

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

**DoubleTree by Hilton Atlantic Beach Oceanfront
Atlantic Beach, NC**

December 6, 2016

SUMMARY MINUTES

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Charlie Phillips, Vice Chair
Mel Bell

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Chester Brewer

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Additional Observers/Participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in at the DoubleTree by Hilton Atlantic Beach Oceanfront, Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, Tuesday morning, December 6, 2016, and was called to order by Chairman Michelle Duval.

MR. DUVAL: The next item on our agenda is SEDAR Project Update and Approval, and so we actually have several terms of reference that we need to approve, and so I believe you got a revised Attachment 2 that was sent around, and so I think this is the document that we're going to be working from, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The first thing is the black grouper schedule and terms of reference, and there is a revised schedule. The Gulf Council had considered the terms of reference and the schedule, and so you're been given an updated version that includes what the Gulf Council recommended for terms of reference. There were no changes in the schedule recommended, and so do you want to do motions, do schedule, and then the terms of reference separately?

DR. DUVAL: Sure.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The schedule of black grouper, there will be the data workshop in March and then, the assessment workshop, there will be a couple of webinars leading up to it and then an in-person assessment workshop in June. Then the peer review of this will be held in November, and we're hoping that the completed report will maintain and be on time and available to the councils in mid-December of 2017 and then available for review by the SSCs at their spring meetings.

DR. DUVAL: Right, and if I could get a **motion from the committee to approve the schedule for black grouper, SEDAR 48.**

MR. PHILLIPS: **I so move, Madam Chair.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Charlie and second by Chester. **The motion is to approve the schedule for SEDAR 48.** Any other discussion? **Is there any objection? Seeing none, that motion is approved.** Next, we would need -- We will let John run through these, but we'll be looking for a motion to approve the terms of reference.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Going through the terms of reference, we first have the originals, and I will just skip through that. They are primarily the standard terms of reference we see for benchmark assessments. Then we'll go on to the mark-up that has the information provided by the Gulf Council, and the things in highlight are additional information suggested by the Gulf.

In Data Workshop Term of Reference 1, addressing stock structure, they made a number of bullets there to request some additional information to review the research and to make recommendations on the biological structure and define the unit stock. To provide a recommendation to address the council management jurisdiction supporting management of the stock and the benchmarks and to document the discussions and recommendations in a separate working paper. They're asking for some more detail on there. This is a stock that has been assessed before some other times, and the councils have procedures in place now for how they divide up the productivity of the stock and establish their ACLs.

DR. DUVAL: Hopefully everyone had a chance to look at those.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If there's no questions, I will move on. Seeing none, okay. On Term of Reference Number 2, they added additional information to provide estimates of ranges of uncertainty for all life history information, and so we certainly expect that that's done, and this simply clarifies and makes sure that it should be provided.

Concerning discard mortality rates, they added an additional phrase there to consider other shallow-water groupers from the U.S. and Gulf of Mexico, Southeast U.S., and to expand the research scope that's looked at. Again, I think it's -- A lot of times, these things are done, but they just wanted to be sure that it's explicit, because we have run into situations where things that aren't explicitly stated maybe aren't done.

On Item 4, where they talk about the measures of abundance, they raised the issue of mislabeling of gag as black grouper and what corrections and adjustments are made to the historical data, and that's probably another good point, because that has been an issue with this species in the past. Number 6, addressing recreational catch statistics, they just added this phrase of "provide maps in state and federal waters".

Now, getting into the assessment workshop, Term of Reference Number 6 addresses the benchmarks, and they added a phrase to request that there is justification provided for the use of any proxies. They specified the F current, which now is the geometric mean of the most recent three years of fishing mortality, and, in the projections, they added a request to provide equilibrium yields at FOY.

MR. HAYMANS: I am very sorry, but what document are you in? I know you said you sent around an update, but I can't find it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This was in the late materials. It's Attachment 02 Revised.

DR. DUVAL: Is it that it is not showing up on the webinar or that it's not on the website?

MR. HAYMANS: I wasn't considering it late material, but I was looking in the SEDAR folder, and it was the same thing I printed, but I'm good now. Thank you.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Are we back on track now? The concerns were just logistical and not with content.

MR. HAYMANS: We're all, over here, still trying to figure out the new system.

MR. CARMICHAEL: No problem. Then the final set is the Review Workshop Terms of Reference, with a change suggested in Term of Reference Number 3 to evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following of is the stock undergoing overfishing at F current, and so it just clarifies that, whether you're saying is the stock undergoing overfishing, and it specifies where that is evaluated. Then it asks for the information that supports that.

Then, addressing the stock-recruitment relationship, adding an additional phrase of, if there isn't a stock-recruitment relationship, what additional data may help inform this relationship, and so I

think that gets at a potential research recommendation that could come to help clarify what could be done in the future, for future assessments, to help define the stock-recruitment relationship.

That was the final change that they suggested. If everyone supports those, I think we could make an overall motion, perhaps, that says to accept the terms of reference as modified or approved by the Gulf Council.

DR. DUVAL: Any questions for John on the changes? I thought they looked good, actually. They were good changes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I did, too. I thought they added a good bit of clarity in a number of places, and we certainly supported them.

DR. DUVAL: **All right, and so I would be looking for a motion from the committee to approve the SEDAR 48, black grouper, terms of reference, as modified by the Gulf Council.**

MR. BREWER: **So moved.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Chester and second by Charlie. Any further discussion? **Is there any objection? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: On black sea bass, this is a standard stock assessment, and so I will jump down past those terms of reference there for a second and we can do the schedule first. For the terms of reference that will be approved now, this is going to be done through a number of webinars and data scoping, starting in February of 2017. Then the assessment process webinars will be held during June, July, and August of 2017. Then, hopefully, if it continues on track, the complete assessment report is available to the council by September 29, 2017. That would then make it in time to just squeak in, probably, for the briefing book for our October SSC meeting in 2017.

DR. DUVAL: Any questions for John? **If not, we would just need a motion to approve the project schedule for SEDAR 56.**

MR. BOWEN: **So moved.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Zack and second by Mel. Any discussion? **Any opposition? Seeing none, that motion is approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: The motion read: **Move to approve the SEDAR 56, black sea bass, project schedule. Then the next item is the SEDAR 56, black sea bass, terms of reference, and this is to update the last assessment in 2013, SEDAR 25, with data through 2015. It's asking for a model consistent with the SEDAR 25 update configuration and revise the configurations, as necessary, to incorporate and evaluate any changes in model inputs or parameterization approved during this assessment.**

One thing that's coming up there is, recently, with golden tilefish and then again with red grouper, there has been some discussion of changes within the model. Most importantly, and certainly having the most impact on the assessments, has been the fitting criteria that have been used. One

of the things that's been raised is one -- That sort of caught us off-guard, I think, a bit on golden tilefish, because folks weren't necessarily expecting that to be changed in the assessment.

One of the things that we think maybe needs to be solidified a bit more is, if changes like that are going to be considered, they should be specified here, because there is an allowance to bring a model up-to-date with the most recent technology, but I think, within SEDAR, there's always been an expectation that those kinds of things would be indicated upfront, so that you knew they were coming. That's certainly so in the case of the SSC. Perhaps if it were an update, as was the case with tilefish, that may affect what the SSC thinks about whether it should be an update or a standard assessment, since they have more involvement in a standard assessment. If the changes are expected to, perhaps, impact outcomes or basic decisions in the model, they may want to upgrade the type.

This is already planned to be a standard assessment, and so we know we have the SSC panel involved, but I think -- I'm not sure what extent we can here include any of those model changes, but, certainly in the future, we need to think about having those more clearly specified and maybe going to the Science Center analytical team to find out what changes they foresee being necessary to this model to bring it up to the most recent version.

MR. PHILLIPS: I guess this goes to John's point. I was listening in on the red grouper webinar the other day, and they seemed to be changing what was best available science on them, and it was a little disconcerting, I will say, for lack of a better term, and John and Marcel can probably get into it later and explain more about that, but I would like for them to know that they know what rabbit they're going to run and how they're going to do it and there is no surprises when they're doing their work.

MR. HARTIG: I'm not on the committee, but this is something near and dear to my heart, and watching us go through the painful reductions in golden tilefish based on the robust multinomial likelihood function, to me, before that is used in the assessment, you need to look at -- This SSC needs to review that type of change, number one.

The other is you actually need to bring fishermen into that discussion, to talk about multinomial likelihoods on a species-by-species basis, based on what you were trying to correct with that specific model parameter. Now, I say that in the realm of golden tilefish because, the way Erik described it at the SSC meeting, it's supposed to deal with correlations between the way sampling is done in schooling fish, where they encounter different sized schools, but, in golden tilefish, the gear is set across depth ranges, and you don't get that schooling impact in the golden tilefish fishery.

When you set a piece of gear in golden tilefish, you're going to be encountering a number of different sized species where you set that gear in most occurrences. Now, in some places, it looks to me like you're going to see some larger fish in the area, but I just looked at the Foundation report from Florida, and, if you go outside of the depths that most people fish in, it looks, to me, that you get a much broader size range sample in the longline fishery than you would if the fishery was operating as it operates, trying to target larger fish.

The problem with that is I don't think the multinomial was appropriate for golden tilefish, based on the way the fishery is prosecuted, and so those kinds of decisions, on a species-by-species basis,

need to be reviewed by the SSC before that is used and with some input from fishermen as well about how the fishery operates. Some of that could be taken care of by looking at some of the information that was in the latest Foundation information or actually going back to some of the size grades, the market grade categories, and reviewing some of that information to show that the fishery produces a broad range of sizes.

The selectivity of the fishery-independent information shows that it is different than the fishery, and one of the drivers in the tilefish assessment was the increased, supposedly, selectivity on large animals, but, if you look at the population as a whole, that selectivity is not seen in that way, and so the fishery-independent samples sample much more of the population across shelf depths, and it gives you a better indication of what's actually in the water at any one time. To make a long story short, I believe that we should have a better way to look at these model changes before they're made in the assessment, on a species-by-species basis.

DR. PONWITH: Avoiding actually talking about stock assessment decisions in a council meeting and really focusing on process, I think that it's always worth a discussion to make sure that our SOPPs for how we conduct our new research track assessments and operational assessments going forward are crisp and certainly that the way we are carrying out standard and update assessments are according to the SOPPs.

I think that's a conversation worth having. We don't want to get into the specifications of the model in the council meeting, but certainly discussing whether those SOPPs are serving us well, whether we've got those right, and whether we're carrying out our work according to them is a reasonable thing to discuss within the council, so that we can take it up in the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Bonnie. I guess, with regard to process, I had made some comments at the SSC meeting, some suggestions for how to try to, I think, improve the clarity and maybe transparency of changes in model configuration or changes in uses of fitting criteria and changes in data treatments upfront, so that SSC members have that information right up front. What was the procedure or decision made in the previous assessment and has that been changed in this assessment? What does that impact?

Having some kind of table like that, right up front, so that people can see what those changes are and have a sense of what those are going to be, I think that would be helpful. First of all, it's not that changes are not detailed within assessments, but you're going within particular sections of the assessment write-up to find that information, and so I agree that the questions about process are appropriate for us to discuss, in ensuring that there is clarity and transparency in that process for everybody involved.

I think Ben has made a suggestion for perhaps how there can be a little bit more clarity and/or transparency, from the SSC's perspective, from within their wheelhouse and the decisions that they are responsible for with regard to determination of best scientific information available and best processes to use before those come before the council. We've gotten a little bit off-track here, but it's a good track.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think we have a little bit, and I think some of this comes down to in Number 2, where you're talking about the changes as incorporated in the latest BAM

configurations, and so that's the part that we're not always clear what exactly that means. What might have transpired from the last assessment, in this case 2013, SEDAR 25, to what is the state of the art now in 2016?

I wonder if, thinking along the lines, Michelle, of what you guys were saying, would you all add something here that perhaps says to fully document all the changes in one place and compare the prior as well as the proposed change, the outcomes or the impacts of the previous approach as well as the proposed change, for each individual change? That's pretty common, a lot of times, when there is changes being made in an assessment, to say, okay, here's how it was and then here's this change and here's what it does, so then you can tease out what impacts on the outcomes are tied to developments in the data or developments in the particular approach used in the model.

DR. DUVAL: I agree. I do think it would be good to add a little bit more specificity to that bullet of incorporate and detail -- Incorporate the latest BAM model configurations and detail changes between previous SEDAR 25 update model setup data-handling procedures and impacts on the assessment or something along those lines. As John is writing this up there, I say that as not because we are going to be making decisions about that, but having those details available for the SSC, when they do the review, I think is going to be very helpful. I would say also "and impacts of those changes". Are folks around the table comfortable with that additional language in the second bullet of Term of Reference Number 2?

MR. HARTIG: I mean, it's really all we can do, for now, and so I will just hold any more discussion.

DR. DUVAL: I think we would need a motion. Let's get a motion to modify the second bullet, and then we'll get a follow-up motion to approve the terms of reference as modified. **If someone is willing to make a motion to modify the second bullet of SEDAR 56, Term of Reference 2, to read: Incorporate the latest BAM model configurations and detail the changes made and impacts of those changes between the SEDAR 25 model and the proposed SEDAR 56 model.**

MR. PHILLIPS: **I will make that motion.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Charlie. Is there a second? Second by Zack. **Is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: Back to the terms of reference? Okay. Then the rest are fairly standard. Document changes made to the model input datasets, and that addressed that a little bit, but I think it added clarity. Update the model parameters and estimates and comparisons, and then we do stock projections.

We have stock projections for OFL is based on the P* of 50 percent and then ABC of P* of 40 percent and 75 percent FMSY, and I think 40 percent is the current P* recommendation, and so, of course, if that were to change along the way, after the SSC, they would request additional projections, as they typically do. There are six terms of reference. Any further discussion?

DR. DUVAL: I don't see any. Is there a motion to approve the terms of reference?

MR. PHILLIPS: I make the motion that we approve the terms of reference. Approve the SEDAR 56, black sea bass, terms of reference, as modified.

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Charlie and second by Chester. Is there further discussion? Is there any opposition? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That dispenses with Attachment 2. The next item in the SEDAR updates and reports is blueline tilefish, and I think, as most of you guys are well aware, there's been a lot going on with blueline tilefish. There's been a lot of effort devoted to the stock ID issue. There was a meeting in July of a stock ID workgroup. They made some recommendations. Their recommendation was blueline tilefish should include the entire Gulf of Mexico and the entire Atlantic, all as one stock.

That raised some concerns at the SEDAR Steering Committee, which met in September, and the Steering Committee recommended that there, one, be a review of that by the SSCs, a subset of the SSCs, from the Gulf, the South Atlantic, and Mid-Atlantic, because those were all three going to be involved in this assessment now, and then further reviewed by the leadership group, with leadership from the councils, Science Centers, and Regional Offices, very similar to what happened in March of this year, when the stock was -- When we were discussing how to deal with the Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic and New England overlap, potentially, in the stock at that time.

The reasoning behind the SEDAR Steering Committee was that the recommendation of the workgroup was extending into the Gulf, but no folks from the Gulf had been involved in any of the deliberations or discussions up to that point. The Gulf Council hadn't been involved for the planning for the stock assessment, and there was not Gulf SSC folks and other representatives involved on this workgroup, because the reality was that no one really anticipated that that boundary of the stock was going to be extended to include the entire Gulf of Mexico.

Following the SEDAR Steering Committee's recommendation, a subset of SSCs were convened for a webinar meeting on October 28, and their recommendations were, and I highlighted a couple of them that are probably the most relevant to the stock ID questions directly, and they stated that the genetic evidence failed to reject the null hypothesis of one continuous genetic stock, but they raised a lot of concern about the limited sample size and geographic distribution of samples available from the Gulf.

That was also pointed out by the Gulf representatives at the Steering Committee. Something like fifteen genetic samples were taken in the Gulf of blueline tilefish. They were in an area south of Tampa, between south of Tampa and the Florida Keys, and the intent of them in the original study was that they would serve as an outgroup in the genetics, to help clarify the distinction between what was intended to define the stock structure along the Atlantic coast, and so everyone was rather surprised, I think, that those fish ended up showing no difference, which has kind of triggered this whole discussion. When they looked at that the workshop and found that those fish didn't show any difference with the fish in the Atlantic, that led to consideration of, well, is it all just one stock?

They addressed the spatial data and they addressed the habitat distribution, and we were kind of aware of that. Habitat occurs all the way around, and so there is currents down there. There is possibilities for larvae being transported, and they recommended that there are limited data to

support spatial variability and life history parameters, due to the aging issues and little data from the Gulf to assess the demographic differences among regions. Reproductive data have some spatial and temporal limitations, and they said the results of the analyses of the existing data do not refute the existence of one population on the Atlantic coast from the Florida Keys through Virginia.

They brought in a little bit of a wrinkle there, saying Atlantic Coast from the Florida Keys through Virginia, as opposed to the entire Gulf of Mexico and including the whole area, and that's been one of the major contentions of this, is you have genetic samples from a limited area. You don't know anything, because you have no sampling, about the entire Gulf of Mexico.

The workgroup recommendation was based on we have those samples there, but we think there is habitat connectivity and there is fish occurring, and so there's a possibility that this gradient could continue all the way around through the Gulf of Mexico, and that's been -- Within the Gulf representatives, that's been one of the major points of contention, is just saying, well, yes, that's true, but you don't know, and we don't have the information, and so they've been hesitant to have the entire Gulf group of fish thrown into this assessment without better information.

That was the SSC subgroup recommendation, and then the next step in this process was for the leadership group to have a conference call and review this, and their bullets were they accepted the findings of the joint SSC review. They recognized the limitations of the genetic sampling and the nature of which those samples were connected and that there is no genetics information to determine stock structure within the overall Gulf of Mexico.

They recognized the possibility for gene flow, and this has been discussed as well, the gene flow and how that could affect recognizing separate stocks with genetic information. That's also been discussed by our SSC a number of times.

Their final recommendation was to recommend using the boundary between the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic Council as the southwestern boundary for the SEDAR 50 stock assessment of bluefin tilefish, and they recommended research being conducted to fully define the population structure of bluefin tilefish in the Gulf and define the relationship between fish in the Gulf with those in the Atlantic.

That group felt that there is really research to be done and it wasn't clear. At that point, their recommendation was to use the council boundaries, which is what has been used for the southern boundary of that stock, as well as a number of other stocks that probably have equal possibility for larval transport and habitat connectivity.

This recommendation then, SEDAR staff began to move forward on this assessment, but then, during the data scoping phase of this, the data scoping panel raised objections to the leadership group's recommendation, basically that they felt they should have the opportunity to explore those Gulf of Mexico fish and decide whether or not that the stock should extend into that area or not, based on whatever they may determine from looking at the data and what's available for the Gulf data.

Then that was forwarded back to the leadership group, and it's a little bit in flux now as to whether or not the leadership group is going to reconsider this and get back together and figure out how to

proceed, and, from the SEDAR perspective, I think for guidance, what we would like here, or certainly what I would like to see, is to ask that you consider modifying the term of reference, because you do approve the terms of reference for these stock assessments, and consider modifying that to change Term of Reference 1, addressing stock structure, to reflect the recommendations of the leadership group.

Then, barring that, perhaps you can provide some guidance for how we resolve this issue, and I want to point out that time has reached an absolute critical condition. The data workshop for this stock is in January. We are fast approaching the point of no return of, if there is further upheaval in this or if there is no further changes in this, it's quite possible that this assessment will not proceed as scheduled. If it gets bumped out of the SEDAR schedule, it's probably going to have a pretty significant delay, given all the other things which are in the works and the need to get rolling on the other assessments that we have planned, certainly, in 2017 and 2018.

When we bump an assessment, it's not always as simple as just saying, well, when is the best time that works or when do we think we can get the groups together, but we have severe limitations within SEDAR scheduling for balancing the data deliverables of the data group out of Miami, who provide the bulk of the catch data and the length data and all of that stuff, and there is only so many points within the year when they can provide deliverables, and you've got to keep in mind that they're providing deliverables for not just the South Atlantic, but the Gulf, the HMS, the Caribbean, and the sharks and every other assessment that is being done through SEDAR, and so that's a pretty tight bottleneck we have to navigate within SEDAR scheduling.

MR. BREWER: With regard to the data from like Texas and Louisiana and Mississippi and the Panhandle, on the genetics of those fish -- I know you were talking about deliverables and all, and you were talking really fast, but is there any kind of timeline as to when you might have more genetic information than just the stuff that came from just south of Tampa?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Nothing certainly in the timing that would help this situation. There is some studies being proposed. I know that there was one we've seen that's being proposed by Jan McDowell of VIMS, to try and expand coverage and such, and I expect that others are probably looking at this as well, but that would be, I would say, a couple of years down the road before you have results, perhaps. They're at the writing proposals now and trying to get funding, get the money, and go do the studies, and so those things take at least a couple of years.

MR. BREWER: Right now, the terms of reference are set up for the Gulf and the Atlantic, or was there a dividing line in the present terms of reference?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The present terms of reference for this process of this stock ID group to review it, with the anticipation, when that was written, that they were really looking at that northern boundary between us and the Mid-Atlantic, and the stock extension up into the Mid-Atlantic area and the North Atlantic. There really wasn't, during any of the planning stages, any consideration of that southern boundary shifting, and so the prior assessment was done with a southern boundary at the council boundaries, between us and the Gulf of Mexico.

MR. BREWER: The boundaries, if we take this, it would be that line that's out from like Cape Sable that we've been using for other management, for the southwestern boundary?

MR. CARMICHAEL: This will be the council boundary that we have.

MR. HARTIG: I would be inclined to go with the leadership decision. I mean, there is another complicating factor in the Gulf, in that I spent about a month in Mexico, ten or fifteen years ago, and there is a substantial number of blueline tilefish in Mexico, and how that enters into the system, I have no idea, and we will never solve that, going forward, in the Gulf. So that's another outstanding question in the Gulf, how is that related, and so I would go with the leadership decision.

MS. BECKWITH: I am not on the committee, but I would certainly support going with the leadership suggestion.

DR. PONWITH: This is a really challenging situation, because, if you, just from a sheer logistics standpoint and the pragmatic realities that we're under the gun, it certainly would make the assessment expedient to follow that approach. The challenge, in retrospect, that I have with it is that we're trying to get our arms around kind of the science underpinning the stock structure or the stock dynamics of this species, and artificially truncating the data that we have available to help answer those questions in advance of the assessment rules out the scientists' ability to look at those data and see what those data tell them.

Will the data from the West Florida Shelf provide a perfect picture? Absolutely not. There is obviously a lot more work that could be done, which we've already heard a couple, like what about Mexico and what about farther west and things like that, but the fact of the matter is that, looking at what data we do have available can be very informative for the status of the stock along the Atlantic seaboard, and ruling out the ability to use those data does create some challenges.

I think, in the least case, there is some mystery about the stock west of that line. In the worst case, it's possible that we would do this assessment and bring a finalized assessment to a review panel and have them ask the question of what about the potential that animals that are west of that line are actually contributing to the productivity of the stock in your region and did you look at that, and essentially we would be prohibited from doing that by that terms of reference.

I will confess that I was on that call when we talked about this, and I succumbed, I think, to the challenges of how do you take the information you would gain from an assessment that was more inclusive and translate that into management advice for west of that line, and I was having a hard time putting that together, and that was one of the drivers. The fact of the matter is that there is strong precedent for using data from beyond jurisdictions, management jurisdictions, to understand the status of the stock and then chunking up that stock, based on what you learn, into more manageable or more traditional management units. At this point, purely -- Not considering the logistics, but, purely from the science standpoint, it would be prudent to open up those data for consideration by the scientists conducting that assessment, to have a more full picture of that stock across its range.

DR. CRABTREE: I think this is a situation that we need to really consider carefully, because I think what you're going to find is that, for most stocks in the Gulf of Mexico, there are a lot of larvae coming around the tip of Florida and going up on the east coast. Now, it's not clear to me why that means they shouldn't be assessed separately, and I think, if we're going to go down this

path here, it is setting a precedent that we're going to go down this path with red snapper and a great many stocks.

That is a huge decision, and I don't think it's a decision that should be made by a SEDAR panel. I think it's a decision that needs to be made at a much higher level and with a much broader consideration of the implications of doing this, and I don't believe that discussion has really happened yet.

We have already seen, with cobia, how moving a stock boundary can have huge consequences, and I don't want to get into a situation where these stock boundaries start bouncing all over the place and moving around a lot, because I think management is not going to be able to deal with that. At some point, these scientists have an obligation to produce science advice in a fashion that can be used by management, and so I don't think this is a decision that ought to be made by a SEDAR panel.

I think the leadership looked at this. I think it merits a lot more consideration. I don't know that Bonnie's concerns about not looking at that data resonate that much with me in this particular case, but I think this needs to be given much greater discussion and consideration than it has so far, and I think there needs to be a decision made by leadership as to what way we're going to go with this, so that we have consistency among all these SEDARs and we don't keep bouncing around, because I think it's going to totally disrupt management if we do that.

DR. PONWITH: Just on that point, I think the real danger here is conflating understanding the true status of a stock with how you manage it in the aftermath of that, and I would never presume that looking at the status of stock across its full range means then that you have to manage it absent traditional council jurisdictions. Those are two separate questions, and I think Dr. Crabtree has a point, that you do -- If you do look at a stock across its full range, which is the scientifically-prudent way to look at a stock, then you do have a second step of then how do you create meaningful scientific advice to the managers relevant to jurisdictions, and that is an important conversation that needs to be had, but that is a two-step process.

In my mind, it shouldn't really drive the notion of how you look across a stock across its range, essentially ignoring the fact that another jurisdiction -- From a management perspective, another jurisdiction may be contributing to stock productivity, to some degree, and ignoring that creates kind of a blind spot in the science, in terms of understanding the true dynamics of that stock, and I think that's the point right now.

DR. DUVAL: It seems, to me, that there's not been very much consistency, I think, in that regard, looking historically with how our stock assessments have been conducted, using management boundaries to truncate the data, and so I'm not quite sure whose decision that is, but I agree with Roy that it bears more conversation.

DR. PONWITH: I agree. I think it's an important conversation, but the council and the SEDAR Committee and the assessment scientists and the SSC are really complicit in that very issue of raising it, and it was that the council themselves that put as one of their top priorities understanding stock ID, as a prerequisite to conducting a benchmark or conducting an assessment. It's understanding the complexity of sometimes a stock boundary is different than a management boundary and knowing if that is true or knowing if that is false is important in understanding the

true status of the stock. It helps you manage kind of uncertainty around stock dynamics that can't be explained by the management things that are happening in your own wheelhouse.

The council, essentially, has been on the record saying that stock ID matters and we really want to look into that, and I think that's a reasonable -- It's an expensive and it's a new way to approach this, rather than just this is our jurisdiction and think about this jurisdiction and this jurisdiction only. It's a more holistic, more kind of ecosystem-scale approach to this. I think it's a smart way to go. We just need to teach ourselves, when we do that, how do you take what you learn and apply it to the traditional management jurisdictions, and that is an important conversation to have.

MR. DELERNIA: I'm going to try to contribute to this conversation a little bit using -- In the Mid-Atlantic, we assess summer flounder as a unit stock, yet, when it comes to management, we have regional management for summer flounder, so that we recognize that the availability of summer flounder may be different throughout the region, and so that we have different management measures for the regions within the range of the stock, and the agency is able to improve our management process, provided that the total catch doesn't exceed -- That we don't exceed the TAC. We do assess the entire stock, but then we do have regional management measures along the coast, recognizing the difference in the distribution and the availability of the summer flounder.

DR. DUVAL: So where does that leave us? I mean, I think the -- I am just projecting from what I have heard from the Gulf Council, is that this is an unplanned activity for them. They are kind of being dragged into something that they didn't plan for, and they're not interested in receiving management advice from an assessment that they did not have on their list of priorities, and so, while there may be interest in exploring those data, in the interest of producing the best science, it seems to me that -- Again, I am not trying to put words in the Gulf Council's mouth, but they're not interested in receiving management advice from this, and so how do you address this? Then I think, to Roy's point about needing a bigger conversation, I am uncomfortable here making, this group making a decision, that would potentially impact the Gulf without their input.

DR. PONWITH: I have thought about that, and I think that's a fair critique. You don't want to say, oh, and, by the way, we're assessing your stock and you haven't had a chance to review the terms of reference and like it or lump it. That's not a very diplomatic way to engage in what could ultimately be challenging conversations going into the future, and I don't disagree with Roy that we do have to have some conversations about what do you do when the stock ID work tells you that stock straddles a jurisdiction and what do you do about it?

Having some really good, strong conversations with scientists and with the managers about how do we set up a process for dealing with that, going into the future, because it's different than the way we've done it before, is a smart thing to do. In this case, it may not be ideal, but one solution that is attentive to the scientists' concerns, but also attentive to the Gulf's concerns about fair play here, in terms of their involvement from the onset, is to use as much data from the Gulf as is available in our hands right now, which means, Chester, we wouldn't be going out and doing new genetics work and trying to play catch-up here.

That's a future data need for down the road, but we would take the data that are readily available now and use those data from the Gulf to inform the science process for this stock assessment, to the fullest extent possible, but that the management advice would be focused on the Atlantic

seaboard and then could be used to inform future decisions in the Gulf of Mexico going forward. It's not ideal, but it certainly is a way to deal with the science concerns of our data workshop people and still address the management concerns of the Gulf.

DR. CRABTREE: The trouble is that I don't really know what that means, in terms of what you just said, and I do think this is something we need to have a much fuller discussion about. I think, Michelle, the place to have this discussion is really with the SEDAR Steering Committee. There, we have the representatives of both of the councils that are involved, and maybe we need to pull in the Mid on some of these, but I think it's mostly the South Atlantic and the Gulf, and we need to bring in some of the science and really think this through, because one of my complaints over the years about SEDAR has been the inconsistencies from assessment to assessment.

We do things different in one assessment than we did them in the other one, and I've gone through these records and looked at them really carefully and, oftentimes, you can't find any real rationale for why it was done differently. It just had to do with the personalities in the room when the decision was made, and I don't want to let that drive this one. It's too big of a deal and it's too important, and we simply have not had these discussions about the implications of this and the impacts of this and what it would mean. We haven't even come close to thinking this through, and we need to do that before we go down this path.

DR. PONWITH: To that point, I think the SEDAR Steering Committee is a reasonable place to discuss the management implications of the full geographic range of a stock, if that spans more than one, but, if you're looking at the science, I think that initial conversation is most appropriately held at the SSC, so your SSCs then can advise the councils about what are the repercussions of knowing a stock spans the boundary of the jurisdiction, but data from beyond that jurisdiction are excluded.

DR. CRABTREE: I think that's fine to bring in discussions from the SSC, but I think the decision-making body here needs to be the SEDAR Steering Committee. We need to be informed of all the implications of this, we need to hear from our scientists, and we need to make a decision of how we're going to proceed in a consistent manner with SEDAR assessments, and that hasn't happened yet.

DR. DUVAL: John and then Ben and then Gregg. Then we're wrapping this up and moving on, because we've got other things to address.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We are, and I think everyone recognizes that we do need this bigger conversation, and the Steering Committee has actually started down that path. We have the stock ID and meristics workshop planned, and that really is integral to that bigger decision, and one of the things that is happening there is the management representatives are being brought in more than they have in other SEDARs, and that's because of the management/science overlap of this.

One of the issues that probably hasn't been addressed, and certainly should be by the Steering Committee, is the idea of what is the default. When the information is uncertain, what is the default that you do? Do you use existing boundaries or past assessments, et cetera? I think that's a perfect conversation that those guys should be having, and we'll certainly trigger it at future Steering Committee meetings.

Now, one of the challenges here though is the information is not all that clear, and, if you looked at the workgroup, you see that the genetic folks made one recommendation and the life history folks made another recommendation, both of them kind of ending in the Keys. The group that talked about spatial and everything had four hypotheses for a number of different stock structures, and they veered toward making it all inclusive and including the entire Gulf of Mexico. The overall workgroup recommended the entire Gulf of Mexico, and I think that has caused a fair amount of the concern, is extending it all the way to Brownsville, Texas, when you only have data from a little bit of area in South Florida that was looked at.

There is the divergent opinions, and the leadership made their recommendation, and the reality is, and I will mention the timing again, I think, if we're in the position of saying we want to include the Gulf data and consider this, then, to avoid troubles and to respect the process, the Gulf Council needs to get engaged in this assessment, and to say -- As the SEDAR Program Manager, I don't see that that's going to happen in time for the January data workshop, and so I believe, if the Gulf data are going to be included and we're going to go along with the earlier recommendations and not go along with this management group recommendation, then, given the timing, that probably means this whole assessment is going to have to be delayed, and that's probably going to incur us, maybe, some costs and penalties for hotel deals and everything, and I know that shouldn't consider into the science recommendations, but we do have to consider, at this table, where the rubber hits the road, and that's kind of the bottom line.

We don't want to get into a situation, as we did with the Mid-Atlantic in the prior assessment, where the assessment was extended into an area's jurisdiction and they had no say in terms of reference and no say in schedule and no say in appointments, and so the Gulf Council will have to get in here and make appointments for this and review those terms of reference.

I will point out, when we deal with these terms of reference, if we're going to say extend to the whole Gulf, then the Mid-Atlantic has to approve them and the South Atlantic has to approve them and the Gulf has to approve them. If there is any differences, we've got to get together and get all of that resolved, and so the reason we've been working on stock ID and terms of reference for about eighteen months is because we at least knew that we had to get two councils involved.

I think, if we go to this and we say we're going to get three councils involved, we're probably talking six months or better just, likely, to get the terms of reference reviewed again by everybody's SSCs and the councils and approved and some sort of joint bringing together of the minds to resolve any discrepancies that may exist in these terms of reference, and that's all going to take a lot of time.

Pragmatically, I believe the choices that are before you are to assess this stock based on that council boundary, recognizing the leadership group recommendation that research be conducted to fully define the population structure of blueline tilefish, define the relationship between fish in the Gulf with those in the Atlantic, and have that as part of the assessment. I think, if the Gulf data were explored in this assessment under that term of reference, but they were not included in the model that provides the stock advice, then that would probably be an acceptable compromise to the Gulf Council, though I don't know that for sure.

I think the concern is, if landings and stock from the Gulf are included in the overall model, even if we say that's not going to apply to the management recommendations of the Gulf, I can see,

within ACLs, the potential for double-counting, because those fish would be counted in the Gulf's ACL, as it exists now, and, if you take landings from South Florida and put them in this model and they count toward the Atlantic stock's ACL, now you've got those fish counted twice within your ACL.

I think there, to me, is the real practical problem of bringing in that stock in any way within the model that provides management advice. I think you could explore them within the assessment, as long as the model that provides management advice only includes landings through the council boundary area, and then they may -- The assessment workshop and others could come up with, perhaps, some clarifying information on what the risk is to overfishing and productivity of the Atlantic stock by not accounting for those fish. Maybe they are a huge source of recruits. I think, at this point, we don't know.

Discussing that could be useful. Then the council has that information when they go forth and set ACLs, and the SSC can review it when they set ABCs. I think that addressing that term of reference within that may be one compromise to allow those data to be considered, as long as they're not included in the model that gives the status information and supports the ABC recommendation, and I think that's all that I had, after all that conversation.

DR. DUVAL: All right. I have Ben and then Gregg, and then we're wrapping this up.

MR. HARTIG: For one thing, Bonnie, based on the amount of data we had to do the blueline tilefish assessment in the first place, we don't have enough data to do a robust assessment on blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic right now. The other thing about that is there are outstanding questions in blueline tilefish that have to deal with the amount of blueline in tilefish and how that was separated out back in the 1980s, when that was done originally, and so that question has to be answered as well in the South Atlantic, before you can move forward and try to do an assessment. I don't -- I am going to stop.

MR. WAUGH: We provide our recommendations to the SEDAR Steering Committee, and that leadership group has already talked about this. All the points that have been discussed here were discussed quite extensively on that call, and that leadership group made a decision. As John has laid out, if we are going to second-guess that decision, that is going to result in significant delays and cost issues and also, just to keep this in perspective, we're talking about a minor, miniscule amount of landings from the Gulf.

We have ignored significant Mexican catches of king mackerel for years and years, and those assessments have been reviewed and deemed the best available science. Everybody knows there is a significant component of that mortality that's not being addressed and hasn't been addressed, and so I think we just need to look at this carefully with what John has said, and if we are now going to second-guess the SEDAR leadership group's decision, this is going to have a cascade effect, not to mention the point that Roy made about needing to look at the bigger management implications.

DR. PONWITH: I am struggling with using king mackerel as the example for why to draw the science cutoff, and that is because we have recognized, for a very long time, the problem of the paucity of Mexican data in the king mackerel. We have tried to incorporate it, and have not had good success in the past. This is the assessment where that all changes, because, in this stock

assessment, it is going to be an assessment jointly using U.S. data and Mexican data, and that's been negotiated with the government of Mexico, with their counterpart to NOAA, and they're standing up teams right now to pull together all of their data and condition it for inclusion in the assessment and to calibrate the age structure. It's a classic example of where we knew that there was a problem, and we've been trying to solve it for years, and the 2018 assessment is the one where that problem will be put to bed.

MR. WAUGH: I'm sorry, and not to get into an argument or belabor it, but that just makes my point. We've known for years that it has never prevented the mackerel SEDAR assessment from being deemed the best available science. It's the same situation here. We recognize there is a question about stock ID. The leadership group said this should be a high research need, and we need to get that information and then we address it. In the opinion of the leadership group, we don't have that information to move forward now and it's better to move forward with the boundary at the council boundary and deal with this stock ID issue when you have more data in the future, exactly like Bonnie has said that we're doing with king mackerel now, after many, many years.

DR. DUVAL: I feel like we're at an impasse here. I am not sure that we can move forward at this point. I mean, there have been a couple of suggestions to modify the first term of reference for the SEDAR 50 data workshop, to incorporate the recommendation from the leadership call regarding unit stock ID, and I'm also hearing that we need to have bigger conversations about how to do this. The problem is that the process has been chasing this assessment from pretty much the beginning. That is the big disadvantage here. John also made a recommendation for how the recommendation from the leadership call with regard to exploration of the Gulf of Mexico data could possibly be addressed in the assessment. What's your pleasure?

I am not going to sit around the table and waste time, and so I'm going just going to say let's go on to the next agenda item, John, and we can circle back to this, either if we have time at the end of the agenda or back at Full Council, and so I think the next item on the agenda is just an update on SEDAR 53, which is South Atlantic red grouper.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Let's go down the list of what we had. We had SEDAR, and we addressed that. We had SEDAR 51. That's Gulf of Mexico gray snapper. This had a stock ID component as well, and the recommendations of the 51 stock ID workgroup was not to combine all of the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic into one, and they recommended that Monroe County be included in the Gulf assessment, and so that's been discussed, and it seems to be amenable to folks on that group. We passed it by the council leadership, and it looks like we're on track that the South Atlantic won't have to have major involvement in that, because they're just going to draw the line through Monroe County.

Then SEDAR 53 is red grouper, and that has been underway. The one issue that came up some there was further discussion of the algorithms for fitting the model. It crosses over into the issues on tilefish, where we had a change to the robust multinomial likelihood. There, there is a Dirichlet multinomial that was published in the literature this summer and has been imported into the BAM. The red grouper group discussed that, and that's what they recommended to be used for the red grouper model, the latest multinomial likelihood-type fitting approach.

Then we have vermilion snapper. That's a standard assessment that's planned to happen this fall. It seems to be underway and doing well. We have the MRIP revisions, which will be coming up. We have requested for red snapper, red grouper, blueline tilefish, and black sea bass. Just to recall, these will simply be updating the MRIP data and not advancing terminal years in any other way and not changing any other input data on these assessments. Based on the latest discussions with the MRIP transition team, we're on track to have information for those assessments to do in the fall of 2017. Mike, do you have a question?

DR. ERRIGO: No, I just wanted to really quickly -- About red grouper and the likelihood, I just wanted to say that the SSC is aware of the issues that happened in golden tilefish, and they were very careful to request a full set of different types of sensitivity runs to compare the outcomes of the original multinomial that was used in SEDAR 19 and this new multinomial likelihood that's being proposed for red grouper, and so they are running the old SEDAR 19 model with the new multinomial, and then they're running the new model, the SEDAR 53 model, with the old multinomial, so they can see side-by-side comparisons, and so they are aware that this is a big deal, and they really want to make sure that this time they have all the information necessary to look at what's going on there. I just wanted to say that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The MRIP survey transition continues to be underway, and the latest update -- One of the things that was noted is that the phone response rate is on a downward trajectory. It's been below 10 percent the last several years, and so really getting that wrapped up and moving into the new mail survey, with the response rate being quite a bit better, should hopefully improve those estimates over time. I think there was also some discussion that any thought of additional years of overlap was probably going to become of decreasing returns, since the response rate is just so darned low as it is now.

The stock ID meristics workshop, which I mentioned earlier, we're looking at addressing cobia and scamp. Yellowmouth will be considered. There's not a lot of data there, but that was brought in because of the species ID with scamp. Gag, gray triggerfish, and white grunt and trying to get stock ID worked out, because we're seeing this is such an incredible problem.

What I think we'll probably need to do, from a Steering Committee perspective, is, in the spring, maybe talk some about sort of that the process may be when there are conflicting opinions of what the stock ID should be, but one thing that the Steering Committee did, which is probably going to be very useful and important, is recommended a peer review, an independent peer review, of the recommendations from this workshop, which can be important when you do have these divergent opinions of what scant science actually tells you.

DR. DUVAL: John, I apologize, but Roy had his hand up and I missed it.

DR. CRABTREE: I wanted to back up to the transition to the mail survey issue, and I think there's a presentation in your briefing book that you could look at, but it appears that, towards the end of next year, we're going to be looking at substantially higher recreational catches than what we anticipated, and both this council and the Gulf Council are looking at some reallocation issues that are kind of premised on that the recreational fishery is underfishing its quota by roughly 50 percent.

I think you may need to bear in mind that that may not be the case and that, by the end of next year, you may realize that, in fact, all of these quotas are being caught, and keep that in your mind.

There's a lot of uncertainty about this right now, but we could be looking at a huge amount of work that we need to do next year to deal with this.

DR. DUVAL: I was just going to make note of the fact that I hope folks have taken the time to read Attachment 3 in your briefing book, which gives you the update on the MRIP transition process, because some of those graphs are pretty scary looking.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's something I was going to say as well. Look at Attachment 3, if you haven't, because that's the latest report that shows the evaluations of how they could affect the assessments as well as what is going on within the surveys. As Roy said, it's going to have big changes, and, when you change what you thought was caught, you're going to change what you think can be caught, particularly for ones that are simply based on catches. There's going to be an increase across the board, and so you're going to have a lot of work to do, probably, to make sure that we have the proper ACLs to apply against our yardstick of catch in the future years. That was the end of the general SEDAR updates. The next item is the Steering Committee Report. They met in September in Charleston, and that is Attachment 4, and I see Ben.

MR. HARTIG: The gray snapper assessment, and it harkens back to decisions made at that assessment, in the face of the genetics between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. Most of the animals that live in the Gulf migrate to the Atlantic in huge spawning aggregations, throughout the entire reef system to spawn, and most of that larvae has a chance of populating the entire Atlantic. Those types of decisions made, to include all of Monroe County and the Gulf, there is implications on the Atlantic from the number of fish that we would have access to, from the sheer number of larvae that are spawned off the Atlantic in the Keys.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Any other comments on that? Moving on.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I talked about one of the big points of discussion at the Steering Committee, and that was the stock ID issues and dealing with the blueline tilefish. The Steering Committee also agreed to move ahead with the research track process. We have talked about that a number of times in the past, and they want to move with that as soon as possible, and the primary reason for that was the suggestions that that could increase overall assessment productivity, which is certainly one of our primary concerns.

It was initially discussed to be done as a pilot of scamp in 2018, and that's joint with the Gulf of Mexico, and it was also suggested now that it would be carried forward to all assessments, and so the 2018 cobia assessment is also going to be done as a research track. Now, to some extent, that fit in with the recommendations you guys made in September about changing the timing of cobia, to bring in some more data, because that means, under the research track, you get the assessment tool built over a pretty long period of time. Then, about a year or so after that, you will get the operational assessment with the most recent information, based on that tool.

It fit in with your timing of cobia. That means that it will get started on the research track to build the tool, but then you will get the operational about when you expected, and we shared this with the folks up at ASMFC, because there's a lot of interest, obviously, in cobia. I discussed the timing and the research track process with them at the annual meeting up in Maine, and I think we were able to address their concerns.

While there were some that would like to see the cobia assessment get done on a faster track, I think they recognize the situation and the realities and the management changes and the need to get data that reflect the changes that have perhaps been going on that could be included in that assessment, and so there was acceptance of this recommendation and the change in schedule and the timing of when they get the operational assessment, even if there wasn't, perhaps, overwhelming support for it. I think they recognized the reality of what was going on.

MS. BECKWITH: For the operational component, did you guys discuss the terminal year of data that we would be trying to include in that? Was it 2019 data?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, 2019 data. The other big thing that the SEDAR Steering Committee does, obviously, is address the SEDAR schedule, and so I just wanted to pull that up in Attachment 4, to show you what is coming up for us. Really, this table kind of shows you an overall view of everything that's going on. Here is 2017, going across here. We have the blueline tilefish, the black sea bass, which we talked about, vermilion, MRIP revisions. Then, in 2018, as you can see, we have the scamp research track and the Atlantic cobia research track occupying a lot of the time, but we're also looking at getting greater amberjack and red porgy standards. You have the Gulf doing this, and you have the other assessments. Working across here, we have the king mackerel benchmark in 2018.

One thing you should notice is that there is a lot of SEDAR activities going on, probably a lot more than in past years certainly, certainly a lot more than in recent past years, which I've kind of mentioned is something we're going to have to deal with in terms of resources, both for travel funding and just supporting of this amount of activity and getting all the data and everything into the right places and done as it needs to be. It's going to be a challenge.

The next thing we'll look forward to, of course, in the next Steering Committee meeting in the fall, is looking at what do we want to do in the future, in 2021 and beyond, and there is some thought that we may want to see how these research tracks work out a little bit before we fully commit to that, but our plan is to work on updating the SEDAR SOPPs to address the research track process and look at an initial draft when we meet. We'll probably just really present it and let people mull it over, because our spring meeting, likely in May, will be over a webinar.

Then, in our fall meeting, it's face-to-face, and we'll try to dig into those SOPPs in detail, and so we'll probably be bringing that to you guys in March, maybe, to get some initial comments. If not, certainly at later meetings during this year, depending on how they come together, and I believe that's the primary actions from the SEDAR Committee, and so I will pause here and see if there are any questions on that.

DR. DUVAL: Any questions regarding the outcome of the SEDAR Steering Committee? Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. Back to the overview. The next item is the Assessment Priorities, and so you know this is something we've been working on for a while. We have talked about priorities within this committee, within the council, within the SSC, and then, probably two years or more ago now, the agency came out with a prioritization tool.

We've been in the process of applying that tool to our stocks and scoring our stocks for that, and the SSC wrapped that up after a meeting with bringing in some representatives from our APs to

score some of the more subjective metrics. Those include things like the importance of a fish to a subsistence fishery, and they came up with a list of priorities.

What I have done, in the various tables that follow, is to try to show you how the priority ranking out of that exercise compares with the priorities that you guys have established in the past, and so I pulled our ranking species in the South Atlantic Council's research plan. We have identified our primary data collection species, and the idea there is these are the stocks that would be targeted for your top-of-the-line, quantitative, age-based assessments, your most data-intensive assessment methods that would be done, and then we have our secondary data collection species, and these would be the ones that we would be looking at for some of the less-intensive data collection approaches, such as not including the age information, since that is such an intensive piece of data to get.

Then you have also identified special need stocks that are tied to their management or their life history traits, and so, if you go down in here, in Table 2, the ranking is how the stocks came out from that NMFS prioritization tool, and the score that it gets in the table just shows you if they've been assessed. Then the priority ranking over here, I listed how the council has ranked them.

You can see there is some difference. There is things that have come up pretty high in the NMFS ranking that the council hasn't established as a priority, such as hogfish. The hogfish assessment has been done by Florida, and it's been a priority in that area, and that's great. It's just, as we know, sometimes the most important things to the states don't always line up with the most important to the council overall, and so we have hogfish probably being the biggest example of that. Silk snapper came up pretty high, Number 15, ahead of a number of things that certainly the council has assessed and that the council has identified as priorities, and so you may want to consider that.

The point of the NMFS thing though is we have always made clear that it was not intended that that would establish the priorities for this council, nor would it establish the priorities for the Steering Committee, but that it would just be another tool that you could use when deciding what your priorities are, and I think, along those lines, we should probably consider addressing what our priorities are and do our primary and secondary priorities -- Are they still consistent?

How many can we actually do? How many age-based assessments and such can we actually accomplish? Discussions like that, I think, would help us, and certainly help me bring to you, perhaps, a long-term assessment plan that meets your priorities, and so we had the discussion considerations, which are right at the end of the overview, and some questions to try and talk about here that will help guide the discussion for the future, such as should the priority stocks list be changed? How do you want to address your SEDAR capabilities between keeping existing assessments up to date and assessing all managed stocks? What factors do you think should be important in determining assessment frequency?

That's important, because I think I want to make clear that not every stock has to be assessed at the same frequency, and we shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking that everything needs to be assessed on a three-year basis. Some may need a one-year and some may need a two-year and some may need longer, and I think, if you look around the country, every other region does that, ASMFC and the SARC and our neighbors to the north. Not every assessment is on the same frequency.

What factors should determine that, and which ones do you think need the regular updates and intensive of the age-based assessments, because that has a big impact on what we can do overall. Then what unassessed stocks do you think are priorities for data collection, to try to get them assessed? If we get some feedback on questions like this, that will open the door to maybe come up with a preliminary long-term assessment work plan.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I want to try to restate what I think John said, because I'm not sure that I fully understand. That particular list, is it just supposed to be guidance, or is the SEDAR Steering Committee going to take that to the bank and use that list to say, oh, well, but lane snapper is in front of red snapper and so we need to move it up in the list? I guess I'm trying to understand the utility of that ranking and how it's going to be used by the SEDAR Steering Committee versus how the council is going to use it, and can you maybe help me understand that a little bit more?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and it is completely guidance. It's along with, say, your rankings that you've established in the past and recommendations of the SSC and advisors and everything. It's just one more source of information that you could weigh in considering, and all of the councils are doing it. That's where we see it ending with all of them, because then we still -- The SEDAR Steering Committee will weigh the recommendations from each council, for what that council says, okay, these are our priorities and why these need to be done. They won't be bound by whatever came out of the rankings from any of the councils that are involved with this.

DR. PONWITH: First of all, let me applaud the South Atlantic Council staff and collaborators from the SSC and certainly folks from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center for moving this along. We are the farthest here along in the process within the three councils in this region, and that's noteworthy. This has been, I think, an important and informative process.

How this is intended to be used is really to provide some metrics to help the council make smart decisions about the use of resources. The stock assessment capability doesn't keep pace with the demand, and so we have to make smart decisions about what stocks are going to get done and what aren't. If we use sort of gut instinct, we end up running the possibility of getting into a trap of the do-loop of the top five over and over and over again and then end up in trouble with stocks that haven't been adequately addressed.

I would say to use what we learn from this prioritization process, and, if we choose to depart from it, make sure that there is an extremely strong rationale that is carefully considered for why, and that careful consideration might be, well, the tool maybe wasn't as informative, because we scaled things improperly, and so it could be the tool, or it could be extenuating circumstances, some economic issue or some science issue, that bubbles up at the eleventh hour that helps explain why you would bump something in line, but you certainly want to be judicious in how you make those decisions and do a good job of justifying them.

One thing that I would like to put on the table, in addition to those questions, is, again, we all know that we would love to have more assessments than we're actually capable of doing, in terms of the boots on the ground for the data preparation and the stock assessment scientists and the finances it takes to actually carry it through that process, and one way of making a dent in the list is to take a look at species that are appropriate, that are high on the priority, but appropriate for a data-limited approach.

We've got some experience under our belt right now. We've done a data-limited assessment in the Caribbean, and we've got results from that. We are making modifications to the ABC control rule to enable us to use those results, and so we're well along in that process, and the same thing is true in the Gulf. We had a very successful data-limited assessment that was completed this fall and underwent review.

I think what that does is it gives us the opportunity to go to school on all the things they learned through those processes and have a pretty seamless adaptation of those methodologies to be using in this region, and that would give us an opportunity, I think, to make a pretty big dent in the list, and so I put that on the table for consideration.

DR. PONWITH: That was something that the SSC, I think, wanted to have a discussion about, is looking at stocks that would be appropriate for a data-limited workshop down the road.

MR. CONKLIN: I am no longer on this committee, but I appreciate you --

DR. DUVAL: Okay, and so I am going to -- If anybody would like to be on a particular committee, and I said this in September when the committee assignments came out. Everybody got their top five, and so, instead of all these little snide comments about what committee you're on or not on, come talk to me afterwards.

MR. CONKLIN: No, ma'am. It was not like that. I was just reminding myself.

DR. DUVAL: Okay.

MR. CONKLIN: I wanted to speak about this tool, and there were some other council members at the SSC meeting, but was this tool worked with more than just what we saw at the SSC meeting? I know there was also some questions raised by the SSC on some of the scalars and stuff like that and scoring for different parameters in it.

From what I saw, the way that this tool was worked with and the length of time that was put into scoring different stocks, I don't feel -- Unless it was worked with more by the SSC and the members of the APs than at the meeting, then I don't think this is sufficient enough to go by, because I don't feel that there was adequate time devoted. It was kind of, well, what do you think this one should be and what do you think that one should be to the AP members, and I just don't think it's thorough enough to go by yet, and so I just wanted to bring that up and ask that question. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: I am going to turn to John and Marcel to address that question a little bit more. I mean, there was a considerable amount of work that went into the initial version of the tool, or it wasn't even the initial version, but it's the multiple iterations of looking at the tool and providing scores upfront that the Science Center staff have done, the SEDAR staff, before it ever came to the SSC at this past meeting.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I think it's important to highlight that the SSC sees this as an ongoing process. When new information becomes available, we are refining, and I agree that we spent quite a bit of time refining this, but we also realized that we probably will come

back to this spreadsheet and refine it, and I think, for instance, information that's in fishery management plans and information that comes out of especially recently-funded research projects, through CRP or MARFIN or other opportunities, would be very valuable to include, and so this is not the end-all of this process, or at least that's what, I think, was the SSC's opinion on this process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I get that it's a -- I now understand that it's a living document, and so how often do you think that the SSC is going to go back and look at it? Is this every meeting or what?

DR. REICHERT: The SSC hasn't discussed how often we would see it. I think we serve at the pleasure of the council, and so I think, if there's new information, I think the SSC may request to take another look at that, or, if the council feels that it's appropriate for us to take another look, then we can certainly do that.

DR. DUVAL: I think it is something that we would want to update on a regular basis, and this was the first shot at having this type of participatory approach, utilizing some chairs or past chairs of our advisory panels. You had three stakeholders there, and certainly their knowledge is considerable, but it doesn't necessarily cover all the species throughout the entire range.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I failed to mention that. The input from Ira, Kenny, and Robert was very valuable, in addition to the input from the council members that attended and the council liaisons, and so we hope that we can continue the process by involving people with the specific knowledge in refining this.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think it would probably be a biannual type of evaluation, and we're on that track with our council research plan too, and so I think, in accordance with when the council updates its research plan and priorities, that would be the time for the SSC to comment on this, because what we have now is -- If you look at that spreadsheet and look at it closely, there's a lot of things there where there are metrics that are on there. In some cases, they could be things really important to some regions, but they're not an issue within ours.

There are a number of things where we don't have information, and they're just kind of scored generically, one value across the board, which means they're not carrying a lot of influence. Then, as you refine the scoring and get more information, perhaps you can have better discussions of how different components of that should be weighted relative to each other, and so it definitely will be a work in progress.

I think, at this time, it's an initial rough draft of how things look, and it could be informative and it may affect what you think of, okay, what do I need to do with resources down the road, but, as was commented by an SSC person of when will this be applied, when we got to the SEDAR Committee and talked about the priorities, we're pretty rock solid on our schedule and what can be done out through 2019 or 2020. You really are -- If you were going to bring in something new and have this affect the perceptions, you're probably looking at 2021 and such, even at this time, and so there's time to have this improve before we get to updating the Steering Committee schedules.

DR. DUVAL: Chris, does that address some of your concerns about the thoroughness with which this tool was used or I guess considered and that the intent is that this evolves over time? This was sort of a first cut.

MR. CONKLIN: Sure, it does, and I appreciate the fact that we did have the chairs of the APs there participating. Every time this is reevaluated or whatever, I sure would like to see those chairs of those APs back down helping with that process as well.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I echo that, and, if you will allow me, I would like to make one comment relative to the SEDAR schedule. The SSC discussed the SEDAR schedule, and there was one concern that two concurrent research tracks may prevent from lessons learned during the very first research track. They may not be able to be incorporated in the second research track, and so there was a little bit of discussion and concern relative to the fact that these were two concurrent very first research tracks, and I just wanted to mention that real quick.

DR. DUVAL: I guess, in looking at some of the questions, in terms of providing guidance on long-term assessment priorities, as John has shown, we have the two lists that have been developed previously, in terms of primary data collection and secondary data collection species, and I think an important question -- I think, when these priorities were developed, we were thinking about what we tend to think of as a traditional stock assessment.

Having the question of what stocks might be appropriate for a data-limited approach, recognizing that we're never going to have all, probably, of the basic information that we would really like, in order to be able to run all of our stocks through an age-based assessment, and so I think that's a conversation that we would like our SSC to have, in terms of what stocks are appropriate for those more data-intensive types of assessments and what stocks might be more appropriate for a limited approach, because that's going to help us provide input on the second bullet, which is does the council prefer to devote SEDAR capabilities to keeping existing assessments up to date or assessing all managed stocks?

I think assessing all managed stocks is just simply an impossibility for us. That's just never going to happen, and so we need to focus on those ones that are most valuable and that are of greatest commercial and recreational importance. That's where we need to be putting our efforts, and I think, once a robust, traditional stock assessment approach is developed, through the new research track assessment, that those are the ones that we would want to see sort of maintained and looking for SSC input on other types of data-limited approaches for those stocks for which we're just never going to have the type of information that would be appropriate for an age-based assessment.

DR. REICHERT: To that point, Madam Chair, we discussed that we would look at the stocks for data-limited SEDAR projects at our next meeting, and so we will hopefully provide you a little more guidance in the next update.

MR. HARTIG: I think one thing you might look at, Michelle, is what are the data-limited species where we're bumping up against the ACL now in six months of the season. It's sometimes in porgies, but it's almost every year in the jack complex. We're closing that fishery halfway through the year, and so that's somewhere where possibly productivity could be increased, based on SSC explorations.

DR. REICHERT: Madam Chair, if you will allow it, there's a slide in my report, relative to the landings, that I think addresses that concern. We didn't have any specific ABC recommendations there, but we did discuss that, if ABCs are exceeded by large amounts, then that should probably

have some effect, in terms of the assessment priority, and perhaps we can build that into a rumble-strip approach to address inappropriate ABCs and potential adjustments, and so we did, Ben, discuss the fact that we should look at landings and where are we relative to our ABC recommendations and take that into account in the priorities relative to the assessments.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you for that, Marcel. Is there other input on prioritization of stocks?

MR. HARTIG: In what John has laid out, John, how do you -- Does the SSC have the first crack at this or is it -- Do we do in tandem what the council thinks is important versus the SSC involvement as well? How do you see this working? I would like to see a framework of how you see that we develop this and then why we might make our decisions moving forward. I would very much like to see that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think a little feedback here about what you guys see as important in the assessment planning and prioritization and then go to the SSC, yes, and get the feedback from them, certainly, on things like what factors affect frequency, from your minds, and also find out what factors affect frequency from the SSC minds. Then it would come back to you as the ultimate determiners of the priorities, but you could sort of weigh both and see if the SSC considerations affect what you ultimately do on something like frequency. Then certainly the stocks to get the regular assessments and the prioritization and the frequency and that sort of thing. Then, finally, the unassessed as well.

I think direction, maybe, from you all that we take -- Provide whatever you can on these questions and then also take these back to the SSC and see what they have to say about them in their April meeting. Then it can come back, and so I see this as sort of being iterative and something that we start working on now, but it may take a little time to come up with what we think is really a viable long-term plan, but I think that's a good goal in the long-term, as I have said here before, because we tend to be very reactionary, and that's difficult when you have limited resources.

As we have discussed on tilefish, the timing of these and the need to plan ahead on these is so important. We don't have a lot of ability to make last-minute changes and change our minds mid-stream on these, because of the planning and logistics that go into it, and so putting some time and effort into what we really want to get out of the assessment program would be good, and I think, ultimately, that helps define what are the assessment needs in the region.

What does the council really need, in terms of assessment productivity, to feel comfortable with its management decisions and its management program? In that, again, we're very reactionary to what we can get, but we're hoping that all of this, conclusively, at some point, helps maybe build a better case at the Region for how much we actually need and not opposed to just what we actually get.

MR. HARTIG: So, by March, actually, the council should have the discussion about how we want to move forward, so the SSC can see what our decisions were, and then they can deal with that.

DR. DUVAL: I am wondering if maybe a future conversation about how to more effectively refine the council's list of priority species might be to walk through this spreadsheet ourselves, those input values. There is recreational importance and subsistence and constituent demand. I think non-catch value and ecosystem importance, those were all inputs that our advisory panel chairs

worked with the SSC to provide input on that, and so it would certainly be -- It might be helpful for us to do that, and that could be another piece of information that plays into final priorities when we go to the SEDAR Steering Committee.

DR. REICHERT: To that point, I just talked with John, and it may be helpful to the council if we add some text to the spreadsheet to explain why the SSC chose certain values, and that may help the council to refine those values, so you don't have to start from scratch. That may take some time, but I can work with John on that.

DR. DUVAL: How would folks feel about an approach like that, having a future conversation about providing input on those tools?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Great idea.

DR. DUVAL: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think we can agree that we have a need to evaluate our priority list. At the March meeting, you would like to have time set aside to go through that scoring and get a sense of what the factors are and what they've been scored now and what you think of all that.

DR. DUVAL: If we can do so. I'm always concerned about time on the agenda, and so I think we'll take that as a recommendation, probably, when we get to Executive Finance and we start looking at schedules and meetings.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I am guessing you're going to need two hours to go through something like that. It has a lot of criteria, and you have a lot of species, and we actually winnowed the species down. There are some species that weren't included in there, just because of the magnitude of species that we manage in this region, but I think that could be good. If we could do that, then we would be in a good position to go back to the SSC, and, regardless of whether that happens in March or June, I think, at the SSC in April, we will pose these same considerations to them and get their ball rolling, in terms of what they think are the important factors for priorities. Really, this is not just priority stocks, but what is the assessment workload scheduling and the priorities within the scheduling.

DR. DUVAL: Because not every one of those tabs on that spreadsheet is something that we would be able to provide input on. There is only like four, I think, that would be appropriate or relevant for us to provide input on. Okay. Everybody is looking so excited around this table. I think that was the last item on our agenda. Is there any other business to come before the SEDAR Committee right now?

MR. CARMICHAEL: In blueline, if you want to go back to that now or at Full Council, but I do think, given the way the terms of reference stand, it would help to get those clarified, as painful as that may be.

DR. DUVAL: I am just not sure -- You all tell me. I am not so sure, based on the conversation that we've had around the table, that we are going to have something productive right here right now. If folks would like the opportunity to think about this a little bit more and come back at Full Council, that might be my recommendation. How do you all feel?

MR. BELL: I was going to say I don't think we will have a different result right now, but, if we get a chance to talk amongst each other a little bit, and either wait until Full Council or even if you want to just come back at some later time before that, that's fine, but I think I would just kind of chill on it right now, until we've had a chance to kind of regroup.

DR. DUVAL: That would be my preference. That being said, let's go ahead and take a few minutes. The next committee that we're going to start -- Remember I said yesterday that, if we had the opportunity, that we would move into Information & Education, and so we'll give Amber and Mark a couple of minutes to get set up.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 6, 2016.)

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Amanda Thomas
January 3, 2017

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