

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

**Charleston Marriott Hotel
Charleston, SC**

September 14, 2010

SUMMARY MINUTES

SEDAR Committee:

Duane Harris, Chair
Dr. Brian Chevront
Ben Hartig
Mark Robson

George Geiger, Vice-Chair
David Cupka
Vince O'Shea
Tom Swatzel

Council Members:

Robert Boyles
Dr. Roy Crabtree
Tom Burgess
Lt. Brandon Fischer

Dr. Wilson Laney
Mac Currin
Charlie Phillips
Doug Haymans

Council Staff:

Bob Mahood
Mike Collins
Rick DeVactor
Kari Fenske
Kate Quigley
Dr. Julie Neer
Julie O'Dell

Gregg Waugh
Roger Pugliese
John Carmichael
Kim Iverson
Anna Martin
Myra Brouwer

Observers/Participants:

Monica Smit-Brunello
Nik Mehta
Dr. Carolyn Belcher
Dr. Nick Farmer
Red Munden

Dr. Jack McGovern
Dr. Bob Shipp
Dr. Marcel Reichert
Dr. Bonnie Ponwith

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in the Topaz Room of the Charleston Marriott Hotel, Charleston, South Carolina, September 14, 2010, and was called to order at 2:15 o'clock p.m. by Chairman Duane Harris.

MR. HARRIS: The next item on the agenda is the SEDAR Committee Meeting. Let me go ahead and dispense with the approval of the agenda. Any objection to approving the agenda as shown? Seeing none, the agenda is approved. The next item is the approval of the minutes of the last SEDAR Committee Meeting.

Any additions, deletions or corrections to those minutes? Seeing none, those minutes are approved as provided. Okay, now we're on Attachments 1 and 2 of SEDAR Activities and John Carmichael is going to give us an overview.

MR. CARMICHAEL: As most of you know, there are quite a few SEDAR activities that are going on at the moment. We are coming close to wrapping up the Red Snapper Benchmark that was elevated from the update. They've gone through the assessment workshop and the public comment period.

The assessment panel is making a few changes in the report relative to the comments that came in from some of the public comments and then from comments from the panelists. The review workshop is coming up in a couple of weeks in October. It will come to the SSC in November and then it will come to you guys in December. That is where we stand on red snapper.

We also have underway a benchmark of spiny lobster and Goliath grouper that are both underway. We're going to have some activities for those coming up in October, and then reviews of those will be occurring in November, also, and with the idea of getting some information to you guys as requested by the December meeting for those.

One of the most important issues I guess in the South Atlantic has been dealing with black sea bass. We had a black sea bass update planned for this year, and then that got delayed as we worked on the red snapper benchmark. We began to work on the black sea bass I guess after the June council meeting when we held data scoping.

It was realized at that time that there is nearly 50,000 age structures that are available for black sea bass collected over the last few years in response to research requests and data monitoring requests to try and collect more age samples, so we have been successful there, but the model that was developed before did not incorporate age-structure information. It didn't incorporate age-structure samples because they didn't exist.

There was some discussion back and forth and some of the council members got involved on this, and the question was raised about getting this information incorporated. Well, that represents a change in the model structure and bringing in a different model that incorporates this new data that didn't exist, so it really demands that there be a benchmark assessment.

This issue came up during the scoping and we've held some webinars to work on the data. We put this to the data panel and assessment panel at their last webinar, and the SSC representatives

agreed, along with the rest of the panel, that the appropriate move is to do a benchmark of black sea bass. We had some discussions then, of course, about trying to do a benchmark here in the fall, say doing a data workshop this fall and trying to get it out quickly, take advantage of the progress we have made so far, but it seems that perhaps the best course of action is to begin it next spring and include data through 2010.

One of the reasons for that is that we have a lot of age structures, but they're not fully caught up in the aging process because of the changes and the shifting priorities and working on things like red snapper earlier in this year, so that there are some age structures, several thousand, maybe up to about 9,000 that haven't been done yet.

In talking with the primary aging labs, which is South Carolina DNR through MARMAP and then the Beaufort Team, they said that they believe they could probably have the ages updated and be ready to go with a full through 2010 data set perhaps by April in time for a regular data workshop timing.

So what we have for you guys here and action is, of course, we had in the original briefing book a proposal for black sea bass based on an update. Then we had your Attachment A-2, I think it was called, 2-A, that addressed black sea bass as a potential benchmark with the data workshop in the fall. I'll point out that this hasn't been through the SEDAR Steering Committee.

That committee is meeting in about three weeks, the 1st of October, so we'd have to get this approved through them to move forward on this, but I think it would okay for the council here to take some preliminary action, review the terms of reference, consider the schedule, and acknowledge that we'd be looking at a benchmark schedule starting with the data workshop probably in April of 2011 and then dissemination to the council in March or June of 2012, depending on the process as it exists now and the time steps that we have to work through.

So we have for you in that attachment a schedule which will be modified like that. The terms of reference I think could be approved and then get some guidance on the number of participants and some preliminary approvals on there. Especially for the data workshop, it would be nice to start contacting people if we're going to do it in April and think about our space needs. Then the others we could certainly take up in December and we can make adjustments in December, also.

That will cover black sea bass so our primary actions are, then, really appointments. We have a request for an SSC reviewer for the Goliath and spiny lobster review workshop. This is a replacement for some SSC people. And then we have a red snapper chair and then we have the black sea bass. We can take those however you would like.

MR. HARRIS: We'll take them in order. George, I'll call on you first.

MR. GEIGER: Mr. Chairman, I don't know if this is the appropriate to do this or not, but I want to go back to the beginning here and talk about our current process which entails the webinars. Is that doable now? Charlie and I both have sat in on every one of the webinars, and, Charlie, you can speak for yourself, but I'm going to give my impression and my opinion of what has occurred here, and we have not spoken about this as to our impressions.

But, having been involved with the SEDAR process right from the beginning and watching the maturation of that process to where we are now with webinars, it has been a very, very encouraging and positive experience for me as a council member. Certainly, again, Bonnie, kudos to you for taking the red snapper assessment and turning it into a benchmark and working on this; kudos to the assessment people for the work they've put in and making this thing happen. I really appreciate it and I recognize the work it has taken to get that done.

That said, we embarked on this experimental process, which the first ones in my opinion was is this going to work. It seemed like we were fraught with silence from people who didn't actually understand or know how to work or operate within this webinar process. I can say, just to make a long story short – and we have had to expand the original concept of the number of webinars that we originally proposed.

We had to expand those because of questions that came up during the process. Again, kudos to the people who have been able to make their time available to support those increased webinars. I've seen a dramatic change in the participation of the people who are on the assessment panel during this webinar process where there is now a much more free exchange and you see the scientific repartee between people in an effort to come to consensus as to what best serves this process. That's very encouraging.

I like the webinar process in that you don't have to travel, you're not going for a week. The original concept as it was designed was to provide an opportunity for inclusion of the fishermen because they didn't have to take themselves away and travel for a week, give them an opportunity to participate in a block of time periodically; and again an opportunity for the public to even view and see how these SEDARs are conducted from soup to nuts. That is extremely beneficial.

The problem I have is that as John was just talking about let's talk about appointments. We need to be judicious I think in how we're going to appoint people to these panels and this SEDAR process in the future because the participation of the appointed panel members from the public, not the scientists but the panel members from the fishing public has been appallingly bad.

I mean, people have not – they have not been there. We've had some people who are not appointed members of the particular webinar panel who participate and are there, but they're not assigned to the panel so we've got people who are interested on the outside who are participating and we've got assigned panel members who are not participating.

Somehow when we make these appointments we have to ascertain that these people in fact are going to make the commitment to participate or else find people who will. Perhaps we need a primary and an alternate and people have to commit. If they don't show up at the first webinar, we've got to go immediately to the alternate somehow. I think we're losing the effect – well, maybe we're not losing the effect of having the webinar because even without the fishermen's participation the process has moved forward, but I think we would all be much more comfortable if we had that participation of the fishing public involved as we believed would help the process be in its transparency.

That said, I am a supporter of the webinar. I think I've seen them mature, I like the process. I appreciate where we've gone with this red snapper, and I think at the outcome the fishing public will be hopefully pleased with the outcome. We'll see. Did I leave anything out, John? I know I've harped to you about these things.

MR. ROBSON: I was waiting for a motion.

MR. GEIGER: Well, had you been listening I really said that I wanted to make a comment when I started and it was the opportunity for the chairman to cut me off and say, "I'll only accept motions." **But I'll make a motion that we very carefully analyze and scrutinize appointments to these webinars and panelists – as panelists to the webinar process to ensure attendance.**

MR. HARRIS: You've heard the motion; is there a second to the motion? Second by Ben. Discussion on the motion? George.

MR. GEIGER: In addition to that, just as a followup, there needs to be some process – and I'm not sure who the correct person is on the staff, whether it is the SEDAR staff or the council staff, the biologist in charge of that particular assessment species, to do this followup with the attendees to make sure they're going to attend and figure out how we're going to make sure they participate. That is the key element; there has to be some type of contact from staff to the participant.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We actually approved a process I think at the last meeting about dealing with that because the council began making these alternative appointments. That is part of it about the council staff assigned to it being the one who determines which of the alternatives should be brought in and the SEDAR staff just letting them know what the participation level is. I think as we get into this in the future it might be helpful if the council were to perhaps identify perhaps the order in which these alternatives are brought in or perhaps they –

MR. GEIGER: Do you mean alternates?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Alternates, yes, the order in which these alternates are brought in and then perhaps – you know, I don't know if they're tied to an individual person or what. That may not always be the good way to go, but maybe they're classified by fishery sector or what have you, but I think a little guidance from the council will help us down that road.

The other issue is you come into a situation sometimes where maybe someone participates for a couple of meetings and then can't and then you have to wonder if you bring in an alternate cold. That could be an issue. They don't have the background. We also have it with, say, if you have someone who didn't participate through the data webinars or assessment webinars and they want to come in at the review – one of the things about having people participate in the whole process is having the knowledge and the background. They may not be really ready to jump into the review if they weren't there for the assessment. These are some of the tweaks we will have to think about.

MR. GEIGER: John brings up a good point. Periodically there has been some pretty deep scientific discussion and some of the participants who were involved weren't really educationally – or they weren't at the same level of understanding as the people who were having the discussion. It then delays the process to have to try and bring them up to a particular point of understanding. I don't know, maybe it could be that – I'm just stating this; we've gone a bit afar.

This is supposed to be a science-driven process; so naturally when you bring non-scientists into the process, there is a potential for getting away from the pure scientific aspects of it by having non-scientists appointed to these panels. That is not to say you still couldn't appoint people as formal observers; and certainly anybody who attends the webinar, I've never seen anybody who hasn't been recognized.

Correct me if I'm wrong; if anybody has had a question, it seems they've always been allowed to ask their question and state whatever position they wanted to. In discussions with folks, there has been some concern about maintaining a scientific level to these particular deliberations.

MR. HARTIG: I think we all should, you know, the ones of us who have been involved in these processes get together and give John a list of what we think will help or won't help or what we think the priorities are to move this process forward. I think industry also has to get into this and be aware that this is where they can make a difference in management in the future and possibly have an industry-funded group that participates in the process.

I think down the line that would be much more helpful to have dedicated people who are up to speed on the science to participate in the assessment and the review workshop because a fisherman fresh off the street, as he participated at the data workshop, may not be able to have the right information or history to participate in the other two. I think if we get our information to you it would help.

MR. GEIGER: Again, I've attended a lot of these SEDARs, and I do so specifically based on a very unsatisfactory circumstance I was involved with in an early SEDAR. I want to see a science-driven process and not a results-driven process. I don't think we should be having a process here with a result in mind or trying to do things or perform functions within this process that result in an end-driven result. I don't know if I'm making myself clear.

I want a scientific, rigorous review. I don't care what the end process is as long as it is a result of this scientific, rigorous review. I am very opposed to seeing people who get in to try and bully their way through this process and bully their way to an end result. I think we need to guard against that.

This has to be a transparent process. The panelists we appoint even on the scientific side have to be able and be willing to stand up and speak and take on this vigorous scientific debate amongst themselves to come to consensus because we're looking for an end result here which is unbiased and in my opinion should be scientifically driven.

MR. HARRIS: Obviously, this is a work in progress and we've still got some improvements to make, but we're going to move forward. I'll let Bonnie have the last word before I call a vote on the motion.

DR. PONWITH: I appreciate the opportunity. We worked very, very hard on creating this process; and just as hard as we worked on creating it, we are very eager to obtain feedback from these first examples of working assessments through the process. I've tried to talk to members of the fishing public, the NGOs, academicians, other people who have observed the webinars in terms of the desired outcome of transparency, to make sure that they're available and bring these assessments closer to the fingertips of people who are in the managed public.

If there is feedback that could benefit the way we operate this process, I think the entire SEDAR Steering Committee would be glad to hear that. I guess what I would say in response to George's comment, if I were to paraphrase what you were saying, I would say that it is very critical that the science be conducted in a way that is outcome-neutral; that the science is being conducted not to a specific desired end but as in an outcome-neutral scientific process.

MR. HARRIS: Okay, George, I'll give you the last word.

MR. GEIGER: And there have been some concerns. I've had concerns expressed to me about having a paid member representing industry serving on the panel. To be frank with you, from my perspective I've listened to it and I think we have benefited from it, actually. I think the questions have been very good and scientifically based, and they have been rigorously debated; sometimes with a positive result, sometimes with a different result, but I think we've benefited from that particular aspect of the webinar process.

I think as the process matures it will get better and better. I think, John, your staff has a great handle on how to conduct them and keep the meetings moving and stay on point and extract the necessary information from each webinar. To that degree, I think they're coming along great.

MR. HARRIS: You've heard the discussion. **Is there any objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.** Okay, John, are we ready to move into appointments? Goliath Grouper Review Panel, first of all.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Just to refresh everyone, the Goliath Grouper Review Panel and the spiny lobster essentially occur within the same week; Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and then Wednesday, Thursday, Friday I think is how it works out. Some consistency in who we have appointed would be helpful in terms of just getting people down there and having them participate in it.

There was a lot of interest from the new SSC members, which is very encouraging. As noted in the overview, John Hoenig, George Sedberry, and Eric Johnson – and actually he should be added to that. He is not on what you have; I've just added him – have all indicated that they are interested and could participate, and then our existing member, Marcel Reichert, also said that he can participate.

Just as a refresher, Luiz Barbieri will also be there. He will be chairing the Goliath Panel, so he will be there as well and he has worked a lot with the spiny lobster, obviously, and the Goliath. We will have some good senior SSC representation there as well. I think perhaps the best thing to do is perhaps to appoint maybe two SSC reviewers of this list and let us figure out who can still actually make it at this point in time. If you guys are willing to do that – or appoint three of them or if you want to go and appoint the two, but I think appointing John Hoenig, George Sedberry, Marcel and Eric Johnson would give us some latitude to find out whose schedule still works at this time.

MR. GEIGER: I would make the motion to appoint those four members – invite those four people to participate.

MR. HARRIS: You've heard the motion; is there a second to the motion? Second by Ben. Discussion? Robert.

MR. BOYLES: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on your committee. George, I don't mean to sound smart, but is that not contrary to what we just talked about in terms of carefully analyzing appointments?

MR. GEIGER: Well, my concerns have not been with – the scientists who have been appointed have shown up. We haven't had that problem. It is the fishing public, the anglers, the members of the constituent groups who have been appointed to the panel and are actually part of the process in developing a consensus who are not there. Now, we've had members of the angling public, the constituent groups who are not appointees present who ask questions and participate, but they're not part of the decision process.

MR. BOYLES: My misunderstanding; thanks for the clarification.

MR. GEIGER: I'll read the motion, Mr. Chairman; move to appoint Hoenig, Sedberry, Johnson and Reichert to the Goliath Grouper and Spiny Lobster Review Panel.

MR. HARRIS: It has been moved and seconded; is there further discussion on the motion? Is there objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The next item is the Red Snapper Review Chair. I think we had someone arranged for a chair. I can't remember the background of what the issue became with the chair. Now I remember; it was Scott Crosson, another one who got hired by the federal agency. He got hired away from the state of North Carolina this time, so he just said that he really can't be the chair of that workshop. We talked to the SSC about this at their last meeting and Anne Lange has agreed to be chair of this.

MR. HARRIS: So do we need to officially appoint Anne Lange as chair of the red snapper review? George.

MR. GEIGER: I would make the motion that we appoint Anne Lange as the chair of the red snapper review.

MR. HARRIS: Ben seconds. Discussion on the motion? Is there objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This brings us up to our next item, which is the one that is a little complicated, I admit, because we're not quite sure how everything is going to play out, and we're trying to be prepared to be timely in dealing with this issue. It is the black sea bass situation.

We have the terms of references, a schedule and a preliminary participant list. As I said, the schedule remains to be determined. I think we could perhaps get some discussion and guidance. Certainly, it will be beneficial to the steering committee representatives if you could – perhaps after we deal with things we can do by motion – discuss the schedule and give an idea if you accept June 2012 for getting that and if you support getting the 2010 data; and then some guidance on participants.

We could look at the participant list if you perhaps want to go over that in detail and consider people for the data workshop. On the other hand, one option is to recognize that as the potential list and we can find out who could actually participate in the workshop when we know when it occurs. Let's start with the terms of reference and if we can get a motion on those or discussion, we'll move from there.

MR. GEIGER: Well, do we want to talk about whether or not we're going to do a benchmark or an update first? I think we need to talk about that first.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, I guess I would say that fits in with the terms of reference, but, yes, we can a comment on that first and then we'll decide.

MR. GEIGER: Okay, well, why don't we talk about the comments? Kari, are you prepared to characterize the comments that we had on the telephone call the other day amongst the data workshop panelists with regard to their recommendations?

MS. FENSKE: George, are asking about the –

MR. GEIGER: Yes, there was some discussion the other day on the data workshop telephone call.

MS. FENSKE: The webinar?

MR. GEIGER: Well, it was a webinar, I guess. I'm confused, there are so many of these things. There was the discussion as to whether we should go forward with a benchmark or an update and there were some pretty specific comments from the panelists.

MS. FENSKE: The panel did feel that it would be best to go forward with a benchmark as opposed to an update. Some of the reasons they cited was the inclusion of the age data from the 47,000 new otoliths that had been aged that could not be used if it was just an update. They also

brought up some issues about splitting the maturation year blocks that are currently being estimated. I'm not sure, John, if you remember the split at North Carolina was another issue.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, there are some issues about stock ID, which have been discussed over the original benchmark and the last update. North Carolina has raised these issues. It could be looked at in a benchmark.

MR. GEIGER: Well, arguably, one of the defining things is the fact that they can do an age-based assessment now because of those large numbers of otoliths that are available. Based on that, I would make a motion that we do a benchmark assessment – convert the black sea bass update to a benchmark. **Okay, here is the motion, move to elevate the black sea bass assessment to a benchmark, including data through 2010, and presented to the council by June 2012, which is what I meant to start with.**

MR. HARRIS: David seconds. Okay, discussion on the motion? Robert.

MR. BOYLES: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on your committee. I think this is a good motion. I would like at the proper time – and this may not be the proper time – to reiterate something Kari said; 47,000 samples. That is a lot of samples to process. I have concern as the state agency that is responsible for some primary data into this assessment of how we're scheduling these things. It is excruciatingly difficult to staff this. No question we need to do it, but I just think we need to be very, very deliberate and very, very disciplined about we schedule these assessments and move forward. Thank you.

MR. HARRIS: Well stated and I agree with you. Ben.

MR. HARTIG: The only thing I would have added to the motion was contingent on the steering committee's decision.

MR. HARRIS: Yes, I think that needs to be added because the steering committee does have to go along with this. Our committee is acting in advance of the steering committee, and we're assuming I guess that they will act appropriately.

MR. GEIGER: And to the point about the large number of otoliths, Kari, correct me if I'm wrong, but the preponderance were from North Carolina or are in North Carolina, and I got the impression that they were aged?

MS. FENSKE: I thought the bulk were from the MARMAP in South Carolina. There were some 30,000 from MARMAP, 7,000 from North Carolina.

MR. GEIGER: Okay, I've got it backwards then.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and then like I guess 8,000 from other areas that the Beaufort Lab has, so Robert's folks have aged two-thirds of those otoliths and did them right quickly, so this really good to be able to get this in and do it as a benchmark.

MR. BOYLES: And, again, I'm not suggesting this is not the direction we should go in. I just think that we at some point have got to be very, very deliberative about how we move down this road. Because, how these things get scheduled and moved around, our guys are planning sampling seasons two and three years out and we're trying to get them out on the water.

I've recited chapter and verse the financial and personnel difficulties we have had as a state. I don't want to cry too much of a river, but I just think we need to be cognizant of the fact that these assessments are being done and there is a lot of time and effort that goes into planning and executing them.

MR. GEIGER: And you're right, Robert, there is, but we're not the ones suggesting that this is the way to go. It was the panelists, the ones who are doing the work. Jennifer Potts was on the call; Marcel, you were on the call, I believe or on the webinar. You know, I was confident that the people who would have to do the work understand it and they thought that a benchmark would be the best way to go.

MR. HARRIS: Well, I will add to that, too. We don't want to repeat – I think Roy was the first one I heard say this – the vermilion snapper situation where we have thousands of otoliths sitting out there that either had been aged or are waiting to be aged, and we can't do a benchmark assessment of a species because they haven't been aged and we get tremendous criticism by the fishing public as a result of that. I just think we need to be aware of that, and we need to be as aware of what Robert said as to that; but to the extent that we can ever accommodate doing a benchmark assessment with new data, we need to try to do that. There may be times when we simply can't, but we need to try.

MR. GEIGER: Lesson learned.

MR. HARRIS: Lesson learned, right. Okay, further discussion of the motion? Do we need to read the motion, George?

MR. GEIGER: I move to recommend that the steering committee elevate the black sea bass assessment to a benchmark, including data through 2010, and presented to the council by June 2012.

MR. HARRIS: Do we need to modify that motion with respect to the steering committee? Okay, it is up there. Okay, further discussion? **Seeing none, any objection to the motion? That motion is approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: Would you like to consider the terms of reference? I don't think that would necessarily be premature. We understand that if we get the process changed, then we have terms of reference ready to go; and if it stays as an update for some reason, we have those already covered and previously approved.

Any discussion on the terms of reference? They're fairly typical draft terms of reference. In this case they reflect what we learned about obviously the baseline from the original couple of assessments as well as things that were raised during the data scoping. I think they're fairly

thorough and cover the bases pretty well. I don't think anything in particular sticks out as changes here. They're fairly standard. Let's see if anybody has any questions or comments on them.

DR. CHEUVRONT: No, I don't think there are any questions so I'll just go ahead and make the motion that we move to adopt the black sea bass terms of reference for the benchmark assessment.

MR. HARRIS: You have heard the motion; is there a second to the motion? Second by Ben. Discussion on the motion? Is there objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This dispenses with the SEDAR-related activities until we get down and talk about the steering committee advice, and we can touch on some of what you guys have already added there. The next item relates to the South Atlantic Research Plan. This is one of the requirements in the Magnuson Act that the councils annually provide a prioritized research plan submitted to the agency.

It lays out what the South Atlantic Council would like to see done in the coming year. Actually, it gets at the issues that Duane brought up earlier and were discussed about data needs and having the biological requirements and such in there. The plan is Attachment 3, just for your information. It is fairly similar to what we've presented the last couple of years.

The one slight change is that I added a bolded section in the beginning which highlights issues for 2011 through 2015, which is our reporting period. Of course, right at the top of the list is SAFE Reports, so I guess that's timely, and getting accurate information for landings, discards and effort.

I also highlighted the fishery-independent monitoring program and urging continuation of that and full support of that as a result of the workshop that was held last November. The process here is you guys provide any comments; and then if you approve it, we'll submit it to the agency around the 1st of October.

MR. GEIGER: John, as a result of the SEDAR we get research recommendations. Do those research recommendations find their way into this report; is that what forms the bulk of this?

MR. CARMICHAEL: They do in a comprehensive overview approach; not in a species-specific approach as they're provided at SEDAR. What this reflects is the general gist of many of the research recommendations that address things like adequate age sampling, the need for independent surveys, increasing the accuracy and precision of catch statistics.

MR. GEIGER: Roy, in MARFIN where do you get your priorities or how do you establish the priorities for the MARFIN Program? Do you take it from SEDAR or do you take it from requests for –

DR. CRABTREE: SEDAR is a big part of where they come from.

MR. CARMICHAEL: They send out the drafts to people to review them. I'm one of the people that gets the draft RFP.

MR. GEIGER: What MARFIN sends out?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and get the chance to comment on that; the same goes for the MARFIN CRP.

MR. GEIGER: But there is a priority process that goes on before that where you establish a priority for MARFIN projects?

DR. CRABTREE: Yes, and Andy Strelcheck and Jack have gone through SEDAR research recommendations to make sure they're reflected in the MARFIN RFP.

MR. GEIGER: All right, I just want to make sure they don't get lost. There have been some comments made about we'll put that in the research recommendation and a comment like, well, maybe they don't ever see again. I just want to reassure people it doesn't drop into a black hole.

MR. HARTIG: One of the things I'd like to see looked is a group of scientists get together and look at the subsampling of otoliths and pluses and minuses of doing that. We've done it for several species in the SEDAR process, and I was a little bit bothered by it in king mackerel. I don't understand enough about it to know how they did it and what impacts it may or may not have in a stock assessment. I would like to see somehow have some paper written by someone on that topic.

MR. HARRIS: Do you want to add that to the research recommendations; do you want to make a motion?

MR. HARTIG: All right, I would move that the subsampling of the otoliths, the procedure that is now carried out within the science center or whoever – I guess it is the science center or the state – well, leave it at the science center because that's where it ends up – should be evaluated. **The motion is move that the subsampling of otolith procedures carried out within the Southeast Fishery Science Center be evaluated.**

MR. HARRIS: Is there a second to the motion? Second by Brian. Discussion of the motion?

MR. WAUGH: Do we have a written plan for collecting size and age samples; because with limited resources, it seems a shame to be collecting so many samples of one species, that we have to then come up with ways to subsample the otoliths to age, and then we've got other species that we don't have sufficient age samples for. I'm just wondering do we have a written plan for how we're collecting our size and age data so that then we don't have to come up with sampling programs.

MR. HARRIS: Bonnie, do you have a response?

DR. PONWITH: The normal circumstance that we have is that more are required and so it is an enviable situation to actually get to a point where you overshoot. From a statistical standpoint, you can reach a place where processing additional otoliths gains – you hit a diminishing returns' point where processing additional otoliths and reading them provide very little additional statistical precision.

It is difficult at the beginning of a year to know when you're going to reach that point. You can project it based on the amount of variance in historic and use that as a guide. Sometimes that serves very well and sometimes it doesn't. You always are better served by collecting somewhat more than you think you're going to need just in case you have a year where you have a very vastly different year class structure than you had in the past or much higher variability within year class.

So, in terms of a written document that outlines those protocols and sets what the targets are, I think we've got general guidance. I don't have a document that goes species by species individually and has that collectively all in one place.

DR. SHIPP: Not only am I not a member of your committee, I'm not even a member of your council, but I do want to comment. I think Ben's motion is really important. One of the reasons is that when you have really high numbers of otoliths, you have to be so careful that the fishery-dependent source of those otoliths doesn't bias your results. It is really important to focus on the fishery-independent sources of those otoliths.

DR. LANEY: If memory serves me correctly, the ACCSP Operations Committee does annually go through the process of putting together a plan or what amounts to a plan by species, looking at targets for hard parts for ASMFC and council and I think even highly migratory. Kari may help me out, but I know the council species and the ASMFC species are part of that, so they do go through that process on an annual basis and they do try and coordinate that across all these programs.

MR. HARRIS: Thank you, Wilson, good information, and it begs the question of why we're not moving towards ACCSP protocols. Ben.

MR. HARTIG: That would be interesting to see. It would be interesting for us to see that every year if we can get a copy of it.

MR. HARRIS: Will you provide us a copy of it at our December meeting? I thought you would. Okay, you've got the motion on the table and we've had discussion. Further discussion? **Is there any objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.** Now if someone wants to move to approve the 2011-2015 Research Prioritization Plan. George.

MR. GEIGER: So moved, Mr. Chairman, I move to approve the 2011-2015 Research Prioritization Plan.

MR. HARRIS: Is there a second to the motion? Seconded by Mark Robson. Discussion on the motion? Is there objection to that motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved. John, you're up again.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Let's move on to the next item. Item 5, this is the stock assessment prioritization and also getting into steering committee recommendations in this topic because this is a request of the steering committee. I guess by way of some background – and Robert brought up the issue about the otoliths, and in this case I think the picture is really much bigger than black sea bass.

Where are now on sea bass is that the guys actually did a bunch of otoliths and then kind of found out they weren't going to use because of the update, which is pretty tough considering the resources that goes into that. But one of the issues we had this year is that we were changing the assessment plan in February and we changed it again in June.

Our plan has been – when we set out on SEDAR, we had a goal of having up to five years planned and at least having the next couple of years that are pretty well locked in. We have scrambled a lot in the last couple of years to deal with the changes in the Magnuson Act and to deal with the red snapper issue. I think everyone understands the challenges, but what our data people are begging – and I hear it from not just MARMAP but also from the federal people, and not just from Beaufort but also from Panama City where they do another bunch of the aging – is that it takes years to do this kind of aging work and to keep up; and when we change our schedule on them six months out, nine months out, when we tell what we're going to do two years from and then we get nine months away and we change it, it reeks havoc on their abilities to try and keep up.

I think we really need the steering committee and ask the councils to try and do everything we can to get back on some semblance of looking ahead and planning and not keep torquing those guys around, because it is ultimately going to hurt our productivity, and we're all trying to get to better productivity.

Along those lines of productivity is this issue of figuring out just how many assessments need to be done. To those who haven't been on the steering committee yet, you've missed the great excitement that goes into the annual planning; the bargaining back and forth about how many slots there are and how many assessments the council wants.

And as you all know, we'd love to get 10 or 15 assessments each year, but the resources just aren't there so there has to be a pretty cutthroat prioritization. Part of the issue is that it is really not clear how many assessments the council needs and how often they need them, and now we're having more issues with ABCs and ACLs and need to get more timely assessments.

We simply know up front that we cannot assess 72 stocks or 85 stocks on annual basis. We're going to have to make some decisions here. We also have seen that within the agency – and this is coming up from HQ and my work with Rick Methot who sets the annual plan evaluations and assessment evaluations is what used to be considered five years is adequate is now getting narrowed down to like three years.

So we're looking at shorter windows of the agency even considers as a timely assessment. Roy has brought this to our attention and he has raised this issue many, many times, and trust me he brings it up at the steering committee, and he is keeping on top of that about keeping these assessments timely.

So along those same lines, the discussions at the last steering committee was that perhaps it would help if the councils were to look into their stocks and think about how often they want assessments done, how often do you want benchmarks, how often do you want updates looked at, how do you want different species assessed?

I think we know that obviously catch-at-age assessments are state of the art currently, but they require the most resources, they require the most effort and sampling, and there may be some species that can be adequately managed through looking at surveys, through production models that don't require all the infrastructure of an age-sampling approach.

In deciding which species make which cut obviously is a pretty tough task, so I went ahead and jumped into this in response to the steering committee's recommendation to put something on the table for you guys, and the intention is that you can give some guidance back to your steering committee representatives so they can go to the steering committee in October and be prepared to talk about what is sort of the long-term South Atlantic oriented assessment workload that we're looking at.

One hope is that then gives the agency, through Bonnie primarily and also Roy's support about saying these are the kinds of assessments our councils need, this is the kind of resources we're going to have to have long term down the road to get this done. So that was really the impetus behind this Attachment 4, and really I just went through it and looked at it in terms of what are the top species in landings and thinking that those are the ones that are likely to be the top components of the fishery, the ones that you want catch-at-age assessments from.

I also considered what are the ones that you've done catch-at-age assessments in the past or the ones you've been talking about doing catch-at-age assessments, what are the species that have generated a lot the discussion and pick those as being the tier that probably really deserve catch-at-age assessments.

And part of it also I made some decisions based on what you did in June about species that might be removed from things like the Snapper Grouper Management Plan to try and say, okay, can we winnow the list down to the things that we actually are going to need ABCs and stuff from. Obviously, as your decisions on that change, that list of species that gets dropped out of this is, of course, going to change, but I think this might be good first-cut for some discussion.

MR. HARRIS: John, are you proposing that we maybe look at Table 1 to begin with and those are stocks proposed for removal from the Snapper Grouper FMU?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I would think one or two. If you want to look at one and to highlight some that you think should definitely stay in, then that would be helpful, yes, so we can start table by table.

MR. HARRIS: Okay, let's look at Table 1. David.

MR. CUPKA: John, if I may, this process you developed here is to I guess ultimately try and get some idea of the workload that would be required? This is just for our council, right, and each of the other councils is putting together something similar that the steering committee will then take a look at and see if we're even within the realm of possibilities?

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's right, David, each council was asked to do a prioritization of their stocks and how they'd like them assessed and when, so this is just for the South Atlantic. I understand the science center is looking at this some from their perspective and bringing in things such as life history characteristics, which could affect the timeliness of an assessment, and I think getting the two together at some point down the road is going to be the best way to get us to a really good working plan. David is right, this is for our South Atlantic Council.

MR. HARRIS: Yes, it is important to know that this is a three-council process. George.

MR. GEIGER: Yes, John, that list looks good to me with the exception of puddingwife. There is a burgeoning fishery for puddingwife, and I know Dr. Crabtree is concerned with that species.

DR. CHEUVRONT: I'll have you know I caught two puddingwife last week.

MR. GEIGER: See, there we have testimony from a council member.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The rules are right there that I applied; average landings less than 10,000 and 80 percent from state waters and then it is covered under Florida Marine Life so all of those can vary. Of course, when you look at percentage in state landings, as you can imagine it varies if I look at the recreational fishery in pounds versus numbers. First of all, you have the issues with the weight in MRFSS and you also have the issues with the size of fish varying as you move offshore. I believe in this I looked at numbers because that is considered the most reliable information out of MRFSS.

MR. HARRIS: We've had this discussion in the past, and it is the first time it has really been presented kind of formally to us I guess. If we can make some decisions on this stuff, I think it just moves us forward a lot more quickly than we otherwise might. George.

MR. GEIGER: Well, if we do this can we then move these same species out of the FMP?

MR. CARMICHAEL: That is what this reflects, the preferred alternatives for things that get removed from the FMP.

MR. HARTIG: I went over this list pretty thoroughly. There are a number of snapper grouper species in there that are mostly insular species and really not a big component of continental type – there is a little bit of landings in the Keys but nowhere else. I don't see anything in there that we can live without basically. I'll make a motion to remove all these species from the Snapper Grouper Management Unit.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You probably should do that at the Snapper Grouper Committee.

MR. HARRIS: Well, I think it is the sense of what we would want the Snapper Grouper Committee to do. I'll accept that as a recommendation to the Snapper Grouper Committee; is that all right. Okay, thank you. Hold that thought; we're going to get there sooner than later. Write that down; make yourself a note. Okay, John, we'll move to the next table.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The next cut looks at the assessment type, catch at age, production model, looking at fishery-independent and dependent trends analyses; and then one that I just sort felt like it falls into special situations; things like Nassau, Goliath, Warsaw grouper, speckled hind, corals, sargassum, of course, shrimp, golden crabs, perhaps. There are some things that just are special and need their own consideration.

DR. CRABTREE: Dolphin there I guess is just a mistake and in the wrong category? Don't we land about 10 million pounds of dolphin a year?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, dolphin should have had a note. That is one of the exception stocks that doesn't fit in based on the poundage. It fits in based on the fact that aging them is so challenging that the general consensus is that a production model may offer the most promise. They grow so fast you'd be looking at daily rings; and once they get up to about three years old, it is mind boggling.

But, yes, you're exactly right, Roy, that one needs a footnote. The general cutoff was to just really look at poundage and then to make a few decisions based on things like what is the reality for this stock, so it came out with this cut of being 22 stocks falling in the catch at age, four falling in production, eight falling in trends under a hundred thousand pounds of landings; and then special, which these are their unique circumstances that need to be evaluated.

Actually I think in terms of workload that perhaps trying to do 22 stocks under catch at age is a bit high, but I just really wasn't sure about what to take out. I think perhaps this is a good first cut based on poundage but other considerations could be brought to bear. One of the things might be many of these stocks that we haven't assessed, so we may want to look at them as saying, well, catch at age or production depending on what was to come out of a potential SEDAR down the road where you actually looked at them and made a benchmark determination.

MR. HARRIS: Do you want to take any action on this? Brian.

DR. CHEUVRONT: I like the work that John has done with this. I think it is a good – it is better than just a first cut. Some real thought has gone into this. I don't know if at this point what we could do is to give some guidance to our steering committee members and ask them to use this as a guide in helping to make decisions about priorities for the South Atlantic Council. **To that end, I would like to make a motion that the council direct the steering committee members to use the SAFMC Stock Assessment Prioritization Proposal as a guideline for decisions about stocks to be assessed.**

MR. HARRIS: You've heard the motion; is there a second to the motion? Second by George. Further discussion on the motion? Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to commend the council for preparing this. It's certainly a very useful tool to I guess kind of guide the discussions that we're going to have at what is going to be a very important steering committee meeting. We're going through a similar process within the Southeast Fisheries Science Center for each of the three councils for including the highly migratory species to kind of evaluate what is out there, what possible tools could be used on what categories of stocks and to kind of get our arms around what the scale of the problem is to help create the solutions to how to tackling that.

And, one of the things that I find myself doing is comparing what our through-put is here in the South Atlantic compared to places that are possibly more mature in the stock assessment process like Alaska and the North Atlantic. I realized that it is not exactly a fair comparison because in a perfect world you would run a benchmark, and that benchmark having been done would enable you to for some period of time do updates.

Updates are lighter lifting than a benchmark; but to take a look at the situation that we're in right now, a very good piece of news is that we got additional resources to add a huge amount of fishery-independent sampling compared to the past to the South Atlantic. What that means is instead of doing a benchmark on species last year or the year before or whatever that timeframe was and then being able to move to an update, we now have to do another benchmark because there is a new data stream entering.

So it is good news but it means that for some period of time, until we stabilize our sampling efforts here, which I don't want to do until we stabilize them as high as they should be – until we stabilize those sampling efforts, we're going to be in a period where we're doing a lot of benchmarks because things have changed to the point where it would be required. So, it will be a while before we get in a situation where we can do a benchmark and then do two or three updates before we have to do another benchmark.

MR. HARRIS: Where do you want to go, John; help me out here.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We have a motion. If we're good with the discussion on this, Brian made a motion and I think you can –

MR. HARRIS: All right, you have seen the motion; further discussion on the motion? **Is there any objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: Also, in Item 5 it is talking about steering committee recommendations. The steering committee is going to meet the 1st of October. They're going to talk about a lot of issues that have been carried over. They were supposed to meet in May but that meeting got cancelled because of conflicts people had due to the oil spill that was going on at the time.

We're running a little behind on our meetings and we have a pretty backlog of issues to be discussed. A couple of really important topics we're going to talk about is obviously this

prioritization, what kind of assessments need to be done in the next couple of years, what the South Atlantic would like to see done in 2011 and possibly in 2012; and also talking about the SEDAR process, evaluating the significant changes that were rolled out for this year; considering the webinar process, considering the appointment process, considering the public review components.

We also added a pre-review review where we take a preliminary draft of the assessment report and make it publicly available and solicit comments and then make changes on that before it goes to the peer review. I guess both George and Charlie were on the webinar and you've seen the comments. It's the first time we've done this, and now it has been for SEDAR 24, red snapper.

I was somewhat surprised that we didn't get many more comments during the pre-review given the importance of this issue and how much attention it has garnered. Now, granted, the period was open for two weeks and I'm not sure that having it opened, say, for three weeks would have led to a whole lot more comments.

This is one of all the stocks that has had an awful lot of attention in the last several months and the last several years, that you would expect an awful lot of comments. I think we need to talk about that process as well. Any advice that council members want to put forward will be very helpful to the steering committee members in October.

MR. HARTIG: John, how did you advertise that two-week period?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It was posted on the council website; it was posted on the SEDAR website. Notices were distributed through all various interested party list that we had for SEDAR 24, which is a pretty extensive list of people that through the data workshop, assessment workshop and other steps that said, you know, "I'd like to know about this; keep me in the loop." That's the main way we did it.

We actually looked at doing it through the Federal Register at one point, but that gets very complicated with the posting of documents and it adds an incredible time squeeze. We needed to have the report done as much as four to six weeks before it was actually available and then noticed in the Register that could look at it because of their document management process.

This step is already adding probably three months to our process; and we just couldn't take that especially not on red snapper where we're trying to meet a December deadline. That's the one thing that we had talked about doing earlier and let you know that we didn't do, and the advice was that we were sufficient in doing that because the council quite often posts things for comment through its websites and stuff. I think Kim had a blurb in the Newsletter about it being available, too. Yes, so we followed all those paths trying to get the word out.

MR. GEIGER: John, how much time did it add to the process?

MR. CARMICHAEL: When we're doing our benchmark planning, standard benchmark planning, it adds about three months because you have to have the document done and then you

have to have the Federal Register done. You have to make it available and you have the comment period and then you have to have a window for followup.

MR. GEIGER: No, not the Federal Register; how much time did it add to this current process?

MR. CARMICHAEL: To this one it added probably six weeks with our shortened time – yes, six weeks.

MR. GEIGER: My candid opinion is that what we got back with regard to feedback was not worth the time that we took to conduct it. It is just strange that you would have public input in the middle of a process when you don't even know the outcome. What is the public really commenting on?

If you get comments from people who have not participated in the entire process, they may be commenting on a specific topic or specific aspect of the assessment and when taken out of context, it loses context. I don't know; I didn't find the public comment portion of it very rewarding.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We had some really good comments and they were comments coming in from people – a lot of them were people who were heavily involved all along. Even if they weren't appointed, they had made a number of comments, and a lot of times they reiterated a lot of those comments at that stage of the game.

Your point about not being involved all the way is true. There were a number of comments that perhaps related to things that were being done. There were some that said you should use a dome-shaped selectivity – well, that was the recommendation that we were using that – or comments like that; so there were a number of things, the reply was, well, that has been done in the model.

MR. ROBSON: Well, we've been talking about SEDAR 24 and revised process for conducting it. I know how busy the workload is already, but it seems like it would be very appropriate at some point after SEDAR 24 to conduct some kind of a formal after-action analysis or process improvement, go through kind of a formal process-improvement scenario, even bring in somebody to help with that and to facilitate that and see where we can find the things that didn't work so well and things that we can improve or streamline and get to all of these different issues throughout all the steps of the process. It seems like it would be time well spent, particularly since we've just gone through it.

MR. HARRIS: Thank you for that; I agree. Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: Mr. Chairman, it is to George's point. We spent a lot of time discussing the relative merits of the comment period. I think the reason and the rationale for including that in the process was that we had an eagerness to maintain transparency. My view is that the webinars actually improve transparency because it brings a broader level of participation. People who couldn't fly and stay in a hotel for a week might log into the webinar.

The feedback that we were getting was concern that there would be no opportunity for people to actually make a point. We tried to include in the process during those webinars the equivalent of a public comment where people were able to send questions or say, hey, one of your assumptions is incorrect and make a point to that effect.

The purpose of the webinar was to really focus on the people who were the named panelists. The comment period was an opportunity for people to, at the close, kind of weigh on scientific issues exclusively to raise the attention, kinds of sins of omission, sins of co-mission in the process to give the assessment panel one more opportunity to have those brought to their attention. I welcome a lively discussion on whether this contributes to the process or not. This was experimental and so I'm eager to hear feedback on that.

MR. CURRIN: I'm not on your committee, Mr. Chairman, but I think it is important for us all to keep in mind that the whole SEDAR 24 process was unique in many respects. It was fast-tracked, pushed; and in view of that, as a routine process, this pre-review review I think it was probably important in this case, but I'm not sure it is going to have that same importance in most of our other assessments. I'm not sure it would be justified in that context. That being said, there may be circumstances in the future where we might want to implement that, but as a routine procedure within the webinar process I'm not convinced that it needs to be there at this point.

DR. CRABTREE: John, how long does it take to do a benchmark assessment with the current process we're using?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The current process, including all this, you'd have a data workshop in mid-April to May and it would get to the council at the June meeting. Now, I think in black –

DR. CRABTREE: April/May and it gets to the council in June?

MR. CARMICHAEL: The following year, yes.

DR. CRABTREE: So that's over a year?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes. That's why I said this pre-review that we added, because of the time lags and then needing to allow time for the analysts to respond to things and then having the review workshop that then occurs after that, that really added a full quarter, and then you push into things like the change in the year and you've got more council meetings to juggle yourself around; and I'm counting to get it from the peer review to the SSC and actually make its way to the council; that's what we're looking at.

DR. CRABTREE: It just seems like we're going backwards. I think if I had asked you that question two or three years ago, you would have said nine months. That's too long and one of our goals has been to streamline and get assessments done more quickly. I look at like the sea bass assessment and the timeline you just laid out, by the time that gets to the council in June of 2012, that last data in the assessment will already be a year and a half ago.

By the council takes action on it, it will be at least two years past. This is how bad the hole we're in. The last sea bass assessment we did was 2005, and so we're going to go seven years without an assessment, and the rebuilding period ends in 2016. It just seems like we're losing ground and not gaining right now.

MR. CARMICHAEL: That's exactly right and it has been a challenge. At SEDAR we're looking into this and ways we can streamline this thing. We've got some ideas about – you know, recognizing that data become available in June and that's why we try to hold the data workshop a little earlier so we're getting ahead of it there – perhaps a modified webinar meeting approach with a goal of having the review workshops held by October so stuff can then get to the council at either December or March, depending on the timing of SSC meetings.

DR. CRABTREE: That same year?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that we do it in June – you'd have your data in June, you'd have your review by October, we'd be able to have an SSC meeting in November, and the council gets it in December; so, it would be data, say, from 2010, that you'd be getting the full final results in December of 2011; so you'd be getting it six months after the final data were done. I think that is where our long-term goal should be to get to that level. I don't think you can get it any quicker than that.

MR. GEIGER: And, Roy, you're exactly right, we discussed the fact that we wanted to have these things occur on a quicker time schedule, but we also wanted public participation in the process so that we didn't get bombarded like we did as a result of SEDAR 15 with red snapper. We wanted public participation. The question is to John, with our new experimental process within SEDAR 24, did that lengthen the SEDAR process? Obviously, it did.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, our new process definitely lengthens the SEDAR process. We compressed things for SEDAR 24, but that is not the way you could do things in the long run.

MR. GEIGER: So the benefit here is do we have public participation; and when we get a result of the SEDAR, will we have the public stand up and accept that result; is that more beneficial than just pressing forward with a fast SEDAR like we used to do it and having the fierce opposition we had in the past?

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I haven't seen a single assessment that came out bad that there wasn't fierce opposition to, so I don't think you can get around that. I just think taking a year to put together an assessment is just too long. We just don't have that luxury. I think it needs to be half of that. Clearly, we've got to turn out more assessments, so I think we need to rethink the entire process from day one.

I think part of the problem is we're reinventing the wheel every time we do an assessment, and we need to look at that. We've still got problems with inconsistencies from SEDAR to SEDAR, and that's part of the problem we saw with the red snapper assessment that has chased us for the last two years. There are just a lot of problems here.

It is just hard for me to see how we're going to be able to function adequately when by the time we're making management decisions, the last data that actually went into an assessment is already two years or more old. You saw that with red snapper this time around. One of the problems we had with snapper and one of the reasons that the public was so critical is they were seeing more fish out on the water because we had a big year class hit the fishery.

In part that is just coincidental that things happened to time out that way, but it is also partly a problem with having the assessment so stale by the time we're taking action on them. I think there are a lot of reasons. The management process takes too long; everything we do takes too long, it seems like. We've been at SEDAR for a long time now, and it just seems like there are some fundamental problems with it. It has been a good process in some respects, but I think it is time for a real hard look at it.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think it is not necessarily mutually exclusive that you have a quick process or you have public involvement. I think we've almost gone so far and that it is so drawn out that it has been detrimental to our participation. I think we need to make sure they don't become research projects with the ending so far down the road you don't get there. This drawn out does raise another issue with the timing and then you have two or three more years of data before management is done and then you think, well, wow, we need to do an update before we can act on it because it is so old. For our survival, we do have to speed it up.

MR. GEIGER: Well, back when we came up with this process – I mean, this process is a result of the SEDAR Steering Committee, right, and it was brought to us. We looked at it and we thought it was a good idea to try as an experiment, so, Roy, hopefully you'll take back to the SEDAR Steering Committee your concerns and work with it at that level. I don't know what else we can do.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I have on the last several SEDAR Steering Committee meetings for some time brought up these concerns, but they basically haven't been fixed. In fact, things are slower now and there really hasn't been much done to address the issue of continuity between assessments and things. They're not easy things to fix.

Unfortunately, there may be some loss in transparency and other things to try and do more quicker assessments and things. If we try to go to more generic assessments where we're not going to completely recreate the thing every time we do an assessment, that's probably going to have some downsides, too. On the other hand, going seven years between assessments, we just can't do this.

MR. GEIGER: And those points are taken, but I would caution don't sacrifice speed for accuracy. That's also another problem.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I'm not convinced that the accuracy is improved by taking 12 months to do an assessment. Even with the process we're using now, we're looking right now in the Gulf of Mexico redoing the gag assessment. We're going to have to rerun it again because there are problems and things. Part of them are procedural problems I think with how we do updates.

Even at the pace we're moving now, we're still having problems so I don't know if one is directly related to the other.

MR. PHILLIPS: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on your committee, but I agree with Roy that we need to turn these things around. Not only is it bad for what we're working on, but it is bad for everything else that we need to be working on. We're not going to please – everything is not going to be perfect. We may have to give up something, but we really need to get some stuff turned around and so we can do it fast and efficiently.

DR. PONWITH: One quick point to Roy's comment and it is for context. When we originally began working on this, my commitment to this council was that if we could implement this, the hypothesis was that it would be considerably cheaper to do stock assessments this way because of the reductions in travel and hotel bills and things like that, and that the savings that we experienced from that would be turned right back into hiring more stock assessment scientists, which becomes a choke point in the through-put.

You can only do as many assessments as you have lead assessment scientists to do. We're getting an infusion – have received an infusion of money in 2010, which is going to increasing the stock assessment staff. I will be giving a full report on that in my center report on the last day of the meeting. Again, the notion was reduce the cost; the savings can be put toward adding additional stock assessment scientists, which then enables us to do more stock assessments per year.

MR. HARRIS: Okay, do we need any motions on this? Good discussion. I do think it is imperative that we look at this process and we continue to look at this process; and to the extent that we can make it more timely, we need to do so. I'm concerned about sacrificing accuracy for timeliness as well, but we do need a more timely process. I'm convinced of that. Okay, the next item, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I'll just share a quote that the well-esteemed Rick Methot offered. When we gave our grouper review, remember the issues with gag and red grouper several years ago and we looked at this, and Rick, who chaired the review panel, I believe, for that made a comment that said you can't let stock assessments become research projects, and I think that needs to be a guiding principle.

One of the issues we've had with so much time is that then there is a tendency to say, well, you have time enough to evaluate everything. I think even with the new process and with webinars and all that, you still don't have time to evaluate everything. If you try to do that, then you're never going to assess but two or three stocks. I think that is very sage advice and we need to keep that in mind. They aren't research projects; they are stock assessments, and there is a time and a place for both.

MR. HARRIS: Thank you, well stated. Conflict disclosure form, is that the next item?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It is unless anyone has any guidance on what they'd like to see assessed for 2011 going into 2012. We have the black sea bass benchmark. You had previously asked for

updates on up to three assessments, and in order they were golden tile, red porgy and gag. How many of those can be done along with the black sea bass benchmark depends on how many lead analysts are available in Beaufort.

At the current time I think they're looking at two based on people moving, people retiring, shuffling of people, experienced, qualified ready to roll. Maybe they'll have three at some point during the year, but I just think people should be aware that there are consequences on other parts of this. I still consider golden tilefish to be at the top of that list. If you guys were to change this, now would be the time to tell your steering committee representatives if you've decided to change that prioritization of tilefish, red porgy and then gag.

MR. HARRIS: Any desire to make any changes with respect to that assessment update schedule? Yes, Brian.

DR. CHEUVRONT: I just want to confirm this is in addition to starting the black sea bass benchmark?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right. Any recommendations for 2012? What we have penciled in – and this was based on the June steering committee discussions – is coastal migratory pelagic complex. That means looking at king and Spanish mackerel; other stocks that were in the complex but might be removed by other concerns, but we would like to look at, say – you know, a long-term efficiency plan is you should look at king, Spanish, cobia, all of those together.

There are a lot of similarities in the fisheries and the data collection and everything, and it would make sense to try and do all those together, so that is one that affects us. There is the golden crab and there is the wreckfish that are also of considerable interest.

DR. CHEUVRONT: When are we planning on doing B-liners again?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It doesn't come to the top of my mind. I can look here and see on my schedule if it is penciled in anywhere.

MR. HARRIS: It is on the list somewhere.

MR. PHILLIPS: Mr. Chairman, again, I'm not on your committee. I'm sitting here looking at golden crab; and if the crab fishermen have a TAC that they feel like they can live with for a few years, do you think there is something else that may be moved into that slot that is more critical as far as what their TAC might be? I'm just throwing it out there.

DR. CHEUVRONT: Yes, Charlie kind of read my mind. I was trying to figure out where we were with B-liners and see if that was a possibility to get – you know, that was kind of controversial and see if we can get something else done with that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: In a pre-June schedule, this is the March schedule we had red porgy, vermilion snapper and greater amberjack updates scheduled for 2012, so perhaps vermilion is something you'd like to see in 2012.

MR. CUPKA: I do know that the golden crab fishermen are interested in getting an assessment. I think they were somewhat happy with the new ABC that we got out of the SSC, but they still think it is low. I think everyone would feel better if we did have a real assessment of some type on golden crab. I think it is important to consider that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: In a recent development, I've had some contact with Brian Rothschild who has indicated some of the fishermen perhaps contracting with him to conduct an assessment; he is considering doing a production model update of the last assessment. My advice has been it would be good to get proposal for what they intend to do and bring it before the SSC and the council and run through the agency to make sure that what is being proposed will meet the standards of both the council and the agency need to actually take action.

MR. CUPKA: I was going to mention that was my understanding, too, that they are so interested in getting an assessment; and if we can't work it through our process, that they're looking at other avenues, and maybe that would be a good route to go and it would allow us to do more than we would be able to do otherwise. They want an assessment whether it is through this process or through some other process.

MR. HARRIS: What I'm hearing is there a still a desire to keep golden crab in the loop in some form or fashion as well as get vermilion snapper in there in 2012. That is what I'm hearing.

MR. GEIGER: Before we leave the schedule, going into this next SEDAR Steering Committee we're going to have a new chair and vice-chair. Do we need to provide to them the authority to speak for the council and make decisions on behalf of the council, or is that an automatic conveyance? We've done that in the past.

MR. HARRIS: I don't know whether it is automatic or not; it is kind of just the way it has worked itself out. We still bring it back before the council for approval.

MR. GEIGER: Well, in certain cases I think there are decisions that need to be made at that meeting and by delaying it to another meeting and bringing it back to the council can delay this process. I think we have a chair and a vice-chair at the meeting who are certainly cognizant of all the concerns.

They have listened to the concerns of the council during these SEDAR steering committees, which is one of the reasons we have a SEDAR Steering Committee meeting at every meeting so that these things are elevated and discussed. I think they should have the leeway to make those decisions for the council.

MR. HARRIS: Make me a motion.

MR. GEIGER: I make a motion that the chairman and vice-chairman as members of the SEDAR Steering Committee have the authority to speak on behalf of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council on all matters concerning the SEDAR development of schedule, et cetera.

MR. HARRIS: You have heard the motion; is there a second? Second by Ben. Discussion on the motion? Is there objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion – Bonnie, are you going to object?

DR. PONWITH: No, no objection, just a double-check. My understanding is it is the executive director and the chair who are actually members of the SEDAR Steering Committee.

MR. HARRIS: That is correct.

MR. GEIGER: Well, that was my ignorance; the vice-chair used to attend, so let's make it the chairman then.

MR. HARRIS: Okay, remove vice-chair from that and just make it the chairman will speak on behalf of the council at the SEDAR –

MR. GEIGER: The motion is to move that the council chair, as a member of the SEDAR Steering Committee, has the authority to act on behalf of the council at steering committee meetings.

MR. HARRIS: Ben seconded it. Further discussion on the motion? Is there objection to the motion? No objections; that motion is approved. Okay, one more thing.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We have one more item and it is the conflict of interest disclosure. It has been batted about by the committee a couple of time, and we have had time squeezes of two meetings and haven't talked about it in depth. The idea is to get at the level of disclosure that primarily SSC members provide – not as much as perhaps council members provide – in terms of people who are appointed to the SEDAR pool and the SEDAR panels, so that you have some idea if someone has a strong primarily financial conflict of interest, but there could be consideration for other conflicts as well, such that might affect their ability to be objective and independent in evaluating an assessment; perhaps, you know, ties to individuals that worked on it.

So, we have had a draft form – you had it at the last meeting but you really didn't get a chance to look at it because we ran out of time. I think at this point it is to see if there are any comments on the form, any edits to be made. If you're comfortable with moving ahead, we can endorse it. If you decide that perhaps it is an issue that has come and passed and you're not still feeling this is something we need to get into; what is your pleasure?

MR. HARRIS: Well, I've reviewed the form and there is not a whole lot to it. It seems to be rather self-explanatory to me, and I didn't see anything that I would recommend changes being made to it. David.

MR. CUPKA: The only question I have for John is that at the very beginning it relates to a specific SEDAR or a specific stock, so is this a situation where the person does this once and is eligible for any of them or does he have to fill out another one if he was selected, say, for a different SEDAR for a different stock for some reason?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think initially it was dedicated to a particular SEDAR, but we may want to allow it to apply across the board so that you don't have to do it many times. Part of that is because people could have ties perhaps a species but not another species. Filling the form out in general could then allow you to judge that person for subsequent species is one option.

MR. HARRIS: Well, I prefer to do it just one time, but I don't want to not capture something that someone might have a conflict of interest over because they fill it out for a particular SEDAR and then another one comes up and there is a conflict. David.

MR. CUPKA: Yes, but it talks about their participation in different fisheries and the ones they have a financial interest in otherwise, so that seems like that would guide our decision on some of that or at least let us know whether they're qualified to even serve on that one.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We could modify it in the beginning just for consideration of appointment to the SEDAR panel and then have them list this information and then it would be available and you could judge it at each instance as appropriate. Then maybe there is an expiration date; maybe two years or something.

DR. CHEUVRONT: I was going to suggest that the council give guidance to the staff on just modifying the form and basically saying that is acceptable if they do that.

MR. HARRIS: Do you want to make a motion to approve the form with that guidance?

DR. CHEUVRONT: Sure, I'll go ahead and do that; that we accept the conflict of interest form – or actually what you're calling it "disclosure form" – conflict of interest form with the suggested edits.

MR. CUPKA: Second.

MR. HARRIS: Second by David. Discussion on the motion? Is there objection to the motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved. Monica.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: I have a question for John. John, on the form, the third paragraph states that this form is to be completed by SEDAR workshop appointment candidates who are not active AP, SSC members, employees of NOAA, and it goes on and on, and that is because you would have already received the information you're seeking on this disclosure from these people?

MR. CARMICHAEL: AP and SSC members, we would. We could consider if you want to apply it to employees of marine fisheries, agencies and the commissions and ACCSP.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: I'm not suggesting that you do or you don't, but I was just wondering if I was a person from the community who wanted to participate, I guess I would want to know why I'm being singled out to complete the form and none of these people are. Maybe you just want to put a little bit of an explanation or maybe not – I'm just bringing it up.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think your point is good about perhaps noting that this is a similar form that is requested already of AP and SSC members and council members, so it brings it more in consistence with the standards for those individuals.

MR. HARRIS: Thank you, Monica, good suggestion. Timing and tasks motion; is there anything else we need to do on that, John? Is there any other business to come before the committee? George.

MR. GEIGER: Under timing and tasking, John, could you resurrect that plan that apparently slipped past me with regard to which staff or whose staff is going to contact the appointees?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Shall I send you the draft plan; is that what you're asking for?

MR. GEIGER: Yes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I can do that; you don't need a motion.

MR. GEIGER: I just want to know who is doing it; I don't remember.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Can I just make that as a to-do list and not have to make a motion for that?

MR. HARRIS: Any other business to come before the committee? Is there anything else we need to do under the timing and tasks motion? Then this committee is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 3:58 o'clock p.m., September 14, 2010.)

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

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October 15, 2010

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council 2009 - 2010 Council Membership

COUNCIL CHAIRMAN:

Charles Duane Harris
105 Demere Retreat Lane
St. Simons Island, GA 31522
912/638-9430 (ph)
seageorg@bellsouth.net

COUNCIL VICE-CHAIRMAN

David M. Cupka
P.O. Box 12753
Charleston, SC 29422
843/795-8591 (hm)
843/870-5495 (cell)
palmstobooks@bellsouth.net

Robert H. Boyles, Jr.
S.C. Dept. of Natural Resources
Marine Resources Division
P.O. Box 12559
(217 Ft. Johnson Road)
Charleston, SC 29422-2559
843/953-9304 (ph)
843/953-9159 (fax)
boylesr@dnr.sc.gov

Tom Burgess
P.O. Box 33
Sneads Ferry, NC 28460
910/327-3528
ttburgess@embarqmail.com

Dr. Brian Chevront
N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries
P.O. Box 769 (3441 Arendell St.)
Morehead City, NC 28557
252/726-7021 Ext. 8015 (ph)
252/726-6187
brian.chevront@ncdenr.gov

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

Benjamin M. "Mac" Currin
801 Westwood Drive
Raleigh, NC 27607
919/881-0049 (ph)
mcurrin1@bellsouth.net

George J. Geiger
566 Ponoka Street
Sebastian, FL 32958
772/388-3183 (ph)
georgegeiger@bellsouth.net

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

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

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

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

~~**LT. Richard Mach**~~
U.S. Coast Guard
Brickell Plaza Federal Building
909 S.E. First Avenue
Room 876/ DRE
Miami, FL 33131-3050
305/415-6781 (ph)
305/415-6791 (f)
Richard.A.Mach@uscg.mil

John V. O'Shea
Executive Director
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries
Commission
1444 Eye Street, N.W., 6th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005
202/289-6400 (ph); 202/289-6051 (f)
voshea@asmfc.org

Charles Phillips
Phillips Seafood / Sapelo Sea Farms
1418 Sapelo Avenue, N.E.
Townsend, GA 31331
912/832-3149 (ph); 912/832-6228 (f)
Ga_capt@yahoo.com

Mark Robson
Director, Division of Marine Fisheries
Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
620 S. Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399
850/487-0554 (ph); 850/487-4847(f)
mark.robson@myfwc.com

Tom Swatzel
P.O. Box 1311
Murrells Inlet, SC 29576
843/222-7456 (ph)
tom@swatzel.com

*BONNIE PONLWITH
NIK MEHTA
MONICA SMIT BRUNELLO
JACK MCGOVERN
BOB SHEPP
CAROLYN BELCHER
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✓ Tom Swatzel
Staff contact: John Carmichael

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Staff

✓ Executive Director

Robert K. Mahood
robert.mahood@safmc.net

✓ Deputy Executive Director

Gregg T. Waugh
gregg.waugh@safmc.net

✓ Public Information Officer

Kim Iverson
kim.iverson@safmc.net

✓ Senior Fishery Biologist

Roger Pugliese
roger.pugliese@safmc.net

✓ Staff Economist

Kathryn (Kate) Quigley
kate.quigley@safmc.net

Cultural Anthropologist

Open Position

✓ Environmental Impact Scientist

Rick DeVictor
richard.devictor@safmc.net

✓ Science and Statistics Program Manager

John Carmichael
john.carmichael@safmc.net

✓ Outreach Assistant

Anna Martin
anna.martin@safmc.net

✓ SEDAR Coordinators

✓ Julie Neer - julie.neer@safmc.net
✓ Kari Fenske – kari.fenske@safmc.net

✓ Coral Reef Biologist

Myra Brouwer
myra.brouwer@safmc.net

✓ Administrative Officer

Mike Collins
mike.collins@safmc.net

Financial Secretary

Debra Buscher
deb.buscher@safmc.net

Admin. Secretary /Travel Coordinator

Cindy Chaya
cindy.chaya@safmc.net

✓ Purchasing/Adm. Assistant

Julie O'Dell
julie.odell@safmc.net

SEDAR/ Staff Administrative Assistant

Rachael Lindsay
rachael.lindsay@safmc.net

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SEDAR Committee
Charleston, SC
Tuesday, September 14, 2010

<u>NAME & ORGANIZATION</u>	<u>AREA CODE & PHONE NUMBER</u>	<u>P.O. BOX/STREET CITY, STATE & ZIP</u>
Michelle Owen EDF	919-923-0774	Sarasota FL 34234
Tim Brandon Fisher, USCG	384 843-740-3179	SRETC, Charleston, SC
Sera Devenak, Penn	910-685-5705	Bolivia, NC 28402
Bill Kelley - FKA FA	305-619-0039	P.O. Box 501404 MARTIN, FL 33050
Paula Johnson ASF	386-239-0948	32120-9351
FRANK HELLES GSASF1	813 286 8390	TAMPA, FL

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405
843-571-4366 or Toll Free 866/SAFMC-10