

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

**Town & Country Inn and Suites
Charleston, South Carolina**

September 17, 2024

Transcript

SEDAR Committee

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Attendees and Invited Participants

Dr. Clay Porch
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Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at The Town & Country Inn and Suites, Charleston, South Carolina, on Tuesday, September 17, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Carolyn Belcher.

DR. BELCHER: We're getting ready to start the SEDAR Committee. Just a reminder for folks who our committee members are, it's myself, Trish Murphey, Robert Beal, Amy Dukes, Tim Griner, Jimmy Hull, Kerry Marhefka, and Jessica McCawley, which will be Kristin Foss standing in for her today, Charlie Phillips, and Andy Strelcheck.

The first item on the agenda is the Approval of the Agenda. Are there any changes that need to be made to the agenda, as currently written? Any opposition to the current published agenda? Okay. Seeing none, the agenda passes. Next is the Approval of Minutes from the March 2024 Meeting. Are there any changes that need to be made to the minutes? Any objection to the minutes, as published? Okay. Seeing none, the minutes pass. The first item on the agenda is the SEDAR Steering Committee Update, which Chip is going to give us the overview.

DR. COLLIER: The SEDAR Steering Committee has been busy since you all last had your committee meeting. Usually, what we try to do is have a SEDAR Committee meeting right before the SEDAR Steering Committee meets, and so it's – They're changing their schedule a bit, and, unfortunately, that meant that you all did not have a committee meeting before the SEDAR Steering Committee met.

They have had three meetings, in order to talk about process, mainly to talk about process for revising the SEDAR process. If you remember back to I think March, I was talking about potentially the SEDAR Steering Committee was considering removing the research track and operational nomenclatures for stock assessments and coming up with this, basically an assessment approach, with different items that could be considered for them, or project components, and, if you think about how stock assessments are done, there's different ways that we've been doing it here in the South Atlantic, and, going back to the original way, or at least that always fits with me the best, there's the idea of just a strict update, and we last did that probably with snowy grouper, back in 2020, and all that does is it's basically requesting just a rerun of the previous assessment, with an update of landings and the index stream, and so that was done for snowy grouper, most recently.

Then another approach could be a topical working group, and this is an approach that's just dealing with a single issue, or a simple item that might be on there, for a stock assessment, and this approach has been taken for both blueline tilefish and golden tilefish, where blueline is looking at some of the recreational landings north of Cape Hatteras, whereas golden tilefish is looking at some life history information.

Another approach that could be taken is just doing kind of assessment webinars, where maybe the SSC, and other members, are looking at the outputs of stock assessments and reviewing those. We haven't had an approach like that in quite some time, and another approach, which is typically the longest approach, is almost like a benchmark, or a research track, where we have all of our data workshop components, a review and assessment workshop, and then a review workshop, and those generally take the most amount of time, and you can see our most frequent one, or most recent one, associated with that is probably something like a gray triggerfish, or a scamp grouper, where it took a long time to get those assessments through.

That's what the SEDAR Steering Committee is trying to address, is trying to get some of these stock assessments through a little bit more quickly, get more information to the council in a timely manner, and so they've been talking about it quite a bit. They're good with removing the nomenclature for research and operational assessments, and so that's going to be changing in the future. What it changes to, that's still up for discussion.

As far as how it's going to happen, one of the things that they've been talking about is looking at this idea of key stocks, and John is going to get into that in our second presentation for this, but they have also talked about how to deal with things, like for the topical working groups, where there are people that are appointed as topical working group members, and other people are appointed as panelists, and so they're still working on the details of how that's going to work out.

There's other discussions going on, on whether or not statements of work are going to be needed, and how terms of reference are going to be done, and so all these things are being worked on, and this will all be presented to the SSC in October, and what we would like to do is just bring it back to the council in December, and, that way, you all can talk about the process in a lot more detail. This is mainly just an icebreaker, and John is going to really get into the details of the icebreaker for talking about key stocks and the revisions to the SEDAR process, and so, John, I will pass it over to you. This presentation is included in recent materials, or additional materials, and it does not have an attachment number. It's called "SEDAR Presentation".

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you, Chip, for that introduction, and I did just make a change to the first two slides, just to help you see what is going on at the Steering Committee, as far as the changes that we're looking at in the process, and so staffs at the Gulf Council, and the South Atlantic Council, primarily, have been working with the Science Center, and it really started as a conversation back around December of last year, thinking about, you know, how do we make the SEDAR process operate better going forward.

One of the things that the center did was talk to both of the councils, to get a sense of what are they looking for out of the process, and what are some of the concerns, and so I just pulled this out of one of the Steering Committee documents, and this is all on the Steering Committee website. You can follow all of that stuff, and see the details, but what I just wanted to point out here is there's a lot of similarity between the South Atlantic Council and the Gulf Council, in terms of what we're looking for.

Timeliness is important on both, and throughput, which just means the number of stock assessments we're getting, the flexibility, and dealing with issues that emerge, and that's also important as we move ahead toward climate resiliency and that sort of thing. We need to be flexible to address that.

Making assessments the right size, and so that really just helps with throughput and such. Transparency and thoroughness, of course, are important issues within SEDAR as well, so there's good consistency between the councils, and the Science Center took this and came up with some objectives to consider what they would like to see in the process, changes as well, timeliness again, flexibility for issues, increasing the stock assessment throughput, right-sizing, again, and that's a term that goes back to some efforts from five or six or seven years ago from the agency about updating the stock assessment enterprise, as it's called, and right-sizing assessments just means

you do the most complex assessment you need to give the information the council needs, but it doesn't mean that every assessment is always the most complex you could conceivably do, and we call it the Cadillac, in the language we use a lot of times.

You know, not everything needs to be a Cadillac. Not everybody drives a Cadillac. Some stocks may be fine in a Chevy, and some may be okay with a Yugo, and it's just, you know, there's different levels of assessment that are out there, and they require different levels of resources and time and energy. One of the things that the center wishes to do, that the council supports, is kind of getting away from ad hoc calendars, and improving our project planning process, which is important.

Through that, we have a number of SEDAR changes that have been proposed so far, and one, as Chip mentioned, is eliminating the research track approach and eliminating the idea of the nomenclature and scheduled spots. The nomenclature issue is people tend to assign quality, and like I used Cadillac versus, you know, Yugo, and you assign quality that, and they're all assessments. They're all going to be robust, and it may be the appropriate tool for the situation, but, you know, the idea of benchmarks and updates carries with it this connotation of quality, and we've been in situations where, you know, the desire is to say, well, I always want a benchmark, because I think that's better, or I always want a research track, because I think that's better, and that's kind of defeating the process of trying to be efficient, and be more responsive, and just make things operate better, and so we're trying to find a way to get away from those qualitative labels and just be able to say, look, we have an assessment.

The slight pitfall we're facing is the language carries with it certain things that you can kind of trust are going to happen, like a peer review, and, if you just call it an assessment, and you leave that stuff a bit more, you know, a la carte, then maybe all those things aren't guaranteed, and that's one of the issues the SSC had initially, and so we'll be talking about that some more in October.

The next step, of course, is then identifying and prioritizing key stocks, which I'll talk about here, and then that leaves what do you do with the remaining, the non-key stocks, that have to be assessed some other way, and they wouldn't be assessed regularly intensively through SEDAR, and so part of this is talking about the idea of scheduling, and slots, and all that that goes on, and so we have our spreadsheet of doom.

Here is the spreadsheet of doom for SEDAR, and it's a tool that's been used for quite a while that lays out the different groups that are within the Science Center and the entities within SEDAR, that function within SEDAR, the South Atlantic, the Gulf, the Caribbean, HMS, FWC, et cetera, and analysts, which would be the 1, 2, 3, 4, essentially, and then the blocks show the different assessments, and it's an approximation of the time that a stock assessment takes, and so you see like a benchmark is going to take you a great big block, maybe two years or more.

A research track was similar like that, and the color codes just reflect where in the landing process things are, but this was a way to kind of capture how much time, and energy, is going into these and to really show, at least to the council perspective, this is how much can be done, and everything is filled up, and, you know, you've got to have some space in here, and we can't put another stock in here.

It has worked pretty good as a visualizing tool at the Steering Committee level. It's not at all prescriptive to the scheduling. You know, the scheduling of specific workshops, and delivery dates, is all worked out, where imagine, say across 2025, all those blocks that are assessments are underway at one time, and so there's quite a Jenga game of balancing this stuff out, to get all the schedules and deadlines and everything lined up, but this just serves for gross workload management, and you will see this in all of the SEDAR Steering Committee reports. We've been using this for probably ten years or more, where you can see the progression of it over time.

Focusing in on what we're looking at in the South Atlantic, what we've operated under, in this language that we use of slots, is having four slots per year, and expecting to get one stock assessment per slot. A number of years ago, when we first started talking about the research track, and even before that, there was always this hope that somehow we would get to more than one assessment per slot per year, and so, for example, if we did more of what was called updates, that are relatively simple, and the Science Center would get the data, run the model, and feed it to the SSC, and that maybe you could get two of those from a given analyst in a year.

The reality is we've never really gotten there, and we've struggled to hold on to even getting four assessments a year, and one of the reasons you can see is, you know, research tracks, and now benchmarks, spread out over so much time, and so you've got multiple things like that going on at one time, and so you see that there's not a whole lot, for example, being completed, necessarily, in 2025. We're going to do a review workshop for the dolphin management procedure, the MSE, and cobia, and we'll have to talk about that, and there's an issue there, but, mainly, the South Atlantic is looking at a lot of stuff being done on red snapper during the benchmark in 2025.

The complexity, and the time that these projects take, affects it, but, you know, the plan has always been to get to about four, and we just really haven't gotten there, and then the way we do the timing is you see this goes out to 2028, and so we do sort of preliminary planning, that, hey, this is what we're thinking of, three to five years out, and do a formal request at about three, do a finalized at two years, and this allows everybody to get say age data done, and that sort of thing, and so this is the way we're doing scheduling right now, and it's something we're hoping to move away from a little bit, in terms of just what stock goes where.

That's where the idea of key stocks comes in, and so what is a key stock? The idea is that key stocks represent those that drive a fishery, in the simplest sense. People don't decide to go fishing based on whether or not they can catch knobbed porgy, my favorite example, but, you know, they do decide things like that based on whether or not they can catch a grouper, or that dreaded red fish, or a black sea bass, or you know we know that there's a group of species, within the fifty-five snapper grouper, that really are more compelling to people, and they're more desirable, and they're the kind of things that people plan trips around.

The idea is that those are key stocks, you know, something that really drives a fishery, and people make decisions about, is important, and those are the ones that we need to keep up with. We also know that, while we haven't assessed everything of the fifty-five snapper groupers, the fifteen, or eighteen or so, that we've assessed over time represent like 70 percent of the landings, and so another consideration is, you know, if you get the right key stocks, then maybe you're not assessing that many of them, but you are getting the bulk of the landings, and that's important to capturing what's going on in the fishery, because we know we'll never have the resources to assess every stock in a big complex like snapper grouper, and this isn't a new idea.

If you look back into the work that we've done on scheduling, and prioritizing, it goes back to at least 2008. We have identification by the council of our data collection stocks, and we identified those targeted for age-based assessments, and those targeted for other types of assessments, and so, you as a council, and those before you, have operated in kind of a key stocks type of approach for quite a while, even if the term wasn't used specifically, but you do see it coming up in 2015.

There was a tech memo about prioritizing fish stock assessments, and "key stocks" were coined by us, working with the SSC, with, you know, our council staff, and the Science Center, and the SSC, to try and say, well, we're not going to get all of our stocks, and we're going to have to prioritize, and what are the ones that are most important, and these then would become the key stocks.

We have to now decide, of all the resources that we have before us, which ones would necessarily be key stocks, and I'll talk about numbers a little bit coming up, but, you know, the criteria we're looking at for what we're proposing here, that's going to come, is, first of all, it's a Level 1 priority for the council, and so that goes back to our research and monitoring plan, and Level 1 are the ones that we want to do age-based assessments.

The second one is that the stock has been assessed successfully, and so things that we're going to push through the SEDAR process, and potential regular scheduling, need to really have been assessed, and the reality is that the things that we've chosen to assess over the last twenty years are clearly priorities. There are some other stocks that we've tried to assess, and Jessica is not here, and so I can say white grunt, but, you know, we kind of know the realities of those, and it's been really hard, with limited resources, to get new stocks into that bucket, and it's got to be, you know, a real dire need to get something new added to this right now, because there's just never been a surplus.

Some assessments have been attempted, but haven't passed peer review, and some good examples are Georgia and North Carolina hogfish, and there's just not enough data to be robust. Black grouper, we had the issues with gag, that I think we're finally working our way through. Goliath grouper had numerous stock assessment attempts, but just lack of data really stands in the way of getting something reliable. Recently, gray triggerfish, we've had a research track done, and the operational wasn't completed, and we've put that on hold indefinitely, dealing with this issue of our limited resources, and the issues we have coming up in say 2026, with limited resources and the other assessment needs that you guys have.

The other idea is the stock is overfished, because rebuilding plans need regular evaluation, and it's kind of hard to shift, you know, assessment forces in mid-stream if I've got a stock under a rebuilding plan, especially if it's a long-term rebuilding plan, because that could change the whole nature of that, and so these are the criteria we're looking at, in terms of recommending the key stocks, and so how many are we talking about?

Based on dividing up here into what's been assessed by the Southeast Science Center, and what's been assessed by FWC, we've got fourteen stocks from the center, and five stocks that are assessed by FWC, and I'm going to set FWC stocks aside here sort of for the rest of this, because, you know, they have their own assessment team, and a lot of these stocks are centered in south Florida,

and they're fundamentally involved in a lot of the data collection, a lot of the age work, and a lot of the research and that sort of thing.

There is support provided by the Science Center for data, primarily, in doing these stock assessments, but the Science Center isn't the lead on these, and so these are in SEDAR, but they're in a separate column, in terms of that scheduling that I showed you, and so, when we talk about the South Atlantic Council species, we're really looking at this universe here, starting off with the Southeast Center of fourteen stocks.

As you see them, you're going to recognize all of those things, and, hopefully with the criteria I went through, you understand why all of these are key stocks, and how, over the last twenty years, they've risen to the top of the heap, but there is fourteen of them, and so that brings up the question that I've been alluding to of how many stocks can be supported.

Well, there's a couple of simple rules that you can't get around. More stocks equals more time between assessments, and so remember I was saying we were working under the idea of like four stocks per year for the South Atlantic Council, and so, if we were doing twelve stocks, and we were doing consistently four per year, then maybe we could have three years between them, but, if we're really only getting three, on average, and we're trying to do twelve, now I'm more like four years between stocks, and so there is -- You know, there is a simple math equation to be worked out, in terms of how many stocks and how much time is going to be between them.

One of the issues we faced with the process-wide, SEDAR overall, is evaluating age structures is incredibly -- Processing and collecting and reading otoliths, and interpreting them, takes a lot of work. That's one of the most significant bottlenecks right now, and that's one of the biggest impediments to being flexible, and so to changing what we're going to assess in 2026, say here in 2024, because the ages haven't been processed, and there's not real-time ageing going on for these structures. What they do is they need to know that schedule, that three to five-year window, and so then the agers go into gear and say, okay, I have to age this stock, so that I have it ready in a couple of years, and so that's a real bottleneck in this process, and it's something that hopefully can be worked on over the years to increase our flexibility.

One of the questions is, you know, it's unclear, until we really figure out how many ages can be done, and how many structures, and it's -- You know, the complexity of structures varies from species to species, and the number of structures in a given assessment varies, and so it's not a totally simple question, but it makes it a little bit of an issue for really determining how many can be supported regular and recurring for SEDAR.

I will take an example that was given at the last Steering Committee in July, from the Science Center, and I'll show the figure up here in a second, just looking at some potential schedules, and they gave a potential calendar for the Gulf and the South Atlantic, but I looked at fourteen stocks, with about six years between assessments, and two completed per year in the first few years, and then ramping up to three stock assessments per year in the later years.

One of the issues this causes for us, and it's something we're just going to need to work out, is your SSC is saying they're only giving ABC projections out five years, and so, if we're looking at six or more years between assessments, and ABCs only out five years, then, the last couple of years, you're going to be doing whatever that fifth year was, is normally the case, and so this is

something where they may need to be some give-and-take with the SSC, in terms of making a process that works, you know, from the ground up, from doing the assessment to the SSC giving recommendations to you getting information to make decisions.

As I said, the historic SEDAR planning has targeted around twelve primary stocks in the South Atlantic, and we had a universe of fourteen, and some of those are like dolphin, and they haven't made their way in, and we're looking at trying to get to four per year, and three years between assessments. As I said, we often don't get there.

The FES transition has been a big issue, and it wasn't that many years ago that we went through the first big transition of MRIP, and went to the CHTS from the mail survey, and, each time we do one of those things, you've got total upheaval in the data. What happened when we transitioned to CHTS was the SSC said, you know, a lot of those changes could be significant, and we better do benchmarks for all of those stocks, and so we had a pretty good plan to do a number of updates, and then we had to do benchmark assessments.

That took more time, and our productivity took a big hit, or you're working on an assessment, and it doesn't pass peer review, and you're back to the drawing board. That happened several times with gray triggerfish. It didn't make its way out, and so it's just kind of lost effort, and so, because of things of like that, and, you know, personnel turnover, data changes, all kinds of stuff, we've just really not been getting to the four assessments per year, I think as most of you guys pretty well appreciate and have experienced.

This is the preliminary schedule that we looked at in July, and so keep in mind this was put together before we had this discussion, and we hadn't talked about key stocks. There is a few things in there that were preliminary, that aren't really probably going to stay, like cobia, because that's managed by the Atlantic States now, and there's also gray triggerfish, and so I mentioned gray triggerfish, and putting an indefinite pause on doing that operational, and we need to have this discussion, think about what are key stocks, and then decide is gray triggerfish one, and does gray triggerfish need to be an age-based assessment, every three, four, five, six years, however many it turns out to be?

These are hard decisions that we're going to have to make, because some of these stocks, if they're not age-based assessments, then they're going to have to be something else, and the concern sometimes, as we know from the SSC, is, if something else carries more uncertainty, then that's going to mean a bigger buffer, but, a lot of our stocks that are in something else, all they have is landings, and that already has a big buffer, but there may be potential for a lot more robust things than just looking at average landings and the Cadillac of a full age-based assessment, with all of the uncertainty evaluations that you see in things like black sea bass recently.

Anyway, you can sort of see how the schedule works out. There is the UM in there, which would be a little bit nomenclature, that we kind of have called an interim model, and I think that would be an update model, and, at this point, that likely wouldn't include a full update of the age information, and so this is where some need is to do some research and understanding some of these things, and also looping in the SSC, to see how they're going to respond to some of these ideas like this, like would they accept that to update catch data, and to update their say ABC recommendations, which we don't know yet.

So I'm back to the question of how many key stocks? You know, historically, we're looking at, you know, three-year intervals, and, doing four per year, we could have twelve stocks. If we looked at a four-year interval between stocks, and we did four per year, we could have sixteen stocks.

The near-term SEFSC proposal is looking at two per year, with six years between, and that gives me twelve stocks. If we get to three, with -- You know, if we get to three per year, as I showed in the later years of the prior schedule, would we reduce the interval, or could we see more stocks? That's kind of a question for the council. If you lower the number of stocks, from, you know, twelve to ten, and you're getting three per year, well, then I can get the interval down to something like maybe three-and-a-half, and that's reasonable, but, if we go with fifteen key stocks, because we say all of those, plus I need to throw a couple more in, then I'm going to be looking at longer interval, and so a little perspective on the bottom.

Fifty-five stocks in Snapper Grouper, two in Dolphin Wahoo, two in CMP, Golden Crab, and that's sixty stocks, not even talking about Coral, Sargassum, and Shrimp, and so that seems bleak, but I will give my caveat, as before, of the ones that we have assessed do represent, at least in Snapper Grouper, the bulk of the fishery, 70 percent of the landings, the last time I really looked at it, in the expected ABC, and so, in terms of capturing what's going on out there in the greater fishery, we're not doing all that bad, and it's not as bad as statistics like this can look at, and so you know what they say, is statistics can prove anything, and so it's important to keep that perspective in mind.

What we're looking for from you guys is, you know, do you agree with this process of identifying key stocks for regular assessment scheduling, and, as I said, we're essentially doing this now, and then, if so, you know, what are the key stocks? Is there any input that you could give now? Are there any stocks that you would say, you know, I'm not so sure about that, or are there some others you would like to add, or are there questions that you would like to have? Like Chip said, this is the first look. We're going to talk about this with the SSC, and then we're going to come back to you guys in December, and so, if you're just sort of muddling all this, and you feel like I can't decide a key stock today, what we would like to hear back is what would you like to know before you can decide a key stock? What might you ask your SSC before you do that?

Then do you support fixed long-term scheduling of the key stocks, as proposed, and so it's sort of the do we just lock them into a schedule, or do we continue with sort of the iterative process that we've been doing over the last couple of years?

From that, we sort of go into then this next slide is to sort of give you a working point, and to remember what's out there, and so how could we potentially refine these key stocks, and, you know, dolphin is going to go through the MSE, and maybe you can drop that, and are there others that we could consider dropping, to get to twelve, like scamp, one that's rebuilt, and does it remain a key? Blueline tilefish, are there other approaches for blueline tilefish? They're already doing non-age-based models north of Hatteras, and then there's the ones that maybe we look at, like gray triggerfish, wreckfish, the other FMPs. I will sort of pause here and see if there's some discussion and such, Carolyn, and, you know, try to get some input on these key stocks.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. I saw Kerry, Charlie, and then Tom.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thank you, both. That's really helpful, and I like the idea of this key stock procedure. My only thing is I have a great discomfort in sort of leaving triggerfish off the list, but also knowing -- I don't know where it slides in, unless we took dolphin off, and maybe that makes sense, and slide triggerfish in there, and I think the idea of -- You know, just to answer your question about scamp, and sort of these long-lived slow-growing, easy-to-overfish species, I would be uncomfortable ever removing them, even if they were overbuilt. I think we know these are species that we can get in trouble with very quickly, and so, in my mind, in choosing key stocks, I would be thinking about the species that always felt on the edge of danger for me.

You know, I would take -- Life history characteristics would be really important for me, and then probably next would be importance to the fishery, after life history, but I think it's a great idea, and I like the idea of the set schedule. I feel like it will help us really long-term plan for, you know, management in the future. I just really would like to find a way to add triggerfish back on, because it makes me very uncomfortable not looking at that stock.

DR. BELCHER: I've got Charlie, Tom, and then Jimmy.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, John. I remember this stuff before, and I also remember we love to set things out, and line them up, because there's so much work done beforehand, and I also remember that, invariably, there were fires, always, and, if we don't leave slots for putting out fires, we're going to shoot ourselves in the foot.

That said, you know, as far as key stocks, and I'm not going to name anything in particular, but, if you've got some stocks that aren't overfishing, and aren't undergoing overfishing, and have been steady, even though it may be a major species, and maybe we move those back a couple of years, to help fit in slots for putting out fires, and I would love it if there was no fires, but I don't think I've ever seen it. Just a couple of thoughts offhand.

DR. BELCHER: I've got Tom, Jimmy, Clay, and then Robert.

MR. ROLLER: I want to build upon these statements. I'm with Kerry, and I do not feel comfortable leaving triggerfish off this. They're just too important to our region, but, before Charlie -- I was trying to build this thought in my mind, and I think Charlie articulated it very well, and I'm going to try and expand upon it. You have to have some concept of change, looking forward, and, you know, whether that be a slot to put out fires, and, unfortunately, we're going to have climate fires.

You know, we're going to have big changes, and what is a key species is likely going to change, not just in the long-term, but in the short-term, and I see Number 1 on there, black sea bass, and I'm starting to question, looking around in our region, and are they an important species anymore, as much as they have collapsed their range? Now, I'm not saying they're not, and we all know they're super important, but like, given the impacts in the decrease in abundance of that species, we have to wonder how we prioritize those things.

For me personally, I know triggerfish is way more important, and it's probably taken the place of black sea bass, to a degree, and so I think that, you know, not just the concept of putting out fires, but also recognizing that we're going to see massive changes, and we're going to have to realize how we build that in.

DR. BELCHER: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I agree with everything that's been said so far, and I think we've identified the key stocks pretty well. As far as, you know, setting up long-term assessment goals, I think you have to do some of that, but, again, you have to have room for emergencies, which is kind of what you've been doing.

The one other thing I would add is, you know, it may be the time to change, you know, having to do an age-based assessment, and go back to a non-age model of some type, with considerations of abundance and recruitment, especially on stocks that -- You could say, well, they're already rebuilt, or whatever, and keep track of them that way, but it would certainly shorten things up if that information was more available, or, even in the age model, weighing, you know, abundance more heavily in the model.

Those are things that I think about, because abundance is certainly a key indicator, and, right now, you're using stock biomass determination solely as age-based, and egg production, and, well, there's a lot of stocks that are really abundant, and they're not full of old-age animals, and so abundance is clearly important, and it could be a way to shorten things up and get more timely, you know, on-the-spot, where are we at currently on this species, abundance-wise, and to make better management decisions with that, and so those are the things that I would add.

DR. BELCHER: I've got Clay, Trish, and then Andy.

DR. PORCH: A couple of points. First of all, thank you, John, for that excellent presentation. I think it was a very fair reflection of the discussions that we had at the SEDAR Steering Committee, and before that, and I did want to digress a little bit and comment to Jimmy's point. One of the challenges we have is that Magnuson actually wants you to rebuild to the reproductive potential that would achieve the maximum sustainable yield. It's actually written in it, and so that is part of the law, and that's the challenge with trying to get some proxy of the reproductive potential, so it can't just be say number of recruits or something like that.

I did want to point out that those UM, update models, I think are key to the success of this, and so, even though there's a six-year time period in between -- I wouldn't want to rely on projections for six years. As we all know, projections are hard, especially when they're about the future, and so we don't want to rely on that. Those updated models would be essentially, and often the case is, the same stock assessment model, and we just update it with all the information that we're able to update, and, as John pointed out, it may not always include all the age composition data, but it's still going to be better than a projection.

Any way you look at it, the projection is just making a bunch of assumptions from the previously-approved stock assessment model, you know, about what the fishing mortality rate will be and all these things, but, as we all know, lots of things can happen in between, and you can have recruitment pulses, and you can have recruitment failures, and you can have, in some places, red tide events, and other mortality events, and so, no matter how you skin it, if you do any kind of simulation, an updated model is going to be better than just using projections that were based on an older model, and so I think we keep that in mind, and I would double-down on that, because the center has made considerable investments, working with our partners, to improve those fishery-

independent surveys, and so I'm talking about the video-trap survey, where now we've expanded north of Hatteras, and we're trying to expand further south as well, to get the entire domain.

We have also, for the south Florida area, improved the coral reef monitoring survey, and, maybe most importantly, we now have the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey, and that's one done cooperatively with fishermen, and so we have information now, better information, than we ever had before, and we want to take full advantage of that, and those updated models would be able to use those updated surveys. I think you're going to end up actually getting better quality advice with this particular schedule, and keeping in mind that those updated models are definitely going to be a lot more than just trying to make long-term projections between one assessment and the next, and so thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: John, I just wanted to ask -- The schedule that you put together, is it primarily restrained by resources that we have to do those assessments, and, if so, what would a schedule look like if you had all the resources, we had all the resources, that we would want? What's the delta between what we have and what we would need to get there?

MR. CARMICHAEL: So definitely the assessment schedule is constrained by resources. It's the people to do the prep work supporting the models, like the ageing and the evaluations of life history studies and all that, and then, also, then the next restriction that I guess comes online would be the number of analysts. The next restriction after that is how many can be run through the SSC, and then, after that, it becomes how many things can come to you to take action on, and our process right now, a lot of times, when you get an assessment, they just tend to require pretty significant changes in your fishery.

They can often require changes in allocation, and they can require rebuilding plans, and so the thing is, when we get a pretty simple -- When we get an assessment that only requires a fairly simple change in management, like updating an ACL, then, you know, the council process isn't much of an impediment, but so many of them require so much more, and so it's really -- You know, the way I think of it is it's sort of this sequential level of restrictions, and so I think, you know, the idea -- If we could get four stock assessments coming through the system a year, I believe that that fully loads up every other part of this process.

You know, I think the SSC is tapped out, and I think you as a council, with the resources we have, are pretty well tapped out, if we're getting four stock assessments a year, and so I just think it's -- You know, I've always felt that it's unrealistic to try and get, you know, much further than that, and my focus has really been on can we make them say more timely, so that there's less lag between the terminal year and when you get it, and that there is less of the post-work, in dealing with the projections and everything, which also slows things down, but I think four would sort of max it out. If we could get Science Center resources to that point, and be able to like, you know, have the ages, and have the analysts to really consistently get there, it would be all that we could handle.

DR. BELCHER: Clay, to that point?

DR. PORCH: I think, if you count those update models, which would be full assessments, and they just, you know, would be terminated at a certain date, and so, if data came in after that date, they wouldn't be included, and, I mean, that's one of the things that draws things out, but, if you include those updated models, then it would come out to about four assessments per year.

DR. BELCHER: Robert, continuing onto that? Judy, I will put you in the queue.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and I just wanted to make sure that, for whatever it's worth, what we can do as council members, to try and help support making sure that you've got the resources necessary to be able to move this as quickly as possible, and just acknowledging the importance of these assessments to our entire process.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Trish, I have you next, and then I have Andy, Kerry, Judy,

MS. MURPHEY: So could you go back to the slide with your criteria? There it is, and so I've kind of done a lot of thinking, and so I'll don't know if I'll be able to express all this, but I think the criteria sounds good, as far as trying to pick key stocks overall, and I think it's good. One thing I'm concerned about is trying to build in some flexibility, once you've got these choices, and, you know, you've chosen your key stocks, and, I mean, for instance, if you're having bottlenecks with ageing, are there -- I guess what I'm getting at is maybe you really need to go through a major data triage on each of these stocks, and so, if you've got one stock that you're really getting a bottleneck on the ageing, you know, can you back that down to a lesser -- Or a less complex stock assessment, because I know one thing you all are -- You know, in listening to the SEDAR stuff, the Steering Committee stuff, you know, you're also talking about efficiency.

We're all trying to get more efficient, and so it just seems, if you could apply some sort of data triage to this as well, to -- You know, if you see that, well, maybe we can back off the Cadillac, and use the -- Not even the Volkswagen, but the Subaru, and, you know, is that feasible?

Something else -- Let's see. What was I thinking? I guess those are my main points, and, getting to gray trigger, that's a fish that everybody is concerned about, and I guess the Cadillac didn't work, and so maybe switch -- You know, can we go to a less-complex analysis, and I kind of feel like, you know, everybody wants the Cadillac, but, you know, those lesser models -- Those work too, and I think a lot of those are tried and true, and I think that goes back to your data triage.

There may be other fish that, you know, a lesser one is going to be more appropriate. You get a little bit more -- You get more done, and there was the other thing about my flexibility. As Charlie mentioned, there's always fires, and you're going to have to build that in. I mean, you're going to end up with data shortfalls, and stock assessments don't always behave, and so you end up having to try other -- You know, throw another different M, or somebody else has come up with a new life history information that needs to be -- You know, it won't get thrown in, because it was an update, and I think you need to build some flexibility in the process to be able to be nimble to any new information you've got, and so I just think flexibility is going to be an important piece in this, too.

DR. BELCHER: John, you had something to that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I would say, you know, Trish, to the first part, I think, you know, if you go in, and the council says I need an assessment of this stock, and the hope is to do an age assessment, but you can't, then hopefully we can fall back onto something that still gives the council information that's robust, and I think Clay would certainly support that, and I've heard him, you know, talk about being practical, in that sense, and not having things held up while you pursue some data, which may be really difficult to obtain, or even, you know, high risk as to whether or not you're going to succeed.

Then triggerfish, just to clarify, it wasn't an issue with the research track, and it was a workload concern for the short-term, for like 2026, and there were some concerns of the extension of the landings into the Mid-Atlantic region, where we may cause some governance issues that are going to make the operational perhaps a bit more complicated than would be some others, and so we just felt, in the need of the other priorities to get done, that that one just needed to have its brakes tapped, but, as far as we know, you know, the research track assessment didn't have, you know, too many issues that would certainly stand in the way of it being pursued further, and I hear, loud and clear, people's comments on leaving some added capacity to deal with the unexpected, and the fires, and to have some flexibility, and that's why I think it's kind of important.

You know, if you take the idea of four major work units, and you schedule three of them for regular recurring assessments over time, then you are reserving some capability, whether that's for a fire, or that's where an assessment is complicated, and you need an extra person, or that's where you say you've got to jump in and do an extra update on something, or new projections, and, you know, there's so many things that pop up within this that need to be looked at.

Then the other possibility too is, know, if you put 100 percent of the Science Center's resources towards the regular recurring assessments, I have nothing for the remainder stocks, and so there needs to be some recognition that we have these other species that maybe get looked at less frequently, or we have data-limited stocks, which we are going to need cooperation with the Science Center, and their support and expertise to work through those, and so, you know, to me, if our base work unit and analyst is four, we can really only put about three of those, in my mind, toward regular recurring SEDAR assessments, if we're going to succeed on the, you know, bigger-picture view.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Trish, you have a follow-up to that, and then, Clay, I'm assuming you had one as well.

MS. MURPHEY: Just an additional just thought, and I'm not real familiar with -- I just know, if something has passed or failed peer review, in the peer review, can you get input from them on what would be different methodology to consider, and, I mean, is that asked, or can you, and maybe that would also be helpful in moving forward, you know, for future assessments.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, that's absolutely the case, and one of the things we've really done, over time, is try to move away from the concept that a peer review is pass or fail, that a peer review needs to be that, and it needs to be input, and that was one of the fundamental things of the research track, and then the subsequent operational, because the research track doesn't give you management advice. It was to give you a chance to then incorporate recommendations from the peer review into your operational assessment.

DR. BELCHER: Clay, to that?

DR. PORCH: Yes, and, you know, first of all, you know, I can't resist, Trish, to comment, when you mentioned things like there's new information on life history, or new information on this or that, and that's exactly what happens in SEDAR, where lots of people bring lots of things to the table, and then you end up trying to essentially make a Cadillac again, and that becomes making a Cadillac, and so, at some point, we have to figure out where to draw the line, because very often that new information, even if it gets included, doesn't actually improve the assessment that much, and so it's really still a Volkswagen, but you just put a Cadillac body on it.

What we want to do is not do all that extra work to put a Cadillac body on it, when the essential engine is still the Volkswagen, and that's still the workhorse, but putting that Cadillac body takes a lot of work, and where we draw the line has been very challenging, and we've mentioned peer review, CIE reviewers often -- Because they come from all different parts of the world, they have all different ideas, and they make lots of different suggestions, sometimes counter to one another.

It depends -- You know, one group will recommend one thing, fixed steepness or something like that, and another group will recommend another approach, and it's actually been really challenging. I think my point to all this is it's actually better, from a management perspective, to have a fairly consistent approach through time, because none of these models, of course, can get all the details right.

The key is that they get the essential dynamics, and then you're just giving consistent management advice, and that's why I think having a six-year interval is good, with update models in between, and so using consistent procedures, and then, in the sixth year, if there's something really fundamental, then they can consider whether that needs to be included in the assessment, but, again, all the management strategy evaluations and such, that I've seen, show that it's more important to be consistent than it is to chase every little piece of new data that comes around.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, Clay. Continuing on, I have Andy, Kerry, and Judy still. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Great discussion around the table, and I'm not sure if I'm at a council meeting or a car dealership right now. Thanks, John, for the presentation. If you could go to Slide 2, because I'm going to maybe take us in a little bit different direction. Maybe not Slide 2. Slide -- It was the keys stocks and non-key stocks. That was it. You passed it.

To me, I think the key part of this is that last bullet, to assess remaining non-key stocks with less-intensive approaches, and then, John, I think I heard you say something along the lines of, especially talking about the update assessments, kind of like the SSC's ability, or willingness, to accept that, right, something along those lines, and I would kind of turn that to are we willing to accept that as a council, right, and I have long argued that I think there are simpler approaches.

I think there are ways that we could make the process more nimble, and probably produce science and data and information to inform management in a more timely manner that is less rigorous than a full-blown age-structured stock assessment.

The South Atlantic, for a number of species, obviously has really good indices of abundance now, for both video and chevron trap, right, and so, oftentimes, I look at those, before I see the outcome

of an assessment, and I can predict the likelihood of what that assessment is going to tell me, right, and so, if you go to then the list of species, for the key stocks, you know, these meet all the criteria that John has laid out, and I think he's done a great job of kind of explaining how he arrived at those, but I think the reality, for me, still comes down to what are the species that we want to take those less-rigorous, you know, assessment approaches for, because there's a subset of those species in that that I think could be pulled out.

We're going to be able to do key stock assessments on that regular schedule, and then, for those non-key species, work in science, and information, that could be provided to the council for those species, and then, to tie, I guess, another comment together, and, I mean, I've heard about, you know, the opportunity to address fires, unforeseen circumstances, kind of scheduling for flexibility, and I like that approach.

The challenge is we're trying to get away from the uncertainty of not planning for assessments and then not having the data, and the information and everything, ready to be prepared and funnel into the assessment process, and so, if we do that, if we put in some unknown slots, or to-be-determined slots, we still have to some planning processes a couple of years in advance, and what's going to go in that, and what information needs to be then prepared, in order to meet those needs, but I would suggest, to be honest, that we try to take the list of fourteen and get it down to eight or ten, and then put the remainder in the simpler-assessed-stock approach.

DR. BELCHER: I've got Kerry, Judy, and then Tim.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks, Andy. That goes really nicely on where I was going. I think, when I originally went through this -- When you went through this presentation, I was thinking we assess them, and those are the only ones we then really respond to management for, and I kind of missed that last bullet about what we do with these non-key species, and, just like Andy, every single time I've seen MARMAP/SERFS/whatever, I know, right then, where the assessment is going to go, and so it does make me comfortable, more comfortable, than having a shorter list, even maybe reassessing how I felt about triggerfish.

I was just thinking that that meant we weren't going to deal with them at all, but what I would love to know, in the future, if this is the way we're going, is it possible to lay out sort of a dummy's guide to the process, and the timeline, for these non-key species, and are we going to look at them every so many years, and maybe we can't say exactly what we're going to look at for these species, but we know probably we're going to look at SERFS, and we're going to look at maybe catch data, you know, just sort of have a general idea, so that we know when those species are going to come up, because we are going to have to funnel some of that stuff into our management plans, too.

DR. BELCHER: To that, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I would like to get there eventually. You know, we've wanted to get there, for those stocks, for a long time, and I think, as part of this, as people said, not devoting 100 percent of our capability to crunching these handful of stocks, but leaving some additional, so we can have a realized plan for getting into those other stocks, and I think getting the SSC into the unassessed stocks, seeing where that workgroup goes, and just trying to come up with a long-term view of doing something for those species, would really be helpful, and that's where we would like to go as next steps.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. I have Judy and then Tim.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the presentation, John. It was very good. I'm like Kerry now, and I was wanting to make sure that we added triggerfish, but now I'm so confused, but we do need, I think, because I think triggerfish is very important, and I think fish that you don't think are going to be very important are, with all the new changes we're going to have, if we have any more closures, and we're not going to be able to keep -- You know, the gag season is so short, and we don't have any red snapper, and --

UNIDENTIFIED: (The comment is not audible on the recording.)

MS. HELMEY: I know. We can't keep them, and so, anyway, I did want to say something about a used car dealership. Old Cadillacs make -- They're really great, because they've got fins.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. Andy, I was really glad that you brought up that about, you know, using some type of different model for those other species, and I was curious. Were you thinking along the lines of like, you know, a simpler approach, something as simple as like a fishery-dependent index-based approach, to give catch recommendations?

MR. STRELCHECK: Not necessarily anything specific, Tim, but there certainly is a whole suite of different assessment methodologies, with age structure being on the highly-complex side, and others being on the more simplistic side. The other thing that I think challenges us, with a lot of our assessments, is the amount of data, and information, that's brought to the table and has to be included in an assessment, right, and so, the less data, and information, you have to weave together, the faster that assessment could be produced, and so an index-based type of assessment, right, that includes less data streams, but still is rigorous to provide management advice, and is scientifically sound, to me, is, you know, an opportunity for us to speed things along, but there is certainly things in between an index-based approach and an age-structured assessment that might also be worth exploring.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Andy.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Kristin.

MS. FOSS: I think we're headed in the right direction with this, and we want to become more nimble with assessments, but how is this actually going to work? Are we going to like adjust the current SEDAR like schedule for the next few years? Like are we going to go back to a blank slate, or is staff going to continue to bring us updates on how this is actually going to work with the Science Center and different SSCs?

MR. CARMICHAEL: So that's sort of the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question, probably to come next, and, in my mind, we're going to have to -- You know, we have the idealized approach that we're thinking of, something that would look like this in the long-term, but I don't think we can just get there this cleanly, and one of the big reasons I think that is because of stocks that are in rebuilding plans, and we have to make sure we have a schedule that respects those rebuilding plans,

and so, for example, if I have a stock that's -- You know, let's say that tilefish was in a rebuilding plan, and it was supposed to be rebuilt in 2031, I wouldn't want to do an assessment in 2030, with data likely through 2028 or 2029, and then be so close to rebuilding and think I'm six years before I get a chance to declare it's rebuilt, because we've got to have an assessment that declares the stock rebuilt before you can move into just, you know, out-of-the-rebuilding-plan-type management.

I think that's one major consideration, that says we're going to have to transition into this, and there's going to be other considerations. There's just going to be staff, and moving from the current plans we have, and we have stocks planned out through 2028, that are based on council needs, and we've got a backlog of hot topics that we need to look at, and gray triggerfish is certainly one that needs to be worked in there somewhere, and, you know, we have a pretty good workload already shown up through 2028.

What we'll have to do is transition from kind of this picture view to that more of a fixed view of when I'm going to say how often am I going to look at gag grouper, and where is that in the rotation, and so it's going to take a transition period that I would say is four or five years, maybe, and, I mean, it could be 2030 before we're okay, you know, and settled down, where everybody is in their right spot and they're following the longer-term view, but, you know, they're going to slip into this.

My thought is the stocks are going to slowly kind of slip into their slots on this schedule over time, but it may take a little bit longer to just get there, because of the needs that you have, and because of dealing with the rebuilding plan, and so it's going to take some look to look at, okay, where are my restriction points to accommodate rebuilding plans, and how quickly can I get into this.

DR. BELCHER: I've got Charlie and then Clay.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, just to kind of clarify things for me, because we've got things like black sea bass, and red porgy, with very low catch limits, and probably recruitment issues, is why stocks are low, and, every time we see a red porgy assessment. we're hoping for better, and it's the same thing, click, click, click, and so would some of those stocks, that fall into those categories, even though they're overfished, would they fall into the update slots, or those to-be-determined slots, so we could kind of get down to our key species that we're actually catching? Just a question.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, possibly, and I don't see why not. We may have to have some conversation with the agency about, you know, could you declare a stock rebuilt based on an update, and it might come down to, you know, what was in the update, et cetera, but, as far as, you know, if something is on a really long rebuilding timeframe, then, yes, that could be a really good way to clear some space and get us into this schedule a little bit faster.

I think that, in general, we're just going to have to be creative in how we approach this, and realistic, and agree that this is where we're headed, and let's get there, and know that we're going to have to, you know, make some sacrifices here and there, and maybe I won't get the model that I want for everything, but I do get the ones that I really need.

DR. BELCHER: Clay.

DR. PORCH: The short answer, to, you know, John's question, is absolutely. It's an update model, and it's still an updated assessment, and so, yes, that could be used, if it showed that the stock was rebuilt, and it's rebuilt, and, you know, the intervention that I was planning to make is that I think we could probably hasten the transition to the schedule using those updated models.

You know, the challenge has always been that people push back on that, including, at times, the councils, because, again, it's not the Cadillac assessment, right, and it doesn't have the most updated information, but, if we're willing to move with that, and say, okay, we'll use the update model, with the information we're able to update in a reasonable timeframe, then I think we can kind of transition this schedule maybe before 2030, but it would depend on using those, but, otherwise, I agree with John.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Any further discussion on this? John, back to you.

MR. CARMICHAEL: So thanks. You know, I really appreciate that good discussion, and I feel like people are largely on the same page. We've got some great feedback, and so we talked about further discussion in December, and, you know, it will go to the SSC in October, and then come back to you, and a couple of things that, you know, I think we can bring to you is we've discussed some the idea of these non-age-based assessments, and we can bring some information on the different types of assessments, and what they provide, and there's been lots of work, and papers, and workshops, held on this very topic, and so I think we could come up with some ways to help you understand what's out there and what's realistic and what is time and data needs, et cetera, and I think that would be helpful.

I think then trying to take the stocks that we have, and try to see how they could start to fit into this, you know, alternative scheduling approach, and, you know, as I said, put the markers in there for rebuilding plans and such, and try to get an idea of the complexity, to get us transitioned over to this other scheduling, and keeping in mind, in doing that, retaining flexibility, and so maybe, you know, 75 percent of the resources are devoted to that and retaining the extra.

The Steering Committee then will talk about this more in 2025, continuing, and how long it will take to get all of this revised will probably depend on comments from the SSCs, and, while there is many entities involved in SEDAR, it's primarily the Gulf and South Atlantic that are dealing with this particular issue. The Caribbean does a bit of its own thing, and HMS does a bit of their own thing, and, for the commission, we primarily provide peer review, and so, really, in terms of the scheduling and the workload and these issues, it's the South Atlantic and Gulf that are dealing with it, and so how long it takes the Steering Committee to settle all this stuff is going to depend on the feedback we get from the SSCs and the councils.

I hope that, by, you know, sometime during 2025, if not April, then certainly by October, the SSC is, you know, given a final review of the process changes, and where we're headed, and we're in good shape, and, you know, they can look at it in April, and not have any more, and be done with it by October, would be wonderful.

Then we'll be finalizing SEDAR process changes, updating SEDAR guidance documents, SOPPs, all that kind of stuff, transition into scheduling, which I think is probably realistic, really, for like 2027, to try to start putting stocks into that other framework, and that's why I say, you know, I think, if we could start there, and, by 2030, have everything working in that framework, I think

that would be amazing for SEDAR, given the way things have operated in the past, and the realistic timelines, and so, yes, this is where we are, and what's coming up next, and we can continue this conversation in December, and Chip and I will write this up and kind of have the next phase of this hopefully ready for you guys, and we'll see what the SSC has to say about these plans.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. Just one clarifying question for me, and so you talked about a non-age-based assessment, the different types that are available, and so they satisfy the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements for reproduction potential, for MSY, because that was what I asked, and I said using abundance and things, and will it satisfy the MSA for MSY potential?

DR. PORCH: Magnuson is not that prescriptive, and so some of the, for instance, production models, biomass is essentially a proxy for reproductive potential, and so what would be harder to do is justify just number of fish, but biomass is often used as a proxy. In other words, you know, reproductive potential tends to be correlated with weight and not really number of fish so much.

MR. HULL: Thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Any other further comments, or discussion, or questions, at this point for John or Chip? Okay. Thanks for all of that. Moving on, we've got Species Selected for the Stock Assessments Overview with Chip.

DR. COLLIER: So, at the last SEDAR Committee meeting, we talked about potentially six to seven stocks being assessed in 2027. The Science Center provided their guidance on which species would be assessed in 2026, and they indicated that they would be able to do two species in addition to red snapper, and so the original request by the council was to include gag, gray triggerfish, king mackerel, red grouper, snowy grouper, and potentially hope for a black sea bass assessment in 2026, knowing that these requests were ambitious.

They came back, and the Science Center indicated that they needed two analysts to work on red snapper. It's a complicated stock assessment, and so they're going to have two staff members working on stock assessments, and so that knocks out two potential slots there, and there was a change in the coastal migratory pelagics. There used to be an analyst slot for that, and that was transitioned over to the Beaufort assessment team, and so that dropped one of the potential species, and this left us with a choice of just two slots, and which two to put in there, and the two selected were gag grouper and red grouper. Information on what that was selected is both are important species, and it's been a while since they have been reassessed, and so you can look at the information on what's going on for those two species.

I did want to give some background information on why those two were selected over the other two, and you can see how everything has had to transition, because we are limited in the number of stocks, and so gray triggerfish got moved out. As you guys have indicated, you guys would like that put back in, and king mackerel was moved down in the stock assessment schedule, and maybe it's going to be a little bit easier to look at the graph for this.

King mackerel got moved down to 2027, and snowy grouper got moved down to 2027 from originally being in 2026, and vermilion snapper was included in 2027. There was an attempt at an

interim assessment being done for that species, and it was unsuccessful, and so it's been a considerable amount of time since that has been last reassessed, and so that was included, and then we also have black sea bass in 2027. This species has been going on a downward trend for the past few years, and so we felt it was very important to get that species included.

All these items in blue, if you think there's a more important species to put in there, you guys can speak up, and we provide the rationale, in the text, on why those were included in 2027 and 2028, and so we have started developing the schedule for 2028. WE have filled in three slots, but, as John said, if we're going to be going to this new approach, we might be having to transition from this and move -- And bounce some of these stocks around as well, and so these are just preliminary, the items in blue, just current thoughts from staff, and, if you all have any recommendations on how things should change, just let us know, and we can make those modifications, and then the chair and John can bring it up during the SEDAR Steering Committee, to hopefully get it moved into an orange or a green, and green means that has been approved by the SEDAR Steering Committee, and scheduled, and then orange just means it's been approved by the SEDAR Steering Committee, but it's not currently scheduled. With that, I will take any questions.

DR. BELCHER: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I know red snapper is a big deal, but I'm kind of curious of why it still needs two analysts. I mean, is it a new stock assessment model, or the extra, the great snapper count, or I just -- I don't know, and it just sort of surprised me to see that you were shifting two -- You know, you were having two analysts on it, especially when we're trying to work on getting more efficient, and so I was just wondering about that.

DR. BELCHER: Clay.

DR. PORCH: This is actually a huge deal, and it is largely the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project, where we're actually trying to incorporate indices -- Well, the estimates of overall abundance, but also other aspects of the close-kin genetic mark-recapture study that Will Patterson is doing, and there's a lot of subtleties there for incorporating in an assessment, and it's not an easy lift, and so we really need the brainpower of those, and, in fact, we're even contracting somebody else to help us with that. There's a lot of wrinkles in there, and you need to get it right, but there's a lot of other pieces of information that are being evaluated, and this is one, probably, where we do want the Cadillac assessment, and so, yes, I think it definitely warrants the two analysts.

The only intervention I would make along those lines, that we should probably bring up at the SEDAR Steering Committee, is that the red snapper, South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project, will not be completed until August of 2025, and then it will undergo some degree of peer review, and so I don't know that we actually need to start the assessment as early as it's listed here, since we won't get the biggest single piece of information until much later in 2025, and so it probably would be advantageous to start it later, and probably shift it into ending in maybe early 2027, but we can have that discussion at the SEDAR Steering Committee, but I think it would be good for the council to think about that.

DR. BELCHER: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I don't know if we can do that, Clay. The data workshop for this is in early 2025, and so April of 2025, and I don't know if there's going to be a SEDAR Steering Committee meeting before that, and what this is marking, with it showing starting in 2024, is the data scoping, and so we know what information is going to be coming from that South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project, and that information will be known at that point, and then there's going to be a data workshop that is starting in the spring of 2025.

That's going to incorporate all of the age data that's being collected through that project, and so the age data doesn't necessarily have to go through some of that rigorous process. In late 2025, we do have a potential pause set for -- Or that could take place in the assessment, as they're trying to incorporate some of that research project into the assessment, and so hopefully things will go smoothly, but we do have it built in, and timed out, so the review can occur for the Red Snapper Research Project and then be incorporated into the stock assessment, without causing huge delays.

DR. BELCHER: Clay, to that?

DR. PORCH: Just keep in mind that that's scheduled to arrive -- Again, to be completed in August of 2025, and then there's the review, and my experience is those often take longer than we thought, and we'll see, but it may very well spill into 2027, but I take your point that the start date is only the data scoping, and the actual data workshop is much later, the spring of 2025.

DR. BELCHER: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I just had another question, and, granted, this is 2027, and so, I mean, this is still, you know, planning way ahead, and I was curious about the king mackerel, and changing the -- Because you changed analysts, do you have to change models? I don't know, and I guess that -- Was it -- It just seems kind of odd that -- Again, maybe getting at inefficiency, but that, because you had to change -- Because you changed an analyst, which makes you change the model, and that makes you have to do continuity runs now between two assessments, and that -- I just wondered, and is it necessary to make that change, because, again, you've built in an inefficiency, and, I mean, granted, I guess it's one time, but -- Or, you know, I didn't know whether analysts aren't like cross-trained in different Stock Synthesis and BAM and, you know, production modeling, or whatever, and, I mean, I know everybody kind of has their specialty, but I was just sort of surprised that making that change kind of created a whole other elongation of stock assessment.

DR. BELCHER: Clay.

DR. PORCH: Part of it, as I understand it, is also the SSC is used to working with BAM, and the way it produces output, and I recall, the first time we did a Stock Synthesis model of king mackerel, that was one of the concerns, because the output doesn't neatly fit into the ABC control rule that they had crafted, and so I think that's part of it, but it is also true that these algorithms are really complicated. A production model is child's play, but, when you get to some of these statistical catch-at-age models, there is lots of bells and whistles, and, you know, really understanding how the algorithm, the software, works is absolutely critical.

We have a few people that are cross-trained and can use both seamlessly, but not that many, and so, ideally, you know, we'll have the analysts that were involved with king mackerel in the

previous assessment involved in this, but it just makes sense that, if this is going to be something that's taken on by the South Atlantic team, and they're going to produce output in a way that the SSC is used to working with, that we switch it over to BAM.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Any other comments relative to 2026 and the assessments that we have currently on the schedule? Amy.

MS. DUKES: I would appreciate a little bit more explanation on the complexity aspect of the red snapper assessment too, and it's noted in here that it's just going to be more complex, and that two analysts are going to be needed, and, to kind of piggyback off of what Trish was saying, it would be helpful if you could go into a little bit more detail, so that we can understand perhaps a little bit more still, and I'm still not there.

DR. PORCH: Besides all the additional information that's coming in, whether it's age composition and other studies, it's mostly how do you incorporate the new information that's coming from the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project, and there's two sources of main things that are coming out of that. One is an absolute abundance estimate based on our video survey data, and another is the close-kin mark-recapture data, and that actually provides you more than an index of absolute abundance. It can provide you an index of reproductive potential, and other information, and what they want to do is actually stitch that information directly into the stock assessment, as part of the statistical model.

That's never actually been done before, and, now, we've used close-kin mark-recapture estimates, just point estimates of absolute abundance, and plugged them in, for instance, for southern bluefin tuna, and I think that was one of the first ones in fisheries applications, and there's been some examples with marine mammals, but, at least domestically here, and, really, I can't think of any case where they actually incorporated all the close-kin output directly in the stock assessment model, which requires changing the software, and so it's not a simple thing, and you need to test it, and make sure the software works properly, and it's not something you just whip up and program quick and you're done. It's going to require considerable testing to make sure we get it right, and so it's really groundbreaking. It's quite exciting, for those of us who are mathematical modelers, but it is a tedious exercise.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, Clay. Other comments, or questions, on the schedule, as it sits right now, for the assessments? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Just one, and do we still think it's realistic for the cobia, and I know it's not our fish, but I'm going to ask from a state perspective, to have that assessment done at the end of 2025, with the change of analyst?

DR. BELCHER: We're getting into the Other Business.

MS. DUKES: Sorry.

DR. BELCHER: That's okay. I'm glad that you're observant on that, and, yes, we're about ready to cross that line anyway. Chip, would you like to discuss cobia?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so, in talking with Pat Campfield and Bob Beal, with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, they had indicated that there was going to be a delay in the cobia benchmark assessment, potentially leading to a restart of the benchmark assessment at another timeframe.

As you can see here, the slots are pretty full, and the terminal year for the previous cobia assessment was 2017, and Atlantic States would like to have this stock assessment completed as quickly as possible, and me, looking at the schedule, I would also like it to be completed as quickly as possible. If it does get moved down in the timeframe, there was some indication that they might have to go back to a data workshop, in order to make sure that the terminal year of the data is up-to-date, because it is getting a little bit long now, a little bit long in the tooth, from the terminal year, and so it would be ideal if that could get done.

There is some white space in here, and I know you see the dolphin management procedure review, and that orange one in 2025, and we're hoping that maybe the slot could get filled, but, yes, it's a little concerning that migratory cobia could get pushed back into the other assessments that we would like to have, but this is also something to consider, is how do we deal with hiccups like this, new staff coming in, or staff leaving, on how to get that worked into the assessment schedule, because, if you have a fixed schedule like this, that's assuming everybody can do an assessment every year, and it takes some time, I think eighteen months, to get somebody worked up to be doing the assessment alone.

DR. BELCHER: Clay, did you have anything to add to that?

DR. PORCH: I mean, nothing really to add, and that's what happened. You know, we lost the lead analyst that was slated to do that, and we don't have a lot of redundancy in the system, and they already kind of agreed to the procedure they wanted to take. If it had been just analyzing, you know, alternative ways to manage the stock, it would be a different matter, because we could have multiple people participate, but, since they agreed on the assessment approach, more or less, that they want to take, we're going to need to slot somebody else into that.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, Clay. Other conversational pieces about schedule? Okay. Any other business for the SEDAR Committee to discuss at this point? Seeing none, we'll recess that committee. We're going to go ahead and take another ten-minute break and come back and discuss what we're going to do for the rest of the afternoon.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on September 17, 2024.)

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Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
October 22, 2024

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Attendee Details

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Bailey

Bianchi

Alan

Bissette

Jesse

Bradshaw

Christopher

Brouwer

Myra

Bunting

Matthew

Byrd

Julia

Cermak

Bridget

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