

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SEDAR COMMITTEE**

**Town & Country Inn  
Charleston, SC**

**September 26, 2017**

## **SUMMARY MINUTES**

### **Committee Members**

Dr. Michelle Duval  
Mel Bell  
Chester Brewer  
Chris Conklin

Charlie Phillips, Chair  
Zack Bowen  
Mark Brown, Vice-chair

### **Council Members**

Anna Beckwith  
Tim Griner  
Doug Haymans  
Jessica McCawley

Dr. Roy Crabtree  
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Chip Collier  
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### **Observers/Participants**

Leann Bosarge  
Rick DeVitor  
Dr. Bonnie Ponwith  
Dr. Marcel Reichert  
Tony DiLernia

Dr. Jack McGovern  
Monica Smit-Brunello  
Erika Burgess  
Jeff Radonski

Other Observers and Participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Town & Country Inn, Charleston, South Carolina, Tuesday morning, September 26, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Michelle Duval.

DR. DUVAL: (The beginning of the SEDAR Committee audio is missing.) I am going to turn things over to John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The SSC held a webinar in early September, the day after Labor Day, as I recall, to discuss the research track process, based on the guidance that you gave at the June meeting to have them discuss that specifically, and I will ask Marcel to come up and provide the report from the SSC and their discussions.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, John, and thank you, Madam Chair. Indeed, the SSC met on September 5, and I will highlight some of the recommendations and comments that were in the report that was provided to you. The SSC noted that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center response was brief and did not provide a lot of additional details on the research track, and when I say “research track”, I mean the research track process that includes the operational assessments.

However, the SSC does recognize the need for and value of the research track, or that approach, and supports the idea, in concept. However, we also feel that there is a lot of lack of detail remaining on the process and the current ability to full define benefits. We felt that, at the moment, it was premature to recommend a research track process as a replacement for the existing procedures.

The SSC further suggested that perhaps a pilot of the process can be conducted and evaluated to determine, for instance, how the process actually works and perhaps further clarify what benefits the process will provide and how the research track process will fit into the existing council and Center processes. To aid in this evaluation, we felt that perhaps there is a need to compare and contrast the research track and existing process on key points and evaluate if the research track generates more, more timely, and more robust and higher-quality assessments. I would like to highlight some of the details, further details, in the report, and, as I said, there are some more recommendations and comments in the actual report.

We felt that there are some questions that may need to be addressed to allow us to formulate further recommendations. For instance, what is the plan for the transitioning from or amending the current process? Is, for instance, the research track going to be in place for a period of time in addition to the current process? What are the specific roles and responsibilities of the Science Center scientists, the SSC, and the council in this research track process? Also, we felt that there was a lack of information on the roles of data providers, and we felt that that needed a little bit of clarification in both the research track and the operational assessments, including the time to collect, assemble, and provide the necessary data.

We also felt, in particular, relative to the operational assessments, that the scope may need a little bit of further clarification in particular, and that’s similar to what we currently have in the standard assessments. What changes are allowed, and what are the criteria for allowing such changes? We have had some discussion in the SSC relative to the changes that were made in the standard assessments, and this is similar. For instance, who is responsible for making these decisions?

Specific to the research track, clarify -- There may be a need to clarify what constitutes significant progress and who determines that, and what is the review or updates of that process along the way?

Some final comments are we felt that one of the benefits that we clearly recognize was that, currently, first-time assessments are analytically challenging and influenced by data limitations. Many provide difficulties to accomplish in a strict time schedule. An alternative approach like the research track may increase the chances of developing acceptable and more robust assessments.

We also felt that keeping the process within SEDAR had some benefits, such as the participation by SSC and others, in particular state and other data providers, and this goes back to the updates, the operational assessments. We discussed whether addition of a stricter category of an assessment was needed or could be useful, but we also thought that this could potentially be included in the range of operational assessments, and we felt that the role of the SSC in this category, the operational assessments, may need to be further clarified, and that concludes my SSC report.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks for that, Marcel. Are there questions for Marcel about the SSC's thoughts and recommendations? I have to say that I was a little bit surprised to hear that SSC members want to maintain like a strict update -- To maintain multiple assessment categories, and so not just an operational assessment, but an update assessment, and I think a standard assessment as well, rather than allowing for the operational assessment to kind of subsume those categories.

DR. REICHERT: To clarify that, we discussed that, but then we also recognized that that range of details could be included in a range of operational assessments, and so I don't believe that the SSC strictly proposed to develop different types of assessments. Like, in the current system, we have the standard and the operational assessments, but some SSC members expressed an advantage of having a very strict operational assessment, and I think that may be beneficial, for instance, for a timeline, but we also recognized that it could be included in that range of operational assessments.

DR. DUVAL: So you mean like a strict update assessment, as opposed to a strict -- You said "operational", and so I just want to make sure that I was understanding clearly. Like a strict update assessment, where you're just simply updating with additional years of information, as opposed to a standard.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and our understanding was that that would now fall -- In the new system, that would fall under the operational assessments.

MR. HARTIG: Bonnie, what's the Center's timeline for figuring your nuts-and-bolts on how this is going to operate?

DR. PONWITH: Well, we're ready. I mean, right now, in draft, we're looking at a scamp research track assessment in 2019, and, if this SSC's recommendation to this council is that we do a pilot before we lock ourselves into something that takes a major change to adjust back from, then my proposal would be -- I can accept that, and let's make that scamp research track be the pilot. I think part of the reason that we're -- Everybody wants to know the very last detail of how this will work, and what I would like to do to -- That's a reasonable request.

What I would like to do is allay those concerns by saying that we should have as much clarity as possible, so this pilot doesn't become a four-year experiment. We want to create bounds around

it, but I don't see any trouble at all using SSC members, Science Center members, a representative from the councils, to serve on a steering committee to work on the SOPPs, because it's an important -- The SOPPs are an important enough thing that you want to make sure that you get them right, so that, once they exist, you can live by them. In that situation, having multiple perspectives is beneficial, as opposed to having just people from the Science Center working down to the very last detail about how this would work.

My sense is there is a sweet spot between keeping enough flexibility to be adaptive if something we didn't take into consideration bubbles up, but constrained enough that it doesn't become a four-year or five-year loosey-goosey experiment, and I think that that's where we're all yearning to be, is in that sweet spot, and, if I am reading the SSC correctly, that's what they're talking about.

My sense is that FY19 scamp could be the pilot, and we can work on the terms of reference for that and use that terms of reference as sort of this is specific to this species, but, if this works the way we intended and we don't see things that didn't bubble up that we hadn't thought of, we can use that as the template for the actual SOPPs change when we're ready to go from pilot to fully implementing this.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Bonnie.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think one of the challenges we still face is some of the bigger details less than the fine-scale. I think it's more of a concern with people -- Concerns expressed by the data providers is what is their role throughout this process, and how is that different from the process as it lies now? That's one thing they would like to see.

How do we go about developing the terms of reference, and what is the schedule? How do we handle the peer review? There have been some discussions along the way that, well, if using the CIE applies a point in time at which you have to make decisions, so that you can get on the CIE schedule and docket and have those people involved, then maybe that's too restrictive and we should move away from using those CIE reviewers, and those are some of the really big questions that have yet to be answered that we were working on for a while, and I think we really have to get through those now.

We already have a group convened by the Steering Committee, or identified by the Steering Committee, with representation from all the cooperators to work on the SOPPs details, once we get a sense of these big-picture things. Really, we've been waiting on getting the big picture worked out before we press our cooperator representatives to put folks on that group. We had hoped to do that this spring, and we have not been able to, because there's been a lot of uncertainty about this process up in the air and as being the really key things.

Where the workgroup had left it with the Center and the SEDAR folks was asking the Center to do basically a work plan, statement of work, outline, essentially, of what the research track would look like and how would we handle the terms of reference, how would we handle appointments, what kind of schedule are we talking about, and I think, once we can get something like that, and, if it's tailored towards scamp, that would be fine, then that's a possibility of considering that through a pilot, and I think it definitely should be piloted before we even go through and talking about changing SOPPs. We should try this and see what we learn and then go into fixing our SOPPs up.

DR. DUVAL: I would agree with that, and also scamp came to mind, to me, as an ideal species to potentially pilot this on. I mean, some of the stuff is going to have to be worked out along the way, I think, but, as John mentioned, the concern from data providers, in terms of -- I think the intent was to try to minimize their role throughout, so that they would not be asked to revise how data have been pulled and how they are provided and using whatever is existing and available. I understand that, but it might need to be compiled in a slightly different manner.

DR. PONWITH: One of the things that drove the creation of this idea from the first point was a situation in a benchmark, which has a very discreet beginning and a very discreet ending that's predetermined, of you have that fact, coupled with the fact that a benchmark is meant to be, to some extent, exploratory, and we were having a situation where the data providers would provide the data in a way -- They were structured in a way with a presumption of how the assessment was going to go.

Then something would be learned in the process that would bust that assumption, and that would create a scenario where the data providers would have to actually go back a second time and either acquire information and do brand-new data pulls or completely restructure those data, and the time that it would take to do that wasn't built into the schedule, and you get into this sort of hairball of who pays the time price of that, the data providers by doing this overnight, when it wasn't really built into the schedule and they did the data once, or is it the analysts?

Often, because the analysts are last in line, they were the ones that paid that price. The data providers would do those secondary analyses at the expense of time that the analysts would have had, because the CIE review was already locked in stone, and it became a go/no-go situation, and that always put us in a situation where, if you learn something that's going to make that assessment better, it's a horrible decision of do you meet your deadline or do you look at this thing that you honestly believe is going to make things better?

The notion of that research track is to give yourself the freedom to be able to explore those findings, but the way it works with the data providers is they go through the same initial analytical procedures that they would to pull the data together. The difference is you don't necessarily need that last data point of the terminal year. You can get data that is representative of the type of data that would be used for the assessment and then turn the analysts loose, because the output of this whole process isn't management advice. The output is a recipe book for how the assessment will be done when you do the operational assessment after this whole thing has been approved. It creates a situation where you don't necessarily have to have those data providers on the hook for that second tier of analysis. That can be done within that process.

MR. WAUGH: One of the benefits that I think we were after when we first started talking about this was getting to that operational stage and more frequent assessments, and it's like there is a carrot dangling from the end of the stick, and the problem that I have is that stick keeps getting longer and longer and longer, and we're talking about 2019 before we will have the first test.

We're having difficulty fleshing out the design of this program, and, in Attachment A3b, we've got an approach to look at doing different types of assessments more rapidly, and it seems to me what we need are more rapid assessments, probably simpler assessments, because things change

so quickly is what we're seeing, and I think Ben outlined this yesterday, and I just wonder if this research track is still going to be useful for us, in terms of what we need.

A lot of the MSA proposals, if you look at those, and we'll be talking about these under Executive Finance, they're looking at putting in more rigid deadlines for stock assessment. Everybody sees the need to move forward with more frequent assessments, and, given our extreme data limitations, maybe we don't need that many big, fancy, detailed, complex assessments. What we need are more frequent, more simple assessments that address our needs.

John has outlined the beginnings of that approach, after some discussions with Erik, in Attachment A3b, and so I just wonder if maybe we don't need to step back a little and evaluate whether or not we still feel the research track is going to be a productive avenue for us to expend the time and effort, or would it be more productive to redirect those to more frequent and more simple assessments?

DR. PONWITH: Exactly to that point, I hear what you're saying, and, in fact, that actually is part of the vision. Part of the vision is that we would be able to really step up the pace, the periodicity, of these stock assessments. The catch is that every stock, at least once in its life, has to go through its first assessment, and that's never going to be fast. Always that first assessment, what you're going to have to do is make a decision of what tool, what modeling approach, what modeling tool, is the best tool to use for the life history and the data availability of this species, and that takes more time to do than the stock assessments that follow that.

Your statement on the level of sophistication and complexity I think is a really good one. We really do need to be mindful of that. I think that exploring that question carefully and then being able to live with that answer once we get it is part of the solution to picking up the pace of this.

Another thing that the council has been talking about for some time, and we're engaging you on this, is the desire to more fully utilize our indices of abundance as sort of a leading indicator of stock response to management measures, and this is something we're also very keenly interested in doing, and that is to be able to look at these projection analyses and use these interim projection analyses, going into the future, as the ability to generate ABC advice and then basically updating those interim projection analyses on the off years to be able to revisit OFL by fully incorporating new age data and the otolith readings into there to update that information.

I think that that's the direction that we're heading, but it's just that we're still going to need something that more deeply explores these, and we're finding problems with the benchmark. Every time we hit that situation that I described, this is a way to avoid that situation. The other one is to confront the situation with the benchmark and say, well, it doesn't matter. If you found something interesting, you're just going to have to meet that deadline, but we have struggled with that scenario.

DR. DUVAL: I am just going to remind folks that we only have just less than thirty minutes left, and so Mel, and then I would like to wrap up this agenda item and move forward.

MR. BELL: I was just going to say, when this was first rolled out, I remember thinking that this is a way that we'll be able to increase capacity or to deal with production, is what I call it, of assessments, but I'm not so sure now. It seems like some of that -- I get it, that it's just a different

approach and a different tool, but that was one of the things that I saw, is an initial benefit of the concept was -- Somehow, in my mind anyway, the way it was presented, I was thinking, great, increased capacity to turn out more assessments in a timely manner.

DR. DUVAL: I think where this comes down to is that we're not going to know if we want to do this until we actually do something, which I think is why the SSC recommended that there be some pilot. I mean, I am certainly willing to move forward with scamp as that research track pilot. Obviously we're going to have some more discussion about this this afternoon, during the Steering Committee, when we get input from the Gulf.

I think, Bonnie, probably the concern you're hearing around the table is that it is going to take time, on the part of your staff, to actually do a research track and do a pilot, no matter what it is, and I think you're hearing some concern that that's valuable time and valuable staff that we also want to be able to use their skills to do other assessments, and so, anyhow, that's where I see us. Is the committee willing to provide a recommendation to move forward with the research track as a pilot? That's the only way that we're going to be able to evaluate it, I guess is my sense. Just to remind folks of who is on the committee, it's myself, Charlie, Mel, Zack, Chester, Mark, Bob Beal is our ASMFC representative, and Chris.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think, Michelle, that's basically the status quo, is moving forward with a pilot of scamp as a research track, and I think a key point of this that has come up is, as Bonnie said, things get behind, and then who has to pay, and the assessment people feel like they're always left holding the short end of the stick when data are delayed and it cuts into their time and there is a hard deadline for the review.

A huge question in this is, is there a hard deadline for the review or not? Is this just an open-ended process, and is that -- I think that would certainly help with regards to planning what this scamp looks like, is how do you guys feel about that? How important is this hard deadline to you on a project like scamp, and when in the process are you comfortable knowing when you say, okay, we'll have the review at this point, and how important is that CIE peer review?

I personally think it's very important, because we simply struggle with the expertise at our SSCs, and I imagine the Gulf is the same, of putting enough people on those projects to staff them and give the feedback that's necessary and then to have independent people to come in and do the review. We don't have that expertise, and these models get more and more sophisticated, and our SSC members struggle to be able to understand the sophisticated type of analyses that are being done. It's not that they're not smart and very bright people, but they don't do stock assessments every day for a living, most of them, and so we personally think the CIE part is very important, and that comes with certain administrative tasks, and that's why we do sort of need to know where we stand on that.

DR. DUVAL: I agree. I think the CIE review is very important, and it sounded to me like the Science Center also felt the same way, that they really wanted the CIE review of the research track approach. The sticky part is you have to adhere to the scheduling guidelines to get those reviewers in place, and so that requires like a three to four-month lead time, and so that's the only thing. I think we're going to be relying on Science Center staff to be able to project when they can sort of wrap up the assessment stage and move forward with that, right?

DR. PONWITH: Very briefly, it's a matter of working the way through the process and doing a back-calculation and knowing, when you get three months out from when you are confident that you're ready for that CIE review, you refine the dates of that. We would put into the schedule that this year we need a CIE review on this species, but the date of that would be a sliding window with a T-minus-three-month lead time of making that date concrete.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Anything else on this topic? Can we move forward this afternoon and say that we have support for using scamp as a pilot to move forward? We can certainly express our concerns about being able to backup that ending of the assessment phase, so that we can get a CIE review in, and I think this is consistent with what the SSC recommended, that we're going to need to do it before we figure out if we really want to do it. Okay. Awesome. Moving on.

The next thing on our agenda is the joint South Atlantic/Gulf workshop that we had discussed at our last meeting, including representatives from the Science Center, the Regional Office, and MRIP to develop recommendations for alternative procedures for our problem-child species that have been characterized by outliers and other unusual values, and so, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Problem children, indeed. This is really an update of where things stand. We had set off intending to have a workshop this fall, and the council's intent and purpose of this workshop was to come up with and select alternative approaches for estimating catches for a number of these stocks with the high PSEs, the rare events, things of that nature.

During the planning process for this workshop, we were informed that those methods that were presented to our SSC in October of 2015 were really not considered ready to be put into place and used to develop methods, and so, given that, the council decided that, well, we really are not in the position to put the funding at this time into that workshop if the need really is to further explore and come up with alternative methods and analyze those methods and see how they will perform and things of that nature.

That led to the various letters that are included here in Attachments 2a, 2b, and 2c. We just wanted to bring you guys up to speed and mention it here, to let you know why that workshop is not happening, and we're anticipating that the agency is going to continue to try to work through this, and, at some point, we'll do that other stage of figuring out what other methods maybe should be considered and evaluating those methods and getting some things in place that we could actually then go and use to provide us alternative, maybe, or more, hopefully, more robust estimates for these species.

DR. DUVAL: Are there any questions on any of that?

MR. HARTIG: Not so much a question, but I couldn't be more disappointed in what we got. I mean, my gosh, we had a presentation, and the SSC had a presentation, and it looks like we're going to move forward, and, all of a sudden, now we're stopped in our tracks and we're dead in the water. I mean, this is absolutely critical for the recreational management of our fisheries, and the South Atlantic -- I know the Caribbean is low on resources, and low on the priority totem pole, but we're just above them, basically, in everything we do now.

There is a number of things that were cancelled for these different meetings. We were told at one SSC meeting that we were going to get, from the Center, a way to calculate ABC, and that was



cancelled, or not really cancelled, but then they told us that we couldn't get an ABC out of it, and so there is just a whole bunch of things that are coming together at one time for the South Atlantic that is really depressing, basically, and I don't know how to -- The citizen science thing was the same deal.

Here we are, and we don't have the necessary data, and here's a way to get it, and we get no backup on how we proceed with citizen science from them, and so I mean it's just a litany of disappointments from our partners higher up. Now, with NMFS local, not so much, but, with the higher-up hierarchy, it's a problem, but I will leave it there.

DR. DUVAL: I will say that I did have a conversation with Dr. Werner after we sent that letter, expressing extreme disappointment, and I also talked to Dr. Van Voorhees as well, and they are well aware of our frustration here in the region, and I think it's fair to say that that letter certainly woke folks up and spurred them to move forward on the effort to try to come up with some additional methods.

My understanding is that there was supposed to have been, I think, a meeting of the steering group at the agency level with Science Center staff and MRIP staff, I think the first week of September, to try to move forward on this approach, and maybe that's, Bonnie, what you wanted to speak to, and so I will turn it over to you.

DR. PONWITH: I was actually going to talk to you about the methodology for generating an ABC, but that's a different topic, and so I will postpone that, but that is one that I need to make a correction, and that is that we have not stopped that. We hit a pause button, to try and get some other products out the door in time for this meeting, and that's a pause button.

That work continues in earnest, and we are eager to have conversations with the SSC about how to move from using this methodology, this project analysis, as a monitoring tool to monitor stock response to management measures and take it that next step to convert it to something that can actually be used to generate an ABC and to monitor changes in OFL. That is something that I would propose that we include on the SSC's agenda, so that we can continue those discussions.

DR. DUVAL: Bonnie did tell us, at the last meeting, that there were tradeoffs associated with the request for a golden tilefish rerun using the revised fitting methodology, and that was one of those tradeoffs, was postponing this. Anything else on the MRIP workshop and moving forward on trying to get some methods to provide us with a means of actually tracking our ACLs to ensure that we're triggering accountability measures when appropriate?

I will say that, in my follow-up conversations with Dr. Werner and with other MRIP staff, I made it abundantly clear that that's what we are interested in and that there needs to be some separation between dealing with some of these estimates from an assessment standpoint versus using these estimates in management and monitoring harvest against our ACL for accountability purposes, and they were clear on that. They understood that, and I am hopeful that this effort that the agency is undertaking that is comprehensive to develop and certify different estimation methods moves along as efficiently as possible, because we really need this down here, and folks are aware of that, and I'm not sure there's much more we can say on that topic. Okay.

The next item on our agenda is guidance to the SEDAR Steering Committee, and so this is Attachments 3a and 3b in the briefing materials. 3a is just a status update on where we stand with existing projects, and 3b is a little bit of an update to a document that John has presented to us before, has included in our briefing materials before, in terms of determining our assessment priorities.

MR. CARMICHAEL: 3a gives you the regular rundown that we do at each meeting of where things stand on the various projects in the South Atlantic region. Two things I want to highlight here, and one is the MRIP revisions, which are planned, and the MRIP peer review was wrapped up at the end of June. They are expecting the reviewer report any day now. As of a conference call last week, it will go out to the transition team, and the agency is going to draft a response, and that's going to take some time to work out, but they are including the transition team on that. As soon as we get a copy of it, of course, we'll be glad to share it with everyone and spread it around and make it available. The good news is they are still staying that we're on track to have the revised data by mid-2018 of next year, as we planned, and so far, so good, in that regard.

The other item is vermilion snapper, which is underway right now, and a letter went out to the council leadership here this morning. The data deadline was September 18, and a number of pieces are still pending, and so we haven't got all the data in. A lot of this is really related to the hurricane effects that we had that hit so much of Florida, and the Science Center people were hit pretty hard by that, and so there is perhaps something that may have to be done. We don't know what that means for the schedule at this point, because we really don't have all the data yet, and we're not sure where we're going to get some of those, but I did want to bring that to your attention, that there are some difficulties with vermilion snapper right now.

Just to point out that this is a standard assessment. This isn't a benchmark or anything, and so those issues about data being late and its impacts affect all of our assessments that we deal with and not just the first-time ones. That just brings you up to where we are. There will be a meeting of the Steering Committee this afternoon.

One of the things, in addition to the research track, another big topic for the Steering Committee is what does the South Atlantic Council see as its assessment priorities going forward, and so, if you go back here on the overview, I had summarized what we're -- This is what we have underway. In 2019, we are looking at yellowtail snapper being done by Florida and then snowy grouper, golden tilefish, cobia continuing, and the scamp research track. That's what our requests are for 2019.

Then, in 2020, the requests so far is red snapper, Spanish mackerel, red grouper, and gag. Historically, we have certainly not been able to get more than four stocks ever, and so I think adding any more to that would probably be asking for far more than we can hope to achieve, but we would like you to verify that these are what you see for 2020.

Then, considering 2021, we have white grunt and gray triggerfish, which have been two that there is a desire to get acceptable first-time assessments for these stocks. They have just sort of been kicked down the road. White grunt in particular, that can has been kicked down the road many times. That is where Attachment 3b comes in. This lays out the assessment priorities, kind of working on the different ways that we go about it.

We have the stocks that you have identified as your priorities, which is what is Table 1 in 3b, and this is updated based on our discussions back in December, where we modified some of these primary and secondary species. Then we have just -- I just have a rundown, based on everything that we have assessed, when was it assessed, how long has it been, and when are we looking at again.

The good news is, with the plans we have in effect, most of the stocks that we have assessed in the past are on track to be updated within the next couple of years or so, and that keeps them from getting too old. I think, obviously, greater amberjack is certainly one of our big issues. Thankfully this is being done, because it is an extremely old assessment. We tried to do black grouper and had some issues there, and spiny lobster is another Florida one. If you're familiar with that assessment, we're not too concerned about the different life history of this species and how we manage it, and the age of that assessment probably isn't much of a concern.

Yellowtail snapper is coming up, and wreckfish does raise a question, because this was done by an outside contractor, and, as we mentioned, in dealing with that, it's never really clear who is going to come in and grab those things and do updates. We have heard from the fishermen that there is some interest in that, but I think this is something to keep on our radar screen. As you can see, the others are in pretty good shape.

This results from the tool, which was Table 3 in that attachment. When we talked about the NMFS tool, we said, well, perhaps it would be helpful to rank stocks and separate them out between those which have never been assessed and those which we're assessing now, because, if something has never been assessed, it kind of had a tendency to bump up on the list.

The good thing there is certainly white grunt and gray triggerfish, some that we are interested in, and scamp are at the top of this list. Lane snapper comes up, which we've talked about before, which may or may not be as big of a priority as some of these others. Dolphin, of course, which is another long-term issue to think about, because that has special needs, in terms of how it's going to be assessed.

In looking at this and trying to think of how we deal with these issues, I realize that there is a number of stocks that are continually at the top of the list, things that we try to do regularly, and so sort of the last part of this discussion is to think about is there a better way to go about assessing these stocks, and that's where Erik and I started talking some about this idea of key stocks and the ideas that -- Thanks to Ben too, who has kind of had discussions with me over the years about these things.

There are certain stocks that really are going to drive this multispecies fishery, and, if we were to assess those stocks on a regular basis, would that be a better use of our resource, to keep those -- I see twelve to fifteen stocks, based on what we're able to do. If we could keep those up-to-date, would we do a better job overall of managing the complex? If we had a regular schedule for that, and we know what to anticipate, would that free up some of those other resources to do more things like research tracks on these stocks, which we know are particularly challenging?

I talked with Erik some about this and brought in the idea of the rumble strips that the SSC has talked about as a way of getting information between assessments, and it's really emerging as something that may hold a lot of promise, planning on the Science Center analyst folks' end,

keeping the information up-to-date, so that it's less work when you're doing an update, and he and I both think this has a lot of promise.

If you guys would agree to a scheduling approach like this, where you would have twelve to fifteen stocks that we put on a regular check-up list and get information on a timely basis for them and then see what resources are left for bringing in other stocks to the fold, essentially, and, if that holds promise for you guys, what we would like to do is run it by the SSC and then consider what are the key stocks, get advisory panel input on that, and then really work up a schedule. Erik's intention would be to work up with the people he has and what they do and what kind of timing could we have and how could we start folding our existing assessments into this?

DR. PONWITH: That was a really long sentence, and let me start with the very last point that you made first. We are actually very eager to explore this key-stocks approach. We see some very, very strong benefits from this, and we see it linking quite nicely with the research track approach, to be able to move into operational assessments that follow this approach. We have talked about the rumble-strip notion of looking at these indices, again as a leading indicator, and this is a way to be able to use that information effectively to be able to pick up the pace of those stock assessments, and so we're eager to continue exploring.

If I might then go back to some of the scheduling issues, first of all, I am really happy to hear that the MRIP is on track. I will say that we're eager to do those MRIP assessments in the end of 2018, in the fall of 2018, and that's all contingent on those data being ready for us in the June to July timeframe, and so that's going to be really, really crucial to keep an eye on that and keep the pressure on getting those calibrated data ready, so that we can get those done. The whole schedule hinges on that.

A couple of things. Snowy grouper, somewhere in those materials, snowy, I think, was annotated as a standard, and our sense is that we think that should be done as an operational assessment, because we are not seeing any new data coming in that would actually bump it to being a standard, and that would improve some efficiency gains there. I think the same thing could be said for tilefish, to look at tilefish as an operational assessment in 2019.

Another point is you have, in 2020, Spanish, and I think Spanish is going to be good and ready for an assessment in 2020. We do think that that should be done as a standard assessment, and that is because, during the last stock assessment, the base model was set up as a two-sex model, and the last review recommended that we use a single-sex model for that. I think that's a big enough change in the modeling approach that it rises to a standard, and I think that's something that we should at least have in our notes. You're right that getting -- 2020 is crowded, and, if we've got red snapper in 2020, we are likely going to have to look at moving one of those species farther out. I think that you had suggested red grouper as being the candidate for that, and that seems rational to us as a selection.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You said "operational" for when you were talking about the snowy and the tilefish, but I think you meant updates. We're all doing that. The snowy, I think the reason for a standard is because it's just been so long, and we can do a standard probably pretty tight. We normally do. Then tilefish, the last one we did was an update, and there were some issues that the SSC raised that they said, well, you couldn't include those in an update, and so they had asked for

that to be a standard, and so I think tilefish definitely needs to stay as a standard, because there are some things that they wanted considered which we couldn't do last time.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, back to wreckfish, and we've all heard the concerns of the fishermen about them basically paying for the last assessment, and we have heard things like their lease shares are going up, and somehow we've got to figure out what to do with that and where to put it, and just acknowledging that it's out there is really not enough. We really need to figure out how we're going to run that rabbit.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Is that something we should ask of the Center, for how we can go about getting that updated?

DR. DUVAL: Bonnie, maybe if you can consult with your staff about updating the wreckfish assessment that was done previously by an outside contractor, that would be great.

DR. PONWITH: Is that an action then that we'll put on the December agenda to discuss? How would you like to handle that?

DR. DUVAL: Yes, I think so, if you can get some feedback for us in December, and I think that would be great, just in terms of scheduling priorities.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Bonnie, I think we go to the SSC and we ask them about the scheduling, and we can ask them about snowy grouper and what specific things, and I think, for tilefish, we'll look back and see if we need them to clarify on those two, because 2019 gives us a little more time.

DR. DUVAL: Then, John, the other thing that I had noticed was just in terms -- I hate to say this, but there is two benchmarks that we were looking at in 2021, which was white grunt and gray triggerfish, and white grunt is a red-headed stepchild, and gray triggerfish is the problem child, in terms of ageing, and I know there was quite a bit of work going on to try to come to some resolution with regard to the ageing difficulties for gray triggerfish.

I think maybe there was a calibration workshop or something that was going on, and I just didn't know -- We have, in this document here, that the council might want to consider moving white grunt to 2022, just given that there are two benchmarks in a single year, and allow full use of the 2021 slots, and I didn't know if you had any feedback from your staff on that or -- Especially, I think, in regards to gray triggerfish and the ageing difficulties.

DR. PONWITH: What I hear in 2021 is that they're open to those assessments, and they've got them penciled in to sort of our draft, based on your interest in them. One of the things for gray trigger was to get the validation study done and that information synthesized, so we can actually use that for making those decisions, and our expectation is that that study will be buttoned up and ready for use, the results ready for use, by 2021.

I can go back and talk to them more extensively about the notion of those two benchmarks, but, if I hear you correctly, rather than running two benchmarks, your notion would be to run one benchmark, so you could get more updates squeezed into the same year, and was that what the question was?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I think that's sort of the thought. We have so many stocks that need to be kept up to date that two benchmarks could really take a big toll on our output that year. Certainly, in the past, we regularly did multiple species in benchmarks, and we have kind of gotten away from that. A lot of times, a stock ends up getting the short end of the stick, and I think a lot of people felt that was a real problem with triggerfish when it went simultaneously with red snapper the last round. While there were some data issues, there were also concerns that things -- We just didn't have as much time to talk about gray triggerfish as it deserved.

I kind of lean towards now the single species ones seem to give us a better chance of getting through the issues of that stock with fewer data snafus and hold-ups. If we were to push one back a year, do you guys favor getting gray triggerfish and then white grunt?

DR. DUVAL: I think we would -- I don't know. My preference would be for gray triggerfish, but some additional input would be appreciated. I will note that we have sort of tentatively moved red grouper into one of those 2021 slots for an update, and I think one of the other suggestions was that black sea bass might fit into one of those slots for an update, since it will have a 2016 terminal year, if we were to move one of those benchmarks further down.

MR. BELL: You actually covered it. Gray triggerfish, definitely in 2021, and then I was going to ask about red grouper, because we had talked about moving it, but that was an update. That wasn't a benchmark.

DR. PONWITH: Just reacting to that, I think that makes really good sense. We concur that gray trigger will be ripe for conducting that, because we will have those results buttoned-up. There is a quite large backlog of white grunt otoliths, and this gives us a little bit more breathing space to get those taken care of, by pushing them out one year, and to be attentive to the updates that we talked about.

MR. HARTIG: The other thing is that will give us time to see if the research track works with scamp. Then you have a first-time assessment with white grunt, and it seems like it would be a natural progression to do that, and so that dovetails better.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. I am just sort of thinking about -- I am looking at the table that John had showed us, which is Table 4 in that Attachment 3b, and so what I have done is filled in red grouper in one of those two open slots, followed by black sea bass. I have moved white grunt down into 2022, looking at that and taking into account Ben's comments on possibly applying the research track to that, and then I think we would -- John, you indicated that this will go back to the SSC for some of their input on a standard versus an update for snowy grouper in 2019 and the recommendation for a standard for Spanish, just due to the single-sex versus separate-sex models.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Was that sea bass in 2020?

DR. DUVAL: Sea bass in 2021. John has some stuff up here on the screen, and so we would be looking for a motion from the committee to modify the assessment priorities as you see up there, to move red grouper to 2020, or red grouper to 2021, I think. It's already in the 2020 slot.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Are there thoughts on a type for that? I think the issues --

DR. DUVAL: It was just a standard.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't know that there's issues that would move it beyond a standard at this point, and so I think a standard for now, as a placeholder.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, I guess, considering the feedback we get from Bonnie in December on wreckfish, we'll just have an asterisk on the bottom of to be determined on wreckfish.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and we'll draft a memo to Bonnie, asking that they provide a report back at the December meeting on wreckfish.

MR. BOWEN: I will try to be brief, but just a clarifying question. The sea bass update for 2021, that is not -- There will be one in between that for a terminal year of 2016?

DR. DUVAL: Yes, and that was one of the things, at the last meeting, that was brought forward, because there were some delays, in terms of data delivery, and so we had gone back and asked all the data providers in the Center if we could bump that terminal year up to 2016, because it was previously, I think, 2015, but, due to the delay in actually completion of the assessment, we asked for a 2016 terminal year, and so we'll be getting sea bass, I think, in June of next year.

MR. BOWEN: **If that's the case, I would be prepared to make that motion.**

DR. DUVAL: **Motion by Zack to modify the assessment priorities as follows, to move red grouper to 2021 as a standard, add black sea bass in 2021 as an update, conduct Spanish mackerel as standard in 2020, and move white grunt to 2022 as a benchmark.** Is there a second to the motion? It's seconded by Mark. Is there further discussion? **Is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

It's 12:38, and so, if there is no other business to come before the SEDAR Committee, I think we will recess for lunch, and those of us who are on the Steering Committee will need to be back here at 1:30.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on September 26, 2017.)

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

Transcribed By:  
Amanda Thomas  
October 23, 2017

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