SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

Charleston Marriott Hotel
Charleston, SC

September 13, 2011

SUMMARY MINUTES

SEDAR Committee

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Tom Swatzel

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Observers/Participants:

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith
Bob Gill
Kate Michie
Dr. Steve Turner
Monica Smit-Brunello
Rick DeVictor
Dr. Jack McGovern

Other Participants Attached

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in the Topaz Room of the Charleston Marriott Hotel, Charleston, South Carolina, September 13, 2011, and was called to order at 3:25 o'clock p.m. by Chairman David Cupka.

MR. CUPKA: If you'll take your seats we'll go ahead and convene the meeting of the SEDAR Committee. We will be closing the meeting toward the end to discuss selecting some participants for SEDAR 28, but that's at the very end. The first order of business is the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes to the agenda? Seeing none, then our agenda is approved.

Next is approval of the minutes from our last meeting. Are there any corrections or additions to the minutes? Seeing none, then those minutes are approved. The next item is SEDAR Activities and, John, you're going to give us an overview of where we are.

MR. CARMICHAEL: A quick update; the main thing we have going on right now in the South Atlantic is SEDAR 25, South Atlantic Black Sea Bass and Golden Tilefish. They've been spending most of the summer working on the assessment workshop for these two stocks, trying to get those assessments put together. The workshop was June 21st through 23rd, so just after our June meeting.

They've had a number of webinars over that time and they're end and approaching the deadline for the review workshop. That will be held October 11th through 13th. That was pushed back a little bit. It was going to be next week, but they asked for a little bit more time for model development when they realized some things were not quite going as smoothly as had been hoped in the initial stages.

It was kind of touch and go there for golden tilefish for quite a while as a number of you know. It seemed like that model has started to come together and the panel has a preferred alternative to put forth of a base run that they're hoping is favorably reviewed by the review panel, but we will see. Any questions on those, I'll be glad to entertain them, but that's where we stand now, and our plan is that these assessments will go to the SSC in November and then come to you in December.

MR. CUPKA: Any questions for John? Okay, next is the SEDAR process update. John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay, at our last meeting we discussed having an overview of the SEDAR process as it currently stands. I put this together to walk through some of the changes that have been considered in the last couple of years and give you an idea of what we're looking at for the future.

Just a little background on SEDAR, it had started it back in 2003, the original SEDAR process, largely involving – essentially only involving the South Atlantic Council at that time in SEDAR 1 where we dealt with red porgy. Then we did black sea bass and vermilion in SEDAR 2, and soon after that it was expanded to the entire southeast, so that's when SEDAR really became a large thing and affected all of the councils, the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico as well as the South Atlantic.

A few later HMS came in because the Southeast Center did the shark assessments for HMS so that was brought into the SEDAR family essentially as it was. Then through history SEDAR has really been an evolutionary process as a council and agency collaboration tried to deal with problems as they arise and try to deal with things like having now an ACL system, which requires ACLs and AMs, which requires a lot more assessments than what we were ever getting in the past.

We've seen an increased role of the SSC throughout, which I think everyone will agree is a good thing. Some of the recent changes have to add more assessment types. We've also tried to take advantage of technological advances mainly through webinars in terms of process, but we've also seen the models evolve a lot over the time since 2003. Things in some ways get a lot more complicated but in others ways allow us to assess stocks that in the past we really couldn't because of data gaps and deficiencies and such.

Now we did some major changes in 2010 and 2011, which most people are familiar with, intended to try and increase assessment through-put directly relevant to trying to get more timely information through the council but also improved timeliness – that's something that we grapple with a lot within SEDAR is how do we get more assessments done – trying to improve the documentation, trying to define the assessment types, talking about the roles of the SEDAR Review Panel and the SSC, which over the earlier development was always kind of a point of contention as to who what is the role of an independent review panel and what is the role of the SSC as a peer review body for the council.

And as we're always trying to do is improve workload management, and that's something that we may struggle with at times; I think if we look back at the pre-SEDAR period we're a lot better at that now than we were in those days. Some major changes that were done to address those concerns where we implemented the three assessment types – and I'll talk about these some in detail when we get to them – we've refined the TORs.

And as I mentioned earlier in the Mackerel Committee that is kind of an ongoing process. We increased the meetings essentially of the data and assessment workshops by using webinars to allow the groups to get together and talk more often and address issues a bit more efficiently, we think.

The review panel has evolved a lot over time and the most recent change was to add three SSC members to the review panel as reviewers and a chair. We've also developed a more rigorous scheduled planning process, which is something we've been working on for a while and we're trying to implement this year.

Now not all the things we've tried have stuck. There are some things we tried to put in place in 2010 really to try and get more efficient, but in the current stage trying to get a lot of assessments through and dealing with some big issues we've had to fall back on the basics and some of these things haven't really taken off. I think one of the ideas we discussed early on was doing benchmarks and updates in alternatives years as a way to increase efficiency.

This has been sort of set aside because we've had to deal with a number of high-profile issues and we've had to deal with the changes in the Act, which have made us change our plans and have to do a lot of updates. We considered doing AW meetings entirely by webinar; and if you look back at the assessments done in 2010 we tried that.

It was not warmly received in most quarters actually. A lot of people felt that the controversial issues didn't get the attention that they needed. Some of the analysts felt like they didn't get the time they needed to really talk about those issues and they didn't get to the bottom of them very efficiently.

We had a group of people that looked at those changes and it was recommended to go back to doing an assessment workshop. I guess it was February when the steering committee actually had said that. Now this is something that, of course, we have to sort of keep on the front burner because resources being what they are; to try and get more assessments through, one way to do that and to save both time and travel expenses money is to consider or continue to consider meeting by webinars.

But for the plans right now, we're looking at having an assessment workshop by webinar. We'd like to abbreviate that some and then have conditional meetings through the webinars and have one face-to-face meeting if we can that kicks it off and gets some of the toughest issues on the table and addressed, but this is something the steering committee will probably continue to talk about.

Another thing which we tried was this pre-review of the assessment workshop report where we had an assessment workshop report and put it out for a lot comments; and while it was good to get some feedback on that, it really created a serious time crunch because you needed the time to have the document available, you needed people to have time to review it, to get comments in, and then you needed to really give the assessment workshop an opportunity to talk about it.

What we ended up doing was realizing this was adding several months to what was already an extended process, so in the interest of trying to get more assessments done this part of the process was tried in 2010 but it hasn't been carried forward into the future. So what are the things that have stuck a little better and what are we doing now in terms of how SEDAR is operating?

Well, I think the place to start is with the assessment types. Right now we have three types of assessments. Some of parts of it, especially the standard, are a bit confusing; but to start with the simplest, which is a benchmark. That's what SEDAR has always been known for. It's the basic assessment that we've done from the beginning.

And, really, there are no large changes in how a benchmark is done under the current process. We have a three workshop process, data, assessment and review workshop. We bring in lots of people, you evaluate new models, you evaluate all the data sources, you have the independent peer review, it comes to the SSC. That's pretty straightforward.

The standard is the type that was recently added, and this falls between the benchmark and the update. The idea of a standard is that there will be a lot of instances where maybe you don't need to do a full benchmark but you do need some evaluation of a new data source. We especially this is going to be important as we move forward in the southeast because we have things like a new independent survey that is being done.

We hope to have continued increases in things like bycatch sampling, we're going to have changes in MRIP, so we're going to have changes to our core data sets that we'd like to be able to implement without having to go through a full benchmark. That's because we can be a lot more efficient.

Maybe I can do three or four species benchmark in a year for the South Atlantic if I put all the resources into it, but maybe I can do two benchmarks and four standards if I can streamline that a little bit and I can put species together in ways that make sense. So a standard comes after a benchmark. You've got to an approved benchmark that has been accepted.

Then you have this sort of hybrid type where you have a standard. Process-wise there is a data and assessment workshop. The idea is that because you already know most of the data sets you're working on, people can put their data together, make it available to the analysts. They can begin doing the initial model runs, and then you have one workshop where you talk about the new data series and you talk about the base model runs and you try to get that configured and then maybe a couple of follow-up webinars to finalize.

The key part is that it is limited allowance for new information and that it's reviewed by the SSC, so there isn't an independent peer review coming in on the standard assessment. It would done by a group that you guys would appoint, and it will come to the SSC for review. And then the final type is the updates, and this is very strict.

This is something that SEDAR is kind of hands off on with the exception of just the timing and the scheduling of it. It's really going to be conducted by the agency; in most cases the Science Center, but we do have assessments which are conducted by the state of Florida, in which case that would be the lead assessment agency.

An update, of course, follows a benchmark; you could do an assessment that goes benchmark, standard, update, you might go benchmark straight into an update if the benchmark worked out really well and people are satisfied and there is no new information. But the important thing is that in an update you only add new observations to your existing series.

You can't bring in a new piece of data into an update because you're not having any workshops. The agency is going to conduct it. Their scientist who is the lead on this would solicit the data from all the different partners. Whether they be ACCSP or the state, SEAMAP, MARMAP, what have you, they're going to solicit the data. They're going to be free to contact people as necessary, via e-mail and telephone, what they make sure they got the data right and they understand it, but there is not going to be any formal workshops being held.

It will be provided to the SSC for review just like the standards. Right now we're hoping that we can be more efficient by moving into doing standards and updates for some stocks. Of course, you need to have a good, rigorous, accepted benchmark to get there, which at times can be a bit of a struggle, but we have a number of species in the South Atlantic where we feel like we can start following this approach. I'll pause here and see if there are any questions on these types because this is a pretty important thing.

MR. CUPKA: Any questions for John in regard to the three assessment types?

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right, I'll carry on then. The other thing we've been working on and it's a bit of an ongoing process is refining the terms of reference. I mentioned some of this earlier. Some of things we've done is we've tried to make them more in sync with the report sections. That just makes it easier for the participants and for the users in the end.

We tried to sync them with working groups, so what we have now in the data workshop is a term of reference for each working group with a number of bullets under it that describes what it needs to do. As I also mentioned, we're trying to become more generalized. It's moving toward more of a question and answer instead of a – you know, we used to use things like evaluate and see if things are appropriate and adequate and stuff of that nature, and we're tying to be a little more simpler language and more question and answer to the individuals and especially with the review workshop.

Part of this is focusing on the basics; things like is there reliable catch, are there reliable indices, is the data used properly, is the model consistent with accepted scientific practices, what can you say about stock status. If you can't determine status from the quantitative model, what can you tell us from the other series?

I've had some discussion with people like Rick Methot at the national level who has a lot of experience in stock assessments. We really think this is a good way to move in our terms of reference in the future. Really, all of this is avoiding what could just be an outright and simplistic rejection. If you ask a review panel to review a quantitative model and they decide there is some problem with it, they might stop right there and not carry on.

Well, you may have good information in terms of looking at landings trends or indices or age composition, so we want to make sure that they do that type of stuff and that they put information forward that is useful to the SSC and to council ultimately, because we have in many cases 18 months of work, an enormous investment, a lot of people's time and a lot of travel money in these assessments and we don't want to get to the very last thing and get the rug pulled out from under us.

Also, in the terms of reference we're looking in an increased role of the Science Center, and the goal is that the Science Center will take the first cut in crafting these terms of reference, which is good because they know a lot of what is going on with the data. They're on the front edge of a lot this new data collection, especially when we deal with things like standards in terms of what be considered for a standard and what might be evaluated in this particular assessment and letting them take the first cut at this.

And then after that it still goes through SSC review and council approval and everything as it always has. The steering committee is going to be talking about some terms of reference again in October and we have a new set of frameworks. What we do with these, we have a basic framework terms of reference made available for every assessment and then they're modified through the Science Center, SSC, council approach to fit the particular stock that we're dealing with.

The data workshop as it is had no major changes and mainly bringing in some webinars; a pre-workshop webinar to try and get everyone to agree on how data should be put together and maybe to answer some questions if someone finds out they can't put it together the way they thought, and then a number of post-workshop webinars to try and get the final data. We really want the data workshop people to focus on data evaluations.

In the assessment workshops, during the workshop phase, which is the face-to-face workshop, do the primary decisions, try to look at initial runs if they have them and then they can talk about them and then expect a number of webinars for followup. I'll say the biggest thing here is we've trying to condense this assessment workshop process, but we've found it has been very difficult for benchmarks.

The benchmarks went back to having the full three workshops, including an assessment workshop process. The standards have been successful in condensing this down. The peer review panel, as I mentioned, changed a lot over the years. Right now we have an SSC member as a facilitator/chair, up to three SSC as reviewers, the CIE reviewers coming in, and then one council-appointed independent reviewer, which has always been an option if you wanted to put somebody else in there perhaps from a university or something to fill out the expertise on the panel.

But the benchmark review panel is pretty much very consistent as it has been prosecuted over the years, because remember this is just for benchmarks and you don't have this for the standards and the updates. The big thing we're working on now is how to best prioritize our assessments and manage the stocks that need to be done.

What we're looking at now is kind of about a 15-month in-advance planning window. What would happen is in the May of the year, say, this last May 2011 the steering committee gave an idea of the slots they had that is coming up in two years out, which in this case would be 2013, and the council has made an initial request.

As you know, we've talked about this. In June and July we ran it through our SEDAR Technical Committee, they give us some feedback, and this is representatives from the Science Centers, the SSC, who can give us some feedback on data availability and what is possibly feasible. We've discussed this with the SSC. We discussed it here at this table with the SEDAR Committee in June.

So we have now a prioritized list that we'll talk about again later in this meeting that will go to the steering committee for the last step in October. The really important thing is that we want the steering committee to finalize the stocks for 2013 in October of 2011. That is critical because it gives the people involved in things like the age-sample processing time to get their work done.

That has been one of the big problems when we try to make changes midstream, close to an assessment beginning is that the age people can't get their work done. Maybe down the road we'll be at a point where age samples are kept up with on a three-month lag or something, but that is going to take a lot of resources. As we all know, those resources aren't really going to be forthcoming in the near future. We need o have some restraint here at this level so that we let those guys get that work done and give them an idea of what is coming.

The other thing is with scheduling is we've always wanted to try and tailor things like cooperative research requests to the stock assessment schedule so that we get projects coming available and their information becoming available in time to help an assessment. As long as we keep changing the schedule two or three years in advance, that really doesn't happen.

We're hoping to follow this process and get this assessment schedule here done for 2013 and follow 2011 and move on with this in the future years and keep it rolling with this sort of lead time for folks. That's how it is being done now; what are we looking at for the future? Well, the biggest thing is the through-put, the output, productivity; it really doesn't matter what you call it, we need more of it.

We've got to get more assessments done is what we talk about at every steering committee meeting. We talk about it all the time. We talk about it whenever we get with the analysts; how do we get more done? But within that we have transparency and SEDAR wants to be a transparent process. It's intended to be open, to involve a lot of people, so that can sometimes stand in the way of getting a lot done.

One of the questions we're grappling with in the steering committee is what does transparency really mean and how can it be evaluated, so that's what we'll be talking about in the future. Similarly along these lines is increasing this buy-in. We hear a lot of talk about public support for the assessments and getting buy-in. I think the big question here is how do we separate process from outcome?

We had some discussions about that in June, and that's really the critical issue because we've all seen that you can get an assessment that has a good outcome and it's not scrutinized as much; and then one with a less than favorable outcome, then a lot of times it gets criticized and the whole process itself gets criticized for something that's really an outcome, so we've got to maintain the separation of that and recognize that they're different things.

Dealing with public comments, when we started in SEDAR we didn't get a lot of those and we're getting more. We initially let the council process these as a way of handling the comments, and now within SEDAR we're looking at a SEDAR-dedicated way to better manage the public comments, because we want to make sure that they get into the hands of the people where they belong, to the people at the workshops, to the people that are making decisions, to the SSCs and the council as the process rolls along. We're going to going to find a more rigorous way of keeping with them.

Then the bottom line here is workload management, always. Not every stock is going to have a statistical catch-at-age assessment. We simply don't have the resources for the data or the analysis. One of the questions is how do we prioritize, what stocks might be assessed by lesser means?

That's a council question really to answer because it's up to you say that for some species I may accept a different level of information. That's a critical thing but with the number of stocks we have to manage we're going to have to make these types of hard calls. It's interesting to change some colors. Really what we're dealing with is this was supposed to show that you have a choice between being timely, being thorough or being transparent.

Within SEDAR originally we were really thorough and we were really transparent, but we weren't necessarily very timely, and now what we're trying to do is more timely. That means that there is going to have to be some give and take in terms in thoroughness and transparency. You often hear it termed in engineering circles as you want it good, fast or cheap; pick any two.

Well, within stock assessments it's really timely, thorough and transparent, and it's hard o optimize with more than two of those, but that's the challenge that SEDAR is really facing right now. It's something that really at national level stock assessments in all the arenas are dealing with this.

We've got to be more timely, but we've also got to maintain transparency and we've also got to maintain thoroughness, but we may have to relax some things and we may have to do some things a little bit differently so that we can get the assessments done that we need to get done, because late information is not doing anybody any good. Are there any questions? That's the end of overview. I hope I hit the issues that were of interest and have cleared up sort of how SEDAR is being run right now.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, John, good presentation as always. I think one of the take-home messages from all of this is that SEDAR is an evolving process, and the steering committee and the SEDAR staff have been putting a lot of time and effort into ways to increase the through-put and to deal with transparency and also to encourage involvement particularly of fishermen in the whole process.

As John says, it's a real balancing act to try and do some of this, but we're constantly searching for ways to improve the process and it's continuing to evolve. We aren't there yet but we've come a long way. We've still got a ways to go. Questions for John?

MR. JOLLEY: I thought that was very helpful to me, John, but I had a couple of questions. Did we or are we using independent peer review in the SEDAR for red snapper and black sea bass?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, an independent peer review panel was done for red snapper and the current assessment of black sea bass also has an independent peer review panel.

MR. JOLLEY: Okay, and do think there is any – I saw the comment about the procedure being so full we might have to back off on age and growth to some extent here and some of these analyses, and I was wondering if there might be some help from the states cooperatively in assessing age and growth so that we don't have to rely just on catch statistics in some of these analyses.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The states have been pretty big partners so far and a lot of the aging work that we have done is through the South Carolina Lab and MARMAP, key aging partners. They have been a lot of help and they've been a lot of help in collecting the samples. Now, how much more they can step up, of course, right now is probably not a whole lot given what their situation is. We're seeing a lot of the states have to fall back more into their state species and perhaps not be as involved in some of the federal management species as they might have used to be or might want to be.

MR. JOLLEY: Well, I would just suggest that there might be more opportunity than we think. I know the vital nature of the age-and-growth aspects, too, in some of these more controversial decisions, and so I would hope that we would exhaust our opportunities there if it's possible.

MR. CUPKA: Other comments of questions for John? Seeing none, then we'll move on. The next agenda item was a presentation on the Southeast Fisheries Science Center Data Program that Steve Turner was supposed to do, and Steve hasn't made it yet. What we'll probably do – we won't have to take any action. It's mostly for information, so we'll probably start the first thing in the morning with Steve's presentation before we get into the rest of our committee meetings. That brings us down to incorporating appointed observer comments.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, the council appoints observers, council members and AP members, to some of the workshops. At the last meeting we discussed having a process for bringing in their comments and that you would ask them to submit comments to the process, what they saw and what they observed, what their impressions were of the process and of the assessment.

You want to have a means of making sure that those comments are received and that they're vetted and they make their way to the right place. You asked that we come up with a way of dealing with this, and that's what we have here in the overview. It's the second page at the top there and basically some recommendations for how we handle this.

The idea is that these are to the council. These are somewhat from the SEDAR process. This is a comment from people you appointed back to you and to your process. The idea is that this would be separate from SEDAR as SEDAR applies to all of the councils, because not all the councils are necessarily are going to want to do this like you guys have chosen to do.

The idea is that comment should document the participation and perceptions of the process by the people who are submitting them. What we'll ask that appointed observers by the South Atlantic Council submit their comments following their participation in a SEDAR and those are on multiple workshops.

Let's say they're on the data, assessment and review; it would be up to them if they want to submit one overall report of their perception of the process as it was and their full range. Then the comments would made available to the SSC when it gets the assessment report and also be made available as part of the council's administrative records, so they'd be available to the council and to the APs along with the full assessment report and the SSC recommendations.

What you have here is the assessment is just one part of this overall record of what is going on. The SEDAR provides you with the assessment and then the SSC provides its comments on top of that, and the AP can provide comments and then you receive it and you take your actions, and your actions are also part of the overall record.

These comments would become part of that record and they would go along with the assessment in terms of your recordkeeping process and the things that you considered. I think we will open it up and see what people think of this overall process and if this is something that the committee agrees with, we'll start advising the South Atlantic Council's appointed observers in this.

MR. CUPKA: Comments on the recommendations for this approach? We've done a little bit of this in the past or at least kind of stuck our foot in the water a little bit. I guess Tom was our test case for this. We sent Tom to part of the black sea bass assessment and put together a short report which he distributed to everyone.

I think it gives us another viewpoint on just how things are going and not necessarily from a technical or scientific standpoint but just some observations on how that appointed observer felt that the process was carried out and if there were any problems with it. It's just a little more data to look at to make a more complete record.

I want to thank Tom for kind of being the guinea pig on that, but I think it is a valuable thing to do. As John said, we'd be open to any comments on the committee as to whether you want to continue with a process like this if you think it has merit or if you think we need to do something along the lines of the recommendation we got from John we'd be interested in getting some feedback on that. Mac.

MR. CURRIN: John, how important are the comments of the observers to you and the other direct participants in SEDAR? Do you see those as being important to you or would they be, I would suspect, more important to the council and perhaps the SSC?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think they're very important to me as managing the SEDAR Program. I'll say that a lot of the changes I just went through in that presentation have come up from the ground level through the people that are there. They've lived through the workshop and they said, "Hey, this worked, this didn't work, maybe you should try something else."

I think in that regard they're very useful and I think it would be very helpful to the SSC as well as the council to kind of get this sort of first-person feedback, especially if you get an assessment which may be controversial and it can be very helpful to get feedback from a council member or an AP member who was an observer and says, "I know this is really tough and I may not agree with all the decisions, but I think it's a pretty good assessment in the end." That kind of feedback as well as about the process could help give the SSC some good confidence in the assessment and feel comfortable moving forward in giving you recommendations.

DR. DUVAL: Excuse this because I'm still relatively new here, so am I to understand that Tom was the first test case of actually appointing a council observer then, so you haven't had an official council-appointed observer prior to the black sea bass; is that correct?

MR. CUPKA: We've had a council-appointed observer; we just haven't asked them to provide sort of a report on what their feelings were about how the process went. We've always had a council member as part of the SEDAR process.

DR. DUVAL: Well, if you're looking for a motion to accept the recommendation, I would move to do so if you would like that kind of formal acceptance.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, we'll accept that as a motion and give John a minute to get it up on the board. It just formalizes the process a little more than what it was before, too, as well as giving some additional insight into the whole process. As John said, often we get some comments out of that that may help to improve the whole process. I think it's useful.

MR. CURRIN: I'll second that, David.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, we have a motion by Michelle and second by Mac. **The motion is to accept the recommended process for incorporating South Atlantic Fishery Management Council appointed observer comments. Further discussion on the motion? Is there any objection to the motion? Seeing none, then that motion is approved.** Anything else on this particular issue, John? All right, that brings us down to our next item, which is a SAFE Report Framework, and Attachment 2 has sort of a sample SAFE Report.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This is a top that is near and dear to everybody as far as dealing with the SAFE reports. As directed by council some time ago, we've been working with regional office staff and science center staff to come up with a framework for a SAFE report and a process for putting it together.

I think in a lot of ways we're making good progress in terms of how we would put this together and the kind of information we would get. We had hoped to have more of a final draft for you at this meeting but this has become more of a conceptual draft just because of some delays in getting the data.

Now, that's one of the reasons why I think Steve's presentation is so important because he can bring you up to speed on what the science center is doing and the progress they're making in terms of reducing those delays and making the data much more accessible to everyone. As it is now and as he'll show, there are lots of different data collection programs spread out over the region and they're not always easily compatible, so that's kind of been he challenge.

And as we've discussed, changes in the recreational data program have certainly affected all of our data collections for this year and certainly our data presentation. With that, I don't necessarily want to have to go through the whole document. We can go to places if you guys would like, but what we'd like at this point is to try to get a sense from you guys if you think this is the right type of presentation, do you think the information is in there that is going to help you in your job in evaluating accountability measures and evaluating catch limits, evaluating regulations.

The general approach to this is snapper grouper. It's the most complicated FMP we have. It starts out with the presentation of information for the complex as a whole, total landings, tables of things like stock status for all the stocks, tables of assessment-generated parameters where we have them for MFMTs and MSSTs and ABCs and all of those are listed, and then it moves into a section of either species or complex-specific information where we show landings by species for the stocks where you have species-based ACLs.

It shows landings by complex, total for the complex and then the individual species for the groups where you've grouped things together. Black sea bass is used in here as an example of the type of species-specific information we would give. It's a stock under a rebuilding plan so it has the rebuilding schedule on landings and things of that nature. We're trying not to keep it from getting very large, but with the number of species we have in snapper grouper there is probably going to be no way that we don't get fairly large.

We can go to some specific places if you'd like, but I think we could get some feedback, if you think we're in the right direction, if you think we've got the right kind of information, and importantly if there is something you'd really to see which you didn't see in this document, we'd like to get that in there as well. David, we can open we can open it up for kind of a general discussion.

MR. CUPKA: Any comments or questions for John on this? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Without going over it really well, I'm tickled to death to see it finally.

MR. CUPKA: I think it is a good place to record some information maybe that you wouldn't see otherwise, something in the data collection community that sometimes is referred to as metadata, which helps to explain some of what you see going on, and if fishermen have some of that information it would be good to pull all that together if we could into one location. Sometimes you can see what has happened but you don't really understand why and hopefully this would help shed some light on that as well. Other comments or questions for John? Is this something you want to see pursued further? Mac.

MR. CURRIN: Yes, I was very favorably impressed, John, and I didn't see anything – I've looked at it fairly closely and didn't see any glaring omissions. I'll certainly look at it again, but I'm very excited about the possibility of having something like this available. It's a lot of work to get it done the first time, but it's also a lot of work to keep it updated and updated in a timely manner, and both of those things are critical. We've got to have a commitment to have it updated in a timely manner every year.

DR. DUVAL: I agree with Mac, I think this is great and especially recognizing the workload to put this together the first time and to keep it updated because this fishery management plan is so complicated, that it's so nice to have everything in one place like that. It reminds me of the FMP updates that are done by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Hopefully it won't be quite as labor intensive for some of the other FMPs, but this is fantastic. It's nice to take one document and be able to flip through and find some of the information that you need especially if you get an angry phone call or something like we often do.

DR. PONWITH: I certainly enjoy having a one-stop shop for all of that information. I've been an advocate for using sort of an electronic approach to this; so that rather than writing a dust-collecting document, that once it's done it goes to the shelf a year later and it's part of the historic record, but it sort of loses its utility of creating almost like an electronic shelf where the second the data become available you can update it rather than waiting until the end of a year or the end of some predetermined timeframe and create a paper document that's a compilation of things that have various shelf life.

By having an electronic system; for example, every time you do a stock assessment, if you have a re-estimation of some parameter that you want to document, you could put it there. That would happen in a perfect world once every two years, three years, four years; whereas the landing data come available annually and the commercial data are available sooner than the recreational data. By having an electronic system, the second those data hit the word "final" it can be actually repopulated into this electronic shelf of information, so it would include not only the data itself but what its refresh date was so that you've got the most recent information at your fingertips all the time.

MR. CARMICHAEL: What I think one of the keys to this is deciding what we need and then working with the Science Center in terms of automating this type of thing. Those were the discussion that we've had with Steve like specifically as we can be in terms of what we want and then they can generate programs that will give us the information we need.

That's really the key to this, I believe, and that's what our intention is in terms of giving updates. The idea is that we can get information from them and we can get the management changes from the regional office, and then at the council we can put it together into a package that's available and rely a lot on things like links.

As the Science Center gets more automated and says if you want the most recent data as of immediately, give your link in the document where you can go look at it and then give this as sort of probably timing being about this time of the year at the September meetings, giving you here is the summary of the last year and here is what we think is going on.

MR. CURRIN: Bonnie, you make a good point about having the date in there that it was last updated. I think it might be equally as important to have a little tag in their with the date that it's expected to be updated next.

MR. CUPKA: Other comments? These are all good comments. Bill.

MR. TEEHAN: John, are there any plans to set up a separate group that will just do red snapper assessments from now until 2032?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No comment! We can certainly keep them busy, though, I will say.

MR. CUPKA: Other comments? Well, it sounds like something the committee is very interested in and I'm sure the council is. I guess we will proceed forward with that as time allows. It's not like you're looking for things to do, I am sure.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, we just got data from the Science Center in the last couple of weeks giving us updates on this stuff, so the intent would be to try and get that ported into it, looking at that and the types of formats and see what kind of figures and tables we can create efficiently and then hopefully have something that's further along in December; and maybe as time allows try and be able to get some more stocks put into this, more FMPs. And that's the other thing, our approach on this is doing it on an FMP basis so that we get one for each FMP. Obviously if we get the snapper grouper done, the rest of them are going to see like a walk in the park.

MR. CUPKA: All right, other questions or comments? If not, we're going to move on to SEDAR Steering Committee recommendations, and, John, I'm going to ask you what you're looking for here. I know one thing we talked about was the process, and I think the last time people indicated they may have some wording that wanted to submit in regard to our process document and I don't know if we've received any of those. Again, it's a dynamic living document and changing all the time. Are we going to go over priorities again?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, we had a couple of topics to talk about. This is your chance to give some guidance as to what the steering committee representatives are going to bring forward at the steering committee meeting in October. The primary topic of that meeting is prioritization for 2013, and then as always we talk about the general SEDAR process.

At the last meeting there was some indication that people wanted a bit more time to digest those guidelines and bring forth any comments. We wanted to sort of discuss it in terms of technical things and procedural things. If anybody has anything to bring forward that we can take to the steering committee, we'd appreciate that. Then we'll discuss some about the assessment schedule and we'll talk about that.

MR. CUPKA: If they do have anything, they can get that to you before the steering committee meeting, which will be in October?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, it's October 13th so anything could come – let's say copy me, but David and Bob as the steering committee representatives and they'll take that under advisement.

MR. CUPKA: All right, are you going to go over our priority again just to make sure nobody has any changes.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Based on getting some comments from the SSC when they had a conference call in July, so they took what you put forth in June, we presented to them in July, so then we asked for some feedback on the type of assessments that should be done. They felt it was best to just list it in terms of primary and secondary priorities.

An important reason we prioritized these is that if things happen at the Science Center and they can't do as many slots as perhaps they thought they could, we'll know which things should be dropped first, also we know that we have more stocks listed to be done in 2013 than the Science Center is going to be able to do.

There is going to have to be some tradeoffs made at the steering committee to try and get this stuff done. The primary priorities started with a red snapper benchmark, and I think that's at the top of the list and that's going to stay at the top of the list, and it's probably not going to come off the list in 2013 because looking at this stock in three years was one of the things that was in the rules that went forth for the no possession restriction.

I don't see any scenario where red snapper is not looked at in 2013 and doing a benchmark because we have to look at an entirely different way of looking at this stock because we haven't had any harvest. We've got the independent monitoring that has been going on for a couple of years, and we hope that will be informative.

The second one is blueline tilefish, which is being placed in there because of the developing fishery that has happened in the northern part of our jurisdiction. It has never been assessed so it has to be a benchmark. That leaves the secondary priorities; gray triggerfish, which has been lurking there just on the horizon for quite a while.

The gag assessment is getting to be several years old and I think it was maybe 2006 when we had 2005 data. It needs to be updated. The SSC suggested this could be done as a standard. The reason they shied away from an update was because of things like the new independent sampling that has been underway and just the amount of time that has passed, they're a little uncomfortable in doing an update for something that has been four or five years down the road just because they don't know what might have changed.

White grunt is one they would like to be done – that was listed as a benchmark – scamp and also snowy grouper, and snowy grouper as a standard because that's another one that's several year down the road and really needs to be looked at again. This was the SSC's priorities. We're asking from your guys do you agree with that list so that's something that David and Bob should take to the steering committee.

Should we consider some other things in light of something like the MRIP changes? For example, king mackerel is one that was on the schedule for 2012 and then got dropped off and it has not really been penciled in anywhere for now, but it has got a good recreational component and it might be something that could fall into that apples and oranges scenario if we don't look at it. I think we'll open it, David, and see what we think.

DR. CRABTREE: I guess to John or Bonnie; do we have any notion – the fishery-independent survey has been going go in the South Atlantic for how long, close to a year now, less than a year? I guess my concern is that we get to 2013 and we don't have enough information to do a red snapper benchmark. I'm wondering when we might be able to come to some conclusion about the likelihood of being able to pull off an assessment that comes to a conclusion and when we start talking about Plan B, which it would seem to me at some point would become reopen the fishery.

DR. PONWITH: The first year of the new fishery-independent data collection and the augmented MARMAP collection was 2010, so we're in the second year of our collection. If we began a benchmark in 2013, it would be a scramble to get the 2012 data prepared, assembled, the ages of the fishes read, but 2013 represents the very first year that it would even be conceivable because that would be the year we would have three data points for that new survey, and that's sort of kind of the bottom line amount of data you would need to evaluate.

Again, the feasibility of doing a stock assessment in 2013 depends on then the stability of the data that we see in those three years. If the data show a trend that is a fairly stable trend, then it's highly feasible to conduct a stock assessment on it. If the data are bouncing around a fair bit, it becomes more and more challenging to use that.

It's early even still to be able to make a determination on that at this point because again we're still gathering the 2011 data. I think it's wise to put it on the schedule and put it there as a placeholder. As this year unfolds and the data for this year are completed, take a look at last year's data compared to this year's data and get a feel for a prognosis.

But again it's very early to say because we're missing that third year of data. I guess my recommendation might be definitely put it on the schedule for 2013 and then in December, maybe by that time we'll have enough of a feel for how the 2011 data are looking compared to 2010 to make some further comments on that.

MR. CUPKA: I guess I have some concern about the issue you brought up, John, with the MRIP situation because without seeing that data and really looking at what some of the impacts would be, it's going to be kind of hard I think to guess which species might bear another looking at. It's almost like – unless I'm wrong; unless I'm completely missing something, it seems to me like until we see that we won't really know what the impacts are and so we won't really know if any species need to be prioritized that aren't in there now.

You'd almost have to wait to the next year to have that data in hand, but that may be a while. If there is something that comes out that really needs attention, I don't know if we want to wait until 2014. It's a little difficult to really come up with anything in regard to specific recommendations.

MR. CARMICHAEL: David, I think that's really true, and that's why I started of it from the status and the accountability measure perspective. The one that came out to me in that view is red grouper. What has been assessed and determined to be overfished is black sea bass, red grouper, red snapper, snowy grouper, red porgy.

Well, black sea bass we're doing and red porgy we're going to do an update next year; red snapper we're doing an update next year – no, I guess not red snapper. That's scheduled for the future – it's vermilion. So red snapper and red grouper are two that overfished, so they could fall into this apples/oranges type situation and potentially – you know, because you're overfished and you have the payback penalties, I think that's one of the biggest risks that we face.

They may be two that are a higher priority in 2013 so that you get the updated MRIP data included in those assessments before the MRFSS program ceases to exist once the data change takes place. Some time in 2012 we expect that probably to happen. So then I think the question is would something like doing standards or perhaps updates of red grouper and red snapper trump – I mean, red grouper and red porgy; would that trump, say, blueline tilefish: you know, something like that?

Would that trump gray triggerfish and maybe doing red grouper? And gag is one that's overfished which wouldn't have the payback, I suppose, but is another one that's on the list that won't be looked at for a while that we probably should look at. I think red grouper is one that really comes up, though, for me for a concern that we might want to elevate in its priorities.

MR. CUPKA: Do we have any indication from the technical committee that we would even have the information we need to do a red grouper assessment if it turned out that way?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think we have the data. It was last done in 2009 and probably the only reason it's not showing up higher in the priority list right now is because we things like snowy grouper which were last done in 2001. It's relatively recent is the only reason it's not risen up higher. We did a benchmark of it a few years ago. Theoretically the data still exists to do it again, and you guys are just getting around to kind of putting the rebuilding plan into place. I think the information would be there.

MR. CUPKA: I guess I'm not talking about landings and stuff like that as much as I am the biological information, hard parts and that sort of thing. I don't know whether that would be available or not. Tom.

MR. SWATZEL: I think a couple of meetings ago the council had expressed support for moving vermilion snapper up. I think we talked about switching it with the red porgy assessment. I think they're both scheduled for updates. I'm curious as to where are we with vermilion because at one time the update was scheduled for this year, I think, and to me vermilion snapper is one of those species that is so predominant here in the South Atlantic. To me it merits priority, so I'm just curious.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Vermilion is scheduled for 2012 to do an update. I think that's the one that's on the list for next year; vermilion and – let me check the outline. Yes, it's on the list.

MR. CUPKA: Other comments or concerns about the list as it stands now? We will need to try and lock in on these, and we don't want to keep changing them. Mac.

MR. CURRIN: Just a question regarding some of Bonnie's comments about red snapper. All of us realize how critically important it is to gather the information we need to do a good assessment and determine whether or when we might be able to reopen that fishery to some degree. I understand the fishery-independent surveys are going on.

A large part of that, though, is video information, which is useful information; don't get me wrong. But as far as having data available to consider how to change management, perhaps, of red snapper, are we going to need hard parts? We're getting some from the longline survey. My question I guess, Bonnie, is, is the longline survey expected to provide us with the adequate number of ages of red snapper to enable us to do a meaningful update or benchmark assessment for that species?

DR. PONWITH: Yes, certainly, keeping up with the age sampling is going to be important. One of the things that we are benefiting from by the enhanced MARMAP sampling and an increase in the geographic scope of the fishery-independent data collection that we added in 2010 is a broader distribution of the traps.

We're not just dropping down a camera; we're dropping down traps that have cameras mounted with them so that we get a synoptic sampling from both of them. We are getting some red snapper in those traps, and we're getting more red snapper in those traps than we had historically in those efforts, so that's going to help us.

In terms of the adequacy, let me do a double-check on that and find out what our rate of collection of hard parts are and then get back to you on that, but certainly that's such an important feature of the stock assessment. I know that the sampling is being done with an awareness of those requirements.

MR. CUPKA: I think it would be good to get some information back on that. We know the traps are not the most efficient gear for sampling red snapper, and I guess a question or a concern I would have would also be the size distribution that's going in those traps. Is it just small fish and what is that going to do to the picture we get from that particular gear, so it would be good to have some of that information. John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was just going to verify with Tom that it is 2012 for vermilion. It's an update for vermilion and red porgy in 2012. We're handling a number of the stocks that are overfished through 2012 with the exception of red grouper, and then the other one that comes to the forefront is king mackerel because it's not on the list anywhere.

MR. CUPKA: Any desire on the part of the committee to –Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Mr. Chairman, I'm not on your committee but I think what I heard John say was if we go ahead and try to do a red grouper update, I guess, it makes a lot more sense to them now and it's probably easier to do now than waiting a couple of years.

Since they've got all they can do, it might make sense for them to go ahead and do that now and maybe, I don't know, triggerfish or the white grunt that has got backed up a couple of time already, I think. That's going to be the same workload, but go ahead – we get more bang for the buck if we go ahead and do that red grouper now. It's just a thought.

DR. CRABTREE: It seems to me updating red grouper would be a higher priority than white grunt of gray triggerfish at this point.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Perhaps if we're in the magnitude of slots that we could do in 2013, red snapper, blueline – that would be two benchmarks – and then red grouper, snowy and gag is standards or updates and we could work with the Science Center to find out what is the best way – you know, whether they're acceptable for standards or updates.

Given that red grouper doesn't sort of trigger the time lag like the other two did, like snowy, obviously, the SSC might be comfortable with a red grouper update, which should be feasible hopefully to the Science Center. If we can get those five stocks, I think we won't be as big a risk of penalties for the apples and oranges situation.

MR. CURRIN: I'm fine with that, but I think we don't need to lose sight of gray triggerfish and start kicking that too far down the road. We've had a lot of effort shift and concentration of effort on gray triggers because of closures of other species. There is still fishing going on out there, and what they're allowed to bring home for the most part, when we've had closures on groupers and red snapper and vermilion and black sea bass and everything else, is gray triggerfish.

They're bringing them in and I think some of the recent landings show that, illustrate that, and I think we need to be very, very careful and stay on top of that and get that assessment done as quickly as we possibly can. We've got lots of them that are kind in the same boat, but that's one I think we need to keep in the forefront.

DR. DUVAL: I was just going to make the same point as Mac just did about gray trigger; the same thing; thanks.

MR. CUPKA: We all realize that and again we're back to the question of what we can do versus what we need to do, and we just need to decide and move ahead and try and get it done. Do you think you have input on that, John? Do you think we need a motion or anything in regard to that or do you just want to represent red grouper when we get together at the steering committee; would that suffice?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I'm comfortable with that input or you when we go to the steering committee. I think we can put it together.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, other comments in regard to priorities. I guess those are the two things we needed in regard to the SEDAR Steering Committee recommendations. If there are no other comments on this, that brings us down to SEDAR 28 approvals. John, I'm assuming we can go over the terms of reference approval and the schedule before we go into closed session and then just save the participant discussion for the closes session. If that's true, we'll go ahead and go through those first two items and then we'll close the meeting for the appointment process.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I think that's correct, David, we can take care of these things and then you can go into the closed session. The most important part to point out to the council in terms of the schedule, there are a lot of things about the specific details, but we're looking at a data workshop in February so we'd include data for 2011; assessment workshop in May likely to be in Miami for these stocks; and review workshop in August with the goal that it comes to the council through the SSC meeting in October and then to the council in December. If there are no concerns with that schedule, we'll move ahead with it.

MR. CUPKA: Any problems with that? Michelle.

DR. DUVAL: When was the data workshop again?

MR. CARMICHAEL: In February, 6th through 10th; the week after our scoping is penciled in.

DR. DUVAL: I guess my only concern is just some of the comments about the MRIP re-estimates and if those would be available in time to be incorporated into this process. I hate to waste people's time and travel money. If those might be coming out a month later or something like that, that's the only concern I have.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I'll say that when we started working on this schedule we thought that those would be coming out in June and then in the fall, so, yes, I really hope that those are out by then. If we don't have the re-estimates – you know, I think we have to have those to do this assessment and I would hate to do such important recreational fish without having that updated data.

We could bring it in and maybe we'll have to do a webinar if it comes late, but maybe the schedule will have to shift some, which will put getting this assessment to you guys in December obviously in jeopardy, because it may then shift it back to like coming to you in March. I hate to be this close to kicking this thing off and have to be thinking about these types of things, but we don't really have a lot of control over that deadline. If you guys feel otherwise, we can stick with this schedule; but if you think it's a fair amount that we get that updated data in here, then we'll make it happen that way.

MR. CURRIN: Waiting for MRIP is kind of like having a drunk brother; you know, you don't know when they're going to show up or whether they're going to show up. I don't think we can kind of wait and drag our heels waiting for the brother to show up. I think we've got to plan as best we can and keep to the schedule; and if he shows up, feed him.

MR. CARMICHAEL: If it comes out in April, maybe we can have a webinar to talk about it and get the numbers in for the guys to run the model, check the recreational values and go with it. You make a good point because it wasn't that long ago we talked about whether or not we should hold up black sea bass to wait for the new numbers,, and I think we all look in hindsight and say it's a good thing we didn't.

DR. CRABTREE: It's not like you can just go into one of these assessments and just plug in the recreational numbers and rerun. You're going to have to update everything when you do it.

DR. DUVAL: I'm just thinking about what the public will say if those numbers do come out and they're not – you know, we're just having a couple month lag time on that.

MR. CUPKA: Okay, John, do you want to move on and cover the terms of reference.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The next thing is the terms of reference, so let's see if anybody has any comments on these. Gregg had suggested requesting something in here to get an overall table of landings, and what I've been thinking about that is down here where we talk about characterizing commercial and recreational catch – now this is specific to cobia, but they're both exactly the same with regards to this item four and the data workshop – is to add a bullet saying to provide a single table showing landings by sector and whole weight so that we can get one overall table.

As I think about this and trigger my memory when Bonnie showed the recreational reporting, I think what we would want in that is the process that the Science Center is now using to estimate recreational weight. There is a big problem with recreational weight because MRFSS is not well sampled with regard to weight, and that's why the assessment input takes the recreational data in numbers and the discards are in numbers, so getting something in consistent currency is always the challenge.

The Science Center has a process which is being used to evaluate your quotas and your ACLs, so I think that would be the appropriate data source to use in terms of saying here is the best estimate of an input weight for MRIP, and knowing that, of course, we'll have an estimate on the back end of the estimated weight which would use the assessment's process for estimating mean weight at age and applying it to the catch through the very complicated bookkeeping exercise that the assessment goes through. I think that might be the avenue for getting this data in there in acceptable format might be satisfactory. If others think so, we'll go ahead and add a bullet like this for it.

MR. CUPKA: Other comments? Has everyone had an opportunity to review the terms of reference? I looked through them and noticed that we did add something about doing – what do you call it where you go back and do the assessment to check against error – yes, the continuity run did get added in. Are there any other concerns or items? John, do you need to go over the terms of reference for the assessment or the review workshop?

MR. CARMICHAEL: If anybody has any comments or suggestions, I'll point you to the Spanish because we had the issues with the other South Atlantic Spanish assessment. There are a number of things in there that refer back to the mackerel stock assessment panel and some of the issues that were raised in the SEDAR 17 assessment of this. These terms of reference for Spanish got pretty specific to what we need in that fishery.

While we've got them up here, it's a good thing to sort of highlight this new approach we're using. Here are the review workshop terms of reference. We used to just ask them to evaluate the assessment. Now we're giving them some specific questions; is the stock overfished; what information helps you reach this? We want them to lay it out a lot better.

Is it undergoing overfishing, what information; is there an informative stock-recruitment relationship; is the curve reliable for evaluation of productivity? Are quantitative estimates of status determination for the stock reliable? They may or may not be; so if not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and condition.

We think that sort of last piece right there is really going to be a strong hook to make sure that they don't just walk out on Wednesday and say, "Well, you know, it's not a very good quantitative model so we can't tell you anything about it." Well, if that's the case, then we want you to burrow down into this thing and make sure we get something out of our investment in this process. We're hoping that's going to really help.

The other one is number five, which was added by the SSC, and the Gulf SSC has added this in as well – and I think it was Luiz that came up with this, who sits on both – is that they make a lot of changes to the base model, then we want the review panel to provide a probability distribution for that base model.

It's a way of again keeping it from getting off track; because you ask for a PDF in the assessment workshop, but sometimes the reviewers might go down a different path and put models together in some way. If they do that, we want them to tell us how we should go about getting the PDF out of this. We hope that we're sort of getting to the place where we're not going to get any surprises at the end and we'll always get some information. I'll see if there are any other questions or suggestions; and if these sound good, we'll move on with them.

MR. CUPKA: If there are no other comments, then I think what we'll do is we'll go ahead and go into the closed session portion of our meeting.

(Whereupon, the open session was recessed at 4:40 o'clock p.m., September 13, 2011.)

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened in open session in the Topaz Room of the Charleston Marriott Hotel, Charleston, South Carolina, September 14, 2011, and was called to order at 8:30 o'clock a.m. by Chairman David Cupka.

MR. CUPKA: If everyone will take their seats, please, we want to reconvene the SEDAR Committee and finish up our business. We finished everything yesterday except one presentation by Steve Turner. He is going to give us an update on the Southeast Fisheries Science Center Data Program.

DR. TURNER: Thank you for inviting me to give this presentation. I'm pleased to let you know about the progress that we're making and hope to make in the next few years. The Fisheries Statistics Division was formed essentially a little more than a year ago in Miami to basically provide a greater focus on data collection and data reporting.

We work with six different management groups, the Southeast Regional Office, the South Atlantic, Gulf and Caribbean Management Councils. We work with the Highly Migratory Species Division and we work with ICCAT. In terms of data collection we work with 17 different partners there, the Southeast Regional Office, Northeast Regional Office, Northeast Fisheries Science Center and Science and Technology in Silver Spring.

We also work with ACCSP and Gulf States Commission and the nine southeast states. Additionally, we work with Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Today I want to talk about a little bit about process and then I'll focus mostly on applications' process, talk a little about quality, timeliness, accessibility and efficiency; basically goals we're striving towards; improving these items; and then I'll really be talking about them as they're applied to the catches and the monitoring, the landings work, the catch/effort and essentially the logbook work, our biological sampling and our data systems.

In terms of processes, for quality we're trying to standardize many of our approaches, and I'll run through this very quickly. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this. I'll just give you a few examples here. We're trying to standardize things; one, the way data is coming in, to streamline things, but also the way we're outputting data and the systems we're using to generate output so we get increase – we try to really optimize our workload and increase the quality of the information we're getting out by making sure that different people are getting the same answers from the same data set.

We're working on verification of data in a variety of ways. One of them is reconciliation. Reconciliation allows us to compare, say, trip tickets and logbooks but also when VMS becomes available we'll be able to link into that so that we can verify that we're getting the same information from multiple sources; and where there are gaps, we can work on filling those gaps.

We're working on timeliness, bringing the data in faster but also making the data more readily available through automation to the various users, whether it be the public or whether it be stock assessment scientists or other users who are allowed to get confidential data, both confidential and non-confidential access.

Improving our processes; this is essentially speeding things up so that the data become available in a more timely manner. Accessibility; we're working both locally and nationally to make the data more readily available to both the public and to scientific users. Standardization that I mentioned under quality is part of this process to make things consistent but also to feed the data to the national system that is being developed for essentially a one-stop shop for obtaining landings data in the future and probably other data sets like catch, effort and size composition.

Automation fits into this. Linking; one of the systems we're building in Miami is a data warehouse where the different components of the data are basically linked together. The trip ticket can be readily linked to the catch/effort data from that sample, the logbook data from that trip; and if biological samples were taken either dockside or though an observer program, they would also be available on a trip-by-trip basis.

We're beginning that process now and trying to increase our efficiency so that we can spend more of our time on quality and less of our time generating reports. The applications, as I mentioned before the catches and the monitoring, primarily landings and the landings monitoring, the catch/effort, which is logbooks – I'll be talking about the biological sampling a little bit and our data systems.

In terms of landings, on the commercial landings, as you know, this past year we've spent a great deal of energy on electronic reporting by dealers. We're working to increase timeliness so that we can do a better job of monitoring quotas and landings for ACLs. We're working with our partners along the coast, both NMFS and commissions and states, and we're working with the

Highly Migratory Species Division to try to standardize requirements along the coast so that a dealer hopefully will be able to make just one report and whoever needs it will be able to access that information and trying to reduce the burden on dealers.

We're working on completeness checks reconciliation. Right now we are building this system for – we're working on the details of this system with landings and logbooks and the Gulf of Mexico, the IFQ data; we're linking those up. Eventually we'll move into linking also the TIP information, the dockside sampling information and observer data sets.

With the Gulf of Mexico information that we were originally funded for, we're currently getting about an 85 percent match and we're also identifying areas where we can improve our processes; so, work with the states, work with the reporters to try to get even a higher matching rate than we're getting at this point. Monica.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Steve, what does a 85 percent match mean?

DR. TURNER: That means that on 85 percent of the trips we can match a logbook to that trip. Now, there is a whole variety of levels of matching. There can be a very perfect match and there can be a less perfect match. The number of days that we allow between the two different data sets, they match within one day or they match on the same day or the poundages are exactly the same, that sort of thing. We have different qualities of matching that gives an indirect estimate of the quality of our linking.

MR. CURRIN: Steve, one more question along the same lines. In instances where you have a poor match, less than 85 percent or whatever your criterion is; which data set is your groundtruth or fallback? Which one do you rely on when there are discrepancies amount the data sets; how do you deal with that as far as data that are used?

DR. TURNER: Well, at this point I don't think there is one perfect data set, and so we need to essentially be flexible there. It seems to me we could have a logbook without a trip ticket, you can have trip ticket without a logbook. Both are meant to be a hundred percent but that could exist. If VMS is put into place in the South Atlantic – it is in place in the Gulf of Mexico and HMS – we know that there is a fair amount of time when the VMS is not on, so there is not one data base that is definitive. Also, with a trip ticket you can have multiple trip tickets for the same trip.

It would be nice if the logbooks were the primary source, and they may turn out to be as close to primary, but we aren't yet able to say, okay, we are always getting a trip ticket for a logbook, but we're working in that direction. As I said earlier, we're working to reduce the burden on dealers, few reports.

A year ago a dealer had to report the same information to the state and to – and then they had to aggregate that information on a biweekly basis and send it to us if they were selected to report. This year dealers just make one report if they're dealing with coastal species. With HMS they still have to make a separate report, but HMS is moving in this direction as well, and we're trying to make sure that the information they need and we need is recorded all in the same report so that everybody can just – a dealer can provide one report that all different management groups will use or all the monitoring groups will use. Yes, sir.

MR. TEEHAN: When say combined into one report, in Florida we have the commercial trip tickets which run through the state; is that what you're using from states that have trip tickets as the one report or is there a new system?

DR. TURNER: No, we're matching trip tickets with logbooks and we're matching trip tickets with IFQ. The way I see what we're building at this point is essentially a bunch of indexes saying this trip hooks with this logbook, hooks with this IFQ, and shortly we'll say it hooks with this VMS, so then we'll have a bunch of pointers that allow us to link at a later time.

Commercial landings monitoring; right now we have two monitoring systems, an interim and a long-term monitoring system. The interim data, the data is currently reported to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and/or the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and we're accessing that data for our quota monitoring.

Long term, the data will be and is being reported to – we're also drawing some of that data from ACCSP on the interim basis. Long term, hopefully in the relatively near future, perhaps this year, all the information will essentially be – all the South Atlantic information will be essentially at ACCSP though some improvements are needed to be able to do that well.

We've developed a system – it's pretty much built. We have some more pieces to put into it – that will allow us to monitor directly from ACCSP and Gulf States Commission. That's why I say that we have two systems in place. One is our long-term solution and our preferred solution. We're working on essentially the data reported to the states, so the data is coming in with a state dealer number.

One of the difficulties for implementing our long-term solution is that for some states we don't have very recently up-to-date lists. They may be updated on an annual basis or something of that nature and/or even less frequently than that, and that poses a major problem for us figuring out who should be reporting and whether they have reported.

If we think a dealer is not reporting but we're not positive of that, we don't want to send out a letter and say, "Hey, you're not doing your job" when they actually may be doing their job and it's just a problem with our understanding of what these state dealer numbers actually mean. There are a couple of solutions here for us to continue working with the states to improve those state dealer lists, but also to work through the councils and the regional office to develop a permit for all dealers who handle federally managed species so that can be incorporated and we can know exactly who has reported and who has not.

This is a major piece of information we need to really improve our quota-monitoring capabilities. Timeliness, I'll give you a little a little information in the next slide on timeliness. Currently on the left-hand axis we have pounds reported on time, so this is within five days of the end of a reporting period.

You can see that currently, up until from early January to mid-June of this year, we've had on the order of 40 to 50 percent of the pounds landed in the South Atlantic reported on time. This presents a difficult problem for us in that we have to advise the regional office on the status of a quota when we're getting towards 50 or 75 percent of the quota being landed.

We have to say, well, you're getting close and we would expect you to reach your quota in some period of time. When we don't know what has happened with half of the landings, it's a very difficult situation to handle.

Now, I cut this off in June because we certainly have data for late June and July and August, but clearly we don't know what fraction of the total would will be landed in the future, so I'm not even going to present the fractions that we have there. Here the message is we need really the permit lists that I described a minute ago for us to be able to get to the dealers and say you need to start reporting on time. Mac.

MR. CURRIN: Steve, what are the consequences to the dealers for not reporting on time? If there are none, is there anything that the council can do to help eliminate or address that problem?

DR. TURNER: I don't know about what sort of actions can be taken. I know in the past in the northeast basically tickets have been issued for late reporting and that sort of things. We have not been doing that yet in the southeast. Before we get there, we need to clean up our ability to identify which dealers are reporting and which are not and then we can move forward on what actions to take. I think we need to continue to improve our systems.

Here is on a dealer basis the number of days until the dealer has reported. Now, the median is the lowest line here and we see that 50 percent of the dealers reported within, oh, anywhere from roughly five to fifteen or twenty days. Now the upper most line is 95 percent of the dealers reported in early January between 80 and 100 days or 110 days, and we've seen that we have 95 percent of the dealers now reporting in roughly, oh, 50 days.

Now, this presents a major problem. If we don't have 95 percent of the dealers reporting for 50 days, it's very difficult for us to say what the landings actually were. We have to do calculations that would suggest what might have been taken, and it's going to be far better for us to actually know what was taken.

Because of our uncertainty about the identity of dealers, we are not yet sending dealers letters saying you have not reported, you need to start reporting in a timely manner. We need the assistance from the council as well as from the states to improve our dealer lists. Sir.

MR. PHILLIPS: Of that 95 percent; are most of the dealers that are doing the bulk of the species; are they reporting on time or is this number high because a lot of dealers that have permits to pack something just aren't packing it so they're not sending in a report?

DR. TURNER: Well, the dealers have the ability to send in a report that they didn't land anything. If we go back to the previous slide, we can see that at least within a small number of days, reporting on time, five days after the end of our reporting period, we're still missing a lot. Now, I have the information for 95 percent and things like that, but I didn't show it. I have not calculated this on the primary dealers. I could do that but that would just take more work for my staff, but that's a very reasonable question.

DR. LANEY: Steve, I know we've discussed this at the ACCSP Operations Committee, but do we have all the – are all the dealers able to report electronically in the southeast yet?

DR. TURNER: In January of this year we basically started asking all dealers to report electronically and essentially made it mandatory March 1st. There actually are a very small number of dealers and very small dealers who are still reporting – are not using electronic reporting, and those people are coming on line.

We're almost at a hundred percent; we're close. That's of the dealers we know of. There could be other dealers out there. Now, we started with essentially dealers who had landed in the last couple of years, 2009 and 2010, and we sent them all letters saying please start reporting electronically.

MR. HARRIS: Steve, a question about dealers; you said that you're not sure if you have all the dealers, and it's really up to states to provide that information. What states in the southeast do you believe are not providing updated information on dealers?

DR. TURNER: The states with a small dealer list have good lists. Georgia and South Carolina; their lists are in good shape. The two larger states, North Carolina and Florida, have more difficulty because they have a large number of dealers and it's more difficult. North Carolina apparently provides their dealer lists to ACCSP on an annual basis, but if dealers come and go then that presents a problem for us.

MR. HARRIS: I guess a followup to that; how do you know if dealers are coming and going? How do you know that you don't have an updated list? If it's produced annually by North Carolina, if you don't get a report from a dealer that you had previously, are you assuming that dealer no longer exists? I just don't understand what the data source is for you to believe that you're not getting up-to-date dealer lists.

DR. TURNER: Well, it's easier for me to answer this indirectly. I know for mackerel; over the last several years we've seen a lot of dealers come and go. I think in general at least in the Gulf we're seeing a 10 percent turnover annually, and I think for mackerel the turnover was even higher than that.

The mackerel dealers right are not required to have a federal permit. If they were required to have a federal permit, it would be far easier for us to track them, but we would also want – we need to match the state dealer number with the federal dealer number once the federal dealer number is in place to allow us to be sure that we're identifying the proper dealer from whom we're getting the data. Have I answered your question?

MR. HARRIS: Well, I might have some follow-up questions later. Just go ahead and complete your report and we'll see; I'm not sure.

DR. TURNER: Okay, one of the things we have done in the last couple of years is develop what we refer to as an ACL file that started on the recreational side and it's now moved to both the recreational and commercial side. We provide this information to the regional office every couple of months when the recreational information comes in from MRIP.

We've essentially established procedures to provide standardized information for a large number of species managed by the two councils. This provides us a simple way to present information to the regional office. For the Gulf of Mexico we're integrating both the headboat survey, MRIP and the Texas information.

Each survey presents some situations that we need to work with to provide information to the regional office; such as for MRIP the MRFSS data, their system for estimating weight of the landings in some situations is – the weight of the landing is not estimated for a more rare event species generally though perhaps a few times with the more common species.

In situations where they have no weight observations for fish landed and they don't have information in adjoining cells that they're willing to grab an average weight from, then we will see that there is an estimate of catch but there is no estimate of weight for that catch so we fill in for that.

Another thing we do is we handle the change in the charterboat sampling system back in time. We make adjustments for the fact that the new charterboat survey covers X years and we adjust back in time so that the regional office is being provided a consistent data set over time. We're using procedures developed by SEDAR for that process.

We're still improving our procedures on the ACL files, but we're moving in a direction that provides standard data for management. In addition, we're trying to use some of these same approaches for the recreational side for the weights in the assessments as well so there is consistency between the information on the weight of the landings being used for assessment and for management.

For the headboat surveys you know I believe that an electronic reporting pilot was completed about a year ago, and we're hoping to move into a hundred percent electronic reporting in the near future. That depends on MRIP funding. We're also working on verification. We are comparing at-sea sampling. The SEDAR is comparing the at-sea sampling with the logbook sampling.

We're developing procedures for dockside sampling to verify the logbook reports, and we're also doing independent trip confirmation. In other words, if a captain reports that he took a trip on these days, we're verifying a sub-sample of that activity. For commercial logbooks we're doing verification through the reconciliation I described on the trips taken and the landed quantities. I mentioned a minute ago the electronic headboat logbook pilot project.

Biological monitoring, we're doing some work to examine the efficiency of dockside sampling. We did a tiny bit of work on mackerel. That was in North Carolina. We ran into some problems there and so we shifted earlier this summer to work on vermilion snapper. We'll be comparing the dockside sampling taken by our port agents with samples taken by a large group of additional port agents to compare how the sample compares to a much larger sample to see if we're getting any discrepancies in the sampling with our procedures or not.

We're going to be doing something very similar in the Gulf of Mexico on some groupers in the coming year. We'll be focusing there on red grouper. We're making small steps towards electronic reporting of dockside sampling information, basically electronic measuring boards and the like, but that's initial steps.

We're also going to be doing some investigation of alternative approaches to measuring fish using photography. We'll see how well that works. That's at least an initial pilot. We developed a biological data system for the two aging labs. The Beaufort Lab and the Panama City Lab is basically an inventory system but it reduces manpower substantially by linking directly into the biological data bases from which the original sample was recorded.

This also makes the information available through the Oracle Date Base. Rather than being housed on personal computers in the lab, this then makes the information more readily available to assessment scientists. Data systems, we're working to standardize our outputs. As I said earlier, we're hoping to allow users more and more independence and consistency in results as well as speedier results.

As I mentioned before the reconciliation of the linking, it's really going to be an important component of our data warehouse, allowing the difference pieces of the data to be examined together. The data warehouse will also permit simpler access for our scientific users. That is what I have to say, so if you have any questions. Wilson.

DR. LANEY: Steve, do we have any sense at all for how information we're missing that takes place in the form of direct sales, you know, from the dockside sales or sales directly from the fishermen to restaurants, for example?

DR. TURNER: We have not done external studies to try to estimate that. Mac.

MR. CURRIN: Yes, Steve, a couple of questions. One, you mentioned that you had some dockside sampling effort I think for vermilion snapper in North Carolina and you had some problems with it. What kind of problems did you encounter?

DR. TURNER: No, that was mackerel. We did it in the winter and essentially the problems were weather. Moving a group of people into the location in a timely manner when the boats were coming in. We shifted then to vermilion where we thought we could get more trips at a better time of year.

MR. CURRIN: Okay, thank you. I just wanted to make sure there weren't any problems that we could address. The other question I have, you mentioned the frequency of updating from the states affects your ability to deal with the data and monitor quotas properly. How frequently would you like the updates from the states to occur? Would you like them – I mean, for example, the state of North Carolina once a week said, okay, we had three additional dealers, here are the numbers, if they would send those to you weekly; would that help out?

DR. TURNER: I think that would be a big help. One of the things that I thought about is if the states need help to initially get their list in shape, perhaps ACCSP could help with that. If it takes a substantial amount of work to really get a list in shape and then less work to maintain it; North Carolina's list may be in good enough shape that it's easy to maintain and it's just the periodicity of updating the information at ACCSP. That may be a simple fix; but Florida, they may need more assistance to really get themselves in shape and then maintain it after that. The Florida data base managers would have to address that.

DR. DUVAL: Steve, thanks for the presentation. And just to the point that Mac was speaking of, our license staff actually send out weekly reports to staff regarding numbers and types of licenses that have been sold. Obviously, there are no names or anything like that attached to those.

I would have to speak to our license chief, but I wouldn't think it would be that difficult to get more timely dealer information if that's what you're concerned about. I wouldn't think that we would have a lot of dealers that are dropping in and out, frequently drop a year as Duane was saying.

DR. TURNER: Great, that would be a very big help.

MR. CUPKA: Anymore questions for Steve? We need to kind of move on here if we can, but this is obviously important and I don't want to cut anyone off. If not, then I want to thank you, Steve, for your report. That will conclude the SEDAR Committee report.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 o'clock a.m., September 14, 2011.)

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