

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SEDAR COMMITTEE**

**Lumina Holiday Inn  
Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina**

**December 4, 2024**

### **SEDAR Committee Members**

Trish Murphey, Chair  
Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair  
Robert Beal  
Amy W. Dukes  
Tim Griner

James G. Hull, Jr  
Kerry Marhefka  
Charlie Phillips  
Andy Strelcheck

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Judy Helmey

Tom Roller  
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Emily Ott  
Dr. Mike Shmidtke  
Rachael Silvas  
Nicholas Smillie  
Suzanna Thomas  
Greyson Webb  
Christina Wiegand  
Meg Withers

### **Attendees and Invited Participants**

Monica Smit-Brunello  
Dr. Marcel Reichert  
Sonny Gwin  
Kristin Foss  
Dr. John Walter  
Shepard Grimes

Rick DeVactor  
Kathy Knowlton  
Haley Stephens  
John Sanchez  
James Paskiewicz  
Rob Cheshire

### **Observers and Participants**

Other observers and participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Lumina Holiday Inn, Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Trish Murphey.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. We'll go ahead and convene the SEDAR committee. Just to go through the list of members, it's myself, Jessica is the vice chair, Bob Beal, Carolyn Belcher, Amy Dukes, Tim Griner, Jimmy Hull, Kerry Marhefka, Charlie Phillips, and Andy Strelcheck, and so that's the group here. I will go ahead and turn it over to Chip and Marcel.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you. What we're going to start off by doing is going through a brief overview of the SEDAR changes, and this is Attachment 1. I'm not going to go into a long-winded, detailed description of the SEDAR process changes. I can't hope to match what John did at the last meeting. He's a much better speaker, much more thorough in this process, much more knowledgeable, and so you guys got a briefing on that the last meeting.

This is more of an, all right, you had a chance to think about it, and let's think about where it can go from here, and it also had a chance to go to the SSC, and get comments from them, and Marcel is going to speak, after me, about what the SSCs thought about some of these process changes.

The one thing that I do want to highlight is, throughout this process, SEDAR has tried to do the four Ts, which is thoroughness, throughput, timeliness, and transparency, and some of those are contrary to each other. Timeliness and throughput, those two go together, but they quite often are in conflict with transparency and thoroughness. Those two tend to take a lot more time, and so SEDAR has always been trying to balance those four Ts, in order to get through the process.

This has led to changes throughout SEDAR, beginning in 2004, where they were adding different categories into that benchmark process, where they were adding standards in there, in addition to updates, and then, also, in 2018, where it was a change to research track, trying to get some of the more throughput in there, and there is a graph in throughput for this.

One of the things that we want to note is there are some bottlenecks within the process. It might not be all that easy to see on the screen. Let me blow it up a little bit, but what we have here are data timelines, and how long it takes to get different pieces of data into the process, and what you see, on the left side of this table, is basically the categorical pieces of data, whether it's commercial landings, going down into the indices of abundance and how long it takes those.

On the right, you can see, for a given year, when the data collection occurs. That's in green. In yellow is the accumulation phase, and then in blue is the available data for analysis. Orange is data analysis, and then, finally, available for use in stock assessment.

What John highlighted, during our September meeting, was the age data is a critical component of this, and it really causes delays in the overall stock assessment process. Right here, you're looking at basically a two-year delay, from the end of a year, until the age data is available for use in stock assessments, and so that's going to always be hindering some of the process and the timeliness of some of the stock assessments, if we're looking to get age-based assessments for all of these.

Another thing that we've added to this is the overall throughput for the Southeast Fisheries Science Center assessments, and you can look at it from 2002 all the way up through 2024 assessments

that have been completed, different types of assessments, whether it was a benchmark, standard, update, or through the more recent approach of research track and operational.

What has always been the hope is trying to get four assessments per year. That really hasn't panned out. You can see it has occurred in a few years throughout the process, but, unfortunately, through time, it just hasn't been able to be realized, and so now we are going into some proposed changes for the SEDAR process.

Highlighted in those proposed changes are to eliminate the research track approach. Just the councils have been feeling that it's really difficult to deal with the research track approach, when you get an assessment and then that's not going to be used for management. You have to go back through and do an operational assessment after that. That just leads to overall delays in the system. It leads to frustration for people that are working in the SEDAR process, because they're having to do the same job pretty frequently on the same species.

Then there's also the desire to eliminate the assessment nomenclature, and schedule slots instead, and this was presented by John last time, exactly looking at a potential schedule of maybe two species being completed per year, with a potential assessment schedule of stocks getting reassessed every six years, with an update model maybe at a three-year time point.

In order to do this, and get that accomplished, the council will need to select some key stocks. We'll be talking about that in the next presentation, after we get done talking about the process changes. Then the final piece of this puzzle, and it's probably a big piece, is we need to figure out how to assess the remaining stocks with less-intensive approaches.

There's over thirty stocks that are not assessed, and, right now, how are we going to deal with those stocks, if we're not going to go through the SEDAR process, and make sure we're getting quality information, in order to set the ABCs for those species? I'm just going to check to make sure I've gone through everything.

Some of the pieces that were discussed at the last meeting, and we have a section on this, is the committee had suggested to have a slot remain open, in order to accommodate some of the emerging issues that could be coming down the line, whether it's due to climate change, whether it's due to change in stock species, whether it's a change in the overall fishery.

Everybody knows that things change pretty rapidly in the fisheries world, and so having this open slot is key. The SSC also recognized that that is a needed piece in that. What that also means is you're going to have -- You potentially need fewer key stocks, if you're going to have an open slot. Maybe a key stock could be slid in there, if there's no emerging issue coming up, but the process needs to be set up in such a way that you can get through there and have the number of species assessed in a timely fashion.

One of the things that we've been trying to do, as far as this key stocks approach, is reducing from the fifteen, and, as soon as we started trying to reduce from the fifteen, two species have been added on to the list, and so now it's up to, I think, fifteen, or sixteen, and so gray triggerfish and white grunt were both suggested as potential species to include.

The committee also pointed out that we need some flexibility in the assessment approaches, and similar approaches may be useful for giving more timely catch advice. We just need to figure out how to do some of these potentially simpler approaches. I know there's some -- There was some discussion, by the Science Center, indicating that some of the age-based processes, even done through an updated approach, and maybe not a full age-based, but having some of the background information, might be better than some of the data-limited approaches, and so just considering the tradeoffs from those, which approach would be best for each stock, and maybe it's not going to be the same for each stock. We need to just sit down and think about it and what's going to work.

Another thing that we will need to be working on is the ABC control rule, to better address some of the uncertainties that are associated with these different stock assessment approaches. We feel like it's pretty clearly laid out for Tier 1 assessments, and so those age-based assessments, and those are going to be done through P\* approaches.

We don't have other assessment approaches used typically in the South Atlantic. It is going to be coming up with blueline tilefish, where we do use different approaches, and so figuring out how we address uncertainty, and developing that management buffer between the OFL and the ABC, will be important.

Then more frequent assessments will require getting catch level recommendations incorporated into management more quickly. We do have approaches that can potentially address this, and, potentially, if we get management, or catch, advice on a more regular basis, we're not going to have as big shocks to the system. Everything hopefully will be working out a little bit smoother. Maybe minor changes we can just do it through simpler ABC changes. It might not require big shifts in how the overall management of the fishery is occurring.

Some other recommendations, and Marcel will get into these, so I'll just leave these out for now, but, as Marcel is giving his talk, just think about the committee action for this, which is to provide guidance on a process that best suits the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for discussion at the SEDAR Steering Committee at the February 2025 meeting. They are going to try to really hammer out some of the details for this new process, and it would be good to get some advice, for both Trish and John, as they sit on the Steering Committee representing the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. With that, I will transfer over to Marcel. Let me pull up your presentation.

DR. REICHERT: All right. Thank you, Chip. The SSC received a brief presentation on the developing SEDAR process by Julie Neer. The SSC discussed that there was some concerns for the increase in ambiguity in the SSC roles and expectations. We felt that perhaps a new structure will make anticipated SSC workload more uncertain, and, in other words, where and how much is the SSC involved in the assessment process. That may not change much from the current process, but at least we had a discussion about that.

Some members expressed some resistance to the removal of the standardized nomenclature. Several members mentioned that, generally, maximizing production comes with standardization, and so there was some concern in that area.

The SSC also mentioned that it was probably good to remain -- To retain the scope of work, or similar, prior to drafting the terms of reference, and that was to specify the assessment components

and needs. We felt that that may create clarity, and, again, that is currently done, but the SSC felt that that should be retained.

FWRI is already doing stock assessments, in particular for Florida-centered stocks, but we mentioned -- The SSC mentioned that it may be possible to leverage other state and university partners to conduct assessments, and that may expand capacity.

As Chip mentioned, and the SSC discussed this also, the timely available data is critical in the assessment process, and the timing, and it's often a bottleneck, and I think the graph that Chip showed you highlighted that. If the new format is going to be successful, this is something that should be addressed.

This is also something that Chip mentioned, and the time to complete an assessment will depend on the complexity of the assessment. Currently, the time allotted for each assessment in the schedule that was presented is the same, and we were wondering -- The SSC was wondering if there's sufficient timing flexibility in the new process. More complex assessment may take more time than less complex methods, and I was getting a little ahead of myself, but this is the thing that Chip mentioned.

The SSC said that, for some stocks, maybe less complex assessment methods can be considered, and that may provide more timely results, but there's, obviously, a tradeoff between timeliness and uncertainty. More often than not, the more complex assessment methods may have a lower uncertainty, but sometimes it's worse to consider that tradeoff.

Again, something Chip mentioned, the SSC agreed that it may be good to leave one slot open for non-key stocks or unplanned assessment requests. In the schedule that was presented at the SSC, there was no slot for those non-key stocks, and I think we all know, and realize, that unplanned assessment requests will pop up, invariably. It was also important to maintain the data progress from previous assessments, and we felt that that would help in increasing efficiency. We briefly discussed that it may be possible to assess species with similar life histories as a complex. If that's possible, there may be an option to reduce some of the number of slots.

We were asked to consider additional information. The SSC mentioned some economic information, status determination criteria, the availability of indices, in particular if fishery-independent indices are available, recruitment trends, age validation. We also discussed that it may be good to look at the volatility of some of the stock assessment outputs. We mentioned that more volatile stocks may need more frequent assessments. If a lot is happening within the stock, you may need more frequent assessments.

We were also asked what information was needed for catch level recommendations and health checks. For catch level recommendations, I think it's the same information the SSC needs right now, and that's the stock status, with uncertainty estimates, and, for the health check, we discussed that it would be good to get all available updated information, but at least an index trends, catch trends, some economic information, and if and when the ACL was reached would be very useful to help with the health check.

We briefly discussed key stocks. Chip already mentioned that white grunt and great triggerfish were discussed by the SSC. Those are two species that we have a pretty good amount of

information for, including life history, a fishery-independent index, landings, et cetera, but we also realized that other species need to be removed, and I think I showed this picture of a white grunt that was a little disappointed, and also the great triggerfish that was a little surprised to initially being left out. We were also asked about some other considerations for -- I keep forgetting what the UM stands for.

DR. COLLIER: Update management.

DR. REICHERT: Update management. Thank you. Basically, the SSC said that any methods that can be completed within a relatively short period of time would be good, but we mentioned interim analysis updates, and, of course, the methods will depend on the available time and data, and, again, as I mentioned earlier, the more comprehensive methods may reduce uncertainty, but may take a little more time, and so, again, there's a tradeoff between timeliness and the potential uncertainty in the outcome of the assessment.

Then this is an important part, or an important issue, for the SSC. Stocks assessed by partners are part of the SSC workload, and so we feel that they should be added to the overall schedule. That would help the SSC with managing their workload, and I believe this is my last slide. Yes, and that completes my report. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thanks, Marcel. So, Chip, are we going back to you, or we want to start discussion?

DR. COLLIER: Well, just while Marcel is up here, are there any questions that the committee has in regard to the SSC discussion of the SEDAR process changes, or key stocks?

MS. MURPHEY: Does anybody have any questions, or thoughts? Okay. I'm sorry. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just had one thought of, you know, with the load of assessment, different stocks that you need to assess, and with, you know, data provisioning takes the time, is the workload of time, and is there any way that you could have some stocks that are kind of like eminent, that you're not currently working on, but you know, these you want to do, and you could get some data provisioning started ahead of time, and, in other words, get ahead of the process a little bit and have these stocks already loaded, and then you just throw them into your operating system.

You know, it's kind of like what we do in our business. You know, we do prep work, and then, when it's time to cook the food, bam, it's prepped, and it's ready to go on the fire, and so you've got your stock assessment analyst working, doing what they do, and then you have these other stocks ready to throw into the system, because the data has already been worked up ahead of time. It's not really in the main line of fire yet, but it's getting loaded. I know that takes more staff, and you don't have it, but it's just the way that I would look at it. I don't know if that's a possibility.

DR. REICHERT: This is something that the SSC did not discuss. If I speak from my previous work experience, that's how we would work. We would work about two to three years ahead of schedule, and so, if the schedule is set, then you can do that. I think there's a link between the flexibility and changes in the schedule and being prepared, but I'm now speaking for myself, when I was still working with South Carolina DNR.

I think that's possible, but, with a more rigid schedule, I think that is potentially more possible than when there's a lot of changes, but, personally, I think that would help with getting data ready. The problem with ageing is that it just takes time to examine the otoliths, and there's not a lot of flexibility in that.

MS. MURPHEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Thank you, guys, for a very good discussion at the SSC meeting. I was there and it was well thought out, and well discussed, and a little bit of back and forth, which was nice to see, but, from my perspective, I support what the SSC is suggesting for those SEDAR changes, getting rid of the research track and what have you, but I really wanted to focus on this idea of the key stocks, and you guys talked about it, and you hit it on a little bit, but this idea of prioritizing that list, and so having that list, and then prioritizing that list, based on what the current need is, I think is something that should be explored and discussed a little bit more.

Keeping that wild card slot I think is really important, and, also, those further discussions of combining those species. Back in the day, we used to do stock assessments that did contain more than one species, and we've seemed to have gotten away from that, but, if they are similar species, cohabitating species, it would be really nice to be able to have two species combined, but I just wanted to make sure my thought process was right. If adopted, this would be something that would begin in 2027?

DR. COLLIER: I don't feel like there's going to be a hard deadline for this, right, and we're kind of in an interesting process right now, where we're trying to remove the idea of a research track, and then, for right now, we're going to be essentially doing operational assessments, and so we're going to continue with the statement of work process, the terms of reference process, and so a lot of the key components that Marcel had talked about that would be needed in the non-nomenclature, and it's still going to be there. We just have to make sure that we clearly describe, with you all, and with the Science Center, exactly what we expect from the assessments.

MS. MURPHEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, guys, for the presentation. You know, as I think about adding stocks to this priority list, while I think that's good, and I think there's some stocks that do need the attention, part of me keeps thinking, you know, that, before we start rearranging our priority list, or adding to that priority list -- I mean, it seems like we really need to focus on solving the data problems we have, and the uncertainty that we have existing with the stocks that we are assessing.

I mean, in my mind, it's a complete waste of time to think about adding more -- Prioritizing and adding more stocks to a list, when we're assessing stocks right now and the outcome of the assessment can't be used for management purposes, due to data and uncertainty problems, and so, to me, you know, the whole SEDAR process, and the SSC review of that, and handing down an ABC, needs to take a step back and look at, well, let's solve the data problem.

Let's solve the uncertainty, because just assessing more stocks, with the same uncertainty, and the same unreliable data, that's too old, by the time it goes through the management process, to be effective for this council, and for the stakeholders, is really just spinning our wheels and continuing on down the path that we're continuing right now.

Black sea bass is a perfect example of this, and so, while I can -- You know, while I can really feel for the white grunt and the gray triggerfish, I just don't see the importance of, you know, trying to assess white grunt with MRIP. As long as we keep hanging our hat on that data, the uncertainty is never going to go away, and we're going to be sitting here, years and years from now, trying to figure out an ABC, from data that the terminal year, by the time you finish your conversations, is five years old, and that's not going to get us anywhere.

What I think you need to concentrate on is these new methods, whatever they are, whether they're indices or whatever they are, but it's got to be something that's flexible and allows for some type of catch level recommendations on a quick and timely basis, and I don't know exactly what that is, or how that is.

You know, in my simple mind, it's just simply landings. You know, you're either catching the fish or you're not. If you're not catching them, then there could be a problem, or there might not be a problem, but does it really matter, because you're not catching the fish, and so you can't do anything if you're not catching the fish, even if there is a problem, and so, anyway, that's my two cents.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you Tim. I've got Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have a couple questions, and then I have a couple of comments. First, it's unclear to me, in the new process, how the MSEs that we talked about, like for dolphin, how they fit in here, or how does the interim analysis process fit into this new process?

Then, also, my other question is it's also unclear to me how -- So Amy had some questions about starting in 2027, and so I think we already have assessments scheduled out through 2028, and so then would the councils go back and change that up to fit the new process, and would we be doing that maybe after the SEDAR Steering Committee meets in the spring? It's just confusing to me how you would kind of start this process and mesh it with everything that's already on the schedule.

I mean, I get that we're getting rid of the research track. I'm fine with that, but I'm just not sure how MSEs fit in here and then how this process kind of goes with what we've already selected, and so, after I get those questions answered, I can make some more comments.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you Jessica.

DR. COLLIER: So MSEs are not going to be done through SEDAR, or at least that's how the SEDAR Steering Committee has talked about doing it. They are a bit different than normal stock assessments, right, because it is an iterative approach, where you go through, and you develop your model, but you're also getting input from the public along the way, and it would be a little bit more challenging through the SEDAR process on how to do that.



The reason that you're seeing it in the SEDAR schedule, for something like the dolphin, is because we want a CIE review for that MSE, because it's going to be setting catch level recommendations, and so that's the key part there.

It's not necessarily going through a normal SEDAR process that would be a benchmark. It's going to be -- There's a -- It's similar to a SEDAR process, because it has a lot of people engaged, whether it's council staff, or Science Center staff, in order to put the pieces together, but it's a different style of assessment approach, in order to do that.

As far as do we need to change things with the current statements of work and terms of reference, not necessarily, because the operational is fairly flexible of what type of assessment that you're getting. We don't have any new species coming into the list, which would be the type that start a research track. Red snapper is essentially -- It would be a research track. It was a research track. We changed it over to a non-named assessment type, and so we did that within a meeting. It was some changes to the terms of reference. We addressed -- The committee addressed those, and we feel like we're on a good path for red snapper, in order to get that accomplished. It is going to be a rushed timeline for that one, but we think it's there.

Then, for the other assessments that are coming along the road, you know, it's just let's make sure we have open communication, what you all would like to see out of those stock assessments. If it's more of a standard approach, where you want a lot of changes, to or more changes, to it, or more like an update approach, where maybe it's just a topical working group that is requested, and so we have the flexibility to do it now. It's just it's not going to be at this date we have officially changed over. I think it's going to be a little different than that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess some of my concerns are similar to the concerns that Tim brought up. I really just don't like this new process, and so we're going to go from four assessments a year to two assessments. It feels like, with the reauthorization of Magnuson, we need more data, faster data, and this just feels like it's going in the wrong direction.

I mean, I appreciate the adaptability of the process, meaning it's looked at frequently, and changes are made. I'm fine with getting rid of the research track, but, I mean, I heard, in Chip's presentation, that I think we have over thirty species, maybe in the snapper grouper complex alone, that we have no stock assessment on, and so I think we need to be considering changes to management.

I mean, it's been almost fifty years since the Magnuson Act. I just feel like we're kidding ourselves that we're actually getting the data that we need to manage some of these species, and I think that we need to start pulling some of these species out of the fishery management unit for snapper grouper.

I talked, on Monday, about things like grunts and the confusion from anglers about what are the fifty-five species that are actually in the snapper grouper complex, and we end up arguing with anglers all the time, and they're very confused about what's in there, and then they have questions about the assessments and it's like, well, so wait, and grunts are in there? Well, wait, and what was their assessment? Well, yes, there hasn't been one. Well, when was the last one? Well, there never was one. So you don't know the status of it? No. Well, when are you going to know the status of it? We don't know. Probably never.

I mean, some of the species in MRIP, it seems like not only are they not intercepted even once a year, but sometimes it's every three years, or five years, and so I'm just frustrated with this process. I wish that the Science Center could hire more people, and maybe put more folks into this assessment process.

You guys already know that FWC completes five stock assessments through this SEDAR process, to try to help and contribute to the overall workload, because it's important, and so we are taking away from state stock assessments, and using our state assessment folks to do federal stock assessments, and, while we're happy to do it, we have tons of workload, and we are prioritizing these federal assessments over the state stock assessments, and so I'm just very frustrated with this process.

I was hoping that we would get more throughput, more ideas of how to get this data, instead of less, or, as Tim was saying, less timely data, or, after a ton of folks spend a lot of time on a stock assessment, we can't get catch advice, at the end, and so then I feel bad for all those people that spent one or two years, you know, toiling over this stock assessment that ultimately we couldn't use for management, at the end of the day, and so I just feel like we need to get better, and we need better data for management, and I don't -- I just feel embarrassed for us.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, Jessica. I had Charlie, then Kerry. Charlie, Kerry, and then John. So go ahead, Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I agree with everything said at the table, and I remember, you know, my previous rounds. As Marcel said, we've always got fires coming up, and we need assessments, and we need slots, and they say they might want to set a slot aside, but a set a slot aside in what timeframe?

Is it a slot a year, a slot every four years, and we really -- I think we need to have a serious conversation on, until we can get more throughput through the Science Center, what kind of more abbreviated assessments can we do, so the council can kind of, you know, help, you know, nudge those that production up, because we need we need the assessments. Even if it's not a gold standard assessment, we need something to tell the fishermen, and for us to use for management, and so we need to have that discussion, other than do we need a gold standard for everything. We need to have that discussion on which species can we do what for.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Charlie. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks. I know this is not the Snapper Grouper Committee, but I really wanted to pick up on the point Jessica just mentioned, and you sort of ended with, as far as, you know, the fifty-five species in the snapper grouper management unit, and I would like to remind everyone that, when that fishery management unit was started, there were roller rig trawls in the fishery, and there were fish traps in the fishery, and there was not the recreational pressure that there is now.

It's a completely different fishery. There was indiscriminate ability, efficient indiscriminate ability, to catch a lot of varied species. We are not catching species in the same way we were catching them then, and I think that that's a really good justification for why maybe they were in the management unit then, but maybe why it makes sense to remove them now, and I would like

to sure that we set aside the appropriate time, in the appropriate place, to talk about removing species we can remove, therefore getting it back into the SEDAR process, and how we make that better, but I think we need to have that discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so I agree with Kerry. I was going to bring it up in the Snapper Grouper Committee as well. I would like to start a process to look at the species in the management unit, and I think it's ten questions, and go through the ten questions, for some of these species, and see if we can start removing them.

We did that a few years ago. I think we maybe removed four species, and the State of Florida then extended our state regulations into federal waters for those species, to make sure that they had some management on them, but I'm going to be talking about this more in the Snapper Grouper Committee, in hopes that something could come back maybe as soon as the March meeting to look at the fishery management unit.

I was going to talk about it when we get to Amendment 46, because I would like to talk about reporting, and have that discussion under Amendment 46, and, when you're thinking about that, not only do we have stock assessment issues, but I don't think that it's feasible for fishermen, if we're going to add reporting to that, to try to report on fifty-five species that are in the fishery management unit, and so I'm going to be bringing it up in the Snapper Grouper Committee.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thanks, Jessica. I saw John Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thanks, and this is a great conversation, because it's actually the exact same conversation that the Science Center has been having, and at the SEDAR Steering Committee, and so I think a lot of the concerns that are being echoed around the room are exactly the ones we are addressing.

I think that there was -- Perhaps not realized in the presentation is that this is actually going to increase the throughput of management advice, and I think that somehow it came across as a decrease in throughput. You saw the bar chart that showed two assessments per year. That was under the old model.

That was also under the model that doesn't incorporate a lot of the changes that we are trying to do to be able to increase the recency of advice. It's not just throughput. We could generate as many stock assessments as we wanted, but you can't really squeeze further a more recent time period from the terminal year to when management advice hits the streets. There's always going to be a lag.

The only way to improve upon that, and to reduce that lag, to get to what Tim is saying, to say that the advice is more current with what's going on the water, is to use other methods that adjust that catch advice more frequently, based on some kind of simpler tool, like an interim assessment, or a management procedure, which would be developed through an MSE, so that's where MSE fits in.

The interim assessments, right now, have not gotten a lot of traction right now, but, given what this council is saying you need, and you want, is to be able to get advice that is more current, then it's not more stock assessments. It's better use of things like the indices we've got to adjust catch advice in between assessments, which is exactly what we've put into -- The there's a calendar that

we have that has twelve different -- Twelve stocks and white space for those problem species that may arise, that uses a combination of stock assessments, every five or six years, and then interim approaches to update that catch advice, to do tuning in between.

That's really the key to getting that recency of advice, to getting the throughput, but still maintaining the stock assessment process. What would be excellent is to request that the SSC seriously consider interim approaches for a lot of these stocks, or index-based management procedures, and, right now, I think the SSC has generally not wanted to go explore them.

At least a particular one that was put forward wasn't a particularly good index, but I think we saw, from Tracey's presentation, that we've got a really good index, for many species. from our trap video survey, and it's probably reflecting what's going on in the water. That's what we're recommending to lean on more for those adjustments in between stock assessments, using an interim approach, based on an index like that.

I think it would be good for us to see the full calendar that was presented as a proposed calendar to the SEDAR Steering Committee. Maybe, Chip, you could pull that up, because I think that gets to addressing the throughput aspect that I think right now we've got this sort of false impression that we are reducing throughput. We are actually going to increase it pretty substantially. Thanks.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. Go ahead, Jessica, and then I've got Carolyn.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I guess my question to that is, and I will happily look at that calendar, but I guess how does that work with our SSC process? I think that the SSC is only meeting two times a year, and I know occasionally they have a webinar, outside the meeting, and so I guess I'm also wondering how this this new process, and what John is describing, fits with how our SSC does its business, and maybe something needs to be done differently on the SSC side, but it almost sounds like we're also going to be asking our SSC to either have longer meetings, or more frequent meetings, you know, to account for all this, or bring this in, review all these different items. I guess, Marcel, did you all have a discussion about that, or Chip, and can you explain how you're thinking that would work to accommodate what John is describing?

DR. REICHERT: Well, as I mentioned in my presentation, we did discuss our workload. I think the difficulty the SSC has at the -- Right at this moment is that it wasn't quite clear how this all would affect the SSC's workload. We have, as you mentioned, two in-person meetings, and then we have regularly scheduled -- A webinar regularly scheduled between those SSC meetings.

I think, in the past, we discussed adding an SSC meeting. That hasn't materialized, for a variety of reasons, but I think, in the past, if an analysis is completed, whether it's an interim analysis or a stock assessment, the SSC has been willing to -- Either via webinar, or add it to the agenda of their regular in-person meetings, to review that, and I think that -- I think there's absolutely a willingness by the SSC to review whatever is completed, but we didn't we didn't talk about specifics, in terms of workload. That reminded me that not only the partner assessments should be added to the schedule, but also the MSEs, because, again, that's a part of the SSC workload. Thank you.

DR. COLLIER: The SSC has talked about the number of assessments that they could potentially look at during a single meeting, and they recommended maybe two assessments per meeting. At one meeting, I think we had three, and they said that was too much.

I do want to point out that the SSC chair has been at I think the last eight or nine council meetings, meaning that they've had a meeting in between your council meetings the whole time, and so, even though we only have two regularly scheduled, they have a flexible schedule, in order to incorporate some of the questions that come up along the way, whether it's a stock assessment or a question for a stock assessment, or getting giving guidance on different topics that the council requests, and so they're having a lot more meetings than two per year. It's usually four, and some years five, and so it is quite a few meetings that the SSC is having along, throughout these past few years, especially post-COVID, and I'll bring up the slide that John requested.

MS. MURPHEY: Carolyn has been patiently waiting, and so go ahead Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: It's probably a good thing, because I was trying to formulate the comments that I want to make, and some of it, for me, is, if you go back to your list, Chip, and I'm sorry if you're going to end up bumping the table off, but back to the SSC recommendations, that bullet that was in your report.

Focusing --The first couple things, I don't really have that much comment on, because we know that this is what we're working towards, but leveraging the state partners, when possible, to expand capacity, and, right now, stock assessment capacity is probably at the lowest, in the South Atlantic, that it's ever been, and the reason I say that is North Carolina and Florida tended to be the two states that had the largest stock assessment teams in the Southeast, and North Carolina currently has zero.

We lost the person for cobia, and that's a federal person that's now out of the loop. You've got the situation where we're working -- We were lucky with ASMFC being able to give us a person that is split between Georgia and South Carolina, but, even at the South Carolina and Georgia levels, our folks are multi-hatted in this situation. They don't have that ability, and so leveraging state partners would be great if we had that to stand up we, and we don't have it, and so I don't know how we're going to pull that off.

The outside entities, the thing that's disappointing to me about trying to work with universities, and knowing that universities are willing to help, is we have no money for university people. They're not going to do it for free, and, even though state people are paid, it's free time, because we're moving them from one part of their job component to another, and so going to a university - - We're going to have to find the money to get a university involved, and then I'll caution us back to what happened with wreckfish.

BSIA on redacted data, are we happy with that? They weren't able to look at confidential data, and so are we going to fix that? How are we going to move forward on that? I don't see how that's putting us in the BSIA realm, and so, just with personnel, and trying to get more people into the system, those are some of the caveats and concerns that I have with that.

Going down to the interim, and the MSEs, I don't disagree that there's probably not potential in those, but what scares me is what happened with the one interim that you all saw, that we -- The index that was put forward was not adequate, and so, for me, that puts a bad taste in my mouth for -- Show me a successful interim analysis for a species in our region.

We know it works in other places, but I can't speak to the biology of those fish. I'm not a Pacific west coast person, and so show me, on a sidebar, and if people are looking for research, and people are doing off projects, why can't we look at some species that aren't under the gun for management, to say here's a successful choice for an interim analysis.

The MSEs, we're still working our way around, and we're kind of still not sure what it is. Is it an assessment, and where does it belong in the process, and so, until we get one for us, that gives us confidence in it, I'm still feeling like it's the potential that's out there, but we don't know what the realization is going to be, and so I'm not saying that they're not potential solutions. I just don't have the confidence in it, and enough understanding of it, for our stocks to feel comfortable going forward.

Then one comment that Marcel had in his report slides is talking about -- Can you pull up the presentation? I'm not sure which number it was. It kind of gets back to choices and what are things that can be handled quickly. Let's see. Scrolling down, it's past the -- It was a tradeoff to get the other the uncertainty part of it. There was a comment made about recognizing that, if you go for the more data-poor approaches, that there's a tradeoff on uncertainty.

My argument would be what data do we have, and, instead of saying, well, if you choose to do DBSRA, there's a high amount of uncertainty that goes with that. I'm not saying that that's the best approach, but if it's the reason why we keep parking lot things, that's not the way to do that because it's the idea of selling it.

Back in the day, we were running models that had high error terms in it, because we were doing the best we could. We put parameters into it. We weren't running 200 or 300 parameter models, and we accepted that this is the best we know, and this is what we have going forward, and yet now, all of a sudden, that's our biggest hang-up point, is because we can't get that number down to zero, with a billion things, and we can't -- We're not confident with moving forward with it.

We have to move forward with something, and we're never going to change our current status and how we're assessing our stocks. We've got to come up with some compromise, and I'm looking at Marcel, to see if I'm confusing him. I want to see what his comment is, so that I can at least kind of clarify where I'm going with that.

DR. REICHERT: Well, I was a little confused, because what the SSC discussed is that, in some instances, it's perhaps more timely to assess speeches with a less-complex method. You may have enough data to do a full-blown statistical catch-at-age model, but, depending on where you are in the process, that may take a longer time, and that's why the SSC mentioned the tradeoff between the timeliness and the potential increase of uncertainty, if you're using a -- That's not always the case, but, in some instances, there may be an increase in uncertainty, when a less-complex assessment method is applied.

Then the discussion becomes whether the SSC, and the council, is comfortable with that tradeoff, and, in some instances, it may be more important for the council to get timely advice, and they are okay with a potential -- Again, a potential higher uncertainty. I think that's what the SSC discussed, and I'm not sure whether that addresses your concern, or question.

DR. BELCHER: So that puts a better context on that, because the way that I see that is, if you have a species that has an abundance of data like that, is it not an important species, and why have we not assessed it, because it seems like, if you are like choking in data, it's obviously well seen, and well touched, and there's a lot of information about it, and so why are we not looking at it as an important species, versus the ones where we don't have it, have never had it, and then it's that, well, we could be timely, but there's a tradeoff, because there's high uncertainty. To me, check off those easy ones, because there's nothing you can do any differently.

I mean, we've sat around the table, and it goes back to Chip's time at the table, where we were looking at ABC recommendations, on recreationally-caught species, that we can't even make third-highest work, because there's not enough information there to do it. Well, I think holding out on that, some of those -- Again, back to whether it goes to the Snapper Grouper or not, but there are species we need to be talking about checking off the list, instead of this whole hold out for more, and maybe we'll get there. Meanwhile, we've got other things that are there, ready to go, and we can never get to them, because they're not important enough, and that's kind of where I struggle with some of that.

DR. REICHERT: From an SSC point of view, I agree, but I think this particular comment was more within one species. In terms of priorities, the SSC briefly discussed this, but I think we felt that that's more like a council purview, in terms of what species they need information, or an assessment, for. I hope that helps.

MS. MURPHEY: Thanks. I've got John came up to the table, and I'll let John take a -- Give some discussion.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It's quite a quite a bit of discussion here, and I think, you know, Carolyn said some of the things that I was wanting to come up here and say too, and I think, you know, it's clear, from this, that we got to change, you know, and something has got to change within SEDAR, and something has got to change within -- As Jessica mentioned, and as Kerry acknowledged, we have a lot of things in the FMU that maybe no longer need to be there.

Maybe there's no -- They're never going to be assessed and kept up in the way that Magnuson demands. Remember Bonnie, and some of you all remember Bonnie, around the table, and, when the Magnuson was reauthorized, and she said it was the great equalizer, and all stocks need to be treated the same, but the reality is we've been waiting and waiting and waiting to have the resources to treat all stocks the same, and we're not going to be there.

You know, we can do different things within the analytical realm, but we still have a data bottleneck, and that's still an impediment, and there's no guarantee, as the discussions of the steering committee have been said, that the data enterprise is going to keep up with the proposed assessment schedule across the three councils, you know, as has been presented so far, and we don't know that the things done between the assessments, whatever they get called -- How much age information are they going to include? We're not sure. We don't know. We don't know what can be kept up with there, and ageing in Beaufort is probably going to get a lot worse, since the building has been condemned.

Then, as Carolyn mentioned, you know, sort of the -- She said show me, and, yes, I think that's the issue with the interim. They may work. This in-between stuff may work, but the problem is the

council has not seen that it can work, and the one effort failed. You know, indices, a lot of times, look good, but yet the index used was not even used in the assessment, and it wasn't considered reliable.

The point I've made at the steering committee, several times, is I think there's a burden on the Science Center to come to you and show that this works. Take a stock like black sea bass and go back retrospectively and say, okay, if we would have done this interim, and we would have looked at the survey, what will we have told you the catch level should be. You know, we have a lot of assessed stocks. We have a time series, and we could go back in time and do a variety of stocks, take stocks that got better, take stocks that got worse, take stocks that stayed flat, and we have all of those examples in our repertoire.

Show that, okay, if we had applied this method, here's what this index would have done, and can we show that doing some sort of index-based method is really tracking along with the population, and can we get the SSC onboard, which is critical, but, also, can we get the Science Center's analysts onboard with it, because, you know, there was discussion, at a couple of SSC meetings back, as I recall, Marcel, about black sea bass, and considering doing an interim, because that stock is getting long in the tooth, as Tim mentioned. It's a big concern, when we have so many years between the terminal year and taking action.

By the time the discussion got done, including the analysts who worked on it, it was kind of like we don't think the interim type of thing is really going to work in this case, and what we really need to do is just get in and do an assessment, and so we keep sort of getting into that situation, but, you know, it's going to take everybody getting onboard with this, and trying some of these things, but I also think it's going to take bringing the council some proof, so you have confidence that, okay, we can we can jump into this, and it's going to actually work, and we're going to see that, and the SSC needs to see that.

Then we all know that, when we get some sort of in-between analysis, and it shows a big reduction in catch levels, we'll buckle up and prepare for screams of doing an actual proper assessment. You know, I think that's just the reality. We see this every time we do any kind of analysis. The reliability depends on the outcome, so often, unfortunately, but, you know, we just know that's going to happen, and I think just let's be eyes wide open and realize that that's going to be the case. It's not as simple as like, okay, we'll just accept a, you know, 25 percent catch reduction.

Then I think the other concern we have is, you know, with our current many years between assessments, which the new proposal even still does, is we're still -- We get big changes from assessment to assessment. They don't settle down anymore. You know, everything is done with the GLM model, and so catchabilities and surveys and fisheries and everything is changing from assessment to assessment, and perceptions of life history and all this, and so there's no stability.

They're prone to these just wide swings from one assessment to the next, unfortunately, and, you know, part of that is getting new data as well, but I think that factors into some of the cold feet of the council, who are jumping into this like six years between long assessments, and so I think we know the -- With the resources that are available, we -- As Tim said, we can't add stocks to this bucket. It's already overflowing, and, as Jessica said, then we need to address the FMU.



We need to bring some reality to all of this thing, and not have all these stocks out there that are never going to be known, and we don't even know like natural mortality for some of these stocks, after fifty years of Magnuson, and that should be a concern. You know, what do we really know about these stocks, and so I think we need to do a couple of these things.

We do need to look at, you know, the procedural changes within SEDAR, but I think, Jessica, your issue is really about the throughput, and not so much the process, and so then that means the only way to get more throughput, with the current resources at the Science Center, is we have to have less stocks that we try to squeeze through the eye of this needle, which is going to be tough.

Then, in the future, maybe we do get to a point where we can use some of these in-betweens, but I think the only way we do that is that, when we do an assessment, we say, all right, what can I do, what is reliable in this pot of data, that we have our data experts, and we go through peer review, and everybody is looking at, and what can we do before the next assessment, what can we do on a two-year, three-year, whatever basis, that everyone that's going to have to deal with this will accept and the peer reviewers can say, yes, that's reliable, and the SSC has a chance to look at it, and, you know, evaluate it.

Then I feel like, you know, as a package, you can then go forward and say, all right, the next assessment might be six years down the road, but, every two years, we want to apply this technique, and we want to update these things, using the index or what have you. To me, that's the only way we start phasing this into our system. We've got to we've got to have that. We've got to scientifically bring to you, the council, this proof that this works, so that you have confidence in doing it and can get over this sort of cold feet of the unknown, because it's really bad.

The one effort we had on vermilion was a total failure, you know, really, when you look at it, because it didn't get through, and it should have been maybe done differently, but the Gulf is also struggling with dealing with these interim analyses, and getting them factored into management, and so, you know, clearly it's an idea that offers potential, but it maybe is not quite ready for primetime, and it needs some more effort, and it's going to take getting the SSC onboard and showing you all that it works.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I appreciate that. I guess I would add -- So I have seen a couple of the interim analyses in the Gulf, and I believe there was one for red grouper, and maybe one for lane snapper, so I have seen that it works. I guess the thing is that it's just a little confusing to me, over here in the South Atlantic, because it -- At one time, and I can't remember if it was John Walter or Clay, they said we don't have the long-term datasets over here, like the Gulf does, and we cannot do interim analysis.

Now we're hearing we can do interim analysis, and, like you guys, said we got this one for vermilion, and it was kind of a flop, and so it I would like to see proof of concept over here in the South Atlantic, and I liked John's idea of, you know, go back and do some of these, for some species that were assessed, so we can see how it would perform, and see how some of the datasets over here in the South Atlantic would perform.

Then, while I have the mic, just to kind of talk about the SEDAR process as a whole, and another thing that the SSC seems to be saying, and we're saying, is -- Maybe the chart that John Walter was talking about somewhat captures this, and so I get that the SEDAR Steering Committee is

really looking at things that are going to get specifically a formal stock assessment, but it's almost like one of the things we're struggling with is the broadening of the processes used to assess these different stocks, and I, as a council member, can't see that anywhere.

You know, like I can't see a list that lists out, well, these numbers of stocks are proposed for an MSE, and these are the stocks that the FWC is going to assess, and these are the stocks that are going to go through the SEDAR process, and these are the stocks that are proposed to get an interim analysis, and so then it leads me to question the role of the SEDAR Steering Committee.

Is the SEDAR Steering Committee only looking at the formal stock assessments, and juggling that, and figuring out what the timing is just for those, because it seems like what the council is struggling with is all these other in-betweens, like the interim, and the SSC is struggling with it too, and, you know, how is it going to come in, when is it going to come in, what are the requirements, and workload, that would be added between meetings to the SSC.

I guess I'm also questioning is there a way to capture all of these broader things in one place, and is that even the steering committee's role, and like are you really broadening what the SEDAR Steering Committee is doing, because, at that SEDAR Steering Committee, like Luiz Barbieri, who is over our FWC stock assessment folks, and he's at the table at the SEDAR Steering Committee, and so I'm even questioning, because of the new process, and because of these struggles, if the role of the SEDAR Steering Committee either needs to be broadened or changed.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Jessica. I had Shep, and then John.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I really just had a comment, and I asked Marcel for his feedback on this, but I attend all your SSC meetings, and I remember, you know, the vermilion snapper instance, where you had the index. The SSC discussion that I recall did not poo-poo the approach, but merely that the index chosen did not track the other information they had for the species.

I've seen other species where the SSC is going through it and has said this would be a good species for a -- A good index for this species, because it tracks the results of the assessments. It just seems, to me, that one of the questions that I have had all out of that is that it seems like you need the assessment to identify the appropriate index, and then that puts you in the position of having to assess every stock before you can really develop the index for it, and I'm not sure that necessarily addresses your problem in the short-term, but thank you, and, Marcel if I could get your feedback, that would be great. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: No, and I think you're absolutely right. At that time, I think the -- I think John mentioned it also, and I think the SSC actually suggested some potential other species where this approach would likely work. I think it was some of the behavior of vermilion snapper that may explain why the index may not -- In that particular species, may not be sufficient for an interim analysis, and so I think you're absolutely right, and, to-date, that vermilion snapper interim analysis is the only interim analysis that the SSC has seen, and discussed, and so I hope that kind of answers your question. Thanks.

MS. MURPHEY: I've got John Walter, and then Tim, and then I would like to go ahead and wrap this up, but go ahead John.

DR. WALTER: So I think we are seizing defeat from the jaws of victory here. We've got a thirty-four-year time series in the index, in SEFIS/SERFS, that Tracey Smart presented to us of what we think -- I think I'll quote Kerry as saying that, when I see those indices, I know exactly what the stock assessment is going to say, and I think that says kind of a lot of probably where we would go with like using -- Leaning on that survey and identifying some wins, and admittedly we could harp upon the vermilion not being a good one to get first out of the gate for interim, but I think there's plenty of others that probably the SSC has identified would be good ones, where we say, yes, actually, that's doing --That's what we see on the water.

I think here what we want to focus on, what would be really good to hear from the council, is direction to say please explore some interims for some of these species, show us that it works, which is basically doing what we call a desk MSE, and that is just an analyst taking that and showing that in fact --Doing the retrospective to say, yes, if you did adjust the catch in between time, in between assessments, with this index, you would make those fine-scale adjustments that would do exactly what we want it to do.

When the index goes up, the catch should go up, which, for lane snapper, is exactly what happened in the interim. They're not -- It goes both ways. The interim actually increased the catch for lane, because the index is going up, and everyone said there's more lanes out there, and so I think just some direction to say, yes, explore this, and, yes, this is meeting the council's desire for increased throughput, and more recent advice, and then we will work with that, and that's exactly what we're actually proposing to you, in the SEDAR Steering Committee calendar, was to be able to increase that throughput, through a combination of interims, empirical management procedures, and stock assessments, and so it's a suite of different methods, suited to the particular situation. Thanks.

MR. CARMICHAEL: To that, I think, you know, my feeling of guidance from the council is you guys have said we are interested in this, and we support this. The SSC has looked at it, as Marcel said, and they've identified other stocks. I think we're there. We're at the point of now doing the show me it works, and I think that's where we are. I think the council recognizes we need to change the SEDAR process, they're open to using this, and folding it into the assessment schedule, to get more timely information, and we're simply at that point of saying, okay, now show me it works.

MS. MURPHEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, and thank you for that, John. You know, that was exactly what -- When I heard Shep's comments, that's exactly kind of where my mind was going, and so, you know, I guess my first response is yes, yes, and yes. You know, we most certainly want to explore interim analysis, using any available indices, you know, especially ones that we know we have confidence in them, you know, and so I think the way forward is using these indices, and empirical management procedures, you know, because when I look back at it, you know, you can say that, well, you've got to truth the indices using the assessment first, but we already know what -- We already know what the assessments have done to us, and so, you know, I don't --

Like I said, I we already know what doesn't work, and so, when John is talking about show me it works, well, you've already shown us what doesn't work, and so, you know, I don't see why we would need to wait for an assessment to use any interim analysis, and I'm all for moving forward

with this, you know, as fast as we can, and it sounds like you guys are onboard and you're teed-up to do it, and this is the way we need to go. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Tim and so we're going to wrap this up, and I'm going to go through what I think the conversation is -- It's getting very interesting, but I'll see if I can capture this, and, Chip, if you can make sure I've captured it. The biggest things I got was there's definitely concerns of how this interim analysis is going to work. John had suggested, and I think folks supported, going and kind of checking out past assessments and see, if you had done an interim analysis, what would it have told you.

Something I think I heard, and this may have been from John too, was, when we start a stock assessment, build in a plan for an interim analysis, and so I'm thinking that would be part of a term of reference, and, that way -- Because that made sense to me, because you're already having to triage your data, to figure out what's the best model to go, and then you can go on, right there, while you're doing that triage, what kind of interim analysis may work best, and so I heard that as well. Is everybody in agreement of that?

I did hear some support for, you know, maybe looking at making more complexes, less single species, which led down to maybe we need to revisit the management -- The snapper grouper management unit, but that will be talked about in Snapper Grouper. I think, for the most part, everything else is -- Everybody else pretty much agrees with the other changes? Have I captured that all right?

DR. COLLIER: I think so, and I think one of the other key points that was brought up was what Jessica had mentioned, was the scope and what the SEDAR Steering Committee does. Right now, it is focused on stock assessments that are run through SEDAR, and should it begin to incorporate some of these other processes? When you look up at the Northeast, they've got that Northeast Regional Coordinating Council, and that helps to work across several different issues. It does include the stock assessment development, and the process for that, but they also tackle other issues that go along in the area.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. Tim, one last time.

MR. GRINER: This just because you -- The way you brought that up there, and I guess I just want to make sure that I understand. So if -- When you're talking about the terms of reference, and building into the terms of reference the ability to do these, or to include this interim analysis, how does that address using our analysis for stocks that were not on this assessment schedule that we've already assessed? I mean, because I -- How do we move forward using this, and going with this procedure, if we're back to tying it to an assessment that has yet to happen again?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think you would -- So, assuming we get some of the requested things that say, yes, okay, this works, and you all have confidence in it, and the SSC does, I think it would be one of those things that would sort of have a rolling start, and like, assessments that are coming, we would say, you know, we should consider this, and we should consider, you know, what sort of interim things can be done.

I think we should also, at the same time, and it hasn't been hit on, but we discussed it a little bit, was we would also say are there simpler models that could work better, that can be done quicker

and more timely, and I think those are two things that should be looked at when you do a benchmark.

Then, you know, I think, for the other stocks that are farther out, or maybe not, you know, on the schedule right now, I think we should consider giving them a shot. You know, if we have a stock that we think has a really great index, and we've done an interim-type look at it, and we've done some back-in-history evaluation, and the SSC says, yes, this is one that we said we think this has real potential, then I think, if the SSC were comfortable with that, then you could certainly put that in place right then.

Then, you know, the next time it comes around, and makes its way up to a SEDAR slot, then maybe you look at what you did, and what you might do differently in the next interim, and so I don't think we should say that you can't use this at all until you go through the whole benchmark part of evaluating it, and let's have the flexibility, which I think you guys seem to support, to put that in place when we think we have a stock that has potential to give you better information doing this.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, John. Are we ready to move into key stocks? I'm sorry. John.

DR. WALTER: One of those -- To that point, one of -- Part of our proposal, from the Science Center, is that we take some of these stocks out of the SEDAR, process because SEDAR is transparent, and it's inclusive, and it's a great process for bringing everyone to the table, but it's also very time consuming, and so, for some of these interims, that might be a desk -- Basically a show me, bring it to the SSC, and do it.

The Science Center does it, or FWC does it, and brings it to the SSC, and they say, yes, it meets the needs, and then it gets done, rather than through the full SEDAR process, because it might not need that, and that's one way to be able to speed the process up, but it does come at some of the cost of the transparency, and so I think we're going to have to be fine, and okay, with saying, yes, please get this done, and bring it to the SSC, and we don't need it to go through the full SEDAR process. I think that's what I'm hearing here from the council, because of the need, but I just wanted to say that would be a way to speed things up. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: While I appreciate that, and it sounds good, but I would like to see that listed out somewhere, like in a table format, that also gets to kind of some of these SSC recommendations, so it's almost like you're using the concept where you had a table before, and it showed which stock assessments were on there, and what I think that John is saying, and we're saying, is that you're looking at a table that indicates which things are not going to get a formal stock assessment, and instead are going to go through an interim process, et cetera.

In theory, this sounds pretty good, but I would like to be able to visually see this and see which species we're talking about that would come out of the process, basically permanently, and go into a different process, whether it's MSEs, interim, or what have you, and so maybe that's something that the steering committee can work on. I just don't want to give it a gold star yet, until I can see that, you know see it laid out by species, et cetera, but the concept sounds pretty good.

MS. MURPHEY: Thanks, Jessica. Okay. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Another thing that comes along with the assessments not potentially going through SEDAR is risk, right, and it could increase the risk that the stock assessment is not accepted by the SSC for developing management measures, right, because it doesn't have the same level of transparency, and it doesn't have the same level of people diving into the data and looking at it, and so there could be increased risk that's associated with that. I think it's important to begin to recognize that, as you decrease some of these Ts that, you know, SEDAR focused on, what in what could potentially happen down the line as well.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thanks, everybody, for that lively discussion, and so I guess let's -- Okay. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to throw out one thing here. Given this discussion, it sounds to me like it might be a good idea to have a meeting in conjunction with the SSC, where you could have a little bit of this back-and-forth, and I'll remind you that the statute says the council should meet in conjunction, at the same time, with their SSC, to the extent practicable, and so that's something you might want to consider. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Shep. All right. I guess we will go ahead and move into key stocks.

DR. COLLIER: Marcel, you've already covered key stocks, right?

DR. REICHERT: Yes.

DR. COLLIER: All right. So Attachment 2 is looking at identifying key stocks, and this is a lot of the same information that you guys had seen in September, and so I'm not going to go through that in great detail. I can pull up what John had mentioned, as far as, you know, looking at a schedule on how it looks like over a time period, and so ignore the names on the left. Necessarily, those aren't all that critical in this discussion, but it's looking at the time series, right, looking from 2024 up to 2032, and how many stocks could be assessed, and how frequently they get assessed.

If you want an updated model, maybe every three years, and a stock assessment every six years, this is a process that could work. If you feel like you want a stock assessment every three years, then you need a different process, and you're going to have to decrease the number of key stocks that you have listed.

I have a feeling that the table that I had in the Attachment A2 probably wasn't all that palatable, because I went with alphabetical on which species were going to be included. I know nobody likes that kind of process, but it's just to give an idea of what to use, and I'll pull up that table right now, and so this is getting -- It's another way of looking at the same information that was presented in the table there.

We have a list of species. If you want to go at different time schedules, and let's say this blue group is what you get at the most frequent assessments, say every three years, and then, if you wanted every four years, you would get to add another two stocks. If you wanted every five years, you get another two stocks on that, and so that's what this table is trying to get at, and I do have a separate table, at the end, where it's color-coded just like this.

It has a list of species, and what I would like you all to do is start putting the species in the list, and I don't know if you would rather think on the timeliness part of it, or you want to think about the throughput part of it. Both those Ts are important, and I don't know which one was most important to the committee, and so giving you the flexibility to select these.

Going back a little bit, I do want to highlight some of the information that had been requested. We were requested to look at landings, several different pieces of information, whether or not there was age-based data, whether or not there was an index for the species, the importance to landings, and so we have several of these pieces of information that have been analyzed in a little bit more.

Starting off for considerations for the stock assessments, we have Stock Level Priority 1. An age-based assessment was desired, and so do we have any age structures for these? In addition to the species that are currently assessed, there are some species that have greater than 200 age structures collected, at least in the TIP database that I was able to look at, and so we have blackfin snapper, and we have gray snapper, silk snapper, yellowedge grouper, and wreckfish that had greater than 200 age structures collected over the time series.

Importance to landings, it exceeds one million pounds, and this is a sum total of the past couple of years, and so most of the stocks do exceed that one-million-pound mark. The missing species within this list would be dolphin wahoo and gray snapper.

It's a little challenging to get to the economics of it, as well as looking at the landings of it, because, if you look at landings for something like red snapper, it's a highly constrained fishery, and you can't land everything. White grunt hasn't been managed to the same level as red snapper has been, as far as looking in details of it, and so it's not necessarily a fair comparison to look at landings among species.

Has the stock been successfully -- Has it been successfully assessed, and we felt like that was a key piece of it. We're not necessarily looking at expanding the number of stocks that could be assessed, but maybe focusing down on a few key stocks here, and so not reinventing the wheel, and we want to make sure that the ones that are being assessed are really good, and another key component of a stock assessment is having a good index of abundance, or an index of abundance, that's available through a fishery-independent survey.

Tracey gave a really good presentation on what's available through SERFS, She also gave it from the coastal trawl survey, some indices of abundance that are available there as well. Also coming along, or coming online, we have the South Atlantic Seepwater Longline Survey, commonly referred to as SADLS, and that will work for some of the deepwater species, such as blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, and snowy grouper.

Then the Science Center has developed their SEAFiSh viewer, which is the Southeast Abundance of Fish and Shrimp Data Visualizer webpage. You guys can look at that, and it has additional information.

Some species that have had a stock assessment, that has been attempted, but not passed peer review, those include Georgia through North Carolina hogfish, black grouper, and goliath grouper. All those had some data issues that prevented successful review of those stock assessments, and then gray triggerfish just has not been operationalized.

Another important component for a key stock is likely looking at whether or not the stock is overfished. Overfished stocks are supposed to be updated on a frequent basis, in order to make sure that we are going to be meeting the rebuilding timeframe. We have six stocks, out of the nineteen that are currently assessed, that are overfished. Three of those overfished stocks are also overfishing.

At the previous discussion on some of the key stocks, as well as the SSC, as Marcel had mentioned, gray triggerfish could be considered as a key stock. They also recommended white grunt. An interesting part of the discussion that they had at the SSC level is everybody is going to have a differing opinion of what a key stock is, and so what they're defining as a key stock, based on the science, is likely different than what the managers are going to be basing a key stock is.

Marcel had already gone through the important information to consider when considering key stocks. The other thing I do want to point out is key stocks -- You know, this is not a finalized list. This is going to be an evolving list, and maybe something pops up, in that emerging issue category, or that blank slot, and so some of the key stocks might change through time, and maybe it no longer is a key component of the fishery.

Kerry had mentioned how the fishery has changed over time, and got rid of -- Or reduced the -- What was it? Traps and roller rigs? So maybe the fishery changes over time, and things are different, and so maybe key stocks change as well.

Some notes on key stocks that meet the criteria above, but not necessarily considered key stocks, one is wreckfish. That one has been assessed. It was done by an outside contractor, and the reason that this potentially doesn't rise up to a stock -- For a key stock is the importance of the international harvest of wreckfish. This species is Atlantic-Basin-wide. It goes all the way over to the Mediterranean Sea, and then they come back, and so it's going to be difficult to assess those just in the South Atlantic region.

You're seeing an MSE that's being developed for dolphinfish. That is going to be looking at addressing some of those issues, and so maybe we address wreckfish in a similar way, through an MSE approach that's able to get some of that important data, international data. Dolphin, you guys are talking about that through the MSE process, and so I'm not going to highlight that again. We don't necessarily need to go through the assessment process.

White grunt is currently -- It wasn't listed in there, and we likely have multiple stocks of white grunt in the South Atlantic region. The reasons for that is not only based on landings information, but it's also based on some morphometrics, genetics, several pieces of information that indicate there are multiple stocks of white grunt in the region, and the council has recommended dropping that as a priority.

Gray snapper, it was prioritized as an age-based assessment. It just has not reached the prioritization level, due to the current workload. Spiny lobster is managed through optimizing yield per recruit. Once again, this is an international stock, and it maybe doesn't fit the stock assessment process that we have in the South Atlantic region.



Black grouper was done not that long ago, and it was considered for another assessment that, due to data issues, it was not moved forward, but the State of Florida is currently working on this, through an MSE process, and so maybe that's not a species to consider, and then the stock of hogfish from Georgia to North Carolina. A previous age-based assessment was not accepted. There has been new information on life history that has been collected, but it is a rare-event species in the recreational data sets, and, overall, there's low landings.

Getting back to this table, and so we have some colors highlighted here on how long between assessments, and so, if you do a -- If you look at the blue, that means you're looking at a three-year time window between assessments. If you're looking at green, that's four years between assessments. If you're looking at the yellow, that's five years between assessments, and then the green -- The reddish color, the rust color, that is six years between assessments.

What I've done, at the end of this, and it's not in your table, in your paper that's listed, but what I have, over on the left, is the stocks, and then I have the overall list of stocks, and so what I can do is just, as you all discuss this, maybe tell me to move it over, and let's start off with one that you think is probably most important. I would assume red snapper would be there, and probably king mackerel would be there, just thinking of a couple species that that might be very important, but I could start off with those two, and then maybe you all recommend which species are -- That you think are most important, and then we can discuss timeline and what other species might be key to put in there as well.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thanks, Chip. Is everybody good with starting out with those species he just listed of red snapper and -- I'm just looking for hands of species you would like to see in the blue.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Gag.

MS. MURPHEY: Gag. Do we have to also -- We need to be sure to include the overfished ones that we're having to rebuild, right, and that's going to -- Are those going to need to be higher up, and that's just a question. In the meantime -- I guess it's a question, and I don't know whether the stocks on a rebuilding plan need to be a higher priority.

DR. COLLIER: So that could be part of those adjusting key stocks, right? If the successful rebuilding plan rebuilds the stock, maybe it's taken off that high priority, and maybe done on a less-frequent basis, or maybe assessed in a different way, but, yes, I'll put those overfished species over there as well.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay, and I had John.

DR. WALTER: Yes, and if I could just add something, because this is often a difficult thing, because you're saying you're maybe prioritizing one stock over another, but if I could simplify it down to which stocks keep you up at night, and you get the most pressure to update management advice, and how frequent you want the management advice updated.

Really, that's -- It's not saying that any stock is less important than another, but it's some stocks get more attention than others, and we're more worried about them, and we want to update the catch advice more frequently. That's what this key stocks really is doing. Thanks.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I guess I have to ask the question then, and you're talking about frequency. We've just basically talked about what the timeline is, and so, if things are going to be needing to be assessed more frequently than what's currently outlined, how do we work forward with that? Just -- I'm asking for a solution on it, because that's what it's saying, is it's like, okay, we want red snapper, and we want it done every two years. Well, that's not the way the current structure is being done, and so is it better to talk about the species, and then come back to the process and talk about whether or not that's going to work? I mean, I guess I'm just a little confused with how that timeline with frequency is going to work.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that was my concern as well, and it's hard to put things in this table, because I'm not sure that I understand which stocks are candidates for the interim analysis, or any of that, and so I'm having a hard time, because of what Carolyn said, because this doesn't seem to fit with the new process, and I can't see what may be getting an interim analysis, and so it just feels like we're blindly putting things in here.

MS. MURPHEY: John.

DR. WALTER: What's really helpful for us is to hear what this council needs, independent of what assessment it gets, and which stocks keep you up at night, and how frequently do you want the advice. We'll sort out how to assess it, and what method to use to provide that, but, because, ultimately, setting the catch levels is in your wheelhouse, and doing the science is in the SSC and the Science Center, we'll figure out how to get that advice to you.

It may not be possible, and I can't promise everything, but that's, I think, the best way to compartmentalize this decision, and so red snapper. There's a lot of pressure on red snapper. Everyone wants catch advice updated frequently, and that's definitely meeting the need for key stock. How we -- If you want catch advice every three years, it might be that it needs a combination of stock assessment plus interim to be able to meet that, because even the best stock assessment is going to be several years in the past on its terminal year, and so the catch advice is coming from projections, and we know that the projections have high uncertainty.

In that case it might be, and, granted, we need to show that something like that works, some combination approach works, but then just hearing from you what you want, and how frequently you want it, and then we'll work on trying to meet that. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, okay. I just would -- I guess I would like some follow-up after we work on this list of stocks, and maybe it's easier to put things at the bottom, or we try to just go right to what are the species that we don't need it as frequently, and try to see if we can put a few things on there, because, otherwise, I feel like all of us are saying it's everything, we want everything, right now, and what's the best you can do on all of these species, but so just trying to think of another way to do it, and maybe there's a way to figure out, from that assess list, which ones can go to the bottom.

MS. MURPHEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. To the conversation, and what John just said, I mean, what stocks do we feel comfortable that we would like to have an interim analysis, you know, using the SERFS index, or the other indices that are available, and I would love to have that with red snapper right now, because we do have really good indices on that, and catch levels, and both fisheries-independent and fisheries-dependent, and I think you could give us a really good UM on that species, and there's some others like that, and we would like to have -- I would love to see that.

You know, some of them we don't -- I think that's a good way we could go, is which ones do we want to see that type of analysis, where we can get it quicker, more often, and advise, and we can monitor where -- How the rebuild is going, and do we need to make some type of changes in between an overall operational-type assessment, and so, you know, I'm comfortable with a UM on red snapper and not a full-blown assessment. I think we have enough, you know, and when the -- If we can get the full-blown assessment, yes, but let's do something that's simpler, quicker, more often. Red snapper I think it's a good candidate for that, because you do have good indices for that.

MS. MURPHEY: So what is the pleasure of the council, because I think some people are confused by just making a list. I think Jimmy did make a good -- I think that is a good idea, to consider what type of assessments, interims or whatever, would be useful, and so is that -- How is that working? How would that work?

DR. COLLIER: I caused some confusion here, and so, for these assessments, if you're putting them in the blue box, that doesn't mean they're getting assessments every three years. What that means is, if you go beyond that blue box, and get into the green, that means you can no longer get assessments every three years for those species. You're going to be getting assessments every four years. Because you've added more key stocks in there, you get less frequent assessments, and so that's what those color codes are meaning, and not necessarily those are going to be the stock assessments.

Maybe adding some details in there of what other pieces of information, or what types of assessment you would like to see for these different species, would be useful, and so, for red snapper, I added in there with an update model, and so maybe that's going to be another piece, but, you know, in order to get to -- In order for this key stock approach to work, not everything is going to be included.

If you want to have that that gap in there, that is going to be dealing with emerging issues, you have to reduce the number of stocks that can be assessed, because you have a blank there. That means the key stocks -- Assuming that a key stock is not going to be that emerging issue, and it's going to be another species coming in there, and, therefore, you can't have that in the list, and we have to triage the number of species that are being assessed and, you know, which ones -- Let's just start off with which ones are in the top-ten, or which ones are in the top-twelve. Those are likely the number of assessments, or key stocks, that that could be done with that six-year approach, with the update model in between.

MS. MURPHEY: I've got Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So then can you scroll further down, and so the table has other species in there that are currently being assessed by FWC, and I'm just confused as to how to do this ranking,

if you will, or put them into one of these categories, and is everything that's being assessed by FWC -- It doesn't need to go into this table, because FWC is already doing the stock assessment, and so like Florida Keys and east Florida hogfish, mutton, and yellowtail, and so those just stay kind of -- And black grouper. They stay status quo, with the FWC conducting them, and, thus, we don't need to move them into the colored part of the table, and is that right?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so the colored part of the table is looking at the assessments done by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. I'm assuming that FWC will continue to assist in the number of assessments being conducted in our region, and hopefully we don't have to triage those as well, but, right now, that that's the assumption, is let's focus on the stocks that are going to be done through the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So then, if it's not a key stock, and it's not going to be assessed by FWC, and so like where vermilion is, and so vermilion is just below the line here, what would that mean, in reality, if it doesn't get into the key stock list? What does it mean?

DR. COLLIER: That just means you're going to be getting less frequent advice, and maybe we could stick it into that emerging issue slot every so often, when there is time to put it in there, right, it -- We haven't had something for vermilion snapper in quite some time, and I'm not saying that it shouldn't be a key stock, but it would be -- You wouldn't have a guaranteed timeframe of when it's going to get reassessed. That's the difference with that open slot there, and so remember this is just in alphabetical order right now, and so don't worry about where they are in the list. It's up to you all to put them in the list.

MS. MURPHEY: I have Amy, and then Kerry, and then Carolyn, and Charlie.

MS. DUKES: To that point, Chip, if it's not a key stock, does that -- Can we at least ask for an update model, or an interim analysis, knowing that we've got really good fishery-independent indexes for vermilion snapper, and not necessarily have it get so far down on the list that we forget it? I mean, I would like -- If it's not a key stock, can we at least ask for a UM?

DR. COLLIER: So I'm going to take the name of vermilion snapper away from it, because that one didn't work for the interim analysis, but let's say black sea bass, and that one has -- It seems to have a really good index, and it tracks fairly well with the stock assessment. That would be a candidate for something like interim analysis, but, given the status of that stock, it's probably not one that you would want to remove out of the key stocks, with the impact of climate change.

All of this is really difficult, especially in the lens of climate change. We're seeing several of these stocks changing, and maybe six years is -- I mean, we've seen black sea bass go from a healthy stock to a very bad stock in that six-year timeframe, and an update model could have helped us along the way, to maybe prevent some of the -- Or reduce some of the landings that occurred, but would that have helped rebuild the population if it's recruitment failure? Maybe, or maybe not.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. I've got quite a few hands. Thank you, Amy. We'll go to Kerry, and then we'll get Carolyn, Charlie, and Tim.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks. I think that's where I'm really stuck. Like red porgy, right, and we have a lot of competing needs. Red porgy is not as economically important as a vermilion snapper,

but red porgy is overfished, and has been overfished since 1998, and isn't responding to management, and commercially I can at least speak. Recreationally, I'm less sure, but, you know, it's become less and less important, and so it makes me nervous to have a stock that is super commercially important, like vermilion snapper, to not always have our pulse on what's happening there, but we would be worried about red porgy, where we're talking fifteen head of fish a trip, or wherever we're at now, or thirty, and I can't remember, but it's overfished, and so are we then compelled to keep it at the top?

This is where I'm really struggling. Black sea bass was another example you gave. When I answer John's question about what keeps me up at night, deepwater grouper, and most groupers keep me up at night, because of their life history, and, you know, all of those other characteristics, but I don't lose a ton of sleep over red grouper, because that's kind of in the red porgy category, and we've tried, and we don't know what's happening, and so that's not so much a solution to this as it is a question. Can we move things out of the blue, like a red porgy, that is overfished, to put something in there, or do we need to keep those species, and I guess, Trish, you asked that earlier too, and I still don't understand that.

DR. COLLIER: I would say you can move these wherever you want. You know one of the -- I was just using overfished as a criteria to put it in the list, but maybe that -- It doesn't have to be consistent. It is your list on what you would like to do, and you just have to provide rationale on why you're developing the list and why you're identifying these as the key stocks.

MS. MURPHEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I'm going to piggyback off of where Kerry was going. I think there's -- As I look towards John, and Chip, and I do think that there's some, obviously, compelling things that would keep certain species above bar, right, and, I mean, red snapper is kind of the one that we don't really have much choice, but I think, if we get deeper into the weeds with things, and like we start talking about with the UM, as an interim, and now we're starting to get back down the slope where we just were with the processes.

We don't know what we've got, and what's going to work, and so I hesitate to get too much into the process part of it. As we sit around this table, if you were set -- If you were told, right now, all you could pick was four species off of this list, and this is all you're going to get, is four species, which ones would you pick, and why? If Magnuson compels us, because of rebuilding schedules, overfished, overfishing, we don't get much of a choice. Those are the ones that are going to rise to the top, because you've got ramifications on those, right?

Then you've got the other ones, and like black sea bass, unfortunately, is in limbo right now, because we have an assessment that says something contrary to what the current status is, and that is something we're going to need to deal with, and so we can't just not look at that one, and so I think, to me, trying to keep to the management part of it, we've brought these to the table numerous times, and we have ones that we revisit more frequently. Those are the ones that I think we should be thinking about in the blue, and maybe to the level of like what Kerry is saying, is, okay, so red porgy is on the blue right now, and does MSA make it have to stay in the blue, or can we reason it out to the green, and then potentially down lower, because of exactly what you're saying?

Yes, we acknowledge that these are problems, but MSA is going to keep it pinned, or we can slip it down, and then, if it goes below bar, then we talk about it, and maybe that's the way to look at that, is are -- You know, where's the compelling point for those species, and, back to what you're saying, they all pretty much have a status, or they don't, and maybe that's part of the drive to start with, is which ones are statuses that we have to address, and then go to the next level, and you can kind of -- But that's what I mean, and then you reorder within that.

Which ones -- So, if you've got four, well, like I said, red snapper and red porgy, you know, and so you've got that differential there. I don't know. I just feel like we have to get to that, as opposed to getting too much into, well, we could do an interim for it, back to what we just talked about for an hour earlier, is stay out of the process part, and let's talk just in the species and which ones we feel need to stay above four.

MS. MURPHEY: I think that makes sense. I have Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Mada Chair, and I agree with everything Kerry and Carolyn said, and, if we're just going to talk about key stocks, then I would say we need to have vermilion and golden tilefish on that list. I'm not sure we need red grouper, red porgy, and snowy grouper. We've been doing the same things, and, every time they look at it, we get the same advice, that they're still in the gutter, and so, you know, we're spending a lot of time, and I would just about bet that, the next time we get an assessment, it's going to say the same thing again, and so how often do we need to do that, if we're not going to get any real, you know, catch production out of it?

DR. COLLIER: So, for stocks in rebuilding plans, you are supposed to get updated every two years, and an update on that could be looking at it compared to the overfishing level, versus a full-blown stock assessment, and so it it's not clear on exactly what your analysis is, or your comparison for an overfished stock, but you're supposed to get information every two years.

MS. MURPHEY: Is that happening now?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. So it's not happening now. Okay. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, aside from that, and facts are facts, and Chip said what -- You know, what the law is, but, just generally speaking, and think of what -- You know, key stocks are the most important ones. If you have something that's in an overfished status, I think it's hard to say that's not a key stock, or something that we need to keep an eye on, and clearly you have the, you know, monitoring the rebuilding stuff in the statute as well.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, Shep. I have Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, and thank you for that, Shep, and Chip, for that reminder. You know, like Chip said, you know, climate change is driving the need to update catch advice on a lot of stocks, and, most importantly, ethe overfished stocks. I mean, I think we cannot get away from, in any way, shape, or form, the importance of these overfished stocks.

I mean, they're overfished for a reason. I don't care if they've been on there, like a red porgy, since 1998. Obviously, then maybe it's not overfished, right, and maybe we don't we don't really know what it is. Maybe we're -- Maybe we're trying to bring the stock back to some historical level that's never going to be there, and it's really not overfished anymore, and it's just this is the new norm, right, but, in any event, those ones that are on that list need to be addressed, so they either come off that list or we figure out how to keep trying to make management decisions to eventually get them off the list, but you can't just push those down lower.

They are overfished, and they are the most important ones that we have to deal with. Whether they're economically the most important ones or not is not really the issue, in my mind, and, you know, the second part of that is, if it's not overfished, even if it hasn't been assessed in a while, and it is a very important economic fish, like the vermilion snapper, in my mind, it's one of those things that, well, it's not broken, and so why are we even looking at trying to fix it?

You know, just keep going the way we're going. Vermilion snapper, regardless of assessment or anything else, it's one of the best success stories this council has ever done, and so why would we look at even putting that anywhere but down at the bottom of the list, and so -- But I think with -- When you start mixing in climate change, and how that affects some of these stocks, especially the ones that are overfished, that's where you have to start, and you have to concentrate on these overfished stocks, either getting them out of that status or figuring out what the next management decision is going to have to be to turn the tide on it. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: I have Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So a question first, and then I have a suggestion, but Tim was kind of going where I'm going. So, if it goes down lower, or it's not in the colored portion, it doesn't mean that it doesn't get an assessment, because it could come in another way, or it could get some other type of analysis, and so, if that's the case, and I was thinking back to how the Gulf Council did this, and I think that they only, and maybe Sanchez can speak to this, but I think that they only selected like five stocks, and then everything else went into a different category, and they were really looking at high-profile, really high effort.

In thinking about what Tim is saying, I would pull vermilion snapper, golden tilefish, amberjack, scamp, Spanish mackerel, and others, and maybe even red porgy, way down to the bottom. I would get them out of the top. I think I would pull king mackerel out of there too, because, using kind of what Tim is suggesting, we don't need to keep in the same cycle.

You know, we're looking -- Trying to look at these species as frequently as possible, and, instead, you're kind of -- You're going to bring them into a new system, if you will, and so I don't know that you need to take species that have been doing well, or are a success story, and I don't know that they need to be at the tip-top for they need as rapid of an assessment as we can get them, but maybe John Sanchez could speak a little bit to the Gulf process.

MS. MURPHEY: Can I skip it -- Can I get you, John? Thanks.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you. I would agree with your concept, and your approach. You should look at the species of more interest to you, for whatever reason, and prioritize them accordingly. What we're doing in the Gulf works for us, and so I don't want to be bold enough to tell you what

to do here, but one thing I would love to see here, and I guess I will be bold enough, is, on red snapper, are we still using a start date, for looking at the assessment, a start date in the 1950s, because, to me, here's a problem.

I mean, nobody is going back to 1950. The world is not what it was in 1950, and it never will be again. Data was horribly poor then, and maybe we should start something that important with something in the 1980s, or better, where we do have data, and maybe go from there and see what we come up with then, but maybe it's not as doom-and-gloom as it looks with a 1950 start date.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, John. I had Kerry, then Charlie, and then Tom.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, I'm still a little confused, because I've heard -- I sort of heard conflicting things from Jessica and Tim, that I want to make sure I'm clear. I've come around to the thinking about the vermilion snapper and the golden tile. What I'm confused about is Tim had sort of mentioned we really need to keep the overfished species in the top, and, if my math is mathing correctly, we have more overfished species than we have slots for the blue.

If we're deciding that that's our criteria, then I guess we need to figure out the one overfished -- One or two overfished, or, one, I guess, overfished species that can slide from blue to green. I mentioned vermilion snapper before, and, Chip, you can move it. I'm okay with that, but then how do we say -- We have more overfished species than blue spots, because we do.

DR. COLLIER: Well, yes. I mean, there's nine overfished stocks, right, and so that that leads to some issues. A couple of them are done by Florida, and so those aren't necessarily going to be done by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and so, what was it, and hogfish is one of them, and so you have eight that would be in that overfished category. So put the overfished stocks in the list?

MS. MURPHEY: All right, and so we need to get this finished up, too. I had Kerry again. No? You're good? Then Charlie, and then Tom. Tom is good. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I guess there's a little bit of confusion with me, with is key stocks equaling overfished stocks, or is key stocks equaling commercially-important stocks, or is key stocks equaling both? Now, if it's commercially-important, vermilion and golden tile and king mackerel -- They are very, very commercially important.

Now, they are doing well, and they have been doing well for a while, but, like I think I heard Chip say, had we been doing some interim updates on black sea bass, we might have seen some trouble coming, and been able to mitigate it, and so are we going to just not -- Maybe do them every six years, or -- Assume that there's not some regime shift coming that's going to affect these stocks, and hope that everything's going to be well and good? It probably will. Is it a bet we want to take? I don't know, and so that's kind of where I was thinking.

Our commercial -- Because I can't imagine what our snapper grouper fishery would look like if vermilion took the hit that black sea bass took, or something like king mackerel took a hit, because, at our port meetings a few months ago, all the guys off of Georgia said kings aren't up here anymore. If you want to go catch kings, you've got to go to Florida, or somewhere else, and they just don't come here anymore, and is that trend going to keep happening, or another trend going



to, you know, go on, and so -- Which is my rationale of trying to keep the stuff that's working in the assessment schedule.

You know, do we need to stretch it out longer, or do we -- Then we get into the process, and what process do we want to use in the assessment schedule, and I thought I heard that we didn't want to talk about process, and we just wanted to talk about key stocks, and so that was kind of what I'm thinking, but I get it that we're mandated to do overfished now. If that's what we've got to do, that's what we got to do, but I am -- I'm afraid not to keep the important stuff in the schedule, at some timeframes. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Does anybody have anything else to say? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: To that, but also to the whole -- Because I've gone back and forth, Charlie, with the commercial versus overfished, but it just occurred to me that this body can actually -- Shep, tell me if I'm wrong, but we can react not just to scientific advice. If we hear, from our advisors, or a fishery performance report that they fell out or something, and if our -- If it comes out that everyone is worried about vermilion snapper, we don't need an assessment to do something.

I mean, obviously, we need to build rationale, and that rationale would be the fishermen are seeing -- You know, we have somewhat freewill, and so maybe we need to really be thinking about that, and maybe there's a way for those species that Tim was saying that, if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and maybe there's a management way we can create a structure, again through the fishery performance report, and maybe we already have it, where we're making sure, on those species, we're paying extra attention to what the fishermen are saying, and sometimes we tweak based on that, and not just an assessment.

Maybe that can ease our concerns with some of those other species, but I think the onus will be on us to let our advisors know that, hey, it's going to be a long time before we get a vermilion snapper assessment, and so it's really important that you talk to us about what you're seeing on the water.

I would also point out, if that was ever successful -- If they ever came to us and said we're worried about this, and we reacted to it the way they wanted, we might build a little trust, and we might have a good relationship, and so I think just -- Let's just not freak out if we don't get an assessment about something, and let's remember it doesn't mean we can't do something.

MS. MURPHEY: Thank you, Kerry. So we are really about out of time. Go ahead, Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I do want to point out that you guys are able to be more restrictive, but, because, for most of the stocks that you manage, your ACL is set equal to the ABC, it does not give you the opportunity to respond if people are saying that the stock is doing well, and so there is a concern there, but, once again, if there is a spot built in that gives you the flexibility to add this species into the assessment, then you could potentially do it.

Unfortunately, that is going to be a delay, and so you would be able to respond more quickly to a negative than a positive, but, if you are clear, and discuss what the issues are with it, then I think, you know, that's -- You're in a better position.

MS. MURPHEY: Our vice chair made a suggestion, and so I want to float this to the group. Could staff go and put a list together for us, and bring it back in Full Council, and you heard the concerns, and thoughts, you know, processes, and overfished, and what's important and not important, and, you know, you kind of heard that, and so for some -- Using that guidance, and then your thoughts, and maybe it would be easier if you guys make some recommendations to us, and we can agree, or move around, from that, and is that something doable, and you could have ready for Full Council on Friday?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, that's something that could be doable, and we could make it on a couple of different criteria, right, and just make a list based on certain criteria. Here we are -- Commercial was an important one to consider, and, also, overfished stock was an important one to consider, and so we can look at that and bring something, bring a couple back for you all to discuss.

MS. MURPHEY: Is the committee good with that? Okay. Jimmy. I do see heads shaking. Thank you.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I'm good with that, but so, right now, Chip, what you have displayed in the blue are overfished stocks, and they are filling it in, and the way the rest of us just fell into place down below at this time, but those are overfished stocks, in the blue, all of those, correct?

DR. COLLIER: That's correct.

MR. HULL: All right. Thank you.

MS. MURPHEY: Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I just wanted to amend something you said. I think you said that are important commercially, or maybe Chip said that. To me, it's not just important commercially, but it's just kind of important overall, but not everything can get in the blue, and so, like Kerry said, we can ask questions at any time, to try to get a status, and so I think we're closer, but I don't think that we've gotten the list fully filled out, I guess, but, yes, I wouldn't just focus on commercial landings, and I guess I would focus on the fishery overall, because some of those have high recreational landings, but yes.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thanks, Jessica, and so are we good with that? Okay. Thank you, guys, for the conversations. We'll adjourn SEDAR and get ready for Snapper Grouper. We'll take a fifteen-minute break.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 4, 2024.)

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

Transcribed By  
Amanda Thomas  
January 27, 2025

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# SAFMC Dec. 2024 Council Meeting

## Attendee Report: (12/2/24 - 12/6/24)

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Yes

**Interest Rating**

Not applicable for staff

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Atkinson

Seth

Aukeman

Trip

Barile

Peter

Barrows

Katline

Bauer

Tracey

Beal

Bob

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Alan

Blough

Heather

Bogdan

Jennifer

Brouwer

Myra

Bubley

Walter

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Matthew

Byrd

Julia

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Joe

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Margaret



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Smillie	Nick
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Spanik	Kevin
Spottswood	Robert
Spurgin	Kali
Stephen	Jessica

Stephens	Haley
Stephens	Haley
Sweetman	CJ
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Waldo	Jennifer
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Walter	John
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Willis	Michelle
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carvalho	avelino
collier	chip
griner	tim
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moss	david
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oden	jeff
sandorf	scott
thomas	suz
vara	mary
zales	bob
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Baker	Scott
Beyea	Taylor
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Sartwell	Tim
Schlenker	Lela
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Stam	Geoff
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Council	South Atlantic