SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

Savannah Hilton DeSoto Hotel
Savannah, Georgia

MARCH 7, 2012

SUMMARY MINUTES

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Other Observers at end of document

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in the Madison Ballroom of the Savannah Hilton DeSoto Hotel, March 7, 2012, and was called to order at 3:25 o'clock p.m. by Chairman David Cupka.

MR. CUPKA: We'll go ahead and get the SEDAR Committee under way. The first order of business is the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes to the agenda? Seeing none, then our agenda is approved. The next order of business will be approval of the minutes from our last meeting. Are there any corrections or additions to the minutes? Is there any objection to approving those? Seeing none, then our minutes are approved. The next is SEDAR Activities Update behind Attachment 1, and I'm going to ask John to go over those.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right now we're in the middle of doing the stock assessments for SEDAR 25. This is involving the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico cobia and Spanish mackerel. They held the data workshop a few weeks ago and the assessment workshop is coming up. Not surprisingly, they're running a little behind on where they'd like to be in terms of having data ready.

A couple of reasons; one being it's many stocks, two stocks, two areas, four assessments going on, a lot of people involved, a lot of data. Another thing is there is actually I guess a really justifiable reason to be a little behind is that they're really trying to get the 2011 data included in this assessment.

Given the timing of it, they didn't anticipate being able to do that, but those at the data workshop have agreed to – you know, they went through the data process, discussed the data without necessarily having the final numbers for 2011 and everybody is really working hard to try and get the 2011 data in there. We're running a little behind, but that's primarily the reason.

I have given you guys the current project schedule from the last round of the steering committee. One question to bring before you deals with 2013, the red grouper assessment. When we discussed it at the steering committee, it was left undecided as to whether this would be an update or a standard. The SSC has recommended it be a standard assessment.

One reason is that they'd like to be able to bring in the new SEFIS data if they can, and they want to consider some spatial aspects, and they just know it has been a little bit of time that has passed like some of the other assessments, so they'd like a little more leeway that the standard gives them. That will be action for you to get you make a recommendation on red grouper.

The final thing is the discussion of black sea bass in 2013 where we've asked through the SSC and the council for some evaluation. We will discuss at the steering committee the best way to handle that. I'm not sure if we have anymore to add to that at this time since we talked about it quite a bit at our last meeting.

MR. CUPKA: John, do we need to take an action then in regard to red grouper and whether we agree with the recommendation that it be a standard?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's correct, David.

MR. CUPKA: Or do you just want me to see if there is any objection to that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think given that, that would be fine, yes.

MR. CUPKA: All right, we have a recommendation that the red grouper be a standard assessment. Is there any discussion or objection to that recommendation? Seeing none, then we will go that route, John. The steering committee will address the issue of black sea bass; is that correct?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's correct.

DR. CRABTREE: John, do we need to talk about red snapper?

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's coming up next.

DR. CRABTREE: That's coming up next. Well, it seems to me it has some bearing on sea bass because it would alter the workload for 2013 potentially, right?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It may affect what is ultimately done for sea bass, the intensity of the analysis that they do. I think where we are now, just recognizing that we need something done for sea bass, we can talk about that here when we get into the assessment priorities.

MR. CUPKA: Yes, we haven't forgotten that one, Roy. John, let's go ahead.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right, Item 4 deals with assessment priorities and what the committee is asked to do is establish priorities for 2014 in the process and then we go through and get those approved by the steering committee this October. The SSC was asked to review the preliminary priorities for 2014. They suggested red snapper, benchmark; white grunt, benchmark; scamp, benchmark; black grouper, update.

Now, this is where things start to get a little bit different than what we have expected at the last meeting. As I'm sure you all recall, there was mention from the Science Center of doing a red snapper benchmark, being able to do that and feeling that could be done successfully in 2013. I believe Bonnie is going to comment some on that because the situation may be slightly different at this time. I guess with that, it's probably best just to turn it over to Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: We've spoken at length about the situation that we're in with red snapper and the timing of that stock assessment. We are making some very good progress developing a time series of fishery-independent data through the SEFIS, SEAMAP and MARMAP data collections. The earliest that we believed it would be technically feasible to conduct a stock assessment using those data would be 2013. The reason for that is that would three data points in the time series, '10, '11, '12.

For us to have really have any hope at all of detecting a trend in those data, you basically need three years. From a technical standpoint, the very earliest you could hope for a stock assessment

that measured trends would be three years. The catch with that is that you could end up holding out a benchmark stock assessment slot in the SEDAR schedule, conduct an assessment taking the full amount of time; and we know because this is a new time series, the analysis on this would be rigorous and would be highly involved.

There is a risk that we go through all of the time commitment to do that and find that those three points don't line up; that we end up with a lot of variability in the data because they haven't had enough time to stabilize in the time series. The scenario that we could end up with is being able to conduct a stock assessment but having results that are too vague to enable us to make strong management decisions based on it.

The thinking all along has been the longer that time series is, the more likely it is that the data would have time to stabilize out and actually show a trend that we would predict we'd be seeing, which is an increase in these stocks due to the ending of targeted harvest of them. It puts us in a situation of do you do a full benchmark at the expense of another benchmark and run the risk of not coming up with a useful result or do you wait longer and allow that to stabilize?

At the last SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting we discussed this dilemma and the position that we landed on was to instead of running a full benchmark in 2013, supply the data to the SSC and have the Science Center and the SSC evaluate those data alongside of the projections that were conducted in the last stock assessment.

If you'll remember, we did the stock assessment and then we did projections on what that assessment led us to believe the trajectory of recovery of that stock would be based on the assumptions that the assessment was done on. If we take a look at the fishery-independent data alongside of those projections and those data corroborate those projections, it creates a pretty firm foothold for making management decisions based on that.

Now, there is uncertainty and the reason is because whenever you conduct a stock assessment and then generate a string of annual projections going out from there, the projection that immediately follows the year of the stock assessment is the estimate that is the strongest. The farther you go out from there the more uncertainty there is, and the reason is because those projections are basically a snapshot that freeze all of the assumptions.

You know, ecological conditions, the status of predators, the statutes of prey, it sort of freezes them all as a stable assumption and we know that is not particularly realistic, but it's how the modeling is done. The feel was that if we took a look at the projections and the fishery-independent data side by side and they corroborate one another, you factor in the amount of uncertainty you have due to the fact that these were done earlier and use that to provide scientific advice to the council on an ACL for the fishery.

That would give us a little more time to gather more fishery-independent data in the hopes that then when we look at that the trends are clear and stable, and it gives us a higher probability of that huge investment of doing a benchmark assessment is going to pay off in terms of giving us contemporary estimates of the true status of that stock. There was a bullet in the slide

presentation at the last council meeting that said that a benchmark stock assessment could be done in 2013.

That's technically correct; we would have three years' worth of data. The thing that is the mystery is what would the outcome be; would there be a useful product at the end of that. In other words, would the results be definitive enough to enable you to make management decisions based on it. That's kind of a snapshot of where I think we are on red snapper. I'll stop there to see if people have questions or comments.

DR. DUVAL: I guess maybe more of a question for John. Bonnie spoke about the SSC working side by side with Science Center staff to look at these projections and the fishery-independent data. I guess I'm wondering how much SSC time this would take up. I assume this would still be occurring in 2013. John, do you have any sense of that or, Bonnie, do you have any sense of that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't expect it will take an inordinate amount of SSC time. Our anticipation is a lot of the work would be in laying what is expected, what the SSC needs to see in terms of analysis and reporting on that analysis so they can make a decision and then phase in once the report is done where they review the information, provide peer review of it, which doesn't necessarily have to take a huge amount of time either. I think they can handle the workload.

DR. PONWITH: And to that point, the thing that we would like to do is get some time on the SSC schedule for the upcoming meeting this year to actually begin those discussions. One thing that – if you will recall the projections, it wasn't one set of projections. There were a series I think of half a dozen scenarios in those projections.

What we need to do is go back and revisit those scenarios in the projections from the last stock assessment and decide which of those, either one or what subset of those we want to use as the baseline. I believe quite strongly that would be an important decision to make in advance of the analysis that we would do in 2013.

Secondarily, we would have the very discussions that John was talking about. Again, I feel like setting up the procedures for that evaluation so there are clear expectations of what they would be responsible for would make that analysis go much, much more smoothly. Our position would be start on it this spring and then conduct it next spring and then conduct it next spring. That way we're all set up and ready to run.

MR. CURRIN: Bonnie, a couple of questions; one, I seem to remember there was a video index either being collected and/or being used in the Gulf of Mexico. Is that correct?

DR. PONWITH: That's correct.

MR. CURRIN: And it is being used?

DR. PONWITH: It is.

MR. CURRIN: Okay, how many years before that index stabilized or became useful to indicate trends in the fishery; that's my first question?

DR. PONWITH: And that's a good one. I can tell you beyond certainty that it was greater than three years, but I can't tell you exactly how many. I can look that up and find out how many years it took before the SSC was comfortable including that as an index.

MR. CURRIN: And I think that bears on my second question, which is how many years would it take before you begin to either justify doing a benchmark or feel confident that the data are giving you adequate trends to do a benchmark? They're kind of related.

DR. DUVAL: The only reason I asked the question that I did is just some of the other discussions that we've had around the table earlier this week and probably some of the discussions that we're going to have tomorrow at snapper grouper. I was just considering the workload that we're putting on the SSC given some of the other priorities that have been expressed. I just wanted to make sure that you all felt as though this collaborative assessment of red snapper could be done without displacing some of those other priorities.

DR. PONWITH: Another issue is the timing. If we did the route of meeting with the SSC, the timing of it would be best if we waited until the 2012 data were as complete as possible, so there is going to be a tradeoff. I know we will want it as early as possible because that ensures when a result could be available for actual execution; in other words, something that would impact the potential for reopening the fishery. We need to temper that with maximizing to the fullest extent possible the amount of that fishery-independent data that are actually completed, finalized and ready for inclusion in that analysis.

MR. HARRIS: Bonnie, I appreciate what you're saying and I understand that. I understand the longer time series of data we get the more likely we're going to have a better assessment result. I am curious – and this is a little bit off the subject – but we've all seen all the e-mails that David Nelson has submitted. I know that you have addressed some of them and some of the questions that he has raised and the concerns he has raised.

I would just like to make sure somebody addresses all of those issues and that they are raised before the SSC and the stock assessment group so that we either accept what he is suggesting and we put it into the assessment or we reject it and tell him why it's rejected.

DR. PONWITH: I think that's an excellent recommendation. The situation that we're in is some of the e-mails that come aren't requesting anything. They're basically making a statement; this is what I believe. Some of them actually ask a question; and for the ones where there is a distinct question, we try to sit down and get an answer to him.

Some of the questions that are raised are situations where the stock assessment panel conducted the assessment according to the agreed-upon approach as set out by the stock assessment panel and Captain Nelson disagrees with that. That puts me in a situation of I wouldn't override the stock assessment panel.

The questions that he is raising are valid questions to be looked at in the next stock assessment, but I don't know how fruitful it is to deal with them in the hypothetical; in other words, without the context of actually going through and revisiting the stock assessment. Those are sort of three-course bins that his questions have tended to come in. The ones that are genuine new questions, those are the ones we really are focusing the most on. The other ones I believe that we would be best served dealing in the context of the full-blown assessment, but I take your recommendation.

MR. HARTIG: Bonnie, I heard you when you talked about taking the projections and the fishery-independent data and seeing if they're tracking. What happens if the fishery-independent data shows it's more optimistic? Is there a way to incorporate that, also?

DR. PONWITH: That's exactly – I wouldn't picture it as a one-sided evaluation. In other words, if the assessment appears to not only corroborate but show that the trajectory of rebuilding may have been underestimated, that could be taken in as advice. Again, we have to deal with uncertainty and we've got tools for being able to do with that, but again I don't picture this as a one-sided evaluation.

MR. HARTIG: This fishery-independent information, we've got a long time series from MARMAP. I may have been out of the room if you've already talked about this. As you know, they received a 40 percent cut in their funding. How are we going to have the necessary fishery-independent information based on that 40 percent cut to continue to do this?

DR. PONWITH: Well, I'm actually really glad you brought that up. We just last week completed an independent peer review of the fishery-independent data collections that was the triumvirate. It was SEFIS, which is the new survey we began with the 2010 increase in the South Atlantic.

It's the MARMAP and the SEAMAP that collectively are forming the foundation for understanding the status of this stock. The MARMAP Program received a significant cut and that is going to be a very, very difficult challenge for us. We will use recommendations. We actually brought this up in the – I'll have to refresh my memory whether we actually included it explicitly in the terms of reference, but it was brought up in the opening statements that we want to use the recommendations that this independent review panel provided us to help us make decisions about how would we reshuffle our activities to make sure that the components of the collection that are bringing us the richest amount of precision and richest amount of accuracy in this collection are the ones that we're making the investments in.

It can't be ignored that a cut that is 40 percent is more than just you shuffle here and adjust there. That actually takes an extreme toll on the program, and we're still struggling with how we're going to make adjustments for that. It will have an impact in the quantity and the quality of the data that we collect.

MR. HARTIG: And one more, if I may, to that; well, what is more important in the fishery independent, the precision and accuracy or the long-term nature of the data?

DR. PONWITH: Yes.

MR. BOYLES: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on your committee, but as you know we run the MARMAP Program out of South Carolina, and a 40 percent cut is fewer days at sea. It's fewer tissue samples processed, it's fewer otoliths read, it's fewer bodies to do the work. It's our great hope that congress will recognize the importance of this program. What I'm dismayed at is with all of the discussions on the Hill about better data, this is entirely incongruent with the message that I think our constituencies and our anglers have sent to our elected officials. I do hope that the "royal we" can find a way to restore that funding for 2013; and perhaps more importantly to preserve the integrity of our ability to manage that long-term data set. I think we're all going to have to dig deep on it.

MR. PHILLIPS: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on the committee either, and I'm not sure what exactly you would call this, what you want to do in '13, since it's not a benchmark and it's not an update. I don't know what name it is. What I'm hearing in between the lines is there is going to be a lot more uncertainty in this, whatever comes out of it, than what you would get out of a benchmark should you try to do a benchmark; and i.e., so if you got more uncertainty, then you're going to have to buffer down. Say if there is a possibility they get some fish, instead of getting two fish possibly under a benchmark they may get one fish or something because you have to figure in uncertainty. Am I on the right track there?

DR. PONWITH: There will be uncertainty because, again, that first year that you project out from the end of your assessment is the highest quality projection. The farther you go out the more uncertainty there is. There will be uncertainty in that comparison. You're absolutely right, I would anticipate that the SSC would mitigate for that uncertainty in their advice to the council on setting an ACL.

That said, we could do a benchmark with three years' worth of data. I do want to revisit Ben's question because that is a very legitimate question and it's linked to this answer. If you have three years' worth of data and instead of looking like this where they trend up or where they trend stable or whether they trend down, you end up with either an upside V or a right side up V.

It makes it very difficult to interpret the true status of that stock. You people know better than anybody that this is a very dynamic ecosystem. It's not a stable ecosystem. It is very dynamic. This is getting back to the answer to Ben's question, and that is that long term is important because it helps you mitigate for fluctuations about some stable mean, but the precision and accuracy is important because the higher your sample size the sooner you reach sort of a stable picture of the true trend of that stock. The two in concert are linked and both critical to having solid scientific advice sooner.

MR. CUPKA: Any other comments or questions? I know we're all kind of disappointed that we're not going to get what we thought we were going to get and we need to get that information as soon as we can. It's a serious situation, but nevertheless we're disappointed. Roy.

DR. CRABTREE: John, when we thought we were going to do a benchmark red snapper in 2013, did we arrange the schedule? Does the fact that we're not going to do a benchmark red

snapper in 2013 open up the possibility for other things or did we never adjust the schedule to do it in 2013 to begin with?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We never adjusted the schedule to do it in 2013 to begin with. We haven't gotten around to detailed scheduling for 2013, and we really hadn't gotten around to what would be cut as a result of doing this, what would be done in lieu of. It's really no impact in terms of what we're doing in 2013, no.

MR. CUPKA: We talked about it at our last meeting when we heard that was a possibility, and I know we gave it our first priority but we never actually incorporated that into the schedule is my understanding. All right, John, is there anything else under assessment priorities. I know there will be probably some discussion when we talk about recommendations for the steering committee, but is there anything else at this point you want to bring up?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, we have the list there of species for 2014 that we should talk about. The other thing I guess I wanted to comment on was bringing the red snapper plan to the SSC. We mentioned here in the discussion about doing it at our next meeting, and our next meeting is in I think like three weeks.

It would be probably hard to get something on to the SSC's agenda with this short notice. We are talking about SEDAR things in general as we always do, but one thought I had was obviously we'll fill the SSC in on this and perhaps I could propose to the SSC that maybe they can form a subgroup of some sort that will work on this in detail with the Science Center guys to sort of have this more concerted and cooperative effort.

And then at our next meeting following this, which will be in October, there are a number of assessments to discuss so a number of the Beaufort people would already be planning to attend that meeting and that would be an opportunity maybe to really talk in some detail and actually have a bit more focused plan for what the Science Center can do. I think it might be the most efficient way and just run it with a subcommittee if they will agree and if you like that plan.

Now I'll pull up our overview here. What we had scheduled for 2014 was red snapper, white grunt, scamp and then a black grouper update led by Florida. I guess at the top of that list is would red snapper be done in 2014 or should red snapper be held in reserve until we see what comes out of this ongoing effort.

One thing I'm thinking is if this says that there can be some harvest coming in of red snapper as a result of this analysis working through the SSC with some 2012 data, then we may want to get some of those samples in the system before we consider doing the benchmark. I just wonder do we really want to do this in 2014 or 2015 or some later time. Would you feel more comfortable penciling in red snapper after you see what comes out of the plan evaluation?

DR. CRABTREE: Let's just say hypothetically we do the analysis for 2012 and it indicates we can reopen in 2013 with 50,000 pounds commercially and a two-week recreational season or something like that. What would we really gain if we held off until after that happened? It seems to me you've got a break in the time series and you've changed so many things that

they're not really going to be comparable. I guess we could get some otoliths and things maybe, but I'm not sure what we really get out of that. We're getting otoliths I assume from the survey that's going on now. Do think that the gain from that would be enough to wait on?

DR. PONWITH: Just a correction; what we'd be doing in 2012 in October is going back and visiting those projections to decide which one or which set we'd be using to baseline and then setting up sort of the procedures for what the SSC wanted to see in 2013. Again, the actual meeting with the SSC to do that would be ideally far enough in '13 that the 2012 data would be final, so that we have three solid years to look it. It's not '12 and then action in'13. It would be doing this review in '13 to see if we could reopen later in '13 or '14.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I'd like to see the timing of that adjusted such that it would come to this council at a point where we would have the option of opening a fishery in 2013. It seems not acceptable to me to have it all push off until 2014. I think we need to work on the timing of all this so that it happens in such a way that we get something from the SSC, whether the ABC remains zero or not, so we have time to take some sort of an action in 2013.

DR. PONWITH: So the question is if the data are final let's just say May or June of 2013 and this were a couple month process where we work with the SSC and then leave some time for iterative analysis, that would have it blessed and ready to go to the council around the August timeframe; is that early enough to be able to take an action?

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I think if we had it – that would mean it would come before the council in September. That would leave us at best an emergency rule with some sort of short season in the fall somewhere. That's pushing the timelines on things.

MR. CARMICHAEL: When we had talked about this at one point, the original plan was that it would come to the SSC in like their spring meeting of 2013, and part of that was thinking, well, the primary data they're going to be looking at – one of the big data sources is obviously the survey itself, which that is conducted – you know, that's completed, what, in the late fall or early fall of 2012 the survey would be completed, so that does give them some months to get that done.

We're not waiting for, say, commercial catch statistics and stuff to all be validated and the age samples to be read from the fisheries, which normally is what pushes our data back until June. I think at that time we're thinking maybe we should have the data done a little a little bit sooner than we normally would, and we may make like a late April SSC meeting in 2013 with then a June council meeting.

DR. PONWITH: That's a pretty good assessment. The things that we need to do or we need to review the video sampling, which is pretty labor-intensive, and then, of course, we need to slice and dice the otoliths, labor-intensive. The thing that's probably going to be lagging are the bycatch estimates for recreational and for commercial, and those would be pretty important.

DR. CRABTREE: But I think that ought to be the timing we try to achieve is the spring SSC and before this council in June, and that way we would have time to deal with it.

MR. CUPKA: Yes, I agree with that, Roy, we need to try and do something as quick as we can. John, if you can get the SSC to work with some of Bonnie's staff to see if we can't achieve that, it ought to be a very high priority if not the highest priority.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Definitely, okay, we will. That brings us then back to the red snapper benchmark in 2014. I guess my thought, Roy, in terms of if you have some fishery-dependent data coming in, what would that add? I tend to think it would add a lot. It would give us some idea of fishery-dependent CPUE, what might be actually going on. There is so much more potential effort out there and it gives people a chance to maybe get a broader range of samples and stuff. I think it would be good to compare fishery-dependent and fishery-independent age compositions and such. I think there is a lot of value in it.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I thin it depends on how many fish there are and how much fishing is going to take place. If we had a two-week recreational season and the way MRFSS delivered, I doubt we'd be able to get much out of that. I guess that remains to be seen.

DR. PONWITH: In terms of the fishery-dependent data, you're absolutely right; that is another data stream that we can use to help corroborate the trends that we're seeing in the fishery-independent data collections. We spent a lot of time talking about that and one concern is that we don't want to make the mistake of assuming that will then be another data point in the old fishery-independent trend lines.

We have a pretty rich fishery-dependent indices of abundance, but this is such a strong discontinuity in terms of the way the fishery is going to be executed that we don't see the new data as a good addition to that old time series. Basically, it's going to represent a new time series. That said, it's very important in terms of helping us to round out our understanding from what we're seeing on the fishery independent.

MR. CURRIN: And if it opens up, whether it's for two months, two weeks, two days, I think we should make a concerted effort to collect absolutely the maximum amount of information, bones, and mount a campaign to let people know how important it is so that we get everything that we possibly can from any kind of activity in that fishery, because it's going to be light years more than we're generating ourselves on an annual basis.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, John, do you need anymore discussion on the priorities? We kind of got away from your list there.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Is the committee satisfied with these priorities; red snapper, benchmark; white grunt, benchmark; scamp, benchmark, in 2014? Do you think that's the most appropriate things to look at?

MR. HARTIG: John, given that the schedule is going to go on as printed before, is that the way we're looking at it now?

MR. CARMICHAEL: This is what would go to the steering committee for discussion and potentially being finalized in October of this year for 2014. If we get some great insight from our efforts on red snapper, we could swap another species if we do that rather promptly. As we've heard, though, our trouble is if we try to swap species six months out we cause problems with age people.

And what we know about MARMAP and discussed, that's probably going to be even more critical that we stick to our guns in terms of this scheduling because they're not going to have the ability to jump in and catch up on age samples for some species that we throw on the list at the last minute.

MR. CUPKA: Yes, and we'll also have our regular process where we get input from those people and try and get that settled so we won't have to change midstream, which creates all kinds of problems. Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: What I would recommend – and what you both said about switching is absolutely critical and I certainly agree with you – what I think would be beneficial at this stage is have a stock on deck so that if farther down the line we do end up reconsidering any of these, there is another stock in queue that we can at least look at from the standpoint of science management and logistics. If you wanted to invest some time thinking about if you were to move one out and one in, which one would you move in next. I think having that sort of as a standby would be beneficial.

MR. CUPKA: John, I know we've bumped some stocks. In fact, we bump them all the time so we ought to have some idea of some that we could kind of have for standby.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The ones I would suggest are what is listed here in this paragraph. One is greater amberjack and I've put that in there because it was last done in 2007 so it's getting up there in age when we figure we're talking about 2014. The other, of course, is black sea bass, and I think black sea bass is a very obvious one because the SSC has asked for extra analysis, and how in depth that analysis is will be determined by the workload and the other priorities. I would suggest those two as the two to be on deck for future consideration in 2014 if an opportunity arises.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, and personally I would say if we had to prioritize those, I think I would give black sea bass a little bit higher priority than I would amberjack. That's my personal opinion. Duane.

MR. HARRIS: Correct me I'm wrong, which I know you will, John, but hasn't white grunt been on the schedule before and it keeps getting moved down because of higher and higher priorities, and I see that as just continuing. When you've got species like amberjack and black sea bass, white grunt just kind of pales in comparison to those species.

Is it even realistic to leave it on the schedule for any time in the near future until we get these other fisheries opened back up again after we've had some assessment and they show there has

been significant improvements. I'm just kind of asking the question as to whether it's realistic or not. We keep doing it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think there is a lot of interest in doing white grunt. They've done some data work and they were prepping to do it last year, I guess; and you're right, it has been bumped quite often for other priorities. One thing about it is it's a very important fish in terms of its contribution to the overall fishery.

It's probably at the top of the list of landings for unassessed species that we deal with. There is that concern there about not knowing something about a stock that's a very big contributor to the overall fishery. But, yes, is it as critical to black sea bass or greater amberjack, well, I guess it depends on how you weigh the ACL based on landings versus what may come out of an assessment.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, thank you, John. We need to move on here. Roy.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I was just going to say it seems to me we have a real need for sea bass and it seems to me red porgy ought to be high on the list because we're basically at the end I think of the rebuilding period. I understand the desire to look at some of these unassessed stocks, but it seems to me our highest priority is to confirm that we've ended overfishing and are rebuilding these stocks that have created so many problems for us. It's something to think about.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We're doing a red porgy update this year.

DR. CRABTREE: This year we have a red porgy update?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, red porgy update this year and the rebuilding time I think was 2018, so this should give us a good hint as to where we are. This update should tell us when we should do the next benchmark.

DR. CRABTREE: So that just really leaves sea bass hanging out there that we need to deal with.

DR. DUVAL: Mr. Chairman, that's all I was going to notice that I thought red porgy was already on there, and I would also agree with personally of putting black sea bass ahead of greater amberjack.

DR. PONWITH: To that end, we had a request from the SSC. The SSC set ABCs for 2012 and 2013 fishing year based on SEDAR 24 projections. Those projections included preliminary landings for 2011. They asked if we could go through and adjust those projections using the actuals, and the answer is we do plan on going ahead and adjusting those estimates for the actuals, which tightens up those projections. We can do that based on whatever the best data are at the time when those projections need to be run. If it's with complete final data, fine, we can do that. If it's missing a couple waves, we can do it with the data that are final to that point.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, John, do you want to move to our next agenda item. Who is going to cover the Logbook Pilot Study?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I just wrote up there the recommendation is support 2014 priorities as listed, and then we identify black sea bass and then greater amberjack as standby stocks for 2014. Our next item is the Electronic Logbook Pilot Study. You guys have asked for a presentation for this over the last couple of meetings, and they have been waiting to get the project actually done, get the materials ready, and they'll tell you what it found, and we are there. I believe, Andy, you're going to report on this.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm going to report on the MRIP Logbook Pilot Project in the Gulf and then I'll hand it off to Bonnie Ponwith to discuss the headboat work that was done here in the South Atlantic. Gordon regrets that he couldn't be here, but his wife was receiving an award after 40 years of teaching, so I think he had a pretty good excuse.

To give you an idea of the presentation outline, I'll discuss the National Resource Council and MRIP findings regarding preferred methods for for-hire data collection. I'll then go over the preliminary results of the Gulf of Mexico Pilot Project and then Bonnie will discuss the Headboat Project that was ongoing. With regard to the NRC – I'm not going to read all of this – there were some key findings and statements that they laid out in terms of reporting by for-hire vessels.

Essentially they recommended maintaining logbooks and that be mandatory; and that in collecting this information that we should collect it so that it's verifiable and can be checked to make sure it was accurate as well as that the data is submitted in a timely manner. In developing the pilot project in the Gulf of Mexico, we took into account these three primary factors in terms of designing the pilot study.

There was also an independent panel of experts that made recommendations regarding for-hire data collection. This was done in 2006. They proposed best practices for for-hire surveys, and they provided some additional details on ways that logbook data collection could be conducted. Those details included weekly electronic reporting, complete participation, verification of the data that is being collected, maintaining complete vessel and site frames, as well as probabilistic sampling and weighted to account for differences among sampling sites.

All of this was essentially in designing the Gulf of Mexico pilot. We took into account the recommendations that were made to MRIP and the NRC to design the study, and then that study began in September 2010 and ran for a year. Vessels at the end of the study were informed that they could essentially continue using the reporting program, but it was no longer mandatory to report.

Right now we're in the process of putting together a final report with conclusions and recommendations hopefully this April. What I'm going to be presenting is largely from a presentation that Beverly Sauls gave to the American Fisheries Society Meeting. Beverly worked with a team of individuals including myself to help design the pilot project and run the study, and she has worked up some preliminary information on the project.

You're well aware of the current methodologies for data collection. We conduct data collection through a series of surveys that collect both dockside catch information and phone surveys that collect different information to estimate catch. With this pilot project, the recommended method was essentially to do a census through reporting or test the viability of a census through mandatory reporting.

If you can't achieve a census, then is the logbook data useful and could it be adjusted in some form or fashion to be useful in providing estimates of catch and effort? The survey included two study areas; the northwest Florida coast, which included actually 358 vessels that were selected of which 36 did not report during the entire study; and then Corpus Christi, Texas, which included at the end of the study 58 vessels.

The reason that they embarked on this pilot study is there was a tremendous amount of interest by charter captains, in particular the Panhandle of Florida, to have logbook reporting and so that area was selected as one of the primary areas to test the south but then to also balance that with another area in the Gulf of Mexico that maybe had less support than the Panhandle.

The study design included all for-hire vessels with federal permits. Headboats that participate in the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's Headboat Survey were excluded. Vessels were required to report in order to have their permit renewed. Weekly reporting was required, and it was essentially one week from the Sunday of the reporting week that they were supposed to report. And then self-reported data, there was both effort and dockside validation that was conducted to evaluate the accuracy of the data that was being reported via logbooks.

This gives you a schematic of all of the parties involved. Certainly, this was done by our partner states, for the most part Florida and Texas in conjunction with the Gulf States and the National Marine Fisheries Service, but as you can see the efforts involved the state of Florida and Texas working with the for-hire industry to get weekly reporting either electronic or there was an option for paper-based reporting.

That information was fed into a data base that went to Gulf States. The Gulf States did weekly and monthly tracking of missing reports. If there were missing reports, they came back to the state agencies for followup. There was a lot of phone contact with individuals as well as e-mail reminders and late notices.

What Beverly wanted me to emphasize with you is that this was a very extensive ongoing effort to pursue data collection in order to get people to report in a timely fashion. If they had missing reports and failed to respond to our efforts to contact them, they were added to a non-compliance list that we maintained, and then the permit was put on hold; and when they went to renew their permit, they could not renew their permit without submitting their logbook records.

You can see that it was an intricate process with a lot of people involved to make it happen. For the validation, there were two types of validation. There was fishing effort validation so sites were clustered were clustered into regions. The Corpus Christi Site was essentially region and then the Florida Panhandle was clustered into six separate regions.

Those regions were randomly selected each week and then every vessel at every site in that region was validated. What they were doing was determining if the vessel was in port or out of port; and if it was out of port, determining whether it had gone fishing or had reasons for being out of port.

That was then used to then compare against logbook reports that were submitted after the fact. For the dockside validation of catch, this was similar to what we currently do with our MRFSS and MRIP sampling. Sites were randomly selected based on the proportional size of the fleet at particular sites.

All vessels were interviewed upon returning and then we directly observed the catch, counted fish, weighed fish, measured fish and interviewed the operators for other information such as discards, anglers and effort. All this was then used to compare against logbook records that were submitted for that same trip to see how well they compared against one another.

There was also an at-sea validation component. This once again was used to compare against discard estimates that were being provided by the for-hire captain. We haven't included any preliminary analysis in this presentation, but certainly the thought here is that on-the-water observer coverage is going to be much better than self-reported data, so we wanted to see how well is the self-reported data comparing to the observer coverage.

What I'm going to talk about in the next few slides is just the preliminary results. It goes through reporting compliance and timeliness as of August 2011 and then discusses both the effort validation and effort-and-catch estimation through the first nine months of the project. With reporting compliance, we had full compliance from all of the vessels in Texas.

For the vessels in Florida, recall that there were about six times as many vessels in Florida that we were working with. We had 36 by the end of the study that did not report entirely to us; but as you can see as the study went on that we had improving non-compliance. But with that said, there was still a good portion, about 10 percent of the vessels that were not complying with any of the reporting requirements by the end of the study.

You can see in this – this is from the start of the study to the end of the study – the percent of missing reports in terms of vessels that were supposed to be reporting, and so that reported non-compliance shows throughout the entire time series for Florida because vessels did not report. For Texas you can see that they're down at zero for a bulk of the study, but at the tail end of the study what you're seeing is that there is a larger portion of vessels that are missing reports; and the closer you get to the date that they should have been reporting, the higher the non-compliance is.

Although that reporting timeliness improves over a matter of weeks after when they should have reported, you still don't have that real-time data that you need for a lot of these fisheries if there is going to be a lag of several weeks or in this instance as much as a month and a half. The goal obviously would be to reduce not only the reporting non-compliance in the graphic but also the reporting timeliness to where vessels are reporting as they're supposed to, one week after the week in which they actually conducted those fishing trips.

For effort validation, this is a little bit different than the slide in the presentation that was in the briefing book, but the main point here is the blue bars represent observed vessels that were validated. When they out to sites, they determined how many vessels were in port and out of port and the reasons why they were in or out of port.

As you can see comparing the blue bars to the gold bars, you have to do a tremendous amount of work to validate effort and yet the number of vessels that were actually out fishing is a fairly small percentage of the overall validation that was being conducted. It increases obviously during the summer months in terms of the number of vessels out fishing because that's the peak time period of fishing, but there was a lot of effort expended to validate that in fact boats were going fishing during that time period, but a lot of them were also not going fishing.

That's also important to know when you're looking at logbook records to determine if they were or were not reporting properly. Through the first nine months of the study, the bottom line is that we had an overall compliance rate of about 68 percent; so 32 percent non-compliance. I think what was more concerning to us at the end of the study is that the reasons for not matching were, one, the fact that a lot of people were not filing reports, but more importantly that a vessel erroneously reported that they were inactive when in fact they were out of port fishing and we had validated they were out of port fishing.

Although compliance did improve slightly, it essentially had about a 68 to 70 percent compliance rate during most of the study and did not improve greatly from there. With the effort estimation, what I talked about is if you can't complete a census, well, is the data still useful for other purposes? We looked at three variables to examine differences between what was being collected dockside and what was being collected in logbooks.

We looked at the number of anglers, hours fished and angler hours. Right now there is the for-hire survey that contacts vessels directly and asked them information about trips taken and effort data, so how comparable could this information be with the dockside sampling and the effort sampling if it's collected through logbooks?

The comparisons here, just to get you oriented, the first column is absolute difference, so this is essentially how well did the dockside compare to the logbook, and so there was a mean difference of about a half an angler reported in the dockside intercept compared to the logbook. For hours fished there was about seven-tenths of an hour difference between the dockside and the logbook.

That essentially accounts for both differences that were positive where more anglers or more hours reported as well as differences that were negative in which less anglers or less hours were reported. If you look at it based on an average different you can see that they actually matched up pretty well and angler hours actually were pretty close; less than an hour difference on average.

On an individual basis they may not match up well; but when you look at it on an aggregate basis, they actually matched up fairly well, taking into account both those differences, higher and

lower, results from the two types of sampling. For catch estimation, kind of a similar story; with the harvest there was always a positive bias toward higher estimates from dockside reporting versus logbook – excuse me, more being reported dockside versus logbook.

But if you look at it on average, there really wasn't much of a difference between what was being reported between the two sampling methodologies, so they were very consistent with one another. Statistically they weren't significantly different. The bottom line is what was being reported on average by all of the trips that were validated was consistent with our dockside sampling program, so it was essentially telling the same story.

Based on all this, our take-home message in terms of the conclusions are that a lot of effort was required to start this program up; that achieving compliance is going to take some time; and we certainly improved compliance but we were a long way from having full compliance; and then followup is critical.

It's not going to just be that we require a logbook program and everyone is going to properly report. We're going to have to continually follow up to get buy-in, work cooperatively with the industry, and obviously the goal is to get everyone participating and accurately reporting. In order to do that, we spent a lot of time and effort to go back and get people to report that weren't reporting.

That's a lot of resources and administration of the program that would ultimately have to be scaled up to a lot more vessels if this is used as the primary data collection system. Some other conclusions, as I mentioned the logbook records were not a census. There was certainly missing reports and that was certainly a gap in terms of the success of this project and how scalable it will be in the future. The results, as I said, might not be applicable on an individual basis, but it looks like it could be scalable based on the consistencies we saw between dockside and logbook sampling.

In terms of on average we were seeing consistent results even though they might be biased for one individual or trip one way or another. Certainly, a small monitoring program is likely not going to be sufficient for this and that we're going to have to spend a lot of time and effort to validate logbooks and ensure that the results are going to be comparable to existing surveys.

The good thing was that the logbooks were at least equivalent to the survey methods that are currently in place when we look at average effort and catch for some key species. With that, the reporting period ended in August. We're working on the final analysis. Some of the things that we're going to incorporate in the analysis will be what I just presented; the comparisons of dockside validation and logbook records.

We're also going to discuss the key questions that I think the council is going to be most interested in, which is is the census attainable, what are the resource needs that we're going to have to put into this, how can we improve compliance, what is the cost going to be of such a monitoring program, what is the level of sampling effort needed, as well as if you can't obtain a census what can be done in possibly adjusting that logbook data so it's a viable alternative to a census. All I can say is stay tuned and that report will be forthcoming in the coming months.

With that, I'll leave with the acknowledgment slide as a transition into Bonnie's presentation and I'll field any questions I guess before Bonnie speaks.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, Andy. Any questions for Andy before we get into Bonnie's presentation? Doug.

MR. HAYMANS: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on the committee but did you go to any of the folks who were non-reporting and ask why? Forgive me if I missed that somewhere.

MR. STRELCHECK: I had the unenviable position of being the person they called when their permit was not renewed. There was anything from I wasn't aware of the program requirements, which in some cases was true – in many cases they received a certified letter and signed for it themselves so they somehow forgot – to you're the government and why should I give you anymore information that I already give you and the whole range in between.

There was certainly resistance to is just from the standpoint of it's an additional reporting burden on them. But as I said, there was a strong contingent that wanted to see this happen and believed that everyone was going to report accurately and successfully like they do, and certainly that was not the case based on the results we presented.

I've talked to Ken Brennan a little bit about the results, and he was actually fairly impressed with a 70 percent compliance rate for a pilot study, so I think it is a good step in the right direction. The key is how can you improve to go from 70 percent up to close to a hundred percent with the limitations of staff time, effort and administration.

MR. HARRIS: So, Andy, if you didn't renew their permit and they called you and they didn't have a good excuse, what happened?

MR. STRELCHECK: In order for them to renew their permit, they are referred back to the logbook pilot personnel that collected that data and they had to submit logbook records essentially to account for all of the logbooks that hadn't been submitted during the study. The pitfall with that and the problem with that is that they could be submitting erroneous logbook records for the last 12 months if they did not keep good data records, but they were at least mandated to report what their activity was during that time period.

MR. HARRIS: And those ones that didn't like the government did go ahead and submit those logbooks so that they could get their permit?

MR. STRELCHECK: We still have a list out there of over 30 vessels that have not submitted logbooks to the state. They may not have a valid permit at this point or it hasn't come up for renewal.

MR. CURRIN: Andy, would you care to speculate on increasing compliance if you had showed up on a monthly basis and requested their permits if they had not complied instead of at the end of the year?

MR. STRELCHECK: I think certainly it would help, but I think the challenge still is there are a lot of permits out there and some of these people are hard to reach. Although they have contact information with our permits office and updated it on an annual basis, we've failed to reach a lot of people even through letters and phone calls.

That line I showed earlier that was kind of flat and then increased at the very end, a lot of those people were people that we were just not able to contact during the entire study, and some of those are calling once they try to renew their permit and asking, "Well, what is going on here; I wasn't aware of the program" or "I failed to participate in the program." Yes, certainly, I think a monthly compliance requirement would help. It would definitely improve the timeliness of the reporting. The underlying compliance rate still might be low for those that just don't want to participate entirely.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, we need to move on. Bonnie, do you want to give your portion?

DR. PONWITH: We have spoken about this before, but this project is now complete and the final report has been submitted to the MRIP Program and is under review by the executive committee right now. The project goals for this was to set up a pilot project by soliciting representative vessels to participate, develop electronic logbook software and then implement reporting from these selected vessels using that software.

The vessel operators were asked to fill out their reports in two different ways; the traditional paper reports and then also on the electronic logs as well to be able to do some comparisons. Again, the purpose of the study was to demonstrate electronic reporting to examine its potential and its advantages in improving reliability, the accuracy, compliance and the timeliness of those data.

Here is what the current paper form looks like. The real issue with the paper form is this; the captains would fill these out and then we would have port agents show up on a monthly basis at some prescribed time at the end of the reporting period and pick those logs up. The logs would then go to keypunchers, who would keypunch them and send them as a flat file to the analysts. Between the acquisition of the logbooks and when the electronic data were actually in the analysts' hands to use for estimations, it resulted in like a two- to four-month lag period.

What they did was put out a bid for developing the electronic form. It went out competitively. A company successfully bid for that project and built the forms. The forms were designed to look as much like the paper forms as they could to kind of minimize the learning curve on this. The forms were filled out and transmitted by the headboat vessel staff, and then the data would be made available to NOAA Fisheries Service the second they were uploaded by the users.

The data were validated using port samplers. First of all, the port samplers would go to the individual boats and sample the landings, sample the fish brought back, and that would enable them to take a look at the count and the species in the actual port sample, boots-on-the-dock look at the catch compared to what was reported in the logbook.

The second thing that was done was an effort confirmation; basically how many boats reported that they were out fishing and how many boats did the port samplers actually observe leaving the port to go fishing. In the view of this pilot study it was pretty successful. They had seven vessels involved in this and collected a lot of data.

The overarching observations were that they had better quality control, absolutely reduced data handling and more secure data delivery. The results from this pilot is that we could save two months' time in generating the annual catch and effort estimates, and that's just annual. That doesn't preclude going to something like quarterly estimates.

Again, what we wanted to do was compare the paper versus the electronic reporting for these series of features. In terms of reliability we found that 95 percent of the trips we know that took place were actually reported. On the accuracy, well, you know, this is kind of lukewarm in my mind. They had a 67 percent agreement with the landings.

The accuracy was much higher for snapper grouper species than all species combined; and then in terms of compliance, a 93 percent compliance rate which is basically a trip that was reported by the dockside observers actually reported electronically that they were out as well. Of course, then there is timeliness and that's one I'm going to want to talk a little bit about with you; the mean 20 days between the fishing date and the availability of the data.

Again, there are some features in how we set this up from a regulatory standpoint that will influence that. The recommendation of the folks running the pilot study is that we implement this regionwide, and by regionwide we mean in the Gulf and the South Atlantic. We feel for this to be successful it will require strong technical support going into the transition.

We want to use internet-based software and certainly use the port agents who are known entities out there in the ports as our folks interfacing with the industry and then also review the regulatory infrastructure. Right now there is monthly reporting. Our recommendation is that we go to a regulation that requires weekly reporting for this.

Some of the software recommendations – and again this came from the staff that was running the pilot, but it also came from feedback from the vessels that were participating. They filled out a fairly extensive evaluation and gave some very good feedback that would make this better if we were implementing it full scale; things like including clickable maps, species ID aids, putting features in the software that allows us to figure out what features of the software are most used, and then putting range checks on the data so people couldn't put in a 35-pound guppy on their reports and things like that; and then again catch history query function to make it easier for repeated entries for these captains.

That is the summary of the pilot study, and again the recommendation from the folks running the study as well as from me is that we go ahead and go to electronic reporting for this component of the recreational fishery. The thing that would make this the most useful decision would be to accompany that with a regulation that requires weekly reporting.

I think that would create some very keen advantages. I would enable us to have headboat data that could be used for an index of abundance. It would just be very valuable data, not the least of which it would enable us to have a turnaround on those landings quite a bit faster. One of the questions right now is there is a lag period between when the reporting period ends and when those reports are due.

Currently I believe that lag period is one week. For example, the reporting period is the month of August you must have your paper log prepared to be picked up seven days at the close of that reporting period. For electronic reporting I think we need to talk about this. Would we want seven days at the close of the fishing period, that one-week period, to be when the electronic reports are due or are there advantages to making those reports due on the last day of the reporting period?

The reason I asked that is that what we want to do at all cost is promote filling out those records as close to the day of fishing as possible because I think that has a pretty strong impact on the accuracy of those reports; but the flip side of that is if someone is out on a 12-hour fishing trip, scrubs down the vessel, it would mean having to sit down at the computer and report. Somewhere in there is sort of the sweet spot for the amount of lag you'd want between when the reporting period ended and when you would want those reports submitted. I guess I would close with that and turn it over for questions.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, Bonnie. Are there any questions for Bonnie? Obviously, there is some work that needs to be done here, and our Data Collection Committee will be looking at some of this as a function of their activities. Any questions for Bonnie on her presentation specifically? Seeing none, then we'll move on.

I think this next subject is one that is going to be of a lot of interest to us. This deals with Revised MRIP Catch Estimates and how we might approach having to deal with some of this. I think Russ Dunn, who is the National Recreational Fisheries Coordinator, is going to start off and then Andy is going to follow Russ.

MR. DUNN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to come. As with the previous presentation, I am here, as Andy did, trying to fill the shoes of Gordon Colvin, who sends his regrets. As the chairman said, I'm the National Recreational Policy Advisor. I was here about a year ago or so, a little over a year, and touched base with you on some of the initiatives that NOAA has undertaken in terms of trying to improve our relationship with the recreational community while also improving stewardship of the resource.

We had a fairly successful 2011. Just to touch on a couple of highlights, we held a post-release mortality workshop in Atlanta, a national one, and Duane attended that. That was here actually in Georgia in Atlanta. We completed the 2011 National Angler Saltwater Expenditure Survey, and that will provide us with significantly better economic data come probably at the beginning of 2013.

Each of the regions within the agency developed and released a Regional Recreational Action Plan, which sort of outlines their recreationally related projects and plans for the next year or

year to eighteen months. Of course, what we're here to talk about today, the agency through its MRIP Program revised historic catch estimates of recreational fisheries back through 2004.

With that out of the way, I'm just giving you basically the nickel tour of MRIP, a little refresher; talk about what we found, what we did and then Andy is really going to talk about sort of what it means and where we're going from here. He has the nitty-gritty of what it means for the council here.

As everyone will attest, recreational data has really been an ongoing concern for a number of years for managers as well as fishermen, and everyone recognized the need for more timely, precise and accurate data. With those needs in mind, MRIP was created in 2007 essentially to address the recommendations of the NRC's review of the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and to really try and improve stakeholder confidence in catch and effort estimates, which have not have high traditionally.

Just a real quick overview of the timeline, essentially in 2006 the recommendations and congressional mandates came out. Then the organizational structure and working groups were put in place within the agency in 2007. Research needs and priorities were identified. Then in 2008 research and pilot programs were approved and begun.

In 2009 the Saltwater Registry Rule was published to be implemented a year later in 2010. Also, in 2009 the draft implementation strategy for MRIP was released. Then in 2010 the second round of MRIP-related projects was approved. Last week the operations team for MRIP met to give its approval to the next to the third round of projects. Those should be announced fairly soon.

The executive steering committee of MRIP has until I believe March 20th to provide comment on that so we should see those soon. Obviously, at the beginning of this year the improved methodology and re-estimated numbers were released in late January. As a quick refresher, the NRC Study which was commissioned by NOAA essentially found that there was a mismatch in our surveys between the information that was collected and how that data were used to generate estimates.

This was the result of a series of untested assumptions that NOAA was using in generating its estimates. Ultimately those two factors had the potential to skew our catch estimates as well as give a false indicator of precision of the estimates. This slide essentially gives a snapshot of what we had been doing in the past that was found to be problematic by the NRC and what we are doing differently now.

In short, what the agency did was to eliminate the potential for bias in the estimation methodology by aligning the formulas that were used to produce the catch estimates with the way the data was collected; appropriately weighting the previous collected data to account for sample discretion in surveying alternate sites; and finally dropping alternate mode data that was chosen at the sampler's discretion.

With regard to the re-estimates, another way to think of it is essentially the new methodology down-weighted some data in order to better reflect the reality. The improved MRIP methodology allowed us to go back and recalculate estimates to 2004, and that breakpoint was the result of the fact that there was a different methodology used for collecting data between 1998 and 2003.

That second wave of data, as you're probably aware, we anticipate having revised and available at the end of the summer. Right now in the agenda it indicates August. Hopefully, we will be able to stay on target with that. What we found when we did re-estimate was essentially that for most species there were no specific trends in direction or the magnitude of changes.

Some went up, some went down and some stayed the same. What we also found was that the precision of the estimates was lower. Essentially they are more accurate but they're less precise, and what that means is essentially it's closer to the bulls eye but the grouping isn't as tight. I have the classic illustrative example or analogy here for those non-statisticians like myself.

You can see the first one, the tight grouping is very precise. The middle one is accurate, close to the bulls eye, but it's sort of all over the place. What we are ultimately shooting for is both precise and accurate. A couple of the representative results here; these four species were chosen really because they were representative and we also chose them because they weren't highly contentious examples so people could focus on the trend line as opposed to getting into the specifics of a given species.

You can see that they bounce all around. Sometimes they're higher and sometimes they're lower, but overall they tend to be fairly close together. Sometimes people say, "Well, why is that, that doesn't make sense, you've redone this, you've changed your methodology, we should have seen radically different numbers."

The short explanation is that just because there was the potential for bias does not mean there was actual bias in all cases. In some cases there certainly was. You can see, for example, on this next slide, the Gulf of Maine cod, there was a pretty substantial difference. In that one year of 2009 there is a 51 percent difference in that one year.

Overall the time series the catches under MRIP were 25 percent lower than MRFSS. This was really used to show that in contrast to the previous slide where things lined up nicely, that was not always the case. In fact, the South Atlantic Council has that with some species itself. The one that jumps to mind for me is red grouper. In some cases it's much higher and in some cases it's much lower.

This slide really identifies some of the important recreational species by region just to give you an idea of the range of differences that were seen between MRFSS and MRIP. The slide is based on weight and calendar year except for those with either two or three asterisks, which are then either fishing year or the number of fish. With that, we get into the specifics of the South Atlantic Council, and I'm going to hand that over Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm going to run through examples of eight or ten species that you manage currently. Just to get oriented with the graphics I'm going to be showing, the blue line represents the MRFSS landing estimates. The red line represents the newly revised MRIP landing estimates. The dashed lines are the confidence intervals around the MRIP landing estimates. Down at the bottom you see the red and green bars, and those are done on an annual basis so it gives you an idea of the change relative to MRFSS, either positive or negative, for any particular fishing year for each species.

For sea bass I did not do it on a fishing year. I just did it on an annual basis, but as you can see the trend is largely consistent with MRFSS. The MRIP confidence intervals encompass all of the MRFSS estimates, although there are certainly some differences in 2006, 2007 and 2008. MRIP staff conducted four case studies to look at what was causing some of these differences.

There were going to be looking at further species, some of which I'll be talking about today, to really better understand – we know what changes were made in the methodology, but what specifically were those adjustments pertaining to these particular species that results in those changes.

With black sea bass, what the landings indicate is that the MRIP estimates are greater for North Carolina but less for all the other South Atlantic states. If you single out South Carolina as the example, there was a large reduction in private landings from South Carolina. What they noted was that there was oversampling occurring for angler fishing trips at high activity fishing sites, and so that oversampling was resulting in those catch rates being weighted higher than they should have been.

When you factor in trips that did not catch black sea bass and that were sampled at other fishing sites, it's going to reduce or lower that catch rate; and as a result, it's going to lower your landings estimates that were also being generated through the MRFSS survey. That's why we see a large reduction in private landings from South Carolina as just one example as to how these estimates are changing.

For red snapper you can see once again the error bars surround the MRFSS estimates. The trends are largely the same although there is certainly a consistent overestimation of MRFSS relative to MRIP, so MRIP landings estimates are lower than the MRFSS estimates with the exception of 2006 where they were higher.

Vermilion snapper, a little bit more choppy with MRFSS and MRIP crossing one another in several places, but it looks largely that the early estimates, 2004-2006, were higher for MRIP and then lower for MRFSS, and then it switches in terms of the pattern, but once again largely a consistent trend. It's smoothed a little bit more with MRFSS than it was with the MRIP estimates.

When you get into South Florida species – and you'll notice this trend with yellowtail. I think it might present mutton snapper in here as well as black grouper – what we see is that the MRIP estimates are actually all consistently higher for South Florida species,. Those are the species

that were of most interest to us in looking at case studies to really understand what is causing those differences with the re-estimation.

As you can see, the estimates are consistently higher with the exception of one year for yellowtail snapper, but they're also encompassed within those uncertainty bars. For gag grouper, variable but very similar pattern with 2009 estimate for MRIP being quite a bit higher than MRFSS.

For red grouper, which Russ mentioned, you can see that there is a consistent higher estimate for MRIP compared to MRFSS, but you can also see how large the uncertainty is around the estimates. As Russ mentioned, with the new methodology the uncertainty in the estimates is being better estimated. Previously it was not being estimated appropriately, but in this instance we do have a lot of uncertainty surrounding those estimates.

For black grouper, similar to yellowtail snapper, consistently higher landings estimates being estimated by MRIP versus MRFSS, so there is something going on with how sampling was being conducted and weighted in South Florida in particular that is resulting in the estimates being scaled up for MRIP versus MRFSS.

Greater amberjack, largely overlaying the MRFSS estimates over time with some deviations in a couple of years; and then king mackerel is probably the closest in terms of the estimates compared across years. In fact there was no difference if you looked at the 2004-2011 average landings for king mackerel, but you also that the tight error bars around that so we have a lot of samples being collected with a high level of precision.

And then snowy grouper and golden tilefish, those landings are estimated in numbers so this is all in numbers of fish and not pounds of fish and they're variable, but at least for 2007 forward for snowy grouper, yes, they differ in terms of the amount by fairly high percentages, but in terms of the quantity those differences are fairly small in terms of the overall landing estimates.

Similar with golden tilefish; there is really very little change in terms of the golden tilefish landings estimates compared to MRFSS. The bottom line is what does this mean to you, how are we going to proceed? Obviously, the catch estimate is going to affect our stock assessment results. They can affect the management actions you take in terms of setting catch limits, setting allocations; are we over or under the catch limit; how are we going to monitor the catch limits?

There are certainly some species that have significant changes, so what will those revisions ultimately do in terms of regulatory changes and what will be necessary from the council's perspective? To give you an idea of the implications, you just worked through the Comprehensive ACL Amendments.

By my count, which might not be quite accurate, we have 67 annual catch limits in the South Atlantic, and 6 of those are going to be unaffected by this, so that means 61 are going to be affected by it. ACLs based on landings data will need to be modified when we have the entire time series that ACL was based off of.

We believe we can do that through a regulatory amendment for the species that have allocations, which is everything for the most part in the South Atlantic. Those include landings data through 2008, but a lot of them extend back into the nineties – in fact, I think most of them – so those are going to require a potential modification by the council.

If you want to look at revising your allocations, if they're based on landings data that would have to be done through a plan amendment. We have a lot of species that are assessed and these are the list of species that I could come up with in terms of needing to incorporate this new data when available into updated or benchmark stock assessments.

From the standpoint of the SEDAR Steering Committee and the Science Center, certainly I think there will need to be some discussions about whether certain species will need to be prioritized over others based on the magnitude of changes and what impact those changes may or may not have on the stock assessment.

There is also a jurisdictional apportionment for at least three species in South Florida that would have to be addressed based on these changes. As we transition, starting in 2013 MRFSS will no longer exist in terms of a sampling survey. We're only going to be able to generate estimates through the new MRIP methodology.

We will have the benefit of 2012 to generate estimates side by side; but because of the implementation of new sampling programs and protocols in 2013, that will no longer exist. Our transition strategy that we're proposing to you and that would be beneficial for you to discuss at this meeting is to initially coordinate with your Scientific and Statistical Committee to review this information and how we're going to proceed.

Some immediate questions will be how do we monitor the ACLs that are currently on the books; but then also as we head down the road, how are the acceptable biological levels and catch limits going to be adjusted into the future and over what timeframe? As I mentioned, reviewing the stock assessment schedule and determining the priorities for stocks that might be most affected by the transition to MRIP will be a key transition strategy.

John will be talking about the Calibration Workshop coming up, but we have a Calibration Workshop scheduled for the end of March. This is to deal with estimates prior to 2004 and to figure out a way that we can calibrate the landings estimates for those years where we have not been able to revise the estimates consistent with what we did for 2004-2011.

The Science and Technology Section in headquarters at this point is planning on revising estimates between 1998-2003, but that exercise won't be done until probably late August. Based on all these findings, begin reviewing and revising management measures as necessary through your regulatory and plan amendment process.

I've put together a schematic of at least one potential timeline. I would have to admit that this is probably overly optimistic, but we've essentially released the estimates in January. We're here at the March meeting giving you essentially the initial first look at what the implications might be. As I mentioned, we'll have this Calibration Workshop in late March. From that the SSC is

going to be meeting in April, and I know this is going to be at least an initial discussion with them.

Certainly, they're not going to have all the data and information they need to revise ABCs at that point. What we're proposing is that in June you would begin working on necessary regulatory and plan amendments, at least beginning development of those initially or at least the structure. The Calibration Workshop results and MRIP estimates for 1998-2003 would be released in late June to late August, so that information will be coming available during the middle of the year.

From there a lot of work begins with council staff and with the regional office to take that data, prepare it for SSC review as well as continued work on the amendment with recommendations and information coming from the SSC in October and then the council, depending on where we're at at that point, taking final action in December or more likely in March of 2013.

It's certainly an ambitious timeline, to say the least. A lot of things have to fall into place. A lot of things can't move forward until we have some decisions made with regard to the Calibration Workshop as well as the revised estimates for 1998-2003. That gives you at least a sense with regard to modifying ACLs for unassessed species what would need to be done.

Where we're heading; improved catch estimation methodology is being implemented now. We are going to continue pilot testing this year, finish that up. We're going to implement survey design improvements for both dockside and effort surveys starting in 2013. We're moving toward enhancing timeliness and geographic level reporting.

For those that might have seen it, we did release the findings of the Timeliness Workshop from this past year. Those discuss in more how we're going to make those improvements. The improvements are largely related to the pilot projects we just discussed, the logbook reporting, angler dockside intercept survey complementing the improved catch estimation, utilizing the Saltwater Angler Registry and other more frequent ways of reporting and posting estimates.

All of that will begin, as I mentioned, in 2013. For those that are interested, the end of this presentation has comparisons in terms of numbers of fish and not just pounds of fish. Also, you can go to the NMFS Website where the comparison query is, and you can compare any variety of species that you want to just to give you an idea of how the estimates compare to one another. I'll take any questions.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, Andy. Boy, if anybody thought we were about to get ahead of the curve a little bit, I think you can lay that to rest. Questions for Andy? Mac.

MR. CURRIN: Andy, it seems to me that the problems our SSC is going to have are going to be very similar, if not common, with all of the other council SSCs as far as calibration, having to deal with the data before 2004 and figure out some methodology or approach to make that useful.

Is there some risk we're running or on the other hand would there be some value in having all the SSCs come to some common decision on an approach for that or is that just expected to bounce

around and then everybody and then everybody is ultimately going to get on the same page and utilize it or take the same approach in the calibration effort?

MR. STRELCHECK: The Calibration Workshop, which John can talk more about, that's going to involve personnel and other people from the northeast and southeast. Those are the two regions that are affected by these revisions to MRIP and not the west coast. The goal there is to come up with a consistent approach that would be recommended. It will be peer reviewed by the Center for Independent Experts.

That's why it would take from the end of March until June some time to get a final report. Once that's peer reviewed and accepted, that would be the approach we would use to move forward. Now, the challenges overlaying that is we're looking at calibrating pre-2004 but we're also at the same time revising estimates for 1998-2003, so that calibration might only apply to pre-1998 data at some point. But in answer to your question, absolutely we're wanting consistency not so much at how the SSCs apply it but in terms of just the recommended approach that's going to be taken by the agency.

MR. HARRIS: Mr. Chairman, I'm pretty much brain dead, but let me see if I understood or misunderstood something, Andy. I thought I saw a slide that suggested that we wouldn't be making changes to some of these ACLs for stocks that have been assessed based on these new data until we have an update assessment. Am I right?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, because those ACLs are set based on the assessment result, so you can't just simply go in and update an assessment with new landings data. You've got to add in the catch-per-unit effort and all the other data that would be available since you last ran that assessment. To the extent that the estimates are very consistent with one another, those might be less priority to look at in terms of updates versus ones that deviate greatly.

DR. CRABTREE: But even for assessed stocks – for example, yellowtail snapper I think is based on an assessment although I'm not sure of that – we're still going to have to do something in cases where there are significant differences in the landings. That may be to apply some sort of correction to the ABC. I'm not sure what we're going to do there. I think we're going to need the SSC to help us out with that. We're going to have to do something in cases where there is a substantial disparity even for the assessed stocks until we're able to get the assessments redone and factored in.

MR. CUPKA: And you can see of the difficulties staff and us have had trying to plan some of these activities because we don't know exactly what is going to be involved, but we do know it's going to be a significant amount of work involved. We've got this on top of everything else we're trying to accomplish. Duane.

MR. HARRIS: Mr. Chairman, with respect to what Roy just said, is it possible that we would be simply adding error on top of error in taking something like yellowtail snapper where there was a wide disparity in the estimates and just trying to come up with some kind of correction factor when it was an assessment based on the MRFSS data and now we've got new data and simply going to try to tweak it in some way – I'm somewhat uncomfortable with that.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I'm uncomfortable with it, too, but I don't think we have the capacity to rerun all of the assessments this year and update everything and rerun them. There is no question that there is more uncertainty in the yellowtail assessment than we knew before because we know now catches are quite a bit different than what they were, and we don't know exactly how that might change the outcome. We're going to have a transitional period here that's probably going to last a couple of years until we get these assessments redone.

Probably as we go through the SEDAR priorities, we need to think about making some of these stocks a higher priority where we see big differences in the catches. I don't have another solution to it in the transitional period other than to apply some sort of corrections factor that adjusts for it as best we can until we're able to rerun these assessments. John, they just ran a yellowtail snapper assessment; do we have those results yet?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, they're putting it out for a CIE review and that's probably going to be wrapped up in May or so, I think.

DR. CRABTREE: I had spoke to the folks at FWRI who were doing that about doing some sensitivity runs to look at what happens if the recreational catches are highly higher than we thought and how would that change things. I don't know if they did that or not, but that would be one way to look at how much uncertainty does this interject into things.

MR. CURRIN: Just one question – Andy or anybody that could address it, possibly – I'm just real curious about the South Florida data and why there are several species that are showing distinct trends and almost indicates an opposite bias from the biases that were addressed in the MRIP corrections; any speculation or has anybody given any thought or come to any conclusions about what might be going on there?

MR. STRELCHECK: I hate to speculate. Certainly, we're asking and looking into it. Those are some key species that we want more information on. What has been the story so far from the case studies has to deal with how they were estimating catch rates and the bias I spoke to earlier about over or under sampling of high or low activity sites. In this instance what likely is driving this is that there was an underestimation of catch rates that has now been corrected and it is actually resulting in higher catch rates than we were previously estimating.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yellowtail snapper is interesting. Roy mentioned the big differences and we hadn't seen that if you look at the South Atlantic. Under the queries you can look at the South Atlantic by state and you can look at the Gulf of Mexico by state. The change in yellowtail snapper is in the Gulf of Mexico version of the changes, so I guess it's sort of the western and southern sides of Florida there where that is going on, which is interesting, but it holds with what you said. There are a number of species down there in southern Florida that seem to show some of the bigger changes.

MR. WAUGH: I was just wondering if any evaluation had been done about soliciting help from other NMFS centers to just redo the assessments that have been done, just replacing the MRFSS

numbers with the MRIP numbers where we have them. It seems that might give us a better idea of what is going on, particularly if this calibration approach fails.

DR. PONWITH: It never hurts to ask and I'm certainly willing to do that. I know that everybody has a lot on their plate. We're particularly impacted by this. I will absolutely be willing to make a case to my colleagues, the directors of the other science centers and our chief scientists, with that proposal of could we bring in a SWAT team and do a rerun.

DR. CRABTREE: But I'm not sure it as simple as just update the MRFSS numbers or the MRIP numbers, because if you have an assessment that's two or three years old I think it would be a problem to rerun it without pulling in the more recent three years. If you do that, then I think you have to update the other indices or it seems to me there are questions about is it based on best available science at that point.

The positive side of this is if you think about it – the SSC gives us new ABCs – if you don't want to change anything; those ABCs basically we have the control rules and they'll convert into ACLs and there are not many decisions to be made. With the allocations, if we don't want to change the years or anything and assuming we have a calibration factor to apply to the earlier years, you plug in the new numbers and here are the new allocations, and there really aren't many decisions to be made.

I think it's only where we may decide, well, we don't want to use the earlier years before corrected MRFSS and things like that where we start getting into alternatives and analyses and things. But, to the extent that we just recalculate things, it may not be that demanding on our part.

MR. CUPKA: Well, as we can see there is a lot of work ahead for everyone. John, do you want to briefly tell us a little bit about this upcoming Calibration Workshop.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, we have sort of talked about this topic, and what is coming up here soon, at the end of this month, is an MRIP/MRFSS Calibration Workshop. SEDAR is working cooperatively with the MRIP folks on putting this together. The idea is to discuss methods of doing the calibration.

The workshop is not going to provide us calibrated numbers or anything of that sort. They're going to talk about whether it's possible to do some calibration that would give us MRIP equivalent estimates prior to 2004. They're also going to discuss how these MRIP numbers, whether they're from earlier than 2004 or just 2004-2011, how those can be implemented within our assessment program.

I'll be talking about SEDAR and how we handle their assessments and there will be others speaking about the SARC program from the northeast and how their assessment process works and how they could funnel new numbers into them. The group is going to try to come up with some recommendations.

In terms of how you get the numbers into an assessment system are going to be things to consider. The SEDAR Steering Committee may wish to prioritize the stocks that they think need to be addressed in this. Part of this is going to be some evaluation from the Science Center, as I understand it, of some potential impacts on assessed stocks of looking at these numbers.

Both the Northeast and Southeast Center folks are going to be involved in doing that and presentations on that. There will be a lot of discussion of other types of data changes and methodological changes over the years and how they were calibrated; looking at experiences not just within this type of data collection system but a variety of other systems to try and see what sort of calibration techniques even exist.

Hopefully the workshop is going to tell us if a farther back in time calibration is possible, give some best practices for how we implement these new numbers into our respective assessment programs. As you can see, that's pretty much what the term of references address. As Andy mentioned, it's going to be sent out for a desk review from the CIE so that adds a little bit of time, but we do expect the final report, say – you know, funneled through CIE and everything and have it by July 1st at the latest.

We will have it for our September meeting and we will have it for the SSC at that time. Depending on the findings, maybe we have to convene an earlier SSC meeting or something and we'll just deal with whatever we have to deal with when the time comes as sort of our plan. There is a lot riding on this and we're really interested in what it is going to show us, but at this time it's kind of open. We haven't seen any preliminary analyses and no preliminary evaluation so we really don't know what to expect. Are there any questions on that workshop?

MR. CUPKA: We are involved I guess in inviting the participants to that and there will be representatives from the SSC as well as staff and other people.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's right, David, each of the councils along the Atlantic from New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic are invited to send a staff representative and an SSC representative to the workshop. The SEDAR is providing some support to them for travel for the non-federal people, and then there is a load of federal participants as well.

The next item then is Volunteer Angler Data Workshop. There was a webinar held about this, one of many programs that MRIP has been working on over the last couple of years to try and deal with these data changes and figure out unique and innovative ways of dealing with recreational data.

There were some council members who were pretty interested in this, and I just wanted to share some of my observations on listening to this. It was an interesting webinar. They had presentations from around the country on how people deal with voluntary angler data. There is a lot of different kinds of volunteer angler data that is out there.

There is a lot of promise, I believe, and some of the most effective ways of using volunteer angler data is when it's really focused on a specific question, and one of the things that has

emerged is when you start dealing with, for example, discards. You don't have any biological sampling at the dock of discards because they were thrown back.

Observers don't really work that well on private recreational vessels so a lot of areas have had success in using volunteer anglers to measure discarded fish. A good example is in the striped bass assessment, and some programs that popped up in some of the New England states were very helpful as discards became the primary mortality source in that fishery.

New Jersey has followed with some of that and you have sort of seen that grow into other states where focusing on particular fisheries where there is a lot of interest and people are willing to give you more detailed information that you otherwise have very scant data; they're proving useful in filling certain specific data gaps. Florida had some examples with their snook program.

We've certainly seen a lot of examples where this goes on in freshwater lakes; you know, creel cards and stuff. A lot of times in trout rivers and stuff there is volunteer angler reporting opportunities where you can provide that detail. It seems as far as its use in assessments, one of the biggest problems in comparing volunteer angler data – and no one has really cracked this one yet – comparing it to like an MRIP program is – you know, you just don't know the people who are reporting and how representative they are of the fishery as a whole.

I think about that and I say the biggest problem is that you went out fishing and you didn't catch any fish, you're very unlikely to report that through some sort of volunteer program. People tend to report when they catch fish or when they have really good days and not the really bad days or when they catch nothing, so you sort of have the zero problem, which greatly limits your use of this for like a CPUE index.

It's interesting with all the people working on it in the different areas it's a good opportunity to kind of let the knowledge base expand quite rapidly and we expect that over time we might come up with better ways of using these data sets. The states themselves are working on some really neat things. I know North Carolina and Virginia both have programs where you can voluntarily go in and record your data in an online system.

Sort of the carrot in that sense is that you can get a report on where you fished and what your own CPUE is and everything like that. That could be really useful, too, I think in the future, at least until everyone starts taking fishing log records like Wilson Laney when he goes fishing. It was an interesting thing and I'm glad that MRIP is doing this kind of stuff and working on it and collaborating with others and hopefully we'll be seeing more of this down the road and the MRIP system would be able to bring in types of data like this as the bugs get worked out on them.

MR. CUPKA: All right, thank you, John. Our last item is the steering committee. The steering committee is slated to meet this coming May and we're going to be meeting by webinar. We've given you some guidance on the scheduled discussion. I don't know if you need anything else at this time. Obviously, there will be some things coming out of the workshop at the end of the month that will fit into that. If you think you have what you need at this point, we'll not worry about it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I have what I need. If everyone feels like they've given me all I should know, then we're good.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, is there any other input for John on our steering committee? The main thing is we will be discussing the schedule and all, and I think we have input for that. Is there any other business to come before the committee? Seeing none, then we are adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 5:37 o'clock p.m., March 7, 2012.)

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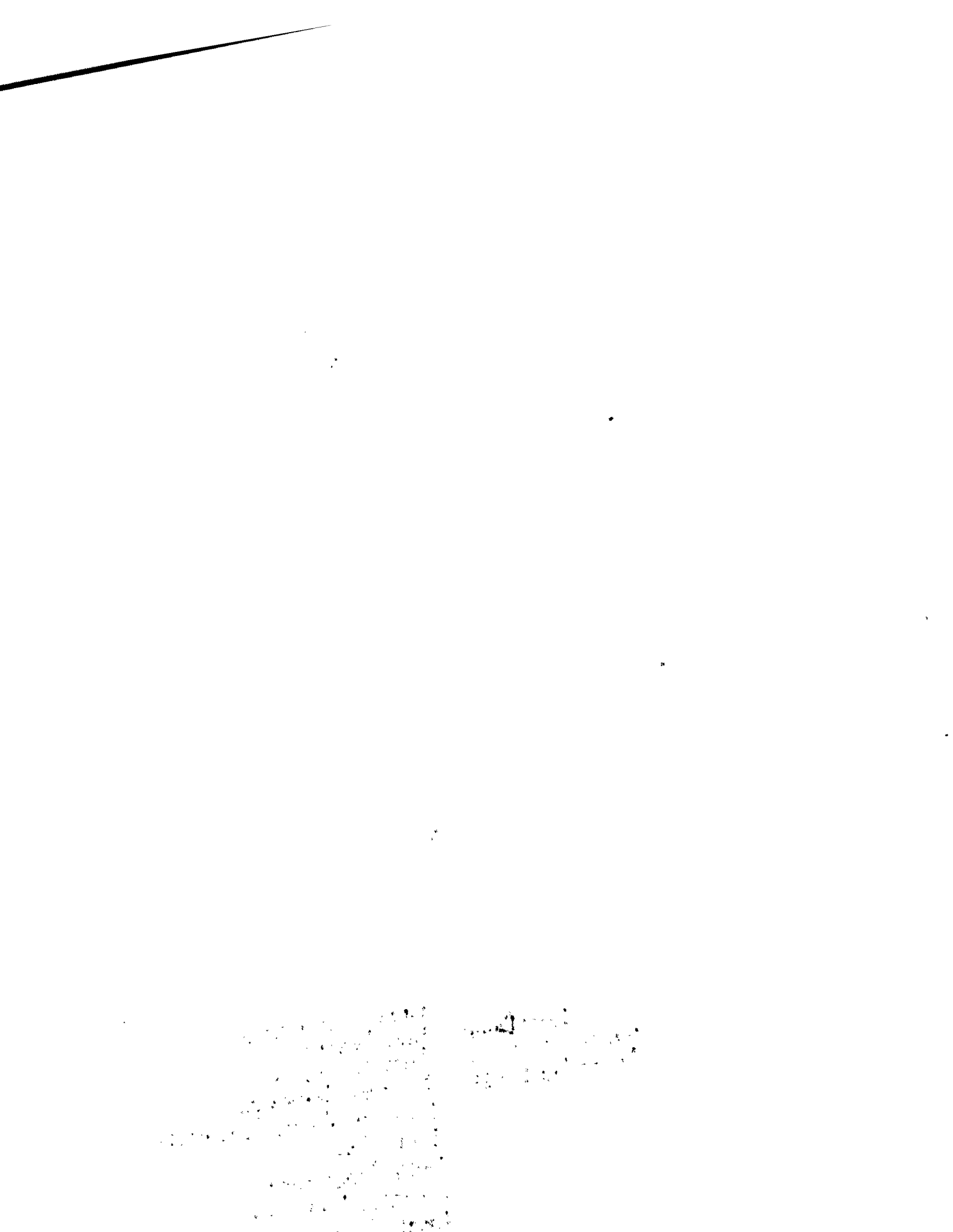

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Charlie Phillips
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Duane Harris
Doug Haymans
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Roy Crabtree, Chair
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✓ Ben Hartig, Vice-Chair
✓ Michelle Duval
✓ Duane Harris
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PLEASE SIGN IN

So that we will have a record of your attendance at each meeting and so that your name may be included in the minutes, we ask that you sign this sheet for the meeting shown below.

SEDAR COMMITTEE MEETING
March 7, 2012
Savannah, GA 31401

NAME & ORGANIZATION	AREA CODE & PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	P.O. BOX/STREET CITY, STATE & ZIP
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Sherri McCoy	321-868-0500	sherrim@wildoceanmarket.com	715 N. Tropical Trail Merritt Island, Fl. 32953
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Phil Conkle	843-251-1437		11249 Campfield Cr Jacksonville, FL 32256
P.O. Box 970 Wando, SC 29578			

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SEDAR COMMITTEE MEETING
March 7, 2012
Savannah, GA 31401

NAME & ORGANIZATION	AREA CODE & PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	P.O. BOX/STREET CITY, STATE & ZIP
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