

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SEDAR COMMITTEE**

**Sawgrass Marriott  
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL**

**June 12, 2017**

## **SUMMARY MINUTES**

### **Committee Members:**

Dr. Michelle Duval  
Mel Bell  
Chester Brewer  
Chris Conklin

Charlie Phillips  
Zack Bowen  
Mark Brown

### **Council Members:**

Anna Beckwith  
Tim Griner  
Doug Haymans  
Jessica McCawley

Dr. Roy Crabtree  
Ben Hartig  
Dr. Wilson Laney

### **Council Staff:**

Gregg Waugh  
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John Carmichael  
Myra Brouwer  
Dr. Chip Collier  
Dr. Mike Errigo  
Kim Iverson  
Roger Pugliese  
Amber Von Harten

### **Observers/Participants**

Dr. Jack McGovern  
Monica Smit-Brunello  
Dale Diaz  
Dr. Marcel Reichert

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith  
Erika Burgess  
Rick DeVictor

Other Observers/Participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Sawgrass Marriott, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, Monday morning, June 12, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Michelle Duval.

DR. DUVAL: We are now back in open session for the SEDAR Committee, and the next item on our agenda is SEDAR Projects Update, and you have a couple of attachments, and so the first one is projects underway, and that is Attachment 2a, and the next that we'll be reviewing is Attachment 2b, which is the vermilion snapper schedule and terms of reference, and so we'll turn things over to John for 2a.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The vermilion snapper assessment is coming up, and you have your terms of reference and a schedule to approve, and it's going to get started here this summer and then have it to the SSC for their spring meeting in 2018. There are a number of webinars to work through the process with the panel that we have made appointments for.

Then the terms of reference are straightforward and consistent with our past update standard process of stock assessments, and it's updating the benchmark, and that was SEDAR 17 in 2012 and updating it through 2016, with a few changes that are listed here in Term of Reference 2, where they're going to consider including the SERFS video index, and so our increased independent sampling, and update the BAM model to use its latest configuration, which is important, and look at the error distributions of age and length composition data, which is another advancement that we've been seeing in the assessments in the last couple of years.

Then the rest of it is details, just updating the information from the assessment and going through the stock projections that are necessary, and so we would be looking for a motion to approve the schedule and a motion to approve the terms of reference.

MR. HARTIG: John, I am not familiar with the Smith et al. 2010 paper. Can I get a copy of that? Will everything else be thrown out that was done with the vermilion snapper in the past and only this paper will be used for discard mortality rates?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't think so, no. We usually wouldn't throw out everything, but they would maybe change some things, if they can, based on new information from the paper.

MR. HARTIG: It specifically says that it will be based on Smith et al. 2010, and so that was my question.

DR. DUVAL: I am waiting for a motion from the committee.

MR. CARMICHAEL: There are some draft motions up here to consider for approving the schedule and the terms of reference.

MR. BELL: **Madam Chair, I move to approve the vermilion snapper assessment schedule.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Mel and seconded by Mark. Is there discussion on the schedule? **Seeing no discussion, is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.** Next, I would be looking for a motion to approve the vermilion snapper assessment terms of reference.

MR. PHILLIPS: **Madam Chair, I move that we approve the terms of reference.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Charlie and seconded by Mel. **The motion is to approve to the vermilion snapper assessment terms of reference. Is there any discussion? Is there any opposition? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

The next item is the assessment process and schedule, and this is Attachments 3a through 3e. I didn't know if that's where we were going to talk about some of the ongoing projects then as well.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We will talk about the projects and then we'll get into that item, because we do have a number of projects to go over, and I think Bonnie might have some information. On Attachment 2a, you have a status update on all the different projects that we have underway to look at that, and then I think, as we get in here on Number 3, there is more details of a number of those items, and so maybe if we just want to go through each of these, maybe looking at the committee actions, which is Item d. If you look down here, we have a list of the things that we really need to talk about and specifics, in terms of all of these different stocks and where they stand.

I wasn't going to go over the specific projects in detail, other than the things in here as they relate to what we've got to talk about. In 3, the first thing is, of course, the Steering Committee, which they met May 5 via webinar, and their report is Attachment 3a. They talked about the schedule, and they talked about the research track.

The big thing, really, with the research track at this point is that it's taking a little more difficulty to get the details of that hashed out than was perhaps initially anticipated last fall, and so, as a result, the scamp research track is being pushed back a bit, and the Science Center folks are working now on hashing out the details of just how the research track process will operate.

Really, the core issue came down to deciding how much we're schedule-driven, as we have been, versus how you work in the extra time to actually explore hypotheses and do the research component of the research track, and that's the real tricky area to navigate, and we're optimistic of getting most of this worked out, and our Steering Committee will meet in person in late September.

We anticipate, at that time, having a lot more of the details hashed out and be able to better lay out the documents that we expect to define the SEDAR project, such as the terms of reference and the schedule, to be able to lay that out for the research track, so that everyone knows what to expect and that they need to do, in terms of their participation, as we bring in folks from so many different groups and entities when we do these assessments.

DR. DUVAL: One of the things that came out of that is that, originally, cobia was scheduled for a research track assessment, and it was actually, I believe, a recommendation of this working group of SEDAR staff and assessment team scientists from both the Beaufort Lab and the Miami Lab that cobia just revert to our normal benchmark process, given that there really wasn't a consensus on how this research track process would move forward at this time.

The recommendation is for cobia to go back to a benchmark assessment, and we discussed this at the SEDAR Steering Committee, and so where cobia is headed right now is that we're working to schedule a stock ID workshop that's just specific to cobia for the early part of next year. We would follow the process that the Steering Committee has laid out with regard to stock ID workshops, and so this would undergo an independent peer review. The results of the stock ID workshop would undergo an independent peer review for cobia.

Then what was discussed at the SEDAR Steering Committee, given I think some of the challenges with coming to consensus on how the research track should move forward, was that we would move into a benchmark of cobia in the latter half of 2018. Now, that is different than what the recommendation was that was provided by this committee, which was to wait until 2019 data could be included in an assessment.

I will be honest with you that I've had some misgivings with that, just given that you would be pushing out the availability of any management advice from an assessment until likely 2021, something like that, and we've had two years of higher than expected catches of cobia, and so I think moving forward with an assessment sooner rather than later, under our existing benchmark process, given these challenges with the research track, would likely be appropriate.

There is ongoing research with regard to stock ID right now that would be, I believe, completed, at least some of it, prior to a stock ID workshop occurring in the spring. I know Julia Byrd has been trying to keep up with many of the researchers in the different states who are doing work.

Now, we do have some recently-funded projects in North Carolina. Dr. Jeff Buckel received funding to conduct some sonic tagging of cobia as well as collecting fin clips that South Carolina DNR has agreed to analyze for us. That would provide additional information with regard to natural and fishing mortality and things like that, and that would not be ready, but that's kind of the summary of the conversation surrounding cobia. We need -- The committee action, as you can see here, is to provide some guidance on the research track for consideration at the September Steering Committee meeting.

Also, I think we need to, and we will get into this maybe a little bit later, but, in terms of the assessment schedule, where we're going with cobia -- Given that we have a management partner in the Atlantic States Commission now, I think they would likely support moving forward with an assessment sooner rather than later.

MR. HARTIG: I wanted to say something about the research track. At our SSC meetings, Fred Serchuk has had some misgivings about the New England experience with the research track, and I don't have any problem going forward with the research track, but I think the Center needs to at least get together with New England and find out the problems that they've had and why it hasn't gone as well as it may have. I certainly would encourage the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to get with the Center, the New England Center, and to see the concerns that were raised by Fred and address some of the problems that they've had.

DR. PONWITH: We will eagerly do that, because we certainly want to go to school on things that have worked, where we have some excellent cases of that, and we certainly want to go to school on things that have been glitches. John did a good job of recapping where we were at the SEDAR

Steering Committee, and, since that committee, our staff have met multiple times on the research track.

It is just enough different that it's not tweaking the way we do things now, and really getting on the same page on how this would work, from a timing standpoint, is very, very important, and part of being able to describe what a success looks like is making sure that everybody in the room has the same notion of what a success is, and that is, I think, the stage we're at right now,

We have had some very good, very vigorous conversations about this, and I think we're in great shape for being able to line-out a more defined timeline, and I think John did a good job of describing the number-one challenge, and that is creating the flexibility, so that, if you turn over a new rock that hasn't really been looked at and you find something under there that is statistically significant in its contribution to our understanding of that stock, you actually have the time to capitalize on that, as opposed to being tyrannized by a deadline because the hotel meeting rooms are booked and things like that.

The flip side of that is you don't want to have a completely undefined endpoint, because we know, often, in science, it takes as long as you have, and so what we're trying to do is find that sweet spot between those two situations and really do a good job of lining-out where the flexibilities are, to help us capitalize on things that we learn, without having something that takes so long that you don't get that operational advice that we're all yearning for to do a good job in management.

I look forward to the conversation about cobia and how we intend to go forward on that, and the reason is become I come bearing greetings from your colleagues in the Gulf, and the people in the Gulf are very, very interested in a cobia stock assessment themselves, and we are hitting kind of a jam on cobia, and that is we recognize that an important first step is going to be that stock ID workshop, but the involvement of the Gulf in a cobia assessment won't really be known until we see how that stock ID workshop ends up.

If it does end up requiring the Gulf to be a player in this, the Gulf is very eager in getting an assessment done, and so that's not the problem. There are some competitors for slots, and, even more importantly, there are competitors for the lead analyst. They are eager to have a gray triggerfish assessment done, and the gray triggerfish assessment is done by an analyst who is in the middle of an assessment right now, and their gray trigger analyst is also the lead on cobia. The timing of the stock ID workshop and the timing of the actual assessment is important, for those two reasons, and so I look forward to having further discussions with you, because it will influence some important decisions in the Gulf as well.

MS. BECKWITH: I missed it. What would be the terminal year for the new schedule?

DR. DUVAL: 2017.

MS. BECKWITH: How would that impact us if we decided to move cobia over to the commission?

DR. DUVAL: When we had this conversation -- When the motion at the Atlantic States Commission came up to request that the council consider moving cobia, Atlantic cobia

specifically, to management under the ASMFC, there was conversation about assessment resources being dedicated to that.

Now, Dr. Crabtree isn't here right now, but he spoke to working with the commission to try to ensure that those assessment resources would be available for cobia, and so I think one thing is that any transfer of management of a particular species is not a quick thing, and so I think we are -- It's still our responsibility, at this point, to move forward with a cobia assessment, particularly because the trajectory that we're on right now is ASMFC is moving forward with a complementary plan. We are moving forward to try to provide as much flexibility under our plan as possible for cobia management, and so, while cobia is still under federal management, I think we still have the responsibility to continue to assess it, similar to Atlantic menhaden.

MS. BECKWITH: I guess I haven't thought too much about this, but I think my original concerns still stand. If we were going to retain management of Atlantic cobia, I am concerned that not giving enough time for the fishery to stabilize and then doing a stock assessment would have the results be, I think, less than ideal and put us in a greater bind than we currently are.

I think those concerns still stand, and I think, if we're moving towards moving Atlantic cobia to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, I do think it's a good idea to give them the most updated information, but management under the commission, of course, allows a little bit more flexibility, and I would be a little less fearsome of the results of the stock assessment, potentially, if it was managed under the commission. That may not make complete sense, but that's sort of where I'm at at the moment.

MR. HAYMANS: It's tough to be in much of a tighter bind than we're in now, at least for some of the states, but a clarifying question, and I'm sure it's my ignorance, but, if the stock ID workshop upholds the current split, is the assessment done on -- Is there an assessment done for both halves, or is the assessment on the entire population across the coast?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The way it was done last time, with the split at the Georgia/Florida border, is the fish that are caught in Florida are counted within the Gulf. You have an assessment which covers the Gulf up through the northern Florida border, and that's the way it is now. The Gulf is extremely interested in getting their portion updated as soon as possible, which they talked about last week, and, of course, if this stock ID shifts that boundary in any way, that will impact theirs as well.

MR. HAYMANS: Not meaning to jump too far ahead in our agenda, but we have an emergency action request, I guess, from the AP. I am going to make the assumption that we're probably going to -- I won't say ignore that. We'll have some discussion about that, but we can't really consider that, I would assume, with the fact that we have a stock ID workshop coming up, and is that making too big of a leap?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, there was a lot of discussion about that at the AP, but they made the request, and part of that was just to try and get a clear, definitive answer on the reasons why that request couldn't, perhaps, be accommodated, if it can't be accommodated. They just really wanted the question answered explicitly and on the record, I suppose.

That's one of the reasons they made that request, but, yes, that will certainly affect it. What comes out of the stock ID workshop is going to be a big part of it, and the stock ID concern was one of the big reasons why this was backed off of the research track, because that adds such another uncertainty, and we're already dealing with -- On the Atlantic stock, as we have it now, we're dealing with us, of course, but also Atlantic States and the Mid-Atlantic.

When we do the stock ID process, all of those folks, including the Gulf, will be brought together, to make sure that everyone potentially impacted has a voice and a seat at the table. That's the real lesson learned from blueline tilefish that's driving a lot of this right now, and it is kind of tough to presuppose where that will go.

I will add, as far as the timing of that, what we're hoping to do is to schedule it to take as much advantage as we can of the research that will be done, as Michelle mentioned, and there are some projects we know will really not be practical, but what Julia has been trying to do is talk to those who are doing research on stock ID, in particular, and get a sense of when their projects will have information and schedule the workshop accordingly, and so it's a little bit of a gray area, of course, in terms of when this will happen, but it looks like a stock ID workshop hopefully by the first half of 2018 and a data workshop later in 2018, once the 2017 data are done, is our plan.

MR. HARTIG: This question is unrelated to this topic, but, since Bonnie mentioned it, they are able to do a gray triggerfish assessment in the Gulf. I would be interested to know what the differences between the two areas are and why we can't complete the assessment in our area, and that's all. I am not going to ask you right now, but I would like to know, in the future, why the Gulf can do it and we can't.

DR. DUVAL: We sort of meandered a little bit on our discussion topics under the SEDAR Steering Committee. We have talked a little bit about cobia, and I think, Ben, that might be something that would be a topic ideal for the September Steering Committee meeting. We have an assessment on gray triggerfish in the Gulf, and, unfortunately, despite, I think, two attempts, we don't have an assessment on gray triggerfish in the Atlantic, and so perhaps, in advance of the Steering Committee, we could have some materials that might allow for some discussion of that at the Steering Committee.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was wondering if maybe we should -- I don't want to delay any more, but it might be useful to maybe have the Center come up with something and bring it to the SSC. It would push it back another meeting on you guys, but it might be good to get the SSC's perspective on that. Maybe they can make a recommendation of what they think is an appropriate way to resolve those issues and do an assessment.

DR. DUVAL: I am fine with that. Would other folks be okay with that approach, to bring something before the SSC in regards to how triggerfish has been assessed in the Gulf versus some of the challenges we have faced here on the Atlantic and why those challenges are different? I am seeing heads nod around the table. Okay. John, you were looking for guidance on topics for the September Steering Committee meeting, and we've talked some about the research track and some of the challenges.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Marcel was going to come up and give some of the SSC comments on that, and I think that might help us maybe give some guidance on the research track.

DR. DUVAL: Marcel, come on up.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, before you go on, and I'm not sure where we need to put this, but I have read Bonnie's letter on how much staff they need to be updated on reading otoliths and things like that, and I have read that we're getting 2.4 assessments per year, and we've got eighteen that we've got done, and it's averaging six years.

When are we going to figure out a way that we can have that -- When are we going to have the discussion on how to speed things up? Do we need simpler assessments that the Science Center can do? Some of them do we need to be simpler and some of them maybe more complicated, because of the nature of the species? When are we going to have that conversation, Bonnie, so we can figure out how to get the stuff that we all need?

DR. PONWITH: The answer to that is, in part, the research track. The notion of the research track is you take more time to study what's known about the species and what data are available on the species and use that information to create kind of a long-term strategy for how that species is assessed. From that point forward, the assessment is like an update assessment, because the main decisions have been made.

Essentially, the work to doing that assessment is a much lighter touch, and, the more stocks that have been through that process, the easier it is than to use an assessment approach, where, again, most of the decisions have been made. That cuts out a lot of the need for the face-to-face meetings, and it cuts out -- It just makes it a lighter, faster assessment process. It will take a while to get there, but that's one approach.

Another approach is to -- One thing we've talked about, and it's been basically piloted in the Caribbean, with great success, and it's been used in the Gulf of Mexico, and that is to conduct a suite of stock assessments using data-limited approaches. Essentially, that's taking your stocks for which the data simply don't exist to be able to support an age-structured assessment and use some data-limited approaches, as well as some simulation approaches, to groundtruth that.

We are happy with the results that we're seeing thus far. We have had to make some changes in the Caribbean to the control rule, the ABC control rule, so that the control rule is set up to be able to accommodate the type of advice that comes out of the data-limited approaches, but that would give us the ability to assess a series of stocks for which the data are simply not adequate for an age-structured.

Then, for the age-structured, that combination of doing the research track to understand the stock, to make smart decisions about how the assessment should be set up, and then running them as updates from that point forward, would really influence the throughput. Right now, one of the things that has happened is we have added some assessment scientists to the team, both in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean group, and the South Atlantic group, but, of course, what that has done is shifted the bottleneck down to the preparation of the data, and so the data handlers right now are the ones who are essentially the chokepoint on increased throughput at this point.

You might have an assessment scientist who actually could handle another assessment, but the people who are preparing the data for that are at their full capacity, and we have had recent

retirement, this spring, of a person who is fairly senior on our team, and it takes a long time to get those positions backfilled and get them trained up to the point where they have the capabilities, and that's been exacerbated by the hiring freeze that came on in January. Essentially, what that - - That freeze has been released at this point, but that freeze created a backlog of hiring actions, and so it's taken a while to work our way through that backlog.

Those are some of the things that we're working on to try and improve this. We're trying to keep an appropriate balance between the number of data preparers and data analysts and stock assessment analysts, and tweaking that will basically create sort of a sine wave of where is the chokepoint, and we're happy to do that. Getting new staff and then reassessing where the chokepoint is is a good thing, but we're entering, I think, a fiscal season where adding new staff becomes more and more challenging.

MR. PHILLIPS: I guess that leads to two questions. One, often, when we want to do updates, we get new data streams, and so we're trying to add those in, which precludes it being an update. It has to go back to a benchmark level, and we're always looking for different data streams, and so that can be a problem there.

The number of reading the otoliths, for instance, do you have numbers for certain species that are minimum numbers, so that we don't have to read 20,000 and that we could read 10,000, or do you have those numbers, so we can figure out exactly what you need to do so that we can get stuff done and maybe just do some SPR-type of assessments that are -- They're not data-poor. We have the data, but we just don't need to use everything to get the answer to the question, and I will stop there.

DR. PONWITH: My view is that, for cases where we have otoliths that enable an age-structured assessment to be done, we should be doing age-structured assessments. They tend to be a lot more reliable than just basic production models, but the other question that you had, is there a way for us to stratify and subset the otoliths, the answer is, mathematically, yes, and that makes good sense, because one way to do this is you read every otolith you have.

The other way you do this is you take a look at the strata that you have collected your otoliths in and you only process as many otoliths as your weakest strata, so that you're not oversampling some of the other strata. That takes math. That is basically our data group, in conjunction with our assessment group, but it could save a lot of time in the lab to do that.

The other thing that saves time in the lab is to understand how those strata are collected and make sure that we're not, by design or otherwise, oversampling, but that's very difficult, because you never know in advance. You only have estimates of how much activity is going to happen in any one strata at a time, and so overshooting is always better than undershooting, but it's nuanced. It's a difficult thing to do.

DR. DUVAL: Some of the staff at the Beaufort Lab have actually recently put out a paper on sampling strategy evaluation, to try to address this, where is your sweet spot on sampling. I had Dale and then Gregg, and then I would like to move us back to the agenda. Thank you.

MR. DIAZ: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Gulf Council -- It seems like it's Groundhog Day. You're having the same discussion that we had last week around the table for SEDAR, but we're

concerned about getting as many assessments through also, but the way we handled it at this past meeting is basically we set our assessment priorities in place, to where it would be known what our priorities are, and that's how we kind of handled that at the last meeting.

I will read the motion that passed the council. In 2018, to assess, in priority: 1)gray snapper benchmark; 2)MRIP calibration updates; 3)king mackerel research track; 4)gray triggerfish standard; 5)cobia standard; 6)red grouper standard. Anyway, we do realize that Dr. Ponwith has some challenges, and there might be some reasons why something has to be pushed back, if there's one analyst that is busy with something else, but that's the way we did it. We laid it out in priority. Thank you, Madam Chair.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Dale.

MR. WAUGH: One of the big items for this upcoming SEDAR Steering Committee is this research track, and Michelle and I are tasked with taking you all's recommendations to that meeting, and I think we really need to be clear, and I am not, for one, clear on where we stand on this research track.

It was intriguing, initially, because of the increased frequency of getting assessments on the backend, but, as Charlie pointed out, we're averaging 2.4 assessments a year, and the latest timing that we've seen for this research track is taking multiple assessment scientists multiple years to get the research track done, which gives you no management advice, and then you've got another period of time before you get your management advice.

I don't know that we can continue under ACL management at the current pace of getting 2.4 assessments a year, and this research track activity may in fact slow that productivity down, and so, if you were to buy into this research track approach, you may be foregoing assessments for multiple years, and I think that's something we need to weigh in, and I know, for me, it would be helpful to have some pretty clear guidance from the committee and council on how you want us to carry this forward for that Steering Committee, because I know other councils have concerns about this research track approach as well.

DR. DUVAL: With that, I would like to turn things over to our SSC Chair, Dr. Marcel Reichert, to walk us through some of the discussion that the SSC had with regards to the research track approach.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Madam Chair. The SSC met on April 25 through 27, and what's important to realize is that was the week before the SEDAR Steering Committee met, and so we didn't have an opportunity to discuss a number of items that were discussed at the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting afterwards.

I had two slides, but I will provide a verbal report on the research track. As John mentioned earlier, there are still many aspects of the research track that were unclear to the SSC. A couple, in particular, were discussed, and one is there were some questions of whether the research track will replace the benchmark and if there is a phase-in between the current format and the format with the research track and operational assessments. How would the potential phase-in process work, or what would it look like?

Of course, what the SSC is also very interested in is what is the exact role of the SSC? What's the involvement of the SSC in the research track and the operational assessments? We feel it's critical to specify that process and the SSC role, and we also discussed, of course, the dilemma between the desire for products and then the dilemma of the staff availability, and Dr. Ponwith addressed that a little while ago. We feel that, obviously, SEDAR priorities -- Clearly defining the SEDAR priorities is very important, in that respect.

The recommendations currently of the SSC is to provide a clear timeline for the research track and the operational assessments. Although we realize, and Dr. Ponwith mentioned that also, and we realize the fact that the assessment scientists must have time to complete the research track process, and so there is a little bit of a tension between providing that clear timeline and providing enough time for a good result that is research.

We also recommend that perhaps the research track should address issues that affect multiple species, and this goes back to the best bang for your buck. If you can address something that could be beneficial to multiple assessments, that would probably be a good thing. Also, because we realize the competing attention for assessments, it's important to review where we can get, indeed, that best bang for our buck. Where is the research going to be leading to the biggest impact, in terms of operational assessments?

We also felt that the assessment process, the research track, should retain a data, an assessment, and a review step, with the SSC's input or representation at each step. Because there was a lot of aspects that were unclear, the SSC recommends that perhaps, after the Steering Committee meeting, we could have an SSC webinar, so we can provide the council with some recommendations for the September council meeting. That completes my report for the research track topic, Madam Chair.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you for that, Marcel. I thought my understanding was that the SSC maybe wanted to have a webinar prior to the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

DR. REICHERT: Remind me of when is the Steering Committee meeting?

DR. DUVAL: The Steering Committee meeting is usually like late September, after the September council meeting, and so I was thinking that they wanted to have the opportunity to have a separate webinar to have some discussion, in order to -- That would be provided to us at our September meeting, so that we could chew on that, and then Gregg and Charlie would be able to carry that forward to the September Steering Committee meeting.

DR. REICHERT: You're absolutely right, and I got my dates wrong. The SSC webinar was proposed to be in July or August, and so that's prior to the Steering Committee meeting, and so you're right, and I apologize for mixing up my months. Thanks for that clarification.

DR. DUVAL: Questions for Marcel on that? I think one thing -- I know, Bonnie, at the May Steering Committee meeting, you had committed to working with your staff to try to address some of these issues and bring everybody to consensus, and it seems like, prior to the SSC meeting, we would want to have that output from you and your staff, in regards to process, and I see John has his hand raised, because that would be more productive for the SSC, to see what the Center is

thinking, in terms of how the research track would work. Then they could have a webinar and provide some feedback, which we would then receive in September.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The way we discussed it at the Steering Committee, and what we had started working on this spring, was for the Center to work out the details and the SEDAR staff to work with them to address all the logistical issues that are necessary. Then that will go to a sub-group of all the cooperators, and so the cooperators are the councils and commissions, et cetera, that are party to SEDAR.

Folks were asked to make appointments, and we got a few appointments. I am wearing my SEDAR Program Manager hat here now. We didn't push the cooperators to name everybody, because of the delay in getting the process documentation worked out, but, once we get that information from the Science Center and the SEDAR staff goes through that with them, then we want to put that out to that subset, and it's folks like the SSC Chairs and others.

We want to get their opinion, and then the intention would be to, once they have raised their questions and we can get further information from the Science Center or wherever it can come from, is to make it available to all of the cooperators and the technical groups, like our SSC and the Gulf's SSC. Really, we would like to be able to run through all of those steps, certainly by our September meeting and in advance of the Steering Committee. Having something for the SSC, I think, in July or August would make a lot of sense. That would certainly be our target within the SEDAR program.

DR. DUVAL: So you all are working on that right now in the background?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and, as Bonnie said, they're working on getting their vision of what the research track looks like, and we're waiting to receive that at the SEDAR offices, I guess, in which case then put it out and make it available to this group of cooperator representatives first, and that would be the next big step.

DR. DUVAL: Bonnie, do you -- I know that your staff have a lot going on. Do you think that information and sort of that vision would be completed by the end of July or August, so that the remaining things could kind of roll through, as we have outlined here?

DR. PONWITH: Absolutely, yes. Like I said, we've met multiple times on this, and we have really arrived at a way forward, and we have committed to getting that on paper, which is always a different thing. When you create something new, and it's floating in your head, to be able to convert that to paper is, a lot of times, where the glitches are, but we will have a draft on paper early enough that -- I think John is exactly right that we'll be able to work with the SEDAR staff, because the next step is how do you take this approach and actually work through it logistically and make sure that it's doable logistically. Once we've had that opportunity, it's ready to get out to the SSC early enough for the SSC to be able to reflect on it and advise the council.

DR. DUVAL: It seems to me that, in terms of guidance that would be coming out of this committee for the September Steering Committee, we're going to be waiting. On this topic in particular, we're going to be waiting a little bit on this and for the SSC to have the opportunity to weigh in on that. I think, broadly, probably I would expect that perhaps the guidance from the committee, or at least a concern that the committee might want to express, is just how this gets folded into the

existing process and how can we do so and still ensure that we have productivity, in terms of assessment completion. I use the term “assessment” loosely. It can mean anything from an age-structured assessment to something that is using a data-limited approach, but that is, I think, what we’re interested in.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If you support us convening an SSC webinar to try and review this in advance of the Steering Committee meeting, certainly, and, ideally, the September council meeting, if we could, I think that’s helpful guidance, too.

DR. DUVAL: I definitely would like to see a webinar in advance of the September council meeting, so that folks attending the Steering Committee meeting can have some clear guidance on that.

MR. PHILLIPS: I think, basically, what we’re really looking for is some kind of assessment that -- I am just going to call it a working assessment. Whether you use some protocols that are data-poor or updates or whatever, but we just need something that is a working assessment that gives us something useful for management. It doesn’t have to be top of the line, but just something useful for management, and then we can work on stuff as we need to.

DR. PONWITH: To that point, that’s where things get messy, because, if you’re going to use it to drive management, there are requirements for peer review and for data quality, and so that gets tricky, but I will tell you what the answer might be. The answer, I think, is something that you folks have asked for that we’re actually looking into, both in the South Atlantic and in the Gulf.

That is can we set up a system where we use these research tracks to really understand the status of the stock and then create an index-based update, where the change in an index gives you a leading indication of what direction that stock is heading, because, a lot of times, when there is very, very, very intense demand for an assessment, it’s because something changed.

Either the last assessment required very stringent management measures and people want an assessment soon, so they know whether those management measures are doing their job or not, or a stock is improving, and there are signs in the field that the stock is improving, but you’re constrained under stringent management measures and you want to know has that stock actually mathematically changed the way we’re seeing on the water, such that those management measures can be relaxed.

One of the things that we’re looking into, in response to the council’s request, is, is there a way to develop an index that’s reliable enough that, on an annual basis, we can simply update that index and say things are going the way the stock assessment projected it would and so let things progress, versus an index saying things are better than we expected or not as good as we expected and should we be making adjustments, and so we’re in discussion about that within the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

We’re looking at index-based approaches to see if that has a future. I think that gives us sort of interim advice that meets the Data Quality Act, that meets the need for peer review, as long as these index approaches are peer reviewed, that could give more frequent updates than an assessment every five or six years, and so that’s the direction that we’re heading. I think that’s an interesting approach, and, as long as we do it right, I think it holds a lot of promise.

DR. DUVAL: I feel like we're on two different conversations here. There is input on the research track approach and then how to provide science-based management advice for remaining stocks and do so in a fashion that is cognizant of the limitations of the data that we have right now. Just because you have ages, it doesn't mean that you should do an age-based assessment. There is some lower limit on ages that I think would preclude you from doing that.

Dr. Erik Williams, with the Beaufort Lab research group, did highlight some of the research that they are doing at the SSC meeting. That was one of those approaches looking at sort of an index projection methodology for tracking management effectiveness that you could use in between assessments and evaluation of the data-limited toolbox and simulation of spatial modeling in stock assessments and some national model comparison involving the Beaufort Assessment Model, SS3, ASAP, and some other models nationally, which I think is going to be very valuable. That's just to let folks know about that. I have Mel, and then I want to move on to the next agenda item.

MR. BELL: Just something Gregg said a while ago. When we were first briefed on the research track concept, I think what was attractive about it, to me, was the ability to improve output, because we have a large number of species that we have to manage, and we needed to increase capacity, in terms of being able to work with more than two or whatever the number is a year, and so that was attractive.

Then I guess what I didn't consider was what it would take to get that sort of up and running, and that seems to be where we are right now. It's not ready for primetime yet, and so we're not ready to use it, and we don't have a parallel universe we can go in and get it up and running while we -- The same people that are having to do that are having to do the other stuff, and so I get that, but Bonnie's point about some other means of indices or something we can look at, that would be great, but the bottom line, for us, is we've got an awful lot on our menu.

We need to be able to move through them a little quicker and be able to get an idea of what's going on with things that we are working with, and so anything we can do to improve capacity or our real-world management to inform decisions is great, and so I was just -- Gregg said that about the -- It looked like a great idea, but I didn't really think through the whole, oh yeah, we've got to get this actually up and running, and so that's sort of where we are, I guess.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. I would like to move on to -- I think we have just about beat this one to death, in terms of the research track. Clearly, we're going to need some additional advice. There are steps in the process that are being addressed right now with regard to what the Center's vision is for this approach, and we'll get some SSC feedback on that in time for the September council meeting, and then I think that would be used to inform any guidance that is taken to the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting in September.

The next things that we need to address, and we need to leave sufficient time for discussion on the Stock Assessment Improvement Plan, which is the last item on our agenda, but, at the last meeting, we talked about a joint SSC meeting workshop to address issues related to MRIP and the fact that we have difficulty, or MRIP has difficulty, in tracking our catches against the ACL, simply because it was not designed for the relatively rarely-intercepted species that we have here in the South Atlantic, and it's not just limited to deepwater species.

Cobia is obviously challenging in that regard as well, and it's simply that the survey was not designed for those types of rarely-intercepted species, and we did send in a letter to Sam Rauch after our last council meeting, highlighting all the challenges of these catch estimates and, I guess, maybe the lack of credibility that some of those estimates have, both with managers as well as stakeholders, and how do we address those. There are some techniques out there that MRIP staff have developed to deal with these sort of small domain sizes and to deal with rarely-intercepted species that involve annual estimates of catch, or multiyear estimates of catch, combined with annual or multiyear estimates of effort.

The outcome of that was having a joint SSC meeting/workshop to address this, and so we have a couple of items that we need to address, in terms of conducting this workshop with a subset of SSC members. It was suggested that trying to convene both the Gulf and the South Atlantic SSCs and having some Mid-Atlantic representation would be really difficult to try to have it be a full meeting.

I think the suggestion has been made to have some subset of SSC representation, along with MRIP representation, and so does the council support this? Then we also need a little bit of discussion with regard to how this meeting or workshop should be convened? Is this a council process with the council staff providing administrative support or being conducted through the Science Center? I think I'm going to turn it over to John to sort of lead this discussion.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thanks, Michelle, for that good introduction. We have talked about this. It was initially as a joint SSC meeting of the two SSCs, and, as it's mentioned in there, due to timing and budget and whatnot, we would really like to suggest that this be done as a subset, and I think the Gulf supported that as well, as being as a subset. I would just make sure that you're okay with that.

Then we would like to support this as the SAFMC taking the lead, in terms of administrative, providing the meeting room space and covering the administrative record and all that kind of stuff that goes with it, and then we would have the others appoint their participants and pay the travel for their participants, and so run it as a council process. That incurs some costs from the council, and so we would like your approval to do that, to make sure that you're okay with that. It would be a subset, and then it would basically be run through us as a workshop of multiple SSCs and Science Center folks and MRIP folks.

There is an organizing committee that's been appointed, and I've got a poll out now to try and have a meeting of those guys in the next two weeks. Really, at that point, we want to finalize the date and figure out how many people are coming and start laying out what we need to do for the agenda and all that kind of stuff.

DR. DUVAL: Is there any objection to using a subset of SSC members, as John has suggested? I am not seeing any objections to that.

MR. HARTIG: The council has gone down the road of making improvements to MRIP. We're trying to give them universes that are more defined. We're trying to get a stamp for the snapper grouper fishery, or possibly a deepwater stamp as well, so we can do this. Now, as we do these, and recreational reporting as well, but, as we do these things, this workshop would be great to advance these questions of what we're doing, but will this make a difference? Will this make a

difference in the MRIP process? Will it help define and give us better estimates? We are moving down this path, but we really don't know if it's really going to result in better estimates of catch.

DR. DUVAL: Or more precise estimates of catch, I think is what we're looking for, and that's what some of those alternative techniques that the SSC saw in October of 2015 are aimed at. They're aimed at increasing the precision around the estimate, and it also has, I guess, increased the accuracy -- It can increase the accuracy of that estimate as well.

My only concern about a workshop is just that this doesn't balloon into some big, long, hairy thing that doesn't provide us the guidance that we want. There are some tools that are already out there that MRIP staff have developed. What we're looking for is which of these techniques should be applied to which of the species in the South Atlantic.

This is a problem that we have raised for the past three-plus years, that I can recall, and so that's what I am looking for out of this workshop, and I don't want it to be delayed by some proceedings or whatever. I just don't want it to blow up into something big and hairy that takes a while to get an answer from.

MR. CARMICHAEL: There was a presentation to our SSC in October of 2015, where the MRIP folks came, and they laid that out, and that's what they -- They said there are ways. There are ways that require changes, like Ben mentioned, and then there's ways that they can do it that don't require any additional expenses, but just another way of evaluating and doing the estimates.

That is really the primary focus of this, is to figure out, of those ways they laid out, which are the ones to be used within our region, and that's the way they put it to us. They said that these are there, but it's not our place to tell you, in the Southeast, which of these methods you use. You in the Southeast need to tell us which method you would like to use for which stocks, and bringing everybody in is a way to make sure that we do it the same as the Gulf.

Red grouper, for example, with joint management, it wouldn't do well for us to do one thing and the Gulf to do another thing, and so, as Michelle said, that is going to be the first focus, and I think I can note that, in terms of, as we go with this organizing committee, that the first term of reference is to figure out which of those existing methods we need to use for which stocks.

DR. PONWITH: Exactly to that point, I am very -- I am in complete agreement with you. This could be a wonderful and exciting philosophical discussion, and none of us can afford that, including MRIP. MRIP put an offer on the table, and this, in my mind, represents our opportunity to take them up on their offer, and my point to your big concern is that the way you avoid this from becoming a philosophical discussion and make it very product driven is by bringing the exact right people onto that steering committee who will be designing, essentially, the terms of reference for that workshop.

That workshop can be as exactly laser-point specific as you want it to be, and it's hard to do, because it isn't just this council. It's getting the Gulf Council and their views and the MRIP people and sort of their world view and the Science Center and representation from the Mid-Atlantic, and so it's a big group, but I think that that work is absolutely crucial to make sure that the deliverables from that workshop are things that we can take and run with.

DR. DUVAL: I am glad to hear that.

MR. WAUGH: Just to quickly point out that we had a session at the recent CCC meeting on recreational fisheries, and one of the issues was this alternative ACL tracking methodologies, and Cisco, on behalf of MRIP, did indicate that they would attend and provide staff to work on materials for this workshop ahead of time, and I think that, Ben, is one of the first items you were getting at, and that's the focus of this workshop.

The second, alternative methods to estimate recreational catches, is a longer-term process. This alternative tracking methodologies, that is something that we could start using. We need to talk about what is the mechanism to change from just using the MRIP catches and catches from the headboats now versus these other methods, because what we were led to believe is the council can specify how that's done. That can be done fairly quickly, and I don't know that it needs to be done through an amendment, because we didn't do an amendment that said you're going to use the MRIP numbers. We can do that very quickly and change, perhaps for next year, how we start tracking our recreational ACLs.

DR. DUVAL: That would be my goal, is I would like to get some advice back at the December council meeting that says here are the methods that we have identified, that are of the ones that the MRIP staff have put together, that are appropriate for this set of species, and this is how we can use those methods to track against our ACLs. That would be my goal. I would love to see in time for December. I understand that these things take a little bit of time to wrap up and to produce the report and document all the decisions that have been made, but, at a minimum, by early 2018 would be great.

In terms of next steps on this, it sounds like everybody is onboard with a subset of SSC members conducting the workshop as a council-led process and then, in September, are we going to need to -- Is this committee going to need to see anything or approve anything, with regard to sort of the specific terms of reference that Bonnie was speaking to, or is this simply going to roll along and happen?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't think you will need to formally approve it. I think what we would like to do is empower that steering committee group, the organizing committee, to do the terms of reference and then send it out to the different councils, for review over email, as they get developed, just to make sure there is opportunity for feedback, but I don't know that we have time to go through a formal review process of all the cooperators.

DR. DUVAL: I am fine with that, but I just wanted to make sure that everybody was clear on what the next steps were. Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think you made a good point that I will carry to them as well, which was that the goal of this is better methods for tracking ACLs, because one of the concerns that has come up is what does this do to what's used in assessments, and we need to make it perfectly clear that this says nothing about the data and how they're used for stock assessments. This is solely for ACL tracking purposes.

DR. DUVAL: Yes, that is correct. All of the MRIP data are the MRIP data, as S&T has said previously. Those MRIP estimates, once they have been finalized and are put out there as best

scientific information available, those are all available for use in assessments, and always will be. Okay.

The next major topic is assessment scheduling, and so I don't know if Marcel has some SSC input to offer on this as well. There is a number of items that we need to discuss, and so a potential completion date for a golden tilefish revision, timing for that assessment, and there have been some challenges with black sea bass, and we need to discuss potentially advancing the terminal year for that. We've had a little bit of discussion about cobia, and we need to have a little bit of discussion about the MRIP revision assessments and the species we would want to include in that, and then future priorities.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I will lead off with the golden tilefish. We had asked, at our last meeting, about getting an update, and Bonnie raised some concerns with that in the response. We talked about that at the Steering Committee, and the request was made to at least try and do a revision of golden tilefish that would apply the new fitting algorithm that was used in red grouper, to see what effect that would have on the golden tilefish assessment.

I think Bonnie was going to tell us sort of where that stands and what they could do and what the timing could be on that, and there may have been some further discussions of what they can do with golden tilefish. I think we could go to Bonnie and let her fill us in on what the latest and greatest is on the tilefish situation.

DR. PONWITH: The discussion that we had was running another update and incorporating additional data, which would require waiting for the data to become available versus doing the revision to the golden tile using the red grouper sort of analysis approach, and that can be done fairly quickly, but it's certainly less informative, and my understanding is that the direction that you were heading is that you wanted that red grouper analysis done on golden tile. I guess I would like to groundtruth whether that is still the case.

DR. DUVAL: This would be -- You remember, at our last meeting, we talked about getting an update to the golden tilefish assessment, as John noted, and so there are several attachments in your briefing book. Attachment 3c just deals with golden tilefish ageing. We had some concerns about that, whether or not they were the same ageing issues that pertained to golden tilefish as we've seen with blueline tilefish.

I think 3b is the memo from Bonnie back to us with regards to conducting an update of golden tilefish that would include additional years of data in the data streams as well as using the fitting algorithm that was used in the red grouper assessment, and so, at the Steering Committee, what we put forward was how about at least using the new fitting algorithm that was used in the red grouper assessment and applying that to golden tilefish, because, shortly after the SSC review of the golden tilefish update last year, the red grouper standard assessment was going on, and a different fitting algorithm was used.

The request was to take that fitting algorithm and apply it to the existing golden tilefish update that we have, and it wouldn't advance any years of data, but we're also under the gun a little bit on golden tilefish, because overfishing is occurring, correct?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I guess we would like that for the October SSC meeting, would be the timing, if that's possible to get the revision.

DR. DUVAL: I guess that's a conversation we need to have. Does the request to the Science Center stand? Are folks in agreement with taking the fitting algorithm that was used in the red grouper assessment and applying that to the existing golden tilefish assessment, with no other modifications to the data, and then, if that's the case, we could get that back in time for the December council meeting, because it would have to go to SSC review, and then we would have to consider the timing of the next golden tilefish assessment, in order to incorporate additional data.

MR. PHILLIPS: We're going to change the way we're looking at it because we think it's going to give us better estimates?

DR. DUVAL: The fitting algorithm that was used in red grouper was that Dirichlet multinomial, as opposed to the robust multinomial, which was used in the tilefish update, and so I think Dr. Williams came before us in December and talked a little bit about these fitting algorithms and what they do and how this is a very active area of research and that this Dirichlet multinomial is something that's been -- It's now being used in other assessment models as well.

MR. HARTIG: To Charlie's point, we don't know what's going to happen when they reapply this fitting algorithm. We don't know.

DR. DUVAL: We're operating under the assumption that, because that algorithm is now the best scientific information available, that it will give us -- It will provide advice that is more robust and defensible.

MR. HARTIG: In my reading through the Steering Committee Report and the discussion with Bonnie was we don't really have a decision to make here. I mean, she said we can't -- If my reading is incorrect, let me know, but she said that she couldn't do the tilefish update. That is my reading of everything that I have read about this now, that that couldn't be done, and so we really don't have a choice here. The only thing we're going to be getting is the refitting algorithm for the December meeting.

DR. DUVAL: That's correct, but I think what Bonnie was saying was -- That was the discussion at the Steering Committee meeting, was to rerun the same assessment, but just with the different fitting algorithm, the new fitting algorithm, and she just wants to make sure that that's what the council wants to do and supports that before she tasks her staff with that.

DR. PONWITH: Right, and what you said, Mr. Hartig, was correct, but it was bound by time. If you will recall, we discussed the fact that the MRIP-lites were going to be postponed until we had the full set of data, and that that created a window, and the council's reaction to that was, well, good, let's do a tilefish update.

That is the thing that can't be done. We can't shoehorn a golden tilefish update in that timeframe, because, number one, it's a bigger job than what fits in that timeframe, and it would require all the data development and the age structures and everything, and so that can't be done. An update to the golden tilefish assessment can be done, but just simply not this fall.

If you're looking at something being done this fall, to be able to look at it, that refitting analysis could be done in that amount of time. It does impinge on some of the work that we're doing on red snapper, because we're also looking at the methodology we'll be using for that fishery-independent index and working with the SSC in developing a way to set ABC using that, but that is something that can be done in this timeframe.

The one thing we don't know is we don't know what using that new refitting technique will look like when it's plugged into the assessment. We don't know -- We believe that that refitting analysis is a superior analysis, but we don't know what the model outcome is going to look like when we do that refitting.

DR. DUVAL: Is everybody clear on that?

MR. BOWEN: But we do know that it's best available science as of now.

DR. DUVAL: The refitting algorithm, yes.

MR. BOWEN: To me, it's a no-brainer.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. It looks like there is support for moving forward with applying the refitting algorithm to the existing golden tilefish assessment. Okay.

MR. HARTIG: Just one additional comment on golden tile. We have the foundation information that gave us a thousand more samples in golden tile. In the next update, can that be included, John, in an update, or would some other standard or some other methodology have to be used to incorporate that information?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Bringing in that much new data, you may want to do it as a standard, but a standard doesn't necessarily take that much longer than an update. It simply means you will have a panel of the SSC folks, as we've showed for vermilion, and so I think you could certainly do that as a standard.

The SSC discussed this, and they supported getting a standard of tilefish as soon as we can possibly get it done, because of addressing the selectivity issues and the data issues. There's a lot of issues with this assessment that has been discussed by the SSC over the two or three meetings that they've talked about it, and they certainly recognize the need to improve that update and get some of this information in there.

As Bonnie mentioned, the challenge has been timing, and so I assume that we want to get this revision, because that's something that can be done relatively quickly and easily and get to you quickly, but we still have the need to get a standard assessment of this stock as soon as we can, whether it's 2019 or what have you, but we need to get that done. I think that's the bottom line, and so, when we go to the Steering Committee, that's something the South Atlantic needs to put on their list, probably.

DR. DUVAL: Anything else on golden tilefish? Okay. If not, then we need to move on to discuss the terminal year for the black sea bass assessment, which is SEDAR 56.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Bonnie mentioned the issue with the MRIP revision assessments, and we've noted that those have been delayed. That has somewhat of an effect on black sea bass, and we're concerned about lags with the terminal year, as it's discussed in the report, and when we get the fishing level recommendations. The MRIP stuff is going to be done sometime late 2018, and, by not advancing the terminal year and having this assessment underway, you would be taking management actions, say in 2019, with a 2015 terminal year.

The question was raised of should we try to look into advancing the terminal year of this stock assessment, and Julia Byrd contacted many of the data providers, trying to get a sense of why different pieces of data could be available. We would like to consider what that would do to the schedule if we were to advance the terminal year of black sea bass to say at least 2016. 2017 would certainly change the scheduling of things and that nature, but I think it's certainly something that needs to be done.

If it does get advanced, then perhaps this is one that also doesn't need to be done on the MRIP revision list, depending on how far you were to advance it and delay it, but, I think, from Bonnie, if you guys have got any more information on a final answer on what the reality is for at least advancing this to 2016 and any prognosis for even looking into 2017.

DR. PONWITH: That's going to be really the question for each of those MRIP-lites. The criteria that we used for selecting what was going to be on the short list for the lites is that stocks that had had a recent assessment, because, once the assessment gets old enough, doing that update-lite really isn't as informative.

We can take a look to see where we are in black sea bass, whether that pushes us to the point where it falls off the list, where really it should be a full update, but, typically, when you add a terminal year to the update, it basically means, depending upon where they are in the ageing, and so I'm hedging, because there are three groups that you need to consult for an answer like this.

You need to talk to the people who are processing the otoliths, and you need to talk to the data people and find out how many assessments they are pulling data for, and then you have to talk to your assessment team, and so I have to be careful about making a commitment until I can actually do a good job of touching bases with all of them, but, in the general case, to add a terminal year, another year to the terminal year means the otoliths need to be processed and pooled from all of the labs that are working on those, and you have to wait for the data for that terminal year to go final, which typically is late spring or early summer timeframe for the commercial and the recreational data to go final.

DR. DUVAL: I just want to make sure that everybody is aware that there was a delay in the black sea bass assessment, a six-week delay, that was requested, just due to the timing of the late delivery of recreational landings information, just for folks who haven't been following along with SEDAR 56, and so that's why we're having this discussion right now about advancing the terminal year and how that relates to these MRIP revision assessments.

I personally had concerns about -- Because the intent had been that we would have originally received the SEDAR 56 at our December meeting, and it would have been reviewed in October by the SSC, but the management or catch level recommendations would not have been provided

until it had been updated with the new MRIP recalibrations, and now that delay in the terminal year of an assessment by four years is what caused me certainly a lot of concern when we were at the SEDAR Steering Committee. I think, for the sake of the public, advancing the terminal year at least to 2016 would probably be advisable, but I need some committee input on that.

MR. BOWEN: I would like to echo your sentiments about the heartburn of delaying that. With what I see going on on the water, this delay is probably going to -- Not probably, but this delay is going to be good for the fishermen, but it's going to be terrible for the fishery. The catch per unit of effort on the sea bass is in the tank. The trends from MARMAP for sea bass is in the tank, and it just provides some real heartburn for me that a six-week delay is going to end up pushing this thing back for a minimum of a year, or maybe even two. That's just real frustrating.

DR. PONWITH: What I am learning is that, to add the 2016 data into this assessment, we would be able to complete the assessment and get the report to the SSC for their review in April.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think that is what we were hoping, since we had already pushed the schedule back until April, if that could allow including 2016 data. It sounds like it is possible, and so I think this would just be maybe a motion to advance the terminal year to 2016, since that was in the terms of reference, might make it cleanest.

DR. DUVAL: Could I get a motion from the committee?

MR. BELL: **I would move that we advance the terminal year to 2016.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Mel. Is there a second? Second by Charlie. **I think we've had a lot of discussion on this already, and so, if there is no other discussion, is there any objection to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

I have just a shout-out of appreciation to all the folks who are working on updating those ages, because it is, as Bonnie mentioned, across multiple labs, including staff in our agency as well, and so I really appreciate everything that everyone has done to provide Julia with what it would require to advance that terminal year.

We have had some discussion on the timing and terminal year for the cobia benchmark, and I think there is a lot of moving pieces with this one, clearly. I don't know if folks have any other thoughts on moving forward with cobia. John had outlined that the intent is to move forward with the stock ID workshop and at least finish that by the first half of 2018 and then try to schedule a data workshop for later in 2018, the second half of the year, with 2017 as the terminal year.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That is what is in the Steering Committee's scheduled plans for now, and so, as long as you agree with that, we don't need any formal action.

DR. DUVAL: I understand the concerns that Anna has raised about stability, but I think, from my perspective, two consecutive years of really high catches is maybe not the kind of stability that you were looking for, but it is certainly coming close to a trend. I am not seeing any more input on that, and so, Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: Just to reiterate the question that the Gulf had, and that was, if the stock ID shows a fairly homogeneous population, and, again, how that stock ID workshop is set up really, again, depends on the terms of reference and sort of the scientific advice on how you use findings to drive how that assessment is set up, but, in the event that the outcome of that is one homogeneous population, it does have an influence on the Gulf of Mexico, and so we will want to keep that in mind and be prepared to engage the Gulf of Mexico really now in this. Of course, that does then get us into a situation where the analyst who would be doing the cobia assessment is right now in the middle of a gray snapper assessment, and we would have to contemplate how we would bring the Gulf in with that situation.

DR. DUVAL: I think those are some of the moving pieces that I was referring to, and so certainly keeping that in mind. Okay. Let's finish this agenda item up. We just need to talk about red snapper and how that plays into the MRIP revisions and then the guidance on future priorities, and then we will move into the Stock Assessment Improvement Plan.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Our planned MRIP revisions are for vermilion, black sea bass, blueline, and red snapper. Now, the reason red snapper is being suggested here to remove from this list is because of the concerns that have been raised about using the prior assessment from SEDAR 41 and using any projections from that assessment to manage the stock, given the conditions that we've been observing now and concerns with uncertainty, et cetera, et cetera.

I think, given that, and given that we're not in a position of using the outputs of that assessment to develop the actual management actions and set the ACLs, then it doesn't really make sense to do a revision for this stock, and so I would suggest removing the MRIP -- Removing red snapper from the MRIP revisions list. That would be a motion too, I think, that would help that.

DR. DUVAL: So do folks understand the reasons surrounding this, the uncertainty? Again, just to make sure that the intent is clear, we would be looking for a motion from the committee to remove red snapper from the list of MRIP revision assessments, and we'll hear a little bit more later on, in Snapper Grouper.

MR. HARTIG: **Madam Chair, I would make that motion to remove red snapper from the MRIP revisions list.**

DR. DUVAL: It looks like Chester was the seconder. **The motion is to remove red snapper from the MRIP revision assessments list. It's seconded by Chester. Any further discussion? Is there any opposition? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

Then, finally, guidance on future priorities, the last page of your overview shows the schedule as it is right now, and so I think we would be wanting to make sure that these are still your priorities or if, as Mr. Diaz noted, the Gulf had passed a motion of their priorities in order, understanding that the Science Center and the Steering Committee need to work those in as needed, but, up on the screen, are your priorities for 2018 and 2019.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This is what we've negotiated with the Steering Committee so far, and then some of your long-term ones below that, being 2020 is red snapper, tilefish, and red grouper. 2021 is white grunt and gray triggerfish, two stocks that have always seemed to have been on that long-term horizon to get assessed, but we would like to get those assessed at some point. The question

here is are there any other things that come to mind, any other issues, that you have or any changes you see in 2019 that you think that something else is more important?

We will also have some discussion similar along these lines when we get to the Data Committee and look at our research plan for the coming years, and that includes a list of our priority stocks, and I think that's another time to bring in some of the discussions that we've had here this morning.

DR. PONWITH: Just one point. On the king mackerel, it's down as a benchmark, and we are, within the Center, are really approaching this almost as a research track, and the reason is, of course, because we are bringing in the Mexican data, working with the Mexicans to bring in the Mexican data and some Mexican analysts.

We are working right now on the image analysis and working on developing procedures for image analysis and micro-constituent analysis, to look at mixing rates, to be able to incorporate those data in and understand how to interpret them when we get them. We will give you updates on that as that work develops, but I think taking a good, hard look at how we set up that assessment is going to be very important.

DR. DUVAL: I guess the only question that I had on the priorities was, given some of the concerns that have been raised with black grouper and the postponing of that assessment, or the halting of that assessment, due to the stock ID issues -- We have gag on there as one of our 2019 priorities, and the SSC had raised a few concerns about, I think, because we were using a proportion of gag versus black to separate those stocks, would not those same stock ID issues that are of such concern to black also apply to gag.

I think that's where the SSC had some discussion in regards to how these data are evaluated at the data workshop, when the decision is made to move forward into an assessment and then you get to a point in the assessment where you realize that the concerns apparently were not maybe as thoroughly addressed in the data workshop as they might have been, in order to not expend resources when you're not going to be able to move an assessment through to completion. I don't know, but I just raise that. I don't know what the plans are to try to clarify those concerns or address those concerns about stock ID for gag versus black.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Just a little background, for those that are wondering. There's been an issue with identifying species that are landed as black or gag, and it's a big issue down in Florida. That is the primary reason why we have suggested halting the black grouper assessment, because it was realized that how they thought the data were being sampled was not necessarily how the data were being sampled, and so it's going to take some going back and looking into things to actually calculate the ratios correctly between black and gag.

It was considered much more of an issue with black than gag, because black has much smaller landings than gag, and so the few unknown or missed, potentially -- Not landed properly, under the proper name, that would be thrown into the gag assessment, it wouldn't have nearly the impact that it was having on the black grouper assessment, because of the vast magnitudes and differences in the landings.

That being said, however, you do need to have your input data correct, and so I think, toward Michelle's point, when we get to terms of reference in 2019 for gag, I think we would have to have

a term of reference that looks into this issue and addresses this confusion in species landed, to settle it and make sure that we have the right information for gag, which means there are a couple of years to get this worked out, but I think it puts the alert out there, to the folks that identified this problem and are in the position to solve it, that, by 2019, it needs to be solved.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. With that, these are the priorities. Are there any other priorities that folks want to put forward?

MR. HARTIG: We've had a lot of discussion about golden tile around this table earlier, that we need to get that update sooner than later, and so I would suggest, in 2019, replacing Spanish mackerel, the standard Spanish mackerel assessment, with golden tile standard. I mean, Spanish mackerel is on autopilot. It's doing well. Recruitment continues, and the stock is in great shape. I would much rather see a golden tile update, or a standard, in that slot.

DR. DUVAL: Okay, and so golden tile standard to replace Spanish mackerel in that 2019 slot.

MS. BURGESS: I just wanted to follow up a little bit on the black grouper assessment. I conferred with Marcel, who confirmed that that halting isn't just a halt. The group that was working on it with FWC and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center is putting together a report to address this, and that report will be brought to the SSC, and so that should be discussed well ahead of the gag assessment.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you.

MR. WAUGH: A question to Bonnie on king mackerel. Bonnie, you said that you're approaching that as a research track, and so is that still going to include Atlantic mackerel, and will there be assessment advice coming out of it or, like a research track, will there be no management advice coming out of it?

DR. PONWITH: The goal is to do those back-to-back. We need to have the time to be able to evaluate the mixing rates adequately between the stocks and incorporate information that we get from Mexico in that, but, ultimately, the goal is to -- Once those evaluations are done, it's to conduct the operational stock assessment, so you do get management advice out of that.

MR. WAUGH: Is that within the mid-2019 timeline that we would get that management advice?

DR. PONWITH: That would be a goal, but I am going to have to consult with the Mexicans on their data holdings and the status of those data. In other words, have they processed their age structures? If they have, then it's simply a matter of doing a calibration workshop to make sure that we're doing them the same. If they have tissues and they haven't processed them yet, that could influence the time.

The thing about taking a research track approach is that we don't need to have 100 percent of the data from the terminal year to get started in setting up the assessment approach. We can run simulations and make decisions about how the assessment should be conducted while the actual terminal year of the data processing is underway.

MR. WAUGH: I'm sorry, but I'm still not clear. At the end of this research track, mid-2019, will we have the management advice, or, at that point, then will these operational assessments have to take place, and so, sometime after mid-2019, we will get the management advice?

DR. PONWITH: The answer to that is I won't know until I have a chance to have a conversation with the Mexican government. I should know the answer to that by your next council meeting.

DR. DUVAL: Great. Thanks, Bonnie. Ben has made the suggestion to replace the Spanish mackerel standard in 2019 with a golden tile standard, in order to incorporate the additional data and age structures collected by the research done by the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, and so I would be looking for a motion from the committee to do so.

MR. HARTIG: **I would move that we replace the Spanish mackerel standard assessment with a golden tilefish assessment.** Do you need the data?

DR. DUVAL: I think it's understood that you would incorporate the most recent data in there.

MR. HARTIG: Okay.

DR. DUVAL: It's seconded by Chris. Any discussion on that? **The motion is to replace the 2019 assessment of Spanish mackerel with golden tilefish.**

DR. PONWITH: John, can you refresh my memory of when was the last Spanish completed?

DR. DUVAL: That was SEDAR 28, and so it would have been -- Because cobia and Spanish were assessed at the same time, both Gulf and South Atlantic stocks, and so that would have been the end of 2012, but it was actually was delivered in 2013 was when the --

MR. CARMICHAEL: I am thinking it was 2011-ish terminal data.

DR. DUVAL: Yes.

DR. PONWITH: So that is concerning, to postponing the Spanish when the assessment is that old.

MR. HARTIG: I think, Bonnie, part of this -- I would like to get together with the SSC and the Beaufort assessment team at some point and look at a length-based assessment for Spanish mackerel, completely getting out of the ages. The fish only lives to be fourteen, and I think the fishermen can provide enough of the measurements, through a citizen science program, to really boost the amount of data that is used in that assessment.

I think that is more important than doing another age-based Spanish mackerel assessment. I think, really -- I would further that with king mackerel. I think you could do the same thing with king mackerel, based on -- We have talked about assessments and how we're doing them, and we've talked about age, and we've talked about data-limited, but we haven't really talked much about length.

I see, in the future, fishermen partnering with the data providers to get a number, a substantially increased number, of lengths into these assessments, which would far outnumber the ages that are

used now. I think you would have a much better assessment, and I think, if you look at the stock reproductive outputs of these animals, if you take a ten-year king mackerel versus a five-year king mackerel of the same size, they're going to produce the same amount of eggs.

I don't know that you are getting that much out of your ages from your mackerel assessment, and so those conversations need to be had, and I would like to see that done at some point in the future, where we look to get more productivity out of our assessments and focus more on the age-based assessments on our reef fish, which we need them, which they're longer-lived. The mackerels, I think, you could make a -- I have had this conversation with you before. I think you could make that step to go to lengths and then flood the number of lengths from the fishermen involved.

DR. PONWITH: Well, an age-based assessment is, in the general case, going to be better than a length-based assessment. Length-based assessments have their deficiencies, because length can be synonymous with age, to a certain point, but it gets muddy as the animal ages. It's predictive ability to correlate with age gets more and more challenging the older the animal gets.

I guess one thing that I want to be sensitive to is, at the same time as we're having these discussions about what your sense of priorities are, from a management perspective, is also what the stock assessment prioritization tool has -- What direction that is pointing us to, and, again, the whole idea of that prioritization tool is to be able to take criteria such as sort of the management status, the scientific status of a stock, a suite of different considerations, and be able to create a more kind of transparent, quantitative approach to setting these long-term priorities and then be able to look at those, after you have run them through that process, to groundtruth that, in terms of your needs.

It just really, in my mind, really highlights the importance of a tool like that to help the council make good decisions in a very, very, very complex setting, with all of these demands, particularly when the demands chronically outstrip the ability to meet those demands.

MR. BROWN: I don't hear the Spanish mackerel fishermen screaming that there is problems and that we need to do this immediately with the Spanish mackerel assessment, but I do hear it from the golden tile fishermen all the time, and I have to lean towards the fact that this makes more sense, to move and replace this assessment with golden tilefish. I hear you, Bonnie, but I think that this is way more necessary, and are we going to make a motion of this?

DR. DUVAL: The motion has already been made.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Does it need to be seconded?

DR. DUVAL: No, it's already been seconded, by Chester, I think, and so we're in discussion right now.

MR. BROWN: All right. Anyway, I really feel like this is important, to move forward with this motion.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Concerns have been duly noted on both sides. Are we ready for a vote? **Is there any objection to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

Is there anything else, in terms of stock assessment priorities? We have, on the list for 2018, cobia, greater amberjack, red porgy, the MRIP revisions, the international king mackerel assessment. Then 2019 is yellowtail, snowy grouper, golden tile, gag, and then the research track for scamp. Then you can see the 2020 and 2021 priorities. I don't know if there is a desire on the part of the council right now to do anything different beyond this. I am not seeing any takers.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think, Bonnie, the king mackerel international assessment, as Michelle summed it up, is pretty good. I think, by the Steering Committee, we're going to need to be able to lay out that process, in terms of getting the South Atlantic and Gulf Council SSCs and everybody involved in doing approvals of schedules and terms of reference and all of that stuff.

In our joint assessments, it always takes more lead time to get that kind of stuff done, and so I think, if we're going to start that in 2018, we probably need to be looking at having the terms of reference and schedule for the South Atlantic SSC by their October meeting, which would get it to the Gulf SSC in their fall meeting, too. If they could actually see it sooner -- I guess the Gulf Council meets in October and then doesn't meet again until the end of February.

If we're waiting on approving schedules and terms of reference at the end of February, that assessment is not going to start until very late in 2018, probably, in terms of making arrangements and all. I think, if we can have a prospectus for what this assessment is going to look like at the Steering Committee, we will be in good shape to get moving on it.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. If there is nothing else on assessment scheduling, I would like to move into the last agenda item, which I had hoped to have a little bit more time to discuss, sadly enough, especially since I spent my Memorial Day weekend reading the Stock Assessment Improvement Plan, all 153 pages of it, but I am going to turn things over to John to just give a summary of this.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I hope everybody spent at least some weekend or some worktime reading that, because there is a lot of information there, and it's really important. It gets at the core of what we do, and it certainly gets at the core of the thing we discuss all the time, which is how to make the most of our assessment resources.

Our comments are quite extensive, as you have seen. Hopefully everyone at least took a chance to review those. They are extensive, and they go through point-by-point with a number of things. They are triggered somewhat by comments that our SSC -- Noting differences between this plan and the prior plan, the prior one really laid out, in great detail, available resources, necessary resources, what was expected in terms of increasing productivity of those resources. This plan is a bit more lite, I think, in that regard. There is more just general topics and general discussion of things and less specifics, less numbers and staffing levels and all of that sort of thing, and that was raised by a concern of the SSC.

Another point that really gets at is, as we have noted here, we need more stock assessments. We need more basic stock assessments. We need to get more stocks that are important to us assessed, such as things like white grunt. White grunt was listed on the assessment schedule for 2005 or 2006 at the first SEDAR Steering Committee meeting in 2003. We're still trying to get to that first assessment of white grunt, and we understand why we've kicked that can down the road for fifteen years now, because we need more assessments.

That's really the underlying tone, I think, of our comments as you read through that, the draft comments. It's just really getting at we need more assessments in the South Atlantic, and getting data to the assessment teams efficiently, as Bonnie mentioned, is now recognized as probably one of the biggest benchmarks, and so I think that's why there's some concerns raised with some of the things in the plan about suggesting the next generation and the level of integration and bringing in more ecosystem things and trying to bring in social and economic information, because we really have not reached the point where our enterprise in our region has matured.

In thinking about this, one of the things that I remember Bonnie saying, in response to the last revision of the Act, I think she called it the great equalizer, because it laid out the need for scientific management of all the stocks, and not just of your handful of really bigtime important stocks, but of all of the stocks.

Personally, I felt, in reading the improvement program, was perhaps that vision was no longer shared by the agency, because it seems to really talk about more of the big priorities and refining assessments and taking existing assessments so much to the next level and the next iteration of the enterprise, and I kind of felt like the need to bring many of our other stocks up was left by the wayside, and that was a fundamental tenet of the prior plan, which was to try and bring all stocks up to some minimally-acceptable level.

It certainly doesn't mean an age-based assessment for every stock. Absolutely not. That is not the intention. Martin Dorn gave a presentation, a number of years ago, when we were talking about implementing the Act, and he talked about the difference between a Yugo assessment and a Chevy assessment and a Cadillac assessment. Not everything has to be a Cadillac assessment, and we all recognize that.

We also know that we have a lot of species that we really don't have much idea of what's going on at all, but they could be assessed, and white grunt is probably one of those. The tone of those comments, at times, is really just getting at that idea, is that we need -- Certainly, I think, in putting a lot of this together, we need to make sure that that focus on doing something for all of these stocks and achieving minimal levels of assessment information is not lost in the shuffle to take the -- Every stock is assessed and get them done.

They mentioned productivity with regard to doing annual assessments, and we don't do annual assessments. We are so far from doing annual assessments that it's almost insulting to say that, well, the trouble with productivity is that the councils want annual assessments. We're looking at six or seven years between the ones that we assess relatively frequently, and it's not from doing too many benchmarks, because there is only about eight stocks in the South Atlantic within SEDAR that have had subsequent benchmarks. In nearly all cases, they're either because of drastically new data or considerably changing the model. We have done subsequent benchmarks of vermilion, because we went from a length to an age.

The Gulf has done a number of subsequent benchmarks, because, in the first five years of SEDAR, they used about seven different models, and they've been standardizing on Stock Synthesis. That led to more benchmarks.

I think, overall, within our region, we have made great use of the standards and the updates and avoided the subsequent benchmarks, and so it's just a matter of getting more of those done, and I

think, with that, that's the general tone, and if there is certainly anything that people would add or any lines that you saw in there that you did not like and you wouldn't want Michelle to stand behind as the signatory of that, with your full faith and support, I think definitely bring that up before this goes out as our official comments.

DR. DUVAL: I have already provided John with suggested edits to the letter, and so it just didn't make it in time for the briefing book, and I think one thing that I was going to suggest is, if folks have not had the opportunity to read Attachment 3d, which is -- I am sorry that we haven't had more time to discuss this, and maybe it will come up in Data Collection, but the response that we requested from Bonnie's shop with regard to what does it take to get through the backlog of ageing resources and what would it take, from a staffing perspective, to keep up with the need for ages, and I think that letter, that response, is very telling, in terms of what it does take in order to keep up with the ages and what it would mean, in terms of FTEs, to be able to not just get through the backlog, but also keep up with ages in the future. I would suggest attaching that to the letter that goes in, because I think it's a great illustration of what's necessary, but I would welcome any input from the committee.

MR. HAYMANS: I am not on the committee.

DR. DUVAL: Anybody.

MR. HAYMANS: I did actually kind of go through some of those, and a comment that I found interesting was the number of staff that Beaufort and MARMAP, and even Panama City, believe they need to catch up and to maintain compared to what FWC is able to turn out. I don't say this flippantly, but I do ask -- How is FWC staff able to keep up with -- I know the level of otoliths that come through that lab, and it just looks like these other labs are asking for more than may necessarily be required. I am particularly looking at page 3 on 3d.

DR. DUVAL: If folks have looked at that, there is a table on PDF page 3 of Attachment 3d in your briefing book that lays out the different labs, the Beaufort Lab, Panama City, MARMAP, and FWC, in terms of what the current resources are, what the resources would be to clear the backlog, and then the resources to keep up with the annual samples. I mean, I don't know, Bonnie, if you want to address that or if you're able to address that, in terms of -- Doug, was it specifically number of staff to keep up with annual samples or the number of staff to clear the backlog?

MR. HAYMANS: I understand, when you look at the species that the labs handle, that some labs probably have more species, but, yes, when you look at the fact that there is thirteen staff requested or ten staff requested, that just seems like a lot of people to maintain the ages on the species.

DR. DUVAL: That's to clear the backlog. That's not to maintain.

MR. HAYMANS: Right. Then you move over to the next column, and it's six staff to maintain, and it just looked like a disproportionate amount of requests or effort needed, and that just struck me as odd.

DR. DUVAL: I think those labs are handling probably more species.

DR. PONWITH: I can't speak to FWC throughput on their otoliths or on their age structures. We were asked to do an analysis of hours, and we got the data from ourselves and from our partners and put it in there. I can't vouch for it, but the other thing is that the -- The age analysis for a species -- It's not a one-for-one thing.

Doing the age analysis for some species is very, very difficult. Like, for example, gray triggerfish, where it's a spine. Others are extremely straightforward, but we get high volumes of structures, and, if there is a high amount of variability in the age, you can't subset them as readily, and so you have to read more of them to try and stabilize the age composition analysis. It's not a one-for-one, and I don't know if that's a contributor to it or not, but we asked them a question and they answered it.

MR. BELL: Related to should 3d go along with it, I think that would be a good idea, because it states some specifics in there of what the challenges are and what we're dealing with and what reality is, and that's been part of our problem, I think, is the perfect world that we want to have comes with a good deal of expense and a lot of work, and so it's good to document that.

DR. DUVAL: I guess I would just point out that the thirteen staff and the ten staff to clear the backlog, that's for one year, and so there are tens of thousands of otoliths that -- We talk about sub-sampling, and people get upset that not all otoliths are read, but there is a significant staffing issue with trying to read all of those, and so then you try to sub-sample in a way that is statistically robust and you're not missing anything. I think the response is simply -- I was looking more at the resources to keep up with annual samples, which, for both labs, appears to be the addition of one to three additional staff members.

MR. HARTIG: To that sub-sampling question, and, Bonnie, you had mentioned this earlier, but would these numbers have changed if you got into the mathematics of the strata and things? If you looked at the optimum number of samples you had for a specific species, like black sea bass and vermilion snapper, where you have a lot of those parts, but I don't know what the strata are within the context of those species, and so, if you looked at that, would you expect these numbers to change a little bit?

DR. PONWITH: Yes, and this is really a coarse analysis. For example, the how many people would it take to clear the backlog is put in terms of one year. Doing this in one year would -- You would have to build a new building to be able to accommodate them. We put it in terms of one year to give people a feel for how big the backlog is.

You can't just say this number of otoliths, because different otoliths take different amounts of time to process, and so we normalized it by saying, if we were to clear everything in one year, how long would it take, and this is sort of the rough analysis.

If time were invested in evaluating sort of where is the weakest link strata for every species and tuning the number of otoliths that we process to that weakest strata, there is a chance that we could actually handle the ageing process more efficiently. That would have to be something that's revisited on a regular basis, because that weakest link strata, in some cases, may be an adequate sampling level, or it may not be, and you may have to create sort of idealized, but that's an analysis that could be done.

It's essentially just doing a statistical power analysis, but it's complicated, and it's something that has to be revisited on a fairly regular basis, because it's sort of like the stock assessment process. You improve one area, and it basically shifts the bottleneck, and, statistically, if you refine the sub-sampling in one situation, it can actually shift the emphasis to another. That is something that we could put some analytical power to, not only within the Science Center, but among our other partners, and try and kind of refine the way we're expending resources to do this.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Bonnie. It's always about resources. What I was looking for is some -- I think, just to put folks on notice, the comments on the Stock Assessment Improvement Plan have to be sent in by Friday, and so we're under a hard-and-fast deadline on that. If folks have not had a chance to read those draft comments, I strongly encourage you to do so and please provide any suggested edits to John, so that they could be incorporated.

If anybody wants to see the edits that I have suggested, I am happy to provide those. I had a few, since I've got to be the one signing it. It sounds like folks are in agreement that we attach 3d as an appendix to this letter, just to sort of hammer home the point about the resources necessary in the region to keep up with basic data collection.

MR. HARTIG: Thanks for that, and, John, thanks to you and your staff, and, Michelle, for your comments as well. I didn't get through the total report, but I did get through all the comments, the detailed comments, that staff has made, and it really gives you a sense of flavor of the South Atlantic's predicament, when we're thrown into the melting pot of the entire council system versus what we're facing, and there are tremendous differences in what we're facing versus a number of the other councils.

I think, John, your comments were spot-on about talking about first-time assessments and then moving to the next level. We're not there. We are not there, and we're still wrestling with the first-time assessments, and the maturity of assessments as well, and, sometime down the road, I would like to get an answer from Bonnie on a research track as far as first-time assessments go.

Would it give us the detailed information we know, so that, when we do the next assessment, that we don't get a completely different picture from the first assessment that was done, and that has happened with a number of different species, where we get the first-time assessment and we're looking like, hey, we're in a realm of possibility of catch limits. Then, all of a sudden, the next assessment we get, things are changed and we're topsy-turvy and it's completely different. Somewhere, I would like to know if this research track will give added information to make that process better, going from the first to the second assessment.

DR. DUVAL: I think that's probably the intent of the research track, is to have more -- You hammer out all of those things ahead of time, and so you have more consistency and dependability, because you have established the actual assessment approach. To that point, and then we're into lunch.

DR. PONWITH: To that point, and it's short. What I can say is that is the intent, from a process standpoint. From an outcome standpoint, of course, stocks are inherently dynamic, and so, as long as you're talking about stabilizing the process, yes. We want to be methodical and meticulous in making decisions about how the stock is assessed, and then the outcome of the assessment is really driven by the true status of the stock.

DR. DUVAL: All right. Anything else on the Stock Assessment Improvement Plan? Again, I would just encourage folks to get back to John before Friday with any comments that you have. If you want to see the comments that I have provided, just let me know, and I will be happy to email them to you. It is 12:07 on my clock, and so I would like to go ahead and recess for lunch. We will come back here at 1:30, and we will reconvene with Spiny Lobster and Chairman McCawley. Thanks, everyone.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 12, 2017.)

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

Transcribed By:  
Amanda Thomas  
July 19, 2017

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