

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SEDAR COMMITTEE**

**Westin Jekyll Island  
Jekyll Island, GA**

**March 6, 2017**

## **SUMMARY MINUTES**

### **Committee Members:**

Dr. Michelle Duval, Chair  
Mel Bell  
Chester Brewer

Charlie Phillips  
Zack Bowen  
Chris Conklin

### **Council Members:**

Anna Beckwith  
Tim Griner  
Doug Hayman  
Jessica McCawley

Mark Brown  
Ben Hartig  
Dr. Wilson Laney  
Lt. Tara Pray

### **Council Staff:**

Gregg Waugh  
Dr. Brian Chevront  
Mike Collins  
John Hadley  
Dr. Kari MacLauchlin  
Roger Pugliese  
Cameron Rhodes

John Carmichael  
Dr. Chip Collier  
Dr. Mike Errigo  
Kim Iverson  
Kimberly Cole  
Amber Von Harten

### **Observers/Participants:**

Erica Burgess  
Dr. Marcel Reichert  
Dr. Bonnie Ponwith  
Leann Bosarge  
Kristin Foss

Rick DeVictor  
Dr. Jack McGovern  
Monica Smit-Brunello  
Dewey Hemilright

Other Observers/Participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Westin Jekyll Island, Jekyll Island, Georgia, Monday morning, March 6, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Michelle Duval.

DR. DUVAL: We are going to call to order the SEDAR Committee. Before I turn things over to John, I am going to turn things over to Amber to walk through the public comment online.

MS. VON HARTEN: Gregg had just asked me to go over the online comment form again. I know I sent you guys that email late last week, but just so we can go on the record to show everybody how this works. Every council meeting, you can always go to the council meeting page, and there will be this summary of all the links that you need for the meeting. We have our meeting details page, which has little drop-down menus, and get used to this kind of format, with the drop-down menus, because there is lots of pages on our website like that. It's a great way to condense information, so it's more readable.

This is where people can go to learn about the schedule at a glance, the webinar registration links, in-person comments, and then the written comments, where it has the instructions, the deadlines for submission, and the direct links to submitting comments as well as reading comments, and so that's one way.

There is also the direct links to the form from the meeting page. There is also a link to it on the briefing book page, and then, of course, you can read all the public comments, which is what I hope everybody has discovered at this point. Let's see what the number is today. It's 593 comments. That has got to be a record.

As I pointed out in the email, I just wanted to make sure that everybody understood that obviously this summary of comments is directly linked to the form, and so all the fields in the form can be displayed on the summary of comments, but, in order to keep it clean, I only have the name, state, and the comment displayed, but, if you do want to expand that, you can go to this little green button here with the white "+" sign, and here is the list of all the columns. You can turn them all on or turn on the other different ones that you want, so that it will display, but this is a pretty clean way to display it, and, of course, they are displayed in the order that they were received, from the oldest to the newest.

Then, to download all the comments, you just click this "export data" button up here, and you can save it to your computer in different types of file formats, and so I just wanted to make sure that everybody was aware of that. That's probably how we'll also do briefing books and things like that for AP meetings and other things as well.

MR. BELL: That is really great, and I didn't know about the little green button, but that's good. Is there an ability to -- There is a lot of comments this time in particular. If you wanted to query or somehow -- If you wanted to query them by topic, is there a possibility to add a field to do that at some point, like if you had a series of topics that were numbered or something? Then you could kind of -- If you just wanted to look at what people were saying about a particular thing, can you do that?

MS. VON HARTEN: The way it's set up now, I had these topic-specific columns in the field that you could select about what your comment specifically addressed. It's a check-box kind of

function, because, a lot of times, people comment on multiple things in one comment. Then, unfortunately, I have found that people end up just checking all of them. There is a way that -- If you download it to an Excel spreadsheet, then you could do your sort that way, but I will keep looking to see how -- There is different ways to do this, and, please if you have any comments or suggestions for the future, let us know, because we can change it.

MR. CONKLIN: I was seeing the drop-down box, where you can click the date thing, but there were so many comments, so many people that had made comments, that I was trying to wade through and trying to figure out if they actually made them or not, and I was wondering if we could get the date on there all the time, but maybe it was just me not being familiar with how to use it.

MS. VON HARTEN: I thought it was on here, because it said it's selected. Maybe it's just the way that this screen is set up. See that it has the date created, and it's on. I don't know why it's not displaying. Let me play with it, and I will see what I can find out.

MR. CONKLIN: Yes, because I just couldn't figure out if 1 was the last comment made or the first and stuff like that.

MS. VON HARTEN: You can always tell with this one, because Kari did a test entry, back when the form first went live, and so that's the oldest entry, from the 17<sup>th</sup> of February. The very last comment, Number 593, is from probably today.

MR. BROWN: Amber, there is no way that you can keep the fields -- When you're looking through there, you've got to keep entering the fields every time, so you can look at whatever -- I mean, it starts at zero every time when you open it up, and is that right?

MS. VON HARTEN: Yes, it will start from the oldest entry first.

MR. BROWN: No, I'm talking about looking at the different fields in the file.

MS. VON HARTEN: If you close your browser, you're going to lose the selections you had, and so you have to do it each time, yes. There is no way to -- Unless I permanently change it to show certain columns, which it seems like everybody likes how clean it is.

MR. BROWN: Can you click a certain column and then print all of those out?

MS. VON HARTEN: If you save it to an Excel spreadsheet you can. I don't know. I have never tried to print it, and so you have to export the data to an Excel spreadsheet, and then you could click the column that you want that way.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Amber. Ben. One more question and then we're going to move on, because we only have a short time for SEDAR.

MR. HARTIG: I appreciate that email you sent out. The only thing I was wondering is all the public comments that we have received for the March meeting can be accessed through everything

you've got on this page? Okay. I mean, I have accessed as much as I can, and I mean the scoping comments and the webinar comments and --

MS. VON HARTEN: The scoping and public hearing comments were packaged by staff by amendment, and so those are under the committees, but, from the briefing book, the transcripts from all the hearings and the webinars are on the briefing book page, at the bottom, below all the tabs, but, yes, this is all the comments that we have received for this council meeting.

There is a couple that came in that were either mailed that I think Mike had scanned, and there is an Other Comments Folder, and I think there's like two in there, but we shouldn't have to use that anymore, now that we have the ability to attach files to the comment form, and so this should streamline everything in the future, to have just one place to look.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Are we ready to move into the SEDAR Committee? Okay. We don't have a very long period of time scheduled for this committee today, and just to remind folks that the committee members are myself, Charlie Phillips, Mel Bell, Zack Bowen, Chester Brewer, Bob Beal, who is not here, and I thought we had added Mr. Conklin at the last meeting.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If you thought he did, then you can say that he is.

DR. DUVAL: I know that we discussed this at the last meeting, and I believe it's in the minutes, actually. Chris was added, and he also sent an email to that effect at the last council meeting, to be added to this committee, and so I just want the record to reflect that as well.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Done.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. So the first item, and this is very nicely laid out in your overview, is the SEDAR Projects Update, and so I'm going to turn it over to John to quickly run us through this.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I will follow your lead with the emphasis on "quickly", and so you have the full list of everything that is underway, and there are many projects underway right now for SEDAR in the South Atlantic. We have black grouper, which Florida is working on, the update for the standard for black sea bass, which is getting started, blueline tilefish, which seems like it's been going on for years and years, and red grouper is pretty well wrapped up. That will be available for the SSC in April, and we're looking forward to that.

Vermilion snapper will get started later in this year, and I will pause here and highlight that we will make appointments and approve the terms of reference for vermilion snapper at the June meeting, and so I wanted to give you advance warning here of that, so you can think about who you would like to see taking part in that assessment and if there is any issues that you would like to have added to the terms of reference.

The default ones are provided as Attachment 1. We will take these to the SSC at their next meeting and see any comments that they may have, but then we'll hope to make all of these appointments and approvals at the June meeting. Hopefully, to help the appointment process go faster, if folks can start thinking about who you might like to come, whether to represent your fishery industry or your local state scientists and such. Give that some thought now, so this can go smooth, and maybe

get it all wrapped up in June, if we can. Then the next item is the MRIP revisions. Is this about the vermilion or the MRIP?

MR. CONKLIN: It was about vermilion. I was just wondering if there was any way that we could send a request over to the Beaufort Lab for what kind of gaps they're looking to fill in the BAM model that we could add to the terms of reference, because, in the red snapper, there was a lot of discussion about it wasn't in the terms of reference, and then we spent another year or two going back and forth and redoing stuff, because of that, and so I wanted to make sure that, when we come in June, that especially for vermilion, being the economic driver it is in our commercial fishery, that we get it right the first time.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and we will. In fact, the way we do it is the terms of reference go to the Science Center team first, and so we try to get their comments before they go to the SSC and then to you, and so I think that may have been forwarded to them. If not, it will be soon, so that we have their comments back for the SSC consideration in June.

DR. DUVAL: Just to that point, Chris, I think in December, when we were looking at the terms of reference for the black sea bass standard, which is SEDAR 56, which is underway right now, we did add a little bit more specific language with regard to, I think, documentation of any changes to the model and specifically what impacts that had on the assessment. We just expanded on that particular term of reference for SEDAR 56, and so I don't know if that's kind of what your comments are aimed at. Okay. We can definitely do that when we see those terms of reference in June.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. The MRIP revisions, and so just a quick reminder that this is to update some of the latest assessments with the revised MRIP data that is expected to become available later this year. It doesn't advance any of the terminal years, but it just revises one data series. That's why they're called revisions as opposed to updates.

What we have learned recently is that the review of the calibration methods, which was expected for this spring, is now likely not to be held until late summer or fall, and so that means that the calibration information, the calibrated data, will not be available for assessments beginning in late summer or fall, most likely, and the other issue is that the third year of side-by-side data was funded, which means that is going on through this year.

At the end of this year, the complete dataset of three years of side-by-side new survey and existing survey will be available, and so the recommendation now is coming forth that we may want to hold off on doing these revisions until 2018, when we have the final calibration, with all three years of information. I think that's something -- We will certainly bring this up at the Steering Committee, but that seems to be a consensus that's moving up through the calibration group as well as the regional leadership at the Science Center and the Regional Office as well, and I think the councils are probably going to be onboard with that also.

DR. DUVAL: Questions? Ben.

MR. HARTIG: That's what I was interested in. I mean, there's like two kinds of reviews. There was one in Bonnie's letter, talking about looking at it, and I don't know what the details are. I don't think there were many details in that statement, but there is interest in looking at that from

whatever they think they ought to look at it, and I would be interested in that as well, in what they're looking at. I had some things that I think that they ought to look at to tie into that.

I mean, one of the things we've never looked at is these intercepts and weather. Basically, if you look at an intercept that comes in and it's way out of line, and the weather is horrible, how does that play into your calculations? I mean, that's just an additional thing that I was thinking that you might want to look at.

DR. PONWITH: I think John did a really good job of capturing where we're at. We put a placeholder in the schedule for FY 2017, based on two years' worth of data collection for the effort estimation process, so that we had a way to be able to take a preliminary look at the impacts of that change of the effort estimation process and understand what its implications are for landings, for discards, for allocations, commercial and recreational, and we put that in there because we plan our schedule far enough out that it made it difficult to know that far in advance what we were going to be looking at for these changes.

The closer we get to actually having the data in our hands and the methodology ready, the more we are realizing that -- Just looking at this, based on what data are in hand, some of the species that we're working with, the changes are going to be big, and so our concern is that doing those MRIP adjustments based on two years' worth of data and based on the preliminary peer review of the methodology may result in us looking at it one time in 2017 and then having to turn right back around and revisit in 2018, when we have that third year worth of data.

We have had some discussions within the Science Center, among ourselves, and we've discussed this between the Science Center and the Regional Office, and we have also had some conversations with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, to kind of compare and contrast what our strategy is against what they're doing up there, and the direction we're leaning right now is that we feel like we may be better advised to wait until we have that third year worth of data, which is being collected right now, to really get that to stabilize out and make sure we have the full suite of information in our hands before we make those adjustments. That is where we're sitting right now.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Bonnie. Any other questions on the MRIP revisions at this point? Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Then the last item was the stock ID meristics workshop, which has been postponed indefinitely, and the intent is to address that for the upcoming assessments of scamp and cobia through the research track process, and that's the ongoing projects.

DR. DUVAL: All right. Any questions on the ongoing projections? All right. Then we move into what's really the meat of our discussion today, and that is our long-term assessment priorities, and John put together a very helpful document, which is Attachment 3 in your briefing materials under Tab 2.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You have that and then you have the spreadsheet, which was Attachment 2, which shows you the scoring, and the information that's in the document is just referring back to that throughout for a number of those categories.

The idea that I had, in putting this paper together, was to try to understand why some of the stocks came up like they did, which I felt was part of the concern at our last discussions and why we wanted to look at this in depth, and so hopefully I identified a few traits of those stocks, and I certainly learned a little bit more about how all the pieces of that prioritization tool come together and what the effects are, in some cases, of how blanks are filled in for stocks where we don't have particular information, and so not to just -- It may be best just to open it up and see what thoughts people have on this and where you want to go, but, hopefully, in the end, we're going to come up with a list of species that we think are ones we need to prioritize for assessments and get some sense of how often we need to do these different stock assessments.

DR. DUVAL: If you recall, in December, when we looked through the stock assessment prioritization tool spreadsheet, there was some conversation among the committee that we kind of wanted to be able to revisit this spreadsheet ourselves and perhaps dig into a little bit more why some of the stocks turned out the way they did, in terms of ranking and the priorities from that tool, and recall that we had several members of our advisory panels, and it was not an exhaustive representation, but we did have several members of our advisory panels participate at the SSC's October meeting in going through this spreadsheet.

There are a number of different inputs that rely on -- They are basically subjective inputs, I guess you could say, with regard to recreational importance, subsistence, constituent demand, et cetera, and so that's what we had those folks sitting around the table for, was to provide some of that sort of waterman experience, in that regard, and I think that folks were a little bit -- Some folks were a little bit surprised at how the ranking for these species turned out, as a result of that prioritization, and so John put this paper together to try to help us understand why things turned out the way they did, and so I think, if folks have questions in that regard or thoughts on how you want to use this tool, there is a couple of different options I think that we could use.

I would, again, remind folks that this tool is simply -- It is one more piece of information. It is not a hard-and-fast endpoint to our decision-making process, but I think you want to be able to justify why you would rearrange your priorities, given the use of this tool. I think, looking ahead, we want to make sure that we fully detailed how we used the tool and how we're justifying, I think, the inputs that we are providing under each of these tabs so that they are reflective of what we believe the priorities are, and so I will open it up. Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: Thank you, Madam Chair. To that point, we're the boss of this tool. The tool is not the boss of us, and so this is just getting at what you were saying. The notion is that we used a lot of the decision-making tools embedded in this tool in the way that stock assessments were prioritized in the past, but it was just sort of internally integrated. This is a more explicit way to take a look at each of those considerations, of why this one this year and not that one, and actually be more methodical about how that information is considered.

We are the boss of this tool and not the other way around. With that said, if the tool, after this methodical approach, tells us that the outcome, that, mathematically, here is the quantitative outcome of that, having a way to logically walk through that and say, yes, this is what the tool told us that we should be doing, based on the weighting and scoring that we've agreed to, but we want to take a different approach to those prioritizations, and that rationale would be a good thing to talk about on the record, to help us be better users of the tool and also to help understand and refine the way that tool is constructed in the first place. It's just a much more methodical way of helping

to make the decisions that we've been making all along, by kind of internally integrating that information.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Bonnie. So I think what -- John has divided this document into several different sections, and the first one of those is future assessment candidates, and there is several bulleted items for our consideration here, and so I will draw your attention to those, such as adding cobia and hogfish stocks as primary data collection species in the research plan, and so the research plan is something that we review annually, usually in June, I believe, after the SSC has had the opportunity to review it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's our plan. We review it biannually, and so this is a year that we're going to be reviewing it.

DR. DUVAL: So I think, if we want to make sure that there are things that we add to it, we need to get out in front of those, and, although we will have the opportunity in June to add things, I think the earlier we can do that, so that the SSC can then chew on it, the better. Ben, I saw your hand.

MR. HARTIG: I am not on your committee, but I actually had a question about the primary data collection species. What does that actually mean when we include those under that heading?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The way we've approached that in the past is those are the ones that we target for a comprehensive age-based stock assessment, and so we would want indices, as well as the age, from all the fisheries. That is really the biggest determinate. The secondary-level ones are ones that we would target for non-age-based assessments, a little less intensive.

DR. DUVAL: Again, walking back to some of the things that the committee want to consider here, adding cobia and hogfish as primary data collection species in the research plan, and that certainly sounds like a reasonable recommendation, to me, for both of those and then maybe a little bit of discussion about the secondary species, and so those ones that would not necessarily be targeted for an age-based assessment, but for which we might want to make some recommendations in regards to which species we would like to see prioritized for other methods, whether that's data-limited approaches -- The SSC, I think, may be talking about data-limited approaches at its upcoming meeting in April, and is that correct?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, they may hit on that a bit, I think, in talking about this topic in general.

DR. DUVAL: So I think one of the things that might come up under there would be adding dolphin as a priority for a data-limited assessment, and then we have had some significant landings of spadefish in the past. Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: At the last meeting, under the Snapper Grouper Committee, John had provided us with an Excel file that looked at the average recreational landings from 2011 to 2015, and divided by headboat, charter, and private. When I finally found this document again and took a solid look at it, one of the things I noted, that I don't know how we can sort of fit into this, is there are certain species that are very commercially important, and, of course, there's some species that it seems like are very recreationally important.



When you look across headboat, charter, and private, we see that black sea bass, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, mutton snapper, white grunt, and yellowtail snapper the top sort of ten catch for each of the headboat, charter, and private, and gray snapper and vermilion snapper come in for at least two of those categories, and so, where that can sort of reach into the recreational catch and importance of those species, it would be good.

DR. DUVAL: Anna, you said gray snapper and --

MS. BECKWITH: Black sea bass, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, mutton snapper, white grunt, and yellowtail snapper are coming up as top-ten catch for headboats, charters, and private. Gray snapper and vermilion snapper come in top-ten for at least two of those categories. Either like gray snapper comes in under headboat and private or vermilion snapper comes in as average top-ten catch for headboat and charter, and so I would just sort of add that to the discussion.

DR. DUVAL: I think, if you look at Table 3 in Attachment 3, that shows the -- It's another way of looking at the stocks, but it sorts them by ACL, and I think almost all of those species that you just mentioned are in the upper level of completion, or they're in the upper half of that table, and so, even though it's not looking at the landings specifically, it is kind of looking at it according to the total annual catch limit, and so I think that would also -- That also gets at what you're talking about, in terms of ensuring that we're considering the recreational importance of this species. We could sit here all day and not do anything, and so Ben, and then I've got a couple of suggestions.

MR. HARTIG: I just had a question to John about the dolphin assessment. I mean, by the time we do an assessment and we get it through the SSC and put regulations in, there won't be any of those fish alive that were in the assessment. I mean, it may give us some idea of what the catch estimates -- If they are relatively correct or not, based on the past assessment. I don't know. I just don't know what we're going to get out of it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think one of the challenges with dolphin is that is a big challenge, in terms of the management timelines and the reality. Then the other challenge is the exploratory assessment that Dr. Prager did a number of years ago identified some key data needs. At this point, they really haven't been addressed. It's the need to have a survey and it's the need to get the ageing worked out and be able to age those fish, and those are still outstanding research needs, and so it's a real challenge to getting that stock assessed.

I think it's one that probably fits into the concept of the research track, as that's going, and particularly the concept of the research track as it's sort of emerging as truly a hypothesis-driven, research-oriented type of thing, where you could work out how would you practically deal with something like dolphin, given its life history and the challenges of assessments and the timelines that we face within this management program. I think that maybe is a direction to go with that one in the long term.

MR. WAUGH: One additional consideration is the stock ID here. This could raise ICCAT issues, and it very well may be that, if you start looking at an assessment of this, that it may come out that it's better handled through ICCAT. That is one consideration. Two, while I agree with John's point that this would be great for a research track, given Ben's comments that this is basically an annual crop, I would think we would have a lot more of our priorities dealt with before we would have the luxury to allow the assessment folks to go off and spend some time researching this. No

doubt it would be fun and it would be interesting, but, boy, we've got a lot of other pressing issues before we entertain that type of luxury.

MR. CARMICHAEL: No disagreement from me on that point, for sure.

DR. DUVAL: Well, and it's certainly -- I think dolphin is one of those species for which, not only taking into consideration Gregg's points, but I know that concerns from stakeholders have been really more about access to that resource and things like localized depletion, which are not necessarily going to be solved through a stock assessment. It's going to take some other kind of conversation, I think, to address those issues. What about hogfish? I mean, do we want to consider adding this as a primary data collection species? Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Most definitely.

DR. DUVAL: And cobia? Can we agree on that? Okay. I am seeing heads nodding around the table. I don't necessarily think -- John, would you like a motion to that regard?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was going to say that I think, if we could get agreement to the bullets that we agree with, and changes or disagreement to the ones we don't, and then I could just reflect that in the committee report as your guidance coming from this document, because actions you would take would ultimately be in approving the research plan and in whatever changes you may make to the priorities that we talk about when we get to the SEDAR Committee guidance.

DR. DUVAL: Everybody is in agreement with the addition of cobia and hogfish, and then, with regard to dolphin, that might be something that is just going to have to be a different and special conversation about stakeholder concerns that I think are probably going to be more informed by research on patterns of movement and things of that nature, as opposed to an assessment. Is there any disagreement with that? Okay. I am seeing a thumbs-up there.

Then, in terms of assessment priorities among the secondary species, and also thinking about things like white grunt and Atlantic spadefish, Anna had brought up the point to consider levels of recreational harvest amongst those species as another means of prioritizing them. Do folks have any specific thoughts? I know lane snapper, Anna, which is one of the ones that you mentioned, is in that table of secondary species. I think the ones that stand out there, for me, would be lane, wahoo, and I don't know. Maybe banded rudderfish? Are there any other thoughts? Zack.

MR. BOWEN: Thank you, and good morning, Madam Chair. As closures affect the recreational sector more and more, almaco jack has become an important species in the for-hire fleet in the last two or three or four or five years, and so maybe that one.

DR. DUVAL: So maybe consider adding almaco jack to that list of secondary species?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It's there.

DR. DUVAL: So almaco, lane, wahoo, and would folks agree that those might be top priorities among that list? Any others standing out? John, is that helpful for now?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I think that is helpful to prioritize somewhat within there.

DR. DUVAL: How do people feel about spadefish?

MR. BELL: It's an important -- It's kind of a pulse thing, and kind of a niche fishery for us, but it's important to a lot of our recreational fishermen, and it's particularly associated with the artificial reefs. I remember a couple of times in the past, or at least once for sure, we really blew through the ACL. It's very easily exploited sometimes on the reefs. I would hate to see it get into trouble or something, and so, if we knew a little bit more about it, I guess I would be comfortable.

DR. DUVAL: John, might spadefish be something that we might want to consider adding as either the special group or for secondary consideration?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think either of those would be good, the secondary or the special. Do we think there are special considerations with spadefish for some reason? Most of these are ones that have special management challenges. Really, when you get right down to it, that's primarily what they are, and then there's like spiny lobster, because of its stock structure and the way the -- Where the spawning stock is and what we receive with regard to it.

MR. BELL: I don't know if this is special, but the way they are typically prosecuted for us, it's around structure or on the reefs. People are specifically targeting them, and it's kind of a pulse fishery at times, but it's really intense when it's there, and so I don't know if those are special considerations, but it's not like the average part of the snapper grouper complex, in terms of the fishery and the way the fishery is conducted.

I have had also, of course, input from fishermen that would like to see it taken out of snapper grouper, because of issues associated with circle hooks and whether that works or not for spadefish, but it's a tricky little fish sometimes to catch, but it's very popular, at least off of our state, for sure.

DR. DUVAL: Let's go ahead and add it to the secondary list, taking into consideration that we may want to think about removal from the complex or things like that. I mean, it's been brought to my attention that we may want to take a more holistic view of when we're removing things from a fishery management unit or removing things from the snapper grouper complex and look at those ecological linkages.

I mean, I realize that what we've focused on in the past has been are these species primarily prosecuted within state waters or are they covered under the Florida Marine Life Protection Act or things like that, but I think making sure that you're not removing one component of a guild and not considering the rest of it, and so that's just food for thought down the road, but I think we can probably move on.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Our next bullet under that category was the white grunt in 2021, to just reaffirm that that is our intent, because that is a stock that has been highlighted and prioritized for assessment many, many times. In fact, it was mentioned back in the like second meeting of the SEDAR Steering Committee, back in 2003, as something to be done in the next few years at that point, and so I think it is one that we probably want to continue to highlight.

DR. DUVAL: Two thumbs-up on that? Okay. Yes. Ben.

MR. HARTIG: I did have one question, John. Given the disjunct groups of white grunt -- You have, what two different populations, and would they be done at the same time or not?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I think, at one point, there was even discussion of maybe three different stocks out there, and so I think it would have to be evaluated and all considered at the same time. Then the next ones, we talked about dolphin, and we talked about spadefish.

One that I guess came out that we mentioned some here is gray snapper, which is a stock that has -- It's been considered. It's got 1.2 million pounds of ACL, and so it's probably one of the highest stocks within snapper grouper that has yet to be assessed. There is a Gulf gray snapper assessment, which is underway now, and it's going to include through Monroe County, and so we may want to consider where gray snapper is and if it should be a primary or secondary stock for us.

DR. DUVAL: I think the stock ID decision on that was -- Is that all of Monroe County was going to be incorporated on the Gulf side?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes.

DR. DUVAL: Can we add gray snapper to our list of secondary species, or are you thinking primary species?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think, given its landings level, that it might be worthy of primary species consideration.

DR. DUVAL: I am seeing number-one fingers coming from the Florida contingent, and so we'll make that a primary species. Okay.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, just to refresh my memory, where are we going to be -- What are we doing so we can finally get around to an assessment on warsaw and speckled hind? Is anything kind of in the works to get some information so there can be some assessments on those? Where are we at? Remind me, please.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I am not exactly sure where we are in terms of data collection efforts and research, but maybe I will yield to Bonnie and see if she's aware of anything that's going on in that area.

DR. PONWITH: We certainly recognize the need for additional data. Those are vexing species, because of their life history and the fact that -- It's a challenging species. The addition of a stable data collection over time, to be able to have a reliable, steady stream of information over time, would be the ideal circumstance. That also has been challenging.

We have had some data collections that enabled us to get some additional information on it, but it's an expensive collection to be able to set up and do on a regular basis. We can take a look at the holdings, and we can look at data-limited approaches of how to best evaluate the status of that species, and I think that that's probably the approach, if we were going to do something, that we would have to explore, and that is maybe to get together with the SSC and discuss some of the data-limited approaches.

We can go to school on what we've learned from the process we have applied in both the Caribbean, as our maiden voyage into applying some of the data-limited approaches, to see how they perform with respect to some species that have problems like this, and then also, secondarily, we've applied kind of the toolbox of data-limited analysis tools to a series of stocks in the Gulf of Mexico, and so we have some experience under our belt, and I think that that may be the best approach, is to take a look at what we learned from that process in the Caribbean and Gulf, talk among ourselves and work with the SSC, and discuss whether we believe that these techniques hold promise for those two species in the South Atlantic.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and, I mean, these species kind of got kicked to the side, a little bit like white grunt, and, if we could figure out a way that we might want to talk about figuring out how to get some data. With the ABCs at zero, if we figure out that we can allow a one-fish catch for just research, and it all had to go to your state agencies, so they could collect them, kind of like what we did with the red snapper in the mini-season, or do something so we can start getting some data, and hopefully, at some point in time, have enough information to do an assessment.

MR. HARTIG: Just to follow up with Bonnie and just an observation, I mean, we have goliath grouper that's been assessed three different times, I think, and it has some fishery-independent indices, and that's never been able to get through. Whenever you cut the landings off of a particular species, it seems to be almost impossible to ever get an assessment that you can rely on, or at least that gets approved for the assessment process, and that's my -- Just to tie that in, that's my worry with red snapper, and I will stop there.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Good input and conversation on some of our special-needs species, and, again, I think it's my understanding that there is a desire on both the part of the assessment team, as well as the SSC, to have this conversation about what species we would want to include in a data-limited workshop.

I think I would like to move on, because we are running out of time here, but I think if folks have taken a look at the Section 3 of this paper that John has put together, the stock assessment prioritization, where it discusses the NMFS stock assessment prioritization tool and sort of the results of that tool and the rankings, and then it also talks about how those rankings are influenced by, to a large extent, the years since an assessment has been conducted.

The longer it's been since an assessment has been conducted, the greater weight or influence that has on how these things come out, and so John did an alternative ranking that actually removes that as part of the weighting, so you can see what -- I think the first table is how things came out of the prioritization tool, and that's Table 7, and then Table 8 is with that assessment overdue factor removed, and you can see that it shifts some things upward in that priority ranking once you remove that particular weighting factor, and so there's a couple of things.

I would like to have a little bit of discussion about that, and then a couple of things that we might want to consider here, and I think one of those is silk snapper, and so I think that might be a good one to add as well, just based on what I have seen of those fish coming in. John, any other thoughts on or anything you want the committee to know about just the difference between the two tables?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Really, what that did -- If you happened to print out the hard copy, they're side-by-side, but what happens there is those stocks which were unassessed, that were very high at the top in the original ranking, they dropped down, and the relative ranking of all the ones that have been assessed largely stays the same, and so things like lane snapper, you will see, and dolphin and almaco slide down the list some, because what is happening in the prioritization is they're getting the maximum score for how long an assessment could be, and so that's kind of driving them up to the top.

To me, realizing that, I think that was kind of helpful to explain what I felt were a number of the stocks which were at the top that might have caught you all's attention, and so I felt this alternative was maybe one way of getting at it, and it led to the idea, and I thank Mike Errigo for sort of bringing this up, is that maybe there is the opportunity that you sort of prioritize, on one hand, things that haven't been assessed that you want to get assessed with some proportion of your resources.

Then you take the things that are being assessed and regularly being assessed and then prioritize how often each one of those needs to be done, as kind of separate ways of looking at that, because you might have entirely different considerations for something which has never been assessed that needs to be added to the list versus something that you are regularly assessing and you need to keep up to date. That's kind of an idea in its infant stages at this point, but I think it might have some real potential.

MR. HARTIG: I am not on the committee, but we had discussed a little bit about that before the committee meeting, and I think amberjack is a really great example, in this case. I mean, we had talked about amberjack a number of times on the assessment schedule, but there were other pressing issues, and the fishermen -- In talking to John, we said, listen, we see a good year class out there on amberjacks, and I said there isn't really a pressing issue to do the assessment now. Okay. So what happened? This year, or last season, amberjacks were closed six months early, which shows that those year classes, and it was actually multiple year classes, we had seen filled into the landings.

Some way to temper your priorities with what is actually going in fisheries would be helpful, like fishery performance evaluations in terms of maybe what we should be doing for the assessments. Like mackerels have been on autopilot. Sure, if you do an assessment when mackerel is at its low level in the seine wave that the population goes through naturally, if you look back in time, you're going to get a bad result, but what we were able to do with king mackerel is we were able to add that recruitment information, which helped us come up with a little bit higher ABC than we would have had that helped the fishery and we were able to do that, but mackerels especially.

Look at mackerels. Spanish has been on autopilot, and we've got a huge year class this year. Things of that nature, bring those in before you actually get to the point -- Maybe at the Steering Committee level, where you're trying to do these things. Mackerel is on the schedule, but maybe we don't have to do mackerel. Maybe we can bring in one of these other stocks that hasn't been assessed that is really important, like scamp or mangrove snapper. Maybe we can let mackerel slide another couple of years, or mackerel is in really bad shape and we need to do mackerel, but some way to gauge how we prioritize these things and maybe allow some stocks to go a little longer between assessments.

DR. DUVAL: I don't disagree. I think part of it is this balance of, particularly with the age-based assessments, actually getting the ageing done, so once something is in the queue and then, if we shift gears, that creates a bit of disruption. I guess maybe, to Bonnie, and I know she had her hand up, but what is kind of the drop-dead timing, in terms of making a shift like that, like Ben is suggesting, where you can try to be a little bit more nimble in your assessment priorities, based on what is coming up.

I think the other thing is, with some of these stocks, where you might have a good year class that's coming in, you might be over your ACL in that regard, and so I like the idea of fishery performance reports. We've talked about that, and I think what we struggle with is sort of what's the appropriate time of year to ask the advisory panels for that type of input, so that it can get merged into this assessment timing. Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: Complex question with many different subcomponents in the answer, and so I will try and keep this all straight in my head. First of all, there is a category in the stock assessment prioritization tool for changes, unexpected changes, in the fishery. Let me just say, over and over and over again, we have had this conversation about anecdotal information, and people, I fear, have put this negative connotation to anecdotal information. We implore you to talk to us about what you are seeing on the water, because what we hear from the commercial and recreational fishers on the water form the basis of a huge percentage of the hypotheses that we go on then to test.

Those on-the-water observations are absolutely crucial for us as a leading indicator of what direction the stock is tipping. We still have to do the quantitative assessment of that, but it helps us to know where our priorities should be when we're doing that, and so I view that category and the tool of unexpected changes in the fishery as a way for us to be sensitive to things you're seeing in an extremely dynamic environment, and so there is one point.

Our Chair has brought up a concern, and that is the fact that the ageing is probably the thing that keeps us from being as nimble as we would always want to be, in terms of saying that I know we said we were going to do this assessment, but let's swap it out for this one, because something happened that we need to get to the bottom of with a stock assessment.

The solution to that is to get ourselves to the point where we have completely cleared our backlog in ages and we're as up-to-date on those as is almost like now you're up-to-date. We have made investments in that, through collaboration through the ACCSP competitions. We are not there yet, but we've made some really good progress.

We need to keep both the fishery-dependent ages and the fishery-independent ages that keep that backlog cleared, and that offers us at least the maximum amount of flexibility, so that, if there's a perturbation in the system or we see something we can't explain, we can make a change. Again, that is going to take continual progress and investments in time and resources to be able to keep those ages up. I think I will stop there on those two points.

MR. BREWER: Bonnie makes a really good point with regard to anecdotal information. For years, for years, it was looked down on, and it would be -- The situation would be the fishermen would say that what you're saying is not what we're seeing on the water, and the response would be that, well, it may be that in your area it's that way, but, overall, that is just anecdotal information.

If in fact, Bonnie, your folks want input from the people that are on the water, because of what has happened in the past, that information needs to get out, because, right now, I can tell you the impression is that -- Particularly, and God help us, in red snapper.

The impression is that you're not listening to the folks that are in the water, and some of them are pretty mad about it, quite frankly, because they're sitting there in certain areas, and it may be -- They're sitting there talking about not being able to get a bait down through the red snapper to try to get to a grouper, and yet red snapper is closed. They're saying there is a huge disconnect there. I think an appeal made, and I don't know if it should be through your offices or if it should be through the council or whatever, but the word needs to get out, because people think that what they have to say doesn't matter.

DR. PONWITH: I appreciate that feedback, and so let me qualify this. The thing we need to be careful of right here is I think what we're talking about is a lag, and that is, if people on the water see something and they see a change, they're going to see that change well before my people sitting in their offices doing the modeling are going to see it, and it's because we need to collect the data and we need to process the age composition and we need to QA/QC the landings. There's a lot of stuff that happens before what you're seeing first-hand on the water actually starts showing up in data that's been properly QA/QC'd and then, all of a sudden, when you say, yes, we're seeing exactly what you said a year-and-a-half or two years ago, we're seeing it in the data now.

Again, that information is really valuable. If you see a stock that you're seeing a change in, you're seeing a size class that you haven't commonly seen before in an area, or you're missing a size class, and we also hear that from the fishermen, where it's like, you know, your stock assessment says the stock is doing great, but, in the last two years, we have stopped seeing recruits coming into the fishery and you need to be worried about this, we have incorporated that kind of information into considerations about changes to the ACL.

The trick is we can't open a fishery based on anecdotal information, and we can't close a fishery based on anecdotal information, but that information can help us to know where we should be making those investments to be able to get quantitative measurements of the scope of what you're seeing and actually be able to legitimately use that in the assessments, and that's a very good partnership.

DR. DUVAL: Zack and Tim and then we're going to come back to this. We are over time right now, and I recognize that we took a little time at the beginning of this to go through the public comment webpage, but I don't want to eat too much into Protected Resources, and so Zack and then Tim.

MR. BOWEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bonnie, to that point, what's frustrating for me, one thing of many, but like I brought up scamp grouper several, several, several, several years ago, and we still have done nothing. We've got it on paper for a research assessment, but my concern for scamp goes back -- The last good year we had on scamps was 2011, or 2012 maybe, and I would have to look back at my logbooks, but my point is it's been several, several years and to no avail on scamps. That is frustrating for me, as not only a council member, but as a fisherman that wants to give anecdotal information.



DR. PONWITH: Madam Chair, very quickly, I agree with you, and I know you have raised scamp, and we have tried to get scamp on the SEDAR agenda for several years. We have almost had it there, and we have actually, I think in some cases, had it there and had it unseated by kind of the tyranny of the urgent.

The hope is that this tool, the prioritization tool, will make it harder for us to actually unseat a stock when we have someone actually out there raising the alarm and saying this stock is in trouble, because what it does is it more methodically gives us the tradeoffs, visually, to say, well, you can do this, but you need to understand what the potential repercussions of this decision to let something else scoot up in the priority list will do. That is what it is intended to do.

A second thing, and I will raise it here as an appetizer. My intent was to raise it during Snapper Grouper, but I will raise it as an appetizer version here, and that is the council has asked a couple of times of what would be the merit of getting information in front of the council on a higher level of periodicity than what our current stock assessment throughput can afford, and that would be in the form of kind of an index-based update on an annual basis.

The council has raised this at two separate meetings, saying could you do an index update, where we take a look at the indices of abundance and tell you what direction those are tipping or what those trends look like on an annual basis, and we've talked about that. The thing that I've shared with you is that the very people that do that type of work are the ones doing the assessments, and doing something like that on an annual basis for all or some of our stocks would have implications to the throughput of our stock assessments.

We can look at what those implications would look like, to give you some quantitative feel for how that interaction -- Do you put all of your money and time into doing a stock assessment or do you do somewhat fewer of those and reduce that tempo to enable yourself to do annual index updates, so that, if we see trouble, we've got a quantitative way to say, yes, we see trouble, and it's big trouble, or we see good news, and it's big good news, and so that's something we can talk about in a greater level of detail when we get into the Snapper Grouper conversation, but it is something that we are open to discussing with you and open to discussing with the SSC, to be able to look at the pros and cons of this approach.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you for that appetizer, Bonnie. That was great. Tim.

MR. GRINER: I share Zack's frustration in some of this. I think a lot of fishermen feel frustrated with phone calls to express what they see on the water and then it just never seems to go anywhere, and they never hear back from it. How hard would it be to have some type of online portal, some way that the fishermen can see what other fishermen are seeing, and have it to where it's out there and they can look at it and you see what other fishermen are seeing in other regions and see if that makes sense to what you're seeing in your region? It just seems like we should have a way that all of these comments, all of this evidence, could be put into a form that we could go on and see and track and see how it plays out with what other fishermen are seeing in other regions.

DR. DUVAL: I think that's something that we can work with both Amber and Cameron on, to see what our capabilities are on the website, to maybe, on an annual basis, gather or solicit that type of input for different suites of species, so that we can have some organized means of feeding that information into the assessment process.

As I mentioned before, we have talked about doing these fishery performance evaluations, which is what advisory panels in the Mid-Atlantic do, and so when would we do that? Would we want like our Snapper Grouper AP to do that in April, sort of do a retrospective on the 2016 fishing year and then move that forward, or would we want them to tackle that at their November meeting, when they might have almost had the benefit of an entire year and could provide it then?

I think those are all things that we can talk about, and it might be, depending on how much time we have under Citizen Science, something that could fold into that as well. I think there are options that we can explore for how to get that information in a timely fashion. Okay. I would like to take us back to what we need to finish up here.

I know that there were several -- John has noted one way that we can look at this would be to allocate one portion of the existing assessments, or one portion of sort of the assessment slots, to maintenance and one for exploring new things, and so I don't know if that's something that we need to make a decision about here, but I think it might be good to get a sense from the committee what you all think about that approach, and then I think the sort of outstanding bullet points that we have here deal with elevating several species to primary data collection and age-based stock assessments and considering adding silk snapper as a secondary data collection species.

What are folks' thoughts on looking at trying to, I guess, maybe divide up available assessment slots between maintaining those assessments, those age-based assessments that we already have, versus using the prioritization tool to help us organize our thoughts on new stuff that we haven't done that we might want to put forward? Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: When I read through the idea of maintaining our current assessments, it seems like it's the assessments that we have had come before us that we're -- I don't want to say comfortable with, because we're never 100 percent comfortable, but it seems like some of the assessments that we get back, by the sheer process of doing the assessment, we acknowledge data gaps or things that might be able to be considered differently or some aspect that, in a future assessment, we would want to reconsider.

That is my concern with the idea of maintaining assessments, is it's a great idea. I love it, and I hope that we would have enough assessments that we could sort of put on that automatic path, but I also recognize that we've had a number of assessments that come back to us, like blueline tilefish and red snapper, those sorts of assessments where we need a slightly more in-depth look during a different assessment process.

MR. CARMICHAEL: My thought on that was the maintaining refers to all the care and feeding of the stocks that we've assessed so far, and so doing things like that would be part of that umbrella of maintaining, and then the other would be what are the things that we have not ever assessed that we think that we would like to assess sometime, and do we separate out the considerations of that, because a stock that we have assessed that we want to maintain, but has major data changes, should obviously -- It would be pretty high at the top of the maintaining the current assessments list, perhaps more so than one that we've done recently and just has some new years of data to add to it.

That would collectively, in my mind, go under that, and I think we could do this -- If you think it has potential, we can bring this in the next time we look at priorities and sort of say here is the rankings of all the things you haven't assessed and what might we do with those, and here is the rankings of the things we've already assessed, considering what we know about them at the time. I think the ones that haven't been assessed may really help inform research requests, things like various cooperative research programs, MARFIN and things like that.

It may help inform that, because I believe, in a lot of cases, those stocks have a number of questions and a number of data challenges, as we've mentioned quite a bit here today, that maybe make assessing them challenging.

That's why, in a lot of cases, those stocks have been kicked down the road, so to speak, because of the uncertainty as to whether or not we would even get an assessment. When we go down the applying the benchmark process, there is a lot of resources involved, and we've been hesitant, in the past, to do that on something where we weren't sure if the outcome would actually be a functioning, acceptable assessment, because of data or methodology challenges. They may actually fit, for a lot of reasons, in kind of their own special category.

DR. DUVAL: Perhaps this is -- Let me see if I can sum this up. We are receptive to the idea of considering this maintenance track versus new stuff type of track, in terms of allocating our SEDAR assessment resources, but we might want to think it over a little bit more and perhaps get a little bit of SSC input on that.

I think the other items that we have outstanding that I would like to wrap up in the next two minutes are also some of these bullet points on I guess it would be page 4 of Attachment 3, looking at elevation of lane, almaco, knobbed porgy, and red hind. Recall that we noted that lane, almaco, and wahoo -- We sort of prioritized those amongst the existing secondary data collection species, and so I guess, John, my question would be is there enough information to consider elevating these to the primary stock list, which is presumably age-based assessments?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think that there possibly could be, but I don't know that it's the best use of those resources, and I will go back to Bonnie mentioned trying to stay up-to-date with ages, and that has certainly been a long-term goal of this exercise for a number of years, has been to try to identify the universe of stocks that you guys think need to be assessed, or age-based assessments, which then indicates what is the overall annual workload of otoliths that the Science Center needs to keep up with so that they can stay up-to-date.

Whether you are ageing things as you do assessments or you're trying to keep up from year-to-year, ultimately, you have to achieve the same workload for ageing for evaluating otoliths. Otherwise, you've always got this backlog, and you will never be able to do the number of assessments that you want to do.

Ultimately, our hope was to identify the stocks that we want as age-based assessments, and, right now, there is almost twenty of them. Maybe, if there's 500 otoliths a year, that's 10,000 otoliths, and so Bonnie could let you know that, given the resources that we have, how many otoliths can we do a year and what additional resources do they need to go start seeking out to be able to do 10,000 or 15,000 otoliths a year.

I don't know the answer to that, but I think the sooner that we establish our universe and say we're comfortable with this and these are what we want age-based assessments updated regularly, then you're on track to keep them up-to-date, and you have the flexibility that we've been wanting for years to adjust the assessment schedule, nine to eighteen months out, and be able to respond to things in the fishery much more promptly.

That is really the long-term end goal, and so, given that, I think we should take great care in adding any more stocks to that list, and I don't think that these are probably worthy, and I think it would be helpful, say from Bonnie's perspective, that, if the Science Center were to evaluate that and consider what can they do in real-time, up-to-date, say by the end of the year or six months into the next year, for age work, what is realistic and what's the number of species they can keep up-to-date and what would be necessary to get this entire list on track to be kept up-to-date. Then we're probably really making major headway into getting the flexibility that you guys want in these assessment schedules.

DR. DUVAL: Bonnie, is that something that you could ask folks to evaluate or their sense of their capacity, given existing resources, to keep up, I guess, with the primary data collection species and get the flexibility that we hope to have in the long-term, and maybe we can come back and discuss that at the next meeting?

DR. PONWITH: What would be really good is -- This is an analysis that will actually take some math to work out, and what would really be good is if we can get kind of the question in writing, to be able to set us off on the right foot, so that we know that what we're delivering you is exactly what we need to hold a meaningful discussion.

I am going to paraphrase, to see if I think I understood what you're asking, and it's essentially, for different stocks, it's not a linear process. Some stocks, it is harder to do the ageing, and it's more straightforward on others. We have some species where there is one specialist and no one else really has -- Everybody else is in journeyman status and that kind of thing.

Essentially, it is, for the stocks that are currently on the primary list, for those stocks, the number of otoliths that it takes to do an age-structured stock assessment, and that number might differ by species as well, but what type of personnel power would you need to bring those stocks up, to clear the backlog, and then maintain a clear backlog into the future, and is that kind of a ballpark of what you're looking at for this analysis?

DR. DUVAL: I think it is.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's sort of what I'm thinking, and how close do the current resources come to what is necessary to keep that list up-to-date.

DR. PONWITH: So, yes, I think we can sit down and take a look at our recent experiences with the current throughput and figure out what sort of personnel power for both the fishery-dependent and fishery-independent datasets it would take to keep the primary stocks up to no backlog status.

DR. DUVAL: Perhaps we can capture that for the timing and tasks motion at Full Council. I am going to give Charlie the last word here, and then we're going to wrap this up.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Bonnie, and I'm thinking about age-based assessments and something like maybe a lane snapper, and I don't know the life history of a lane snapper, but I'm guessing it's not very long. The shorter the life history, to me, the less useful, possibly, that an age-based assessment might be, and maybe that's something that may want to enter into the thought process, and I will kind of leave it at that.

DR. DUVAL: I think the only outstanding thing is I would say let's leave lane, almaco, knobbed porgy, and red hind where they are right now and not move them to the primary data collection list. Silk snapper might be a good one. There is a lot of those fish that come in, and just to add, or at least note, that we may want to consider adding that to our secondary data collection list at some point. Then, if there is nothing else, to come before the SEDAR Committee on this topic --

MR. CARMICHAEL: We also have the guidance for the SEDAR Steering Committee, which is our next topic. Do you want me to highlight this quickly for you?

DR. DUVAL: I think, for this item, this is the research track process, and so you see the bullets under there that this -- As we've discussed before, this doesn't include the most recent data, and it won't provide management advice. We rely on an operational assessment to get those status determination criteria out of an assessment, and so we're going to be -- The first two stocks we're going to be running through this are cobia and scamp in 2018, and so the SEDAR SOPPs Committee is, I think, working on drafting SOPPs for this research track process. I think anything that this committee would like to provide, in terms of what should be considered in that, that's the purpose of this agenda item.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and we'll go through this in the Steering Committee, and the SEDAR staff has been working with the leads from the Science Center, from the data and assessment teams, to try and come up with a roadmap, basically, of what the research track will look like and how it will be constructed and what will be expected of the various players along the way, and we're --

Actually, SEDAR is pushing right hard to get this done, at least to map out the stock ID and the data workshop components, by the Steering Committee, so that those parts can get rolling in time to make these assessments start in early 2018, which, as we know, when it comes to making appointments and approving schedules and terms of reference, that means we would really ideally like the council to be considering some of that stuff in June, if we're going to really be moving ahead on these things earlier in 2018.

Where that sort of stands now is the research track is coming out of something that is very hypothesis driven and trying to avoid an excessive reliance on the deadlines. There is some thought, and, by way of full disclosure, where this is now is still being worked on, but there was some discussion at our last meeting last week that it may not quite be fully ready for cobia, but we're thinking about that, just because of the complexity that is there.

The group is recommending that we don't have a separate stock ID process, but that stock ID be worked out through the overall research track, because there are concerns about having stock ID made with preliminary data, and so that obviously has enormous consequences for cobia, and so we're looking at that very closely and hoping to, by the time of the SEDAR Steering Committee, have a good handle on what exactly that would mean, but, as I said, getting the stock ID worked out is becoming one of the most controversial parts of the whole research track process.

Where that takes place within the research process is obviously critical, because that is kind of one of the reasons we've ended up where we are, procedurally, lately. With that, we're working on an overview document, and I think any feedback that folks have of things that you really feel strongly about or would like to make sure are considered in the research track would be good to hear now, and then make sure that we talk a little bit about scheduling before we wrap up.

DR. DUVAL: With the understanding that the Steering Committee is going to see something in May, and then the council, this committee, would see something in June, I am not sure what kind of input we can provide at this point, because it sounds like there is a lot of swirling, different thoughts about how to deal with stock ID in the research track process and whether or not separate workshop or incorporating into the overall workshop is the best way to go. I mean, does anyone have any strong thoughts on that right now? I am thinking that I would kind of like to see what the group has come up with. Okay. So then, in terms of scheduling.

MR. CARMICHAEL: In terms of scheduling, as you recall, we mentioned the slot we have for the MRIP revisions, which was set up for later this year, and it is going to have to push around to next year and be done probably similar timing, but late in 2018 as opposed to late in 2017. That means we need to consider what impact that has on our overall assessment scheduling, and one thing that we at the staff level think is worth considering is whether or not golden tilefish should be prioritized for a standard assessment, if that could be done, in late 2017.

A couple of the reasons for that are, one, the last assessment was done as an update, and it used a single selectivity period, because that's what the prior benchmark, a standard, had used, but we've had testimony, over a number of years, about shifts in the selectivity to older fish by the fishermen over time, and it was reflected in the data that was available in the update, and noted that the data from recent years supported higher selectivity of older fish.

It was felt, to some extent, that the data was more robust recently than it had been in the past, but I think we have to acknowledge the testimony of the fishermen, over a number of years, about their selectivity actually changing. That's something that could be considered in a standard, changing the selectivity periods.

Then the other issue is when we've looked at tilefish, and, as you recall, the SSC has talked about this a couple of times. One of the things that the changes in the assessments really hinged upon was the fitting algorithm. Recall the earlier assessment had that year of very high recruitment, which was recognized by the assessment panel, the review panel, and the SSC.

There couldn't seem to be anything done in the model that would ameliorate that. The council, as a result, took a conservative approach when they set the references. Then, when we got more data and a new fitting method, it seemed to remove that unusual spike in recruitment that we saw, and we attributed that largely to as the explanation for why the productivity of this stock had changed so much.

One of the challenges, however, is that, in the red grouper assessment, which you're going to get, there is yet another method of fitting the uncertainty and fitting the algorithm for determining the error within the model and what is the best fit, and so there's a new method that came out soon after the tilefish was completed that is now considered best science and has been put forth in the

red grouper assessment, and so I think that raises another consideration for maybe looking at tilefish again.

While that is not expected, I would say, to make a huge change in golden tilefish, I think, when we're looking at a situation like this, where you've got such a huge reduction and such an unusually high difference between the ABC and the OFL in this stock, that any sort of thing like that can have big consequences to the management bottom line. 5 or 10 percent, in that fishery, may make a huge difference, because we're looking at such a great cut from the prior assessment to the current assessment, and so, if at all possible, we think that it would certainly be worthwhile considering tilefish.

Perhaps the third plus on tilefish's behalf is that it's not a lot of recreational catch, and so the concerns with the MRIP revisions would not be as dominant within that fishery, and so it kind of fits in nicely to be done while the MRIP revision is on a slightly-delayed track, and so we'll just throw that out there for you guys to consider, and we'll certainly probably hear back more from the Science Center at the Steering Committee about the prognosis of doing that.

DR. DUVAL: Again, the way this process works is that we settle on our priorities here, and then we go to the Steering Committee and everything gets hashed out there, and so, given what John has laid out, how do folks feel about putting forward a tilefish standard as a potential for consideration, since we don't have the MRIP revisions going on? Jack.

DR. MCGOVERN: I think one thing to consider about golden tilefish is what was done with blueline tilefish. There was some concern about the ageing of blueline, and there was a workshop that was done, and I guess different folks aged them and determined the ages weren't reliable, and golden tilefish is in the same family as blueline, and so I don't know if any kind of exercise like that has been done with golden tilefish, but, before another assessment is done for golden, it might be worthwhile having some kind of workshop to compare ages among different readers and maybe doing the radiocarbon exercise as well.

DR. DUVAL: I see our SSC Chair nodding his head up and down in the back of the room. That's definitely a good idea, Jack. My sense was that golden tilefish were maybe modestly, slightly, teenily, a bit easier to age than blueline tilefish, but, no, I think that's a great point and something that would have to be taken into consideration. Anybody else? Am I thinking this is a consensus that we throw golden tilefish into the ring for a standard and see where it falls out? Obviously we'll get some feedback from the Science Center on that. Okay.

DR. PONWITH: Just, again, it's hard to interweave this with the conversation we'll be having tomorrow, but we are going to be talking about the red snapper projections and the letter that I sent in response to that, and, for red snapper, we do have some concerns about generating projections based on the last stock assessment, in light of the fact that the calibrations for the recreational landings are still in flux.

One of the things that I would like to discuss tomorrow with the committee is some different approaches that we could take for assessing red snapper, in light of some of the challenges we have had with discard numbers, and those discard numbers are influenced by the effort estimation within MRIP, as we take the discard rate that we get from the reports and multiply that by the effort.

Another thing to consider for that timeslot is to open discussions with the SSC about some alternative approaches to how we deal with red snapper going forward and see if we can get some traction on that. That's another possible candidate for that fall. Another thing that we are interested in doing is looking at the MRIP discard information and the CVs we have for it and really work with MRIP to set some standards above or below, depending upon how you look at those CVs, of where you should proceed with caution in using those numbers for management purposes.

For red snapper, with a closed fishery, the discards become a very influential statistic for us, and we have had some conversations with MRIP about the notion of pulling together a workshop to talk about things regarding the discard process for situations like red snapper and for other stocks, where the discard estimates are based on a very solid mathematical, an approved mathematical approach, but the CVs are large, because of the amount of information or the information is very, very -- It's not heterogeneous. You get a high amount of diversity in what people are reporting. MRIP is interested in talking with us about that. That is another candidate, kind of a special topics workshop, that we could consider discussing in the fall, in lieu of those MRIP adjustment assessments.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Bonnie. It seems like we have some things to chew on or think about. I don't really want to get into an extended discussion here, one because we don't have time, and, two, because I think people need time to think about that, and we are also going to be talking about this a little bit more tomorrow during Snapper Grouper. We will leave things as they are, and is there anything else, John, that we need to discuss here today?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, that was all that I had. We will look at the schedule more when we meet in September, and we will prep for a Steering Committee that will likely come near the end of September. At that point, we might want to think about, if MRIP revisions move back into 2018, what does that do for the things that you have planned for 2018, and so I will just throw that out there as something to think about in the next few months.

DR. DUVAL: It's all one big washing-machine, it seems like. If there is no other business to come before the SEDAR Committee, we are going to close this one out.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 6, 2017.)

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

Transcribed By:  
Amanda Thomas  
April 4, 2017



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