

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE

**Sawgrass Marriott
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL**

June 13-14, 2017

SUMMARY MINUTES

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Other Observers/Participants attached.

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Sawgrass Marriott, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, Tuesday afternoon, June 13, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Michelle Duval.

DR. DUVAL: We are going to go ahead and call the Snapper Grouper Committee to order. Pretty much everyone on the council is part of the committee, but I will go ahead and read off the names as well. It's myself; Jessica McCawley, who is the Vice Chair; Anna Beckwith; Mel Bell; Zack Bowen; Chester Brewer; Mark Brown; Chris Conklin; Dr. Crabtree; Tim Griner; Ben Hartig; Doug Haymans; Charlie Phillips.

Then we also have our Mid-Atlantic committee representatives/liaison, and so, for this meeting, Mr. DiLernia is the committee member. Welcome, Tony, and then I also want to welcome Dewey Hemilright, who is the Mid-Atlantic Council liaison, and then I will re-welcome Dale Diaz, who is our Gulf Council liaison. We welcomed him in closed session yesterday, but just for the record, so that folks recognize his voice when he speaks up.

The first item is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any modifications to the agenda?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would like to talk about yellowtail snapper under Other Business.

DR. DUVAL: Great. Any other additions to the agenda or modifications to the agenda? All right. Then the agenda stands approved as modified. The next item is Approval of the March 2017 Committee Minutes. Are there any modifications to the minutes? Seeing none, the minutes stand approved.

Next is the Status of Commercial and Recreational Catches versus Quotas, and I expect that Mr. DeVictor is going to walk us through the commercial catches and that Mike Larkin will be walking us through the recreational catches, and so will turn it over to you, Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, and so, just like with Dolphin Wahoo, I will go through commercial landings for snapper grouper species. They're on the screen there. Again, these are an updated version than what was sent around in the briefing book. I won't go through all the species. I will just hit the high points here on some of the more popular species and some species that are close to the ACL or that have met it.

Starting off with black sea bass, we are at 30 percent of the ACL. Then, again, you can go over to some of the columns on the right-hand side and see where we were last year around the same time period. Blueline tilefish, you have an ACL of 87,521, and 75 percent of the ACL was met, and you can see we closed in-season last year, commercially.

Moving down to golden tilefish longline, that closed on May 9, and we're at 99 percent of the ACL. Last year, it closed on March 15. Moving down, again, we have a split season for gray triggerfish. On the first season, we are at 85 percent. Again, those are two six-month-long seasons. Last year, it closed down early.

Moving on, for the next two, hogfish and mutton snapper, again, as you know, those two are going through rulemaking right now. With hogfish, you can see what the current ACL is for 2017, and that's 49,469, but what we also show is we show the proposed ACL there, and so, of course, we

are setting up two stocks through Amendment 37, and that would have a Georgia northward stock and then a Florida Keys/East Florida stock, and we show what the proposed ACLs are there, and we will talk, in a moment, an agenda item later, about the status of those amendments and where they are in the process.

You can see, for these, what Amendment 37 would set up would be an in-season closure for these stocks and a payback if the total ACL is exceeded and it's overfished, and so we'll be looking at those landings, especially for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock, to see if we have to close down when Amendment 37 goes into place.

Moving on to mutton snapper, again, this is the second species that, through Amendment 41, is going through rulemaking, and so you can see what the current ACL is. It's 157,743. Then you see what the proposed ACL is for that stock, but we are at 19 percent of the current ACL. Snowy grouper, moving on down the list, we're at 88 percent, and so we'll be watching that one closely. That one closed down on June 14 of last year.

Moving on to the next page, vermilion snapper, again, that's two six-month seasons with vermilion snapper. We reduced the trip limit, because that gets reduced when 75 percent of the ACL is met, and so we reduced that, and then we closed it down on May 17, and so, currently, we're at 94 percent of the ACL of that, and what the regulations state is that you roll over any that aren't used into the second season, but we will follow that as the season goes along, because landings come in later, and so we'll see how much of that gets caught up. Finally, yellowtail snapper, the current ACL is about 1.5 million pounds, and that closed on June 3. That concludes my report.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Rick. Are there any questions for Rick on the commercial landings? Seeing none, we will move to the recreational landings.

DR. LARKIN: I will go over the snapper grouper recreational landings and update. Landings are summarized using MRIP or MRFSS. It depends on how the ACL is calculated. These landings estimates were updated to be consistent with the ACL monitoring post-stratification. For example, some of the stocks, the Monroe County landings are assigned to the South Atlantic, for example like gag and greater amberjack, and these landings have final 2016 landings. Then, for 2017, we have up to Wave 1, which is January and February. All the 2017 landings are preliminary, and they include the MRFSS or MRIP landings and also the headboat landings.

These are the 2016 landings. I am just going to go over the ones that exceeded their ACL in 2016. Blueline tilefish, you can see it's 97 percent over the ACL. That one closed on September 1, and the "F" stands for fixed. That one is a fixed seasonal closure. By the time we realized it was over, it was after September, and so the fixed seasonal closure had already occurred.

Golden tilefish went way over. You can see it was 431 percent of the ACL. That one closed on August 27, 2016, and hogfish was 40 percent over the ACL. That one closed on November 30, 2016. The porgies were 31 percent over the ACL, and we closed that one on September 3. Then snowy grouper was another one that was way over the ACL, but this one, like golden tilefish, has a small, low, ACL. Anyway, this one was way over, and that one also has a fixed closure. That's what the "F" stands for. That closed on September 1 of 2016.

Then this is the 2017 landings, which is just Wave 1, and so just the January and February landings. Being such a short time period, you can see that none of these exceeded their ACL. Again, this is Wave 1, just January and February, and you can see that none of these exceeded their ACL, which makes sense, because it's a short time period.

Then we move on to the 2015/2016, the ones that don't have a calendar year, for example greater amberjack. That one, from March 1, 2015 to February 28, 2016, did exceed it by 3 percent. Greater amberjack is a tricky one. That one, by the time we get all the landings in, it's already past February 28, and so it's already exceeded it, but you can see that it went 3 percent over, but the black sea bass did not go over the ACL.

We see greater amberjack has happened two years in a row, and so that one I will keep a much closer eye on, but, by the time you get -- There is a delay in getting the recreational landings, and, by the time they get in, you realize it's already over the ACL, and this one, 2016 and 2017, was 7 percent over, but, like I said, I will keep a closer eye on that one, but black sea bass and yellowtail snapper -- You can see that yellowtail snapper now has made its switch from the calendar year, in 2016/2017, to the August 1 to July 31, and so that one switched over. Currently, with that 2016/2017, we're at 32 percent of the ACL for the yellowtail snapper. That one changed the season in Regulatory Amendment 25.

In this, the gray, the landings are broken down by mode. You can guys can take a look at it, and that's for black sea bass. This is the same setup as before. The landings are on the Y-axis to the left, and then the effort for MRIP and headboat are over on the Y-axis on the right, and the X-axis is the year. In this case, it's the split season there, and then you see the landings are below the ACL, with the black dashes being the ACL. You can see currently, for the 2016/2017, they are below the black dash, and so below the ACL.

Then the gag grouper is the same setup there. It's landings by mode. I will just give you a second to look at it. Then, in the figure here, you can see it's the same thing. You can see how the landings change over time. They are below the ACL.

Then greater amberjack is the same thing. This one is still set in MRFSS, and so you can see it's all in gray. You can see how, in the recent -- In the 2015/2016 and the 2016/2017, it's bumping over the ACL there, above the black dash there in recent years. Mutton snapper, the landings are broken up by year and by mode. Then you can see it there tracked by year, and you can see these relative to the ACL. I'm just going slow to give you guys time to look at it.

Yellowtail snapper, the same thing. It's landings by mode, and you can see that we switched, in 2016, to the different calendar year, the August 1 to July 31, starting in 2016/2017. Then you can see the landings there. Again, they're below the ACL. For red porgy, you can see these here, and there is zero landings in 2017. Again, that's just Wave 1 for right now, and then the red porgy landings. You can see these are tracking below the ACL, and you can see how they change over time.

For vermilion, it's broken up by year and by mode. Then you have the figure there, just showing the change over time. Snowy grouper, it's broken up by mode and year, and then you can see the high peak there in 2016, and it's fairly low landings in 2017, but we only have January and February at this point.

Then the next slide is golden tilefish. We had really high landings in 2016. This one is also in numbers. Keep that in mind, that it's not in pounds and it's in numbers of fish, and so, again we have 2016, but they're currently low in 2017. Then we have scamp, and this was a request, I think last year, to add this in. You can see how the landings change by year and by mode there, and then this is how they track. There's a peak in 2007, but it's been low in recent years for scamp. That's it, and I would be happy to take any questions.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Mike. I had one question. Do you have any PSEs or estimates of imprecision around some of those? I am thinking particularly for golden tile and snowy, the ones that really were exceeded by a significant amount in 2016.

DR. LARKIN: I do. I looked at like golden tilefish had a real peak in one wave, and it was Wave 2 of 2016, and so the March/April wave was really high. The PSEs were, in my mind, above 50 percent. Actually, I take that back. I'm sorry. Wave 2 and Wave 3 had peaks in landings in 2016 for golden tilefish, and so, in Wave 2, the PSE was 57 percent, and, in Wave 3 of 2016, the PSE was 50 percent, and so it's not super high, but it's above 50 percent.

The snowy grouper, I looked at that in Wave 4 of 2016, and that one was also like one of the peak high landings there that went to the overage there, and that one had a PSE of 50.9 percent. I guess they're not super high, in the seventies or eighties, but they're above -- In all three cases, those peaks that kind of led to the closure were above 50 percent PSE.

DR. DUVAL: How about hogfish?

DR. LARKIN: I didn't look at hogfish. Look at that. I felt so prepared, and I thought that you would ask this question. Hogfish, in Wave 3, which is May/June, that one actually had a low PSE, relatively speaking. The peak which caused the overage there was in Wave 3 of 2016, and that one is about 35 percent in hogfish, and so it was relatively -- I guess it was below the -- I always go by the 50 percent threshold there, and so it was below 50 percent, and so 35 percent PSE for hogfish in Wave 3, and that's the same wave that had the peak in landings.

DR. DUVAL: Of course, the final one, blueline tilefish, I know I had looked into this a little bit, and I'm pretty sure the bulk of that harvest was coming from the charter sector in North Carolina, but I was curious if you had those PSEs at your hand.

DR. LARKIN: Yes, they all came from North Carolina, and I looked at those. That one, in fact, I dug into a little further, and blueline tilefish, Wave 4 -- I didn't actually look at their private or charter, and I certainly could, but there was twenty-seven intercepts in Wave 3, and they all came from North Carolina.

That one, I'm actually looking into it a little bit further, because some of those -- I believe they have a bag limit, right? That one has a three per person bag limit, and so some of those bumped over the three per person, and so I'm going to look into that, but, anyway, the majority of them were from North Carolina. Twenty-seven intercepts is where those blueline tilefish -- That had the real peak in landings, which likely led to the closure. I'm sorry. Not the closure, but the overage, the overage of the ACL.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks for that, Mike. Smart man for being prepared.

MR. HARTIG: I would just follow up with Michelle's question. Are there any projected shorter seasons based on our AMs, based on the overages in any of those species?

DR. LARKIN: There is probably someone at the table much more able to better answer this than I am. I am not sure if there are hands up right now, but anyway, the blueline, I think it's a real short season anyway, if someone could correct me. I mean, they close on September 1, but I think they're only open from May through August. They have such a short season to begin with. Probably someone there can answer that better than I can.

DR. DUVAL: Yes, that's true. Snowy is overfished, and so that might be one that would potentially trigger an AM, but I think it's just the -- Blueline and snowy both have the fixed season, but, in terms of the accountability measures, when we went through Amendment 29 and restructured those, it was if the total ACL is exceeded and the species is overfished, then the season gets a little shorter.

I had just asked the question about the PSEs because it's an important piece of our concern that we have voiced and for which we sent in a letter to the Fisheries Service, to Mr. Rauch, about our concerns about that. Any other questions on recreational catches? Okay. Thanks so much, Mike. I really appreciate it.

DR. LARKIN: Okay. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Then we are back to Rick for the Status of Amendments.

MR. DEVICTOR: Thank you. Yes, I'm going to give the status of three amendments, and that would be Amendment 36, Amendment 37, and Amendment 41. Starting off with Amendment 36, that would implement spawning SMZs in the South Atlantic. Because this is a plan amendment, as is 37 and 41, we do NOAs. We publish those, and so the NOA for Amendment 36 published on January 4, and the comment period ended on March 6. The proposed rule published on January 18, and the comment period ended on February 17. The amendment was approved on April 4, and we sent a letter to the council, and so, right now, the final rule package is being reviewed by Headquarters for Amendment 36.

Amendment 37 deals with hogfish, again, and it defines the management boundaries and specifies ACLs and recreational ACTs and AMs and management regulations for hogfish. The same thing here, with the NOA published, and that published on October 7, and the comment period ended on December 6. The amendment was approved, and we sent a letter to the council on December 28 that it was approved, the amendment portion of it, and the proposed rule published on December 16, and that comment period ended on January 17, but that's in the same boat with Amendment 36, where it's being reviewed by Headquarters, the final rule package.

On hogfish, again, and we spoke about this before, we're timing these amendments, the one for the Gulf and the one for the South Atlantic, to go at the same time, with the one in the South Atlantic going just right before it in the Federal Register issue, because there is going to be transfer of authority shifting between the regions, and so we're planning that to go together.

Then, finally, Amendment 41 deals with mutton snapper. This updates biological benchmarks and the allowable fishing levels for mutton snapper, based on the latest stock assessment, and it revises the management regulations. We are working on the proposed rule package right now and also the NOA package, and that concludes my report.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Rick. Any questions for Rick on the status of amendments? Gregg.

MR. WAUGH: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, just to comment that, at the recent CCC meeting, we talked with Alan Risenhoover, and they're doing everything they can to move these amendments along, and, particularly with Amendment 36, we explained some of the particular issues associated with that, where we've got MPAs that their locations have now been publicized, and he thought that was something that perhaps could help move it along, and so they're doing everything they can to try to get that finalized, but I did have a question about the hogfish amendment.

In the past, when implementation has missed a statutory deadline, the council has gotten a letter that we didn't meet the statutory deadline, and we're already past the statutory deadline for hogfish, which means that we -- Overfishing is going to occur this year, based on the new ACLs, once that regulation gets in place, and I was just wondering how that's handled in a situation like this.

DR. CRABTREE: That will all depend on what the catches are this year and what the specific accountability mechanisms are, but the fact that we missed the deadline by a little bit, I guess, if someone wants to challenge us, that we could get our hand slapped, but, beyond that, I don't know what remedy there is.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks. Any other questions on status of amendments? Okay. Seeing none, the next item on our agenda is the Advisory Panel Report, and so this is Attachment 2 in your briefing book, and our AP Chair, Kenny Fex, is here, and that was, sadly, Kenny's last advisory panel meeting as Chair, and I just want to give a big shout-out to Kenny for his leadership over the past couple of years as Chair of the AP and keeping everything running smoothly, and so I will turn it over to you, Kenny, to take us through the AP Report.

MR. FEX: All right. Thank you, and thank you for the lessons that you guys have taught me, watching you in the background. The Snapper Grouper AP got together on the 17th through the 19th in Charleston. We had to reelect new Chairs and Vice Chairs. David Moss moved to Chair, and I would like to congratulate him, and Jimmy Hull got elected to Vice Chair, and I would like to congratulate him. Richard Stiglitz stepped down. He termed out, and I would like to thank him for his service to the Snapper Grouper AP.

We first started out, just like you guys did, with updated management measures. Then we moved to red snapper, thinking there might be a season. We kind of went with what's happened in the past, a two-day weekend for the recreational season, if considered this year, and a seventy-five-pound commercial trip limit, if, again, we're allowed to catch red snapper this year, with no size limit on either sector, the rationale being that you don't want to have to discard fish. Plus, also, it helps in getting TIP samples of all the year classes that are coming through.

Next, we talked about the Vision Blueprint. First off, I will go with the recreational. We've been looking for a recreational permit for the recreational sector, to identify the user group, for a long

time, and that was one of the ideas. Also, to recreational reporting, maybe consider 1 to 10 percent actual recreational reporting, to get a better idea of what's going on.

Recreationally, we looked at a one-hook deepwater fishery. That way, you're not discarding fish from deep water on the recreational sector, and also removing the size limit for deepwater species, exactly for the same reason, discarding fish from the deepwater species. Also, we looked at a deepwater season, maybe a one to two-month season. We believe that over two months might be a little excessive and they might exceed, in overages.

As for the grouper closure, we, both commercially and recreationally, think four months is pretty much on check. The allocations are pretty much across the board, and so any shifts one way or the other would benefit one side or the other, and so we don't look at that as anything that --

For the black sea bass size limit, that was brought up recreationally, and we would like to bring it back down to twelve. Originally, that was brought to thirteen by the recreational sector, back in the day, and so it was nothing to do with the commercial sector. The commercial sector would like to stay at status quo at eleven inches, trap sizes being one of the issues, and for other reasons.

On the Vision Amendment for the commercial sector, we would like no split season on blueline tile. It seems like, currently, we have golden tile, snowy, and blueline at the beginning of the year, which is a deepwater fishery, and so, if you keep them coincided at the same time, it will reduce the discards of interaction. Also, look at maybe a step-down for the snowy and the blueline, to extend the season on that. It seems like people are finding more demand for that species in the market.

We also looked at vermilion snapper on the second wave. Instead of a thousand-pound trip limit, start it at 750, and then drop down to the 500 later on, and the rationale for that was that there's a lot more species to be caught at that time, since the grouper closure is not in effect and the red porgies are allowed to be caught.

To that point, on the red porgies, I know the AP has tried to push to go ahead and get a split season on that, and there's been some reluctance. I think there's an issue that we're not getting the TIP samples at the beginning of the year that we should that would truly show the actual progress of that fishery. A lot of you guys are in denial of it. Also, there is a deepwater fishery happening out there on the snowy and the blueline, which those people are catching red porgies, and so you might consider that as one of the issues that you don't see and us commercial sector does.

We switched then, after that, to the SEDAR update and request for participants. I do note a lack of participation from the AP, and I don't know what reason. I know they're hard to choke down sometimes, and maybe it's just intimidating. I don't know. There was a question on the wreckfish update being postponed. Jim Freeman finds it very important to him, since that is one of his main fisheries.

Mike Errigo gave us a research priority report. We would also like to thank him for his extra efforts that he put forth on the red snapper science efforts. We then switched to the red grouper progress report. I did make note that that is almost like a working paper that the SEDAR stock assessments ask of us fishermen that participate, and so I almost would suggest that you use that as a format before each SEDAR stock assessment, to go ahead and bring that in front of the AP to

get that kind of report, so that information can be given to the stock assessment people, which would be useful to them. That way, if no participants participate, they will have the information needed.

Then we did talk about the red grouper status of the stock. It seems like, generally, from the Keys all the way up to the Carolinas, nobody sees any changes in the stock. In the Carolinas though, especially in my area, I have noted a change in the stock, and so there might be an issue there, but not regionally. It just seems like in a small area that the problem seems to be.

We then got informed about the citizen science update. There was a few people that wanted to participate in that. John Carmichael gave us an update on the ABC control rule for the golden tile, and he explained the risks we have involved in that. As for Other Business, finally, Manny brought forth a motion to be considered by the council for the yellowtail snapper management, and we did approve this, and so this was not just freely thought out and thrown out there.

It was to combine the commercial ACLs in the Gulf and South Atlantic for yellowtail to be managed by the South Atlantic, and keep the fishing year August 1 through July 31. Make a day trip limit between May 1 and July 31, for the day boats, of 500 pounds, and then, within a week, not exceeding 3,500 pounds. That could be enforced, because, as he made a point, most of the yellowtail fishermen are part of the VMS system.

His rationale too was to keep from the fishermen exceeding a certain amount, because they sometimes will stay ten or eleven days, and what happens with that species is it is not gutted, and so I could imagine the fish, after ten days of guts inside it, it could cause a problem, and the market probably will see that in the value of the fish not being proper.

As other business also, Jim Freeman wasn't happy with the recreational of the wreckfish, and so he made a motion to request a review of the recreational landings for wreckfish to determine whether the current recreational allocation is appropriate. Also, he requested the council not consider reallocating the wreckfish IFQ allocations and consider reconvening the Ad Hoc Wreckfish Advisory Panel. That was one of his motions at the end, as Other Business. Seeing nothing else, do I have any questions on the AP Report?

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Kenny. Are there questions of Kenny from the Advisory Panel Report? If not, stick around. We're going to be walking through things, and so, if there are questions of Kenny or clarifications that we need for the AP's input on any of the issues, Kenny is going to be here and happy to come back up, I hope.

MR. FEX: Yes, I will, and I apologize if I did not completely go over it. It was two-and-a-half days, but I would like to comment that Myra did an excellent job capturing it and bringing it forth. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Kenny.

MR. CONKLIN: I have a question. Kenny, can you elaborate some more on the red porgy conversation you all had? I wasn't at the meeting, and I wasn't real clear on what washed out of that.

MR. FEX: It seems there is a few people that are in question with it. I can see a couple of reasons why. I mean, it's a spawning closure, and, recreationally, there is one, and now we're trying to shift the commercial one away. There is a problem with sampling. You're missing the fish when they're typically in the area and they're abundant. During the first four months, I understand they spawn, but they're in forty feet out to 450 foot of water, and, like I said the deepwater fishery is going on. Those guys are out there with the snowy, and they're out there with the blueline, on the hog bottom, and they are catching red porgies that are really big.

I just think it's really an issue that the samples aren't making it to the dock, and also the discards. The discards at the end of the year you guys don't take into consideration. When the vermilion are closed and the triggerfish, if somebody is targeting red porgy, there is a discard issue there, and so, I mean, there are several issues, but it's all in perception of how the stock shows it and the stock science sees it, and that's where I have a problem with it. They're not seeing samples at the beginning of the year, and that is a stock issue and science. Was that clear?

MR. CONKLIN: So you are in favor of splitting a season and opening or are you not?

MR. FEX: I'm in favor, and we put this -- This has been in the Vision Amendment. This was brought forth by the general public, and it's been brought forth by the AP, and I can see the reluctance, but the stock has rebuilt a lot better than what people are seeing, and so I believe that -
- At least, if you're going to do something, do some kind of experimental permit.

Just get some samples to the dock, whether you take part of the allocation and let some of the fishermen bring them in, a thousand pounds within each month or something, just to have some samples, because that's what happens in stock assessments. If you haven't got TIP samples throughout the year, you're basing it on a small percentage window, and that is an issue.

MR. GRINER: Kenny, was there any discussion on, if you did have a split season, what would be an appropriate limit on the first season?

MR. FEX: Robert Johnson brought that forth. A smaller percentage, maybe thirty fish to sixty fish, instead of the 120, but just to try to slow down on the discards at the beginning of the season, and, like I said, bring some TIP samples to the dock, and, again, I apologize that I did not cover everything. It was a pretty long meeting, and there was a lot of stuff that was involved.

DR. DUVAL: Any other questions for Kenny? Thanks so much, Kenny. We really appreciate it. The next item on our agenda is the Southeast Reef Fish Survey Report, and our SSC Chair, Dr. Marcel Reichert, is going to take us through this, and this is Attachment 3 in your briefing book.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let's see if this works. Earlier, we had a little bit of a technical complication. Thank you for the opportunity to once again provide you with an annual update of our reef fish survey, and I want to highlight that this is -- Once we get to the results, that's the combined results of the MARMAP and SEAMAP programs at South Carolina DNR as well as the Southeast Fishery-Independent Survey.

I will go over the first part relatively quickly. As I mentioned in previous years, the Southeast Reef Fish Survey's MARMAP, we have been reef fish sampling with chevron traps, bottom longlines, and rod-and-reel. In 2009, additional funding through SEAMAP allowed us to conduct

reef fish sampling, in particular, to continue the longline surveys, do some diet studies, and also explore new live-bottom habitat.

In 2010, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center joined us, and we are now conducting the reef fish survey in collaboration, and the SEFIS allowed the introduction of the video survey and also allowed us to do a lot more sampling, and I will come back to that in a little bit, and they also do a lot of bottom mapping in the southeast region to identify new bottom.

Our primary sampling gears are the video trap, the chevron video trap, the short bottom longline, and the long bottom longline. They are all soaked for about ninety minutes, and then we use CTDs to measure oceanographic parameters in the region while we are sampling.

The chevron trap is our primary sampling gear, and this is a little video of a trap descending through the water column, and, on top of the trap, you can see the cameras. We currently have two, or possibly three, cameras. The third camera is actually inside the trap. We have used this gear since 1990. Our general sampling season is from May through September, although we do sample in April and October. We deploy the trap to depths of about 110 meters, although we have deployed them in deeper areas. They are baited, and we currently have 4,500 sampling stations, and we randomly select and sample about 1,500 every year, currently.

The short bottom longline, we deploy that from the Palmetto. That is generally used in deeper areas, and we drape a line of about twenty-four meters over high vertical relief. We bait twenty hooks on that line with whole squid, and the species we generally catch on that line are the snowy grouper, the jacks, tilefish, and speckled hind, but also some porgies and other deepwater species.

Then the third gear is the long bottom longline gear, and that's deployed off of our state-owned Lady Lisa Research Vessel. We do that in the so-called tilefish grounds off of South Carolina and Georgia. Our sampling time is usually in August and September. They are also baited with whole squid, and obviously we collect a lot of golden tilefish, but also a lot of sharks on that gear, and we are generally deploying those in so-called blocks. They are based on the former LORAN numbers, and we generally target two lines per block, and I have a little map to show that in a little bit.

One thing that I want to highlight is, when SEFIS joined us and we started doing the reef fish survey in collaboration, we dramatically increased the coverage and also the number of stations, and, within this oval, this is kind of the general coverage and number of stations. It's about 400 that was typical in the late 2000s, and this is what we are currently doing. We are up to about 1,500 stations in the region, and, as you can see by the distribution of those dots, we have pretty good coverage of the area currently, and this is a graph of the current sampling universe that includes all the 4,500 chevron trap stations and the other stations.

In blue are the chevron trap stations. In brown, or gold, are the short bottom longline stations, and, as you can see, they are generally distributed in the deeper areas, and mostly off of South Carolina and North Carolina. We haven't been able to expand that too far south, unfortunately, and, in the kind of reddish here, you can see the long bottom longline blocks, and they are also mostly concentrated off of South Carolina and northern Georgia, and there's a couple of blocks in Florida, but we haven't been able to sample those a lot, and so that's important if you want to interpret the

data in terms of regional coverage, but, for the chevron trap, our coverage is pretty good in recent years.

The next slides are the results of the reef fish survey. We deployed, as I said, a little over 1,500 chevron traps, seventy-eight short bottom longlines, thirty long bottom longlines, and 431 other gear, and those are mostly our CTD drops and our hook-and-line deployments, and the graph on the right-hand side, in blue, shows the chevron trap stations that we sampled. In yellow, or brown, are the short bottom longline stations, and there's a couple that are behind some of the blue dots, and then the long bottom longline are the pinkish-reddish off of South Carolina.

This is kind of an overview of our species that we collect. They are ranked in terms of the most abundant species. CHV is our chevron video trap, the catches, number of fish in the traps, and the short bottom longline, the long bottom longline, the total, and the percentage of our total catch. In red are the species that are currently managed and also the ones that we take life history samples from.

To address some of the questions that came up yesterday, in terms of our life history sampling, which mostly is otoliths and reproductive samples, we do adjust our sampling. For instance, last year, we only selected 20 percent randomly of all the black sea bass that we caught. This year, because of the increase in vermilion snapper this year, we go up to 25 percent of black sea bass and 50 percent of vermilion snapper, and so we do look at our samples and then randomly sub-sample the otoliths.

We have also looked, in recent years, in terms of can we make our reproductive sampling a little more efficient, and so, currently, we are not taking any samples of the males of gonochorist species, such as gray triggerfish and white grunt, because we generally have a lot of information on those males, and, for stock assessments, the fecundity in the number of eggs produced by females is a lot more important information than information on the males, but especially for the gonochorists. If you have a sex ratio of 50/50, that means that you cut the number of samples that you have to process in half, and so we do, over time, look at our samples and look at if we can be more efficient in our sampling.

Since that came up yesterday, currently, we have about -- We collect about 13,000 to 15,000 otoliths a year. That's the number of otoliths we need to process, and our current backlog is about 150,000 otoliths, and so there's a considerable number of otoliths that we would need to process for stock assessments if we want to process everything.

The next slides are our overview of our CPUE for selected species. We use the three gears, and I have some slides for short and long bottom longline. The time series is 1996 through 2016, and, for the chevron video trap, the time series is 1990 to 2016. The CPUE is still, as it was in previous years, in catch per trap hour. We have standardized the CPUE using a delta-GLM method, and we are currently looking at changing that method to a different method, and I will come back to that in a little bit, and we normalized the index to the long-term average, and so you will see the zero is the long-term average, and the error bars that you see in the graphs are the 95 percent confidence interval.

These are the caveats that I always mention, because it's important to realize that this is a summary overview, and it's not a stock status update. For instance, the constraints and the stratifications

and some of the models for CPUE, the units that may be different than what's used in stock assessments, and, also, many species that I am going to show you have not been assessed or updated in SEDAR, and so these trends have not been discussed in an assessment framework.

This overview, I have seventeen species. If you're interested in some other species, I added some additional slides, and so let me know, and this information is available in our annual reports that are usually available in February or March of the year following our sampling, and so, if you're interested, we can provide that information in our reports.

This is snowy grouper. You may remember that this is the short bottom longline, and you may remember that, in 2012, due to a significant funding reduction, we only sampled very limited with this gear, very opportunistically, and so those are the red dots, but this is the CPUE trend for snowy grouper. I will give you some time to take a look at that, and then I will move on. If I go too fast, let me know.

Blueline tilefish short bottom longline, the same area here. We had limited sampling. The blue dots are years where we did sample, but the sample size of the species was too low for a delta-GLM modeling, and the gray dots means that we did sample, but we didn't catch any of the species in question, in this case the blueline tilefish. That's why some of these graphs are interrupted. I just want to mention that there was no fishery-independent index used in the current SEDAR 50, in part due to our low sample size.

Golden tilefish, our long bottom longline, we didn't sample in 2008. Sampling occurs in August and September, and that was a particularly busy storm year, and so we didn't go out, because of weather. Then, in 2012 through 2014, that's that funding reduction, where we didn't sample. What's very interesting between 2003 and 2006 is we did go out, although we didn't sample a lot of lines, but we didn't catch a single fish. In the SEDAR assessment, this index was divided in five-year averages, just as extra information.

I will move on to the chevron video trap. This is gray triggerfish. In some graphs, you will see kind of an unusual point in 1990. I want to remind you that that was the year after Hurricane Hugo, and so some of our sampling was impacted, and maybe the populations were impacted, by the hurricane, but we haven't -- We still want to see if we can take a look at that, but it's the first year of sampling, and so it's always difficult to take a look at that if that's the first or your last year of sampling.

Tomtate, one of the important prey species, and it's one of your secondary stocks in the assessment priorities. There was a decline in the early 2000s, and it seems like a gradual increase in more recent sampling years. This is white grunt. You can see, because we increased our sample size, that, generally, the CVs in the most recent years are a lot smaller than those of the earlier years, and that is purely a function of our sample size, the number of traps we deploy.

I forgot to mention the green species -- If the species are in green, that means that we do not take life history samples. If they're in blue, it means that we do take life history samples. This is *Stenotomus*, and that's both scup and longspine porgy. They are relatively difficult to distinguish in the field, and so we have combined them.

It's a long-term series, and it seems like somewhat of a decline since 2002 or 2003. Currently, we are looking at the lowest CPUE in the time series, which is also the case for knobbed porgy, another secondary stock species in the assessment priorities, and, again, you see here this data point in 1990 that seems to be a little different than the rest of the time series, but, as you see, a gradual decline. In recent years, we have been at the lowest densities in our time series.

The next one is red porgy. We note that they increase in mean size, from about twelve inches in the late 1990s to about fourteen to fifteen inches since 2010, and red porgy is a species that is particularly plastic. That means that there is a high variability in life history parameters that seem to respond to fishing pressure, and so we are currently looking at responses of the population to fishing and management, in particular relative to -- This is a protogynous species, which means that they start off their life as a female and then turn to a male at a certain age or size, and size at age of maturity and size at age at that point of transition has changed quite a bit over time, and so we are currently looking at those aspects of this species.

This is gag, and, here you can see those same dots. Blue, we did collect gag, and I believe it was 1 and 2, but those numbers are too low to be used in that delta-GLM analysis, and this is gray dot, and that means that we didn't catch any gag in that gear, but we did sample. Gag, we usually get in relatively low numbers in our traps, and, again, this is that point in 1990, and so maybe in gag there was something going on that showed an opposite response to potentially that Hurricane Hugo the previous year, but, as I said, that's just an idea.

This is red grouper, the chevron video trap. I want to indicate that all of these indices are calculated the same, and, as I mentioned earlier, what may be used for SEDAR may be different than what I am showing here. This is indeed the case for red snapper. The SEDAR 53 index was different. In SEDAR 53, a combined video and chevron trap index was used, the so-called CVID index, and, more and more, you will see that name appear in stock assessments, and there is a technique where we combine both the video information and the trap catches.

Also, this is still the delta-GLM method. Currently, we are more and more using the zero-inflated negative binomial method, which is a whole mouthful, but it's a little more appropriate to use in the development of an index, and so, as you see in one of my last slides, we are planning on changing to that method in our next trends report. However, the shape of the index was very, very similar.

The scamp, again, it's one of those species where, in recent years, we are seeing CPUEs that are relatively low relative to the rest of the time series. Also, this is another species where we noted an increase in mean size, from about twenty to twenty-two inches in the 1990s to over twenty-three or twenty-five inches in 2006 and beyond.

The next species is bank sea bass, and you will see it's a similar pattern in the black sea bass in the next slide, but there was an increase, which we think may have been one or two really good year classes, and then a subsequent decrease. The peak here is 2011, and, if you look at black sea bass, the peak in black sea bass was also 2011, and this species is currently assessed in SEDAR 56, and I have an extra slide, if you're interested. There are several indices that are considered, and, again the zero-inflated negative binomial method is considered, but that assessment is, as you discussed earlier, still going on, but you can see a couple of really good year classes that sustained that population and caused that peak.

Vermilion snapper, again, that relatively low CPUE in 1990, and there's a couple of ups and downs in the CPUE, and, in recent years, we have actually seen a pretty good increase in our catches in vermilion snapper, as I mentioned earlier, that led us to sub-sample vermilion snapper this year, and so we are randomly keeping only about 70 percent of vermilion. We keep every red snapper that we catch in the traps for our life history studies.

DR. DUVAL: For life history studies. Okay.

DR. REICHERT: Because we're talking about red snapper, this is the red snapper, and, again, this blue dot is that we did catch red snapper, but the sample size was too low to be included in the delta-GLM. As you can see, since 2009, we have seen a pretty good increase in our CPUE, and this, from 2011 to 2014, this is the part of the index, of the part of the CPUE, that was used for the assessment, and so we have seen a pretty good increase in our CPUE since the terminal year of the red snapper assessment, and I'll talk a little bit more about that tomorrow.

This is the last species CPUE graph that I am showing, and I couldn't help showing this little video from inside the trap. This is a red snapper that is really motivated to go into our trap, and this is a really big red snapper, and so we do catch those large red snappers in our traps, and, if you listen carefully, you can actually hear -- That noise is a grunt in the mouth of the red snapper. He just snagged a grunt, and that poor animal is probably telling his buddies that this was a mistake to get in here. You can see a nice moray eel here, and this is a guy outside who decided to stay outside, but to take advantage of a fish that had kind of stuck in the web here. Anyway, I just couldn't help sharing this cool video with you guys.

The lesson from this is also that it's not just for fun, although it's really cool to look at, but this type of video also allows us to look inside the trap and see what's happening. We are using this to look at percentage of fish swimming in and out of the trap. What's happening with fish that are already caught is, if there's a big red snapper that goes into the trap at the beginning of our series, how does it affect the rest of the catches, and so it provides a lot of information, in terms of how to interpret our catches, but, as you can also imagine, not only these videos, but the videos from around the trap are very time-consuming to analyze, and our colleagues at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center are mostly responsible for analyzing that type of information, and it takes a lot longer to get to that information.

In terms of our 2017 reef fish monitoring, we started our sampling, and we have completed two cruises, one for SEFIS and one for us. Next week, both groups will be out sampling again. As I mentioned earlier, our 2017 trends report, I hope we can update everything to what we feel is a more appropriate method, the zero-inflated negative binomial method, or ZINB.

The last bit of information that makes me personally a little nervous is that our new funding year starts on July 1, and, as of now, we have not heard what our funding is, and so I cannot provide you with an update on our funding for the upcoming year, which is in two-and-a-half weeks.

With that, I have to acknowledge Walter Bubley, Joey Ballenger, and Tracey Smart. Joey and Wally are largely responsible for all the analyses, and Joey is working with the Science Center scientists on the zero-inflated method, and, of course, a lot of people are involved, and so I have to acknowledge the MARMAP, SEAMAP, and SEFIS staff and students and the research vessel

crews, and not just the ones that are working with us now, but those who have worked with us in the past.

While I will entertain any questions, I will show you this nice little aquarium, and there will be a test afterwards to see how many species are in this video, and this is one of the videos that is actually mounted on top of our traps, and this is the type of video that our colleagues at the Science Center look at for relative abundance for those species that swim around the trap rather than in the trap. With that, I will entertain any questions you may have.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you very much, Marcel, for that report, and I know there are questions.

MR. HARTIG: Marcel, you mentioned that you sub-sampled vermilion for the first time this year, and how is that decision made? Is that in concert with Beaufort scientists? Do you guys sit down and discuss the amount of samples you're collecting and what you should be doing?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and thank you. That's an important point. Prior to the sampling season, we discuss the plans with our colleagues at the Science Center, so we make sure that we sample and we do everything in the same way, that we sample the same way, and, also, we look at where we can potentially get the best bang for our buck, in terms of collecting additional information, such as diet studies and also otoliths.

One of the things that I wanted to mention, in terms of the otoliths, is, increasing, our otolith and spine archive has become really important, because we can use the DNA from those historical samples in our stock identification studies, and so archiving our samples is really important, and it has increased in importance in recent years, but, yes, we do collaborate and make sure that we are on the same page.

MR. BELL: Thanks, Marcel. That was great. I appreciate you sharing all of that with us, and it just shows you the importance of what MARMAP and SEAMAP and this whole group does in terms of our fishery-independent data. When Marcel gets nervous about funding, I get nervous about funding, but I'm sure it will all work out, but just keep in mind that this work is critical to what we do.

Yesterday, some questions came up about otoliths and what it would take to clear the backlog and move forward, and you can see, from the numbers that Marcel mentioned, that it's quite a few otoliths. It's a good bit of work, but I thought it was interesting, and I am not trying to draw any direct conclusions here, but it was interesting that, if you took what you're seeing, in terms of trends with black sea bass and bank sea bass, and you laid that beside the red snapper trends, it's just kind of an interesting trend in comparing those. Given that you had some interesting video that showed that red snapper certainly like to eat smaller fish, but that's just -- I thought that was interesting.

DR. REICHERT: To that point, we have a similar video for gag, and so those big animals do get attracted to the trap and consume some fish that are in there. That is, I think, where our diet studies are extremely important, and, unfortunately, those are also the aspects of our surveys that get hit the most if we have to make a choice between going out sampling and collecting the fish and looking at age compositions and the reproduction.

One of our graduate students is actually currently looking at -- The problem with a lot of fish that eat fish is it's very difficult to identify fish remains in stomachs, and so one of our graduate students currently is looking at using DNA to identify diet in fish stomachs, in particular groupers and red snapper, because those are the species that have a high percentage of fish remains in their stomachs. Sometimes you can identify them by looking at the otoliths or some of the bone structure or others, but, more often than not, it's very difficult to identify fish remains in stomachs.

MR. BOWEN: I would like to echo what Mel said there. Your work is absolutely -- Not only do I feel like it's critical, but it's absolutely amazing to see this, but, getting beyond that, I kind of took notes as you were giving this presentation, and, to be completely honest, I had seen the trends report before today, but there were some key words that you said numerous times, and I would like to kind of repeat them. I know they're out of context, but it's scary, the terms that you used to describe the graphs that you have just shown.

Some of your words were "lowest in time series" and "too low" and "relatively low" and "similar patterns" and "relative low CPUE". Guys, this is scary. The only upwards trends that I see in this whole entire presentation are red snapper, and we all know the story behind that, vermilion snapper, and tomtate. Every other species that I have seen on here, and maybe I missed one, is like this. We have got to do something. As managers, we are responsible for this, and it is not good. Those key words that you just spoke there that I repeated, it scares the hell out of me. Thank you.

MR. HAYMANS: My question was along Mel's. The 150,000 otoliths, I assume that represents those sixteen species, or is it more species?

DR. REICHERT: Those represent more species. Those are all the species that we have collected life history samples from since the beginning of the trap series, and I have to go clarify that that includes gray triggerfish, and we have aged a lot of gray triggerfish, but there is still a lot of concern about the validation of those structures, and there is currently a study underway at the Science Center.

There is also a similar issue with red porgy, and so those are two big, high-volume species that we do have ages for. We expect that we will have to re-age all of those ages once those increment validation studies are completed, and so, if our current ages are correct, which is difficult to determine until after that validation study, then that number may go down a little bit, but I think we are still talking about -- I need to look up the exact numbers, but probably 70,000 or 80,000 fish that we still need to age or re-age, currently.

That is because, in the last I would say probably ten years, what we are trying to do is keep up with the ongoing stock assessments, so we were certain that we could provide the ongoing stock assessments with the age information that is needed, and the other thing that I want to mention is that it's not just processing and ageing the otoliths. In order to provide the stock assessments with the analysis, there is some analysis going on to provide the stock assessment scientists with the age composition, the growth curves, and the age-related reproductive information, and so there is a level of analysis that goes in that takes time that is included in the time needed for staff to process this, so that we can get that stuff ready for a SEDAR stock assessment. Does that answer your question?

MR. HAYMANS: Yes, it's a twenty-seven-year backlog, roughly speaking, and I was going to ask -- You've got a ready-made workforce right next door to you, and is there ever opportunity for graduate research projects to help with the backlog?

DR. REICHERT: Absolutely. The problem is that it is very difficult to have a rotating pool of staff that helps with ageing fish, because it's very important to get that consistency, and so, for every species, there is a certain level of training that is needed before we say, okay, this person is trained enough, and we have calibration and training sets in our otoliths, and we do that in collaboration with the Science Center, and so we want to make sure that what we do is consistent with what the Science Center scientists do.

Once you have someone trained in those species, especially some of the more difficult to age species, and blueline tilefish is one of them, and gray triggerfish is one of them, and, if you have that staff trained, you want to make sure that that staff member contributes to those ages on a consistent basis, and so, if you have a rotating number of graduate students, that increases the variability and the uncertainty in your age estimates, and so what we do with graduate students is, for instance, having the graduate students conduct those validation studies.

We had a graduate student that did the wreckfish validation using bomb radiocarbon, several years back, and that data was directly used in the stock assessment for wreckfish, and so that's where the assistance of graduate students come into play. We are a little hesitant to use graduate students or, for instance, temporary help, with determining the age compositions, because you want to make sure that the ages that you are determining now are valid five or ten years from now, and so it's nice that you have that consistently-trained pool of people in the lab.

MR. DILERNIA: One of the reasons that I love coming here is that I always learn things when I come here, and so I'm going to ask another question, so I can learn a little bit more. Short longline versus long longline, what is the difference between the two, and why do you have two?

DR. REICHERT: I apologize. In previous years, I had a couple of slides that explained the gears. The short bottom longline is a gear that we use in relatively deep live-bottom habitat with high relief. It's a line of twenty-four meters with twenty hooks, and we drape that over vertical relief. It used to be called a vertical longline, because we draped it over vertical relief, but the vertical line is actually a different type of gear, and so we started calling it a short bottom longline. The long bottom longline is a one-mile cable with 100 hooks. It's a steel cable, and we deploy that over the soft bottom golden tilefish habitat, and so that's the difference between those two gears. They are specific to a certain habitat that we sample.

MR. DILERNIA: Thank you very much.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Thank you, and I was wondering if you could put back up the slide the amount of the fish that you caught and the ones that were in the chevron traps and stuff like that. I had a particular question. Is there somewhere -- Once you put that up, is there somewhere in the presentation of where you would show -- Like say, for instance, I think you had thirty-some blueline tilefish that were caught in chevron traps, and you had that over -- That was 2016. Do you have like the other previous twenty years? Like each one of your traps is put in a specific location, correct?

DR. REICHERT: Yes and no. It is put in a specific location. We have those 4,500 sampling locations, and then, every year, we randomly select 1,500 to 2,000, which we sample. That trap is put on a particular location that we have identified, based on previous catches and videos and information from the recreational and commercial fisheries that have identified that as live-bottom habitat, and it's not completely random. Otherwise, we would drop the vast majority of our traps over sand. They are dropped on a particular place, location, but that location is a random selection of our 4,500 chevron trap stations. Does that make sense?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, it does, but my question was kind of getting to where -- I don't know if you could put the chart up there with your sampling from 2016.

DR. REICHERT: This one?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Yes, sir. You have blueline tilefish ranks twentieth, and you caught thirty-one of them out of chevron traps, correct?

DR. REICHERT: Yes.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Is that one chevron trap or --

DR. REICHERT: No, this is total catch of all of the 1,500 traps that we deployed over the entire region.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Is there any way that you might have in the future to look at where, this year, we caught five in this area in a chevron, something to give you more of an idea of where of all of your fish are being caught at and put it in a more -- There could be some reason why you're catching more there and the reason why -- Which I didn't pay attention to it, and maybe I should have, all the low numbers that you kept -- The low, low, low that Zack pointed out, and maybe there's another reason for that, and so I was just wondering, is there anything in the future that you could maybe put up of where you're catching these fish at, to give a perspective besides just the amount of gear in something that you're using? It might be helpful for me, in a layman's way to put it, the way I look at fishing out there, versus the amount of pots and low numbers, and there could be reasons why that's out there.

DR. REICHERT: We can absolutely do that, and, if you have any requests, in terms of how we can make this presentation more informative to you, please let us know, because, as you can imagine, there is a lot of information in here, and I want to make sure that we are not forgetting to see the overall patterns, but that may be good, and it's relatively easy to do.

I can certainly provide that for certain species or maybe for the species that I have provided a summary for, and it is -- You're absolutely right. There are species that we catch more in certain areas. White grunt, for instance, we catch mostly off of North Carolina, northern South Carolina, South Carolina, and much less off of Florida and Georgia, and so that may be interesting to show those patterns, and so I can certainly do that.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I think it may be -- Not that you do it for everything, but I think it might be, in the future, just doing it for a couple, to give people perspective of how stuff moves around over

the years and how your survey over the last thirty years has picked up the different movements and stuff. Not all of them, but just a few samples or a species that you have looked at. Thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, we can do that. If the committee can tell us what species they are particularly interested in, I would be more than happy to add that to the presentation next time.

DR. DUVAL: I am thinking Dewey is asking for something that's almost like a heat map that we see with the gridded distribution of catches for some of the stock assessment data workshops, and so that might be interesting.

MR. CONKLIN: Thanks. I appreciate the presentation. I was wanting to know -- You mentioned about your funding. What proportion is state funded, and what proportion do you get from the feds and grants and universities and anything like that? Then I also was wondering if you would elaborate on the video survey and give some of the council members and the public who haven't been sitting in the SEDARs how much we're relying on the video index right now and what we're looking for and the future of that, of what's not actually going in the traps, but what we're seeing outside and how you're able to measure them and count them and validate it.

DR. REICHERT: The first part of the question, I can tell you exactly. Our funding is 100 percent federal. However, I want to mention that the agency -- We rely, as you know, we rely heavily on the Palmetto and the Lady Lisa, and I want to mention that -- I think Mel mentioned it in one of the previous council meetings, but the agency has invested close to a million-and-a-half, by now, in renovating the Palmetto, and so, although our funding is 100 percent federal, the agency has made a significant investment in the vessel, with new props and new generators and new shafts. I think, the shape the vessel is in currently, I think we can sample safely and securely for the next years, and so there is a state contribution.

The second part of your question was the video survey, and that's more a question for the folks at the Science Center, and, if you look at several of the stock assessments, in some instances, as I said earlier in my presentation, we have combined, or the assessment team has combined, the video and the chevron trap index, because the videos are on the trap. They're not independent.

In some instances, the decision was made that the video information doesn't add anything to the trap catches, and Nate Bacheler, Dr. Bacheler, and others at the Science Center have published several papers, some in collaboration with us, that is actually looking at the differences between the trap catches and the video catches and how the way you count fish in the videos affect the way you set up an index, and so there's a lot of research going on, and, as you will see tomorrow, one of the big things that we need, that may help in the future, is actually being able to measure fish from the videos. We currently, in the Southeast, don't have that ability, and so that would really help, and so, currently, we are borrowing the length composition and the age composition from the trap catches and apply that to the overall CVID, the chevron video index.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thanks, Marcel, and, kind of following up on Dewey's point a little bit, if we could see abundance, and especially see abundance as it changes over time, and you may have to stratify it with your sampling effort or something, but that might be some really interesting things to see.

MR. BELL: I was just following up on what Marcel said. It's not only the Palmetto which we have -- Of course, we're just very fortunate, the way we're set up, to have the Palmetto and the Lady Lisa and even the Silver Crescent, to some degree, and so we have a fleet of research vessels that are able to be used in this capacity, but, SEAMAP and MARMAP, the people are all federally funded, and, if the people go away, then there's no way to do the work, but we are just very fortunate to have those vessels to do this work with, and it's not just the -- In terms of what we support out of DNR, it's not just the Palmetto, necessarily.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Marcel, for that presentation. As always, this is extremely informative, and so we really appreciate the time that you take, you and your staff take, to put this together. I had just two quick things. One, I was wondering -- I know, because you were tweaking the slides and adding video and stuff like that prior to giving the presentation, but is it possible to get an updated version of the presentation? It's slightly different than what we got in our briefing book.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I apologize. I thought I had sent that updated presentation, but I will make sure that Myra gets that so that you get the updated presentation. Yes, absolutely.

DR. DUVAL: Then the only other thing I was going to put out there, and then we'll move on, was do you all have any discussions, at the staff level, about trying to account for climate change and impacting the universe of your survey? I know, when you guys do the delta-GLMs, you're able to take into account latitude and water temperature, which are all components of how managed species are changing, but I just was curious if you had had any specific conversations about that.

DR. REICHERT: We haven't had specific conversations, although students of ours have looked at changes in distributional patterns. Our data are available. The reef fish data are available with a delay, so that we can make sure that we have the QA/QC correct and that we can use the data for stock assessments, and they are available on the SEAMAP website, www.seamap.org, and, recently, there has been some studies that looked at changes in temperature and other conditions relative to changes in distributional patterns and relative abundance of a variety of species, and I think the most recent paper was looking at the trawl survey rather than the reef fish survey, but we are looking at that.

The problem with the species that you see a signal -- As I mentioned earlier, we have made some changes in our sampling distribution over time, and so it is a little complicated to separate that from potential changes in the distribution that you're seeing, but it is something that we are looking at, mostly by involving graduate students in those analyses.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks. To that point, Bonnie?

DR. PONWITH: Yes, Madam Chair. I want to, speaking of climate, thank the council again for the comments that they pulled together for the Climate Regional Action Plan. We're going through those, and we have incorporated those from the council and other input that we had, and we're dotting the I's right now and getting ready to run that final report through the clearance process.

At the same time, one of the leading actions that was in that plan was to do essentially a climate vulnerability analysis, and so we're teeing-up that work right now, and we've been kind of working on how we will adapt the methodology to each of our regions and putting together a work plan for getting that work done, and so I am sure that we will be incorporating expertise from people

involved in long-term monitoring, like our colleagues from MARMAP and other state collaborators and academic collaborators, in that.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Bonnie. That's great news. Two thumbs-up, and we appreciate your efforts on that front very much. Okay. I would like to move on, but step back. One of the things that we actually, unfortunately, ran over was the Fishery Performance Report for Red Grouper. This was actually at the end of the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Report.

In the previous committee, under Dolphin Wahoo, John Hadley kind of teed this up for us, the purpose of these fishery performance reports. We went through the one for dolphin, and I just wanted to ask Myra to walk through the one for red grouper, and everybody can have that on their brains as they think about tomorrow's work, when we actually get an update on the red grouper standard assessment, SEDAR 53, that came out.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Michelle. Yes, part of the report, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Report, there was an appendix to the end, and mind you, as Michelle mentioned earlier, we, as staff, kind of pulled together these fishery performance reports very quickly, and so, when you look at that report, that's part of the AP report, and it references some information that was presented to the AP that is actually not part of the appendix right now, and so we're still trying to figure out how we're going to change these reports to make them more effective and to get the format right, and so we're still working on that, but I wanted to at least show you some of the things that the Snapper Grouper AP talked about in relation to red grouper.

I am pulling up the same presentation that John Hadley had for dolphin, and I know there's a couple of slides here that pertain to red grouper, and so he already explained the approach that we used with the APs, the kinds of questions that we used to elicit information, and so that's how the report of red grouper was compiled. Mainly the AP talked about that the catch levels over the past five years for the commercial sector hasn't really changed.

We talked about, as John mentioned, how the demand has changed for the charter and headboat trips, and we talked about management measures, the same sort of questions that he talked about that were used for dolphin. In addition to that, we talked about whether there had been any environmental or ecological things that fishermen were noticing that could potentially affect abundance or distribution of the species. We asked them about suggestions for research priorities, and so here is sort of, in a nutshell, what the report includes.

The size and availability of red grouper throughout its area of distribution have generally stayed consistent. They have been rare in the recreational catch in the past two years, and you can see that very clearly in the landings trends. As Kenny mentioned earlier, the regional fishery is primarily centered off of North Carolina, and, again, we'll be talking about some of these landings trends in the recreational fishery when we get into the vision blueprint amendment here in a little bit.

They all agreed that red grouper have generally been less available since about 2008, and remember that that was around the time that the shallow-water grouper closure went into effect, and so that's kind of interesting. They talked about red grouper being primarily a bycatch species on commercial trips, and the location of where the small fish are, generally in the estuaries and in the shallow waters, and it was interesting that we also talked about the value of this fish for

restaurants, and it was determined that, in fact, red grouper are not a sought-after species when it comes to seafood.

There was a lot of talk about how red grouper have increased in popularity among spear fishermen in Florida, and we talked about recommending more research on juveniles, and, in general, early life history and also whether lionfish were perhaps having an impact on the population, and, in fact, this was discussed, I believe, at the SSC meeting, and Eric Johnson, I believe, indicated that there had been studies showing that lionfish, in fact, don't seem to be impacting red grouper. Anyway, I just wanted to make sure that you guys had a chance to look through that, and, as John said earlier, if you have any suggestions for how we can improve these reports, we like to hear them. Thanks.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Myra. Are there any questions or suggestions at this point for Myra on the fishery performance reports?

MR. GRINER: Where did the information come from or how did you come about the information on the desirability of the red grouper at the restaurant level?

MS. BROUWER: There were two members of our advisory panel, Kerry Marhefka and Dave Snyder, who are both very involved in seafood marketing and the restaurant business, and they both agreed that, in their experience, at least in the areas where they are familiar with, they're not very desirable.

DR. DUVAL: Tim, do you have a different experience, I think, with the restaurants that you interact with?

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I think it must be a localized thing, or the type of restaurant that maybe they were servicing, but we see a great desirability for that fish at restaurant levels.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks for that. If there are no other comments or questions on the fishery performance report, again, this is something that we're going to continue to refine. I think it is going to be an extremely useful tool for the council, for the advisory panels, for the SSC, and for our constituents. As we build this time series, it's going to become a very important qualitative tool.

With that, we will move on to our next agenda item, which is Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26, and so this is Attachments 4a and 4b in your briefing book, and this deals with recreational management measures and items that came out of the vision blueprint process.

MS. BROUWER: Okay. First of all, apologies for the length of this decision document. I realize that it is ideally -- It is not ideal, as far as how long it is, and you had to get through sixty-some-odd pages of it. I will mention, and this will come back up, I believe, in discussions later on this week, as far as decision documents, what their purpose is and how we can improve them, and so I will just put that out there so you can be thinking about it, because I know it will come up later this week. We try, of course, to make these documents useful, and, if they're not being useful anymore, or if they're becoming unwieldy, then we need to change things.

There is, as usual, a little bit of background in this decision document. One thing that is missing from the decision document that will be included in the amendment, either in the summary or in Chapter 1, is a lot more about the rationale for why you're taking action, and this goes for both the recreational amendment as well as the commercial amendment, and so that is one thing that we've heard, that you feel that it's important that fishermen understand why the council is taking certain actions, because it may be different, or the perception from the public may be different, and so that needs to be put in the front and be made very clear.

We will proceed the same way that we always do with these amendments. I will remind you that, where we are in the development process, is this is an amendment that is scheduled to be approved for public hearings at this meeting, and so we're going to be requesting guidance on each action, as far as do we have the appropriate range of alternatives. For a lot of these, you will see we still have blanks that need to be filled in.

As usual, if there is an action that you don't really want to be there, then we will request guidance to put it in the appendix and so on, and so, the first thing we do, here is our purpose and need. This is the same that you saw in March, with a very small edit, and so modification of the purpose and need is necessary. You can do that now, or sometimes, when you've had the chance to look through all the actions, and depending on whether all of them stay, there may not be any need to modify the purpose and need, but you may want to come back to it at the end.

DR. DUVAL: One thing that I was thinking about when I went through this, and I don't know if this is appropriate for the purpose part of the purpose and need, but if there is a need or a desire to include something about the vision blueprint in the purpose of the document. I realize that you're going to be putting this in the summary, and, again, I realize part of the purpose and need is -- It's very NEPA-related, and so I'm not sure as to the appropriateness of incorporating a sentence that would reference the vision blueprint, but I just wanted to throw it out there. If there is no other comments or questions, we can just move right on.

MS. BROUWER: The first action is on PDF page 4 of your attachment. Here, as usual, we have modifications that, as these amendments get developed, folks have different suggestions for how to reword things, and so we tried to capture that and show it in this highlighted yellow, so that you can see the changes that we are proposing.

There is going to be a lot of editorial things. My suggestion would be that perhaps, unless you want to entertain motions to accept, under each action, all these edits, one thing that we talked about internally, as staff, is perhaps, down the line, making it so that, if it's just a very small editorial change, that we could be given latitude to make that. For example, maybe spell out an acronym or spell out the word "pounds" or put a comma here and there. Sometimes we kind of get a little bogged down in approving all of these very little edits, and you may want to not spend too much time doing that.

Anyway, here is Action 1, and this one deals with modifying the recreational grouper and the ten-snapper aggregate bag limits, and we included both of those in the title of the action, which that was not how it was in March, because part of what needs to happen is some of the species that are currently in the ten-snapper aggregate, because they are deepwater species, they would have to be moved out of that aggregate and added to the proposed deepwater species aggregate, and so there is a lot of things that are being modified all at once in the same action here.

Here is your Alternative 1. It shows you the aggregate snapper bag limit, which is ten per person per day year-round, and then with the various exceptions and such, for vermilion and red snapper. The grouper bag limit is three per day, and then you've got your various exceptions and specific limits for gag, black grouper, the season for snowy and blueline, and the maximum of one golden tilefish per person per day year-round.

Your Alternative 2 would modify the composition, the species composition, of the grouper bag limit and the ten-snapper aggregate and establish a two-fish per person per day aggregate for deepwater species, and so these are species that are currently included in the deepwater complex, which contain yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, and blackfin snapper, and, in addition to that, we would put golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and blueline in that same aggregate.

Then your sub-alternatives allow you to establish a May 1 through August 31 recreational season for that aggregate, and the reason there is only one alternative for a season is because the idea was to try to line things up with the existing season that we have in place for snowy and for blueline. Certainly, if you want to entertain different lengths of seasons, then you would give us guidance to add sub-alternatives to analyze that.

Then your Sub-Alternative 2b gives you the option of specifying that only one fish within the aggregate can belong to any one species. Alternative 3 and Alternative 4 are set up the same way. Alternative 3 looks at a three-fish per person per day aggregate, with the same sub-alternatives, and Alternative 4 looks at a four per person per day deepwater species aggregate, with the same sub-alternatives for a season, and a one-fish per person per day limit for any one species.

It's confusing, and so here is a handy little table that kind of shows you where we are and what the various alternatives would do, including the sub-alternatives for a fishing season and maximum of any one species.

The way I structured this decision document for this meeting was, first, going through the actions and alternatives to kind of refresh your mind of where we are. Then we have the preliminary effects analysis that I will go through in as much detail as you would like, and then I have included the action and the alternatives again at the end of that analysis, so that you will have the chance to review the analysis before we get into the business of accepting edits, choosing preferreds, or deleting or whatnot.

If that's okay with you, that's how I would like to proceed. I also should tell you that the analyses that are currently included in the decision document and the draft amendment do not include the headboat data. I do have some tables for some of these actions with headboat data, and the reason they were not included is because the information came in too late. We didn't make the briefing book deadline, but I do have that sort of in my back pocket here that I can pull up if you would like to see it as we go through this. As expected, there's not a whole lot of information on --

DR. DUVAL: Myra, hang on a minute. Ben.

MR. HARTIG: Sorry to interrupt you, Myra, but I had a question on the Alternative 1, no action. I mean, the aggregate snapper bag limit states ten snapper per day year-round, and you have gray in there, and I thought gray snapper was under a five-fish bag limit. Am I wrong about that?

MS. BROUWER: I don't believe so, but I'm not 100 percent, and I will check on that, but I don't know if that may be a Florida state limit. I'm not sure. We will check on that. We did what we could with the limited amount of information that we have for recreational landings to tease apart the possible effects of these rearrangements for this action, and so this first table shows you the number of intercepted charter and private recreational trips, and so that's the directed harvest and the observed harvest of deepwater species, including sand tilefish, and the years that we're using to analyze information for this amendment are 2014 through 2016.

These data do include Monroe County, and so you can see the breakdown. I was just told that gray snapper is included in the aggregate. As I was saying, this table shows you for each year, 2014 through 2016, the number of deepwater species that were landed in these charter and private recreational trips, and so you can see that the numbers are relatively low, and this table includes sand tilefish, which is not a deepwater species, and this is something that the Snapper Grouper AP did point out, and they have suggested that you consider removing it from the deepwater complex.

Here is the same table excluding sand tilefish, and it's the same thing for each of the years, and so you can see that sand tilefish is actually a very frequently-encountered species. If we go down to the next table, this is the unexpanded catch per angler on charter trips, and so this includes the directed harvest, the observed harvest, and the released, the discarded, fish. Again, it's the same years, and you can see there is a lot of encounters there of sand tilefish. We have included snowy and golden tilefish, and then we have the same information here. This excludes the B2, and so you can see, again, that sand tilefish is pretty predominant there in what folks are catching.

Here is the private recreational trips, again broken down by species, and you do see that blueline tilefish does -- People are catching up to four blueline tilefish, or they did between 2014 and 2016, and so that is one species that is being encountered and people are catching their bag limit of blueline tilefish, but, for everything else, the majority, people are only catching and keeping one species that is included in the deepwater group.

These are the expanded numbers, and so what I just showed you were unexpanded, and this is, of course, just based on MRIP data. As I said, it does not include headboat, and here is the -- These are the expanded numbers landed in the South Atlantic, including Monroe County, and this information here shows you what is caught during January through April and then September through December and May through June, basically so that you can see the distribution, temporally, to get an idea of how the distribution of the landings is by month, or by time-wise.

Of course, back in 2014, we didn't have a fixed season for some of these species. Blueline tilefish and snowy grouper now do, and so then you're going to see that May through August, back in 2014, you did see some landings of blueline, and that changes in 2015. Landings were pretty high in 2016, and we heard from Mike Larkin earlier today.

Also, I should mention that, in these tables, the cells that are highlighted in red show a low number of intercepted trips, and so, by low, we're talking less than twenty, and so these are likely not very

reliable estimates to determine the effects of these proposed management alternatives, but this is the information that we have to work with.

This table here differs from the previous one, because this one imposes a one-fish bag limit. The previous one was showing you the status quo, and, here, you can see that, under a one-fish bag limit, what the catches could be. Blueline tilefish would be a species that would be impacted by a one-fish, because people are catching their bag limit for blueline tilefish. Are there any questions so far?

MR. BROWN: I am not sure exactly when to bring this up, but I spoke about it at the last meeting, and, when we're talking about all these different bag limits and the aggregate for the unassessed species and everything, I would like the council to think about possibly looking at a twenty-fish aggregate per person for all the species in the snapper grouper complex and leaving the bag limits in place like they are and, rather than separating out that twenty-fish aggregate for the unassessed species, have twenty-fish for all the species in the aggregate per person.

DR. DUVAL: I understand what you're saying. Just twenty fish and keep the bag limits that we have in place right now, but the maximum number of fish that any one angler could retain would be twenty fish. I understand that.

MR. HAYMANS: I am going to muddy the water for just a moment, and I'm sorry, but I have trouble separating this amendment from 43 in this action, and I just want to know sort of where we're marching. If we do anything other than status quo on the deepwater species, it's probably going to be a May through August opening in deep water, right? That's the possibility? Then that precludes closing deep water, as 6, 7, and 8 may have in 43. Does that make sense?

In other words, the options for area closures in 43 include areas outside of 120, 150, and so into those deep waters, and some of the alternatives are, for instance, in 6a, that we close May through August, and so, if we're closing deep waters, say 150, May through August, that's in opposition to if we choose something in Alternative 2 for the deepwater species, and I am just wondering, is there a way that we should be considering those actions together as we deliberate this?

DR. DUVAL: I don't think it's muddying the waters at all. I think it's good points, in terms of keeping the big picture in perspective. I hesitate right now to be going back and forth between this amendment document and the 43 amendment document, because I could see us imploding under our own smoking brains, but I am glad that you bring it up, in terms of keeping it in mind, in terms of actions that we take here.

MR. HAYMANS: I imploded last week. I tried to take everything in the two amendments and put them into one Excel table, so that I could look at it visually, and I couldn't do it, and so I am interested in how we can do it as a collective.

DR. DUVAL: I think I would like to let Myra finish walking through this action, and she's also got some suggestions from the IPT, in terms of structuring, and I think that's when we could also talk about Mark's suggestion, in terms of alternative to potentially add, and so let's let Myra finish walking through this, and then we'll have some discussion.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Michelle. This decision document does include preliminary economic effects and social effects and administrative effects, but I'm not going to go through any of that. It's there for you to refer to. I will say, in terms of the headboat data, without bringing up the tables for you to look at, most headboat trips, as expected, are not landing more than one deepwater species, and so that's very similar to what's going on elsewhere in the recreational sector for the deepwater species.

Then, as we saw up here, for golden tilefish, and I'm just going to call your attention here. This is the column showing May through August for charter and May through August for recreational, and so it's looking like a season for golden tilefish, at least for the charter sector, there may be some effects there, but, again, that's one of those cells that's tinged in that red color, which shows that there's a lot of uncertainty and very little information there.

Continuing on past all of the preliminary effects here, here is the action and your alternatives, the way they are structured right now, and, following that, I have just a list of bullets with various input from the IPT. They wanted to remind you that the current golden tilefish assessment indicates that the stock is undergoing overfishing, and we're going to get to talk about golden tilefish a lot more tomorrow, and the council will need to figure out how to tackle that one.

Snowy grouper is under a rebuilding plan, and some of the alternatives under this action would increase the retention limit substantially, especially -- We have three per person and four per person. Currently, snowy grouper is at one per vessel, and it's something to think about. Another thing that you talked about was looking at alternatives for just single-hook rig requirements, and this, again, as Doug pointed out, there is some overlap with some of the things that are being considered in Amendment 43.

Here, we basically just wanted to remind you that that had been brought up in discussion. Do you want us to add alternatives to this amendment to include the option for single-hook requirements? Is that something that you're interested in looking at as well?

Here is a suggestion to possibly structure things differently. It says consider this action is going to establish a new deepwater aggregate and modify the bag limit for those species and also possibly put in a season, and so their suggestion would be to separate the action into three actions. Action 1 would modify the aggregate bag limits. Action 2 would modify the bag limits within, and then Action 3 would modify the seasons, and so, basically, there are other ways to structure this, and we just sort of went with what you see here, but it's up to you.

Then, below that, I have comments from the Snapper Grouper AP, so you don't have to be referring back to the report. They were concerned that alternatives for one fish of any one species could increase discards. The obvious is the recreational data are very minimal, and there is concern about the level of uncertainty. They thought that the season for deepwater species is a good idea, and they did recommend -- They approved a motion to recommend that the council consider a sub-alternative from May 1 through June 30 as the season for deepwater species.

There is concern that ACLs that are being exceeded are going to continue to be exceeded, and we saw, from Mike Larkin's presentation earlier, that there are some issues there, with some significant overages of the recreational ACLs for some species, and then just other items to keep

in consideration as you discuss some of these actions. They did, again, as I said, recommend excluding sand tilefish from the deepwater species aggregate.

DR. DUVAL: One thing, when I was looking through this, that I thought was probably a good approach was the IPT's suggestion to kind of break this out a little bit differently and look at establishing just a deepwater season first, and so I could foresee an Action 1-1 is establish a deepwater season. Then a 1-2 of establish a deepwater aggregate, so that you would identify the species that would go within that aggregate, and then your third, your Action 1-3, might be to look at that bag limit and options in there for what that aggregate limit might be.

I think you could probably also include in there whether or not you wanted to just maintain the existing deepwater individual limits that exist or whether you would want to do no more than one per person or what have you, and so that was just one thing that I wanted to throw out there for committee discussion, because I thought it was a fairly important point that the IPT made, and so apologies for jumping in. Doug, you had your hand raised.

MR. HAYMANS: I agree.

DR. DUVAL: Great.

MS. BECKWITH: I am going to sort of jump around, but I like that idea about the restructuring of it. Specifically, these are a couple of my thoughts, just in general. I don't like the idea of having a maximum of one of each species, because I do agree with the AP that I think that it would increase discards.

I know that we've got some exceptions that we'll have to consider, in snowy grouper and potentially golden tilefish, but, in general, I think one of the reasons that we're moving down this route is to condense effort for these deepwater species that have barotrauma issues, and, if we were to choose a bag limit that was low enough, say two per person, during that May through August season, I guess my intent would be that it would be the least number of exceptions to that rule, with snowy being one, probably, just so that it's two per person.

You guys go in and you catch your two fish, whatever it is. If it happens to be two of anything except snowy, because we know where that would go, then you can sort of pick up and move and end that trip, but I think, realistically, if you have people continue to fish in order to find their second per-person fish for a different species, we're not going to be achieving the goal of reducing discards. Those are my thoughts on that.

In terms of golden tilefish, I guess my hope would be, if we were reducing the season, we could go with two per person per day and include that in that bag limit and have the only exception be snowy grouper, and so those are my personal thoughts on that.

An additional idea for how to reorganize this might be consideration of an additional accountability measure, where, if, for some reason, some species within the aggregate was continuously overreaching their ACL, that we might be able to do something similar to what we've discussed, where that individual species automatically backs up to one per vessel or some sort of vessel limit or something along those lines, and so that might be something we can consider in the long run.

I'm okay with the idea of the single hooks, and, within the accountability measure, if we were to consider that for the deepwater, I would be interested in looking at some PSE value point, where we maybe don't kick in an accountability measure, as we've sent that letter and discussed. At what point is the PSE so high on some of these intercepts that it doesn't make sense to step in an accountability measure for that species? I will stop there for the moment.

One more thing. To Mark's point about the twenty-fish aggregate, I am sort of viewing this as three things. It's a deepwater, a shallow-water grouper, and then a twenty-fish aggregate, and so I think you and I are probably close on what we're thinking. Are you also considering including vermilion and trigger and black sea bass in your twenty fish?

MR. BROWN: That's correct. Everything would still stay the same as what it is, but it's just that we would eliminate the aggregate bag limit as it is right now and have an aggregate bag limit for all the species in the snapper grouper complex, but they would still retain the bag limit that they have right now.

MS. BECKWITH: Right, I think I would still like to see the deepwater as its own and maybe a shallow-water grouper as its own and then sort of everything else fall into that twenty-fish aggregate. I think that would still be simple, but we can discuss that.

DR. DUVAL: I think I'm going to ask Myra about maybe -- She might have to take this back to the IPT, but sort of the best way to incorporate Mark's suggestion as an alternative, and so it sounds to me like, really, the way it might be structured is Mark is asking for a twenty-fish maximum recreational bag limit, and all of the existing individual bag limits that we have in place right now would simply stay the same, but you would just impose a twenty-fish maximum across all species, a twenty-fish maximum retention limit.

MR. BROWN: That's correct, and just creating another alternative.

DR. DUVAL: I think that's probably something that might have to go back to the IPT to reflect upon.

MS. BROUWER: Right, and, just to remind you though, this is going to -- If you approve this for public hearings, you will not have had the time to see what the IPT suggested before we go out to public hearings, and so I'm just making sure that you are aware of that as you give us direction to change the existing alternatives or add alternatives or break things up into different actions and such.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So this is definitely going out to public hearings this fall? Why can't -- I am just confused.

DR. DUVAL: The current schedule is for the committee to approve for public hearings at August, but that doesn't mean that we have to. Our feet are not being held to the fire, but I am just -- Myra is just reminding you of the schedule that we had established.

I think Myra has captured most of this, and I've been taking notes as well, and so I think, just to summarize some of this, we like the IPT's suggestion for how to restructure this particular action. There are some concerns about limiting folks to one fish of any one of the species that might be

included in this, due to concerns about discards, and instead the suggestion would be to simply just look at a lower aggregate bag limit with the least number of exceptions, which might allow for modifications to where golden tilefish is right now, if it's put within a season, but bumping up that one per person. Consideration of an accountability measure, where, if one species in the aggregate was consistently exceeding its ACL, consider imposing a vessel limit, and was that what I heard you say, Anna? I just want to make sure that we're capturing this correctly.

MS. BECKWITH: Right, because we would have a -- If we went with something like a two per person, then it would make sense to either have that one that's exceeding its ACL drop to one per person or have a vessel limit.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Also, there were some thoughts on the single-hook rig, but that you would like to see some additional information, and I think we've captured Mark's suggestion for an additional alternative or action that he would like to see.

MS. BURGESS: On FWC's behalf, I would like to recommend also consideration of something that could address Doug's concern about lining up the deepwater season with any other seasons we may create elsewhere and also concern that maybe the alternatives for seasons that are in here right now are not enough. We would like to recommend a September through December season be added to the document or any other seasons that other council members would be interested in besides the May through August season. I heard Chris mention it too, but the rationale also being that the current season overlaps the spawning season for snowy grouper and others.

DR. DUVAL: It was September through December, right?

MS. BURGESS: Yes.

DR. DUVAL: I am just asking folks to take a good look at the screen, just to make sure that we have captured the input that I think we have received. I think the one thing that we just might want to add in there, Myra, is what Doug expressed at the beginning and just how -- You have got it. Never mind.

While folks are looking at that, I do just want to make a few points. One of the things that the IPT has noted and that Myra has highlighted is the information is really pretty sparse, and, in going back and reviewing things, the aggregate grouper bag limit was originally established as a five-fish aggregate grouper limit, and that was done back in 1992, in Amendment 4. The aggregate twenty-fish limit was actually established in 1998, and I think it was Amendment 8 or Amendment 9, and so some of these things have been in place for twenty years or more, and, if we have this little information right now, imagine the information that was available back then. I know it's really painful to go through this, but I do think it's a really good exercise, so that we can see exactly how much information we do have or we don't have and the uncertainty associated with it.

MR. BROWN: The twenty-fish aggregate has been confusing for that long, too. Not so much for me. I understood it, but, I mean, I hear from a lot of different anglers, and even for-hire fishermen. They just never quite understood exactly how it worked, and so that was the reason and rationale for trying to bring some simplicity to it.

DR. DUVAL: I understand that. If you don't actually have that list of species for which the twenty-fish aggregate applies in front of you, it can be really confusing, as an angler, to try to go chase that stuff down.

MS. BROUWER: Just a clarification. There is one species that is currently not included in the twenty-fish aggregate, and that is tomtate. Would your intention be to include that one, since it is in the management unit, or not?

DR. DUVAL: I am really not seeing any takers around the table right now. I think, based on some of the other information that we've received, when --

MR. BROWN: They are eaten by red snapper.

DR. DUVAL: We have some tomtate reserves out there?

MR. PHILLIPS: I am afraid, if you put tomtate in the twenty bag, that you may have some high-grading.

MR. DEVICTOR: That last bullet talks about different options for seasons, and there is the AP recommendation of May through June. Do you want the IPT to look at that one?

DR. DUVAL: That is a one-wave season, and I think the AP's thoughts on that were that it would help constrain harvest to the catches, or help constrain catches to the ACLs, and is that right, Kenny? I see Kenny nodding his head in the background. What's the pleasure of the committee? Would you like to include just a May and June season for analysis? I am hearing it's too short, that two months is too short. All right.

So, by the conversation around the table, I am getting the sense that folks are not -- We're not in any position, I think, to select any preferred alternatives right now, it seems to me, and I'm almost thinking that this is going to have to come back to us in September if we keep moving down this road.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I've been a little confused as we've been going through the document. In some of the existing actions, we had some other suggestions, and I didn't know if you wanted us to talk about that now or -- Because it seems like people are just throwing out brand-new ideas, and I didn't know how you wanted to handle that.

DR. DUVAL: I think Mark's suggestion -- This is just about the deepwater, and I think Mark's suggestion is one that kind of spans all of those actions, and so I just wanted to make sure that we kind of incorporated that right now, and so, if nobody has any other suggestions on this action, then I would like to move forward to the next action, and we will take folks' suggestions, and so is there anything else on this action? Okay. So let's move forward to the next action, please.

MS. BROUWER: Action 2 is on PDF page 17. It would be to modify the recreational grouper aggregate bag limit and establish a recreational aggregate bag limit for shallow-water grouper species. Again, your no action is the same. You have got your grouper bag limit.

Your Alternative 2 would modify the species composition of the three-fish aggregate grouper bag limit and establish one just for the shallow-water groupers, and so that would include species that are currently in the shallow-water grouper complex, which are red hind, rock hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, and it would also include scamp, gag, black grouper, and red grouper.

Then you have your sub-alternatives that are for a one-fish per person per day, two-fish per person per day, with no more than one of any one species, or three-fish per person per day, with no more than one fish of any one species. Again, we tried to put this in a table, to make it a little bit easier to visualize, and, again, the preliminary effects analysis, or just what we could gather to show you here, is what we will go through first.

The first table looks, again, at the number of intercepted trips that landed shallow-water species from 2014 through 2016 in South Atlantic waters on charter and private recreational vessels, including Monroe County, and so you can see that the majority are landing just one species in the shallow-water grouper complex. The next one includes your discards, and it's broken down by species. Again, you can see that most anglers are catching one species of that complex. Of course, gag is the most frequently-encountered species on charter trips, followed by red grouper.

Here are unexpanded catch per angler on charter trips that landed shallow-water species from 2014 through 2015. Again, we see higher numbers here for gag than any of the other ones. Here is the private recreational trips, including harvest and B2s for shallow-water species, and it's the same set of years, and you see some changes here for gag grouper. These are the ones that were just landed. The previous one was everything that was caught, and so we can -- Looking at these two tables, you can see that a lot of gag are being released, and that's no news there.

Then we have here the expanded catch, like we saw previously, and this is in numbers of fish, and this is for charter and private recreational trips. Again, the cells that are highlighted indicate a low number of intercepts, and so here is for a bag limit of one for each of these species for each of the years. Overall, you can see that the information there is, again, pretty spotty. We have a lot of red on this table. Gag and red grouper are pretty much the only two species that we have some decent intercepts for that we can say something about.

Again, some preliminary economic and social analysis, and we've already gone through the action here and the alternatives, and the IPT -- Their input, again, was to keep in mind golden tilefish, and I'm not sure why that's there, because that doesn't really pertain to this action, but the red grouper assessment is going to be talked about tomorrow. It's overfished and undergoing overfishing, and it may require a rebuilding plan, and so keep that in mind when you're entertaining actions that would affect that species. As we heard yesterday, the black grouper stock assessment is currently on hold, and so, again, another shallow-water grouper that -- Just keep that in mind.

The Snapper Grouper AP wanted information on whether limits are being met, and that's been provided in the tables that I have just showed you, and so, overall, I guess we talked with the AP about how most anglers are not meeting the aggregate bag limit. There were some comments that, in the Florida Keys however, fishermen are seeing plenty of black grouper and that was not a problem. Then the AP expressed some concern about red grouper and that sort of becoming a choke species when it came to managing the snapper grouper complex, and so they just wanted you to keep those things in mind.

DR. DUVAL: I think one of the other things that came out in the red grouper fishery performance report was that there was more targeting of red grouper, I think in the Keys, because of hogfish. Okay. So, are there suggestions or thoughts?

MS. BECKWITH: Sure. A couple of things. One is I read through the history of this shallow-water aggregate in Amendment 4, and there wasn't really any discussion about why this particular subset of fish were chosen. We, of course, don't encounter some of these locally, and so I guess my assumption is that all of these species are caught together or in the vicinity of one another or is there some -- That's, I guess, my first question, in general, for somebody that catches all of these species, and then I've got a follow-up.

MS. BROUWER: I think you're right, Anna. It's a habitat thing. They're species that co-occur, and so I remember there was some rationale, perhaps in Amendment 16, that I had pulled out in a previous version of this visioning amendment, and it pertained to gag, and it talked about the life history and all of that stuff, and so the rationale is there. It's kind of buried, but that's my recollection, and I can certainly dig that up for you, if you're interested.

MS. BECKWITH: I guess my reasoning for asking that question was, if there were any of the species in this complex that didn't necessarily need to be in this complex, if we could pull them out and add them to the twenty-fish aggregate that we might discuss later, but I was thinking about that a little bit differently than Mark.

In general, my comments would be similar to the deepwater, that the maximum of one of each species is not something that I am interested in as an overall component. If we need to put in some specifications for particular species, we can kind of cross that bridge. I would also, I guess in a perfect world, be interested in, again, keeping it simple and choosing like a two per person that would allow all of these species to be two per person, but that would depend significantly on Florida's feelings towards black grouper, and, if there was a similar mindset to additional accountability measures on PSEs, but I think our PSEs are not as problematic on the shallow-water species, and so that's it for now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would prefer that the one for black stay. That's just how I feel.

DR. DUVAL: One of the things I was wondering when I read through this is if there is an additional sub-alternative, Myra, under Alternative 2, where you could modify the composition of the shallow-water grouper, or the current species composition, and establish a shallow-water aggregate bag limit based on what might be done with the deepwater bag limit, where we're pulling species out, but then simply retain the existing remaining bag limits that we have for those other species, because I think that would get to what Jessica is saying about one gag or black per person per day, and so that would be sort of like a pseudo status quo. The only thing that would change would be the actual species composition within that aggregate bag limit itself. Is there any other input on this particular one?

MR. GRINER: Can you say that again? I kind of got lost there for a minute.

DR. DUVAL: Yes, and so, if we modify the -- If we create a deepwater aggregate limit, we'll be taking some of those species that are currently in the aggregate grouper limit and moving them

into a deepwater aggregate, and so what this action does is it modifies the shallow -- It modifies the grouper aggregate and creates a shallow-water grouper aggregate of whatever species are left, that we haven't pulled out to put into a deepwater aggregate.

What I am saying is that, under Alternative 2, maybe add another sub-alternative that would simply modify the species composition. It wouldn't change any of the other remaining individual limits, like what we have right now of one gag or black per person per day, because that's what Jessica had indicated, that she would like to at least have an option to maintain that.

MR. GRINER: So then it would be one gag or one black and three per day of what the species that were left are, basically?

DR. DUVAL: Yes. Does that make sense? I am not seeing anyone else jumping up and down to make any suggestions for this.

MR. GRINER: No, I think that's a good idea. I think we should do that.

DR. DUVAL: I am not sensing any desire of the committee, around the table, to like select a preferred alternative at this time. No. I am seeing lots of heads shaking. Okay. Then, if there is no other input on this action, can we move on to Action 3?

MS. BROUWER: Action 3 is on PDF page 25, and this is an action that would modify the ten-snapper and the twenty-fish recreational aggregate bag limits. Your no action shows what's included in the current ten-snapper aggregate, and then the aggregate for species without a bag limit is currently twenty per person per day year-round, and it includes the porgies, gray triggerfish, bar jack, almaco, banded rudderfish, lesser amberjack, white grunt, margate, sailor's choice, and Atlantic spadefish.

Alternative 2 would modify that species composition and would establish a twenty-fish aggregate, including the species in both the ten-snapper aggregate and the current twenty-fish aggregate, and then, of course, we have to keep in mind that the bag limit for mutton snapper is getting ready to change, so that we would make a little note about that, when it does. Then your sub-alternatives here were the ones that you had indicated that you were interested in looking at, perhaps a twenty-fish aggregate, with no more than ten can be gray triggerfish.

Sub-Alternative 2b has a twenty-fish aggregate, with no more than ten being Atlantic spadefish. Sub-Alternative 2c has a twenty-fish aggregate, with no more than ten fish of any one species, and then Sub-Alternative 2d has an aggregate of twenty fish, with no more than five being of any one species, and so that is what we analyzed for you. Again, we have a table kind of showing how this would work.

The first table is the unexpanded number of species retained on those charter and private recreational trips that were sampled from 2014 through 2016, again including Monroe County, and this table here includes the species in the ten-snapper aggregate and the twenty-fish aggregate. More species are being retained that are within these two groups. You can see there is up to six or seven species together that are being retained.

This is the percent of intercepted charter trips and anglers that were landing different bag limits, and it goes from zero to over twenty-five, of species that are currently included in the twenty-fish aggregate for those three years in the region, and, as I said, these data are unexpanded. You don't start seeing -- Up until you get to about seven or eight, and the numbers just don't change very much after that, but, of course, the bulk of the landings are going to be up to like maybe just three.

DR. DUVAL: I have a question about that table, I guess Table 3.2.

MS. BROUWER: Okay. Let's bring Chip up here.

DR. DUVAL: It just says, on the caption, if the catch is zero, it indicates all species in the twenty-fish aggregate were discarded, and so could it not be that people just didn't catch anything, or is that just the way this table has been set up?

DR. COLLIER: The zero on there indicates that they did not keep any fish in the twenty-fish aggregate, but they reported at least one being a discard on that trip.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. I was just confused by the language where it says that it indicates all species in the twenty-fish aggregate were discarded.

DR. COLLIER: That's correct, and so that's what zero means, is they were all discarded and there were no retained fish in the snapper grouper complex, or that twenty-fish aggregate.

DR. DUVAL: My brain is apparently very tiny today, and so let me just see if I can make myself understand this. If that means that, in 2014, 30 percent of the trips had only B1s?

DR. COLLIER: B2s.

DR. DUVAL: Okay, because this says anglers landing A plus B1, and so would they be -- I mean, B1s are fish that are reported as being dead, but they're not available for measurement.

DR. COLLIER: It's counting the actual catch distribution and is looking at the A plus B1, but you can also have the zeroes in there too, and the zeroes are basically you only had B2 on that trip. If you went out there and you caught all sand tilefish and you released all of those, which is a fairly common example, that they would release all their sand tilefish, that's how many trips -- That's the percent of trips that would release all of those fish.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Maybe we could just work on the language in the description, because I find it confusing that it references just A plus B1, but it's saying that all fish were discarded, and so I guess it seems like there may need to be mention of some B2, but, anyway, I don't want to hang up this conversation. We don't have that much time, but it just was slightly confusing to me, and I apologize if everyone else got it and I didn't, and so my brain is tiny. Do the rest of the trips indicate that it was plus B1 for the rest of the trips? Are the B2s only incorporated in the zero landings per angler?

DR. COLLIER: The B2s are just the zero. They had no retained catch in that aggregate, whichever aggregate it's referring to, either the twenty-fish aggregate or the twenty-fish and ten-snapper aggregate.

DR. DUVAL: Maybe we could just add a little parentheses with “B2” after the word “discarded”. Thank you. I’m sorry for being dense.

DR. COLLIER: No, I’m sorry that -- When you’re dealing with this many species at one time and trying to get some analysis that’s good for you, it does become complicated.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Chip.

MS. BROUWER: Okay. So, moving on, this table is similar to the previous one, looking at the percent of intercepted trips, but this one includes species that are in the ten-fish and the ten-snapper aggregates, and, again, as we just established, those are the ones that were discarded. Now I am confused, because now I don’t see how this one is different from the previous one.

DR. DUVAL: I think the previous one was charter, Table 3.3, and this one is private.

MS. BROUWER: Yes, that’s it. That’s the difference. The percent of intercepted private recreational trips landing species in the current twenty-fish aggregate is presented in this table. Again, the majority is just, up at the top, above three fish. Then here is the same thing, showing species in the twenty-fish and ten-snapper aggregates.

Here is where we start seeing -- This is an interesting table. This is the expanded number of fish from 2014 through 2015. The column that’s labeled “SQ” refers to status quo, and so these are the current regulations with no changes assumed for mutton snapper, and then you have Alternative 2, Sub-Alternatives a through c, that establish a ten-fish bag limit, where 2a only impacts gray triggerfish and 2b only impacts Atlantic spadefish. 2c is ten for any of the species, and then 2d is the one that would establish a five of any one species within the aggregate.

The cells that are highlighted in yellow are where you see changes from the current landings with a potential change in the bag limit, and, again, the red color there indicates very low intercepts, and this is, again, broken down by year. You, overall, for the alternatives that consider the ten-fish -- It looks like, for the charter component, there would possibly be a decrease in landings for gray triggerfish, white grunt, and we see here that possibly for yellowtail snapper and for gray snapper, I believe.

Then, for the private recreational, the changes are more apparent when you consider the five fish within the aggregate, and that’s as expected, and you see more changes there for more species, but, again, the changes would be larger for white grunt and for yellowtail, and so you’re seeing bigger differences for those two species.

Again, the action and your alternatives, as they are currently structured in front of you, with the IPT input, just a reminder that mutton snapper is getting ready to change to a five-fish within the aggregate limit, pending implementation of Amendment 41, and the Snapper Grouper AP was concerned about making the regulations too complicated.

Sub-Alternatives 2c and 2d, where 2c is no more than ten fish of any one species and 2d being within the twenty-fish that no more than can be five, they thought that those two would probably be enough to capture the need to reduce the take for some species. I guess they saw some

redundancy in the way that things are structured right now, and they talked about, as I just mentioned, before they even saw this table, they thought that five yellowtail within the aggregate would be too low for fishermen in the Keys. They asked that you consider adding flexibility in the aggregate bag limits, since the fishery is so diverse and certain species are not available in some areas. In the end, they approved a motion to recommend no action, no changes, for this.

They also approved other motions. They recommended that you consider a bag limit for the porgies, maybe three fish or five fish, and they recommended that the council explore a twenty-fish aggregate of species currently in the ten-snapper aggregate and the twenty-fish aggregate and maintain the current bag limits within the aggregate, which I guess this was a little bit different than what Mark suggested, but that is something that was not included for analysis.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Any thoughts on this?

MR. HAYMANS: I will demonstrate to you that you're not the only one. The way I interpret the tables, that 3.2 and 3.5 and whatnot, is that there aren't a whole lot of people, I mean less than a percentage point for each category, who are either catching the twenty-fish aggregate or the ten-fish aggregate, and so, when I look at the alternatives of what we've got here, I have to scratch my head and say why are we even contemplating this change? Really, we're not affecting that many people, and I really don't see how we get to some of the savings just based on just a few percentage points that you've got, but I put that out there as I don't see the savings.

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and what I would say to that is we -- You haven't had the benefit of having these numbers in front of you when you were talking about this, and we were more focused on, well, conceptually, some of these changes seemed like they would be a good idea, but, now that we have the numbers in front of you, you can see that the way things are.

DR. DUVAL: Don't forget that some of our conversation, if you read all 168 pages of the minutes, was that there was also some concern about triggerfish and that twenty triggerfish was a hell of a lot of triggerfish to be having out there, and so there was a lot of concern, at least about triggerfish, around the table. Is there -- Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: The overarching reason to be reconsidering these aggregates is just to simplify the regulations for the recreational fishermen, and so what we can do to accomplish that is the goal.

DR. DUVAL: One thing, Myra, just based on Table 3.6, that shows everything all laid out, the charter, the recreational, and the status quo, Alternatives 2a through 2c, and then Alternative 2d, and so, because a through c are no more than ten triggers and b is no more than ten spadefish and c is no more than ten of any one species, the assumption that I am making is the effects of any one of those three sub-alternatives is exactly the same. Okay. Is there any desire to modify anything or throw things out?

MS. BURGESS: I thought, the last go-round, or maybe the time before, the committee had discussed including an option that would allow for a ten-fish snapper aggregate and a ten-fish other species aggregate, and I don't see that here in the document.

DR. DUVAL: That is status quo.

MS. BURGESS: Status quo would be ten and twenty, and this would be ten and ten.

DR. DUVAL: Oh. I don't recall reading anything like that, and I just finished reading those at 5:30 this morning, and so --

MS. BURGESS: Possibly it was at a past, before the last meeting, and inadvertently was not discussed last time around, but I believe it had been discussed at some point by this committee.

DR. DUVAL: If you can find that, that would be -- Was it the December meeting or was it -- I am pretty sure it wasn't the March meeting. If we discussed it, it might have been the December meeting, if we did, but, if someone can find that. I mean, I am not trying to inadvertently jettison anything that the committee may have wanted to include.

MS. BECKWITH: Isn't that sort of the same thing as having the sub-alternative that said there's a twenty aggregate and no more than ten can be of any one species? Maybe that's how we felt like we discussed that, and I don't know, but, to me, it's sort of the same. You're asking for the same thing as having a --

MS. BURGESS: It would be more similar to what Mark has brought up, except for it would exclude the deepwater species and the groupers from that overall twenty fish.

DR. DUVAL: I think your overall limit, if you had ten snappers and ten of anything else, would only be -- It would still only be twenty. It's a little bit different than this, I think.

MR. BROWN: I hear what you're saying. I just think that it would be a little bit confusing. I think that just saying the twenty-fish aggregate for all the species that fall under the snapper grouper complex and that they still retain their bag limits. Everything is still the same, but it's just that you can only have twenty. I understand what you're saying, the ten snapper and ten of anything else, but it just sounds a little bit confusing to me.

MR. PHILLIPS: The advisory panel started off wanting to make it simple, and then, the more they got into the weeds, the more complicated it got, all in the -- It was, well, we need to tend this and we need to tend that, and so what you're talking about is -- If you've got some things that you need to set bag limits on, set them and then just figure out what the number is and something that we can do not to get into the same weeds that we're trying to get away from, and so that's just a thought.

DR. DUVAL: I guess maybe my suggestion is to go back and see if we missed that somehow. We can go back and comb the minutes and see if we missed that, but what Myra has on the screen is to consider an alternative for a twenty-fish aggregate, where only ten could be species in the current ten-snapper aggregate. I am having to think about that a little bit, as to how that is different than no more than ten of any one species, that you couldn't have more than ten of any one species, because this is combining all the species in the snapper and the existing twenty-fish aggregate. I think it might be the same thing, but let's just go back and make sure that we didn't miss anything.

MR. BROWN: Wouldn't that put limitations on you though for some of the other species that fall like -- You're saying the ten snapper, but we've got seven sea bass that could be caught. Do you

know what I'm saying? Would it put limitations on that other ten? I am just trying to rationalize this out, the difference between the two.

DR. DUVAL: So this action right here does not include vermilion snapper, and it doesn't include black sea bass, and it would not incorporate those into this aggregate. Those are still separate.

MR. HAYMANS: On page 26 of the minutes, Anna did make a comment about whether we should be looking at a ten max per species. Was that, Erica, perhaps what you were thinking?

DR. DUVAL: I think we just, maybe, had this conversation.

MS. BURGESS: Yes and no. My concern is, if you just say ten max per species and you don't have that ten-snapper limit in there, you could have ten yellowtail snapper and ten gray snapper, and that would be more than the current ten-snapper aggregate.

DR. DUVAL: I see what you're saying. You could fill up your whole twenty fish with twenty snappers, as opposed to ten snappers. What that is, it's actually a twenty-fish -- As Myra has it up here, a twenty-fish aggregate, where only ten fish could be species in the current snapper aggregate. Okay. I am not sure that simplifies things, but I understand where you're coming from, in terms of the snappers. I think just remember that we're trying to make things a little bit simpler for anglers, and that's why we were looking at doing this. Is there any other input?

MS. BECKWITH: Just a question for Mark. Was your original intent to include black sea bass and vermilion in that overall twenty-fish?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. BECKWITH: That was my understanding, and I think Mark's idea, if I am understanding it right, was to create the deepwater and then to actually take the shallow-water grouper and pull that into the twenty-fish aggregate as well, right?

MR. BROWN: Correct.

MS. BECKWITH: Including black sea bass and vermilion, and so I don't know that we've got quite that option.

DR. DUVAL: We do, actually. That's what Myra noted when we went through Action 1, was that all you would be doing with Mark's action is establishing a maximum twenty-fish retention limit. You maintain all the same aggregates that we have right now, and so, if you wanted to catch three groupers, and you catch two blueline and one golden, and then you catch five b-liners and seven sea bass, and so that puts you up to --

MR. BROWN: A partridge in a pear tree.

DR. DUVAL: Yes. Then five triggerfish, and you would fill out twenty fish. Is there anything else on this action? I think we're adding more. Is there any desire to eliminate any of these sub-alternatives? I am seeing heads shaking.

MS. BECKWITH: We probably don't need a four per person for the shallow-water grouper.

DR. DUVAL: Can you say that again?

MS. BECKWITH: Under the shallow-water grouper options, I think there was one for like four per person. That was back in Action 2, but I'm just saying, in general, if you want to get rid of something, that's something you could likely get rid of.

DR. DUVAL: I think that was for the deepwater aggregate. Okay. I just didn't know if folks wanted to eliminate Sub-Alternative 2d, which was no more than five fish can be of any one species or not. Do you want to keep that in there right now?

MR. HAYMANS: **I would move that we remove Sub-Alternative 2d under Action 3.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Doug. Is there a second to that? Second by Mark. Is there discussion? No discussion. **Is there any opposition? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.** Okay. It's only 5:20, and we go until 5:30, and so we're going to move on.

MS. BROUWER: Action 4 is on PDF page 36. This is an action that would modify the seasonal prohibition on recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers. Your no action is recreational harvest and possession is prohibited annually in the South Atlantic EEZ from January 1 through April 30.

Alternative 2 would prohibit recreational harvest of the same species by area. Here is where we start getting into alternatives that we still need to define a little bit better. Sub-Alternative 2a has in federal waters off of east Florida, from the Georgia/Florida state boundary south to the end of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's jurisdiction.

Then it has the closure applies, parentheses, month-to-month, and so the idea here was responding to some of what we heard when we were doing the visioning project, where stakeholders were saying that they wanted to consider these rolling closures that would be effective in certain areas during certain times of the year, and so this is what we took to scoping.

Sub-Alternative 2b would be, in federal waters off of Georgia and the Carolinas, from the Georgia/South Carolina border north to the North Carolina/Virginia border, and then, again, the closure would apply from a certain month to a certain month, where we need to have that defined. Alternative 3 would prohibit recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water grouper species, excluding black grouper, south of 28 degrees North latitude, which is approximately off of Palm Bay, and then you have four sub-alternatives for a three-month, two-month, three-month, and four-month closure. All of these were suggested, I believe, during the course of stakeholder meetings when you were considering the South Florida Amendment.

Alternative 4 would apply only to black grouper in federal waters and on the area specified based on Alternative 2a, and so the area off of east Florida, and then you have the Option 4a closure, and that would apply to black grouper from January through March. Then only January, only February, or only March.

Alternative 5 would prohibit recreational harvest and possession of red grouper in federal waters off of Georgia and the Carolinas, and so that that would be based on Alternative 2b, and then you have the option of that closure being applicable January through May, February through May, or March through June.

Here, as you saw, there is still a lot that needs to be defined in the alternatives, in order to give us the guidance that we need to have more complete analysis, but we did break things down, as you had requested in March, by species, so we can show you the average recreational landings for -- I believe we have gag, red grouper, scamp, and black grouper, which are the ones that you requested, and then we have the average landings here from prior to the closure, which was put in place in 2009, and so this is what the landings look like for the period 2004 through 2009, and it's broken down by state. Georgia and South Carolina were aggregated for confidentiality issues. Then the blue bars represent all the South Atlantic.

You can see the distribution of landings here, and the axis is going to be pounds whole weight, and so here is what those landings look like from 2010 through 2015, and so this is post-shallow-water grouper closure, and this is for gag. Here are the annual landings, so that you can get kind of a birds-eye view picture here. You can see the magnitude of the landings has noticeably diminished since the closure.

Then we have these tables that we put together very quickly. Mike Errigo put these together very quickly to sort of show you the level of discards currently in the fishery, and so this the percent of the total catch of gag by mode from 2014 through 2016 for charter and private vessels, and so you can see the breakdown, and you have 83 percent over here that are being discarded, and it looks like the reason is because they are undersized.

Here is the breakdown of discards of gag on trips that did not hit the aggregate or the gag/black bag limits, and that is denoted where it says, "no bag", versus total discards, including January through April. Again, you can see some pretty high discard percentages overall. This is the discards on trips that didn't hit the aggregate, and this is expanded. Anyway, it's broken down so you can see, but the bottom line is there is a lot of discards going on, and it looks like it's due to - It's undersized fish that are being discarded.

Here is broken down by month, and you can see, for some reason, the high percentages here in September and then again in December, but I think, overall, if you look at January through April, I believe it adds up to about 22 percent are being discarded during that time. This is just to illustrate -- You can get an idea of when most of the discarding is taking place. Overall, it doesn't seem like the closure is really having much of an effect.

Then we did that, just like I said, very quickly just for gag. We could, if you wanted us to, show the same type of information, as long as we have the information, for other shallow-water grouper species. The trends are very similar. Here is red grouper. Again, this before the closure. You can see the landings in North Carolina were pretty high prior to 2009. Then, post-2009, North Carolina pretty much just disappears, and there is a shift to red grouper being landed primarily off of Florida. Here is your annual landings for that species, and the same over here for scamp. This is pre-closure and then post-shallow-water grouper closure and annual landings.

For black grouper, since this is a species that is primarily just landed in the Keys, we looked at the distribution of the landings, A versus B1, mainly just because, as I mentioned earlier, there had been some issues with potential misidentification, and we wanted to see if this was an issue in recreational landings as well, but there doesn't seem to be an issue there. Here is the recreational landings, annual recreational landings, and so, again, it's, like I said, pretty much all Florida.

Then I included this table here. This is some information that was recently published by Nick Farmer and some of the folks in Marcel's shop, and it shows, very nicely, the peak spawning and the spawning seasons for several snapper grouper species, and so to illustrate when the peak spawning is occurring for some of these species. You have some of them, like scamp here, and you have scamp off of North Carolina that are spawning at different times than scamp off of Florida, and that's what we have for you, in terms of preliminary analysis.

MR. HAYMANS: Just two small things, just editorial on that Alternative 2. If there is to be any -- In Alternative 2b, if there is to be any fishery off of Georgia, that line needs to be the Georgia/Florida line and not the Georgia/South Carolina line. It's little things like that. When you're a little state, you're guarded. Also, why the confidentiality with recreational? Is it just one headboat that's landing gag or why the confidentiality issue?

DR. ERRIGO: Some of the years, there were extremely scant intercepts and landings of certain species in certain areas, when it comes down to charter and headboat data especially, and, rather than go through everything and find that here is a confidential block and maybe we'll just block that out -- There were some in South Carolina in certain waves, and some in Georgia in certain waves and months, because, when you get down to state and month and mode, it really starts to fall apart. By aggregating South Carolina and Georgia, we just eliminated the issue.

DR. DUVAL: Does that help?

DR. ERRIGO: I can re-aggregate in other ways if you want to see a split. I was hoping that, by aggregating Georgia and South Carolina, that that wouldn't interfere with the rolling closure issue.

MR. HAYMANS: That answers the question. It's what I figured. It's just very, very, very few intercepts, but I guess I didn't realize that someone could actually dig in and dig down to the individual recreational angler on a headboat level. I mean, it's one thing to be able to dig into a dealer report and be able to see what a dealer is bringing in, but, on the recreational side, I guess it wasn't the same confidentiality requirements.

DR. ERRIGO: I was also surprised to see that landings for let's say a headboat, for a single headboat, are confidential when they're costs are based on trips. However, the way the language is written in the Act about confidentiality, that's just how it is, and so, if you can get at the landings of like a particular headboat, that's considered confidential data at this point.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Here is what I am going to suggest. Unless there are some burning desires for any changes that could be done quickly to any of these alternatives that folks would want to make, I am inclined to recess for the evening and pick this up first thing tomorrow morning, because, whatever work we do here on this action, we're going to do exactly the same thing in Regulatory Amendment 27, and so it should move -- Whatever we do here should move pretty quickly in that one, and the remaining three actions in this regulatory amendment are simply size

limit actions, and I am pretty hopeful that those will be moved pretty quickly and be no-brainers. There is the minimum size limit for triggerfish, minimum size limit for black sea bass, and minimum size limit for a couple of the deepwater species, and so are folks okay with that? Okay. I am seeing nods around the table. We will recess for the evening, and so thank you for your work today.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on June 13, 2017.)

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JUNE 14, 2017

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Sawgrass Marriott, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, Wednesday morning, June 14, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Michelle Duval.

DR. DUVAL: I will call the Snapper Grouper Committee meeting to order. When we recessed yesterday, we were in the middle of Regulatory Amendment 26, and this is our recreational visioning blueprint amendment, and we had gone through Action 3 and had reviewed the preliminary effects analysis in Action 4, which is the shallow-water grouper closure.

I did just want to step back to Action 3, which was the ten-snapper and twenty-fish recreational aggregate limits. I think one thing that Erica had brought up yesterday was an alternative within this action that would not allow more than ten snappers, and so we talked about this, and I think probably -- Myra captured that in the direction to staff yesterday, but I think the way we could address this is to simply add a sub-alternative under Alternative 2 that would allow no more than ten snappers to be retained within the twenty-fish aggregate, and I think that would address the concern that Erica had, and so I just wanted to make sure the committee was aware of that.

Then, also, just within the language of that Alternative 2, I think we would want to include some verbiage in that introductory language that is above the sub-alternatives that indicates that we would want to maintain the five-fish mutton limit, since we just went through all of that work, and that proposed rule has not yet been issued, and so I think we would just want to clarify that.

Back to Action 4, which was to modify the seasonal prohibition on recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers, and Myra had taken us through the language of the alternatives and the preliminary effects analysis, which showed us information for gag, red grouper, scamp, and I think black grouper as well, and so I think where we are right now is the IPT had some input, I believe, and a little bit of AP input, I think.

We have heard from the AP that their recommendation is not modify the shallow-water grouper closure. We've had lots of input on this during the vision blueprint port meetings and lots of discussion just about the regional disparity in how this impacts fishermen up and down the coast, and so I'm just looking to the committee to see if you want to modify any of these alternatives or

select any preferreds for further analysis. Remember that whatever we do here that we're going to do the same thing in Regulatory Amendment 27, since this affects both sectors.

MR. BOWEN: Good morning, everybody. With the results of the red grouper assessment, I feel like we need to do something in terms of red grouper, but, the other grouper, I am with the AP. I would rather just leave it alone.

DR. DUVAL: Anybody else?

MR. HARTIG: Well, I appreciate that, and I've looked at that as well, but this is an equity issue for areas that haven't been able to catch gags for a number of years, and the ACL protects the stock overall. I don't think you will see a significant amount of harvest if we look at at least one month where we're allowing harvest in Florida, and that was one of the biggest things I heard all through south Florida and all through the public hearings in Florida, was do something about the four-month closure. I am not willing to do any more than a month. I am willing to go to smaller trip limits on the commercial side. I am willing to do a whole lot of things to constrain that, in the face of what you're looking at with gag grouper, but it is an equity concern.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks for that, Ben. I will say that I met with some fishermen on Friday, prior to the meeting, and we discussed the spawning closure as well, and so I know that at least one fisherman in our area has, I think, participated in cooperative research several years ago, I think in the early 2000s, looking at the spawning characteristics off of North Carolina.

I think it was sponsored by South Carolina DNR, and it included North Carolina and South Carolina. I haven't had a chance to talk to Marcel yet about that, to see if he remembers that or is aware of it, but there was very little spawning activity of gag grouper off of North Carolina in January and February, and peak spawning was noted to be March and April.

I think one of the things that was tossed around in those discussions was either a March and April or a February through April closure, and mostly folks were referencing gag. Then, in regards to red grouper, fishermen agreed that there were definitely red grouper that were in spawn in May. Now, that is not consistent, necessarily, up and down the coast. I know that Kenny Fex, our AP Chair, does not see red grouper in spawn in May, and so there are definitely differences, and it's not just from Florida to North Carolina, but clearly within North Carolina as well.

One thing folks had suggested there, with regard to red grouper, was possibly a February through May closure. Now, you may incur discards in May. I think that was one of the concerns of the advisory panel, by making a shift or doing something a little different for red grouper, but I would feel remiss if I did not provide that input, and so I just wanted to put that out there for folks.

MR. BOWEN: To Ben's point, the shallow-water grouper closure went into place in what, 2011?

DR. DUVAL: 2009.

MR. BOWEN: Okay. Anecdotally, I am just now seeing the benefits of the gag grouper. We've got a year class coming through now that we're able to harvest, and I would be real careful with them. It's not rebuilt, and we're working on that. We are landing and harvesting that year class that is finally coming through that we have waited since 2009 to see. Now, if Florida wants to do

something different, that's you and whatever you want to do, but, for Georgia up through the Carolinas, I think the shallow-water grouper closure is perfect, with the exception of red grouper.

MR. BROWN: I saw a sub-alternative for February and March, but I didn't see one for March and April. Is there one?

DR. DUVAL: There is not, I do not believe. That's February through April and not March and April.

MR. BROWN: Can we add one?

DR. DUVAL: We can. Would that be adding a sub-alternative under -- Alternative 3 just applies to south of 28 latitude, and so that's a south Florida thing.

MR. BROWN: Okay. The reason I was -- I was going to ask Ben, if there was a change to the spawning closure to March and April, would that benefit the fishermen in south Florida for the timeframe that they were talking about that they needed that fishery open?

MR. HARTIG: Yes, it would be a benefit, but I look at it a little bit differently. I am looking at the stock and when they're coming in to spawn. They are coming down the coast, and they're coming into south Florida to spawn. They come in about Christmastime, and they're there until just late April is when they leave south Florida.

Now, I am talking south Florida. I am not talking north Florida. North Florida has more access over a longer period of time than we do, because the fish are moving back towards you all. I mean, the tagging information is clear. The fish move our way, and then they turn around and they go right back. What I'm looking at is, if you look at the harem nature of the stock, of the fish and how they react to spawning, you have males and females. There are not as many males as females, and they get together in these harems, but the males -- There is a certain time when they figure out when they need more males, and those harems, the largest female will turn into a male.

I am looking at this from a standpoint of all of this is moving down the coast, and hopefully all of this is already set who is male and who is female, because, if you start removing things in the middle, things get different. If you start moving males in the beginning of the spawning season, you're going to have a bigger impact than you would after they're finished spawning.

What I was looking to get to is, at the end of the spawning season, having one month and keeping the three months of January, February, and March closed and having some access in April, when we don't see any spawning occurring any longer where we are, and so you leave the stock kind of intact in male and female, as much as you can, once they get into Florida. Then, at the end of that, you don't -- It's not as important when you're impacting the sex ratios at the end of the spawn as it is the beginning or at least that's my rationale for looking at it that way.

MR. BROWN: I just know that, when I was commercial fishing more, I used to see a lot of them in February and March podded up pretty good up there off of central Florida, and so they were right in the middle of that migration.

MR. HARTIG: You see them like that, but I think, in looking through this and looking through the information we've looked at, I think you would get a better bang for your buck keeping the three months and then just having some access in that last month of the closure.

DR. CRABTREE: I think we're over-tweaking these things. It seems, to me, this is one where I agree with the AP. They are advising us to leave it alone. I am looking at what Marcel showed us yesterday, and gag is heading down and red grouper is heading down and scamp is heading down, and I don't see one good index on any shallow-water grouper, and so it just seems like a time, to me, to leave it be.

MR. BELL: I was just going to say that I was kind of getting lost in what we're trying to achieve, and I realize we're trying to provide protection for spawners, and they don't all -- Well, across all species, across all latitudes, and that doesn't all happen at the same time, but also provide accessibility and equitability, and so there is all kinds of options up there, but I have kind of lost the bubble on what would really work to try to get the best result, and I am more leaning towards the leave it alone piece, but I fully agree with Zack that we need to, at least up in the Carolinas, from what we've seen, deal with red grouper, in terms of some additional protection, but it's kind of gotten a little overwhelming, in my mind. I guess I would have to see a picture, unfortunately.

MR. PHILLIPS: I wouldn't have a problem with this if the stocks were going up. It's when they're going down, and, even though it's not a lot of extra effort maybe, but I'm afraid, if we open up that, then we're going to have to restrict something else somewhere else further on, and I am really skeptical, with the way the stocks are looking.

MS. BECKWITH: Specific to Alternative 2, Sub-Alternative 2b, should that not read the Georgia/Florida border north to the North Carolina/Virginia border?

DR. DUVAL: Yes, and Doug brought that up yesterday.

MS. BECKWITH: Sorry.

DR. DUVAL: I hear the concerns about modifying the shallow-water grouper closure based on concerns that folks had with regard to some of the indices that we've seen, and I guess I should say the indices, but some of the information from the SERFS survey that Marcel showed us yesterday. That said, I am also sensitive to regional differences, and so, Ben, what you're saying is it sounds like, specifically for south Florida, you're simply looking for the month of April, where that spawning closure would be shortened, and that you would also be willing to look at something along the lines of red porgy, where we're looking at really like a bycatch type of limit, or at least a lower trip limit. Is that what I am hearing you say?

MR. HARTIG: Yes, exactly. I mean, some kind of limited access. Of course, it's very limited to the recreational fishery now, but, for the commercial fishery, we don't need a thousand pounds. That's not what we're looking for. We're looking just for some kind of access during that time. I mean, you all are coming from the -- You all catch the gag grouper. You catch them. That's what you do. We used to catch them. We used to be a major player in it. That's what I did for twenty-five years of my fishing. Every winter, I went gag grouper fishing. That's what I did.

I reached into my pocket initially and gave the two months. Unfortunately, we had to go to four months, more as a way to curtail effort than anything else, but, having said that, that is Florida. That impacts Florida the most, because there is not much effort from the recreational fishery during the wintertime in the Carolinas. There just isn't, and so we're stuck with rebuilding the stock by giving up access to this fish, and we did it with vermilion, and we did it again with gag grouper.

We closed the winter months for vermilion, where Florida was really the only one impacted, at least from a recreational standpoint, and so, to get back to at least -- The way to take care of the stock, if the stock is in trouble, is deal with the ACL and then allow some kind of harvest for Florida. I am not talking about a lot of fish here, and so I would just like to at least see this go through the public hearing process and see what we get out of it.

It is interesting for the fishermen in the Keys, for black grouper, that they see a lot of value in the four-month closure and that they're catching more fish after the season opens again. Having said that, in gag, they are gone before we get a chance to catch them in south Florida. Now, that's not true for the northern areas, but, in south Florida, that's the way it is.

DR. CRABTREE: Ben, I get that you're not getting access, but the problem is the fish are coming down there when they're spawning, to aggregate and spawn, and we're trying to avoid fishing on them when they're aggregating to spawn, and I hear what you're saying about sex transition and when it might be best and when they decide, but the fact is that we don't know any of that, and so the premise behind this whole thing was to try and protect them when they're spawning, and you just happen to be in an area that that's what they come there to do, right?

MR. HARTIG: That's true, Roy, but it's done in March where we are. That twenty-five years I spent gag grouper fishing, I looked at every gag grouper gonad that I ever caught, and so they spawn earlier in Florida.

DR. CRABTREE: I get that, but, if you come in and start trying to parse this thing down to have it end in every region exactly when, it just gets too complicated, and that's one of the biggest complaints that I hear about all of our regulations, and so we did the best we could to try and generally cover it. When they spawn and when they stop varies from year to year and all of those kinds of things, and so I don't know, but it's interesting what you said about the Keys, because you recall, when we put this closure in place, that was the place we heard most of the complaints about, and I have heard some guys down there now tell me that it's one of the best things we ever did, and so it's funny how things change.

MR. HARTIG: The difference between that is that they have access to that fish when it reopens and we don't.

MR. BROWN: We already have variables in our management for certain types of things, whether it's hooks or fish openings or whatever, and, since I've been a council member, I've probably had four or five phone calls from people from south Florida telling me that this closure has been hurting them for quite some time, and so I tend to lean with Ben about it, but, if there was a possibility of creating some type of an opening for like April, like you said, south of a certain line of latitude, which wouldn't be that difficult to do, because we already have, like I said, management that is based on that type of boundary, and then give them a certain timeframe where they could open it and have access, so that at least would benefit their for-hire businesses.

MR. BOWEN: Ben, to your point, the recreational sector is not meeting their ACL on the gags, and so I don't -- Yes, we do manage to ACLs, but it's hard to manage to them when we're not reaching them. I have sympathy for the south Florida guys, but, again, let me reiterate that I am just now seeing the benefits, and it's taken this long for that shallow-water grouper closure. I am just now seeing the benefits of it in Georgia, and I tend to go with the AP. I agree with Roy, and I'm sorry.

DR. DUVAL: There is a lot of discards right now. I would ask Myra to pull up the table showing the discards of gag broken down by -- They're broken down by charter and private as well as those that hit the bag limit versus didn't hit the bag limit. I think those are undersized fish is why those are being discarded.

MS. BROUWER: Right. If you look at these tables, the top table includes the closure, and the bottom table excludes the closure. You see that the discards are pretty high, 83 percent and 99 percent, and these are for trips that didn't hit either the aggregate or the one-fish gag/black limit, and so that tells you that the closure is really not having an effect. The fish are being discarded because they are undersized, and we see a lot of discards for all the shallow-water groupers. You saw the information that Chip presented yesterday, and so that's another issue that we have to keep in mind for this group of fish.

MR. BROWN: Is that for the entire region or is it broken anywhere for like different states or different areas?

MS. BROUWER: We haven't done it broken down by state, but my understanding is that it's throughout, and Mike Errigo put this together, and so maybe he has more details, but it's for the whole South Atlantic.

MR. BROWN: I was just curious where the majority of the discards were.

DR. ERRIGO: This particular table, I didn't break it down by state, but I can. It's not that difficult, but this pattern is seen everywhere. If you're looking at where the magnitude of the discards are, it depends on the month and this and that, but it goes with the magnitude of the landings, and it varies by month where the effort is, but the pattern is the same. There is a lot of discards, and they're coming from trips that are not hitting the limit. It's not because everyone caught up their gag limit and now they are discarding gag. It's that it seems to be that they're most likely undersized, and so they are discarding them. Most of the trips are like that.

MR. BROWN: This is just during the closure or this is for the whole year?

DR. ERRIGO: The top table includes the closure, and so some of those fish are being discarded because they're in the closed season, but the bottom table is for all months outside of the closure, and so when you're able to land gag. Outside of the closed season, pretty much most everything is being discarded not because you're hitting the bag limit, but because it's undersized, over 99 percent of the discards.

DR. DUVAL: Those are some pretty sobering numbers. Ben has indicated a desire to at least have this go through public hearing, these alternatives that would at least modify the closure for

south Florida. I am seeing nods from the other Florida members on the committee, but it sounds like, from the rest of the committee, what I'm hearing is you guys would like to maintain the January through April closure as is for the shallow-water grouper closures. I know Zack does and Roy does. Silence means yes, and so speak up now.

MR. BROWN: I am with Florida on this one.

MR. BELL: If there is an alternative that makes Florida a little happier and it's in there, that's fine. I would just express my concerns. I have the same concerns, but, if there is something in there, I am willing to look at it, and is it 28 degrees? Is that the magic line?

MS. BROUWER: Right, and that's a line that we have the circle hook requirement that is on both sides of that line, and it was also suggested, I believe, during workshops that the FWC conducted when they were doing the south Florida amendment, and so it's already an established regulatory-type of boundary.

MR. BELL: I think what we're finding is that one-size-fits-all is just kind of hard to achieve, maybe. That's just, unfortunately, the way it is.

DR. DUVAL: Let me get Charlie, and then we will figure out how we play with this.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, there is two things. One, it might help, if we were going to do a reduced trip limit and change that season, what that trip limit might be. That might help. Another thing is what about all of these other species? What is it going to do to them, if anything?

DR. DUVAL: First of all, you're already at a three-grouper aggregate, and so I'm not sure that I see modifying the recreational retention limit during that time. I think that's too complicated, but I think, if we -- Again, whatever we do here, we're going to reflect that in the commercial vision blueprint amendment, and so that might be where you would want to add an additional alternative, possibly, to consider a trip limit.

I guess the way I'm looking at this, Alternative 2 was simply to try to provide an alternative that would have provided a dividing line for where you could modify the months of the spawning closure. Alternative 3 really pertains to south Florida and the months that you would have that spawning closure in place south of 28 degrees. Alternative 4 would simply establish months of the closure based on that area split that you considered under Alternative 2, and so that was simply looking at Georgia north and then Florida south.

Then Alternative 5 deals specifically with red grouper, but, again, conditioned on how you might select an area split under Alternative 2, and so I guess what I'm looking for, from the folks from Florida, is would Alternative 3 meet your needs, that south of 28 degrees latitude, or do you feel like you need this to be the whole State of Florida? Based on what Ben said, I am hearing no.

MR. HARTIG: I don't want to speak for Jessica, but it is a south Florida problem. North Florida has more access to gag for a longer period of time than south Florida does, and so 28 would work for us, and it's a known management parameter, and it would work.

MR. BROWN: We talked about management that went across the state at Shark Point, and what was that latitude that went across the state? It was for something, and I forget what it was.

MR. BELL: It was on the other side.

MR. BROWN: Yes, but going across the state, and that would probably be a good boundary line there, from there south.

MS. BURGESS: That's 29 degrees, 5 minutes North, and so it is much lower.

DR. DUVAL: All right. Help me out. So is 28 degrees North latitude a good point? Okay. That's what I want to know. What I am trying to do here is there any alternatives, based on what I am sensing around the committee, that we can jettison. I am hearing interest in doing something for red grouper for the Carolinas, which might necessitate keeping Alternative 2 in there, or at least modifying the language of Alternative 5 to just be reflective off the Carolinas.

I am thinking that we can probably do away with Alternative 2. Let me just try to help you guys out here. I am thinking that we can probably do away with Alternative 2 of establishing an area that's Georgia and the Carolinas and establishing an area that's Florida, based on the conversation we just had that the issue with access to gag is really a south Florida issue, and so we could probably eliminate Alternative 2, and I'm just putting that out there.

It seems like Alternative 3 really captures the issue in south Florida of at least allowing some access at the end of that timeframe, and so we could keep Alternative 3. Alternative 4 is black grouper, and, again, this was based on an area thing, but I'm wondering if the folks from Florida want to keep this alternative in with regard to black grouper and if it might not be better to modify that to be south of 28 degrees. I mean, the vast majority of black grouper are caught in Florida anyway, and so I'm guessing that's why this was written the way it was.

Then Alternative 5 could be modified slightly to just apply to North Carolina and South Carolina or North Carolina and South Carolina and Georgia, if we just strictly want to address red grouper. Mel, did you have something you wanted to say?

MR. BELL: Without reference to Alternative 2, if we get rid of Alternative 2, right? What Alternative 2 would do for you is just give you another line, and so then north Florida kind of becomes -- If you take that line out, then --

DR. DUVAL: For the shallow-water grouper closure, then Florida, north of 28 degrees latitude, would be encompassed in the January through April closure.

MR. BELL: Yes, and I just remember Ben talking about those differences between north Florida and south Florida, but, if north Florida is more like everything else, then fine. You can just do away with Alternative 2.

MR. HAYMANS: **Madam Chair, I would move that we remove Alternative 2 to the Considered but Rejected.**

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Doug and a second by Chester. Is there further discussion on this? This is simply removing the alternative that would place a geographic dividing line at the Georgia/Florida border. I am not seeing any other discussion. **Is there any objection? Seeing no objection, that motion passes.**

Then maintain Alternative 3 as is, and what about Alternative 4, black grouper? Since we've just gotten rid of Alternative 2, if folks want to keep this in here, I'm suggesting that it might need to be modified, and I am looking to Florida for some input here. This was an alternative that we brought in that was discussed during the south Florida workshops that would allow for some access to black grouper, and I don't recall specifically, originally, how that was written up.

I tend to suspect that it might have been that we probably had multiple alternatives that dealt with the entire State of Florida, south of the 28 degree line, and it might have also been just for Monroe County, if I am remembering correctly the way this was previously structured, but I think we need to modify the introductory language in that alternative if you all want to keep this in, and so you could make it reflective of Alternative 3, where it would just apply south of 28 degrees latitude.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I am fine with that. I definitely want to keep the alternative in there, based on what we heard when we went out to workshops when we were doing the south Florida stuff, and so sure. If you want to put south of 28, I think that's fine.

DR. DUVAL: Myra is so smart. Myra is saying all we would need to do is actually include black grouper in Alternative 3. Okay. Then we could remove Alternative 4. Are folks on the other side of the table following this conversation here?

MR. BROWN: Well, we were just talking about the red grouper issue and --

DR. DUVAL: Hang on. We'll get to red grouper. I want to finish with this alternative.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would really like the option to keep black grouper separate, because there seemed to be some comments at the south Florida workshops about doing something for black grouper specifically, and so I like it as its own stand-alone.

DR. DUVAL: That way, if we wanted to do something that just pertained to black grouper and didn't modify the rest of the shallow-water grouper closure, you still maintain that flexibility. Okay.

MR. HARTIG: Could we have two area options, Monroe County and south of 28? Could we have two options to go to public hearing with?

DR. DUVAL: I don't see why not.

MR. HARTIG: It's particularly a Monroe County issue.

DR. DUVAL: Do you want to maintain the months as they are written in the sub-alternatives for Alternative 4?

MR. HARTIG: Yes.

DR. DUVAL: Okay.

MS. BROUWER: Just for clarification, we're keeping Alternative 3 exactly the way it is, and so it's going to exclude black grouper, and we're going to keep Alternative 4, but, instead of saying specify area based on Alternative 2a above, it will say south of 28 degrees, and we're going to keep the same sub-alternatives, correct?

DR. DUVAL: I was writing down what we were doing, and so I missed a little bit of that. I just want to make sure -- For Alternative 4, south of 28 degrees, but also a separate sub-alternative for Monroe County. I think that was the part that Ben just mentioned as well. That would actually be adding a whole other alternative, and so, just to let folks know -- Ben, to do that, we would need to add another alternative.

MR. HARTIG: I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to do that to staff. Let's just keep it at 28, like the other one, and we're fine. It's not worth it.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. All clear? Okay. Now, Mark, red grouper.

MR. BROWN: We were just talking about what we're facing with this new assessment and everything and that we feel like we need to tap the brakes on what we have already proposed a little bit, just so we don't completely shut it down. Meaning the bag limit. Right now, I guess you can have three within the bag limit, and so maybe make it one.

DR. DUVAL: I think we've already encompassed that in our previous action, Action 2, where we talked about the shallow-water grouper limit. We already have sub-alternatives in there that would limit harvest to just one fish of any of those species, and so we addressed that yesterday, generically. Here, I am just interested in knowing if the committee would like to keep Alternative 5 in here, specific to red grouper, but apply it to just Georgia and the Carolinas or just the Carolinas, or do you want to not consider this at all? That's what I need.

MR. BELL: The numbers that I have seen that are most distressing seem to be the Carolinas, and I don't know -- Again, looking at Georgia numbers is hard to do sometimes, but it's definitely an issue up our way, I think, for sure, and, obviously, when you get down into Florida, it's not the same picture, but definitely up our way.

MR. GRINER: I agree with Mel. It is definitely an issue for us. The red grouper definitely have roe in May, and so it definitely for sure is an issue for us.

MR. BOWEN: I would like to be, quote, unquote, lumped with the Carolinas on this. Georgia doesn't have a directed fishery for red grouper, but we do see them periodically as a bycatch, but I do think this harvest needs to be constrained, and I think Georgia probably should be lumped with the Carolinas on this.

MR. PHILLIPS: The bandit boats almost never see -- It's one or two, and it's bycatch, for sure, and so whether we -- If you close something that we're not catching, you haven't really hurt anything, and you may help something, maybe.

DR. DUVAL: It sounds like maybe I am hearing to reword Alternative 5 to prohibit recreational harvest and possession of red grouper in federal waters off of Georgia through North Carolina.

MR. HAYMANS: I think I would prefer to keep the 28, if it doesn't cause too much issue. That way, it's all 28, rather than the Georgia/Florida line.

MR. BOWEN: I second.

DR. DUVAL: I am assuming that other folks would be okay with that, except I would like to get some input from Florida, since this would be impacting them as well, and so the suggestion is that, for consistency sake, if we were going to do something to modify the shallow-water grouper closure and we're applying a line south of 28 degrees, then, for consistency sake, modifying this alternative to prohibit recreational harvest and possession of red grouper in federal waters north of 28 degrees latitude, and so that would encompass north Florida.

MS. BURGESS: I recognize the concerns there are for red grouper with the stock assessment that we're going to get later. Looking at the trends in catch, just like Zack said, red grouper is not a directed fishery in Florida. Our fishermen catch it. If they catch it, they keep it. There is no one directing effort on that fishery, but Florida landings have remained constant, while North Carolina landings, unfortunately, seem to have suffered, and so it would be my intent to hold off on red grouper discussions until we get the stock assessment report and talk about that. I am hesitant with lumping all of Florida with the states north in this, and so possibly we could consider 28 North, but I would also like to have the Florida/Georgia border as an option as well.

MR. BELL: Would that be something we could just come back to after we've seen the stock assessment and talked about it or whatever and had a chance to kind of work through the Florida thing? Could we, at Full Council or something, just draw that line, pick the line? That's all we would have to do.

DR. DUVAL: We can certainly come back to this at Full Council after -- I mean, at least this alternative for how you all would like to tweak it at Full Council, after you have heard the red grouper stock assessment. I am not sure it's going to change your minds a whole lot, but we can do that.

MS. BROWER: Also, for the record, I just wanted to remind you that Amendment 36 is about to go online, and that has established a spawning SMZ that will hopefully address or provide some protection for shallow-water groupers.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. We have cleaned this up slightly. Let's go ahead and move on to the next action. I am not seeing any other items to address under here, and so this would remove recreational minimum size limits for deepwater snapper species, and we have got a couple of species in the complex that still have minimum size limits, which is really not consistent with what we've done for other deepwater species.

MS. BROUWER: Thanks, Michelle. This action is on PDF page 52 of your decision document. There is only two alternatives. We have, again, very little information, but we did compile for you this table that shows the number of fish that were measured. These are unexpanded numbers. This is for MRIP, and so private recreational and charter for blackfin snapper, queen snapper, and silk snapper for the three years that we're looking at for this amendment.

You can see there is very few encounters of these species, and so here are the expanded numbers, and this does not include Monroe County. Then, over here, we show you the numbers of deepwater species, again for each of the components of the MRIP estimates for charter and private, and we have included the PSEs for each of the components, and, as you can expect, those PSEs are extremely high.

There is some reported harvest here of blackfin snapper. We also looked at the length distributions, and so here is blackfin snapper on the left, queen snapper in the middle, and this is in numbers of fish, and so, again, you can see that's just a very few. For silk snapper, there seems to be a lot more information than for the other two species.

There would be very minimal changes in discard rates by getting rid of those minimum size limits, because everything that is being caught or landed is above the twelve inches anyway. Then, just for comparison here, we show you the length distributions in other areas, and so here is the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean for each of the three species. Some of these, like silk snapper, they seem to be more importantly recreationally in the Caribbean and in the Gulf. As far as IPT input, the IPT talked about this very briefly, and they basically just supported the preferred to remove the minimum size limits. It just makes sense, and also to be consistent.

DR. DUVAL: All right. Any changes or modifications or anything like that? All right.

MS. BROUWER: The next action, Action 6, is on PDF page 58. This action would reduce the minimum size limit for recreational for black sea bass, and we have the two alternatives to reduce it to twelve inches total length and reduce it to eleven inches total length, which is the current minimum size limit for the commercial sector.

We have here some updated information that was originally prepared for the analysis that we did for Regulatory Amendment 25, when you made changes to the bag limit, and so we're showing here the number of black sea bass discards inside of three miles and outside of three miles for the years 2014 through 2016 and then the percent of the total.

Again, you're seeing a lot of discards in this fishery, over 90 percent, and here is just the landings, and so very few fish are being landed, relatively, to the total catch. Then we did have to put in here a little explanation. The analyses that were prepared to combine a reduction or an increase in the size limit with the minimum size limit analysis were originally going to be presented and discussed by the SSC, but we didn't have time, and there were some issues with terminal year of the assessment, and so that's all explained in here.

I don't know if Mike Errigo wants to talk about that a little bit more. If we do end up postponing or delaying development of this amendment, perhaps those analyses will be able to be incorporated, but there's also the delay in the black sea bass stock assessment, and so I'm not quite

sure where we're going to be in terms of adopting the new methodology that Mike put together to analyze this for you.

DR. DUVAL: Mike, is there anything you want to add to this? My recollection, when you originally conducted this analysis, was that this was indicative of the fact that these discards were occurring because the majority of the fish that people were catching were underneath the thirteen-inch size limit.

DR. ERRIGO: Preliminary analyses show that that hasn't changed, but, to do the full analysis to show effects and what changing the minimum size will do or what effect it will have, I would either have to use the update, which had a terminal year of 2012, which is a bit old now, and so, the assumptions I would have to make, I would be rather uncomfortable with projecting into the future what would happen.

Otherwise, I would have to wait for the new standard, and I am not sure the timeline on that one. If the SSC gets that one in April and reviews it, I would be able to use it to conduct the analysis then, but I'm not sure of the timeline of this amendment and how that would line up.

DR. DUVAL: I think it's probably pretty clear that we're going to need to see this again in September. We discussed this yesterday, and I don't think anyone is comfortable with approving this for public hearings with some of the modifications that we have made. We would at least see it again in September, although that's something we'll talk about in Executive Finance when we look at our priorities and determine what we're going to do for the next meeting. Thanks for that, Mike.

MS. BROUWER: Just another thing to mention that the IPT brought up is that the ABC for black sea bass, as you know, is based on selectivity patterns, and, if the minimum size limit changes, that would affect the ABC. As far as the Snapper Grouper AP goes, they expressed some concern about how the change in the size limit would affect the bag limit and the length of the season. Of course, all of those things would be incorporated in the full-blown analysis for this action, and they did pass a motion recommending reducing the minimum size limit to twelve inches.

DR. CRABTREE: It seems to me that we've got a new assessment that's going to come to us next year. We have seen the CPUE trends that Marcel showed us, and they're not encouraging. It seems to me that we ought to wait and get the new assessment before we start making changes to it. If we end up with a significant reduction in the catch levels, we may not want to lower the size limit, because then the season is going to get very short, and so it makes sense to me to wait.

MR. PHILLIPS: We may want to change the bag limits when we do that, but I thought part of the reason for dropping the size limit was so that we didn't have so many discards, because the discards were killing us. I don't have a problem with dropping the size limit. When we get the assessment, if we need to drop the bag limit, then that's what we need to do, but it's the discards that I think we're trying to get away from, and so I don't have a problem with dropping the size limit to something reasonable, so there's not so many discards.

MR. BOWEN: I tend to agree with Dr. Crabtree. Discard mortality, Charlie, to your point, is only 7 percent. I say we leave this alone. Leave this alone, please.

DR. DUVAL: There have been additional studies that have demonstrated that that discard mortality is probably actually at least twice that, if not three times.

MR. BOWEN: Yes, ma'am. I am just going by the last assessment.

DR. DUVAL: I am just saying, if you want to wait for updated information, then that's going to be incorporated in -- That updated information is a piece of it.

MR. BOWEN: Yes, ma'am, and I do want to wait for updated information.

MR. BREWER: I couldn't understand what you said, but my question is -- I wanted to follow up on Charlie's statement and ask what are the numbers on discard mortality for black sea bass.

DR. DUVAL: In the last assessment, they're very low, and so it was like 7 or 8 or 9 percent for hook-and-line mortality, and then it was, I think, about 1 percent for pots, in terms of discard mortality, but there have been additional Cooperative Research Program studies that have occurred demonstrating that it's actually higher. I think between 17 and 18 percent was the most recent estimate, and that's based on work done by Jeff Buckel and Paul Rudershausen out of North Carolina.

MR. BREWER: I am just worried about needlessly killing a bunch of fish when -- If you drop it down, people are going to maybe, maybe, maybe be able to not have to throw back essentially nine out of ten fish.

MR. PHILLIPS: Chester, you're right. It's the discard mortality, whether it's 7 percent or 20 percent. When you're having to go through ten fish to get one keeper, it starts adding up, and that's how the numbers were shaking out. That is my concern. I would rather go up and not have to go through maybe five fish or whatever the number might be, and, theoretically, if you go down on the size limit, you would have less kill.

MR. BREWER: Just a follow-up. I am assuming that the current information -- I don't know how close they're going to come in this next assessment, but, if you're showing a reasonably high -- What did it say? If you just pick a number of 17 percent discard mortality, that's going to carry over, I think, into your assessment, and it will come to devil you. Maybe not as bad as red snapper, but it will come to devil you.

MR. HAYMANS: To make sure that I heard you correctly, the new assessment mortality was based on pot mortality changes?

DR. DUVAL: No, what I said was that the assessment that we have right now, SEDAR 25, the update to that used discard mortalities of like 1 percent or something like that for pots and 8 or 9 percent for hook-and-line mortality. That was what I said. Subsequent to that, there have been additional release mortality studies that have been conducted that show a higher percentage, around 17 percent.

MR. HAYMANS: For which gear?

DR. DUVAL: Hook-and-line, I believe.

DR. COLLIER: What we originally used was their preliminary analysis for the Rudershausen and Buckel estimate, and that came out to be 7 and 1 percent, 7 for the hook-and-line and 1 percent for the trap fishery. When they were doing that study, that didn't condition the fish on -- They had originally not conditioned the fish on best release practices. They were all doing it on surface release, and so, when they actually reanalyzed the data and they had fish that they had tagged at the bottom, using traps, it actually changed the discard estimate to 19 percent for the hook-and-line and 14 percent for the trap fishery.

MR. BELL: What about water depths for that? Were there breakpoints that they used? That would be important, I think.

DR. COLLIER: That was overall discard mortality. They had a range and, as opposed to looking at a variety of water depths, they focused just on a few depths, and so it was pretty discreet depths that they used in that, and I would have to look back to see exactly what depths they were in, but it was generally areas that were -- At least for the pot fishermen, it was areas that were fished by pots, which is actually shallower than what they are probably going to be fishing this winter.

DR. DUVAL: Zack, and then we're wrapping this up and moving on.

MR. BOWEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. **I make a motion that we remove Action 6 from this amendment.**

DR. DUVAL: There's a motion by Zack. Is there a second? There is motion by Zack to remove Action 6. Is there a second to that? There is a second by Roy for discussion.

MR. BOWEN: The rationale, Madam Chair, is there is just too much unknown here, with the assessment coming up and the trends that we saw yesterday, the trends report with sea bass. Again, we just need to pull this out.

DR. DUVAL: Other discussion?

MR. GRINER: Was that discard study the NC State and Jeff? If I remember right, that was in sixty or ninety feet of water or something like that.

DR. COLLIER: I think it was twenty-three to thirty meters, and so, yes, some of it was in the sixty to seventy-foot range and some was in the ninety-foot range.

MR. GRINER: The mortality rate was around 10 percent in that study, and is that correct?

DR. COLLIER: For the hook-and-line sector, it was 19 percent. For the pot sector, it was 14 percent.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Any other discussion?

MR. DILERNIA: This is an amendment, like a standard amendment, that will go to the Secretary, and is that correct? It's the standard amendment process that's occurring?

DR. DUVAL: It's a regulatory amendment, and so it goes through the framework process.

MR. DILERNIA: It goes through the framework process. Okay. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Any other discussion? Are people ready for a vote? Okay. **All those in favor of the motion, please raise your hand, I see two in favor; those opposed, eight opposed; abstentions, two abstentions. The motion fails and the action stays in.** Last action, I think.

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and the last action in this amendment is on PDF page 62, and it is to reduce the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off of east Florida, and so remember this came up because Amendment 29 made changes to the minimum size limit. It put in a size limit for the rest of the South Atlantic states that didn't have one, and it put a fourteen-inch minimum size limit for gray triggerfish off the east coast of Florida, to make it consistent with the minimum size limit on the Gulf side.

This has apparently created a lot of discard issues in south Florida, and that is why FWC requested that the council consider reducing the minimum size limit back down off of east Florida to twelve inches, which would put it in line with what it is in the rest of the South Atlantic states, and so we only have the two alternatives for that.

Again, we looked at data from 2014 to 2016 to determine the potential impact, and here is a graph. The red line is -- This is the length distribution of gray triggerfish landings, in fork length, inches fork length, off of east Florida, including Monroe County, before the twelve-inch minimum size limit and after the twelve-inch minimum size limit.

The number one is before the size limit period and number two is after the size limit period, and then you've got the twelve-inch minimum size limit here, denoted in blue, and then the fourteen-inch minimum size limit denoted in red. I am sorry that I can't get everything on the same page.

There has been an increase in discards, and I believe the number is -- It's on the order of about 15 to 20 percent since the minimum size limit went into place. Keep in mind that this happened very recently. That regulation went into place, I believe, the end of July or the beginning of August of 2015, and so there hasn't been a lot of time to gather information on discards.

Here are the estimates from the combined charter and private recreational landings for the various components of the recreational catch and the percent of the total catch that is released, and, again, the period one is prior to the size limit change, and period two is after the size limit change, and so you do see some differences, an increase in the amount of fish that are being discarded.

As far as input from the IPT, they wondered if you might want to also consider an alternative that would increase the minimum size limit from twelve to fourteen inches off the rest of the South Atlantic. Again, that's a consistency thing. Also, just to let you know that the Gulf Council is considering increasing the minimum size limit to fifteen inches, as their stock is undergoing overfishing, and so we're in a situation here where there's a lot of inconsistency in the regulations. The AP did recommend Alternative 2, and that's what we have for you on that action.

MR. BREWER: I think a lot of the problems that they're having in the Gulf with overfishing of gray triggerfish is because of effort shift, but, be that as it may, I would be very much in favor of

having the consistency throughout our range, as much as we can. **Therefore, I would like to select as our preferred Alternative 2, and I so move.**

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Chester to select Alternative 2 as a preferred. Is there a second to that? Seconded by Ben. Is there further discussion?

MR. HARTIG: Part of this is -- I mean, we've been stepping around the regional aspects of management for the South Atlantic Council for a long, long, long, long time, and this, in particular, speaks to it. In south Florida, where I've been fishing, rarely do we see that many triggerfish bigger than twelve inches, in my whole fishing career, and, if we don't recognize some of these differences, down the road we're never going to be able to manage our fishermen appropriately.

Right now, we have the largest year class in triggerfish that I have ever seen, ever, by a long shot, so much so that, most of the spots that I mutton snapper fish, I can no longer fish. I don't care what size bait you put in the water. The triggerfish take it off before it gets ten feet down. I mean, it's amazing. You will see fifty triggerfish holding a chunk of bonito this big off the bottom, with their tails out of the water. I mean, it just speaks to some of the things that happen occasionally in south Florida.

Now, I don't believe all those fish are going to stay there. I don't think there's enough groceries on our compacted shelf to support that many triggerfish for any length of time, and so I think, eventually, some of those fish will find their way to the north, but, in south Florida, on average, twelve inches is the right size limit for gray triggerfish. Having said that about the regional aspects, I think -- I'm not going to do that. I will bring it up later.

DR. DUVAL: Don't be surprising me later. I am just kidding. I appreciate all of that, and I think everybody else around the table appreciates all of that as well. I mean, it's fairly common that fish will be larger in size as you move to northern latitudes, and so I don't doubt that at all, and I don't think anyone on the committee has a problem with this, but I would just note that -- I am just concerned about the potential for fifteen inches in the Gulf, because that's kind of what got us into this situation in the first place. There were consistency issues between the Gulf side and the Atlantic side, and then we went to twelve inches everywhere else except for Florida.

MS. BURGESS: From an agency perspective, we changed our Atlantic gray triggerfish minimum size limit to twelve inches and implemented a ten-fish bag limit in October of 2015 through an executive order. We have since put that in place in rule permanently, and we are comfortable having different size limits on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

DR. DUVAL: Great. Thank you. I appreciate that. Okay. Let's go ahead and vote. I am assuming there is no other discussion. **Is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

Myra, that takes us to -- That's the end of this document, right? Okay. Again, my sense is that we want to see this again and we're not approving this for public comment right now, just based on some of the modifications that we made. Hopefully, since we've had additional discussion here, we can get through some of these similar actions in Regulatory Amendment 27 a little more quickly, and so, with no further ado, that's what we're going to roll into, is Regulatory Amendment 27.

This is Attachments 5a and 5b in your briefing book, and, as Myra is bringing those up, I guess I will turn things over to Tim. He had just wanted to talk about a couple of things that he's been thinking about and wanted folks to keep in mind as we move through this particular amendment, because I think some of the things that he is thinking of would certainly impact actions in here, and so, Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. As we look at the discussions we've just had, it's really, really clear that one size just doesn't fit all. As we look at this, it's very evident that there are regional differences in the entire fishery in the South Atlantic, and, as we move forward and start looking at this Regulatory Amendment 27, I think we really need to kind of be thinking about keeping in mind for some discussion that this applies to allocations as well, and I think it makes a lot of sense to look at regional differences and how they can affect allocation as well.

I think it makes a lot of sense, and I just think that it's something that we need to be thinking about as we look through this amendment. I realize that it can't be done in this regulatory amendment and it would have to be a full-blown amendment, but I do think it's something that we need to be considering, and I think it would help solve a lot of the problems that we're seeing in the commercial fishery. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Tim. Just to clarify, you're talking about like sub-regional quotas for a lot of our snapper grouper managed species, or at least like the main ones, where you would look to have one sub-quota for the Carolinas and another sub-quota for Georgia and Florida, and is that it?

MR. GRINER: Exactly, and I'm not saying it has to be all species. I think there are certain species that are more important than others, but absolutely. I think there is clearly a difference from the Carolinas, North and South Carolina, to what happens south of there, and so I would look to basically draw a line at the Carolinas.

North and South Carolina, our fishery is totally different than south Florida. It's completely different. It's completely different than all of Florida, and so that's exactly what I am thinking, is two regions, basically. If Florida has to have more regions, that's fine as well, because I think there is even great differences between south Florida and north Florida, but absolutely the Carolinas fishery is totally different.

DR. DUVAL: I would also say that I think there is definitely differences between the southern border of South Carolina and the northern border of North Carolina as well. Okay. Something to keep in mind.

MR. HARTIG: That is where I was going, but I am not going to go there now, because I'm not going to take the time for this committee. This is a long-term, something we need to think of long-term. What I would like to do is get anyone who wants to be involved together and get with staff and do a white paper about regional management, and so there's a number of regions in Florida, at least three, possibly, that we would be looking at, and I recognize the regions that you're talking about in the Carolinas, and we would get with you and think about what regions should be applicable for North Carolina and South Carolina.

North Florida gets into the sub-tropical complex, with vermilion and red porgies, that are so important to the fishery, and it's not that important to the south, but we have fish in the south, with red porgy in particular, that's been closed -- It was the first SEDAR we ever did, and it's been closed for this time. The animals are the same size now as they were when we closed the fishery, and they are not, on average, fourteen inches.

One of the things that's interesting about that is I don't participate in that fishery, because it's got too many discards most of the time, but it's just not good fishing practices in 300 feet of water, where I catch red porgy, to discard these animals, which it looks like most of them don't make it with a descender device or not. The regional aspect of this is critical, and we need to have a long-term plan to look at this. I mean, it's something that came up in visioning for sure for the long term, and it's nothing that I want to put on our plate today, but just to begin thinking about it.

DR. DUVAL: Ben, I think a white paper is a good way to approach it, and so I appreciate that suggestion. Okay. Shall we roll through Amendment 27? Myra, are you going to be working from the decision document? That's Attachment 5a. Chris.

MR. CONKLIN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to be clear, if we add alternatives to this, will we have to take it back out to scoping or we can add alternatives and then wait and approve it for public hearing? We will have to reanalyze a bunch of stuff, and is that correct?

DR. DUVAL: I think it depends on the alternatives that you're adding. If it's kind of within the scope, within the realm, of what we've already taken out, that's fine. It's if you're adding something that's really more of a completely new action. Then you might have to re-scope it, and so I think there's a couple of options there, that you could scope something via webinar in August and then add it to the document, and then it could go out for public hearings in January, and so there is, I think, a couple of ways that we could work around that.

MR. CONKLIN: I just want to make sure that, as we go through this, that we get things right and not have to revisit it again. What we have here does not help the bigger traditional people that pioneered the fishery, except for just a little bit, and I wanted to make sure that got on the record, that this is not a big-boat amendment anymore. It's trying to squeeze a bunch of fish, a little bit of fish, into a bunch of permits.

DR. DUVAL: I am not sure this ever was like a big-boat amendment, based on the actions that were included. We were focused on seasonality and retention, and I think my recollection of the discussions that we had had was how were we going to try to define those big boats, and, later on in the agenda, we're going to have, I think, Kari and John reviewing for us the social and economic profile, which is really what's critical to get to how would you help those boats that sort of built the fishery.

MR. CONKLIN: Thanks. I was trying to be sensitive to what this is, but I wanted to make sure that it got put on the record that the vision, this vision, is not helping the traditional fishermen, but we'll talk about that later.

MR. HARTIG: I wasn't sure where Chris was going. It's a really good idea that he brought up, because the AP has come up with some really good ideas in the commercial, different than what we had thought about. There is, I think, three different cases where I would like to add what they

put into this document, because it really made a lot of sense to me, listening to the AP when they talked about these different issues, and so I think they have a more innovative way, a better way, to do some of these.

I think they're not that far out of what we're doing, although you may have to add a trip limit or two in the jack complex, which we didn't have, or the amberjack fishery, but, as we go through it, you will see. I know you were there, and so you understood that they came up with some different things.

DR. DUVAL: Yes, and I think I also had some concern that, for some of the conversation, there wasn't necessarily the context for why some of these actions are in here, in terms of the geographic differences from north to south in the fishery, sort of the rationale for split seasons, and Myra addressed that yesterday.

There is a really nice introduction in the scoping materials for this amendment that sort of laid out, in a little mini paragraph for each of the issues under consideration here, sort of what the rationale was and how regulations have differentially impacted boats in different parts of the region, and you don't have the same species assemblages up and down the region, and you don't have the same access, you don't have the same weather, you don't have the same distance from shore. All of those things combine to really create these regional differences, and that was -- I will just leave it at that. That was my concern, is that some of that context really wasn't there, based on the representation of the AP, and that's not pointing fingers at anybody. Folks speak from their perspective, and so that's all. Let's go on and move into this.

MS. BROUWER: The purpose and need statement is on PDF page 3, and I realize that this may change, depending on what you guys choose to do, and so a couple of things that we just did, mainly adding this improving access to the need for the action, and that would address some of what Michelle just mentioned, but, as she said, we will make sure that we include the rationale for why you're taking these actions in the draft amendment, as she just stated. At this point, unless you want to make any changes, I would suggest just moving on.

The first action is on PDF page 4, and it looks at establishing a commercial split season for blueline tilefish. Before we get into the discussion of each of the actions, one of the things that we were going to suggest that you consider is allowing us to redistribute the actions. They're a little bit -- It doesn't flow very well. We've got blueline tilefish, and then we've got red porgy, and then we go into snowy grouper. If it's okay with you all, we were going to organize things a little bit better, so it's easier to see the connections between the actions.

Action 1, the commercial fishing year for blueline is the calendar year. We have two alternatives to specify the commercial split season. The Alternative 2 looks at two six-month seasons, and the ACL would be split into two quotas for both seasons, and so the same way we have it for gray triggerfish and vermilion. We do still need to get percentages in here, and then Alternative 3 gives you the option of varying the length of the seasons, and, again, the percentages for each would need to be specified.

The Regional Office conducted the analysis for this amendment, and there is an appendix in the draft document that has all of the details of how the analysis was conducted, and so, just to put things in perspective, here is a table showing you recent landings and quota closures, and so you

see that there's been a few the last few years. Here is peak blueline tilefish landings that were projected using two different modeling approaches, and, again, you can find all the gory details of what those are in the appendix, but both models projected peak landings in the month of August.

Here is a series of figures showing you the results from each of the two models that were used and so the one on the left that's in red is the one that uses the last three years to predict the landings, and so it uses the mean landings from 2014 through 2016. Then the one in the blue is the SARIMA model, and so that's just a different approach, and the dotted lines are going to be your 95 percent confidence intervals.

Both of those models predict that 50 percent of the ACL would be hit around August, based on current catch rates. I'm sorry. 50 percent would be reached in around April or May. You can see, however, that the confidence intervals are very wide for some of these, and so obviously you need to keep that in mind.

Then we have this table that you have already seen before that shows you the peak spawning and the length of the spawning seasons for the various snapper grouper species, and so, for blueline, it's hard to see right here, but it's this line right here, and so you're looking at peak spawning in the South Atlantic occurring from April through September.

Then we have a table that I will keep referring back through the document, but this is the mean monthly estimates of discards in numbers of fish, and this is, of course, based on self-reported discard rates from the supplemental discard logbook, and it was expanded to overall South Atlantic fishing and aggregated across all years. For blueline tilefish, you see peak discard numbers in April and September.

Another thing to keep in mind for blueline is there's been a lot, as you know, of regulatory changes that have taken place in the last few years. We had Amendment 32. Prior to that, we had an emergency action. Then we had some management measures that changed with Regulatory Amendment 25, and so it's been very dynamic, and, consequently, it's kind of hard to use those data to make confident predictions.

The IPT wanted you to consider moving this action to Blueline Tilefish Amendment 38, which is the one that we have slated to take care of whatever results SEDAR 50 comes out with, and so they suggested that maybe you want to deal with blueline tilefish then. Then, of course, the obvious thing is we would need to get more specifics on how you want to structure the quotas and the length of the seasons.

The Snapper Grouper AP stated that commercial harvest of blueline and snowy needs to be kept in line, and that's one of the reasons we would want to put those actions back-to-back, and that was especially important for the fishery off the Carolinas, after vermilion and gray triggerfish shut down, but they did indicate that some fishermen are also targeting blueline and snowy early in the year. Again, they mentioned concerns about the ongoing assessment and to consider possibly waiting until the results of that assessment are done, and they did pass a motion recommending no action on splitting the commercial season for blueline tilefish.

DR. DUVAL: I am wondering if maybe we also want to run through Action 3, which is snowy, first, so that we can discuss these things together. Are folks okay with that? Okay. Cool.

MS. BROUWER: Okay. Action 3 is on PDF page 18. Here again, the same suite of alternatives for the commercial split season for snowy grouper. Here is your table showing you recent landings, what the ACL has been, the percent of the ACL that was reached, and the quota closure, or the seasonal closure, in-season closure. There has been quite a few since 2012. Snowy has closed early. Then we have, again, the results of the two different models.

For this one, both models are predicting that 50 percent of the ACL would be reached sometime between February and May. Again, you've got pretty wide confidence intervals there. In terms of discards, and, here, I have to refer back to this table here, your discard numbers are quite a bit lower, and there doesn't really seem to be very discernable peaks, other than maybe here in June.

The trip limit currently for snowy is 200 pounds gutted weight. The AP did also suggest perhaps a trip limit step-down for both blueline and snowy, to coincide with the opening of shallow-water groupers on May 1. They did throw that out and also perhaps consider a step-down when a certain percentage of the ACL is met, and so this would be just a different approach to the commercial split season, to get at the issue of providing access and lengthening the season.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. We need to talk about these species together. The idea of split seasons is something that we heard throughout visioning. I know it's important for certainly some folks in North Carolina for whom access to those fish is difficult and where these are some of the only species within the complex that they access, but, that said, there is also concerns about the fish available for the market, and I think, in particular for snowy grouper, this is a fish that is important for markets during that time.

Markets are also different geographically up and down the coast as well, and so I just want to go and see what kind of input committee members have, and, once we've done that, if it doesn't capture some of the input that I received from fishermen when I met with them on Friday, then I will go ahead and provide that as well.

MR. GRINER: The snowy and the blueline are important for us in January, February, March, and April. That is when the market demand is the highest, and that's when we get the best price for those fish. We're at very small limits. We've got a 200-pound trip limit, and so that, in and of itself, with the weather we have, it's going to dictate how this season plays out.

I don't see a need to have split seasons for either one of them. I think, especially with the snowy, it works out best for us if we can have access to that fish when we don't have access to the other grouper. The fish is going to start spawning mid-summer. If you look at both species right now, we're probably at the neighborhood of 80 percent of the quota on the blueline and probably 90 percent of the quota on the snowy, and so the rates that we're catching them at kind of falls in line with being finished with that fishery right at the time the fish is going to spawn.

My preference would be to leave both of them alone, to leave them open in January. We can have access to those fish when the market is the highest and transition out of them into our other groupers once we get finished with the quotas. We're talking about very small quotas here, 70,000 or 80,000 pounds on the blueline, total, and so splitting the season up and continuing it on when there is no demand for the fish really doesn't help the commercial fishery at all.

MR. PHILLIPS: I am inclined to agree with Tim, and the other thing is, if we do something with blueline and then, as soon as we get it done, then we've got an assessment, then we're probably going to do something else with it, and so do we want to do something back-to-back? Is that a good use of our time and how we want to do things? I am kind of concerned about just putting in some regulations and getting an assessment and then putting in more regulations, and so that's a little bit of a concern. Yes, snowy are worth more in the winter, when everything else is closed.

MR. CONKLIN: There is a large amount of our grouper that we have to import early in the year, and Mexico has taken some conservation measures in February and March that really puts seafood dealers in a bind. It makes the snowy much more valuable. I think, in February and March, I'm paying -- Well, I won't say it on the record, but the price is down three-dollars a pound right now to the boat, because shallow-water groupers are open, but there is a high, high demand for that fish in January, February, March, and April. Then, now, there is not so much. I also think that we would have a -- We're close to probably catching these fish, and they really -- The commercial guys really need them early in the year.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I don't serve on this committee, but I do have a few observations, and it's based on the fishing. In different places in North Carolina, the snowy grouper and the blueline tilefish serve a great purpose, but it is in different regions. As you look at the history of North Carolina and the landing of snowy grouper, we have watched a shift in where the amounts of fish are caught and the different times of the year, and the same with blueline tilefish.

We predominantly, north of Cape Hatteras, I would say north of Cape Lookout, don't get really access to the snowy grouper, because of weather and different things, until probably closer to March or April, and also with the blueline tilefish.

In the southern part of the state, they don't catch a whole bunch of blueline tilefish. Probably, when they're grouper fishing, they might have a maximum of a hundred pounds of bycatch or something like that to go along, but we're watching shifts in the blueline tilefish, where, further south, the blueline tilefish is getting caught up. Sometimes I tend to wonder if fishermen just -- Just how it's getting caught up so quick, given a 300-pound trip limit.

There is a tilefish stock assessment that's coming out. I have sat through some of it, and I have scratched my head, because it's going to be more interesting. I have sat through it for like ten years now, and have actively been taking part, and I see one thing in this stock assessment, and this is my words, but the gross lack of science to be done to produce a stock assessment that is believable, and so we'll have to see what comes out of this one.

Even though they talk about the grouper being worth more than fifty-cents a pound at different times of the year and the access to it, the northern part of the state needs some access to it too, and so maybe, after we come out with the blueline tilefish stock assessment and see what the status of the stock is and how that works out, I would be in favor of having some split seasons, just to give different areas -- Something else I would be in favor of that this council chose a few years ago not to do was I would be in favor of having VMS.

I see, as we're going down the future, VMS does level the playing field, and so you had conversations yesterday about -- I can't remember which species, but about coming in at eleven o'clock and not landing, and, if you're going to land, how to -- VMS stops all that. VMS cures

that, and so, as you're looking at going down your fisheries, this council took a lot of comments, a lot of public comments, and acted on it, and I'm hoping that maybe in the future, in the near future, it looks at also professionalizing the fishery. That's a word that they use about a VMS, because it does level the playing field. It will clean up shenanigans, and I do believe there is shenanigans. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Dewey. I just want to make sure that I am clear. Dewey is a snapper grouper permit holder. I just want to make sure I'm clear on -- Are you supportive of considering split seasons right now, in this document, or are you saying that you would want to wait until after the blueline assessment?

MR. HEMILRIGHT: For me, I would be supportive of it now, because I believe you've got to start somewhere. I believe you're already seeing, no matter what the stock assessment comes out and says, you're already seeing a shift, and we need some further data about where these fish get landed at, because we've watched a shift, all of a sudden, in south Florida or South Carolina, where there used to not be landings in the times of the year, and so we're watching, all of a sudden -- If these tilefish are so not there, how can we have all these landings, and so I would be in favor of it now, because it's happening right now, no matter what the stock assessment says for blueline. It's just giving access -- I mean, we don't have no access in the northern region, and, right now, the quota is caught, and we could get good money in the next few months for blueline, even at 300 pounds, which is a miniscule amount.

What we're also seeing is fishermen are changing their behavior, of trying to go to the closest spot to maximize their dollars to get the tilefish, and they're fishing in areas where they haven't fished in ten years and are still catching the blueline, and so I'm sure the stock assessment is not going to catch that, because I just think we're three or four years out of seeing what we see on the water compared to what the science, and lack of, is done in the blueline tilefish.

DR. DUVAL: What I am taking from that is the regional differences are going to exist regardless of where the stock assessment leaves us.

MR. HARTIG: Dewey spoke to what I was thinking. I mean, it's a question of for North Carolina to have some access to the fish when they need the access, and that is an important part of this, and that split season will give North Carolina some access to those fish when they have traditionally caught them, and that's a very important part of it.

Now, I could be self-serving and say, yes, catch it all early and that's when we get the biggest price, but my price doesn't change that much. It's fifty-cents, or maybe a dollar, once grouper opens up, and so, for me, I would just as soon have some access later in the year, since I don't have access to some of the other groupers. It would be nice for me to have access later in the year as well, to be able to fit in some trips where I can actually snowy and blueline tile fish and red porgy fish at the same time in some areas where I catch those animals together. I am certainly in favor of a split season for this, for the equity reasons that we have now.

DR. DUVAL: I will just note that North Carolina has the same kind of differences in the fishery as Florida does. I mean, it changes from the southern part of the state to the northern part of the state. Tim and Dewey are fishing in different areas, and so there are different species that are available, just as with Florida.

MS. BECKWITH: I am just wondering if there is some other way to skin this cat. Similar to what we do with mackerel, is there an opportunity for sort of a sub-regional season that would encompass northern North Carolina that would be sort of able to hash out something for just that region? We do it with king mackerel, sort of, and so that's just a thought.

MR. BOWEN: Do we know exactly how many stakeholders are north of Hatteras with that snapper grouper permit? It can't be - I don't know how many there is. How many are we talking about? Do we know?

DR. DUVAL: It's gone down significantly since 2009, since 13C went into effect, and so five or six.

MR. CONKLIN: I was thinking along Anna's lines. Maybe we could talk about it over lunch or something, but I was trying to draw a line at like the lighthouse and 28 South or something and keep some fish in the middle earlier in the year, when we need them, and you could guys could peel off some of the quota and catch them other times, in all fairness and equity.

DR. DUVAL: Good times here. Good times. I am hearing some support for split seasons, and I am hearing support for keeping things as they are. I am hearing folks trying to understand each other's situations and trying to find different ways of addressing these regional differences. I am not hearing anybody throw up anything to fill in the blanks with regard to the sub-alternatives that we have there, and so, understanding what Chris and Anna were saying about maybe there is a way to look at this a little bit differently, with sort of some sub-regional type of allocation, to ensure that there is fish during the early part of the year, when the grouper closure is in place, but also allowing for that access in other parts of the year.

I am not sure that the alternatives that we have up there necessarily encompass that, because it might require some other changes, but some of the input that I received from folks in the Morehead City area, from some of the fishermen there, was that if the council -- In echoing all of those concerns about the market in the early part of the year, but, if the council was considering split seasons, then perhaps something along the lines of January through April and then something the rest of the year.

I would just throw that out there, but I am looking for some input from the committee as to whether or not there are any of these blanks here that you would want to fill in, with regard to splitting the season a la gray triggerfish and b-liners, where we have it right now, where everything is 50/50 is one alternative, or, if you would like to look at some other modified split and then consider maybe adding some different alternative later.

MR. CONKLIN: Just looking at the spawning seasons on these fish, what you asked about opening them up with like a July 1 second season, I don't think that would be in line with the stewardship that commercial fishermen are supposed to show and I think that we have for our resource. I would think the later, like the July 1, would make more sense, to where you're not fishing them in the spawning and not splitting them 50/50. I don't know how low you could go and track the ACL on time and stuff and also ensure that we meet the National Standards where we're catching all of our fish, but it's something to think about. I am thinking about it over lunch and come back with some numbers. Either that or just remove Action 1 and 3 all together.

DR. DUVAL: You're saying you would -- You're so soft-spoken sometimes that it's hard for me to hear you. You were saying that you didn't think January through June would work, because of when snowy grouper spawn?

MR. CONKLIN: No, I was saying that, if we split the season out into two seasons, the way the spawning lines up, that opening them at the two six-month seasons on a January 1 and a July 1 second season, we would be fishing the fish, or reopening it, in the prime of some of their spawn. The July 1 would not work, and so maybe you could move it on to like September, but you would not want to have half of the quota in September, because then you may not catch all the fish, because you can't carry it forward to your next January 1 season. That's what I was saying.

DR. DUVAL: Gotcha. I don't think we've ever had a problem with not using up all of the snowy quota, but --

MR. HARTIG: Chris, we talked a lot about this shallow-water grouper and what happens when that opens. Wouldn't it make sense to have a January to end of April opening? A shorter season in the beginning, and then put 50 percent of the quota on that, which allows you more fish in those months, because you've only got four months, and then the second season would start -- If you're concerned about spawning, you could have a closure in the middle of a couple of months and then reopen it later, for the second half, for another four months or five months. I am just trying to put together what your concerns are with the market drivers with how important the fish is in the beginning, to allow a little bit more in the beginning, while still allowing some fish for the people who need it in the end.

MS. BURGESS: Chris, this is on point. This is going where you're going, and also with what Ben was thinking, but we would need additional analysis from council staff for this. Thinking about split seasons, because of the quota for snowy, I don't think snowy and all the other species can have the same split season here, and we're going to have to maybe be creative for each one, but, if we open January 1 for snowy, that would be the start date, and have the season end August 31, but the portion of the ACL that would be allocated to Season 1 would be small enough to aim for a quota closure by the beginning of May and carry over the rest of the quota to the second season, to start on September 1, and that could address the spawning season issues and access for this fishery, but, like I said, we would need some analysis from council staff about how quickly that quota might be caught, and we can't always predict how fishermen are going to behave either.

MR. CONKLIN: To Ben's point, I completely support that, but I just don't support the 50 percent for four months. I would probably stack a little more quota on the first part of the year, to ensure that we caught the fish.

I know that we've never not had that problem, but I don't want to put us into that, and I understand that we're still fishing the fish right now, but that's because the weather was not the greatest, and it's not because the fish aren't there, but they're set to probably close pretty soon, the way the ACLs are tracking, but I certainly would like -- If we do split the season, I would like to see more of the quota at the beginning, in the first part of the season, and I would offer up January through April 31 season and then close it and then reopen with maybe like a 70/30 or a 60/40, something like that.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Aren't we presently, right now, for the last couple of years, you're fishing snowy grouper in April and May and it's closed down in June? You're already fishing during, I guess, the spawning season. I am not very familiar with it, but you're already fishing right now, and so, if you're looking at frontloading the access of the quota in January through April and then not opening back up until September, or July, I don't see a whole bunch for the northern part of the North Carolina to get kind of the advantage.

What guys are doing right now are going and trying to catch their 300 pounds of tilefish and trying to catch their 200 pounds of grouper and putting a trip together, and so I don't think we're worried -- It doesn't appear that management is worried right now with the spawning of the snowy grouper, because, the last three or four years, it's been open in April and May and closed in June, and so that ain't the problem that you're worried about.

We're just trying to look at it, in the northern part of the state, of somehow spreading some out a little bit and being able to retain the catch and putting something together, because we're seeing that we're in the southern part of the state, and you catch just a little bit of tilefish to go with your grouper. Therefore, in the front half of the season, it doesn't appear like you need a whole bunch -- You don't need 300 pounds of blueline tilefish to help you out through the year. From people that I've spoken with, 100 pounds would suffice that, and so maybe there could be something where you split the blueline tilefish something a little different than what you're looking at for the snowy, because one area who has historically caught a lot of the blueline is now just being cut out of it.

Something else I think it would help us is to look at who is presently catching the snowy grouper by state and the amount of vessels and the amount of trips that they're making and also the same would be for the blueline tilefish, because we're seeing a shift, historically, in the harvest of what it used to be to what it is now, and it might help each other's thought process up here, because there is definitely some shifts going on, and it would be interesting to see, and I know we can't worry about the -- We have to worry about the confidentiality part of it, but there are some shifts going on that would be interesting to see on paper.

MS. BECKWITH: Dewey, I am not hearing you tell us exactly what months having access to these fish would be most beneficial to north of Hatteras.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: It would be from April on.

MR. CONKLIN: When I was throwing the split season percentages out, I was speaking specifically about snowy, and so I understand what you are saying about blueline, and you're right that they don't have to be the same percentages, because there is a bycatch, and you have explained that, and that you guys -- This is visioning, and so this is -- We can give a little, and it's not one-size-fits-all, and so, if we need to do this, that's fine.

MR. PHILLIPS: If you split snowy out and you want to try to keep it open until the shallow-water grouper, you're going to have more than 50 percent, or else you're going to close after two months, or three months maybe, and then you're going to still have no grouper on the market, and there's just not a lot of fish.

When you start trying to split up 100,000 pounds into a couple of seasons, you are running a long way kind of for a short slide, and we've had that advisory panel tell us that they want simpler stuff, time and time again, and we try to do simple stuff, and then we try to answer all the questions and take care of all these things, and sometimes it's really hard to get there from here, and so I am still leaning towards not doing a split season and just see what happens when the tilefish assessment comes in. Then we can probably go back and look at it then, because I think we're doing a lot of work, and nobody is really going to get a whole lot of it when the dust settles.

MR. HARTIG: Charlie, working with the constructs of what we can do, we can make this work. I am confident that, in talking around the table, and I see heads shaking when Dewey is talking, talking about the fishermen who are catching the snowy in the wintertime, for the most part of the South Atlantic, are getting a relatively small bycatch of blueline tilefish. Maybe we don't need the 300 pounds in the beginning of the season of blueline tilefish.

I am not sure about you guys, but I don't. A hundred pounds would be more than enough to cover my catch of blueline. Now, I catch blueline every time I fish for snowy, when I'm fishing on the reef, and so I would have some bycatch, but, in order to try and shift some of these fish to the traditional area where the blueline tilefish were caught, maybe we can give up some of that trip limit in the beginning that we don't need to try and accomplish at least the blueline, to move some of that blueline into North Carolina, but we do need to also look at -- North Carolina was a traditional snowy area. The fish were still big when we closed the fishery, and that was a real problem when we did that, and it was the same way in Key West.

When we get to the regional nature of talking about these fisheries, fishermen got really hurt by when we closed that in North Carolina for snowy, and I would like to see some way that we get some snowy shifted back to that timeframe. You all, while you may not get the exact economic benefit from it that you were getting in January and February, you would still -- It will give you something else to do during that timeframe, which is important for everyone to have.

The key to this fishery now is to have access to something to be able to catch through most of the year, so you can keep going, so you can keep grinding on something. To me, the longer we can keep these seasons open, however we do it, is the way to move forward and then to address the equity concerns as well.

DR. DUVAL: Tim, and then I want to wrap up this conversation.

MR. GRINER: I agree, and it is not a one-size-fits-all. We have these regional differences, even within North Carolina, as Dewey said, and, if it helps them, then absolutely. We don't need 300 pounds of blueline tile. If we can spread that out to keep those fish available for those guys, I think absolutely that's the way to go, and I guess the same for the snowy. If it's going to help, then I'm not opposed to a split season. I just think you have to get the proportions right, as Chris said, and it's going to have to be heavier weighted in the frontend, but, as far as the blueline, we don't need 300 pounds a trip.

MR. CONKLIN: Right now, our ACL tracking for blueline is at 78 percent, and the snowy grouper is at 91, and so there is a different proportion.

DR. DUVAL: There has been a shift. There has been a shift, especially in blueline tilefish, and I think the idea of getting how those landings have changed over the past fifteen years, since 13C has gone into effect, by state, I think that would be very informational.

MR. DIAZ: This is a little bit different than what you all are talking about, but it's to a point that Chris made a minute ago. He was talking about split seasons and how, if you set them wrong, you might not catch all of your ACL. There was some guidance a while back as to some language in the MSA, and I believe it's National Standard 1, that allows for some carryover provisions.

We are currently working on a document in the Gulf of Mexico, and we just had an options paper at the last meeting, to allow for carryover of unharvested ACLs, and it's going to include reef fish, red drum, coastal migratory pelagics, spiny lobster, and shrimp. Anyway, you all may already be working on that, but that's one way we're trying to get a few more fish for some folks, especially in some fisheries that really could use any unharvested remainder of ACLs, and so thank you, Madam Chair.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Dale, and we're tossing that idea around as well, in multiple ways, to try and find a way forward and try to find a way to take advantage of that. I would like to go ahead and take a break, but what -- We have talked about these two actions, which involve access, and we've talked a lot about regional differences. There is one more action we're going to go through, which is greater amberjack, which has very similar types of issues. That's why, when Myra talked about reorganizing this document, that's why we talked about aligning it.

The snowy, the blueline, and the greater amberjack, those are all about regional differences and access. Red porgy is a little bit more about discards, or at least that's how I'm reading the issue, and I guess, as we sit here and talk about spawning seasons and how we would want to align things to not impact spawning, I just would urge the committee to be very careful about how you guys talk about this, because I'm hearing some inconsistencies.

We're looking at basically removing a spawning closure for red porgy, but we're talking about wanting to try to save spawning for snowy and blueline, and that's a little bit inconsistent, and we're going to get called on that. Charlie, last word, and then we'll take a break.

MR. PHILLIPS: I am listening to Tim say that they don't need 300 pounds of blueline the first of the year. Maybe we do a reverse. We can set a 100-pound trip limit until X date, and then it goes up when Dewey's people -- Maybe that takes care of a lot of the problem, instead of a split season. That's just something gnaw over at break.

DR. DUVAL: All right. Come back in fifteen minutes.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

(A power outage occurred, and an unknown portion of the audio recording is missing)

DR. DUVAL: There were very few discards from the commercial logbooks, and I don't see this as being much different in this amendment, and I don't see any changes that need to be made. Thumbs-up around the committee table? Thumbs-up. Okay. That takes us to Action 9, which is, again, the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish.

MS. BROUWER: This action is on PDF page 59. Again, it's the same suite of alternatives here, lowering that size limit for gray triggerfish down to twelve inches off of east Florida, and here we have -- There has been some in-season closures recently, and, as I mentioned earlier, the minimum size limit changed sometime in the middle of 2015, with implementation of Amendment 29.

Here is your length distribution of gray triggerfish caught in federal waters off of east Florida, and this comes from the TIP data from January of 2014 through June of 2015, and the dashed lines are the minimum size limit that is proposed in each alternative, Alternative 1 being your no action and then Alternative 2, in the red, being the proposed reduction.

The bottom line is there would probably be an increase in fish available for harvest if you choose to reduce that size limit, and that would be, I believe, about 20 percent, and there would probably be a reduction in discards during some months, but a possible increase in harvest rates as well, and so you're looking at perhaps some impacts to the length of your commercial season.

Then something else we added in here pertaining to length at maturity and information on reproductive biology is that a twelve-inch gray triggerfish female produces about half the number of eggs as a fourteen-inch-sized fish, and so I don't know what that translates to, as far as impacts to the whole stock, but that's just something to keep in mind. The IPT, again, the same considerations that we spoke about for the recreational, and the advisory panel did recommend, again, Alternative 2 as their preferred.

DR. DUVAL: I think we selected a preferred alternative for this in Regulatory Amendment 26, and I don't know if the committee would like to select the same preferred alternative, which would be Alternative 2, here right now. You don't have to. I'm pretty sure we're going to see this amendment again, because we have some additional work to do, and so, if there is no desire to do so right now, that's fine. I am seeing blank stares around the table, and so we will go ahead and wait on that. I think everybody is anxious to get to red snapper, which is the next item on the agenda, and so we'll let Myra close this out.

The next item is Snapper Grouper Amendment 43. We have several attachments here, Attachments 6a through 6e, and so 6a is the 2016 red snapper landings and discards, and 6b is status of the 2017 red snapper fishing season, and so Attachment 6a was in the late briefing materials, and it's a seven-page document, and who from the Regional Office is going to take us through this? We also have Attachment 6b is a presentation on the red snapper 2017 season.

MR. DEVICTOR: Mike Larkin is calling in, and he will give that presentation.

DR. DUVAL: Go ahead, Mike.

DR. LARKIN: I am talking about the landings and the removals from 2016, which relates to the season for 2017. SEDAR 24 and SEDAR 41 determined that the stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. Amendment 17A closed the fishery in 2011. Then Amendment 28 essentially came up with an equation to look at the total removals from the previous year to make a prediction for the season the next year, and so that's summing up Amendment 28. If you go to the next slide, I will show you that equation.

Here is that equation, and so I would really like you to focus on Equation 1. If the total removals from the previous year, and, in this case, we're talking about 2016. If they're greater than the ABC in 2016, then the ACL equals zero, which is really the situation we're in again, and we've seen this in other years, and so, really, there is no real point in focusing on Equation 2, because we don't get there. We are in the situation of Equation 1, where the removals were greater than the ABC. Excuse me. The removals from 2016 were greater than the ABC in 2016, and, therefore, the ACL for 2017 is zero, and I will go through some more details.

This is just a summary of the data sources. The commercial landings came from Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The commercial discards came from the delta-lognormal model expansion of the commercial discard logbook, which is self-reported discards. The headboat landings and discards came from self-reported logbooks with some auditing by biological samplers and at-sea observers. The recreational charter and private boat landings and discards were back-converted, because we're still in MRFSS initially, and so the MRIP was converted back to MRFSS.

This is a summary here of the MRFSS estimates, both for landings and discards for 2016. You can see, essentially, the two columns over on the left, the landings were zero, except for all the way down in Florida and east Florida. In Wave 3, there were eighty-one fish landed by the charter mode, the charter fleet. Then you can see the state surveys are all blank, because, in previous years, when there was a season, states had their own surveys, but they're all blank, except for South Carolina. They did have a charter logbook survey in 2016, and they reported no landings, and they had about 1,509 discards.

Here, on the table here, I am just showing you -- This came from MRFSS, and so you can see that, in the two columns over to the right, the discards are high, and really you can say I guess the bus driver was the high discards in Florida, and so you can see the charter has over 100,000 discards. Then the private had over 700,000 discards. Then the removals are calculated -- Those discards have a discard mortality rate applied to them to estimate the number of dead fish from that, and so removals of both the dead discards and the harvest, and everything here is in numbers of fish. These are numbers.

Here is the summary here of the -- You can see that top row there is the 2016 ABC of 121,000 there. Then the numbers down below that, in black, all sum up to the total removals. In commercial landings, you had 418. Commercial dead discards were over 27,000. Headboat landings were over 300. Recreational headboat dead discards were 27,000, roughly. The charter landings are those eighty-one, and the charter dead discards were 48,000. Recreational private landings was zero, but then you can see -- In the previous slide, I showed those high discards. When you apply the discard mortality rate to that, you get about 300,000 for the recreational private dead discards.

At the bottom of the slide, you can see -- You can compare the 400,000 to 121,000. Obviously the 400,000 is higher, and so, therefore, since the total removals exceeded the ABC in 2016, the ACL for 2017 is zero, zero fish. Again, these are all in numbers of fish. I think that's it. I would be happy to take any questions that you have on this.

DR. DUVAL: Mike, before we get into questions, there's been a little kerfuffling around the table here, because I think folks are having difficulty finding where the presentation was, and so, just to

lead folks to that, if you are on the briefing book website, if you go to the Late Documents Folder and click on that and open it, there is a document that says “A06b Presentation on Red Snapper 2017 Season”. That is the document that Mike just went through. Then 6a, if you scroll down a few documents, says “Tab 10 A06a 2016 Red Snapper Landings and Discards”, and that is the document upon which this presentation is based.

MR. BROWN: The ABC that he showed on that last slide, is that the old ABC for 2016?

DR. LARKIN: Yes.

DR. DUVAL: That is the ABC that is based on the previous assessment.

DR. LARKIN: Yes, SEDAR 24.

MR. DILERNIA: Perhaps someone can help me understand this. The discards that were listed there are about three-and-a-half times the ABC. Yet, the stock is continuing to grow.

MR. HARTIG: Exactly.

MR. DILERNIA: How does this occur? There is a mistake someplace. Maybe in my understanding of it, or I just don’t -- You are three-and-a-half times the ABC, and yet the stock is growing and continues to grow. There has to be some kind of wiggle room in here somehow.

DR. DUVAL: This is why --

MR. DILERNIA: I’m sorry. Some people are giggling, and I’m astonished. I don’t know what to say.

DR. DUVAL: This is why it’s always very helpful to have liaisons from other regions.

MR. HARTIG: Exactly.

DR. DUVAL: To help point out the obvious. Are there questions or comments?

DR. PONWITH: Just a comment on that. This is a rebuilding stock, and the whole notion is to reduce fishing mortality to allow the stock to rebuild according to the schedule that we’re being held accountable for, and so the idea is to reduce that fishing mortality to allow the stock to rebuild to the objectives that we set in the timing that we set.

DR. DUVAL: Other questions regarding the removals from 2016?

MR. HARTIG: Tony, based on your logic, you could take the number of discards in the -- The mortality in the discards right now, you could take that number out of the fishery right now as the fishery still rebuilds and not have any impact on the rebuilding. That’s the way it stands now. If you could somehow get a handle on the discards after you took that number, or if you set up a way that the fishery lasted the entire year, based on that discard information, you wouldn’t have to do anything else and the stock would continue to rebuild, and so we are moving in that direction

somewhat. We are trying to figure out a way to allow some of these dead discards to be landed catch, and we're going to progress, I hope.

DR. CRABTREE: I think what is happening, Tony, is the discards have gone way up, and I think it reflects big recruitment and a lot of fish. The trouble is I think the terminal year in the last assessment was --

DR. DUVAL: 2014.

DR. CRABTREE: 2014. The last assessment showed a big jump in fishing mortality in the terminal year, and I suspect that it's not really a jump in fishing mortality and that it's misreading a big recruitment event, but we're out of sync with all of this, and so there was considerable discussion, that I think we're going to come to, at the last SSC meeting, and there has been an exchange of memos between myself and the council and Bonnie and the council.

Where we are right now is we really don't have an ABC that is useable at this point, and we've got to find a new way to try and -- I think what we're trying to get to is an index-based catch level that is relying more on the index of abundance that we have and de-emphasizing the extent to which the MRIP discards are influencing all of these things, but we're not there yet, but that's what we're trying to work through with the SSC, to try and get to a place where we can reopen this fishery in some fashion, hopefully next year.

MR. PHILLIPS: I am guessing this is based on the last assessment with the last MRIP estimates that we got a letter from Bonnie saying we're highly uncertain, and so we just kind of take all of this with a grain of salt and try to figure it out? I'm a little confused.

DR. DUVAL: Bonnie, did you want to speak to that?

DR. PONWITH: We have a stock assessment, and we generated -- We handed that stock assessment to the SSC, and the SSC used it to develop an ABC. The Science Center was asked to develop projections from that stock assessment. The challenge that we have in generating projections from that stock assessment is this.

When that stock assessment was done, it was based on a combination of small seasons for commercial and recreational plus larger closed periods. A large percentage of the landings came from the targeted fishing period. When the fishing is closed, the targeted landings drops almost down to zero. There are some illegally-landed fish that get picked up by MRIP as landed, but most of the catch comes from the discarded fish, and then the fishing mortality comes from, the lion's share, from the dead discards from those estimates of fishing mortality.

We have a good stock assessment. The challenge that we have is how do you project those results going into the future, and we could use the old methodology, which is essentially exactly that, project those results into the future, but, if you look at all the inputs into the stock assessment that we do, the one input that is the most imprecise, that has the highest PSEs or widest confidence intervals, are the discards, and it's because, for the most part, those discards are self-reported. They come from self-reported data without the ability to validate. There is some validation on the headboat. We have some validation in those cases, but, for the most part, it's self-reported data without the ability to validate.

Essentially, what we would be doing is running projections with what really is the most imprecise data stream that went into a traditional stock assessment, and so what we're trying to do is to create another way to look at how this stock is rebuilding that relies less on those discard mortalities going into the future, and that's what this index-based approach is talking about.

At the same time, as we have seen dramatic reductions in targeted landings, we have also benefitted from our fishery-independent survey, which is the combination of SEFIS and SEAMAP and MARMAP, which is now being called SERFS, that combination. That has become more and more powerful with each passing year, and, essentially, every data point you add to that time series, the more descriptive power that time series has to help you understand the status of this stock, and so the notion is to rely on that index as a tool to understand the stock's response to pressures, whether they be environmental pressures or fishing pressures, going forward, to use that to inform our management approaches.

DR. DUVAL: I have a couple of questions here. In the report, the discard mortalities from the previous assessment are being used, and so we have a new stock assessment that, despite the challenges in establishing or calculating projections from that assessment, still stands as best scientific information available, and so we have new and updated discard mortalities, and so when do we move from using these old discard mortalities that are no longer best scientific information available, and I can understand maybe why they're being used in this report, because you have an old and existing ABC, but when do we start putting into play these new best scientific information available in regards to the discard estimates, because, if it's going to be not until we get a new ABC recommendation, then we're going to be constantly in this do-loop of applying what is no longer BSIA, at least the way I see it, to those discard estimates.

DR. PONWITH: Timing is the question, and so, right now, the analysts are working on developing this index-based approach. They're going to have to -- The pace of that analysis will be impacted by the request for the golden tile analysis that's being requested, using the red grouper analysis and applying it to golden tile, because the analyst that's doing one and the other is the same analyst, but, essentially, they are working on that index approach now.

The workshop that we're holding with MRIP and the Gulf Council's SSC and your SSC and representatives from the Mid-Atlantic and representatives from the Science Center, is designed to look at some of these issues of PSEs in recreational discards and how methods that we can apply to try and improve the precision of those estimates and to improve the precision of rare-event catches, and we've had that conversation with respect to hogfish, but I can also see it applying to if you have a closed season and you have one boat that comes in with a bucketful of red snapper. The expansions for that red snapper become an issue.

If you see one, and you're only sampling a subset of the vessels, it would stand to reason that there are other cases of that that you're not seeing, and so the expansion becomes necessary, but the PSEs are high, because your encounter rates might be low, and so the workshop that we have in this coming fall will be really important to have discussions about what do we do to improve the PSEs of those discards.

Then it becomes a matter of how do we use what we know about the status of the stock to evaluate its progress toward rebuilding to answer the question of are there harvestable levels of fish

available and when that happens and how much they are, and that is the process that is really under development, to use the index approach to understand the status of this stock and then work with the council to discuss how you convert that information into harvest advice.

DR. DUVAL: I understand that, and I appreciate that all that effort is moving forward to use an alternative index-based approach. I think my question is really very, very specific to the discard mortalities that are being used to calculate the total removals, and so, for the total removals for 2016, the discard mortalities from SEDAR 24 were applied, and so why can we not -- Now that we have new scientific advice on discard mortalities, why can we not, or why are we not, applying those discard mortalities to the removals, or why can't see those side-by-side?

I am really concerned that the only reason we're not applying them is because we haven't modified the ABC, and I think a lot of people are going to have issues with them, and so, on the screen, we have the different discard mortality rates from the assessments.

DR. PONWITH: Now I understand what you're asking. Yes, the discard mortality rate that we used in SEDAR 24 was used to generate the report that was sent to the council. That rate was used because we were not able to generate the projections we needed to have something to compare the discard mortalities against, and we wanted an apples-to-apples comparison, and so the discard mortality rate for SEDAR 24 was used because we didn't have those projections and then compared against the old projections. We have taken a look at what the new discard mortality rate would do to the estimates of dead discards, and what you see on the screen right now is the results of that.

DR. DUVAL: So it reduces the dead discards by over 100,000 fish, 110,000 or something like that.

DR. CRABTREE: But it still leaves you far above the ABC, and so the dilemma we have is -- This ABC is not based on the most recent assessment, which I think gave an ABC that's even lower. The problem we've got now is we have a stock that's rebuilding and making adequate progress towards rebuilding. I do not believe overfishing is occurring, and clearly the level of removals we've had over the last five or six years is consistent with rebuilding the stock.

The trouble is that we don't have an ABC that reflects the level of removals, and that's what we need to get from our SSC. Now, maybe Bonnie's approach that Beaufort is working on gets us there, and maybe some alternative approach is what we need, but it seems to me, right now, we don't really have an ABC that's meaningful to us, and that puts us in a dilemma, in terms of the mechanism that is laid out in Amendment 28, and so we need to find some other way to specify a season, by amending Amendment 28 or changing this, or we need to get our SSC to get creative and come up with some alternative methodology to bring an ABC out.

If you look through Marcel's presentation yesterday, and red snapper is doing better than virtually any stock we're measuring, and it's showing a tremendous recovery, and that is with a mixture of mini-seasons some years and closures some years, but clearly what we're doing is working and the stock is rebuilding. We just need to find a process to get us to a fishery, and my concern is that we're running out of time for this year to get the fishery reopened for next year, and we need to really come to some conclusions and get some things done if we're going to be able to open this fishery back up next year.

DR. DUVAL: So I understand the apples-to-apples comparison. I guess my next question would be so the index-based method for trying to determine an ABC -- I mean, I am concerned that I'm going to be told that there's also a disconnect between that and the discard mortality rates that came out of SEDAR 43, because the index-based approach is not -- It's using the index that was used in the assessment, but are you still going to be faced with that potential apples-and-oranges comparison? I apologize for asking all these questions, but I think the public is also going to want to know when do we get to reap the benefit of the lower discard mortalities, and are we going to continue to display the removals using these old ones?

DR. PONWITH: No, the discard mortality rate that was used in the most recent stock assessment was used because it was embraced as the best discard mortality rate, and so, if that's what you're asking, that's the discard mortality rate that prevails. Exactly how the -- There are going to be two steps to this, Madam Chair. There are going to be two steps.

First of all, we need to understand how the stock is responding to whatever we're doing, and that is using that index-based approach to look at the response of the stock to management of the environment. Then the second step is how do you interpret that or how do you use that to devise harvest advice, and that's the part that we're going to have to work with the council on.

I know that the amount of effort that we have out there is important to know. I know that we are going to continue to want to know what the discard estimates are, but we think we're going to have to have more information go into answering the question of how do we set harvest advice for 2018 and the period going forward.

DR. DUVAL: I understand that. I think some of the questions that we are going to get are much more basic, in terms of so, for 2017, when we look at removals and we get to the end of the year, are we going to be using the SEDAR 24 discard mortality rate or are we going to be using the SEDAR 41 discard mortality rate, and so I am just trying to get to some of the very basic questions that we're going to be asked.

MR. BROWN: Bonnie, did you say that the PSEs for the discards was the same, was carried forward to 41 from 24?

DR. PONWITH: PSEs are a statistical characteristic of an estimate, and those PSEs are all determined on sample size and how much natural variability there is in the data that you see. We don't set the PSE. The PSE is a descriptive characteristic of the data, and so, essentially, our intent would be to use the fishing mortality rates that were used in SEDAR 41 and to use discard estimates that come from the MRIP program and headboat program and the logbooks, like we always have, but use those in conjunction with trends that we're seeing in the fishery-independent index, and that's kind of the general description of how this is going to work. The specifics of that are what is under development right now, but the answer to your question, Madam Chair, is that the discard mortality rates that were used in SEDAR 41 will be used in this process going forward.

MR. BROWN: The methodology of MRIP changed from 24 to 41, with the implementation of APAIS, and so I was just wondering, with those changes, didn't that have any kind of an effect or an impact on the PSEs?

DR. PONWITH: Yes, you're correct. The methodology did change with APAIS. The calibration for that is important, and then the methodology for the effort estimation process has changed as we shifted from the telephone survey to the mail survey, and so that's a second calibration. Those methodology changes will also require -- They create a new estimate, and that estimate has its own statistical characteristics, and the uncertainty of which will be captured in the PSE.

DR. DUVAL: Tony, last question, and then we're moving on. We have a presentation from Marcel on the SSC's input.

MR. DILERNIA: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at the screen, and there is approximately 300,000 fish that are thrown back dead, say last year. Is it possible to have a threshold -- I mean, I'm not sure how the red snapper fishery is prosecuted, but I would think that red snapper, if they're a bycatch, they are caught while fishing for other species also. I see some of the captains around the room nodding their heads yes.

Is it possible to convert some of those discards into landings? If they're going to be dead anyway, to have, in a sense, a threshold. Say you have ten of one species or fifteen of another species, and, if you have that number of that species, then you're allowed to keep one red snapper, and you're not directing on the red snapper.

You are catching it as a bycatch in another fishery, but, instead of throwing it back dead, you're allowed to land it if you have the prerequisite number of other individual fish or species, in order to allow that landing, and that might be something that you may want to think about, because, again, it's a bycatch. They are being discarded, and you're not directing on them that way. That might be a way to at least avoid wasting some of these fish.

DR. DUVAL: That's great input, Tony, for the conversation we'll have after a couple of short presentations here and we get into Amendment 43, which is really focused very much on that and trying to turn some dead discards into landed fish. Marcel, would you mind coming up here and providing the SSC input?

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Madam Chair. The SSC met, as I mentioned earlier, in April, and we discussed at length red snapper. We talked about the corrected assessment and some ABC recommendations and reporting and descending devices, and I will do my report in that order. The SSC received a brief presentation by Dr. Erik Williams, who went through the corrected red snapper assessment, and, specifically, the data for the headboat discard index were corrected.

We asked Dr. Williams if the new likelihood estimator was investigated in this update, and that's the one that we discussed earlier that was used in red grouper, and it was not. That's a reminder to the committee that that was that method that was discussed. Dr. Williams indicated that the differences between the original and the corrected assessment were minimal. However, the SSC noted that, for instance, if you look at the corrected MSY, that was about 7 percent lower than in the original assessment.

Earlier, the agency had clarified to the SSC that the assessment is still considered best scientific information available. However, the data that is available to monitor the landings and discards are too uncertain to track any projected ABCs, and some of that you just discussed in an earlier conversation here at the table. The current projected yield streams are also still considered best

scientific information available. However, they are not useful for management and monitoring, because of the uncertainty in the catch and the discard data.

In terms of the ABC, Dr. Crabtree already mentioned that the SSC is currently unable to provide an ABC for red snapper, given the available information, and we acknowledge that we are currently unable to do that. However, as was also mentioned in this meeting, the SSC also noted that, although the estimates of the discards may be highly uncertain, there is a high probability that the continuing upward trend in the fishery-independent index, as you have seen yesterday in the SERFS update, reflects the population size increase.

Therefore, again, as was mentioned earlier, the SSC supports the index-based approach that is being proposed to track and monitor the population condition of red snapper. The difficulty in developing a method is how to scale the fishery-independent information to the population level of red snapper. These new techniques would use the fishery-independent index data and project them out from the terminal year to scale the stock biomass. This is a very novel approach, and development of that will require the cooperation between the SSC, the council, and the Science Center, and we also feel that it may require peer and SSC review.

The committee supports attempts to apply the data-limited toolbox as well as some new data-limited methods that are recently developed by the Science Center, and the SSC also suggests perhaps a workshop on the data-limited toolkit can be considered.

If a short season is allowed, the SSC recommends that a permit requirement would be enacted, to place some of the data collection burden on the anglers. However, we also recognize that there are some unknown scientific and statistical issues in developing a permit system for private recreational vessels and fishermen.

Using a short season to obtain representative samples would be extremely useful for assessing the stock, in particular the age samples, but that will require a rigorous scientific design, and this is something that we discussed with the previous mini-seasons, and we have some models on how to approach it, and we also may have some lessons learned from those sampling efforts, but we feel it's very important to use as much information as possible from those mini-seasons for potentially assessing the stock.

With the importance of the fishery-independent index, and this is, I believe, something that I mentioned yesterday, the SSC recommends prioritizing the research to develop a method to determine the size of the fish from the video survey, the SERFS video survey, and, as a reminder, currently, the length compositions, as well as age compositions, from the trap catches are used, are applied, to the chevron video index, and so it would be extremely useful to get some length compositions from the video.

In terms of the reporting and the use of descending devices, as was mentioned, again, success of both actions depends on compliance and enforcement. The timing of the reporting is critical to its use, and, of course, the shorter the reporting time, the more accurate the report will likely be, and the SSC recommends electronic reporting. Initial results concerning private recreational electronic reporting are very encouraging, and several pilot studies will provide useful information.

Methods need to be developed to verify trip reports, both for the landings and the discards, and obviously that's important for red snapper because, currently, most of them are discarded. Also, consideration needs to be given to target species when choosing a sub-sample of people to report. For instance, surveying a deep-dropping trip will affect precision of estimates for those rarely-encountered deepwater species. It was pointed out at the meeting that Florida currently runs a vessel-based survey specialized for those offshore trips. Also, it needs to be recognized that there may be a difference in the willingness to report between individual fishers and a vessel owner who needs to report for an entire group.

In terms of descending devices, again, compliance is key, as was discussed yesterday. Presentations during the workshop yesterday spoke to several of the SSC's discussions and recommendations, and I will mention a couple here. In our report, we detailed several points related to the compliance and the analysis of, for instance, the tag recapture. The bottom line is that the SSC strongly recommends the use of descending devices to reduce discard mortality, and we also feel that perhaps instruction and outreach on the use of these descending devices would be a very useful citizen science project. I believe that completes my report, Madam Chair.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Marcel. A few quick questions, because we also have another presentation that I would like to get to before lunch.

MR. BREWER: Marcel, you mentioned permitting requirements, and what are you speaking of, in terms of permitting requirements?

DR. REICHERT: I believe that was in response to some of the language that was provided. The key there was to make sure that we get information, we get data, from the recreational sector to help us understand the population dynamics of red snapper. Obviously, ultimately, it's up to the council, in terms of how to design that permitting system.

MR. BREWER: Are you speaking of someone being allowed to keep red snapper if they have a permit, or are you talking about permitting from the standpoint of those who would be trustworthy enough, perhaps, to do some research that could be utilized by us?

DR. REICHERT: I don't believe the SSC discussed that level of detail. I think this was more in response to, if a mini-season is opened, it would be good to have a permit system so that we could collect some data from the recreational sector, and I can look a little bit at my notes and see if I can provide some clarification there.

DR. DUVAL: The SSC reviewed Amendment 43, which contains alternatives for a permit requirement, and so that's where --

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and that was the source of that recommendation.

MR. DILERNIA: I would like to, if I could just take a moment to describe an initiative, a framework, that we're developing in the Mid-Atlantic Council for black sea bass. Black sea bass, for years, was fished during Wave 1 of the MRIP cycle, January and February. For lack of data, we had problems authorizing it the past few years.

We are currently in the process of developing a framework that will permit us to reopen the black sea bass fishery during January and February, and the process that we're using will be the issuance of a letter of authorization from the agency. Fishermen, and not just for-hire fishermen, but private boat fishermen or whatever, would apply to the agency for a letter of authorization to fish for black sea bass during Wave 1.

The requirements would be a call-in and call-out and mandatory reporting. We also have some other items in there regarding possession limits and suspending the minimum size, to allow for barotrauma, but, having made the motion to initiate the framework, I am encouraged that we will have it perhaps in place for 2019, but a letter of authorization process may be a technique that you may be able to use to address some of the issues that the SSC has identified regarding whose reporting requirements and who would be participating in the fishery.

The letter of authorization defines the number of participants, and there is no limit on it, but we know exactly who they are, and it requires that they call-in and call-out, so we know when they're going to be fishing, and it requires that they do mandatory reporting, which will assist you in your data collection, and so it may be something that you may want to consider as you forward. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Tony, and I think we have elements of that type of proposal in Amendment 43, which we'll probably end up reviewing after lunch. Are there any other questions for Marcel? If not, I would like to ask John Carmichael to come up here and I think give a brief presentation on -- What is the title of your presentation, John? Is it entitled "How to Move Forward?" It's in the late materials folder.

MR. CARMICHAEL: It is "Red Snapper Ponderings", and you guys know I like to ponder this stuff, and we've been here before, talking about these challenging issues, and I think we had an interesting discussion along these lines in this very room with blueline tilefish a number of years ago.

We got these reports on the red snapper, and obviously we're interested a lot in what the season says and what it says about the population, what it says about the population estimated by the assessment, and so, looking at the report on removals, I was curious about the red snapper encounters, and so, by encounters, I mean the total number of fish discarded and the number of fish caught. How many fish are we estimating that fishermen put their hands on within the year?

In 2016, that works out to 1.0 million fish, and then one thing that we like to think about, in terms of putting this stuff in real terms, is, well, how many fish is that relative to what we think the population was, and sometimes that can be kind of interesting, to get a sense of what's going on. In 2015, and I use that because that's the terminal year for SEDAR 41, and so that's the last year we have a total abundance estimate.

We estimated the population at 1.1 million fish, and so what that suggests is that the 2016 fishery touched 86 percent of the entire red snapper population from age-one-plus. That obviously makes you sort of go, wow, that's an interesting statistic, and what is going on here. Of course, it's possible that some of those fish were caught more than once. We know that happens. Otherwise, we would not get any tag returns, but I don't think any of the tagging studies that are undergoing

suggest that a lot of these fish are being caught more than once, certainly within a particular year or over a short period of time.

It's also possible that these estimates all have uncertainty around them. Both are measured with error, and we're just looking at the point estimates, and that error could be higher or that error could be lower. We don't know, but the bottom line is there's a lot of fish being counted relative to what we think are out there, and, if we look at what was projected in the SEDAR 41 projections for 2016 encounters, that would have been 183,000 fish.

What we see is that what we think really happened in 2016 is that we encountered 5.5 times what we would have thought that we would have encountered back when SEDAR 41 ended, and this is exactly what Roy kind of led the conversation off with, saying that clearly there is something going on here that's a little bit different than what we would have anticipated back when we did SEDAR 41, which brings us to the big question of why, which is why are projections and limits so far removed from what we're really seeing as the current observations?

I think this is really a story about recruitment, and, again, Roy has mentioned, many, many times, that we have these fisheries, and they are hook-and-line fisheries, and they're recreational fisheries, and they're driven by the abundance. When you get a recruitment event, you get a lot of fish. You get high abundance, and you get high availability, and you get high catches.

The other thing you get is you get things happening in the environment that are not consistent with what we would have projected to be happening and estimated to be happening, because we pretty much estimate random situations. We cannot project random events. I mean, we estimate and project average conditions. We can't anticipate when some random recruitment event is going to happen that's going to lead to the kind of things that we're seeing right now.

If we look at what is happening in terms of this is recruitment estimates from SEDAR 41 for the last assessment, and this is the abundance of age-one fish, and so this is kind of after a lot of the bottleneck should have happened, the big red line is what we estimate as average, what we will get at MSY conditions, and so that's what we're striving for, to get around MSY conditions, and we estimate getting like 480,000 fish a year being born.

You will notice though, in some years, we have done substantially better, and I think most folks here remember the SEDAR 15 situation, where we had estimated the population as being in very dire straits and we're looking at extremely stringent regulations, and, right as those were going out for public hearing, we started having indications that there were a lot of red snapper. We saw it in the MRIP B2 estimates, and we saw it in the charter boat and headboat estimates of throwing back a lot of fish, and we saw it the next year in people encountering a lot of fish.

We went immediately, as quick as we could, and we did SEDAR 24, and we showed that there was a really great year class that had hit the fishery, and it was the best year class we had seen in nigh on twenty years, and it had a lot of impact on what we did then and the regulations that we're looking at now and the seasons that we weren't allowed to have for a couple of years.

Well, we did SEDAR 41 recently, and it had a terminal year of 2014, and what we're seeing here, based on the recruitment, is we think that there was a pretty good year class in 2014, but we didn't think that 2015 was maybe all that great, but, looking at what we're seeing now, it's possible that

2015 is actually quite well. This is just based on the stock-recruitment relationship, which, in red snapper, was based on a steepness of 0.99, which essentially means you don't have a stock-recruitment relationship, and so that means your recruitment is being driven by just some random thing that you can't really predict.

I think that is what is at work here. We're having these recruitment spikes come through this fishery, and all of the assumptions that we have of these average conditions are not really holding true, and we are creating these problems, where the ACLs are being exceeded and we seem to have all these issues within the fishery.

That is really the challenges that we face. The MSY is these long-term average conditions. The fishery, however, is driven by these short-term events. Maybe they are low R, as we saw during the 1990s, or maybe it's high R, as we're seeing a little more often right now. We also think, and I think a lot of cases really understand this is true, that these hook-and-line fisheries respond strongly to abundance and availability, and I think that's commercial and recreational as well.

We think about it with recreational, of course, but a lot of our snapper grouper is a hook-and-line fishery, and that's going to also have to respond a large bit to abundance. In theory, the conservative reference that we're required under the Magnuson Act, where you have ABC reduced from OFL, they're going to spread out that high recruitment to offset that low recruitment. That's what the average conditions do. If you took those recruitment spikes and didn't count for them in your estimates, then your recruits that you expect at MSY would be a little bit lower, and we saw this and it was discussed by the SSC with regard to red grouper, which exhibited a couple of recruitment spikes back in the early 2000s.

Realistically, however, this really doesn't work out so well in the real world, and part of it is this huge surplus, or this bounty, as you could call it, from that high recruitment event. It's perishable. This is not like money in your retirement account that you can dole out over the thirty years that you're retired. These are living fish. If you have a high abundance, then you likely have higher natural mortality in that year. We treat natural mortality as a constant over time, but we know, biologically and ecologically, it's likely related to conditions in the environment.

You also have discards, and, if this were largemouth bass in a lake, where discard mortality was extremely low, you could probably spread out that fish over many years and fishermen could catch those fish over and over again and really take advantage of that bounty over many years, but this is snapper grouper, and these are in the ocean, and these fish, like many of them, have a discard mortality rate that can create a problem, and so you have this high abundance, and so you have high availability, and you're going to have the discard mortality.

Essentially, what we end up doing is just wasting those fish, in terms of having to throw them back dead, and, even if you could spread them out successfully, really what tends to happen is the constituents, which is the fishermen, they want to take advantage of that bounty today. If there's a lot of red snapper, they want to be able to catch and keep a lot of red snapper. If there's a lot of cobia, you want to catch and keep a lot of cobia. People want to take advantage of that and enjoy that resource.

None of that really works well with this MSY and spreading this stuff out over the average, and that's the underlying challenge, because, under this ACL management, these high catches are

viewed as a negative, while really, in terms of the fishery, this is a positive. This should be a great situation, and I know Roy has mentioned this a number of times around the table. We're facing this thing and what should be a good situation ends up being treated as something that is terrible that we have to deal with.

One of the other questions that this led me to look at is just how much does the recreational fishery respond to these abundance and recruitment spikes? I just took a relative measure of recruitment, and so I looked at the recruitment in a year relative to that heavy red line, that recruits at MSY, to say, so if the number here is one, then that means that you've got recruitments in line with MSY. When it's below one, you've got lower recruitment. When it's above one, you've got better recruitment.

I lagged it one year, because the recruitments are age-one, but the fishery really starts encountering fish at like age-two. I looked at this with like three-year averages of encounters and other things, and a general pattern holds across all of that, and so I think it's pretty robust. One of the first things that caught my eye was this cluster of points down here, where we had overall low recreational encounters and we had relatively low recruitment, 0.4, 0.6, down to 0.2, down to even maybe only about 10 percent of what you would expect at MSY.

This is from really the first years where recruitment changes in our stock assessment, which is about 1980, looking forward to the most recent years, and so it spans a pretty big change in stock abundance, and it spans regulations, from virtually none to the moratorium that we've had in recent years, and so this pattern of encounters responding to the short-term availability of these recruitment spikes seems, to me, to pretty robust across a lot of conditions that we've seen.

What is apparent is, in these points up here, are where the encounters are over 300,000 fish in a year. In this case, the recruits over recruits at MSY tends to be greater than 0.6, and you might ask about this apparent outlier point, which sticks out there and saying, hey, what's going on with that one, and it looks like we had an enormous amount of encounters, but not really a great year class, and that's because that's looking at our terminal year. The recruitments are based on 2015, age-ones.

The assessment terminal year is 2014, but we can use the SSB in 2014 to figure out how many fish were born on January 1 of 2015, but, since we have a steepness of 0.99, the stock-recruitment relationship is non-existent, and it comes out as just giving us this relatively average recruitment, or slightly below.

I think, in all likelihood, when we do another assessment, we're going to find out that the 2015 number should be way the heck over here somewhere, based on this number of encounters. Of course, this will be a good test to see how well this relationship actually holds up, but I think it's worth pointing that out, to say that this is our most recent encounters. It's the highest number of encounters we have ever seen in this fishery. Clearly there is something going on that is violating the assumptions of what we put in place when we did projections and stuff from SEDAR 41. Our challenge, as I said, as the council, is figuring out a way that we deal with that.

If we were in an ideal world, what we would do is -- Maybe humor isn't the best thing here, but we were really thinking about we would do in an ideal world. We would have an annual assessment update. That would be informed by a reliable index of recruitment. We would provide ABC

values from that reflect the current trends and events, and then we would use that to implement these rapid management changes, and we would be able to have ACLs that are consistent with what the population really is out there, and it would allow the fishery to take advantage of that bounty when you get this recruitment spikes.

On the other hand, it would also mean that there would be times when you would get a run of low recruitment that you would have to deal with scarcity of that fish, and you may have to actually bring things down, but I think that's more acceptable to people when they at least feel like what's happening in the regulations is consistent with what they are seeing in the real world.

Unfortunately, I think that we know that getting annual assessment updates, as we discussed at SEDAR, is really quite a stretch, and, even if we did, we don't have things like the reliable index of recruitment that would really allow us to inform that and have a good estimate of what really is coming into the fishery, and so we've got to come up with some other ways, and that's what we were talking about here today, is what can we really do in our real world with our real situation.

I think part of it is just recognizing that the ACLs really -- This isn't the problem of ACLs and that ACLs are all bad. The problem is that ACLs that do not reflect current population abundance are the problem, and I think that hits at a core problem that we discussed around this table, and it's why we struggle often a lot more with ACLs than maybe some other regions, where they get assessments updated more frequently and they have the type of indices and stuff that give them real information on what's going on within the fishery that's not driven by what's going on within actual fishing operations. They know what their populations are up to.

I think we also might need to consider that these episodic recruitment events may really be more the norm for snapper grouper species than an exception. We have seen this in black sea bass. If you remember the end of the rebuilding in black sea bass, there was a huge recruitment spike. Marcel showed it in the indices. You know that that big spike that happened had to be from a good recruitment event, and we're seeing that sort of taper off now.

We also saw it in red grouper, and it was discussed by the SSC a lot, which you will hear some about later. There were a couple of recruitment spikes that potentially have driven our expectations of what that population can do, and there may be other stocks. Of course, there is probably going to be some species within this complex that really don't exhibit this behavior, but our challenge might be to figure out which ones do.

Once we do, we need to find ways that we can access this surplus that comes from these recruitment spikes, and that's where the idea is of what are the metrics we can use to come up with that are going to tell us that being over the ACL is not likely an overfishing situation, and that's where we think about -- The SSC has talked about rumble strips, and I know the Mid-Atlantic has used rumble strips, and there is the stoplight concept, which is used by places like ASMFC.

There are triggers, which we used to think of years ago. FMPs would have triggers, based on catch levels or mean length or survey abundance or what have you. Just something that you said, when I get to this point, things are bad. When I'm over this point, things are good, and it gives me some sort of real-time metric that I can use in between stock assessments to know what's going on.

We think one possible approach to looking ahead to red snapper would be, and really many of our snapper grouper fisheries, is the bag, size, and season limits should really be set so that they are, in a sense, precautionary relative to the average conditions, and that's exactly what the MSA requirement called for.

We set ABCs reduced from the OFL, and the council sets ACLs and ACTs reduced from that, and you try to set some baseline that's overall precautionary, and that's good, but then we should also be evaluating real-time metrics between stock assessments, so that we can inform appropriate action, and this really gets at when do you apply accountability measures and when do you, for example, shut down a fishery in the middle of the season or have some consequences for the following year?

If you had metrics that indicated a recruitment spike, the idea would be that you should be allowed to maintain the regulations. Don't penalize the fishery if the ACL is going to be exceeded in that year if you have evidence that that's because there is a lot of fish and it's not likely to result in overfishing and you want to just let the fishery run and let the fishermen take advantage of that surplus.

On the other hand, you do have to be prepared for if there are situations where you have ongoing poor recruitment. You should trigger a stock assessment and consider strengthening the regulations, and the little asterisk there is sort of my opinion. I think, really, you're talking about more ongoing recruitment failure than a single year of bad recruitment, because I believe that the risk from a single poor recruitment event is relatively low, because the mechanisms that make hook-and-line fisheries respond to this high abundance also tend to make them respond to very low abundance.

When the fish are scarce, they are harder for the fishermen to catch, and so you're going to see catches drop, in some cases, when the fish are scarce, just naturally. Now, the problem, of course, is, if you have ongoing poor recruitment, then continuing to take fish out of that, even at lower levels than what maybe you did before, is likely to start eroding the population and create troubles, but a one-time spike may not be of any poor concern, in terms of long-term average conditions, than the one-time increase should be of concern in the fact that you're exceeding the ACLs.

Then the big challenge here, of course, is with red snapper and what are the kind of metrics that we can use that might inform us about the population, and this gets at the core of the index approach that we're going to talk about. It could be the encounter rates, as I showed you figures addressing, and it could be things like the headboat CPUE and discards. We have the report on the headboat program from the Science Center, that, if you got information like that annually, that's something that could be used to judge an individual fishery situation and decide what that population is doing.

There may be some other ways of looking at this. Chip and I talked about maybe just presence or absence of a particular species, because, if something is getting more abundance than you think, in something like a headboat with a lot of fishermen and varying levels of skill, then more of those guys should be encountering that fish, and that could be a good indicator.

Then, finally, the other one, as we saw in the report from Marcel, is the fishery-independent surveys. They certainly give us information of what is going on, and they are much more real-time than we can ever get out of any stock assessments. I think, as we get into the next couple of

steps here, we can start thinking more of how these metrics can be used in red snapper and what kind of system can we set up that might be more responsive to real time, and understand that, really, the biggest challenge in the assessment is, as they always are, there is things that are going on right now, in real time, that that model is just not aware of, because it ended back in 2014.

There has been a lot of water under the bridge, and, again, this red snapper population seems to be giving us signals of an incredible recruitment event, and we're just not able to plug it in, and we can't just make up a number and plug it in, because that wouldn't be scientifically sound, and so we have to come up with something above and beyond and beside the stock assessment, and so, around this table, you can guys can make a compelling enough argument that says it's okay that we're exceeding the ACL in this year for these particular reasons, and I think that's where we, at the council level, the council staff, are really trying to push all of this together. Madam Chair, if there's any questions, and I appreciate your indulgence in my ponderings.

DR. DUVAL: We always appreciate your ponderings, John, and so it is about 12:15, and I think this was really helpful. Folks can chew on this over lunch, perhaps, and then I think, as we walk through the document, keeping these things in mind and keeping in mind this information that John has presented with us here, along with this index-based approach and other types of information that we can use to try to provide ourselves a little bit more real-time information that we can use, and I think this goes across all of our fisheries and not just red snapper. I know the Science Center staff are working on this index-based approach that could be applied more broadly than just red snapper, and so, with that, go forth and eat, but you're back here at 1:30. We have a lot on the agenda.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

DR. DUVAL: I will call the Snapper Grouper Committee back to order. We are going to jump back into red snapper. We received our report on the 2016 estimates of discards and the 2017 season, and we received an update from the SSC regarding their input on development of an ABC, and we had some significant discussion about the discard mortality rates between the two different assessments, and then we had a brief presentation from John Carmichael looking at how we might try to move forward, and so I ask folks to keep that in mind as we go through the remaining attachments and have our discussion today, and so I think I'm going to turn things over to Chip. I think he was going to start out with just giving an update on progress regarding the development of a reporting application for the private sector, and I believe that's Attachment 6c.

DR. COLLIER: It is 6c. It's a short presentation, more or less giving you guys additional information that we've been providing for a while now, but we did get funded to pilot a recreational reporting app, and, within this app, we're going to have a permitting side and a reporting side to it.

As you can see from this diagram, it goes from catching and reporting to hopefully improving estimates of landings, whether it's combined with MRIP or some other methodology. The goal of the permit reporting app is we're looking to begin to enable a permit to be issued to individual fishers and have a reporting system to collect data on catch and effort, and, as you have heard today, there is high uncertainty in red snapper landings, but there is high uncertainty in several other snapper grouper species.

If you looked through the complex and you were to step back and think about it, most species are actually rare-event species, and so we would like to look at all species in the snapper grouper complex, start there, and, if we need to, we can go to other species as well.

Some other features that are going to be in this app, or we hope to be developed in this app, it's going to include an option to store pictures of caught-and-released fish, and that can help us in two ways. One, it can be used to begin to get estimates of size of fish that are discarded, and it can also be used to verify the identification by anglers, to make sure they're actually identifying species properly.

There is another feature that's in there, which is going to be testing a geofence feature. We have some protected areas offshore for snapper grouper fishermen, and what this thing would do would just warn fishermen that they're in a protected area. It's not recording where they are or anything like that, but it's more or less just to tell them that you're in a protected area and don't fish here, or don't bottom fish here, and we want to see what kind of influence that has on the battery life of a cellphone. Having a GPS feature turned on can actually drain a battery pretty quickly, and so we want to see if this feature would drain a battery pretty quickly and see the overall impacts to the fishermen and what they like about it.

Partners in the project, we have the Snook and Gamefish Foundation. There's Elemental Methods, and they're going to be the background programmers. We also have Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program, National Marine Fisheries Service, ourselves, and we're going to involve fishermen in this. We're looking to get over a hundred fishermen involved in the pilot project, and we might actually work with Virginia as well in some of their cobia issues that they're having up there.

The timeframe for the project, it was an eighteen-month grant, and we've had some pre-discussion with the designer of the application and ACCSP, to make sure that what's being designed can be entered into the ACCSP data system. We've had coordination with the development and the database. They have been in communications developing an API. Then we've hired staff for the outreach. The staff that we've hired is Kelsey Dick, and she has just graduated from Duke University, and she will be starting on Monday.

You can see we have several things to go on this app, and we'll continue to update you where we are and give you information, as requested. With that, if you have any questions in regards to this app or what we're planning on doing or any suggestions, I welcome them.

DR. DUVAL: Awesome. I'm very excited about this Chip. I think that's great.

MR. BOWEN: Chip, you said Virginia, and, one of the last meetings I was at, and I can't remember which one it was, but I think they have already introduced a mandatory reporting app with their cobia, and is that what you mean when you say working with them? It just seemed to me that they implemented that rather quickly.

DR. COLLIER: They did implement it rather quickly. They have a web-based system now, and they would actually like to explore the usage of this product, so their fishermen can get involved with it and see how it goes.

DR. DUVAL: Zack, just to speak to that, they had implemented a voluntary permit, a voluntary reporting, for cobia last year, to kind of shake the bugs out of the system. This year, they moved to mandatory reporting, and so I think that's why they're a step ahead.

MS. BECKWITH: If this is going to be an app, then I guess the assumption is that it would run on a smartphone or tablet, and so how is it going to be for folks that either don't have the technology, or can it handle multiple fishers within one app, say like a family with multiple kids or one person that has an app and his buddies that don't?

DR. COLLIER: It is in the beginning of the phase of this, and what we would like to see is -- The way I envision it now is, if somebody on the vessel has a phone app, you would be able to use your permit number associated with the individual fisher and be able to enter multiple data for people. If everybody has like a password and a user name, they can get on the system and then enter their data individually.

MS. BECKWITH: Through the app or through like a webpage afterwards?

DR. COLLIER: This is going to be developing an app and not a webpage, and so they can enter the data offshore. It's not going to necessarily transmit offshore, but, once they get back to the dock, it will automatically transmit, and you could potentially enter -- Whoever fished on that trip could enter their data on a single cellphone app.

DR. DUVAL: Anything else? We will look forward to hearing another update in September and see how things are going. Thanks, Chip. Then let's see. We will move into the Amendment 43 options paper, and I think this is Attachment 6d.

DR. COLLIER: That's correct. It is Attachment 6d. What you will notice first in this document is a lot of the actions have been removed, and those actions were actions targeting some of the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements, such as OFL and ABC and ACLs. Part of that is because of the ongoing estimation of ABCs and what we need to do with it, and so I have removed that, but we do not have an action currently in this amendment that would actually remove the calculation method for Amendment 28, which sets the ACL, and so, if you guys do want to have a season in 2018, we would have to have an action in here that would remove that, and we would have to replace it with something else.

Here is the purpose for the action. You guys have read this, and it hasn't changed since the beginning. You can modify or approve the purpose and need, as appropriate, if you like that, or we can modify it however you guys see fit.

DR. DUVAL: I think we can probably deal with any modification to the purpose and need perhaps after we move through the actions.

DR. COLLIER: Action 7 is looking at the commercial sector, to end overfishing, and we have months in there. You guys had requested the June to September season for the commercial fishery, and that would be a closed season June to September, to avoid the peak spawning season. Then there was May to October, just to avoid the overall red snapper spawning season, and then the third option is a year-round closure.

The Alternative Number 3 is looking at the trip limit. We have pounds or numbers of fish, and we have X's for that, if you guys could provide us with recommended trip limits for this. In the past, we had a twenty-five-pound trip limit, and that increased to a seventy-five-pound trip limit in 2013 and 2014.

DR. DUVAL: It was a fifty-pound trip limit. It was a fifty-pound trip limit the first season, and then it moved up to seventy-five after that.

DR. COLLIER: All right. We will develop options for that, with a fifty and seventy-five-pound trip limit. Is there anything that you would like to see as far as numbers of fish, or do you even want number of fish considered?

MR. PHILLIPS: I wouldn't use numbers of fish at all. I would stay with pounds.

DR. DUVAL: So no number of fish and stick with pounds.

MR. BOWEN: That was exactly what I was going to say, and the rationale behind that is to avoid high-grading.

DR. DUVAL: Great.

DR. COLLIER: All right. We have the size limits listed of sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-inch, and, obviously, if you do not select Alternative 4, that's not establishing a size limit. Currently, there is no size limit for the commercial red snapper, and so that option is in there, but you just don't see it.

MR. PHILLIPS: Chip, this is in whole weight, again, and we typically land stuff gutted, and so can we use gutted weight?

MR. BOWEN: Up until yesterday, with our presentation of the many descending devices and many techniques now of releasing fish back into the depths -- Up until then, I was kind of leaning toward no size limit for the commercial sector, but, given the technology and the tools available now, I am thinking a size limit. I don't know what that should be or if you all have any recommendations, but I think a size limit probably should be in place for the commercial sector.

DR. DUVAL: Anybody else? Again, this is an alternative that is in here. It doesn't mean that we have to select anything right now, but it's in there.

DR. COLLIER: Alternative 5 looks at prohibiting commercial possession and harvest of red snapper in or from the South Atlantic using spearfishing gear, and the rationale behind that was to avoid targeting of red snapper. Most people are envisioning this being a bycatch, and so, obviously, if you spear a fish, you're targeting that species.

MR. HAYMANS: I wanted to drop back to Alternative 4 for just a moment, and that is, if we don't have, in Alternative 4, and Chip may have said this, but, if we don't have a no-size limit alternative, are we going to get public comment back only on those three sizes, do you think, and should we have something that suggests that we're not going to have a size limit, in order to get feedback on it?

DR. COLLIER: There is a note that is right underneath there that says that currently there is not a size limit, and so I think that would -- I am at least trying to tell them that that option is still there.

DR. DUVAL: Perhaps it needs to be stated a little bit more explicitly.

MR. HAYMANS: I would think so.

DR. DUVAL: Just that this alternative is in here, but the council doesn't necessarily have to select a size limit.

DR. COLLIER: I will add that into the discussion section. We're pretty limited what we're allowed to focus in on under the alternatives.

MR. PHILLIPS: Chip, I wish we could say that red snapper is going to be a bycatch, but, if you can catch seventy-five pounds of fish or fifty pounds of fish, they are going to target it, because they need it to be part of their trip. If a diver has a valid license and can take a legal fish, I would be inclined not to -- I am going to say discriminate against them because they're diving.

MR. HARTIG: **I would move to remove that action to the Considered but Rejected alternatives.**

DR. DUVAL: So you would move Alternative 5 to Considered but Rejected?

MR. HARTIG: Yes.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. There is a motion by Ben, and seconded by Charlie, to move Alternative 5 -- This is just an options paper, and so is it just remove it from the document? We don't even have a Considered but Rejected. Maybe that's just direction to staff to remove Alternative 5, noting that it's likely that people will target on red snapper even under these small trip limits and that we do not want to discriminate against folks. Okay.

DR. COLLIER: Actually, going back to Alternative 3, there was considerable discussion at the Law Enforcement AP on this. When the Coast Guard, when they typically intercept a fishing boat, they don't have scales on the vessel, and so they would have to follow that vessel back in, in order to weigh the fish, if you do it in weights, and so numbers of fish would be easier for some law enforcement agencies. A lot of the state agencies actually intercept fishermen back at the dock, where they would actually -- The scales are there, and so it's not much impact to them, but I did want to provide that information to you, since the APs did provide it to us.

DR. DUVAL: I am hearing crickets, and so I think it sounds like folks want to maintain pounds, just in the interest of preventing high-grading.

DR. COLLIER: Sounds good. All right. Going into Action 8, we're looking at recreational alternatives. We have a series of alternatives here, and I am going to skip down and actually go into some of the data that's provided. With the recreational fishery and the headboat and charter boat off of Florida, we have information on length distribution of caught red snapper, and I have that provided here. It's color-coded. On the left, it's the charter boat fishery, and, on the right, it's

the headboat fishery, with data from 2010 to 2016, and you can look at the length distribution for red snapper, going from ten inches all the way up to over thirty inches.

It's number of fish measured, and this isn't an expanded number or anything like that, and so there could be some potential distribution changes if it is expanded, but it is a randomized survey, and so this should be representative of the entire catch. You can take that in, and that's just for your consideration, if you're considering size limits or anything else.

Florida is the only area where we actually have observers on charter boats. I have information in Figure 2 for the other three states. I just combined them, and you can see number of fish. The scale on the left only goes up to ten fish, and so it's not many fish that are being measured, and you can see this kind of erratic pattern in the number of measurements, and that's because you have low sample size.

MR. HARTIG: That's headboat?

DR. COLLIER: That's correct. In Figure 2, it's just headboat. They have observers on headboats.

MR. HARTIG: I understand that, and why don't we have more measurements when we have observers on headboats?

DR. COLLIER: They're either not seeing the fish or -- They do have to sub-sample. They can't measure every fish that's being brought on. They generally target a certain subset of the fishermen, in order to get the samples and make it usable. If they tried to get everybody on the boat, it just wouldn't work.

DR. DUVAL: Ben, my understanding is they try to focus on a few anglers, and so they sort of follow that angler throughout the trip.

DR. COLLIER: Now, going into actual average catch per angler per day, you can see the number of trips, angler trips, in Table 1. This is for headboats in Table 1, and it's all states, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and it has data from 2010 to 2016, and this is landings plus discards, and so you can have pretty high catch rates. Some anglers are catching over ten red snapper per trip. The majority are catching less than one red snapper per trip for the headboats. Similar patterns occur in the charter boat vessels and private recreational. I actually don't display the actual catch per trip, just because this fishery has been so constrained over the years. Catch isn't really all that informative.

Underneath that, you can see the input for the Snapper Grouper AP and Law Enforcement AP. The Snapper Grouper AP recommends to allow harvest two days per week. These are just comments that were made during the AP. We didn't have any motions there. Alternative 6 made the most sense for a season, since Alternative 6a would overlap with the spawning season and Alternative 6b would overlap with the shallow-water grouper closure.

They also recommended to have a distance from shore as an alternative to a depth closure. Harvest is still allowed in Florida state waters was a comment that was made. Red snapper discards are being observed in the Keys. As far as law enforcement, they recommended a depth-based closure

would be very difficult to enforce, and they reiterated at the need for straight lines. Overall, if we had additional closed areas, it would result in a need for increased patrols and enforcement.

Going back to the alternatives, now that you have seen some of the information, Alternative 2 is allow recreational harvest of red snapper in or from the South Atlantic EEZ until the ACT is met or projected to be met, and we have a series of times when it could be open. Underneath that, we have the modification of the recreational bag limit.

DR. DUVAL: Just note that Sub-Alternative 3c looks at a vessel limit per day, and that's blank right now.

MR. BOWEN: Is it appropriate that -- Alternative 4, can we add a Sub-Alternative 4d to go to twenty-four inches?

DR. DUVAL: Sure, if you want to. Are other folks interested in seeing an option for a higher size limit? Zack, you might need a motion to do this.

MR. BOWEN: Okay. Thanks, Madam Chair. **I move that we add a Sub-Alternative 4d, twenty-four inches, to Alternative 4.**

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Zack to add a Sub-Alternative 4d for a twenty-four-inch minimum size limit, and is there a second to that motion? I am not seeing any seconds. Do you want to talk a little bit about why you were suggesting that?

MR. BOWEN: I am trying to protect the younger, smaller fish.

MR. HARTIG: I understand that, and the fishery is operating now on some really strong year classes we're getting, and, to me, I think you should take advantage of those year classes and not on the larger fish. I mean, it makes much more sense to me to catch smaller animals than it does larger animals who are contributing more to the reproductive capacity of the stock.

We have gone through this road for years of having size limits, and what it does is it just focuses you on the older fish and the more reproductive animals as we go, and I think that's the wrong direction to take. I think we ought to change direction and go in the area of keeping smaller animals and trying to get the recreational fishery -- Maybe incentivize it some way, and I am not going to mention how now, but incentivize it in some way that they will keep smaller animals instead of bigger ones.

MR. BOWEN: Again, to that point, Ben, not only am I trying to protect the younger, smaller fish, but I'm also trying to alleviate the problem of high-grading. If a recreational angler catches a twenty-inch snapper and the minimum size limit is twenty-four inches, they're probably not going to keep that fish, but the ones that -- If there is a twenty-four-inch minimum size limit and they catch a twenty-inch fish, they're not going to keep it. If there's an eighteen-inch size limit, they're going to keep that twenty-inch fish, but, if they catch one twenty-four, the twenty-inch is more likely to back in the water. I am trying to alleviate high-grading and protect the younger, smaller fish.

MR. PHILLIPS: Zack, I kind of see where you're going too, but discard mortality is what is eating our lunch, and, the bigger the fish, the more discards we're going to have, and so I'm inclined to be like Ben. Let's just have fishermen take some of the younger fish and go and stop and fishing.

MR. BREWER: Would it make any sense to have a maximum size, a slot, per se, to protect -- I mean, we do that with snook, and it's worked out really well, and so, if you're looking to encourage people to keep smaller fish and not keep the large females, you do a slot. Right now, we have a slot for snook, and you can't keep the big ones anymore.

DR. COLLIER: There was an option in this paper originally that included a maximum size limit, and it was recommended to remove that, and so do you guys want to have it put back in?

MR. BREWER: That may have come up before, again, as Zack was saying, before we saw the video and the stuff with regard to descending devices, and I think what people were thinking was, well, if you catch that big fish, or if you catch a really big one, you have killed it anyway, in all probability, and so why not keep it. If we, in conjunction with this, if we're talking about requiring descending devices, and you can get those big fish back down where they live, I think it makes a lot of sense.

MR. HAYMANS: Two things. Chip, I would ask you, in 4, to do the same thing that we did on the commercial side and make it clear that, if people want to continue with no size limit, have that same wording. If I may, I would request an Alternative 3, which I think is where we stopped, that there be a two per vessel, filling out 3c, and maybe a 3d. It would be two fish per vessel or three fish per vessel, as a starting place.

DR. DUVAL: Two fish per vessel or three fish per vessel?

MR. HAYMANS: Yes.

MS. BECKWITH: I was going in that direction, and I was going to ask if we weren't considering the vessel limits because of headboats and how we would accommodate a headboat with a vessel limit, but I was interested in a vessel limit.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. So some input on vessel limits, but back to the size limit thing. Do you guys want to add an alternative for a maximum size limit?

MR. BOWEN: I am not in favor of having a maximum size limit. I have caught a lot of snapper over thirty inches or thirty-two inches, and most of those fish -- The survivability of those bigger fish drastically decreases the bigger they are, and so I'm not for having a maximum size limit.

MR. HARTIG: I have been wrestling with this as well, Zack. Basically, and Chip will tell you, as fish get larger, it's harder to release them, but I don't know how that works with descender devices. To me, you're much more apt to use a descender device on a large animal anyway, to get it back down to the bottom, because here you have a trophy animal, and you know it's going to help your spawning in the long run, and it seems to me that most people would do everything they could to get the biggest animal that they catch back to the bottom as fast as they could using descender devices.

If we're going to make people use descending devices, I think we could improve the survivability of those large fish, and I don't know if Chip knows of any research that has been done with descending devices on larger animals to know if that improves their releasability. I do not know that, but that was -- It would get us to at least some smaller animals, at whatever size we chose, which I think is a way we need to go.

DR. DUVAL: Mark and then Tim. Then I want to wrap up this discussion. If we need a motion to add a sub-alternative for a maximum size limit, then let's have it, because we need to move on.

MR. BROWN: I am struggling a little bit with this, but, with the descending devices, we've had really good success, Ben. I took some of the staff out, and we -- I've got a GoPro on my descending line, and, when we let them down, you can see that fish swims off with the tag in them, and, since we started doing this project, I have had very few, if any, fish come back up. You actually watch them swim away, and so I think that the survivability is pretty high if you can get them back in the water right away.

MR. GRINER: We have run into a little bit of the opposite problem. All we're catching is big fish. We're catching big fish every drop, and so you're having a hard time getting by the big fish to catch the little fish, and so what you'll end up having is you will end up having recreational guys out there, and, instead of catching their one fish and being done, they're going to catch fish and have to release it because it's too big and catch another one and it's too big and catch another one and it's too big. The larger fish are very, very aggressive, and so you're running the risk of sitting there and releasing a whole lot of fish unnecessarily, when they could have taken their one fish or two per person and be done.

MR. CONKLIN: We tagged and descended a twenty-plus-pound scamp right before the grouper opening, and we went back two weeks later and caught the same fish and put it on the market.

MR. HARTIG: **I will offer a motion. I think we should add a maximum size back into the document, Madam Chairman.**

MR. BREWER: At least to look at.

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Ben to add a sub-alternative for a maximum size limit. Do you have something to offer, in terms of what that might be? No. Motion by Ben, and is there a second? Second by Jessica. Is there discussion? I think we would need to probably direct staff to look at a few options for what a maximum size limit might be.

DR. COLLIER: Just throwing numbers out there, and I haven't really looked at anything, but twenty-eight, thirty, and thirty-two?

MR. HARTIG: What is the asymptotic length? What is the length that they reach? Do you know?

DR. COLLIER: No, I don't.

MR. HARTIG: I will work with staff with a number before Full Council.

DR. COLLIER: The option could be twenty-eight, thirty, thirty-two, and the asymptotic.

DR. DUVAL: Do we want to provide that direction? Any further discussion? **Could I please see a show of hands of those in favor of this motion, which is to add a sub-alternative for a maximum size limit of twenty-nine to thirty-two and asymptotic length, seven in favor; those opposed, three opposed; abstentions, three abstentions. The motion carries.**

Doug had suggested filling in the blanks on some of the vessel limits, looking at two fish per vessel and three per fish per vessel, and is there any -- You might want to offer a motion in that regard, Doug, just to make sure that we're doing this cleanly.

MR. HAYMANS: Sure, Madam Chair. **I would make a motion that on Action 8, Alternative 3, that we fill in Sub-Alternative 3c for two fish per vessel per day and add a Sub-Alternative 3c for three fish per vessel per day.**

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Doug. Is there a second? Second by Anna. **The motion reads: Add to Action 8 a Sub-Alternative 3c for two fish per vessel per day and 3d for three fish per vessel per day.**

MR. BOWEN: Maybe I am confused on this, because I have the webinar on my computer, and so I'm not reading it, but, to me, this motion effectively kills the most accountable fleet in the recreational sector, which is the headboat. You're going to have a headboat out there with two or three fish on the boat? I can't support it. They're the most accountable that we have in this recreational sector, and, with this, if this was to go through, it would effectively kill their trips.

MS. BECKWITH: I agree, and that's why I said earlier that my concern with the vessel limit would be how it would impact the headboats, but we could do some additional sub-alternatives where we're allowing a vessel limit to go for charter boats and recreational and not choose it for headboats, and you could conceivably allow headboats to keep one per person, if you wanted to go that way. I mean, there is flexibility. We have the ability to do that.

MR. HAYMANS: There is certainly precedent for that in other fisheries, but the reason I kept it low was -- I am looking for opportunity, and, the more fish you allow per vessel, the shorter that opportunity is, and so I thought the best option would be to keep it low, but, if we need to create a separate opportunity for headboats, we can do that.

DR. DUVAL: What is your pleasure?

MR. BROWN: All I can picture is a headboat stopping and fifty fish coming up at the same time, and who are you going to tell that they can keep which fish?

DR. DUVAL: You could clarify that this would pertain only to charter vessels and private recreational vessels and not headboats.

MR. BOWEN: If we're going to do that, can we also put an option that the charter boats are in with the headboats, since we're going to mandatory reporting as well, instead of being with the recreational fleet? If you've got paying customers on a headboat, you've got paying customers on a charter boat, and how do you decide which of those paying customers on a six-man boat gets a snapper of the two? It's the same as the headboat. If we're going to go down this road, and I think

we need to look at it, I think that we need to have an alternative in there that would put the charter boats with the headboats, in that category.

DR. DUVAL: How do you deal with one fish per vessel for snowy grouper right now?

MR. BOWEN: I don't know a charter boat that's out there targeting snowy grouper, but I know a bunch of them that are fishing for red snapper.

DR. DUVAL: Oh my god. You must be living under a rock.

MR. BOWEN: No, I live in Savannah.

MR. HARTIG: Chip talked about half or one-third of the passengers, and, I mean, on a for-hire boat, you usually carry six people, and one-third of that would be two or three, but some way to meld a headboat with what a charter boat could keep. One-third of the passengers would be able to keep a fish, and that decision would have to be made at the beginning of the trip by drawing straws, to somehow get at Mark's question of what do you do when everybody brings fifty red snappers up.

They would only be able to keep -- Whoever had the straw would be able to keep a red snapper, or at least that's how I would do it if I had a headboat, but some way to kind of bound the headboat catch within what a for-hire boat is able to keep with the number of people that the headboat carries.

DR. DUVAL: I think we are getting way into the weeds here myself.

MR. HAYMANS: I was going to suggest that perhaps -- We have had that discussion. At the end of this document is a whole issue over tags, and, depending on where that discussion goes, it may solve this issue, and so, if we want to move forward.

DR. DUVAL: Let's go ahead. We've had plenty of discussion, and let's just put it up for a vote. **All those in favor of the motion to add to Action 8 a Sub-Alternative 3c for two fish per vessel per day and 3d for three fish per vessel per day, please raise your hand, six in favor; those opposed, three opposed; abstentions, four abstentions. The motion passes.**

DR. COLLIER: Alternative 5 establishes an allowable fishing area, and we have several sub-alternatives within that, areas shallower than 150 feet, shallower than 120, 110, 100, ninety, and seventy-five feet.

MR. HAYMANS: **I think I would move to remove Sub-Alternative 5f. I just don't know that that's anywhere near reasonable.**

DR. DUVAL: Motion by Doug to remove Sub-Alternative 5f. It's seconded by Charlie. Is there discussion?

MS. BECKWITH: I was actually going to suggest that we remove 5d, 5e, and 5f, because I don't actually consider any of those realistic, but I will put -- If you don't want to do that --

MR. HAYMANS: Offer a friendly. That's fine. Offer a friendly.

MS. BECKWITH: **I would suggest a friendly amendment to remove Sub-Alternative 5d, 5e, and 5f.**

DR. DUVAL: Is that okay with the seconder? Charlie, you were the seconder. Okay. So the motion reads: Remove, in Action 8, Sub-Alternative 5d, 5e, and 5f. Is there discussion? **Is there any opposition? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

MS. BECKWITH: I had a question. During the Law Enforcement AP meeting, they were discussing how enforceable this would be, and one thing that came up would be that these depths would have to be translated into waypoints, which never goes well for North Carolina, apparently. My question would be -- Being able to support this concept would be based on if we can enforce it by depth or it would have to be translated into waypoints.

DR. DUVAL: We have had other closures, other depth-based closures, that did not have any waypoints associated with them, and so the forty-fathom closure had no waypoints associated with it. It was simply a depth closure, and I don't know -- I would be interested to know -- I am just going to ask our Gulf Council liaison here. Dale, sorry to put you on the spot, but the depth-based spawning closures that you all have in the Gulf, are there waypoints associated with those that folks have to plug into their chart plotters to stay outside of, or is it just a depth and you stay outside of that depth?

MR. DIAZ: Roy might have to help me with this, but I believe the way we do it is it's a depth and you have to stay outside of that depth, and the depth-based closures that I'm aware of are from Cape San Blas to the east in the Gulf of Mexico.

DR. DUVAL: It looks like there is no waypoints associated with those.

MS. MCCAWLEY: One of them, if you're thinking about like where you can use longlines, that's the twenty or twenty-five fathoms, and so those are already on the maps, and so that's already something that's on a map already.

DR. DUVAL: But there is no waypoints associated with that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't believe so, no.

DR. DUVAL: Similarly for our fifty fathoms, no longlines inside of fifty fathoms. I guess I would probably disagree that this would have to be something that waypoints would be needed for.

MR. BELL: Just recently, remember when we were dealing with Amendment 16 and the sea bass stuff with whales, that started out -- It was kind of based on a depth, and then we converted it, for whatever reason, into a bunch of waypoints that was codified based on that, but I'm not sure you had to.

DR. DUVAL: I think that was Protected Resources' input.

MR. BELL: Okay.

MS. BECKWITH: That is what I was hoping to hear, but just to -- I am going to do this every time we talk about this alternative. On the record, very clearly, our intent is to have this be enforced by a depth range and not to be converted into waypoints that would be codified. You will hear that over and over again.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Are we done with this alternative, Alternative 5? Then Alternative 6.

DR. COLLIER: Alternative 6 establishes a fishing season for areas outside the allowable snapper grouper fishing area, and we have three different seasons there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: A point of order. I don't know if we actually voted on that motion.

DR. COLLIER: None were opposed. Any suggestions on Alternative 6?

MS. BECKWITH: If I am reading this right, and I am just thinking about how the public is going to view this. We establish a snapper grouper fishing season for areas outside of the allowable snapper grouper fishing area, and so what we're saying is, if we chose 110 feet, whatever season that we are establishing in Alternative 6 would be allowed deeper than 100 feet, but, shallower than 110 feet, it would be open year-round? That's the intent of this?

DR. COLLIER: That's correct.

DR. DUVAL: Does everybody understand that? Okay. I am not hearing any input on modifying any of these sub-alternatives or this alternative, and so let's move forward. We have a couple more alternatives here.

DR. COLLIER: There is two more alternatives looking at potentially closing areas, and these two are based on different pieces of information. One would be based on red snapper discards, and the other would be based on red snapper abundance.

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's my recollection, at the last meeting, that I made a motion to put these in the Considered but Rejected.

DR. COLLIER: Jessica, would you mind making the motion again? Is it in the record? Okay. I will take them out.

MS. BECKWITH: Can you remind me of what the vote for that was, because I was actually kind of interested in seeing what some of the areas would be.

MS. MCCAWLEY: The vote isn't listed in the document. It just says it was approved by the committee.

MS. BECKWITH: I guess I would be curious to see what some of the areas under Alternative 7 would be, but I think we recognize that the majority of that would happen off of Florida, and so I understand your concern, but I guess I'm not 100 percent ready to -- Now that I have thought more about this, I might actually want to see at least one of those two alternatives stay in.

DR. DUVAL: Just to clarify, the motion from the last meeting was to remove Action 6 from the Amendment 43 options paper, and that was to establish closed areas to reduce red snapper bycatch and mortality. That was Action 6. This is Action 8, and so the action has been --

DR. COLLIER: I have not changed any of the action numbers, due to confusion, and so they're all the same as they were last time.

DR. DUVAL: So Action 6, I think, was year-round closed areas for red snapper, recreational and commercial. This is specific to prohibiting recreational fishing only, and so, Jessica, you might need to make a motion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Also, I was going to say that we did have discussion about this. This was what Doug brought up at the last meeting about if we're pulling out that other action, and doesn't it pull out these other pieces as well, and so we had some discussion about this at the last meeting, and there seemed to be some confusion as to whether or not this was going to stay in or be removed. **I would move that we remove Alternatives 7 and 8.**

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Jessica. Is there a second?

MR. HARTIG: Second.

DR. DUVAL: Second by Ben. The motion reads: Remove Action 8, Alternatives 7 and 8. Is there discussion?

MS. BECKWITH: I am going to oppose this motion, just because I am kind of curious to see what these would show. That's it.

DR. DUVAL: Is there further discussion? Okay. **Seeing none, is there any opposition to this motion? I see two opposed. Let's see a show of hands of those in favor of the motion, eight in favor. Any abstentions? One abstention. The motion carries.**

DR. COLLIER: Action 9 is establish a private recreational snapper grouper permit or tag program for recreational fishermen to fish for, harvest, or possess red snapper in the South Atlantic region. Alternative 2 has different options for who would be required to possess the permit, whether it's somebody just in possession, fishing for, or harvesting red snapper or snapper grouper species that are associated with red snapper habitat, such as gray triggerfish, black sea bass, and vermilion snapper, some of those species, or all species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Alternative 3 is establish conditions to renew or maintain a valid permit. A permit is only valid if a completed logbook is filed for the previous time block, including no-fishing reports. Sub-Alternative 3b is a permit cannot be renewed until all logbook reports for the previous year have been filed. Alternative 4 is require a harvest tag for recreational fishermen to fish for, harvest, or possess red snapper in federal waters.

DR. DUVAL: Let's run through the IPT considerations for that.

DR. COLLIER: All right, and so the first question that the IPT is asking is, is this going to be a fisherman-based permit or is it going to be a vessel-based permit?

MR. BOWEN: I would think we were wanting a fisher-based.

DR. DUVAL: So a fisher-based permit. How do folks feel about that?

MS. BECKWITH: I still tend to think that a vessel permit is more logical to me, similar to what Mississippi is doing with their Tails and Scales, and, fundamentally, when you have one person who should be in charge of the boat, and taking into consideration that most recreational fishermen have a very difficult time identifying the species, assuming that each individual is going to report and report in any level of accuracy both their catch and their discards, I -- You hope that the captain of the boat, the person who is responsible for the vessel, should take that responsibility on, and I believe that's how the Mississippi program is, and I find that to be the most enforceable, for sure. I think the Law Enforcement AP also felt like a vessel-level reporting was likely more -- Reporting/permit was likely more enforceable as well, and so those are my thoughts.

MR. HAYMANS: On the next page, page 14 there, it says that there could be a delay of up to thirty to sixty days between when someone applies for a permit and when someone receives it, and so, if it were a vessel permit and I go buy a brand-new boat, I've got to wait two months before I can take it offshore to use it, versus, if it's an individual permit, I can apply way in advance and keep my permit, and so I would prefer to see it an individual permit.

MS. BECKWITH: Well, I mean, HMS vessel or individual permits, you can go online and fill out your information and print it out and you're good to go, instantaneously, and so I don't think that having to do a permit in the traditional fashion that we're currently doing is the only way. I think we could follow the HMS version and get a permit instantaneously.

MR. BROWN: I would prefer to see something like a stamp or something that's added on to the state fishing permit, just for an additional -- Just like you do a duck stamp or something.

DR. DUVAL: So you would like to -- A stamp is still a permit, when it comes down to it, but you would prefer to push this out to the states is what I am hearing.

MR. HARTIG: I think, for the private recreational, it makes sense, but, for the for-hire, both headboats and charter boats, I think we could hand them out like we are handling the licenses. The vessel would be permitted under those circumstances for the people. Otherwise, it's going to be tough for a family coming for vacation that wants to get a permit to -- If they have to get a red snapper permit to keep a red snapper, it might be impossible in that timeframe.

DR. DUVAL: This action is just for private recreational snapper grouper permit or tag program.

MR. BREWER: Following up on what Mark said, we already have, at least in the State of Florida, what are called stamps, and we've got a lobster stamp, and we've got a snook stamp. You have to pay a little bit of additional money to get it, but then you keep it with your fishing license. It's obviously not for the boat. It's for the person, and I think what Mark is saying makes a lot of sense, and, in fact, it's what people are already used to in Florida.

The purpose of doing this, I thought, was to identify the universe of people that are actually going offshore and fishing for these deepwater species of grouper, because we don't know what that

universe is right now, and, for data purposes, that would be very important to know, and so my thought on all of this was that you were going to have a stamp that maybe costs five-dollars or ten-dollars or whatever that would be in addition to the cost of your regular saltwater fishing license, and that then would identify how many people are going out there and doing it. I would like to see that, somehow or another, brought into this suite of options.

DR. DUVAL: I guess I was just making the point that, whether you call it a stamp or you call it something else, the idea is the same. It's like a permit or an extra checkbox on your license, but what I'm hearing is it sounds like there is some folks who would like to push the idea of a permit or an endorsement for the private sector out to the states, and is that correct, to have them take care of that on their state licenses? I just want to get clarification on that.

MR. HAYMANS: We have beat this one pretty well, that some of the states aren't willing to sell the federal permit, and that we would prefer either NMFS, the council, or set it up similar to the duck stamps, where you get it through the post office, but I really don't want to go to my legislature to ask them to allow me to sell a federal stamp that the legislature gets nothing from.

MR. BREWER: If you're going to the post office to buy it and it costs five-dollars, so be it. That's fine. The object of the exercise, at least in my mind, was to identify the universe, and, however we get to that, I am fine with it. I just don't think you ought to give them away though, because, if you do, then folks are going to say okay. It doesn't cost me anything, and I might as well have it. Then you're not doing anything to identify the universe.

MS. BECKWITH: I am just trying to think ahead at the practicality of the recreational crowd on a boat, a family, and, if you've got the -- As Tim said, we're not catching red snapper from the shore or piers yet. They're not that abundant, and so you've got to be out there on a boat, and so, somehow, you're sitting or standing on someone's vessel, and someone is responsible for that vessel.

You can identify the universe, not only the number of boats that are accessing the snapper grouper complex, but when that person inputs their information for that day, then you say that I had three people or five people on the boat, and I don't really think that the extra information is going to be that useful of knowing whether it was an eight-year-old girl or was it a ten-year-old boy and what's the income. I mean, I don't see that as being data that we will fundamentally use, in the long run.

If you're getting the universe identified not only of the vessel effort, but also the number of people that were on that vessel, and you've got one person putting in the information -- I know it sort of skews the CPUE of the individual catch per unit effort of an individual, but I just don't see a dad sitting there and putting in the information for him and his wife and his three kids all sort of individually for a reporting for an individual permit for each person. If you guys want to go that route, that's fine. I just don't -- As a businessperson, I am just not seeing the practicality of moving in that direction. I see a method that is more efficient, that gets us the same information.

DR. DUVAL: Here is what I am going to suggest, because we're going down a rabbit hole, and we have a limited amount of time, and we have other items on our agenda that we need to get to. Perhaps, if the committee is supportive of this, we would add an alternative under this action that would say -- That would address whether or not the permit is for an individual or for a vessel. That way, if this goes out to public comment, we can get public input as to whether it would be a permit

issued to the individual or whether it would be issued to the vessel. How do folks feel about that? Roy has got a look on his face that --

DR. CRABTREE: I think we're losing sight of what we're trying to do here.

DR. DUVAL: Yes.

DR. CRABTREE: Do you guys want to open this fishery next year? If that's what you're trying to do, I suggest you take this amendment and set it aside and then let's think about what has to be done to open this next year, because I don't believe what you have in this amendment gets you to opening the fishery, and it's certainly not going to happen next year.

A lot of the things you have in here will take years to do, and so I think you need to think about what you're trying to do and what's your strategy, so that we can have a realistic -- We need to talk about how are we going to come up with a catch level. We've got to repeal Amendment 28. We already have start dates and weekends and things that I think are fine, and we don't have much time to get something done if we're going to get this next year, and so I think you need to think about what is it that you're trying to do here, because I think we're losing sight of that.

MR. BOWEN: To Roy's point, I totally agree, but I think the first step is we need an ABC. I mean, there lies the problem. We can't do any of this without an ABC.

DR. CRABTREE: We can sit and depend on other people to hand this to us, or you can take the bull by the horn. If you don't have an ABC, you don't have one. Set an ACL and move on and let's open this fishery.

MR. DILERNIA: I have a question for Roy, and then I have a comment. Roy, when do you have to have the action on your desk in order to have the fishery opened next year? What is the drop-dead date, calendar-wise?

DR. CRABTREE: It partly depends on when do you want the fishery to open next year. Obviously we would need, for a plan amendment, around six months to get it done, but it also depends on what's in here. If it set up a permitting system or a fish tag program, that's going to take a long time to do. If it's just here, specify the ACL and here's our rationale for it, that's much quicker, and so a lot of it depends on the scope of what you're trying to do, but the first question would be when do you want to open the fishery.

MR. DILERNIA: If you wanted to say open April 1, you would have to have the final action from the council by November at the latest?

DR. CRABTREE: Yes, and so the council would need to vote it up in September, probably.

MR. DILERNIA: The September meeting, which is the next council meeting. All right. That's just getting an idea of timeline. Now, regarding the ABC, is there an assessment that has been accepted or is there an assessment that has undergone peer review, an accepted peer review?

DR. DUVAL: Yes, and so that's the conundrum we're in, Tony. We have an accepted, peer-reviewed assessment. We received that actually at the June meeting last year. Unfortunately, we,

because there are so many changes in MRIP on the horizon, and because this is basically a discards-only fishery, and because the discards are -- The MRIP discards are so uncertain, and that is what is driving the assessment. The projections we have requested would not actually be useable for management by the time we would get them, because of all the upcoming changes to the effort survey, and so that's kind of why we're in this working on an alternative ABC estimation.

MR. DILERNIA: I guess my question now goes to the Region. The National Standard 1 Guidelines basically say that, in the absence of I guess we'll say a peer-reviewed or fully-accepted assessment, you can set an ABC -- You can make the ABC whatever you want, basically, if the assessment doesn't really give you an ABC.

With the variability that the Chairwoman has just described, is there enough room in here to set an ABC higher than what has been put in place as of today? In other words, can we use the National Standard 1 Guidelines and that gray area regarding the assessments and the approved assessments to establish a higher ABC, which might allow more of a fishery to occur?

DR. CRABTREE: We have a number of statements about science, but it's not usable for management, for various reasons, and so whether something is best available science -- If it's not usable for management purposes, then it's rather an academic argument, and it doesn't get us anywhere. ABCs are normally set by the SSC, and they haven't given us one.

At the last meeting, I think what Marcel said is they didn't have any basis to give us an ABC, and so the provision in the statute says we can't set an ACL higher than the ABC, but, if they don't give us an ABC, then I think you could arguably set that we're going to set an ACL, and we're going to make an argument for it. We're going to have to have a rationale for it, how it's adequate for ending overfishing.

Now, I sat here, and we looked at the abundance trend that Marcel showed us for red snapper, and it's going up, up, up. Our SSC Chairman told us, some meetings ago, that we were making adequate progress towards rebuilding. It follows from that then that the level of discards that are occurring now aren't preventing the stock from recovering, and we've had harvest along the way, and so the question comes up of how do we come up with a rationale for an ACL and put that in place and get rid of this process that we set up in Amendment 28.

Then, depending on what we come up with, this fishery could open along the -- I think we already have dates set in the regulations about when the fishery begins, and it's weekends and various things like that, and that stuff can just stay there. The main thing we need is to come up with a catch level, a rationale for how that catch level is consistent with the recovery of the stock and preventing overfishing and get there.

Now, we're going to have to deal with the SSC. They're presumably going to look at this at some point, but I don't know if we're going to get this index-based approach in time for it to give us input on it, and I don't know what it's going to look like or what it will be, and I don't know what the SSC may or may not do, but those are my thoughts.

DR. DUVAL: Monica, to that point, and then I've got a list of people that have some questions, but we're going to move on from here. We're spinning ourselves into this little hole about a permit.

I understand that people want it. We want to identify the universe, but we're talking about nothings.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Even apart from the National Standard 1 Guidelines, I just went through the Magnuson Act itself that Congress has passed and told you what you're supposed to do under it, and the one thing that keeps coming through over and over, and I won't read you all of the sections, is preventing overfishing.

You need to have some measureable criteria, so that you know that you're preventing overfishing. Particularly, remember that this is an overfished fishery, and you've got a rebuilding plan, and so you've got to stay within your rebuilding plan, but you need some measure of something that will tell you when you're overfishing and not. I mean, that just comes clear through the Act in about eight places, and so that's one thing to keep in mind, too.

MR. BREWER: Roy is right. When I remember this first coming up, I think it was at the Chair's run-through, and not for this meeting, but the meeting before this one, the whole idea that, if we don't have an ABC, then essentially we have to make our own ACL, with justification and rationale and some logic behind it. Now, what we're seeing here is there is a lot of the things that we've been talking about, like descending devices and like permits or stamps and whatnot, that have worked its way into this amendment when I think what we really should be focusing on is trying to let folks catch some red snapper in 2018.

It comes through in all of the comments. We have lost a lot of credibility with the fishing public, because what they're seeing on the water does not comport with what we are saying and the rules that we're making, and, if we can -- I have been real concerned about our credibility, and I think that if we can kind of strip away everything else other than trying to get an ACL and have some reasonable limits on size and reasonable limits on days, reasonable limit on number of fish that you could keep, I think we're doing ourselves -- If we do nothing more than that right now, and maybe take all of this other stuff and put it in a different amendment, I think we're doing ourselves a good service.

DR. DUVAL: I will just remind the committee that the reason that these actions are in here having to do with a permit and having to do with descending devices is because we wanted to try to reduce recreational discards, which is what's driving our problem, and we also wanted to try to identify the universe of users.

We can absolutely take those actions and move them into a different document and simply focus on getting an ABC, but I just wanted to remind everybody where we started from and that this was meant to be a complete package. I've got a list of people, and I am going to ask you guys to be extremely brief, and, if someone has already said something that you agree with, it would be great if you could note that you agree and then add any additional points, and so I next have Anna and then Mark and then Jessica and then Doug.

MS. BECKWITH: Given that discussion, I would say that we start by moving Action 9 and 10, at a very minimum, out into a slower pace, and let's go back and focus on setting the ACL. Let's go back and pick the commercial limit and the recreational season and let's move it on.

DR. DUVAL: So a suggestion by Anna.

MR. BROWN: We've already gotten a presentation that established that we had 400,000 discards, and we don't have an ABC. You just said that we could establish an ACL. The fishery is continuing to grow. We know it's continuing to grow even with 400,000 discards, and so why can't we have an ACL of 400,000?

DR. CRABTREE: I can't tell you, just sitting here, what the ACL ought to be, but I think we've got an increasing stock, and we have an index. We know what we've been removing over the past some years, and normally, when we've set an ACL, it would just be landed catch, and so how many pounds of fish can we come up with a good rationale for what we think we could catch next year and, provided we stay within that, be comfortable that we're not overfishing?

That's going to take some time and thought and work with staff to come up with something to look at, but that's kind of the thing I'm thinking about and not so much setting an ACL that's going to be discards, but we're trying to get to can we land some fish. We've got a lot of discards happening. John made an interesting presentation. The discards are largely being driven by the abundance of the fish out there, but the level of discards doesn't appear to be slowing down the recovery of the stock, and so I'm more focused on -- I mean, I'm fine with reducing discards. Our problem is just figuring out a way to have some fishery again.

We don't have a problem in terms of this stock rebuilding. If you look at those abundance trends, it's doing better than any other stock we're managing. Our problem is that we aren't effectively translating a recovery stock into a way to allow some fishing.

MR. BROWN: Can we make a motion though for an ACL? Can we make a motion for a projected ACL?

DR. CRABTREE: You can make a motion, but I think what we're going to need is staff to come up with some options for us as to how to get to a catch level.

DR. DUVAL: First of all, Anna, I just want to clarify that that was a suggestion that you were making and that it was not actually a motion at this point.

MS. BECKWITH: I mean, I'm happy to make it into a motion, but it was a suggestion.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. That was a suggestion, and that's something that we can take up, but I want to get Jessica and Doug, and then I'm going to make a suggestion that -- The next action in this document that we were set to run through was best fishing practices, but, in talking to Chip, maybe we should switch gears here and have him run through the index-based approach to establishing an ACL, but I want to get to the other people on the list.

MS. MCCAWLEY: This is just based on what I'm hearing. I feel like the document that we're working on right now might be too slow-moving and too unwieldy for what we're trying to do, and so it seems like what we're trying to do is have these options for an ACL and develop the rationale for preventing overfishing. We need to get rid of the Amendment 28 process, and we need to choose, to me, some smaller subset of items, likely that were already in this document, that we're wanting to put forward.

I think we need season start dates and end dates, and maybe we want descending devices, or maybe single-hook rigs or recreational bag limit and commercial trip limit. It seems like we need some other mechanism that could move faster. It just seems like this document that we've been working on is too unwieldy for this particular process, and maybe we just keep this as is and pull out what we want to look at in this smaller, faster-moving document.

DR. DUVAL: Out of all of those things that you named, bag limits, start dates, season limits, we just went through all of those, and so I feel like the only thing that you're not including in that list is a permit. As Roy pointed out, we do have things in place, through Amendment 28. Now, I think what we would want to do is remove the formula in Amendment 28 that dictates what the ABC is.

You do already have -- Someone is going to have to remind me of what the start dates are in Amendment 28. It's like sometime in July, shall start no sooner than the second weekend in July, and so we have those things in there. It's a seventy-five-pound commercial trip limit, and it's no size limit. It's one fish per person per day for the recreational side, and so if we can -- If you guys are happy to have those things in place in the interim and just focus on the ABC, we can do that. We can set Amendment 43 aside for right now and come back to it once we just get an ABC in place, if you guys are happy with those. Would that be okay?

MS. BECKWITH: The other amendment has got only like two weekends or six days or something, and so we would --

DR. DUVAL: No, it doesn't. What it does is it -- It's not at all that.

DR. CRABTREE: So here is the thing. You can't really talk about how long the season is going to be until you figure out how much you're going to catch, and you can't really talk about trip limits and bag limits until you have some sense of what you're going to catch. Until we figure out how many pounds of fish can we catch and come up with a reasonable rationale for it, it's hard to know what the basis for a lot of these other things are.

Right now, I think you're right that we have a start date in place, and I think it says that it's weekends, and I think we have a trip limit and a bag limit. Maybe, depending on what we come up with for an ACL, we want to adjust some of those, but that's relatively simple, but, when you start talking about permits and all of that, you're going to get that in place by next year.

DR. DUVAL: The other thing I was just going to say is that there are already stopgaps, through the Amendment 28 process, that say, if you cannot have at least a weekend opening or at least -- I think it's like a three-day commercial season, and, if it doesn't open, there are stopgaps in there. I would have to pull that amendment back up, but those are items are in there.

So, with that said, I think Anna has clarified that that was just a suggestion and not a motion, and so I think we can delete that, and so why don't we let Chip run us through the index-based approach to establishing an ABC? How about we do that, and we'll set this discussion aside.

MR. HAYMANS: I would simply agree with that, but I was also going to ask, since there's only an hour-and-a-half left in today's committee meeting, that perhaps, instead of us trying to rush

through this to get to some other items, that we suspend those other items and we just spend the next-hour-and-a-half on this issue.

DR. DUVAL: We cannot suspend those other items, because we do have folks who are here to hear about some of those other items specifically, and so I think probably what we can do is get Chip to run through this. I am going to move a couple of things around on the agenda. We are going to -- I am going to recommend that we move the Socioeconomic Characterization Portfolio Analysis to September.

I'm also going to recommend that we move the ABC control rule discussion to September as well, because there are folks here that I think would like to hear about decisions on golden tilefish. I don't expect that that will take that long, and there are people here to hear the discussion on the white paper regarding limited entry, and we do need to get the update on the red grouper stock status. I know it's a bit. We might need to take up one of those at Full Council, but that's my suggestion.

DR. COLLIER: The index-based approach is looking at a solution to the problem. We have gotten several letters from either the Southeast Fisheries Science Center or SERO indicating that MRIP landings are not usable for management, whether it's due to the uncertainty in the estimate or -- Yes, uncertainty in the estimate.

A lot of the data-poor methods that have been used in the past focus on using landings to determine what harvest is, and so that eliminates some of those data-poor methods. Marcel had indicated there might be other methods that are now in the toolbox, and so we're going to look into the toolbox, to see if there is something there that is not using landings.

Another option that we could potentially use is to set a temporary experimental quota, based on the indices used in SEDAR 41, and that's used to track annual abundance. What I have provided here is an index developed for the chevron trap index. I did look into trying to provide an index, the CVID index, which was actually used in the stock assessment. Unfortunately, if you're going to be using that video index, it's not available until August, and so, if the start of the season is in July, it's not very informative for the following year, if you're trying to look at annual changes to the index and make sure you're not overfishing.

We can see this is the index for the SERFS chevron trap, and it's Figure 2, and you can see the strong increase, and I have these bounds here, and you can have -- It's based on one standard deviations, two standard deviations, and three standard deviations from the mean. You can use that to figure out if the population is increasing or decreasing or changing or stable. In this instance, I have the data for looking at the last three years. We can see that the 2016 index point is above the third standard deviation, and so, at that point, you would potentially be able to increase your harvest in the following year.

The hard part with this whole index-based approach is where do you start from, and so some of the options that are presented in the paper, one of the options is actually, as opposed to using landings, you use days of effort, because you know the number of days that the season is allowed. Looking at some of the data from the Florida study, when there were seasons in the past, and a lot of these areas up off of northeast Florida, where they actually did the survey, indicated that over 50 percent of the people that were at the boat ramps or going out fishing in federal waters were

actually targeting red snapper. It was 50 to 80 percent of the people were actually targeting red snapper.

It seems like overall effort -- When the season is open, people are going to be targeting red snapper, and so, once again, effort, number of days fished, might actually be an appropriate scalar to use to begin to estimate total removals. Until we can get a better estimate through MRIP or some other program, that might be the option to do it. I am not explaining this well, but there's a lot of different things, and I'm trying to go fast, but, if you guys have any questions, it's all in that paper, and hopefully we can do something with it.

DR. DUVAL: Chip, in looking at this Attachment 6e, I think there is two things. There is options for the index and what years you would use and then also a scalar to determine what your quota might be, because effort would seem to be a bit more reliable, I guess, than total removals?

DR. COLLIER: The problem comes in, as it's stated on the record, that you can't use landings or discards for management, and so how do you use that to scale your fishery if you've been told that you can't use it for management?

DR. DUVAL: Right, and so where -- Point me to which page it discusses --

DR. COLLIER: Page 5 is the start of it.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. I guess I'm talking about the use of effort as your quota scalar.

DR. COLLIER: It's this statement right here: Therefore, the allowable effort in 2014 could be used as a proxy for recreational landings.

DR. DUVAL: I want to make sure that people can wrap their heads around this. We would use the chevron trap index, and we can look at average of --

DR. COLLIER: Your starting point would be that eight-day season, similar to what you had in 2014, and then, the following year, if the stock continued to increase, you could potentially increase the number of days fished, or, if it decreases, you would decrease the number of days fished. If it stayed the same, you would get eight days the following year.

DR. DUVAL: I think I was looking at really sort of the years over which you would use the chevron trap index, and so you laid out a bunch of options there of starting in 2005 to develop the standardization or use the last three years, starting in 2005 and use the last five years, and starting in 2012 and use the last three years, et cetera.

What would be the next step here? Can we make a recommendation based on this and send it to the SSC or could we ask the SSC, through a special webinar, to review this and provide us with a recommendation based on this approach?

DR. COLLIER: It was presented to them at the last meeting. There wasn't much discussion on it, and so we didn't have -- We haven't developed it. It could be developed further if you guys think this is a useable approach, taking days as opposed to landings, and we could look at the DLM

toolbox, to see if there's any information in that, and we can also further develop this to provide you additional information.

MR. PHILLIPS: Would you do the commercial the same way, that the commercial would get days?

DR. COLLIER: No, the commercial would be based on their landings, and so you could -- I mean, there is pretty good tracking in the commercial, and, even though the headboat fishery and charter boat fishery are potentially -- Well, the charter boat potentially would have electronic reporting and mandatory reporting. Catches for the recreational sector hasn't been broken out into the different components of the recreational fishery, and so it would just be as one big lump.

DR. PONWITH: I would want to make sure that adequate care was taken to use whatever science is available to underpin these decisions is used and used according to best practices. We have a stock assessment that has been approved that essentially said that we are undergoing overfishing as well as remain overfished.

The jam we're in is that the stock is changing. It's changing in a good direction, but it's changing, and we don't have projections to give us the way to groundtruth just how good that change is relative to what the expectation is based on the rebuilding plan, and we are seeing increases in the index, which is good news. That's what we're working for. We don't know whether those changes in the index are steeper, meaning faster, than what was expected, based on the rebuilding plan, or slower, based on what was on the rebuilding plan. We don't know that.

The thing that I would want to be careful about is taking an approach that we were not able to adequately describe with some amount of certainty was ending overfishing. Now, I know that our scientists are working on an index-based approach, and it's not something that is going to be able to be presented at this meeting. They are working on it right now, but they're taking into consideration what we can learn from these indices and how we can possibly use sort of multiple lines of evidence, as opposed to relying on just one thing, to help manage uncertainty.

That work is underway, and I think it would be worth understanding what the timeline is for the development of that, to get the SSC engaged early on on this, maybe like the way we do update assessments, where we have a couple of SSC members engaged wholly at the onset and then reserve some technically-skilled people to be reviewers at the end, to make sure that, whatever effort we put into is capable of passing kind of a peer review, in terms having the assurances we need, that we have indeed ended overfishing.

DR. DUVAL: I am trying to find our way forward here, because I would like to have a sense of I think when we could expect completion of that approach, and we have an option that we can use that is our abbreviated option for simply changing the ABC. It's our abbreviated framework, and so we could do that at one meeting and put that in place, and so I think that would be my recommended approach, in order to get an ABC for 2018. I am seeing heads nod around the table. Doug, did you have a question?

MR. HAYMANS: Would you repeat that, please?

DR. DUVAL: Having heard what Bonnie said about the efforts of the Science Center to develop an index-based approach and wanting to be sure that that would be defensible, in terms of setting an ABC, and I am just condensing what you said, that any approach is defensible, scientifically, and use it as the peer-reviewed science that we have coming out of SEDAR 41, but I want to know -- I think we need some certainty as to when would that be completed, so that we could get an ABC recommendation from our SSC and use our abbreviated framework, which allows us to simplify modify the ABC and ACL with no other management changes, and we can do that in one meeting, if I am recalling this correctly, Monica.

This was the abbreviated framework approach that we developed, and I don't know if it's the closed framework or the open framework that allows for simply notice, as opposed to having to go through a full regulatory amendment to do that, and that would be an expedient approach to getting an ABC in place for 2018.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Are you thinking that you would keep the formula that's in Amendment 28?

DR. DUVAL: I am going to say a really bad word on the record. No. Red snapper will do it.

DR. CRABTREE: That's the problem we've got, and I don't know when we'll get an ABC from the SSC, but they don't meet again even until October, and so we won't see it until our December meeting, and that's if all of this goes well. I have heard discussions of workshops and peer reviews and all of those kinds of things, and so that makes it dicey, to me, whether any of that can get done, and then we're left with the problem that we've got to get the Amendment 28 stuff off the books somehow.

Now, you could wait until the December meeting, I guess, and try to do an emergency rule or something to make something happen next year, but then you really have no certainty of what's coming, or you can go down this path of setting something for next year with an ACL and deal with 2018, and then, after we get through the process with the SSC next year and see what they come up with on that, then we spend next year looking at 2019 and beyond and maybe some of these other ideas that folks have, but, I am looking at, right now, of what it would take to get this fishery open next year, and, in Amendment 28, we put start dates of the season that I think are both in July, and so, if we stood by that, we would need to get something on the books by July and have this fishery open, but I think it's dicey to think that we're going to get through all the process that Beaufort is working on and whatever reviews there are in the SSC and then have time to do the amendments that need to take place and get something in place for next year.

DR. DUVAL: I have a question, which is can we -- Because we can modify ABCs and ACLs through a regulatory amendment process, could we use a regular regulatory amendment to remove that formula that we established in Amendment 28?

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: I will look at it.

DR. DUVAL: I think that's the biggest question, is whether or not that requires a full plan amendment or whether or not --

DR. CRABTREE: I think you need a plan amendment to do that.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: That's my first instinct, but I will look at it.

DR. DUVAL: That is one of those actions that we've been putting aside that is actually in Amendment 43, was to actually change that, but, because we didn't have any recommendations out of the SSC, that's why we were putting it aside and focusing on other things, and so I think, if folks are willing to pare this down to simply change the ABC --

DR. CRABTREE: If I could, Michelle, I mean, we're not changing an ABC. That's something that the SSC gives us, and so I think the premise we're on is we don't have a useable ABC right now and so we're going to set an ACL in the meantime, in the absence of an ABC.

MS. BECKWITH: If I am understanding this right, if we would keep the same formula, we would simply have to figure out a defensible ACL that would fit into the current formula in 28 that would allow us to have a season.

DR. CRABTREE: My thinking is that we would get rid of the formula, because the formula is all based on looking at discards, and it's really driven by discards. I think what we are trying to get out of here is having the discards drive everything, because of the huge uncertainty about them and all of these calibrations and changes that are taking place in MRIP.

We're trying to get the focus onto the index that we have and the fact that the stock is rebuilding, and we're trying to come up with some reasonable catch level that we could put in place for 2018, until we're able to get an ABC and implement something from the council. Now, it may be that this index-based approach on things is something we would put into an Amendment 28-like process, and then we would update the index on an annual basis, and, if all is well, we would get an ABC out of it that way, but I don't understand enough about what they are doing to know.

MS. BECKWITH: The disconnect, for me, is how do we get rid of that formula and put the ACL in in a timely manner?

DR. CRABTREE: You need to do a plan amendment, I believe.

DR. DUVAL: I think the difficulty that folks are having here, Roy, is so we could take the plan amendment that we have now, which includes an action to modify the ACL, and just pare it down to that, but how do we -- What are we going to use to establish an ACL if this other effort is underway at the Science Center to develop this index-based approach? You're saying all we have to do is set a reasonable ACL, but based on what?

DR. CRABTREE: Well, we're going to have to come up with a basis for it. For example, if we were to look at the last four years that we have catches or five years or some timeframe, and we know the stock is improving steadily over that timeframe, one could then argue that the level of removals during that timeframe was consistent with recovery of the stock.

You could look at the landings that occurred over that timeframe and say that's consistent with the recovery of the stock. Then you could look at that index and come up with some scalar as to how much we think the population is scaled up, and you could that average and scale it up similarly, and you could draw a connection there between the index is doing and what we've been doing,

and that might be a way to get you there. We would have to lay all of that out in the amendment, and that's how we came up with our ACL. Now, it's a challenge, and there are a lot of hurdles there, but I think, given what I am seeing with that index, it's worth trying.

MR. BOWEN: I am just going to throw something out there, and I may be totally way out in left field under that other rock, but, in 2016, we had 296,695 dead discards. Somewhere in the reading that I have done over all of this, over the last few weeks or months, I read somewhere that the average weight of a snapper now is 5.86 pounds. Is it possible, because we're in the absence of an ABC, to take that 296,695 dead discarded fish that averaged 5.86 pounds and multiply that and come up with an ACL of 1,738,633 pounds?

DR. DUVAL: That's not a question for me. That's a question for the Regional Administrator.

MR. BOWEN: Roy said we could establish an ACL, and that's a formula that I just came up with.

DR. CRABTREE: What I would suggest that you do is that we get Chip and John Carmichael and Jack and maybe another soul from the Regional Office, and maybe get Marcel and some input from the SSC, and ask them to lay out some options for how we might derive a catch level out of what we have. I don't think we're going to just sit here and dream it up today, but I think it needs to be based on averages over some period of time when we're confident the stock is showing improvement, and so, if we continue what we've been doing, logically, things should continue to improve.

DR. DUVAL: Why don't we -- Let's take this input that we have received, and we will allow Chip and Jack and maybe John to go back and take this input and look at the indices and look at the total removals, look at the landings, and provide us some options that we can look at at Full Council. We're not going to get here today. I think there is still some questions about how we would move forward with that or how that becomes approved, but we will try to solve those later.

MR. BROWN: Roy, you were talking about the trend from going back and then coming up to where we're at now, and it continues to go up on the discard issue, and, for 2017, it's liable to even be higher, and so, before we go setting the ACL, and, if you're going to refer to a trend, then we need to take into consideration what this trend is going to look like as we continue to move along this track that we're on right now. Where are we going to be?

If we're going to set an ACL, it needs to be something that is -- We know that the fishery is rebounding, and it's rebounding fast, and we know, with the amount of discards that we're being presented with, it's continuing to rebound. I feel like we're already way past the rebuild point on this fishery, and so, if we're going to set a trend for an ACL, then it needs to be at the level to where we're at right now with discards.

DR. CRABTREE: I expect the discards may keep going up if the stock keeps expanding. It's hard to predict with that, and we've got a lot of changes to the MRIP survey that are going to go in place next year. They're going to switch to the mail survey and away from the telephone survey, and so we're going to have this disconnect between discard levels next year and the historical time series, and there will be some calibration formulas and things like that that we're going to see later this year and next year.

I am more focused on the trend in the trap survey abundance index, and I think, as long as we keep that on a positive increasing trajectory, then the stock is still recovering and rebuilding, and I am less concerned about trying to track the discards and what they're doing, because I think that's going to be difficult to do, and so I am trying to de-emphasize the discards and put more emphasis on the survey.

MR. HAYMANS: Roy, if we find a way to kill the formula in Amendment 28, through that same process -- In Alternative 4, we had options of a start date in August and one in September. Could you also change that start date away from July in that same process, to one of those other two months, since they have already been vetted?

DR. CRABTREE: I don't see why we couldn't do something like that. It's just the more we try to do, we need to think about our ability to get it all done, but I don't see why we couldn't do that.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. I am going to suggest that we wrap this conversation up, as fun as it's been, and we'll see what folks come up with at Full Council on this. I appreciate all the discussion. I think it was good. I know it was frustrating, and I appreciate everybody's forbearance with that. I wish it had gone more smoothly, but I am just as surprised as everybody else is, and so suffice it to say.

The next item on our agenda is the White Paper on Snapper Grouper For-Hire Limited Entry, and we have two attachments in the briefing book, Attachment 7a and 7b. We had begun this discussion at our March meeting. The committee and council indicated that they simply wanted to have an open discussion about limited entry as a tool and what it would be used for, or what it could be used for, and what problems it could address and what the goals and objectives of using such a tool could be.

The committee had asked for a couple of updates to that white paper, and so all Kari is going to do here is just highlight the things in the white paper that have changed and been updated. Folks asked for some additional information regarding like county tourism statistics, and I think permits by county, and so I'm just going to turn things over to Kari to let her just highlight what those are, and then we're going to go back to the open discussion that we were unable to finish at the last meeting.

DR. MACLAUHLIN: All that we added in the white paper, which is Attachment 7a under Snapper Grouper, we added Table 2, which is on page 2, and that is the comparison of the number of South Atlantic federal snapper grouper for-hire permits by county compared with tourism statistics.

Information about tourism at the county level is not so easy to find, and so I used the NOAA Office of Coastal Management. They have a socioeconomic tool, and they actually had these county snapshots, and so I used that. They had a measure of tourism in there, which is the number of establishments and then the sum of the GDP, and it's just so you guys could get a comparison.

There have been some questions about that, and I would need to -- I mean, these were snapshots, county snapshots, and so I probably need to contact the Office of Coastal Management to get some more details about how they determined those numbers, if that is something that you want to add to the timing and tasks and is an important part of you guys making a decision.

Then we also added the April 2017 Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel recommendations, and so we went through the same presentation with them, and so they had some recommendations about it. There was a concern about the number of charter vessels operating without federal permits in federal waters and not meeting safety requirements, but they did recommend starting with just assigning numbers to the permits first, so that you can track them. Then, that way, you could also track any kind of catch history on there.

Then consider the concept of vesting in the fishery, to promote stewardship, and concern over the for-hire industry being tied to the private recreational component and resulting accountability issues. There was a suggestion that there is no need to cap the number of permits, because the overall number has not varied much over the past ten years, but then the council should be clear about the goals of the limited entry before developing the system.

Then there was some concern about permits being consolidated and acquiring a high value, because they would be -- If they were allowed to be sold, and then there was concern about limited entry leading to sector separation and individual fishing quotas for the for-hire sector.

The AP discussed the current lack of proper enforcement and then also that limited entry may exclude participants in other fisheries or sectors who were planning to get a snapper grouper for-hire permit in the future and then a concern that limited-entry permits will be giving a public resource to a service provider.

Then, last, they had some more specific recommendations if the council decides to start work on this and suggestions to evaluate the changes in the number and distribution of permits since 2012. There was a suggestion to not allow the permits to be sold, just so that they would go back into a pool for new entrants, and there was a suggestion for a sunset provision in five to ten years, so the council can evaluate it and then make a decision about removing or changing the system.

There was a recommendation to include historical captains who may not have had the current permit, but have worked in the for-hire sector. There was a suggestion to explore the concept of a decal or some kind of identifier on the vessels and a suggestion to include an outreach component directed at tourists, so that they know how to identify a properly-permitted for-hire vessel.

You also have received some comments on the online comment form. As of about 9:00 a.m., there were seventy-five that were opposed to limited entry, including one from South Carolina Representative Lee Hewitt, and then also the organization the Council for Sustainable Fishing. Then you also had one in support of the program, and then you also received a copy of a letter from the Key West charter boat fishermen, from Bill Wickers. I think that's all of the comments that have come in.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you, Kari. We very much appreciate that, and I think, as Kari indicated, those county statistics are not very easy to get. They're not really all in one place in an easily-accessible source, and so, in terms of the amount of time spent, certainly we could get more accurate information, but that really depends on, I think, where this conversation goes.

The council had said that -- Folks had said that they wanted to have just an open conversation to discuss what issues limited entry might be able to address, and so, in other words, how would a

tool be used, or if there are other tools that could be used to address the same issue, and what goals and objectives there might be, in terms of limited entry, and we wanted to have just an open discussion on the pros and cons. I think you've heard some additional input from your Snapper Grouper Committee, with regard to that, and so I would like to open the floor for discussion.

MS. BECKWITH: Again, I feel like this sort of gets pushed into a limited amount of time, and so we can only have sort of small bursts of discussion, and so I would love to have sort of a two-hour time period, where we can work some of this stuff out, but just a couple of quick thoughts.

I think I agree with the AP that we should be numbering our permits, at a very minimum first step forward, while the council sort of talks through and considers what the real problem -- What our problem statement is and how any of these potential tools might be able to help what we define as our issues here.

I've got plenty of ideas on how we might move forward that I would like to talk through, but I don't know that we've got sort of the time, given that public comment starts in an hour, and so, in terms of one thing that Zack and I can probably agree on is that a reason to move forward in any capacity would be that we would want to give reporting the best opportunity to be successful.

I personally disagree that there is an overcapacity issue, especially with the comparisons of the tourism. I find that these seem appropriate. The number of permits for the areas and the value of even using the GDP is appropriate, and I struggle with the idea that this is a resource issue. I struggle that the charter industry, in particular, is causing a resource concern. I think the recreational community as a whole may be causing a resource concern, and I am sort of abhorred to manage an entire industry based on the discards of one species, and so I would like to take a step back and see -- This needs to move forward as something that is more than just about concerns over red snapper.

The AP discussed concerns about new entrants, historic captains, and commercial fishermen that would like to participate someday, and we've got concerns with historic captains that have never owned a permit, because they didn't own the vessel, but they have participated in the for-hire industry as a captain, and so, since these permits are issued to the vessel, then we have the potential to be leaving captains that have actually participated in the fishery out of this scenario.

I've got ideas on, if we move forward for stuff, how we would create basically an apprenticeship program. My desire would be not to monetize the permit, and there is just a host of different things that we could talk about that just require time to think some of this stuff through, but those are my first thoughts on this, and I will be quiet.

MR. BOWEN: To Anna's point, I feel like there is a resource issue. I mean, the fish that we were catching, the amount of fish that we were catching twenty years ago -- The fish that we're catching now is not even close to the amount of fish that we were catching twenty years ago. I think some of your concerns about the guys that were running a boat for somebody else, we can include this in the amendment, with actions and alternatives in there to include them.

With this limited-entry program that I am advocating for, in no way, shape, or form do I want to cut out anybody that's in the fishery. That is not my goal here. We can establish, in this amendment, where there is no monetary value, some way, some form, some shape. I know that's

your concern, and Doug has mentioned that as well, and we can address these issues, but we cannot have a limited resource without limited access. I mean, there is just no way around that.

I have made some notes here as Anna was talking. Do we destroy the heritage of the charter fleet with open access, or do we preserve it with limited access? That's something that we need to ask ourselves. Why is there limited entry in the best deer-hunting states in America? Why is there limited entry in the commercial fleet and absolutely shunned by the recreational higher-ups, if you will? I will stop there and let Chester continue, and then I will follow up later.

MR. BREWER: I will probably have some comments later too, but I had a couple of questions for Kari, please. When you're listing by county and you're listing the GDP, is that the overall GDP of the county or is that the tourism dollars for the county or is that somehow or another directly related to the number of permits for charter/for-hire in the county? You're showing like \$1.7 billion for Palm Beach County, which is where I live, and I know, while I love our charter fleet, I know they're not adding \$1.7 billion to the economy of Palm Beach County, and so that's my first question. My second question is you mentioned that there were seventy-nine written comments against charter/for-hire, and how many were in favor in the written comments that we received?

DR. MACLAUHLIN: With the table, the information that I got from the Office of Coastal Management, their county snapshots, what the number of establishments and the sum of the GDP is, it's their measure of how much tourism contributes, all tourism, like hotel, restaurants, any kind of establishment, and then how much money is contributed to that county's GDP. It would include any kind of charter fishing, but it's definitely everything. It's hotels and attractions and --

MR. BREWER: So we don't know what the proportion would be.

DR. MACLAUHLIN: Right.

MR. BREWER: I will tell you, in Palm Beach County, it's high. There's a lot, because people come down there, and they want to fish, and they want to go catch a sailfish. Then, on the second one, so that you don't have to look it up, I looked myself this morning, and --

DR. MACLAUHLIN: I read them all too, as of 9:00 a.m. That's when I looked at it, and I think we've had a few more come in, and there were seventy-five opposed and one in support, and that was on the online comment form, and then the other comment that you received, which I think was at lunch, which was a hard copy from the Key West charter boats, with those guys who supported it.

MR. BREWER: Thank you very much.

DR. DUVAL: You should have this in front of you from the Key West Charter Boat Association, and so these are all the members, and maybe like forty-some. Forty-six.

DR. CRABTREE: I am looking at an email that -- I don't know if everyone got it, but we got an email from Ira Lax that had a petition with a list of names of captains that supported it. Does everyone have that?

DR. DUVAL: I think Ira emailed that strictly to council members, and so all council members should have received it.

MR. BOWEN: Kari, of those seventy-five that opposed on our website, how many of these were federally-permitted for-hire operators?

DR. MACLAUHLIN: I do not know. We can look and see. There is a way that you identify the -- You can self-identify as recreational or commercial or charter, and we can compare some of those, but, as far as checking their permits and everything, I haven't done that.

MR. BOWEN: I just find that, in the discussions that I have had with the public, and I said this on the record at the last meeting. I went to ten federally-permitted for-hire captains in my town, and seven of those -- One of them for sure was post the control date, but seven of the ten that I went to were in favor of it, and I find that the ones that -- Most of the people that aren't in favor of this were either not fishing twenty years ago and realized what the biomass of fish were or are fishing illegally without a federal permit.

MR. GRINER: Specifically to you, Michelle, has North Carolina State DMF taken a position on this issue at all?

DR. DUVAL: Could you speak into the microphone? I could not hear you.

MR. GRINER: I was wondering if North Carolina State's Department of Marine Fisheries has taken a stand on this at all.

DR. DUVAL: The agency has discussed this, and I think we believe that limited entry is a tool that should be in the toolbox. We use limited entry in North Carolina for the commercial sector. We use it a little bit differently. I think I have described that before, where we have a total cap on the number of commercial licenses, and then we have an eligibility board that receives applications, and there is a pool of available licenses, and the number of licenses in that pool to be issued is decided on by the Marine Fisheries Commission every year.

There is a total number of licenses, a total cap on licenses, out there, but there is a pool in between that cap and what is actually the number of active licenses, I should say, or the number of licenses that have been issued, and so it's a tool that we use. I think the concerns that the division had was that there didn't seem to be a clearly-identified problem and that the division would want to see a clearly-identified problem and goals and objectives identified prior to making a decision one way or the other on the use of limited entry in this fishery.

MR. GRINER: Thank you.

DR. PONWITH: Addressing this strictly from a data standpoint, and I know that the issue of limited entry is a complicated one, and one where there is a lot of controversy associated with it, but, looking at it strictly from a data standpoint, the one thing where there is fairly universal agreement, and, in fact, a rare agreement between everybody, and that's that everybody really wants better data.

Electronic reporting has been established as a method to improve our ability to be limber in collecting data and having those data in our hands sooner, and I do see having the ability to actually monitor compliance with electronic reporting requirements and having a tool to really incentivize timely and accurate reporting is very useful in this case, and, for that reason, this kind of provision, I think, could assist us with that.

MR. BELL: I agree with that, in principle, and we've discussed examples of how it might actually help, but here's one of my big concerns. We haven't implemented our system yet. Lord willing, in January of 2018, we'll get it up and running and we'll start moving in that direction, and so we don't really know at this point what's going to happen. I think the consideration of this tool is a valid consideration if it's done for the right reasons.

I think the folks that kind of want to consider this are doing it with the right intent, but my concern is timing right now, and it's for exactly what you just touched on, which is we've got this system that we're hoping to have up and running, and it's going to take -- That's going to be a big change for people. That's sort of the implementation of one new tool, which is not going to be an easy one to get up and running, and I speak from experience, based on the fact that we have a system in our state.

I think talking about this other concept on top of that and sort of the angst it seems to be creating and the turmoil -- I find that perhaps counter to a smooth implementation, perhaps, of this new system, and because it's going to require cooperation and communication and some back-and-forth with people, and so the timing of this is what I have probably the most concern about.

You can certainly, if we need to -- We just said to establish a clear need for the tool and consider the tool later, but, right now, I am kind of focused on us getting the reporting system that is very valuable, and folks have definitely expressed a need for, in place and up and running and let's see how it's going and then, later on, if we establish a need for another tool, then fine, but that's my big concern right now, I think, is a timing thing.

DR. PONWITH: I hear you loud and clear. That is a lot of change all at once, and, if you take what you just said and kind of look at it from the other direction, the change that we're taking is a statistical-based approach to estimating landings in the for-hire fleet and switching to kind of a census approach, using self-reported data, and my big concern is we're doing that for all the right reasons.

We are doing it for reasons that I believe are important and we need to do, but what I don't want to do is substitute data from a known statistically-based system for something that really -- Where we really don't have a feel for the validity of the data and don't have a way to reign in the validity of the data. We can have dockside validation, and that absolutely helps, but I do think that that extra tool is going to be really valuable to try and get this right and make that transition from one system to the other as quickly as possible.

MR. HAYMANS: The dockside validation, we heard we're going to be running them side-by-side for a while, but we also heard on Tuesday that perhaps there are other enforcement tools for compliance, such as fines, and I intend to, when we get to Executive Finance, ask at least that this council and other councils can ask NOAA GC to either increase the severity level of the penalties

or at least increase the fines, and it doesn't have to be limited entry that is the enforcement for reporting. To echo Mel's concerns, I think we need to see what non-compliance is first.

MR. DILERNIA: First of all, let me say that this is a major policy decision, I believe, and so I am glad I am not the liaison, but, without direct advice from the Mid-Atlantic Council, I don't think I could take a position. The council liaison can take a position one way or another regarding this decision, but I am a committee member, and, as a committee member, I can share my thoughts with you. I will tell you that, if this does come to a vote, I will be abstaining, because, again, I don't have full direction from the council regarding this issue.

I see value in a limited-access program for the for-hire fleet. I believe that -- I have been in the for-hire business for over forty years, and I wish I owned my own quota, actually. I would have better control over how I could conduct my business if I owned my own quota for the different species, but you're not talking about an ITQ system, and you're not talking sector separation either.

If I thought that supporting a limited-access program would end up -- That we would end up with a sector separation program, where, in the Gulf, unfortunately, and our colleagues in the Gulf are well-intentioned, but it gives forty-something days to the for-hire fleet and three days to the recreational fleet, and I could never support an action like that. I believe that it's unfair.

At the same time, I do believe that there is merit in creating a limited-access program for the for-hire fleet. It's often been said that the for-hire fleet is the commercial component of the recreational fishery, and you have limited-access programs for your commercial fishermen, and so it only would stand to logic that, in the long run, by extension, you would begin to create a limited-access program for the for-hire vessels.

It's been said also that 90 percent of the fish are caught by 10 percent of the fishermen, and I've got a feeling that that 10 percent is -- A lot of them are the for-hire guys, and the more for-hire guys -- Once somebody gets really good as a fisherman, very often they then consider becoming a for-hire guide, and I believe that that will also eventually increase pressure on the stock.

You see your stocks declining, except for red snapper, and that's an open-access program for the for-hire fleet, and so, again, while I will be abstaining from a vote, from a personal point of view, I believe there is merit in exploring and considering a limited access program for the for-hire fleet, but it's just that you have to be careful how you create it and craft it, so that unintended consequences are minimal.

Finally, let me say that John Bullard, at our last council meeting, made a comment that has resonated with me very clearly. He said that everyone wants progress, but people are afraid of change. To have progress, you have to have change, and this might be a small type of change that is necessary for you to continue to progress in managing the fishery. Thank you.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Tony. Next, I have Ben and then Chester and then Anna and then Dewey. Then I want to see if I can try to summarize some of the points that have been made.

MR. HARTIG: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you, Tony. I mean, you made, very eloquently, some of the points that I was going to raise. This is a commercial venture, and we have never really treated it as such. We've separated it out in all of our data collection activities,

the for-hire industry, and it is essentially a commercial platform to take recreational fishermen out on the water.

You rightly pointed to the commercial fishery that is under limited access, and I think it's past time that we did this for the for-hire sector as well. The part about it's not a resource problem, it is every bit a resource problem. The productivity of the Atlantic stocks in the snapper grouper fishery, of all the species, has gone down tremendously with every assessment we've gotten from Beaufort, just about.

The biggest thing was that, when the new assessment scientists came in and looked at the way assessments were being done and changed that with new models and such, much more conservative estimates of our stock were estimated, and we have been going along this whole time with thinking that we can support the same numbers of the for-hire fleet in the face of less productivity of almost all of our snapper grouper stocks that have been assessed.

We really need to look at the resource portion of this in the face of the productivity that we have in our snapper grouper fisheries, and it's critical that we limit it to that portion of the recreational fleet now. I mean, we've finally got them separated out as data collection. That's a great step forward, and, if we separate them out into their own entity, under limited access, I think that's another win in moving forward.

The other thing I said, and Roy really mentioned it earlier this week, is the professionalization that's it's caused in the Gulf. Dale is here, and he could probably speak to that as well. He's been around a long time and has watched what has transpired in the Gulf. Roy has spoken that, as that part of the fleet has been limited, they have become more professional, and, whenever I go to a Gulf meeting, I see the Orange County fleet line up at the mic for the public hearings, one after the other, to talk about management issues in the Gulf, and I have always been very impressed by the number of charter fishermen that they have that give very good comments over there, and so that's another reason why. It would be more professional. We have a lot of problems with people getting in and out of our recreational for-hire fleet, and we hear -- Ira has voiced a lot of concerns about that from where we are, and I will leave that point at that. I think I will leave it there. Thank you.

MR. DIAZ: Kind of to what has been said recently, I just want to mention -- I am not going to comment one way or the other on this particular action, but the Gulf is a very different dynamic, and there's a lot of different things going on in the Gulf than I think what you have in the South Atlantic, although some things are similar, but, in the Gulf, charter boats that held reef fish permits had to fish in federal waters.

States in the Gulf started opening up their state waters and consuming a lot of the ACL, which took away from charter boats, and so that was a big difference in the dynamics of what was going on in the Gulf, and, the three days that Tony mentioned a minute ago, one reason that there was only three days in the Gulf for private recreational is because the state-water seasons were consuming a lot of the fish and taking them away from being available in federal waters. It's kind of complicated, but it would be hard to draw a comparison from the Gulf, I think. Thank you, Madam Chair.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you for that perspective, Dale. It's much appreciated.

MR. BREWER: I cannot support going forward with this at this time, and I would like to say why. First and foremost, I have not heard of any problems that have validity and have some evidence of the problem being there other than enforcement, and I think that there are far better ways, far more efficient ways and far more effective ways, to try to do away with or minimize the problems that I've heard than going with this program.

First of all, identifying people who are federally-permitted, that needs to be going on. The AP talked about it. There needs to be a sticker that says I am the right guy to go with. There probably is a problem with yahoos that are not federally-permitted going out and fishing in federal waters and charging people money to do it. That's an enforcement problem, and that is solved through law enforcement. If you've got limited entry or not, those yahoos are still going to be doing that. Identifying the boats that are a problem. Number the permits. It makes perfect sense.

I am all for and support the charter industry, and any of the organizations that I belong to support the charter industry. The charter industry takes folks that don't have a boat, or their brother doesn't have a boat, or their friend doesn't have a boat, and they provide an opportunity for the public to go fishing. I would like to, and all the organizations that I belong to would love to see the charter industry prosper and expand.

By expand, I mean provide additional opportunities to the recreational public to go fishing. I am very much afraid that something that will be coming up here, and something we'll have to guard against and argue about and everything else, is that we will have a situation where the opportunity provided to the public will decrease, and I really don't want to see that, and I understand that there are a lot of different ways that we can go about it and things that we can talk about that will alleviate the problems that I see and that I have seen, but I don't know that right now is the time to do them, because we've got, I think, bigger fish to fry.

This issue is one that, at the very least, is going to be very controversial, very controversial. We have already seen it, and it's going to take up a lot of time to work through the different options and the different fixes, and so I simply cannot support going forward with this at this time.

MS. BECKWITH: A couple of things. To clarify my previous resource comment, I meant that there was not any resource issues specific to the charter fleet. We're talking about limiting the number of charter, in one way or another, while we still continue to allow the recreational folks to have access without a limit, and so, to Tony's concern about sector separation, fundamentally, that would eventually have to occur, because, if you freeze a number of service providers -- Yes, we are a commercial venture, but, fundamentally, we provide a service.

When you limit service providers, you sometimes get that great service in the long run, but, if you're going to limit the number of charter guys providing the service, but you're going to allow the recreational folks to not have a limit, then, eventually, the charter guys are going to get edged out into a smaller and smaller and smaller piece of the pie for the ACL, and our seasons will begin to become shorter and shorter, and so then the next step to that will eventually be having to separate out a portion of our own ACL, and so that's just the reality of the direction that this would go.

I do like the idea of numbering the permits, and I like the idea of the decal, because those two things allow an increase in compliance, even as just a first step. Those are just good ideas, but

another to note, to Dale's point, is we are very different from the charter fleet in the Gulf. For us, the majority of our fishing guides are inshore/offshore fishermen. This is one of many permits that they hold.

It is a tool in the toolbox that's based on availability and abundance, and there is a concern about new entrants that would be coming in. I mean, Zack said he doesn't want to leave anybody out that's in it now, but that's okay, but, when you get into charter fishing, we're not like the commercial guys, where you've mated and you go out and you get a permit and you have something to sell right away.

We are a service industry, and so we provide -- It's based on reputation, and it's based on if they know that you're good, and so, when you step into a charter fleet, you likely don't have customers, and you have to build you way up, and that takes time, and that is different. For the guys in the Gulf, if you had a Gulf reef permit, you had all of your customers, because the concerns with the red snapper were different, and so, to me, I struggle to make that comparison.

Last time we talked about this, I brought up the issue that, as we move forward, we need to be very careful that a recreational individual does not all of a sudden have more access to the fishery than a state-chartered individual, and so, if I can get -- If I can go out on my private boat with a regular fishing license and I can access all of my state waters and my federal species that are open, but a state-licensed charter guy that doesn't have the federal permits all of a sudden can only access the state waters, but can't go out into the federal waters, we're going to have folks finding very creative loopholes to make sure that they can get out there anyways.

I don't know that that's the intent, and so, again, I'm not opposed. I think the idea that North Carolina follows with having a cap to the permits and finding a way to work down and not having them be monetized, and so, if there is a permit, and it's non-transferable, and it goes back into a pool, so it's available for new entrants, or if you have a permit that's created for specifically new entrants, I think there's a way that we can achieve all of these things, but I don't think that the answer is necessarily privatizing a limited-entry permit.

As we move through this, I think our first step should be figuring out what the problem statement is, and, in the interim, moving forward, potentially, with numbering the permits and consideration of some version of a decal, so it facilitates enforcement to know who is legit.

DR. DUVAL: I would like to get to folks who have not had a chance to speak yet, and so I would like to get to Dewey and then Chris, and then I want to see if I can try to clarify -- We have heard things all over the map here, and I don't know if we're going to come to some resolution today, and I apologize for that. Our agenda was really very full, as Anna noted, and so Dewey and then Chris.

DR. CRABTREE: Shouldn't we have a motion before we have the debate, or are we going to go through all of this and then get a motion and then do the debate all over again?

DR. DUVAL: The committee specifically stated that they wanted to have an open discussion without the pressure of some motion to debate or not, and that was exactly the conversation that we had in December, which is why we put this on the agenda the way we did in March, and we ran out of time there, and that's why we're doing this here.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I think, when you start to limit access to something, there is going to be a monetary value that's placed on something, because it's just going to be -- It's a limited resource, and that limited permit allows you to go fishing, similar to the way it's done in commercial fishing and the value of the permits.

In the charter industry, from the North Carolina/Virginia line to Key West, Florida, you have all types of different charter vessels and sizes, whether they fish in federal waters or whether they fish in state or whether they only have one species to catch north of Cape Hatteras, like blueline tilefish, where you don't have the mixed bags of fisheries, as you do further south.

Second of all, if you do go in and choose the limited access, and say in the northern region that there's a hundred boats, those hundred boats, once they have their limited access permits, if they were to be sold or moved on, do they have to stay in that area where they're done, or could all the limited access permits that will be of value go and move into one place?

Second of all, even though that there's going to be -- Which I believe is -- I wish that it would have been five years ago, the charter boat reporting, for-hire reporting, this amendment that is supposed to take place in the next six months, it's still two or three or four or five years away from getting some accurate how does this work data, no matter what you say here, and so it will be, for the next two or three years, kind of a guesstimation of what the charter industry is catching.

It will also be, when you look at the law enforcement thing, I see still no teeth in it, and I've been asking about it for the last two years. What happens if you don't report? Are you going to have to be weekly reporting, and who is going to check on your weekly reports? I still see it as everybody is patting themselves, maybe a little early, on the back about the reporting, but it's still two or three or four years away before you're going to get any credibility in that.

While there is a lot of things going on right now in wanting to look at the limited access, or possible limited access, of the for-hire industry, first of all, you've got to know what they're catching before you start limiting, and I still think we're two or three years down the way before you get any validity, and especially enforcement actions, to the people.

On the commercial end, I've had it upon me where I've sent my logbooks in late, in Amendment A7 for bluefin tuna, and I avoided the bluefin, but I sent my logbooks in late, and I couldn't go fish off of my state for three years in a certain area, and so there is a higher penalty to pay on the commercial end, no doubt, and I just wish -- Not putting it per person, but that the same type of level of commitment and equality and leveling the playing field would be that same way with others that have to report, and I don't see that in the Southeast, and hopefully that will happen in the near future.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Dewey.

MR. CONKLIN: I see this as the professionals in the industry have spoken, and more and more will continue to speak and get onboard on this, and I foresee, with red grouper and black sea bass and red snapper, and I still don't quite see a way forward with that, but I think this is a proactive step in the right direction for them to get away from being grouped in with the recreational

accounts, and I mean that's just the quick and dirty of it, and that's the truth, unfortunately, but I think this is the right time to begin something like this.

If people keep speaking against it, and we don't listen to the ones that have been in the business and know it better than -- We know that they're actually vested participants that have the permits and have been operating businesses. They're going to sit there and be like, we've been telling you this, and now they're going to have to be grouped in with the recreational guys and tied to the dock and not able to operate their businesses at all.

DR. DUVAL: Zack, and then let's try to wrap this up.

MR. BOWEN: Yes, ma'am. Thank you. To Chester's point about the enforcement, the enforcement guys, and forgive me for not remembering names, but we were at a meeting and they basically -- I am not quoting them, but the gist of their conversation to me was that, until this was a limited access program, they weren't going to enforce it, but, if it ever became a limited access, then it would be kind of higher on their totem pole, if you will.

To Anna, with your last comments, it's clear to me, and the majority of the people in the room, that you clearly do not run snapper grouper for-hire trips. I'm sorry. That's nothing personal, but it's just we could tell with those last comments, and, with that being said, Madam Chair, I am prepared to make a motion.

I would like to make a motion to direct staff to begin working on an amendment to establish a moratorium on the issuance of a federal for-hire snapper grouper permit as of the control date of June 15, 2016. It is the council's intent that the permits must remain in the fishery in the category in which they were last renewed prior to the control date, and then I have a hardship, if Kari can put it on the screen. I think she's got it. An appeal is part of this motion, so the council can read it. If I can get a second, I will offer some rationale with it.

DR. DUVAL: There is a motion by Zack. I will read it. It says: Direct staff to begin working on an amendment to establish a moratorium on the issuance of federal for-hire snapper grouper permits as of the control date of June 15, 2016. It is the council's intent that the permits must remain in the fishery in the category in which they were last renewed prior to the June 15, 2016 control date (Category of passenger capacity, data for charter vessels, headboats only, uninspected vessel, six-pack, U.S. Coast Guard inspected vessel, specify passenger capacity as listed on the U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection, not including captain and crew.) Is there a second to the motion? Is there more?

MR. BOWEN: Yes.

DR. DUVAL: During development of the amendment, the council will review requests to be included from any permit holder that obtained a federal for-hire snapper grouper permit after the June 15, 2016 control date. Applicants should include data from a state or from NMFS that document effort, participation, history in the for-hire snapper grouper fishery. Appeals, an application oversight committee will be established upon approval of the amendment to assist the NMFS Regional Administrator in handling disputes over eligibility for permits. The charge of the committee is to make sure the criteria pertaining to eligibility or initial allocation were applied to any individual's application in a correct manner. The committee will not evaluate hardship

applications. The committee is to be made up of one state director or his designee from each state in the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction, the NMFS Regional Administrator or his designee. NOAA General Counsel will have a non-voting advisory role on the committee. One NMFS staff and one council staff are to provide assistance. Sunset, the moratorium on issuance of federal for-hire snapper grouper permits would sunset five years from the date of implementation unless extended by the council.

MR. BOWEN: With that motion, Madam Chair, I think I have tried to address the concerns around the table that I have heard previous. As you can tell by the length of it, I have thought long and hard about it.

DR. DUVAL: Is there a second to the motion? Second by Chris. Is there discussion? Monica.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: You called on me before I raised my hand, which was great, because we were thinking. One thing I would like to say is -- So you can direct staff to start working on an amendment regarding a moratorium, but the Magnuson Act requires you to consider a number of things, including present participation, historical fishing practices, and a number of other things.

I can see this as an alternative in an amendment, or maybe several different alternatives in an amendment or different actions with which, for NEPA, you would need to consider, I'm sure, all reasonable alternatives, and so there could be -- For example, with the control date of June 15, 2016, there could be no action, or there could be that June 15 date, or there might be another reasonable date. I am not sure, but there is a number of things you have to consider to establish a limited access system.

I guess my point being that these could be actions or alternatives in an amendment, but you wouldn't necessarily have to -- You wouldn't want to decide those upfront, until you saw the analyses that went with them. That's my main idea, is that, if you want to begin working on an amendment, that's fine. These could be actions in the amendment, but there is liable to be other alternatives and actions. This isn't the be-all and end-all of the only thing that's going to be in the amendment.

DR. DUVAL: Thank you for that clarification, Monica.

MR. BOWEN: I was just going to offer some rationale. I tried to incorporate, like I said earlier, the concerns that I have heard around the table, but, since the control date of June 15 of 2016, the number of permits has increased. Establishing a moratorium, to me, avoids many concerns we've heard with the limited entry, such as ownership and permit transfers and permanent programs versus the temporary moratorium. This would cap and probably reduce the discard mortality in the red snapper fishery and the other fisheries, red grouper, sea bass, et cetera. I will stop there.

MR. BREWER: That's a fishery management plan, is what that is.

MR. BOWEN: Thank you.

MR. BREWER: If this thing passes, you are begging to be sued, and you are begging to be sued successfully, because that's a fishery management plan, without going through any of the process, and I obviously can't support that.

MR. HARTIG: My concerns with Zack's motion was that I had heard from a number of people, after we passed the control date, who had said, listen, I've been building a boat. There was several people that said I've been a mate and I'm going to apply for my charter license, and I think there were three or four different people. I said, well, yes, we have a control date, but I said, you know, oftentimes, the council takes other things into consideration, and, with what Monica said about Zack's motion of using just the control date, of that time, it would be only one of the options.

There would be other options developed under that, under Magnuson, that would allow some leeway in using a somewhat later date after the control date to allow some of these people who had legitimately wanted to be in the charter business, to allow them in, and so that takes care of the concern I had with Zack's motion. I mean, we can do that, which is great.

MS. BECKWITH: If we do move forward to develop an amendment, I would certainly want to consider permit pools and apprenticeship permits and how we deal with historic captains and all sorts of other things, and so I think, if we are going to move -- I am glad that limited entry is not necessarily in there, that we're at least considering a moratorium, but, even more than a moratorium, I think I would like consideration of an overall cap.

I think, if we're going to develop an amendment to consider something, what is going to be in that amendment has got the potential to be pretty broad, and this does not encompass certainly things that I would be interested in considering.

DR. CRABTREE: Zack, I would support the concept of looking at this, but the motion has so much in it and so much specificity that I don't think that I could support it as structured. If you would be willing to modify your motion and have it end after the word "permits", so that all it said was "direct staff to begin working on an amendment to establish a moratorium on the issuance of federal for-hire snapper grouper permits", I think I could support that, but the rest of that stuff about appeals committees -- I am not even sure that some of that is even doable.

MR. BOWEN: I was just trying to be thorough, but that's fine. I will modify that motion to end after the word "permits".

DR. DUVAL: The committee would have to -- We have already had discussion about this, and so I think you're forced to vote it up or down at this point, and, if you want to offer a different motion or if somebody wants to offer a substitute motion, we could do that.

MR. BOWEN: Just for clarification, would you want us to vote it up or down before or after a substitute motion?

DR. DUVAL: What I am saying is that you have a couple of options. You could vote it up or down and then offer a different motion, or you could provide a -- You could amend the motion.

DR. CRABTREE: I would suggest, Zack, that you just make a substitute motion.

MR. BOWEN: Okay. Can I do that now?

DR. DUVAL: Can the motion maker substitute his own motion? I don't think so. Someone else would have to make a substitute motion.

DR. CRABTREE: Can he withdraw his motion?

MR. HARTIG: **I would make that substitute motion that Zack has.**

DR. DUVAL: There is a substitute motion from Ben.

MR. BOWEN: Second.

DR. DUVAL: It's seconded by Zack. The motion reads: **Direct staff to begin working on an amendment to establish a moratorium on the issuance of federal for-hire snapper grouper permits.** Do we need any discussion on the substitute motion?

MR. PHILLIPS: If this is going to be an amendment, I am taking it for granted that one of the options is going to be no action, and so, as they lay out how this goes, if we don't like it, then we just go back and vote no action. I just want to make sure that I'm clear.

DR. DUVAL: Status quo is always required under NEPA.

MR. BELL: Just, with all we have going on right now, some of it fairly challenging, from a staff perspective or even just our own energy, is this kind of like one too many bricks in the wagon?

DR. DUVAL: We will see how this motion goes, and those are things that we talk about at Executive Finance. I mean, it's been pretty clearly laid out what the capacity is. Any other discussion?

MR. HARTIG: Just to Mel's point. I mean, this isn't something that I would try and insert ahead of anything else we're doing. As time allows us, under the new way that we're trying to do things, we would do this, in my opinion.

MR. HAYMANS: Just one of the things that keeps being said as a justification for this is that it reduces bycatch and that it's a resource protection issue, but, if we don't reduce the number of licenses, how does that reduce the bycatch? The only way that I see is the argument that these limited-entry licenses would be allowed in the closed areas and other things that the recreational public isn't. To this point, we have kicked out 43, or at least suspended 43, and there's just an awful lot of assumptions that are made that it would reduce bycatch of the species because of limited entry, and, to me, that argument doesn't hold, but I will be voting against this amendment in whatever form it comes in.

DR. DUVAL: Okay. Any more discussion on the substitute? Anna, and that's it. Then we're going to vote.

MS. BECKWITH: I just want clarification on the record that just because -- Even if this were to pass, the moratorium itself is not the only thing that could be considered in this amendment. We could have other options, such as setting a cap on permits. A moratorium says -- It just seems very

boxed in, and so I want to make sure that, if we do consider an amendment, we would be able to consider many options.

DR. DUVAL: If this motion passes, and if there is an amendment that starts moving forward, it's going to have to have different alternatives, and so I think we've already established that. You can't have an amendment with just one alternative in it. You have to have justification for having just one alternative other than status quo. Okay. Are we prepared to vote? Okay. **Those in favor of the motion, please raise your hand, eight in favor; those opposed, four opposed; abstentions, one abstention. The motion carries.**

Now it becomes the main motion. Now you've got to vote again. **All those in favor the main motion, please raise your hand, eight in favor; those opposed, four opposed; abstentions, one abstention. The motion carries.** Okay.

We have public hearings scheduled in ten minutes. However, we still have three agenda items left. We were to receive a presentation on the red grouper assessment, and we were to also discuss a quick review of the golden tilefish actions, and then we were to also discuss -- Brian was going to give us an update on the wreckfish ITQ review.

What I want to check in on -- I know Dr. Williams was online, and he was waiting to give this presentation on the red grouper assessment. I know it's not that long, and I guess I am looking to the committee. There is an updated version that is seventeen slides. I think what I'm looking for is a little bit of direction here. If Erik is still on the line and he is able to give the presentation, and is there -- I think my recommendation would be let's let Erik just get through the presentation, and we can hold discussion until Full Council and deal with the remainder of the items that we have. Okay, Erik. We've got you live.

DR. WILLIAMS: Okay. I will be quick about it. I know you guys are very pressed for time. Just a quick background. This assessment is an update of the SEDAR 19 assessment for red grouper. It was originally going to be just an update, and we changed it to a standard so that we could include the SERFS video data, and we specifically added two terms of reference, one to consider the video index and then the other to incorporate the latest model configuration.

Here is a quick snapshot of the landings and discards, landings on your left and discards on the right, by fishery. It's basically showing the pattern that we see is generally one of increasing amounts of removals from the recreational. The ratio of recreational to commercial has sort of increased in recent years, and a lot of the discards are coming from our recreational, which is the pink bar. The commercial is in red.

Here is the video index that we evaluated for use in the index, or in the assessment. What is shown here is the red line is the standardized index, which we use a linear model to estimate. The nominal is just raw catch divided by effort, and it's shown in blue. You will see that they don't differ too much, which is often the case, and then the confidence intervals are shown.

That video index ended up being combined with the trap data, and so we ended up with a total SERFS combined index, shown in purple in this plot, and the other two indices that we had, fishery-dependent indices, that went into the assessment are also shown here. It's the headboat

index and the logbook, commercial logbook. Of course, what they all show is a general declining trend at the end.

This next slide was just to illustrate that we did make a shift to using the Dirichlet multinomial likelihood component for this assessment, and, when we compared that with the old multinomial method that we used in the past, there was very little change, if any. There was maybe a slight change to a little bit higher fishing mortality and lower spawning stock biomass, but, overall, it's pretty much a minimal change.

Here is the results for the spawning biomass estimates that come out of the assessment. The purple line is the MSST value, which would be our demarcation of whether it's overfished or not, and, as you can see, in the most recent years, and basically starting since 2009, the stock has gone into an overfished condition and continued down since then.

Here is the recruitment pattern. What you can see is, in the most recent years, we've had pretty much below average recruitment, and that seems to be the source of why the stock is declining, primarily. Of course, there is removals as well, but it looks like one of the culprits is clearly reduced recruitment in the last decade, almost.

Here is just a look at the spawner-recruit curve, and so to get an overall glimpse of the historical recruitment pattern in relation to spawning stock size. Here is the fishing mortality, which suggests that we are in an overfishing state in the last year, the terminal year, although the fishing rate has been coming down. As you saw from those landings, they have been fairly kind of stable, somewhat, in the last few years, and so this is just showing the fishing mortality rate. On the right is the fishing mortality broken down by sector, and, once again, general recreational seems to be the lion's share of the fishing mortality.

After we do the uncertainty analysis, or what we term the Monte Carlo bootstrap, the MCB procedure, this is the results of all of those runs. I believe there's about 4,000 runs that go into this, and you can see that bulk of the runs are indicating that the stock is both overfished and overfishing, as indicated by being in that lower right quadrant, and you can see the percentage of points that are within each of the quadrants.

As a result, the stock is overfished, and it is at about a little less than 40 percent of MSST. 97.7 percent of the points were below the MSST value, and it is overfishing, at about a one-and-a-half rate, one-and-a-half times the FMSY rate, and 89 percent of those runs from the MCB were over the overfishing level. Here is a table of the benchmark outputs and reference point outputs. There's not much to note here, other than the values are what they are.

We did a whole series of projection analyses. I won't go over each of these. They're all in the report, but I just wanted to make a quick list of those that are in the report. There is eight scenarios using different F reference values and also different values for future recruitment, looking at whether we would expect recruitment to return to the mean value or stay at the low value.

I have one scenario that I have put in this slide show here for you to look at, just so we can explain what's in each of the panels. This is the F equals zero scenario, and what you see is, in the upper right, it's the spawning stock biomass, with the blue and green-dashed lines demarcating the

rebuilding level that the stock should get to. Then right below it is the recruitment values, and, below that, the bottom left, is the F values that go into the projection analysis.

Then, on the right, the top right, is the landings, followed by, just below that, the discards, and then the last one, the bottom right, is the probability of rebuilding by each year, and I chose the F equals zero scenario just to illustrate that the stock, under F equals zero, will not achieve rebuilding until I believe it's 2023, and there was some confusion, but I think Rick DeVictor confirmed with me that, although the stock, from the last assessment, was not overfished and not overfishing, there was a rebuilding plan in place that was due to end in 2020. What this assessment is suggesting is we're not going to make that 2020 rebuilding deadline, and so I'm not sure what the next steps are at that point.

The basic summary and conclusions for this assessment is that red grouper are currently overfished and experiencing overfishing. The decrease in abundance over the past decade appears to be due to low recruitment, combined with some high landings that occurred in 2007 to 2009, which was probably taking advantage of the higher recruitment that occurred before that, but that's where we are now, according to the assessment. I think that's my last slide. Yes, and so I will take any questions. I know we're right at 4:30, and so you guys have probably got to cut out, but I will be on the call tomorrow if you want me to chime back in and ask any questions.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Erik. I really appreciate that review of the assessment. I don't think the results are necessarily a surprise to most folks, and so I am not imagining that there is many questions, and I know that Marcel will be giving the SSC's recommendations on catch levels, and we really appreciate you hanging in for this. I know it's been a late day, and so thank you very much, Erik.

DR. WILLIAMS: Very interesting conversations up until this point.

DR. DUVAL: I am glad we could entertain you. Thanks. Okay. We did have -- I have asked Brian to come up here and just run through what he has to go through on the wreckfish ITQ program review, because I believe all the wreckfish fishery participants are here, and so, while folks are here, we just wanted to do that. Brian is just going to provide an overview, and we'll have discussion later, but I just want to make sure that everybody in the room understands exactly what this agenda item means.

DR. CHEUVRONT: Thanks, Madam Chair, and I appreciate the privilege to come up here and do this, considering we've got the wreckfish fishermen here, but we need to make sure -- There is nobody who is on the council now who was here when this ITQ was started back in the 1990s, and so what -- There was some procedural guidance that came out for conducting reviews of catch share programs.

It basically said that any catch share program that hasn't been reviewed previously had to have a review that starts in 2017, and so that's why we're doing this specifically now and it needs to be done, and then, just so that you know, these reviews are going to have to, under this guidance, these reviews are going to have to continue every seven years of any ITQ programs that the council has, and so we'll be back looking at that again.

Now, one thing that you need to understand about an ITQ review is this is different than like an FMP amendment. It's not going to contain any actions or alternatives, but it could include some recommendations for changes to the program, and there is some leeway about how we go about doing this. We have actually already had some NMFS staff that has met with council staff one time to talk about some parameters that we thought that the council might like to discuss in the beginning phases of this.

We will go over those sorts of things tomorrow. They're like a few data issues and why we want to start it right now and not wait until September or December to start, but one of the things that the council needs to know, or that the staff needs to know from the council, is what kinds of issues do you want the staff to look at?

You could look at a wide range of things. Some things, we're just going to have to look at anyway, but things like eligibility. How do we get new people into the program? Does the council want to look at ways to increase participation? Transferability? Do you want to look at things like reallocation and duration of ITQ privileges? You can set a time limit on how long the ITQ is set to run.

We want to do that, but we also want to get the wreckfish fishermen to come to the meetings now, in the early stages of this, to help educate folks on what this program is about, what it's doing, how they see it, how they would like to have it changed. Just so you all know, there is very few participants. I think there are six permits in the fishery, and so there is very few participants in the fishery.

Timing, the proposed timing is that we'll want to get -- Staff will want to get at least direction from the council to go ahead and begin this ITQ review at this meeting, so we can get started, and we'll discuss the reasoning behind why now later, but it has to do with staff availability and things like that.

It's really just a bureaucratic reason more than anything else, but what we're looking at doing is having at least a document outline, or a draft document, to the Snapper Grouper AP and to the SSC at their fall meetings, and then we would be bringing to the council, at December, a draft version of the document, which would then -- We would then have basically close to a final document in March of 2018.

The AP and the SSC will bless it for the last time in the spring of 2018, and then final guidance will be given by the council in June of 2018, and then final action would be taken in September of 2018. That is sort of the timeline that we have for this now, and so I just wanted to help orient some of the council members before public comment started, because you're going to get some comment from wreckfish ITQ participants.

I just wanted to make sure that everybody was aware of that, and Michelle has said that we will have some more time to discuss this tomorrow. Now is not the time to discuss the program and what you all want, but I would like for you to be thinking about that and listen to what these guys here have to say to you, because they're going to help educate you on what this program is all about and give you some ideas of what they think the program should look like for the future. Thanks.

DR. DUVAL: Thanks, Brian. Again, this is a statutorily-mandated review, and so we have to -- It's required under the Magnuson Act, and so I just want to make sure that folks are clear about that. Thank you very much, Brian, for that outline, and so give us just a couple of minutes to switch things over, and then we will begin the public comment session. Thanks.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 14, 2017.)

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By:
Amanda Thomas
July 17, 2017

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