kramer**  
Office of Marine Conservation  
OES/OMC  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Department of State, Room 5806  
Washington, DC 20520  
202/647-3228 (ph); 202/736-7350 (f)  
Warner-KramerDM@state.gov

**Dr. Wilson Laney**  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
South Atlantic Fisheries Coordinator  
P.O. Box 33683  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7617  
(110 Brooks Ave)  
237 David Clark Laboratories,  
NCSU Campus  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7617)  
919/515-5019 (ph)  
919/515-4415 (f)  
Wilson\_Laney@fws.gov

**Jessica McCawley**  
Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission  
2590 Executive Center Circle E.,  
Suite 201  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
850/487-0554 (ph); 850/487-4847 (f)  
jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com

**Charles Phillips**  
Phillips Seafood / Sapelo Sea Farms  
1418 Sapelo Avenue, N.E.  
Townsend, GA 31331  
912/832-4423 (ph); 912/832-6228 (f)  
Ga\_capt@yahoo.com

MARCEL REICHAERT  
JACK MCGOVERN  
BONNIE POWLICH  
KEVIN ANSON  
PHIL STEELE  
MONICA SMET-BRUNELLO  
NICK FARMER  
PRES PATE  
LOUIS DANIEL  
TRACY DUNN

# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Staff

## Executive Director

✓ Robert K. Mahood  
robert.mahood@safmc.net

## Deputy Executive Director

✓ Gregg T. Waugh  
gregg.waugh@safmc.net

---

## Public Information Officer

✓ Kim Iverson  
kim.iverson@safmc.net

## Fishery Outreach Specialist

✓ Amber Von Harten  
amber.vonharten@safmc.net

## Senior Fishery Biologist

Roger Pugliese  
roger.pugliese@safmc.net

## Fishery Scientist

✓ Myra Brouwer  
myra.brouwer@safmc.net

## Fishery Biologist

✓ Dr. Mike Errigo  
mike.errigo@safmc.net

## Fisheries Social Scientist

✓ Dr. Kari MacLauchlin  
kari.maclauchlin@safmc.net

## Fishery Scientist

✓ Chip Collier  
Chip.Collier@safmc.net

## Staff Economist

✓ Dr. Brian Chevront  
brian.chevront@safmc.net

## Science and Statistics Program Manager

✓ John Carmichael  
john.carmichael@safmc.net

## SEDAR Coordinators

Dr. Julie Neer - julie.neer@safmc.net  
Julia Byrd - julia.byrd@safmc.net

## Administrative Officer

✓ Mike Collins  
mike.collins@safmc.net

## Financial Secretary

Debra Buscher  
deb.buscher@safmc.net

## Admin. Secretary /Travel Coordinator

Cindy Chaya  
cindy.chaya@safmc.net

## Purchasing & Grants

✓ Julie O'Dell  
julie.odell@safmc.net

# PLEASE SIGN IN

In order to have a record of your attendance at each meeting and your name included in the minutes, we ask that you sign this sheet for the meeting shown below.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
**SEDAR Committee Meeting**  
Tuesday, December 2, 2014

NAME & SECTOR / ORGANIZATION:	AREA CODE & PHONE NUMBER:	EMAIL ADDRESS:	MAILING ADDRESS:
Bob Long	' ,	' ,	WILMINGTON, NC
Ann Dally - SCDD	843/933/9165	AnnDally@scdmr.sc.gov	217 A. Johnson Rd. Charleston SC
Tracy Smart SCNR		smarttr@dnr.sc.gov	CHS, SC
Emily Helmle PEW			ehelmle@penths.org
J.P. BROOKER	OCEAN CONSERVANCY		727 286 0338
Tom Burgess	910-321-3528	tbburgess@embarrmail.com	
Finh Roda NWFES			
Bill Kelly	FLORIDA		
Henric Helles	GSAFFE		TAMPA, FL
JOEY BAENDER	SCDNR		