

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE

**Villas by the Sea
Jekyll Island, Georgia**

March 5-6, 2025

Snapper Gouper Committee

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Meg Withers

Attendees and Invited Participants

Monica Smit-Brunello
Dr. John Walter
Sonny Gwin
Shepherd Grimes
Bob Zales II

Rick DeVictor
Kathy Knowlton
Kristin Foss
Nikhil Mehta

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, Georgia, on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going in the Snapper Grouper Committee. All right. The first order of business is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any changes, or modifications, to the agenda, or any other business, that people know about at this time? All right. Seeing no hands, is there any objection to approval of the agenda? All right. I don't see any hands. We'll consider that approved.

The next order of business is approval of the minutes. Any substantial changes or modification to the minutes? If you have minor issues, misspellings, et cetera, please get with staff. I don't see any hands. Any objection to approval of the minutes? All right. Seeing none, the minutes are approved. Next up is Status of Amendments Under Review. Rick, are you going to give us that update?

MR. DEVICTOR: I will. Thank you. Good morning, everyone. I have four amendments here to go over with you, some that have been submitted to us and some we're waiting on. Starting off with Regulatory Amendment 36, and, of course, that was gag and black grouper vessel limits and stowage of on-demand gear, and so that is going through final review with council leadership, and so we'll start developing the proposed rule on that when we get that.

Next up is Amendment 48. Of course, you all worked on this, and it modernizes the wreckfish ITQ program, and there's quite a bit in that amendment, the offloading sites, wreckfish permit requirements, et cetera. That was submitted to us for rulemaking in December, and so we're working on the proposed rule for that, and the notice of availability.

Then there is Amendment 55, and this has to do with scamp and yellowmouth. The big thing there, of course, is we're establishing a rebuilding plan, and so there is a statutory deadline for that, that we have to get that in place, and so that is currently working on the NOA and proposed rule package for that.

Then the last one is the comprehensive e-logbook amendment. I know that that's been with us for a while now, and we're working on that. I just got a proposed rule to review, and so that's going under internal review, and that's it. Those are the four amendments, three of which we have for rulemaking, and one we're waiting on. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Any questions for Rick? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Rick, or Andy, or whoever, can you all speak to how you anticipate sort of the change, and where we're at now, as far as regulations and what's expected, how it will affect those four amendments specifically?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so I was going to speak to that, and so I appreciate the question, Kerry. Right now we are still, as I mentioned earlier this week, waiting on additional guidance, how the deregulatory versus regulatory actions will be tracked, the economic impacts, or effects of those actions, since we have to have a net negative economic effect for our regulatory actions.

What I can say is we have prioritized anything that's deregulatory, as well as Amendment 55, since that has a statutory mandate. We're, obviously, under a regulatory freeze right now, and so a lot of uncertainty with regard to when that's lifted, what we'll be able to do, how we'll be able to do it.

The other thing to mention is like in-season actions, and so we have fishery openings, or closures, annual specifications that are done in other regions for changing catch limits on an annual basis, and those are exempt from this requirement, and so we will still be able to move those forward, but we've had some limitations placed on kind of how quickly those in-season actions have been moving.

MS. MCCAWLEY: One more question, Andy. I can't remember -- I think it was maybe an executive order on the regulatory freeze, and did it have an expiration date on it? Was it sixty days, or ninety days?

MR. STRELCHECK: I believe it's ninety days.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That would expire -- Do you have an estimated timeframe on when that would expire?

MR. STRELCHECK: Approximately April 20th.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Perfect. Thank you. All right. Any other questions on status of amendments under review? All right. I don't see any hands. Next up on our agenda is Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision, and I'm going to turn it over to Mike and Myra. Sorry. Just kidding. To John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and so I just wanted to make a few brief comments here, to kind of set the stage for what we're trying to do and what our thinking is on this. We're starting out with discussing the fishery management unit being seen as potentially the first step in what maybe you could call Snapper Grouper FMP rationalization. Myra is going to go through a presentation here that'll sort of show how the actions on the table now can fit in, and Mike will get into the details of how we would like to start, you know, eating this elephant that is this giant FMU.

You know, in general, it's pretty clear we need to change in approach on this FMP. I think everybody is frustrated. Everybody is frustrated with the situation that we have, and so, you know, maybe this is a way to get a fresh approach toward thinking about it.

You know, we've got actions that cover permits, and data, and the commercial and recreational stakeholders, and we've struggle to prioritize mightily with the key stocks in SEDAR, you know, and I think one of the big challenges is that it's just the magnitude of the issues. It's the number of stocks. It's hard to pick a priority and take some subset of stocks and say, yes, those are the ones we want to assess regularly without knowing, well, what happens to all the rest and knowing that, you know, all the rest are supposed to be handled the same.

You know, Magnuson makes no exceptions for, well, you only see that in the catch records every other year, and, you know, it's less than a thousand pounds landed, and it's not a big deal. There's no allowances for anything like that, and Bonnie Ponwith said, at this table many years ago,

Magnuson, and the reauthorization, was the great equalizer, that all stocks were treated the same, and I think we've really struggled with that, because of, you know, the fact is they're not all treated the same.

They're not all equal. We don't have the same science for all stocks. We don't have the same quality of information for all stocks, and we don't have the same research for all stocks, and I ran across something that was describing why humans struggle prioritizing really long task lists and stuff. It's because it's overwhelming, but, quite often, if you -- Instead of prioritize, if you reduce, then it gets a lot easier. If your task list is twenty, and you know you're going to get through it through the day, but, if someone takes half of them, and you've only got ten, well, suddenly, it seems a lot better, and we're sort of hoping that, you know, something like that can play out in this management unit.

You know, we've argued about -- When we talked about say reporting, well, what stocks get reported, and then what happens to the ones that aren't reported, and, you know, if we had an FMU that really represented a fishery, then maybe we could say, well, the stocks that are in the FMU are the stocks that, you know, would be subject to say reporting in like the recreational fishery or something, and these would be the stocks that need to have an assessment of some sort.

I think one of the other things is we're looking at fifty years of Magnuson next year. The snapper grouper plan is forty years old. We have stocks in there that we don't know natural mortality. We don't know basic life history. They don't show up in the landings very often, you know, and, if we haven't gotten that kind of -- They're not in surveys, and, if we haven't gotten that kind of information for these species in forty years, knowing the history of resource availability to the agency, I don't think it's very likely that we're going to have better information on those stocks in the next five years, and certainly not, you know?

I think it's a good chance for the council to really take stock of that FMU and think about, you know, the gist of what should be in there is what describes the fishery, and the very fact that you're just caught shouldn't mean that you're necessarily, you know, something that describes the fishery, and defines the fishery, and so we're sort of hoping, in working through this, just kind of keep that in the back of your mind, is, you know, that's where we're trying to go, and try to reduce some of the overwhelming nature of this management unit that clouds so many of our discussions and seems to make them a lot harder than they need to be.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I appreciate that. Thanks, John. I can tell you, if someone gave me a pop quiz right now on what are the fifty-five species, and could I list them out, I couldn't do it, and so I don't think I could do it, and so, yes. All right. Thank you for those comments, John. Over to Myra and Mike.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Jessica. Good morning, everyone, and so I'm going to kind of keep going with the conversation, and how John started us off this morning, and so we just put a few slides together to kind of prime the discussions that you'll be having this morning, and tomorrow, and some that you've already had this week, but to kind of put it all in perspective as you get further into the discussion.

So, as John said, the council is now considering changing the composition in the snapper grouper management unit. We talked about this in December, and the outcome of that process is going to

affect amendments that are currently under development and ones that we've already kind of added to the workplan for upcoming years.

The FMU composition, here, we would be evaluating which species continue to need federal conservation and management, right, and so this is where those ten criteria need to be thought through, and which species could be removed, and which ones would end up being ecosystem component species, and so Mike will walk you through that in a little bit more detail.

Then the topic of key stocks came up in December. It's going to come back up during SEDAR Committee this week, and, there, we are looking at which species need to be prioritized for stock assessments. Then we have the private recreational permit and education amendment, Snapper Grouper Amendment 46. We'll be talking about that one tomorrow, and, in there, in order to figure out which species would be covered under that permit, again, you are referring back to the species that are included in the FMU.

For-hire reporting, this is another amendment that would be affected. Right now, all species are required to be reported, regardless of where they're caught, and this, of course, includes the three FMPs, right, and so this is bigger than snapper grouper, and so there's a lot of super overlapping things.

The way we're seeing, potentially, in the short term, is you could focus on the FMU composition for snapper grouper. That's going to influence, to some extent, the stocks that are prioritized for stock assessments, and then these are the two amendments that you're discussing this week, directly tied to that. Once the reduced FMU is in place, and so this is more long-term, this is where you need to, you know, figure out how to optimize efficiency for the amendments that are upcoming, and the one we've talked about already, and it's currently kind of on hold, pending availability of permit information, is the for-hire limited access.

Again, that would cover more than just the Snapper Grouper FMP, but it's another one that would be affected, and then the long-term -- Remember the long-term amendment that would implement whatever actions come out of the snapper grouper management strategy evaluation is also in the horizon, and so there's a lot of overlapping things. I just wanted to kind of put those visuals in your head, to hopefully help a little bit, to keep it in back of your heads as you are discussing things in more detail, and so, if there's no questions, I think, Mike, we're going to continue with more detail on the FMU composition.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That was a helpful presentation. I guess one thing that I would add is what the Commercial Subcommittee is working on, and wouldn't that be affected, because I didn't see a little bubble, you know, for that, but wouldn't that be affected by this list of species as well?

MS. BROUWER: Yes. Absolutely it would.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any questions? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just to have this in the back of my mind as we go through this, and, if we're thinking about this -- Anything, in theory, that we took out of the FMU, and I know we're not there yet, but that would mean, if we happen to take something out that had a regulation, it would no

longer have a regulation? Okay, and just -- I want that in the back of my mind as we go through this. Okay. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Kerry. Any more questions? Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Well, I guess, along the lines of what Kerry was thinking, one of the questions, in my mind, is for species that are in complexes, and would each individual species count as its own deregulatory action, or would it need to be for the entire complex, and all the complex would count as one? That may not have an answer right now, but hopefully clarity can come in the future.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so I'm going to be jumping into Attachment 1 in your Snapper Grouper briefing book, and then I'll transition back to the PowerPoint slides, when we get a little bit into this, but I do want to give kind of the initial background information before we start working through the large group of species in the management unit.

A lot of this background information was kind of covered in Myra's slides. It's there for reference, but I'm not going to go into it at this point. I do want to point out in the document, the evaluation criteria that are required by Magnuson for you all to go through in evaluating whether a stock is in need of conservation and management, and so this is the list of ten criteria, and, for those of you that were serving on the council at this time, or paying attention to these issues at that time, you'll recall that, back in 2020, staff developed a tool to go through each of these criteria for a suite of species that's listed there underneath that Previous Work section.

The Shiny tool itself is linked in the document, and so kind of the plan, moving forward, is, as you all come out of this meeting, you would give staff a list of species that should be evaluated, and we would then update that Shiny tool, and go through that at a future meeting with you all, so that you can go through the process of evaluating the stocks that you're considering for any change in their inclusion in the management unit.

That's kind of the background information for this meeting. The objective that we have coming into this meeting is to have some preliminary initial review of the management unit and to get some feedback from the committee on which species require further evaluation.

At this point, I'm going to transition back into PowerPoint slides. I'm going to be referring to the tables that are in the rest of the document, but kind of in more bite-sized pieces, so that you all can go through a process of evaluating those, and, actually, it may be helpful to go in reader mode, in case I need to make changes visually.

Okay, and so we're starting off with fifty-five species, and it should be "species", rather than "stocks", but fifty-five species that are included in the snapper grouper FMU, and, really, the way that we're trying to approach this, in this meeting, is to find out what does not even need to be considered for evaluation, and I'll go through a few iterations of some groups of species that either are not allowed to be changed in their inclusion in the FMU, by Magnuson, and then a couple others where we have some indicators that might say that these species should likely stay in the FMU, without further deeper dives into the evaluation process.

The first group of species that cannot be removed from the FMU at this time would be the species that have overfished or overfishing statuses, and those are shown here on the screen. I do note that black sea bass, although it is not technically overfished within the black sea bass amendment, and the assessment that has recently occurred, and it was noted that the stock is in a very poor status right now, at very low abundance levels, and low biomass levels. With a change to the reference point, it is expected that there may be a change to the status coming up in the future, and so this group of species would kind of be off the table to begin with, wouldn't be evaluated further for consideration for removal from the FMU.

The next group of stocks, and, after kind of introducing this, I'll pause and see if there's any discussion related to these stocks. These are the assessed stocks, and, typically, your assessed stocks are those that you have historically viewed as having a bit higher priority. They would have significant impacts on the fishery, and there would have been kind of a motivation to get those stocks assessed, rather than others.

These are the assessed stocks that are not in an overfished or overfishing status. I do note that hogfish, in Georgia through North Carolina, that stock is not considered overfished or overfishing, but hogfish was already listed previously, and so just to keep the running number of species, and I didn't include it in the table right there.

This group of species, you see it on the screen, and I guess I can pause here, to see if there is any reason that this group, black grouper, golden tilefish, greater amberjack, vermilion snapper, wreckfish, or yellowtail snapper, and is there any reason that any of these need to be further evaluated, or should they just stay in the FMU?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm looking around for hands. I had a question. I don't know if you're going to get to this in the presentation, and so we're thinking -- When we talk about removing, are we really thinking of like three different scenarios here? One is moving it to ecosystem component, and one is just removing it entirely, and it has no regulations, and then another is removing it, and then it becomes managed by a state, and the state could extend their regulations into federal waters, and are those the three scenarios of what we mean for what happens to these species as they're removed from the fishery management unit? Is that right?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, that's correct. It could be any of those three scenarios, depending on how the evaluation process goes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. From our perspective, it seems like the first question is should it remain, is it in need of conservation and management, right, and, if you go through those factors and determine that something is in need of conservation and management, then you don't have to answer the other questions, right, and it needs to be in the FMU and stay there. Then, if it's not in need of conservation and management, then the council can decide, right, if you want to try to make it -- Or include it as an ecosystem component species, but otherwise it wouldn't be in the FMU. Then whatever states decide to do later would be up to states and would happen in that context.

One thing I wanted to suggest is I was talking to one of my colleagues on the west coast, because the Pacific Council is going through a very, very similar exercise with this, and just how do you want to approach it, and are you looking at every species that's currently in the management unit, and you're going to go through and evaluate that species in the context of the ten factors and decide that it stays, or are we going to do what it seems like Mike is sort of suggesting here, that you kind of have the first-level filter.

If it's overfished or overfishing, it must stay. It's not going to be evaluated under the factors, and so we'll keep it there. Then some other filters, like you're talking about here, that species -- We want to retain those, and we're not evaluate all of those for the factors, because we think it's pretty clear that we want to keep those, and then, the species that are remaining, you would analyze in the context of those ten factors and decide what stays and what goes, based on that analysis. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Shep, and so that just brought up another question for me. So, in need of conservation and management, isn't it in need of federal conservation and management, because what if there's a species that's in there that is, I don't know, 90 percent harvested in state waters, versus federal waters, and we decide that it doesn't need federal management, because it's primarily, you know, a state-landed species, and so don't we mean federal management?

MR. GRIMES: Well, the agency lost a case in Alaska relative to that, in Cook Inlet salmon, and where they were in the argument was just that, that it's not in need of federal conservation and management. The statute does not say that. The statute says in need of conservation and management, and so, you know, you never know how that's going to turn out, but I would say that's a tricky one for us to look at, and the factors kind of address this. I don't have them pulled up in front of me, but I thought -- I mean, one of those factors is to the extent the fishery is adequately managed. I think it's reflected in there as already adequately managed by states, and so that plays into it, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. There's hands going up. Trish, Andy, Robert.

MS. MURPHEY: I just kind of want to -- You know, in talking about state management, I think we will have to be cognizant of the state's ability to manage any of these species that come off the list.

I know, for North Carolina anyway, anything that comes off the list, we no longer have any rules on it, because we have an interjurisdictional plan that, as long as it's on the list, we can proclaimate for it, but, if it comes off the list, we will have to do rulemaking. Our rulemaking takes up to two years, and so, I mean, I think that's something that we probably need to think about, and I know each individual state has different processes, but that's something that, you know, needs to be considered in all this discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Trish. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I agree with all the points around the table, and so Shep already mentioned it, and so, in terms of the ten factors, there is one that focuses specifically on to the extent which the fishery is already adequately managed by the states, right, and you can, under Magnuson, extend authority, when a fishery is not managed under a fishery management plan

federally, into state or federal waters for permanent anglers off of that particular state, right, and so I know Florida has done that for permit, and pompano, and other species, and that's certainly, I think something that could be considered.

I think, if we go down that path where we're thinking that we just take it out entirely, and there's already what we would deem adequate state management that could be extended into federal waters, we would probably want to have some close coordination with all the state directors on that and what steps the states may be willing to take, and, like Trish was pointing out, what the process would be to extend that state authority.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Andy, and so Florida has done this for numerous species, and, when the council has removed other species from the fishery management unit, there was more of a handoff as FWC was taking the regulations that were in state waters and extending them into federal waters. John, and then I'll go back to the list, and Robert is after you.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you, Jessica, and, just before we get too wrapped up around this axle of what happens to things, and what options there are, the point of this morning was to decide what are the things that you do not want to consider removing, because we have to go through the ten criteria, as Shep described. There's process, and there's rules, and there's laws, and there's the different alternatives of what happens to a stock, as Mike described.

That's a lot of work. Going through ten criteria for fifty-five species is 550 decisions to make, okay, and so we need to manage this workload. We're trying to reduce the workload of that evaluation a bit, and so the question is what do you not want to at all consider dropping, and that's why the presentation is put together like it is, step-by-step through things that we sort of think that -- You're not going to want to drop stocks that are overfished and overfishing, you know, and so let's not worry about what's going to happen when we apply the criteria and how a particular criteria may affect a species.

That is a long, exhausting conversation that we are going to have in the future, after we're able to put information before you addressing those ten criteria, and so we're just hoping, today, that we can reduce that initial workload a little bit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, John. Thanks for that clarification. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I was going to ask a question related to state rulemaking being able to be extended into federal waters, and you answered that. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Other questions? All right. Back to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So just double-checking before I move off -- I haven't heard any reason that you all would want further evaluation of any of this group.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Looks like people are shaking their heads no.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. The next slide, these are stocks that have species-specific ACLs, and, if you look in Table 1, you can kind of see -- We've listed out the ACLs for various species. This gives an idea -- I understand it's not the landings, but it gives an idea of what the expected, you

know, maximum landings for a stock would be, and it gives some perspective on how we kind of see the distribution of this stock, one species relative to another, and so given -- Several of these species that are included here are at zero ACLs, due to conservation concerns.

Given that, is there any reason that the committee has for further evaluation of any of the species included in this group, which would be spadefish, bar jack, goliath grouper, Nassau grouper, gray triggerfish, speckled hind, or warsaw grouper?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would like to consider spadefish. Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and that was high on my list to remove, but I'm curious -- I wasn't around, and how do we have an ACL for spadefish? Like when did that come about, and based on what?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So that would have been in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment, and, as we get into the complex ACLs, they would probably be along similar lines, where they were landings-based ACLs that we don't necessarily have an assessment for those stocks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I would say the same thing about bar jack. Just spadefish and bar jack, and I was hoping that we could dive into those two a little bit more. I'm looking around the table. Anything else here? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I would tend to agree with the comments on Atlantic spadefish and bar jack, but I'm going to agree with them on what I know about the fisheries in particular, and how they are prosecuted, right, and these are not fisheries that -- Well, spadefish are obviously found in federal waters, in state and federal waters, and fished in state and federal waters, in North Carolina in particular.

They're not a fish that is going to be often -- What's the word I'm looking for? Caught while fishing for other species in the complex, right, and so I think that kind of puts them on a unique pedestal. My concern, with any of these things that we discuss, just because I haven't said so, further goes back to Trish's comment, just because of my familiarity with the North Carolina rulemaking process and how difficult it would be for our state to put regulations in place, but that's going to be notwithstanding for anything I say here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything -- Any more discussion on this list of species, and so it seems like maybe two from this list to look at further. Okay. Heads are nodding yes. All right. Back to you, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you, and then now we're going to get into some of the complexes. Now, as I presented the complexes that are included in here, you'll notice that there are italicized numbers next to these complexes for commercial and recreational ACLs.

Each of these species, they are managed as part of a complex. There is a complex ACL, and the complex ACL is the only regulation that is monitored. It is the only one that is evaluated, and so you may have a different distribution of your landings within that complex ACL. The reason why I included those italicized numbers is because, in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment, when these ACLs were set, there were landings for each of these species that were kind of combined to

form a complex ACL, and so this gives an idea, again, of the different distributions, or the expected distributions, of the catch within each of these complexes.

We wouldn't -- For example, with the deepwater complex, we wouldn't necessarily expect all of these species, say silk snapper and misty grouper, to have equal distributions of catch. They didn't at the time that the ACL was set, and so these are the distributions that were observed at that time, back -- I think it would have been around 2010 when that amendment was evaluated, and so bear that in mind, that we're kind of getting an idea of, within each of these complexes, there may be some species that are more important to the fishery, or, you know, kind of more obvious that they don't need to be evaluated, and so we wouldn't need to include them in this process, necessarily, and so I'll pause here.

I did take out yellowmouth grouper, as that has already been grouped up with scamp, and has already been addressed earlier in the presentation, but, technically, right now, it still is in the other shallow-water grouper complex, and so we can pause right now and see -- Is the perspective that all of the species that are included in the deepwater and the other shallow-water grouper complexes would be evaluated, or are there some within there that should be pulled out and they do not need to be evaluated, and they can, obviously, stay within the management unit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm looking around. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: My thoughts are all over the place. I just wanted to ask the other guys fishing what their thoughts are. I know, for this year, for us, silk snapper was moving north, and we caught a lot more silk snapper than we've ever caught before. I'm seeing a lot more of it, and so that would make me very nervous. I suspect that has something to do with a shift. I don't know if you guys are seeing that.

We're moving -- I think what I'm struggling with is do I ever think we're going to have stock assessment or be able to individually manage misty grouper? No. Do I think any grouper should have like no permit required and unfettered access? No, and I don't know how to square it right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me ask you another question, in thinking about that, and so what about sand tilefish? I mean, I'm just trying to pick out some, to figure out if it's something that we even want to analyze, and we would have those discussions. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So I appreciate you bringing up sand tilefish. That's what I was going to bring up. Now, I'm going to go back to Kerry's statement here on why I really need to digest some of this. My issue with removing any of these fish from this complex is I don't want people -- I shouldn't say I don't want people, but I am concerned about people fishing for some of these species if they did not have any sort of regulations and having bycatch of the other species they're going to catch in the process.

For example, sand tilefish, my irritation with them, and, first of all, they're a great fish, is that they're in the shallow-water grouper complex limit, and I find people discarding them, because there tend to be small, and you catch them in deep water, and then maybe you catch a big scamp, and you say -- Well, I know a lot of people will just be like, well, man, I want to keep the scamp, and I don't want to keep the sand tilefish, and so the problem necessarily isn't that we have them

under some sort of management. It's the fact that they were in the complex that they're in, right, and so that's my concern. Is that -- Am I making sense? Like my concern is, if we remove one, I don't want that unfettered access in increasing bycatch of the other species, potentially.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just trying to kind of bring it back to the focus of where we're trying to go, today is not a decision of whether it will or will not be in the management unit. That is a future decision, that will come at a later meeting. The today discussion is do we need to evaluate it, okay, in the context of is it obviously something that needs to be in the management unit and we don't need to evaluate it.

For those that are kind of on the border, waffling, those might be ones that you would consider that, okay, let's go through the evaluation criteria, and then we will make a decision based on that evaluation, but we're trying to figure out, today, are there any of the stocks that are shown here that there is no question, and they don't need to be evaluated at all, and we know that this thing needs to stay in the management unit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and I'm going to throw out two. So we already talked about sand tilefish. I'm going to throw out two for discussion, sand tilefish and misty grouper, and so, Kerry, I think you had your hand up.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, I was just going to take a stab at what I thought, and so I'm going to say what I think should not be considered. Is that easiest way for you? Okay. Chip is shaking his head.

Silk snapper, yellowedge, and I'm sorry, and I was having a side conversation when Tom was talking about sand tilefish, and so I'm going to leave that off. Nothing on the bottom list should be considered, and my rationale for that is their cooccurrence, Tom's point to their co-occurrence with other species, and I would worry about the targeting of those and the incidental capture of species that we know are staying in the list.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and let me try to say what Kerry said another way, and so she's saying don't consider anything in the other shallow-water grouper complex for removal, and she's saying there might be a couple in the deepwater complex for removal, and so I'll throw back out there sand tilefish and misty, and so what do people think about taking those through the evaluation? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and I think we could definitely take them through the evaluation. I'm just -- I'm still trying to get my head wrapped around all this, and so, if we take them -- Are we talking about taking them out of the management unit, or just out of our list of people, things, we're going to do assessments for?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So it's neither one of them, and so we're -- Today, and let me just keep reiterating, and maybe this wasn't the best discussion for 8:30 in the morning on a Wednesday, but so what we're talking about is we're trying to figure out which ones we even want to consider to run through the ten criteria of whether it would qualify for removal, whether we want to consider it for removal, and so we're going through this kind of step-by-step in this presentation.

We've already said, no, don't take -- You can't take any of the ones overfished and undergoing overfishing. We already said no to the ones that we have stock assessments on, and so we're continuing stepwise through this, so that we can try to pick some that we want to take through the ten-evaluation criteria, if that helps. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes. Thank you, and it seemed like I remember doing this exercise many, many moons ago, and, if I remember, almost -- The reason we have the list is because everything would hit one of those criteria, and it was very, very difficult to take stuff off of the list, which is why we've got the list as long as we have.

Maybe we'll have better luck this time, because we're under some different circumstances, but, yes, and I -- To Tom's point about sand tile, yes, we catch one or two commercially, and there's no way in the world we would ever want to try to target that fish, and maybe the recreational people might, but, commercially, in my world, it just wouldn't happen.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so we've heard some discussion about sand tilefish. What do people think about misty? Judy, and then back to Tom.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm kind of like what Charlie said about the sand tile. Over the time when I used to fish in 150 foot of water, we didn't really catch that many, and somebody targeting that fish would probably be very rare, and so I'm going to say yes to sand tilefish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Judy. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So, just for the conversation, I would agree with evaluating, for the exercise, sand tilefish. Misty grouper, based off the other comments, and potentially blackfin snapper, and I would see if anybody else agrees with that, but I will say, when it comes to sand tilefish, and maybe it's just up where I'm at, but we do catch a lot of them in that 200 to 300 foot of water, while fishing for other species in the complex.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I think we said sand tilefish, and misty, and what was the other one? Was it blackfin snapper? Okay. Any others from this list? All right, and I don't see any other hands.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and the one that I didn't hear -- So, kind of with Kerry's initial comment of don't evaluate silk snapper, yellowedge, or the other shallow-water grouper complex, queen snapper -- Should that be included in the evaluation, or is that off the table?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm okay to take that through the evaluation. Okay, and I see other people saying okay to evaluate queen snapper. People are nodding yes. Okay.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you, and we will go next to the next group of complexes, and so we've got the other jacks complex, the other snappers complex, and the other porgies complex, and, again, we're looking for any of these that do not need to be taken through the evaluation, those that need to stay in the management unit, and don't even need to be considered.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would say the other porgies, the whole complex, all the ones in there, and then maybe something in the other jacks complex, and so I'll throw that out there for discussion. What do people think about that? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I probably would not be supportive of the other jacks. All three of those jacks have been commercially important to us, increasingly more so recently, and so -- Wait, and did you say you want to not evaluate them, or you want to evaluate them? Okay, and then I was right. I personally wouldn't, because are -- They've become a much bigger part of the portfolio, at least in our commercial fishery, and that would make me nervous, not having them in the complex, but that's just my experience.

MS. MCCAWLEY: What about the porgies? Are you okay with taking the porgies through the evaluation? Okay. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: Yes, and I agree, too. The porgies, all those you listed, take those to evaluation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I'm with Kerry on the jacks complex. They're cooccurring species, and they are increasingly important to my commercial fishing community, in my area, as well as the recreational community have been increasing for years. I do agree with evaluating the porgies complex, and I would highlight scup.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything else on this list? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I think I might be inclined to put cubera snapper on the list. They're rare, and they would be difficult to harvest, in my world.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Not in Florida, but I'm willing to take it through the evaluation, but it is an ever-growing fishery in south Florida, but I'm willing to take it through the ten criteria. Well, I'm willing to take it to the criteria, if you want, to see how it comes out. Okay, and I see no on that. All right. Anything else on these lists, and so it sounds like we're going to do the other porgies complex, everything in there, and none of the other snappers, and none of the jacks. I'm just making sure that's where we are. Okay. I see heads nodding yes. Robert, do you want to talk about cubera for a second, and then I'll go to Amy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I would go through the evaluation, because I think the state could probably manage that snapper species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so yes to put cubera through the evaluation. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Well, Robert, I will struggle with cubera a little bit, but we can put it through the process, but I was kind of thinking about banded rudderfish, although it is a very important fishery for -- At least for South Carolina, and I think, with the comingling of those species, it could be one that we could at least evaluate. I don't want to touch almaco and lesser, but I do think we could evaluate rudder.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and I'm good with that. Kerry is good with that. Other folks -- I see heads nodding yes around the table, and it sounds like we've added cubera and banded rudderfish. Okay.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and this is the last one. We've got the grunts complex, and then we have a group of ecosystem component species already. Those don't necessarily need to be evaluated, if you're fine with those just staying as ecosystem components, but, yes, we have the grunts complex that's shown there on the screen.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, please, to all of the grunts. This has just been -- During this Florida EFP, I cannot tell you how many conversations that we have, that turn into arguments, about whether or not the grunts are in the snapper grouper complex or not. This is like one of the most common arguments. We take so many calls on this, and so, yes, I would love to take all of these grunts through the list. Any other thought? Okay. Heads are nodding yes. Thanks.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and so I think, at that point, that is what we needed. Just kind of giving a brief rundown of what you all have asked to go through the process, you have spadefish, bar jacks, sand tile, misty grouper, blackfin snapper, queen snapper, the other porgies complex, the grunts complex, banded rudderfish and cubera snapper, and so that significantly reduces from the fifty-five that we were at, and so I thank you for that, and we will work on getting that tool updated. We'll see how quickly we can get all of those updated into the tool, because that's a bit of a data load. We may have to split it into two different sessions, but we'll get that information put together as quickly as we can.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just a question for you on that. So, when it goes into the tool, does it go through each of the ten criteria, and that's inside the tool for each one of the species? Is that how it works?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so I can actually pull it up. We have a little bit of time, and so you can visually see it again, but, basically, you would go through -- We'll update this list of species. You would select the species, and then, as you go through each of these different criteria, there are yes or no questions, and, down here, you get a tally of your yes and your no, and, if you can say that the stock is not in need of conservation and management for all those ten criteria, then that's something that could be considered for some other alternate status away from the FMU.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Mike. Any more questions, because I think we're done with the exercise for today, and so any other questions or comments on this? All right. Next up is the golden tilefish assessment response.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Attachment 2 for the Snapper Grouper Committee briefing book folder is the golden tilefish stock assessment response decision document. You'll recall that SEDAR 89 was presented to you all for golden tilefish. That assessment indicated that the stock is not overfished and is not experiencing overfishing. You received catch level recommendations from the SSC in December, and you have OFL and ABC recommendations that are listed there in the document.

As you'll recall, this is the first species that were expected to get all the way through the new ABC control rule process, and so these recommendations were based on the updated ABC control rule,

and what we're looking for, in this meeting, is for you all to consider what management actions you would like to take concerning golden tilefish, and, if necessary, approve the amendment for scoping. That is a big if necessary. It really depends on the path that you decide to take.

We've included two different timelines that you could go on here, and that is dependent on how many changes you want to make to management. If you only want to change the catch levels, and so you're only changing the acceptable biological catch, and you're only changing the annual catch limits, then you can do that through an abbreviated framework amendment. This stock is not overfished, and not experiencing overfishing, and it would just be changing the limits that are there.

The abbreviated framework amendment, a potential timeline for that would be for you all to direct staff to begin drafting the amendment coming out of this meeting, and the process would be that staff would draft the amendment, bring it to you all, and, at a future meeting, potentially at the June meeting, and, at that meeting, there would be a public hearing that would be held. That would be the public hearing for the amendment, and the council would be able to approve -- Give final approval for that amendment at that meeting, that same meeting as the public hearing. After that, it would be submitted and then go through the NMFS rulemaking.

The potential timeline that has kind of been laid out is for the public hearing, and your review, your approval, to occur at the June meeting, and then -- Actually, that would happen all in one meeting, and then, following the June meeting, there would be the process of submitting and conducting rulemaking, potentially having regulations effective sometime in the first half of 2026.

The alternate route, and so this is -- This actually should be combined. I just noticed that this step of reviewing public comment, approved for formal review, under this timeline -- It should actually be combined in June. All of that, in an abbreviated framework, happens in one meeting.

For a plan amendment, or a framework amendment, then we would need to get an approval for scoping today. If that's the route that you wanted to go, and you wanted to do something more than just change catch levels, then you would need to approve for scoping today. We would conduct scoping hearings, and we would go through kind of our more or less typical amendment process. That tentatively would have regulations effective into 2027, and so those are a couple of different paths that you could take, depending on how many changes you want to make to the fishery at this time.

Going into the changes that have been talked about at this point, so there is the revision to the catch levels. The catch levels are a little bit lower than what they are currently, based on the SSC recommendations, and so there is a requirement for Magnuson to revise the catch levels.

Based on your allocation review trigger policy, there is a requirement to have the discussion about whether you are going to make any changes to sector allocations. If you don't want to, then having some discussion supporting the current allocations to remain in place, that's all that would need to be required. It doesn't need to go through the amendment process, necessarily, if you all decide within the meeting that you don't want to make that change. You would just need some discussion supporting the current allocations. Then, just kind of to aid in that discussion, if you decide to have it today, there's Table 2, and it shows recent landings relative to the ACL for each of the sectors.

Other actions that have been talked about related to golden tilefish have been, first of all, accountability measures. At your last meeting, there was a question about potentially applying phase-in, or carryover, under the new ABC control rule to this stock. Phase-in is not something that can be used in this situation, because the difference between the new ABC and the current ABC is not large enough to be allowed for a phase-in under our current ABC control rule.

Carryover, if you all wanted to pursue that as an option for this stock, you would need to change the accountability measures, because, under the ABC control rule, you're only allowed to use carryover if there is a post-season accountability measure that would reduce the ACL if an overage occurs, and so you would be – You would have to put in a payback provision.

Right now, the accountability measures only have post-season reductions if the stock is overfished, and it's not overfished right now, and so you would need to change your accountability measures to allow for post-season reductions, even if the stock is not overfished, if you wanted to put in carryover, and so that would be kind of the hand-in-hand that you would need to have if you wanted to pursue that form of management.

Then, finally, changing the recreational season start date. There have been discussions, within the last year, about potentially aligning the recreational season start dates for several of the deepwater species, kind of out of the idea that fishermen are spending a lot of time, and a lot of gas, to get out to the fishing grounds, and, if they're going out at a time when the only species that they can really go after is golden tilefish, or if it's offset from some of the other species out in that deepwater, that may not necessarily co-occur, but would be more in the same general area, like a blueline tilefish or a snowy grouper, then it may be advantageous to have those seasons line up a bit more.

Those are the items that have been talked about to this point, and what we're looking for the committee to develop is which actions would you like to put forward in an amendment at this time, and then, based on whatever actions you're deciding to consider, then a decision on the amendment format that you would like to use to consider those actions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Mike. All right. I've got hands going up for discussion. I have Tim, then Robert, then Shep.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, and I just probably need a little bit more clarification on the ABC control rule amendment, and how that would apply. Is it sector-specific? I mean, can -- It is? Okay, and so the commercial does have a payback, correct?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Only if the stock is overfished, and the stock is not overfished right now.

MR. GRINER: So the commercial payback -- There is no payback if we run over it?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Not right now, because the stock is not overfished, and so the change to the accountability measures -- You would need to change them to say that the payback occurs regardless of stock status, if you wanted to pursue carryover.

MR. GRINER: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Robert, and then Shep.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I just wanted to voice support for us to look at aligning the deepwater species seasons. I get a lot of complaints, down in Florida, about, you know, when you go fish for a snowy grouper, all you're catching is golden tide. When you go fish for golden tide, you're catching snowy grouper, and so I think we're really pushing a discard, an unnecessary discard.

The implication of that though is I think looking at the aggregate bag limit. It's three, and I believe it's part of the grouper bag limit, and so, if you align the seasons now, are we restricting the amount of fish people can take, and so I think we need to kind of look at those together, and I don't know what that means in terms of being able to push this through a framework or not, but –

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you for that. I have Shep, and then Tom.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just point out, for your consideration and decision-making here, and I'm not sure -- I'm almost reluctant to mention this, but, anyway, the new – In the deregulatory environment that we're in, your decision to do one action, versus two, that's one rulemaking, versus two rulemakings, right, and so, if it's ten to one, then – No?

MR. STRELCHECK: Sorry to interrupt, and so it would be the package as a whole would be one rulemaking.

MR. GRIMES: I understand that, but deciding to move forward with a framework and a subsequent amendment means two separate rulemakings, and you have to offset both of those separately, versus offsetting them at one, and the only other thing I wanted to point out is, given that environment, I would question whether our past performance is a good basis for estimating how much time it would take to implement just that framework, right, and so the winter 2026 date for effective regulations may not pan out that way. I just wanted to raise that. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Let me make sure I'm interpreting that correctly, what you're saying, Shep, and so you're saying doing a framework action and a plan amendment is two, versus just doing a plan amendment, or just doing a framework action, is just one. Is that what you're saying?

MR. GRIMES: Yes, that's correct, and then you would need to -- If it's ten to one, you need to -- The agency will have to identify the offsetting regulations for two packages, versus one rulemaking. That was my only point there. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Got it. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you. I really appreciate Robert's comment on this. I think it kind of goes into what I was going to say. There's definitely some discards that occur. I'll go back to my comments from the previous discussion on sand tilefish, right, and it's that, sometimes when you have this small bag limit, in these cooccurring deepwater species, I think you can be increasing discards, right, whether the season is open or not, but I am very interested, because of what I've heard from my stakeholders regarding the season change, right?

When you have it open January 1, I think they're more accessible in south Florida, which has been very limiting to the fishermen in the Carolinas, if you get intercepts and it closes early, and so I would love to see the season be changed, whether or not it corresponds with the other openings, but at least be in the times of year in which we have more fishing effort, right, and so –

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So I guess the format that was kind of briefly discussed last time, and it hasn't been brought up here just yet, but, kind of in relation to Shep's comment, it comes up, and so you talked, last time, about potentially doing an abbreviated framework to get the catch levels in place and then, any other changes that you would want to have, because this is relative to some of our other species, kind of a short list, about putting those within another amendment that is already on the workplan.

You would have to take a look at the workplan, and see what this would be potentially added to and included with, but that would kind of separate it from having a completely separate rulemaking process, if you wanted to, you know, do an abbreviated framework and then just have golden-tilefish-specific actions, and you could put those in with some other rulemaking process that is already on the workplan right now. That would kind of separate the timing with which they would be completed. The catch levels would go in faster than some of the other actions would, but that was what was discussed, to some extent, at the last meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we're still discussing what all we're going to consider actions on, and so I'm going to go back and ask more questions. Do we want to consider carryover, because, if we consider carryover, then you've got to change the accountability measure, and so, Tim, when you had that discussion earlier, and I know you were asking questions, but do you want to consider carryover for golden tilefish? I can come back to you. There's other hands over here.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and let's come back to it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Charlie, and then Jimmy.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, considering that we don't have payback now, and we've been getting really close, even though occasionally they've had to open up the season again for another week or something, and I'm not sure we would be really helping ourselves to have to go back with payback. Sometimes we're at 101, or 102, percent, and so I think we may be just doing a lot of work for very little, and so I would be more inclined to just leave it alone.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you. Jimmy, and then Tom, Tim, and Shep.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. From the fishermen, stakeholders, that I've heard from, they're interested in changing the accountability measures and including carryover and payback on the longline sector but, you know, considering -- Is it worth it, you know, kind of what Charlie is saying, and is it worth going through all that?

Right now, the longline fleet is relying on zero quota monitoring to keep them from going over, and, generally, they're closing us down early, and then they're having to open it back up, and so, if we do go over, it's usually because, okay, we opened it back up, and it's much harder to control

that smaller amount, and so they're interested in it, but, you know, sitting here, it may not be worth all the effort and an amendment process to do it, but, on the recreational side, you know, it makes more sense to line those start dates up at the same time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Jimmy. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I've been looking for some clarification on Mike's comment regarding having two different actions, right, and I guess my question is, first of all, is, when you say if like we were to add the second part into a different amendment, right, and would that be like our on-demand sea bass pots with the black grouper change? Is that what you're saying, like two separate actions under one amendment?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I'm not sure of the specific reference that you made, but the overall idea of - I don't know, and we have a couple of upcoming amendments, like we have -- There will be a -- I mean, a commercial amendment wouldn't really fit for the recreational season start date, but something else on the workplan already that is being developed that we could include that season start date change.

I mean, yellowtail and mutton might be an example, or even black sea bass is kind of close. I don't know if -- You know, that would be a decision when you get to the workplan, but those are amendments that are running right now, on close to the same timeframe, in which, you know, you could possibly put something like that in. Yellowtail and mutton is probably closer than black sea bass, because we have gone through scoping.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that clarification, and so then my next question is, if we were to do that, does that count as one action under the ten for one?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're not sure, but it seems like they're saying, yes, they think so.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Tim, then Shep.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I realize it may not be worth -- The juice may not be worth the squeeze on it, but the thing that I think about, and it's not so much the longline, and it's really the hook-and-line sector, because we do depend on that in-season monitoring to close the fishery down, and the problem with that is it has to be a projection, right, and so, if you look at the last couple of years, the hook-and-line sector, when they project it out, we ended up at, you know, 93 percent, 94 percent, and the year before that was 85 percent, and so it doesn't sound like a lot, but 85 percent -- Closing at 85 percent, and, if you could have rolled that over, then the next year's projection may have gotten you closer to the 100 percent, instead of shutting you down at 92 percent.

It does add some fish in a cumulative way, because you do have to project out when to close this fishery, and, yes, we do reopen the longline, but we don't really reopen the hook-and-line. You know, once it's closed, it's closed, and so it's the difficulty in those projections of when to close, but, you know, at the end of the day, we're not talking about a lot of poundage.

I guess the other thing is, if those projections go the opposite way, and you run over the 105 – Then, all of a sudden, you're at 105 percent, and then your 5 percent payback -- You just keep flip-flopping, over 5 to 7 to 10 percent, and so I'm kind of thinking along Charlie's lines, and maybe it's just not worth it, but, you know, I do think it's worth having these conversations on this ABC control rule, with these species, because that's why we did the ABC control rule. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. I have Shep, and then Andy.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess mine is much of a question, but I thought this was one where we had some past comment that, and I think it was Andy Strelcheck, that the carryover would avoid the industry having to expend the costs to put the spool back on their vessel, and retool it all, and, by carrying that over to the next year, they could wait, and they would just have that same quota available the next year, without having to re-gear their vessel late in the year and go back out to catch that last little bit of remaining quota. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so I've appreciated the discussion. Kind of specific to what Shep just said, I've also heard the idea floated about, if we have quota remaining, you know, consider reopening toward the tail end of the year, so they can continue to use that spool for the opening of the next season, right. on January 15.

I guess a couple of things. So, one, I appreciate the thinking around the table. You know, I think, with the abbreviated framework, the one thing I will mention, right, is so it's important, I think, that we try to get these catch limit adjustments in place quickly. My team, obviously, is now further short-staffed, and we're working on a secretarial amendment, and so we're going to be hard-pressed to provide a lot of assistance to the council between now and June, if we go down that path.

Then I really appreciated, obviously, the conversation around some of these other ideas, and I think, you know, we are going to have to get in the mindset of how do we bundle some of these actions with other actions, so we don't have these standalone amendments and rulemakings, and, to me, the carryover ABC control rule discussion may be actually something that we should be looking at, because it could be viewed as deregulatory, right, and it could actually be an economic benefit, for some of the reasons we've just discussed around the table, and so I'm interested in I think continuing to pursue this, and I think it's really determining what package -- How do we, you know, move this forward, and do we split it out into two separate actions or keep on the path of, you know, one action.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that. So Andy is suggesting keep carryover on the table, and it might help us in other ways, and so I would like to hear some thoughts on that. Robert, and then Charlie.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Charlie, if you want to speak to that, you can go ahead. I was going to circle back to a note on that.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, I'm not opposed to talking about it, and Shep is absolutely right. I mean, if you stop in March, and you reopen two months later, a lot of the time your wire is rusty, and

most of those -- A lot of the longline guys are actually wreckfish guys too, and so the wire is rusty, and then they've got to decide do they want to put new wire on just to go make a trip, or maybe two, and so, yes, there is an issue there, but, if you could open it up say in December, when we're going to open up in a couple of weeks anyway, then that might make more sense, and you could, you know, just time when you were going to reopen it differently. That may be how you get around that trouble, but I don't mind leaving it on the table. I just don't want to put a bunch of extra work on Andy's staff just for a very, very little gain.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so, just to be clear, you know, if we're bringing back carryover, we've got to bring back the accountability measure, and so let's just think about that. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I just wanted to make sure, on that last point, that, when we look at changing the recreational start date, we consider the impact to the recreational bag limit. At one point, right it starts in January, and you're allowed to go catch three fish, an aggregate bag limit, and then, you know, in May, it kind of changes, and so there's more access over a period of time for the recreational sector. If we just slide that season back to start May 1, for example, there's several months of fishing that are now taken away from the rec sector, and so I just want to make sure we consider that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We've got that listed. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and two more points. You know, we're talking tilefish now, but maybe we need to also think more holistically. Are there other species that the carryover would be readily applicable for, and looking at broader species than just tilefish, and then I should have add, to Other Business, in terms of in-season actions, but I'll mention it now, right, and so we have a proposed closure date.

I don't want to mention it, because I have no idea when the in-season action will actually move forward, but tilefish will be expected to close potentially in the next month, right, and so we are continuing down this cycle of closing the fishery early. We have a small catch limit, and Robert's point is really well taken, right, and we have snowy grouper open during the summer months, and tilefish closing before we even get to the summer months, and so I would like to try to come up with a solution for that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. So then I'm going to circle back, cause we've heard comments on both sides, to do the carryover, or don't do the carryover, and what do we want to do on that? Do we want to add it to the list? I see some people saying no. What do we think here? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: I try to look back and think where we would have had carryover in the past seasons. I mean, how many times would it have happened? Generally, we've been relying on the agency to squeeze every drop out of that lemon, right, and right to the very limit, without going over, and that's why they opened it back up, and so, you know, it's like you continue down that path, and maybe they can refine that effort a little tighter, and we can really, you know, get more precise on it, or -- I mean, how many opportunities did we have for carryover in the past?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I was wondering if someone at the agency could speak. I'm looking at the numbers right now, and I'm very surprised. I know it was a week or two ago, but it says the longline fishery is only at 20 percent, and that seems low for this time of year. Are we having -- I know it's not -- Does that ring true, that we're having a slower year, in which case this could be -- This could be -- We're not, the hook-and-line, right, and, I mean, hook-and-line, we're doing okay, and so that surprised me, or, at least where we are, we're doing okay, and so this could be a year, rarely.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, relative to Jimmy's comment, we do at least have five years' worth of data included in the document, where you can see the landings relative to the ACLs, and I do want to, I guess, remind -- I can double-check this, but I'm pretty sure that any opportunity for carryover would also need to be relative to total ACL, in the sense of, if the commercial sector is below their ACL, but the landings in total have exceeded the total ACL, then there wouldn't be any room for carryover, because you'd be going over the total ACL, and you would be going over the ABC, and that wouldn't be allowed, under that circumstance, and so there needs to be room for the carryover, so to speak, both from the commercial perspective and from the total perspective in these senses, which there's been a few cases of it, like looking at 2018, and, especially in this fishery, the recreational sector has a very small percentage.

Even if they are over by a percentage, it's not always by a large amount of poundage, or fish, but you see situations like 2018, and 2021, but just bear that in mind, that, if you had the case where the commercial landings were at say 97 percent, but the total landings were at 100 percent of the total ACL, then there wouldn't be that wiggle room for the commercial, necessarily.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, looking at that table, I don't know if there's a lot of room there. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes. Okay, and that was kind of what I was asking earlier, are they separated, but they are still tied together, as far as that overall carryover, and so that does change things quite a bit, in my mind, and, if you were to look at just the same years, or even 2021 through 2024, and you took the commercial, and you cut that out to two components, longline versus hook-and-line, you know, I don't think you'll see -- You'll see the hook-and-line ranging from 85, or 84, percent, probably, up to 97, to right at 100, but, really, we don't really go over very much, but the underage is only, you know, I would say, at best, 15 percent, and so, when you look at that, and then you start adding in the longline component and the recreational component, I don't think it's going to get us anywhere.

However, you know, I don't know that it's not worth going through and putting that option out there, because I don't know that there's a downside to having that on the books, because, if you don't, then where are you if you can't ever use it? Then you're going back through the exercise again, in case quotas go up, or -- You know, I mean, I guess you just address it at that point, but it seems like, if you have an opportunity to put that tool -- To have that tool, even though you don't use it, and it's better to have it, but if we don't use -- If we don't do it now, you know, you can't use it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and let's see what others think. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and I'm kind of inclined not to go down this path right now, and, if we need to change, you know, some payback provisions for some other species, we could probably put golden -- And we want it later, then we can put it in that action, and so I'm inclined just to let it slide for right now, and let's see how everything checks out. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Based on that discussion, it sounds like no to carryover, which means no to the accountability measure. I guess the other thing on our list, that we haven't discussed, is the allocation, and so what do we think about that? Are we inclined to change the allocation? I see heads shaking no, but maybe we need some discussion on that. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I know we'll need to build some rationale. I think that's part of our process, is building the rationale for why we wouldn't change it at this point. I'll start the conversation with saying it looks like both sectors are fully utilizing what they have, and any change would shift it either way, and so I think, given that, I would not consider changing allocation at this point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Kerry, to the extent that we could align seasons, and cut down on the discards on the rec sector, would there be any -- I mean, I think there would then be a change. Presumably there might be more fish, if we could eliminate discards by aligning the seasons, and I don't know how that would impact the allocation discussion, if at all.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Based on the stock assessment, dead discards are not expected to significantly impact this fishery. It's not a species that, as far as it was assessed, that they're experiencing high numbers of discards. Generally, if people are out there catching them, then they're keeping them, up to their limit, but that's what the assessment information has.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I think our stronger justification is we just looked at the allocation in Amendment 52, and made an adjustment, and so it's a very recent change to the allocation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more discussion on allocation?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and so what you all have -- The two actions that you want to pursue, related to golden tilefish, are to change the catch levels and consider a change to the recreational season start date. Coming back to the discussion of how you want to do this, would you like to do the catch levels in an abbreviated framework, in an earlier time schedule than the recreational season start date change, and put that recreational start date in another amendment, that is kind of running concurrently, or running on a little bit of a longer time schedule, or did you want to pursue both of these in a single amendment that would not allow an abbreviated framework to be used, that would be a longer amendment process of either a framework or a plan amendment?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would partly put that back to staff, and maybe we talk about that more during the workplan, but, yes, and I'm just looking around to see if the committee had any input on that at this point in the week. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, I'm just trying to think what else we have going on, like if this is the place that fits best, and I'm always inclined to choose the fastest thing, right, and we know we need to get these catch level recommendations through, and it would be so -- Well, maybe not as quick as normal, but it is the most expedient path, but I also agree with this change to the start date.

What else do we have coming up that we're going to be talking about for snapper -- Is this the most appropriate vessel, or is there another vessel that it could fit in? I presume the longer-term response to the MSE is too far out to do that. Is there anywhere else, so that this can go through quickly?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, right now -- I mean, I guess, from the council staff end, right now could work, as far as fitting in an abbreviated framework for the catch levels. Now, granted, we have heard from SERO staff that maybe an abbreviated framework takes a little bit longer than it would in an optimal situation, because of staff issues, and so, instead of going one quarter with it, maybe we go two quarters, if that's a possibility, and I would have to, you know, look at SERO and see what they're able to do, when they find out what their staffing situation will be moving forward, but, from a council staff end, we could fit in an abbreviated framework in a shorter timeframe, to do the catch levels, and then have the season start date go through another vehicle.

We do have some significant management actions coming up in the, you know, one-and-a-half to two-year timeframe that, if this were to get dragged out, then it would kind of bump into some other things that I know we're going to need some staff to be available to work on, talking about like the MSE response, and we'll have another red snapper assessment that's going to be coming up in a couple of years, that will be finished up in a couple of years, and so there's going to be some staff work that's going to need to go into those items in the long-term.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: So this is really where I really struggle, and it goes back to those of you that were around when I had an emotional moment four years ago, when I talk about us always doing these get an assessment, do a response, these piecemeal situations, and, knowing that we're going to be having a bigger discussion about whether it's the aggregate bag limits, you know, and we're going to be having this other bigger discussion, and it pains me to not have that discussion all happen at the same time, and that's why I'm really struggling.

It has nothing to do with my support for this, because I do support this, but this little piecemeal stuff we're doing, that is not mandatory, and, you know, catch level recommendations are mandatory, but, this other little stuff we're doing, it drives me nuts, and so that's my soapbox. It doesn't necessarily -- That was not helpful, but just so you know that's where my mindset is.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So what I -- Let me try to translate what I just heard. It sounds like you're saying catch levels in a faster document, the other pieces, and, you know, pair with something else, so that we can have a bigger discussion, but, also, I don't -- I just don't know that we're going to solve what is the vehicle right here this morning, because I feel like we need to have this discussion

when we get to the workplan and try to figure that out more, based on everything else we do this week, and so that's just my recommendation, is come back to this discussion later in the week.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I'm fine if we come back to the discussion in the workplan. Myra did just point out to me that there may be a vehicle in the blueline tilefish assessment response, which is scheduled to start in December of this year, and so if it got thrown in, and that might be something to think on as you prepare for the workplan discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right, and so keep all these things in mind when we get to the workplan. All right, and so I think we're done with this discussion for now. We'll be revisiting this, and thinking about what's the vehicle, and then that'll help determine scoping, et cetera, but we'll talk about that later in the week. Let's go ahead and take a fifteen-minute break.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Come on back to the table. We're going to get going again. All right. Next up on the agenda is we are going to run through the Commercial Subcommittee report. The Snapper Grouper Commercial Subcommittee met earlier this week, and, in addition to doing things like approving the agenda and the minutes from their November meeting, then they started diving down into the different issues, and they really narrowed down the list of the topics to two primary objectives.

They want to address commercial permit issues and improve trip efficiency, and, in order to address the objectives, the committee recommended the following. They made two motions. I'll read them. We really only need the second motion, because it kind of covers both, but let me just read the first motion.

The first motion is to recommend to the Snapper Grouper Committee that they initiate an amendment to consider ending the two-for-one policy for the SG-1 unlimited permit, and then let me read the second motion. Recommend to the Snapper Grouper Committee that they initiate an amendment that will address commercial permit and trip efficiency issues. This may include changing the commercial two-for-one SG-1 policy, as previously directed by Motion Number 1.

There are, on the document which is posted on the website, and Mike has it pulled up there, there's a number of topics, and then subtopics, and then sub-subtopics there, that were discussed, especially relative to commercial permit issues, and then there are some ideas listed as ways to increase trip efficiency.

I wanted to let the Snapper Grouper Committee ask questions of members of the subcommittee, if they have any questions, and then, also, I would like to know whether the Snapper Grouper Committee would like to initiate the amendment, as suggested by the subcommittee, and so, first, I don't know if any subcommittee members want to add to the discussion. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Not so much the discussion, but it just spurred me to think ahead and if it would be possible for our next meeting in June to get some brief legal guidance on the income requirement that we've been talking about, because I believe there's -- We may or may not be able to do that, and, to the extent that we can figure out sooner rather than later whether that's an option, that would be really helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and that's being captured by Mike. So, if you weren't at the subcommittee meeting earlier this week, the subcommittee would like to meet again ahead of the June meeting, maybe early in the week, like it did this week, and they've requested some additional information come back to the subcommittee, and so thoughts, or questions? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: It seems, every time we take an action, we're just going to have to consider what we're doing ten for one other expenses, and so I don't know how the subcommittee can do this, but, as we go through this, I think we need to think through prioritizing this. I know that -- I attended the subcommittee, although I'm not on it.

I know this started with elimination of the two-for-one. I just generally think that's an elimination of a rule, and it probably create some economic benefit. The other stuff may cut the other way, and so just thinking about how we, on balance, you know, look at this, and then, as we talk about all the other actions that this council is going to try and take, where we prioritize that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Any other comments, thoughts, questions, and I would love to know whether the Snapper Grouper Committee is good with initiating this amendment, as suggested by the subcommittee. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can I get a little more input on like what the legal opinion you want on income requirements, if we're going to be asked for that? I mean, we've had them, and you can implement them, and so -- But I think, in terms of a legal opinion, that's what you'll hear. I've seen they've been implemented. They've been repealed, for various reasons.

My recollection of the discussion is income requirements are easy to circumvent. You can, you know, structure your business organization in such a way that that business is easily going to meet the requirements, regardless of what else the individuals involved may be doing, and so, at least in the Gulf of Mexico, that's my recollection of why we got away from it. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Actually, that's helpful, because I don't know why I had it in my mind that -- We used to have it for king mackerel. We used to have 10 percent of your income had to -- We used to have to submit our tax return, or a couple of pages of it, and then, for some reason, I had it in my mind that maybe there was no more communication between the IRS and the agency anymore, and so you couldn't do it, and so, if it's possible, then we don't need any further guidance, and the caveats will then become important to understand, but that's all I needed to know. For some reason, I was thinking it was not possible anymore.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I don't recall the entire history, but I guess my recommendation would be still to request the guidance. I don't know if Shep was saying we need a legal opinion. I think what we would want to come back to is probably some history with regard to those requirements, how they were being used, why they were ultimately eliminated. There's some operational administrative challenges that we were facing, in terms of the enforceability and validating the information we were receiving.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that discussion. Okay. How does the full committee feel about initiating this amendment? Are we good with this? I see heads nodding. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Do you need a motion to this, or do you just want to --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, we need a motion.

MR. PHILLIPS: I am going to let Shep go first and then --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just keep in mind the potential for maybe combining it with something, keeping in mind the number of actions moving through the system and the deregulatory ramifications of that. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, Shep, since you mentioned that, wouldn't this qualify as a deregulatory?

MR. GRIMES: There are arguments to that, but, at this stage, I don't -- There's not enough guidance to provide a meaningful response to that. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie, are you making a motion?

MR. PHILLIPS: I will make the motion, and then, as we go through later on, we can figure out if we need to tweak, and where we put it and stuff, but, yes, I would make the motion that we proceed with doing away with the two-for-one permit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So do you not want to initiate an amendment that would address the commercial permit and the trip efficiency issues?

MR. PHILLIPS: It was well-written. Thank you, Madam Chair.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It's seconded by Kerry. Under discussion. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Again, supportive of starting the amendment, but I think we, again, need to think about prioritizing time of staff, and so we'll circle back to that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I know we'll get in discussion later in the workplan, but just let me say this is something we have been trying to do for a long time. We have not done any commercial measures on their own, or looked at the commercial industry, for an incredibly long time. It's long overdue, and I will make the argument, as we go along, that I want -- I feel very strongly this needs to be a standalone commercial document and that this deserves to be fairly high in the priority list.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for that. Any more discussion on this motion? All right. **Is there any objection to this motion?** All right. **The motion carries.** Any more discussion about the Commercial Subcommittee? All right.

We're going to reorder the agenda a little bit. We're ahead of schedule. The next thing that we're going to discuss are the topics for the AP, for their upcoming meeting that is in April, and I'm going to turn it over to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to scroll down into the overview of your agenda overview document, where we list some potential AP documents. I did need to add a couple of later items. They're shown in italics included there, and so we're going to be looking at having the AP review this list of topics, as you all will amend it in a second, and we're going to be meeting April 2 through 3, and this is going to be a slight change in the format from previous meetings.

We're kind of doubling up meetings that week with the Coastal Migratory Pelagics AP, and so they're going to be meeting in the same week. They'll meet at the beginning of the week, and the Snapper Grouper AP will meet at the end of the week, for two full days, instead of the half day, full day, half day that we've done in the past.

Items that are included in this list, that we're going to need to hit, just to make sure that other projects are kind of running on time, and we will need to get a gag FPR update and risk rating evaluation from the AP there. We also need to get a black sea bass stock risk rating, so we can make sure that that information goes into the catch level development that's ongoing right now from the Science Center, and there will be -- There's potentially discussion that the AP would need to have related to Amendment 56.

One item that's a little bit out of the norm, but we do want to make sure we make the time for it, includes this lines of communication run-through, and so Christina has been kind of the lead on that project, but what we're looking to do with the APs is kind of test out some of the methods that we would use in these lines of communication meetings at the various APs, and we wanted to make sure we set aside some time to do and work through that with the Snapper Grouper AP, so that we can make sure we get some feedback and have a few test runs before we actually take it out to the public, and so that's something that will take a bit of time, but I did want to highlight that, outside of our normal business, that that's something that we want to set aside some time for.

Depending on the discussion this morning, you may or may not need AP discussion at this stage for the species need for conservation and management. I don't know if you might want to push that until later on in your discussions, but, looking at the list that we have here, there is a pretty packed schedule for those two days, and Myra has something else that we may need to add.

MS. BROUWER: Yes. Sorry, and we probably need to add the for-hire reporting amendment. My recollection, from the other day, is that the council intends for that to go to all APs.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: That was going to be my question, was whether or not we were going to put that on there, because that was my intention, to have this go to all three of our major FMP APs this month. I know it's a packed schedule and --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and we're having a conversation over here about the evaluation of species need for conservation management. I think it's premature for that to go to the AP at this point, and so that will free up some space. Other ideas, or comments on these topics? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. It should be a rather quick update, but I do think it would be helpful to provide them a quick update about the last motion we just made regarding the commercial sector. I think, since a lot of that information came to them, they might like to know, if they're not listening today, that that amendment was initiated.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Good call. On amendment update, they also need an update on the secretarial amendment. Okay, and what else needs to go on this list? Okay, and not a lot of discussion today. All right, and so I'm going to assume we're good with this list. Once again, we'll see it in the committee report, when we get to Full Council later in the week, and so, if you think of something else, you'll see it again. All right. Thanks for that discussion on the AP topics. Next up, we're going to try to get in, before lunch, the presentation by John Walter on the maximum sustainable yield proxies.

DR. WALTER Thank you, Chair. All right. I am very happy to be talking about science to the council here. This is, I think, a topic that comes up quite often under the council's purview, when the proxy is written down in the fishery management plan, but it's something that's really discussed at the SSC level for a stock assessment, and so I'll go into the science behind the proxy determination, and some of the other topics, and I will be happy to take questions at the end. I'm presenting this on behalf of a lot of our staff who put this presentation together, and I'm glad to be able to do that.

The request here was for a presentation on SPR proxies, and it should include, as you see, an analysis on which proxy is most appropriate for the species and a focus on the currently-assessed species in the South Atlantic. Hopefully we will meet this request here today. The outline is we'll give a little background on proxies, some of the history and science behind the derivation of SPR proxies, a canvass of their use at different councils across the U.S., and then some recent National Standard 1 recommendations for SPR proxies.

Our mandate is, under National Standard 1 of Magnuson-Stevens, it requires preventing overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, optimum yield from managed U.S. fisheries. Optimum yield, as we all know, is limited by the biologically-feasible maximum sustainable yield, which then in turn serves as the basis for our status determination criteria on the biomass that supports MSY, where the goal is to try to get the most yield out of the fishery, while also preventing overfishing.

SPR is an equilibrium quantity that is actually the ratio of eggs produced by the population at a certain fraction to the eggs produced under virgin conditions, and so an SPR of 40 means that the population is producing 40 percent of the eggs that it would at under virgin conditions. Analogous to MSY, we often find that we get more yield out of a population when we're fishing it actually quite hard. It's one of basically the fundamental properties of the population dynamics of fish, is

that, the harder you fish them, up until a certain point, the more yield you get, because of density-dependent effects, where fish eat each other or they limit their production.

It's kind of analogous to mowing your lawn. If the goal out of your lawn was to get the most lawn clippings at the end of a year, you would want to find how many times do I mow it, and at what level do I set the lawnmower at, and that is really the optimum fishing rate, if the goal is the most lawn clippings at the end of the year.

If you let it grow up to seed, then you're not going to get any lawn clippings. If you cut it too much, then you're also not going to get any clippings at the end, because you're going to limit its growth, and so it's finding that optimal level of fishing to get the most yield out of it, which is what we're trying to do, and so MSY is the goal.

Unfortunately, a lot of our stock assessments don't -- Either because of the data, the length of the time series, or other factors, they don't allow us to estimate the stock-recruitment relationship, which is how we determine MSY, and so, in that case, we have to invoke what's called a proxy, the proxy being the best representation of what MSY would be if we could estimate it, and that's where spawning potential ratio comes into play, because it's usually used as the proxy. It may not be equal to MSY. We're trying to get the best representation of it.

So MSY, again, is based on the stock-recruitment relationship. I could go further into that. There's a lot of -- Many, many years of trying to derive stock-recruitment relationships, the functional form, the parameterization of it, but, ultimately, many of our stock assessments are landing in a situation where it is not estimable from the data, and so the things that affect it, the ingredients that go into an SPR curve, are a number of our key life history parameters, the mortality, growth, maturity, maturity at age, or length, and then the fishery selectivity.

It's similar to how we derive a yield-per-recruit curve. A spawner-recruit curve is derived similarly, and I'll go into some of the further derivations of that and then some recommendations for how we could probably better account for those parameters in the derivation of SPR.

One of the things that I think we often are worried about on these SPRs is -- I think somebody termed it as SPR creep, and when is it going to stop? Is it going to keep going up and up and up, and why do we have SPR -- Maybe we started with an SPR, but it was a low value, maybe 30 percent, and we said that population MSY is best represented by having 30 percent of the reproduction that it would at virgin, and now we're often saying 40 percent, and sometimes even higher.

What that means, in sort of a conceptual framework, is that, with a higher SPR, 50 percent, you're fishing the population less, and here is a fishing mortality rate, in the table here, between 30 and 50 percent, and that is an instantaneous fishing mortality rate. 0.5 is pretty high, and 0.17 is quite low, which would mean that we would fish the population much lighter with a higher SPR. It translates to a number of population metrics, in terms of the mean age of the catch, which we've extracted from here, ranging from 2.9 years old to 3.8, and so, basically what you're doing is you're fishing the fish at a larger age, allowing them to reproduce.

The mean length of the catch is also changes, and this is for scamp, and so you have a population, if you fish it at SPR, that would be larger. You would be catching larger fish, and they would

actually be more abundant, and so your catch rate would actually increase under a higher SPR, and I think we are often worried that we're going to get lower yields under a higher SPR, and that's basically focusing on the short-term yields.

Yes, sometimes, in the short-term, you get lower yields, but, if the proxy is the best proxy for MSY, you're going to get longer, or better, long-term yields, because remember what we're trying to do is get the proxy for MSY, and there's other benefits to that, in terms of I sometimes say don't fear the higher SPR, because you're going to have more fish in the population.

You're going to have higher catch rates. You're going to maybe even have a more efficient fishery, because you're going to catch the same catch with less effort, which might be valuable for a commercial fishery, and, conceptually, we often think of, like in the freshwater environment, of a quality bass management. That's essentially keeping the population at a higher SPR, because people say, well, we want large fish, and so, in this case, that may indeed have other benefits to different user groups, at having a higher SPR, but remember the main goal is, again, MSY and getting the closest approximation to MSY.

There's a long history of SPR proxies, starting with a number of papers by Clark that recommended maintaining SPR between 20 and 60 percent, with a target of 30 percent, and then Clark revised those to a recommendation of 40 percent. Mace recommended 40 percent when the stock-relationship is unknown, and, again, Clark suggested 40 may even be too aggressive for some stocks and recommended considering SPR 50 or 60.

A lot of the derivation of this was due to our increased understanding of the age of Pacific rockfish that keep getting older and older. The more we found, the older we found that they were. Some of them live to a hundred years old, and so we have some congeners, with a number of our animals, particularly yellowedge grouper, that has a maximum age of eighty-five, and so we're dealing with some animals that are really in the slow lane of their growth, and of how old they live, which would suggest a higher SPR.

Then, again, that's where the Dorn said that 40 percent is too high for rockfish, and recommended much higher, and then two papers that are particularly valuable, because they relate to a lot of the species we work on, are specifically focused on Southeast stocks, which is Harford et al. 2019, which suggested, particularly for protogynous hermaphrodites, of which many of our groupers are, and that means they change sex, that a 40 to 50 percent SPR had the highest probabilities of achieving long-term MSY.

Then, Zhou et al., I'll go into the next slide. This is one of the most recent papers that uses data coming from a large database of stock dynamic information, the Ransom Myers Legacy Database, and he predicted, from life history parameters, the SPR that would approximate MSY, and this found that the SPR ranges, amongst hundreds of stocks between 13 percent and 95 percent, and this is for stocks that really can't handle much fishing, and those are some really long-lived elasmobranchs, I believe, with a mean of 47 percent.

Now, this isn't particularly useful, because the idea here was that you would take the actual specific life history information for each stock and calculate an SPR from those, but, for about 64 percent of those stocks, it did indicate that an SPR greater than 40 percent would be required to reflect the MSY.

The logic behind the paper was that you could predict the SPR from the life history parameters, if you knew them. Now, the challenge being that, if you remember what I said are the ingredients in that, it's natural mortality, it's growth, it's age at maturity, and many of those things are -- As well as fecundity, and those may either be unknown, uncertain, or they actually may be changing, and so one of the recommendations are, for each stock assessment, to calculate and look at the SPR individually, and I think that's going to be one of the recommendations coming out of a number of some of the work that's going on.

I will make that a recommendation here, and I think that's a fair consideration, because, as a lot of the conversations have been, it's why is it just 40, and why can't it be 35, or why can't it be 32, and, actually, the answer is it probably should be specific to each stock, and its life history, and it should be evaluated at the time of the stock assessment, and I think that's probably something that goes into the terms of reference. Using the latest in life history information, what would be the most effective proxy?

I think I already went into why the shift is occurring over time, mainly because the science is evolving. We're finding that animals live longer than maybe we knew at the time. We're finding maybe that the productivity of the animal may be less than what we had thought, and you say why can't we go back and use MSY, and are we going to always have to use these proxies, and no. Hopefully we will, as we gain data, and the science improves, be able to estimate the productivity of the stock. That is the goal of the stock assessment, but, until such time as we can do that, we're going to have to use the best proxy we've got.

Here's a canvass of the different SPR proxies that are used in the United States. Some of you will recognize the SPR 26 percent. That's Gulf of America red snapper, managed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. That 26 percent has a long history of being derived as conditional on the highest SPR that could be allowed, given the bycatch in the shrimp fishery, and so that one is sort of a unique one, but, for many stocks, SPR 30 is one of the most common. Some use SPR 35, particularly the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, as you see in blue, and then you see a number that are even above that, 40, 45, 50, and, again, a lot of these are west coast rockfishes.

There was a presentation, two years ago, by our senior scientist for stock assessment, Rick Methot, on the technical guidance for estimating status determination reference points and their proxies in accordance with NS 1 Guidelines.

This guidance is going to be finalized quite soon, and I think it's going to have a lot of key information in it, and so I recommend, I think, probably getting a revised presentation of this to the council, and to the SSC, because it's going to really set the standard for how we deal with proxies moving into the future.

Recommendations here are, first, estimate the stock-recruitment relationship, if you can. That's the scientific standard, if we can, and try to do that, and then choose a functional form that's appropriate, and parameterization of the number of the key parameters, and then estimate those from the stock-recruitment curve.

Then it's not recommended to use priors, or Bayesian priors, for the parameters, such that you would basically be saying that we're assuming this, and then updating with new information, but,

oftentimes, if that new information isn't sufficient to diverge from your previous assumption, it reverts to that assumption, and so that's ill-advised. Also, fixing the stock recruitment-relationship parameters is additionally ill-advised, from the NS 1 Guidelines. Then, when you can't estimate that, use a proxy, and, again, that this should be evaluated with each new stock assessment, just like we try to estimate the stock-recruitment relationship with the updated data.

Now, for data-moderate MSY-based proxies, there's a recommendation that the SPR should range between 30 and 60 percent, with a default of 40 to 45 percent for most stocks, and then the proxies for SSB MSY would be the mean recruitment times the SSB, spawning stock biomass, per recruit at the FSPR proxy, which might be F 40 percent, and there's formulas for deriving the SSB MSY using an SPR proxy.

Then, if you're using a proxy, it should be reevaluated with each stock assessment to ensure that it's consistent with the new perception of the stock's productivity. That is we don't set it and forget it, in terms of the proxy, and one of the things that is also recommended is, because the proxy is written down in the fishery management plan, and chosen by the council, is that, if there's flexibility built into the FMP, such that you don't have to reopen it each time the science suggests a different value, then it's much easier to be able to make that change, and that's a key in rulemaking, a key change that could be made, because, right now, we've got like SPR 30 on the books, and I think it's -- For black sea bass, we can't give stock status advice based on the SSC-recommended proxy, because it's written down as SPR 30.

If it was written such that it was with the proxy that is deemed most appropriate by the SSC, rather than any particular number, then we could provide stock status information. The projections could be used using that new proxy, and that's one way to streamline the incorporation of updated scientific information.

So, in conclusion, ideally, we want to estimate MSY directly, but, when we can't, we employ a proxy. Default levels would be in the range of 40 to 45 percent, at least based on national guidance. However, that should be evaluated for each specific stock, and the SSC, at their October 2024 meeting, stated recommending a minimum of 40 percent SPR as an appropriate proxy.

Now, I think here is where probably some guidance might be valuable, in terms of how do we evaluate it, and how does the SSC evaluate it, and perhaps, because there's uncertainty in a lot of the parameters that go into deriving it, based on the Zhou paper, maybe uncertainty in what that proxy should be might be something that could be considered, and I think that's a scientifically-fair point to make.

Now, one other point I'll make is that we're often debating proxies, here on the council floor, as to which proxy is appropriate, and talking about it from the standpoint of risk to the fishery from loss of yield from the perspective of socioeconomics.

The choice of proxy is a fundamentally scientific decision. We don't talk about those same kind of things when we parameterize a stock-recruitment relationship. We shouldn't be talking about those things when we come up with the best representation of the stock-recruitment relationship, and so, when we have those conversations, you often hear me reiterate that, should the council choose a proxy that diverges from the SSC recommendation, there has to be a very strong scientific basis for doing that.

This is essentially reiterating what I said about that the decision needs to be based on scientific determination of the closest approximation, and, lastly, that choosing an SPR that diverges from the SSC's recommendation means that it would allow for a greater than 50 percent probability of overfishing, which is not going to be scientifically defensible. With that, I think that's the end of the slides, and I'm happy to take questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that presentation. I have a lot of questions, and a lot of thoughts, on this. I guess I would say that I do agree that it should be reevaluated with each new stock assessment, but I don't know that I agree that the default should be between 40 and 45 percent. I just think that the council deals with uncertainty through established council processes, and adding conservative SPRs to deal with uncertainty, in my mind, just isn't appropriate.

We also debate this heavily at the state level, because we are often trying to figure out, you know, how we want to manage redfish, how we want to manage snook, and so our stock assessment folks, and our folks on the management side, debate this, and we try to think about what are we really managing for, and then we have those conversations with our commission.

I mean, we debate this ad nauseam, because we talk about the difference between targets, and we talk about the difference between thresholds, and, over time, our commission has thought about, and has done so for a couple of species, increased the management goal for snook and redfish, and so we talk about what anglers want, and how those goals would get us there, and I guess I would like to suggest -- I know that this was also discussed at the joint SSC meeting recently.

I would like to suggest that maybe Luiz Barbieri could come to our June meeting and talk about this a little bit more, and talk about how we've been dealing with this at the state level. We've looked at a lot of these presentations, the guidance on the National Standards, the information coming out of the national SSC meetings, and I would say that we've had a little bit different interpretation than what I saw in this presentation, but it might be helpful -- Especially since our folks at FWRI are running some of the federal stock assessments, it might be helpful for you to see, from Luiz, kind of how we're dealing with this at the state level, because we debate this as well, and, actually, our commission gets down in the weeds on, you know, how we should set this. I guess one of my questions is what was the proxy in the recent red snapper assessment that you guys ran?

DR. WALTER: Which red snapper assessment?

MS. MCCAWLEY: The one that was just run as --

DR. WALTER: The South Atlantic? 30 percent. SPR 30.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Questions? Tim.

MR. GRINER: Where do you even start on this? Yes, this is a really, really important issue, that is going to take a lot of time to really kind of ferret through, and I'm in the same boat with Jessica. I don't feel comfortable with a default of 40 to 45 percent, or 40 to 60 percent even. I mean, the first thing that jumps out at me is this whole idea of a proxy is not the ideal scenario to begin with, right?

You know, an estimation is what we're really after, and not a proxy, but, given that we can't get there, because of data, or moderate data, on particular stocks, then we want to fall back to this default proxy, but, if you go back and you look at these papers, and, you know, with the exception of the 2020 paper, which, you know, I haven't read, and I need to, but the rest of these papers that had to deal with these SPR proxies are twenty-five to thirty years old.

These are old papers, and so, you know, that in itself is kind of problematic for me, but, when you look at where these default proxies come from, and how they're derived, when you look at that chart, and you see that everything above 40 percent seems to be Pacific Northwest rockfish stocks, that we're comparing to what's happening here, and there you go. That chart.

So, really and truly, I don't see that 30 to 40 percent is not more in line with what's happening for us in our species, but, you know, I do think that it takes -- That you're going to have to look at this more closely, species-by-species, you know, and with every assessment. I don't think we can just pull 40 to 45 percent out of the air and say that's where we're going, I mean, because the reality of it is there's a difference between 37.5 and 35, 37.5 and 40, and the ramifications of the difference between 37.5 and 40 percent are the difference between being overfished and not overfished.

These are big ramifications, over very little differences in a proxy, and so I think this really is something that everybody needs to dig into, and have some really serious discussions about, before you go down this road of, hey, we're just going to have a default proxy for every species, and it's going to be greater than 40 percent.

You know, part of the data said that the data-moderate species should be default proxy of 30 to 60 percent. Well, I don't know that we have any species that's not data-moderate, and so, you know, I just -- I'm having a hard time getting my arms wrapped around where did we come up with 40, or how did 40 become the default, or greater than 40? Why not greater than 36.3?

You know, I mean, this is science. Nothing in science falls out on an even number like that, and so I just think that we've got to be really careful. The ramifications are too important to just pick a number like that and say we're going to go with it, and we're going to go with it because that's what they're doing the Pacific Northwest, in rockfish, or some other reason such as that, and so, you know, again, I've got a lot more to say, but I'm going to let some other people speak.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Tim. Jimmy, Carolyn and then Andy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. So we know that our -- A lot of our stocks, their life history characteristics are changing in regards to like productivity, and so why do we compare back to -- The SPR potential proxy back to a virgin population? That would be my first question.

DR. WALTER: So, when I say virgin there, it's really what the population would be if it was not fished. It's not going back in time, like the time series we see often from a stock assessment, and so it's just simply saying, if those fish were not fished, and it was like an old-growth forest, how many fish would be out there if there was no fishing at all, but it's not looking back in time, and so it's not the same as the time series graph we often see of like in our stock assessments.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Have you got more?

MR. HULL: Just one more question, please.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MR. HULL: So I'm trying to understand the importance of steepness in this SPR and the relationship of recruits to spawners. Does the steepness indicate if it's high, an increase in productivity. It's -- I'm not -- I just don't get it.

DR. WALTER: Yes, and so, the higher the steepness, the more productive the stock is. A low steepness would be associated with a fairly low-productivity stock. The relationship then -- There is a shape relationship with it. It's -- You know, I didn't go into it. It's derived in the Zhou et al. paper, but, basically what we're -- The higher SPR, SPR 50, would be associated with a lower value of steepness, and so you would say we need to keep more fish out there, because they're not as productive.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Yes, and I apologize if it sounds kind of rude, or nasty, but I'm going to say I'm a little bit disappointed with the fact that we requested with the focus being on our South Atlantic species. This is basically the same presentation the SSC saw, and so I don't see what we have for new information that we didn't already have in here from Marcel back in December, and so I'm a little bit kind of disappointed with that part of it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, that's part of the reason why I was suggesting that Luiz could come and talk about some of our state species, at the meeting in June that's in Florida, because we've got some specifics for state species, including things like mutton and yellowtail, and kind of how we derive that. I mean, just my opinion, based on life history parameters, I just think that the snappers don't necessarily need to be at 40 percent. Some of the groupers, yes, but I don't think -- Like Tim said, I don't think we should just default to that number. I think that it's really species-specific, but I've got more hands going up. I have Andy, Robert, and then back to Tim.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and a few points and a question. So thanks, John, for the presentation. I think it's informative. I think there's still a lot of questions, obviously, around the table, and other things that we need to consider for management. A couple of points have been made, and so one, I think I would emphasize, and we're not making changes to be like Pacific rockfish, right, and so the body of science, and information, is evolving over time, and I think that's what John and others are showing.

The Gulf Council has been wrestling with this issue for a little while as well, and, like Jessica just said, there's some group or species that, you know, it's increasing to 40 percent. My takeaway from this -- I guess there's really two main takeaways. One is this needs to be species-specific. We need to, obviously, take that into consideration, in terms of the life history and biology of the species, and other factors.

I think the other takeaway is the need for, you know, what I'll call dynamic reference points, and I know John Carmichael and I have talked about that. I think you'll see, in my presentation later today with red snapper, some of the considerations we've done for the secretarial amendment.

My question to you, John, and so the 40 to 45 percent default really is based on the scientific literature, from what I'm understanding. How can we, as managers, kind of better understand kind of the uncertainty around that recommendation, especially when it comes to specific species and stock assessments, so that we kind of know the full depth and breadth of that proxy determination, the recommendation that's coming from the science, you know, what the range is potentially around that for similar species, because I feel like that will help us then inform, you know, what the appropriate benchmarks and management is, and align, or not align, with the science, depending on, obviously, the input and feedback we get from the scientists.

DR. WALTER: Thanks, Andy. It's a great question. I think, to get to Carolyn's point, and her disappointment, which I understand, is that you would then pull out the stocks, or the species, that are Southeast-specific, from like the RAM Myers database, and say what do those actually suggest? What does the SPR look like for the species that we have estimated stock-recruitment relationship for in this region, and that's probably the follow-on.

Maybe that was what was requested, really, and to say so, okay, we've estimated the stock-recruitment relationship for, I think, yellowedge grouper in the Gulf of Mexico, and what is the SPR that corresponds from that, because that's really what we're trying to get at, and probably that's the analysis that would be a good follow-on, to say what's the uncertainty for species that we're dealing with in our region.

Then the second part of the uncertainty is that there's uncertainty -- If you derive it from the life history parameters, there is inherent uncertainty in those, and so, rather than having a fixed SPR, perhaps actually that is something that's unknown, and it has uncertainty around it, and I think that's a fruitful area of inquiry, and I think the people pulled away from this presentation that 40 to 45 percent being a default.

Now, I will say that that is the recommendation coming from this council's SSC, but I think there also is the recommendation, coming from the national guidance, that it be evaluated on a stock-specific basis at each stock assessment, and I think that's a key takeaway here, and so I would say, rather than fearing the 40 to 45, it's more like, well, let's look at it specifically to the stocks we've got here and reflect that back to your own SSC. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: John, just to make sure I understand, this model doesn't take into account any other mortality events other than fishing, and is that correct?

DR. WALTER: Natural mortality is a big factor in it, and so mortality due to predation.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. John, I appreciate you going over this presentation again for us. I have two questions, and so, when you look at the South Atlantic in particular, selectivity is sort of a big influence on our SPR percentages, when we're talking about the interaction with

our younger fish in our shallower waters. To what level do you think that we might be overusing selectivity in the South Atlantic? I'll let you do that one, and then I'll come back for my second one.

DR. WALTER: I'm not quite sure what you mean by overusing it. Is it its influence too high? Well, it is in the calculation of it, and so it is influential. Probably more important is the uncertainty in selectivity is not passed to it, and so we often debate whether selectivity -- How domed it might be, how much cryptic biomass might be there, and each of those -- Depending on what the overall selectivity averaged across the entire fishery is, it's going to give you a different rate of fishing at a certain SPR.

That uncertainty is certainly something that probably would be better actually considered in whatever the proxy is, and so that's probably one of those fair points that is not currently done, because it takes the selectivities, as estimated by the stock assessment, and says that is -- But, as we see, we often do sensitivity runs, and we get different outcomes, depending on what we assume for selectivity when it's not well-estimated. Thanks.

MS. DUKES: Thanks. Sorry, and can I have one --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead. Sorry.

MS. DUKES: I wanted to go back to this idea, and I appreciate Jimmy bringing it up, this idea of virgin stocks, and you said it's referencing the stock as if it was not fished. Referencing the stock as if it was not fished today, right now, based on biomass, and I guess, you know, we talk about the dynamics of it, and I just want to make sure that I'm understanding the utility of the word, or the definition, of "virgin stocks" and how that plays into how you're coming up with that virgin stock value for that biomass right now.

DR. WALTER: It's -- Yes, it's for this stock that's here right now, and, if you took all the animals that you had right now, and you just turned fishing off, and you just projected them in the future, until they were an old-growth forest, that would be that calculation for the biomass at equilibrium, or virgin, conditions, but it's not doing that in a time series perspective of assuming that the stock was at virgin conditions in say 1950.

These are calculations that are independent of a stock-recruitment relationship, to get the SPR, and so it doesn't -- It's not the same as the benchmarks that we would base on assuming that the stock like maybe in 1950 was virgin, which is a strong assumption. I think that's one of the criticisms about using benchmarks that are stationary, or constant, which gets to should we be reevaluating what the productivity of the stock is, if it has changed over time, and maybe a stock is more or less productive than we thought at the start of the time series of our data. I could go into why we make that assumption, generally, of a starting condition being at virgin before fishing, if people want, but that's sort of another topic. Thanks. I'll let you go to the next question.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy, did you have more? Okay. Back to Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. Yes, and one other thing I kind of was struggling to get my arms around is, when I looked at one of -- The chart that showed the age of the fish at the different proxies, and I think the 30 percent, the age of the fish caught, if we can go back to that slide.

Yes, the mean age of catch at 35 percent was 3.1, and, at 40 percent, it's 3.4, and so you're talking about of couple months, what, three months, or four months, of time, and so, when you think of that, over a fishing season, we're talking about differences that happen in real time, which means then you have to take into account what your gear was, right, and so do these -- Are we taking into account whether or not you're using a pot, a hook-and-line, one single hook, or is it a bottom longline? Is it a longline? I mean, so, in my mind, those three months have a lot to do with what your fish -- What kind of gear you're fishing with, and so there's not -- You know, that, to me, has to play into it, what -- The difference in gear that's being used, to look at this properly. Is that being done?

DR. WALTER: We would assume the gear, the combination of gears and fleets, that happened at the end of the -- Basically the last years of the stock assessment, and so, if there was a combination of traps and longlines and handlines and recreational fishing, that would be factored into the estimated overall selectivity of the fishery, that it would select fish at a certain age, and that that would be constant, for the purposes of this calculation.

We're not assuming that there's a change in that, for this calculation. We're just saying what if you fished it at 30 percent, 35, or 40, and what would be the mean age, and what would be the mean length of the catch, but, if the council were to put in some sort of a change, you would actually get changes in this calculation, because you get changes in selectivity, potentially changes, or reductions, in discards, and so you might get more yield out of it, et cetera.

So, as you make a management change, you could affect this, or improve it, one way or the other, in terms of getting more yield out of it, or allowing more fish to spawn, but, again, we're assuming, basically, because, for lack of anything else, that things are the same way they were in the last usually about two or three years of the stock assessment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thanks, and that was very helpful. So, having said that, that means that, looking at this chart, then, using that gear, this chart is alluding to that the difference between overfishing and not overfishing, based on a 35, or a 40, or somewhere in between there, depending on how that number, that exact number, falls out, is the difference between a fish that is basically three months older than it was, and so, within three months, a fishery can go from not overfished to overfishing, based on an SPR, and would that be a correct statement?

DR. WALTER: Well, probably a bit more easier to interpret would be the biomass that would be there, and, in one case, you would have a lot more biomass, that B over B_0 there, in an overfished versus -- I mean, let's say it was $F_{SPR} 30$, and you would have a biomass of 0.39, and, if your biomass was less than that, you would be overfished.

If it went up all the way to 40, your biomass would have to be at 0.48, or 48 percent, of the biomass you would get at virgin to not be overfished, and so you would have a lot more fish out there, and so -- But, yes, they would -- The ones you would catch would be older. It's not quite the same that it would be a three months' difference in the status determination. It would be much more that there's either more or less biomass, relative to the biomass that supports BMSY.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and just a quick follow-up, but that goes back to that based on that virgin stock status. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Thanks. This was an awfully technical presentation. I kind of -- You know, Carolyn said this was given to the SSC, who is a very technical group. I think Jessica had suggested Luiz, who maybe can make it a little less technical. It really -- I kind of had a hard time following it, and so like on -- These are just some questions I had, just to better understand this.

On 7, on Slide 7, where you went through the histories, I did not understand Bullet 4, and basically Bullet 5, when you're saying that the SPR 40 percent is too aggressive, and so some need 50, or 60, and I would have thought this would have been flipped the other way, and so are you really talking about -- Is the F-rate too aggressive for 40 percent, since, as your SPR goes up, your F rate goes down, and so is that -- I don't understand how that's aggressive, unless you're talking about the F rate, and so can you explain that a little bit more for me, please?

DR. WALTER: Chair, you're exactly right. It's the F, and so, just thinking about it, F SPR is much more aggressive, F SPR 40, than F SPR 50, or 60, and so you got it right your first time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: John, I'm trying to, I think, pull some of the conversation together, and so would you agree that higher proxies make the stock more resilient, but, obviously, lower the yield levels?

DR. WALTER: No, because the maximum -- If it's the right proxy for FMSY, it's the maximum yield.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, but you can achieve maximum yield based on specification of several different proxies, right? The hard part is we don't know truly what MSY is, and so we're having to select a proxy, and, without knowing truly what that value is, we're using the best scientific information available to approximate that, correct?

DR. WALTER: Correct.

MR. STRELCHECK: Okay, and so I think one of the things that resonated with me, in terms of your comments, as well as what Jessica was saying, is kind of the State of Florida is looking at this maybe with a little bit more flexibility, and I'll let Jessica respond, but, you know, the State of Florida does not have a mandate to maximize sustainable yield, right?

I also would argue that, when we're looking at MSY, the choice of a proxy can really matter with regard to the sector itself, right, and the benefits that provides that individual sector, and so, stability, size of the quota, and harvest rates for commercial, would be important for maximum sustainable yield. The recreational sector, we often hear, is access opportunity fishing, right, and

so does the studies that have been conducted kind of look at these mixed-use fisheries, and are there recommendations for setting SPR at different levels, based on mixed-use fisheries?

DR. WALTER: No. Really, the mixed-use fisheries are kind of very unique to this region, in terms of the importance of recreational fishing, and so I think most of these studies have really focused on fisheries that are primarily commercial-based, and haven't considered that – I'll try to put it in simple terms, that maybe the recreational fishery wants a trophy fishery, and wants big, large fish out there, which would -- A higher SPR means that more trophy fish are in the population, and that might be a benefit to certain user groups. It's certainly in that concept of like freshwater fishing for trophy fish, or quality bass management, and that is something that's considered. Thanks.

MR. STRELCHECK: Then last question, and choice of an SPR proxy, and so I think a lot of people are getting hung up, around the table, with concerns about how a less aggressive proxy would reduce yield, at least in the short-term. I'll ask a loaded question, but I guess, in my view, yes, that's a concern, but is that a major concern, relative to the amount of yield that we're losing from other factors, such as discards in these fisheries? I feel like discards and other losses in yield are affecting our actual landings levels far more so than the choice of a proxy, but I'll let you weigh-in on that.

DR. WALTER: I think you're probably correct, and I go back to the 2014 paper on the commercial growth potential that we had in the snapper grouper, I think the commercial committee, and said where is the opportunity for growth, and it's probably not in the SPR proxy decision. It is probably in converting those dead discards into retained catch somehow, and so I think your answer I would probably say is correct, Andy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, just to answer some of your other questions, the examples I gave were on redfish and snook, and so both non-commercial species, but we also talk about it relative to the stock assessments that FWRI is running on behalf of the councils, like yellowtail, mutton, et cetera, and so we're not just developing these SPRs just for recreationally-important species, but, yes, and so I guess I would say maybe having Luiz come, and maybe giving a little bit less technical presentation, and kind of talking about how we do it, because we're using that flexibility, on some of those state-managed species, to think about –

You were kind of getting at this, Andy, and John about like do what are anglers want, and, you, know, do they want to see more bigger fish, or do they want more encounters of fish, say in a slot, over the slot, et cetera, and so we're kind of looking at it relative to those types of things, but we're not just doing that for species that are recreational only with no harvest.

We're looking at it for a number of different stocks, whether it's flounder or what have you, and so having Luiz come and talk about this, you know, might be able to make it a little bit less technical and kind of share how we talk about it at the staff level, and then how we present that information to our commissioners, and they get to help make some of these decisions, kind of like the council would, and so it might be helpful. Tim, and then back to Andy.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Andy brought up a good point about, you know, the discards and that's -- I go back to that's exactly what happens with getting the SPR proxy wrong. I mean, that's exactly part of the problem with the discards. You get the SPR wrong, and that drops

-- The ramifications are you have a lower ACL, and you have a shorter season, and you end up with more discards, and so getting that proxy wrong increases discards, in my mind. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Back to Andy, and then Charlie.

MR. STRELCHECK: I wanted to just support, obviously what you're suggesting with Luiz coming to the council meeting in June. I think a couple of thoughts there. One, it would be good, I think, to not just have Florida's perspective, and if we could pull in, obviously, any perspective from how other states might be dealing with this for assessed species, to the extent you assess certain stocks in your state waters.

I think the other thing that you're pointing out, Jessica, is there are some important fundamental differences with regard to just the fisheries we're talking about, whether they're solely recreational, release mortality rates, you know, and so making sure that, when we talk about this, that there's kind of that comparative analysis between state water fisheries, federal water fisheries, the goals and objectives we're trying to achieve with, obviously, these benchmarks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. I was taking some notes on that. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. John, you talked about, if I remember, because it's been a long conversation, and very enlightening, and thank you, and I think you said SPR for Gulf red snapper was 26 percent, and then you had to kind of figure in what the shrimpers were taking out of the population, and so I am -- Is that making the SPR go up, or down, and I'm trying to -- What I'm trying to do is -- I don't really -- I'm not concerned with rockfish in the Pacific. That's cold water, and they grow slow.

The stuff down here, in warm water, they grow fast. I would be more inclined to say what are things like yellowtail doing, mutton doing, vermilion doing, you know, snappers in our world, at our growth rates, and what SPR is working, especially for species that we've been fishing a long time and are not overfished and not going into overfishing, and I think those SPR numbers may be an appropriate range, instead of looking at a big mean for stuff all over the world, and so could you explain a little --

I know Gulf red snapper is in a different environment than we are on this side, but I think there would be a lot of similarities, and, if we can pull some of those similarities, and use them, then it would be very useful, and so how would -- Obviously, the shrimpers are negatively affecting red snapper over there, and they're catching small fish, because they're pulling TEDs, and so the fish they're taking out are immature fish, and so could you expound on that just a little bit, please?

DR. WALTER: Yes. Sure. Basically, the 26 percent came because there was a lowest possible effort that that reduction that could be taken by still maintaining the shrimp fishery, and that was going to still kill a lot of red snapper as bycatch, and so they couldn't get a higher SPR, because there was this mortality from shrimping, and so this was seen as the highest SPR level you could get the stock to, but for shrimping.

If -- Probably, at the time, there might have been a push maybe for SPR 30, and that might be something, and it might be that the two stocks might have something similar, and that logic might

be something to carry over, and I think that's the logic that goes into SPR 30 for South Atlantic red snapper.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, thank you, and, like I say again, I'm interested in, you know, trying to put, you know, apples, even though different varieties of apples, kind of looking at -- I think we've been doing vermilion for a long time, and they've been doing pretty good. I'm hoping a regime shift or something doesn't hit us, but -- As far as the council picking the number, I would think that that would be an uncertainty that the council would -- I would think that would be a council -- We would listen to the SSC, but I would think that would be a council decision, and maybe the SSC could give us ranges, instead of this is the number.

Then the council could have an appetite on, all right, we really feel like this is a really productive fish, more productive than, you know, it's thought to be in an assessment or something, and so we feel like we could use a different SPR than, you know, a suggested SPR, and so I would -- I still think council -- That is in the range of how much uncertainty we want to have. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I just had a question, and so, staying on red snapper, Andy, or John, can you talk about the thought of the South Atlantic in that recent assessment and why you went with the 30 percent SPR? You know, we talked a little bit about the 26 percent in the Gulf, and can you talk about why that one here on the Atlantic and kind of what the thought process was that went into that?

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I'll -- I don't remember the history, you know, and so I would be hard-pressed to talk about it. What I will talk about this afternoon, with the secretarial amendment, is our proposal to change that proxy, at least in the short-term, and I'll explain the rationale why.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. I'll wait for that discussion. Other thoughts, or comments, for this discussion today? It sounds like that we're thinking about, at the Florida meeting, bringing in Luiz. I tried to take some notes on what everybody was saying on the different types of fisheries, focusing on South Atlantic fisheries. I heard, specifically, mutton, yellowtail, vermilion.

He could give examples on species that are pretty much recreational only, like redfish and snook. Redfish is also an escapement, but that's a whole other thing that you can get into. You all asked for maybe a less technical presentation. Anything else that I'm missing that you're wanting in this upcoming presentation? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: You had mentioned some information about surveying kind of what anglers' goals, or desires, were. I think that's important, you know, but, just generally speaking, I think people who are booking recreational snapper grouper trips aren't necessarily just going to look for trophies. They could go tarpon fish, or do something else, and they're going to look to put fish in the box, and so I think fishery abundance is something that I would suggest. I've heard a lot from it, and it's something I think I would like to understand.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'll add that to the list. Anything else for this presentation coming in June? If you think of something else later in the week, you can tell me when we get to the committee report. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I have an off-the-wall question. If we -- Let's say, and Carolyn looked it up, and I think vermilion were at 30 percent on our last assessment. Is there a way to project yields, if we change from 30 percent to 35 percent to 40 percent? Can we do that? Maybe that -- It might be an interest -- It could be a helpful discussion on, if we change it, what would we expect, and why? Just thinking.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, and then John.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, just clarifying question for you, Charlie. Are you talking about an incremental shift in the SPR proxy or seeing comparative projection runs with those different proxy levels?

MR. PHILLIPS: I would think a comparative run, but, if an incremental way is a way of looking at it, I'll look at almost anything.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, I mean, the assessment can run projections with different SPR benchmarks, right, and so that's easy to provide that comparison. If you -- The reason I was asking the clarifying question is, obviously, it was an incremental change, and like let's transition from 30 percent to 40 percent SPR over a period of years, and that could also be done, in terms of projecting yield levels.

MR. PHILLIPS: I just think it would be useful for the council to kind of have these possible scenarios, and so, anyway, thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

DR. WALTER: So I can see two ways to do that. One, you brought up the linkage between steepness and the SPR, and so probably the fairest way to do that is to use that functional shape and say, if SPR was this, it would translate to the steepness, and so it's essentially running the stock projection and projecting forward with the stock-recruitment relationship, with the corresponding steepness related to that, and then seeing what the long-term equilibrium yield would be, basically the MSY out of it. The short-term depends a lot on the short-term assumptions, but that could be done.

Where it's somewhat problematic is how one would then determine which one is the best proxy for MSY. You would have different answers. You might be able to say I like the one with higher yields, but how one would determine that that is a better and more scientifically-defensible proxy for MSY is where I guess I would say which one would be better, and there's a few ways to do it.

You know, you were really onto something with the long-term performance, because that is what we use to estimate MSY, is that, if the stock is staying fairly stable over a long-term, it's probably saying that that's something that's sustainable, and so that's how models are getting that, deriving that information, is saying that here's what has happened over the long-term.

Ideally, it gets some contrast at different fishing levels and says, if you fish it at this, how does it respond, and so you could say which is a better predictor of the things that we've seen, and then run that and say does that then predict the data that we eventually see, and so stop the assessment

ten years in the past and say which one predicts forward, and there are a number of ways to do that.

It is going to be a little problematic to be able to determine which is better, just simply getting three different sets of catch streams out of three different SPRs, and so I would ask the question of how would you determine which one is more defensible? Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I didn't say it was easy. I was just -- You know, if we're told that most everything should go to 40 percent, I would like to know why what we're doing now is not working and what we would expect somewhere else, and I think the fishermen are going to want to ask the same thing, and so -- I know there's -- Again, then it's going to come back to the council on like what do we do, and what do we -- What kind of risks do we want to take? Do we really believe we might get X, if we do Y, and then go from there, and I'm just trying to bring all the possibilities in that I possibly can and help us understand. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Charlie. So, John, based on this discussion, has offered some ideas, maybe for some things that council staff could come back with also in June. Do you want to speak to that, John?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and thank you, Jessica. I was thinking, you know, there's a lot of discussion about where our particular stocks fit in. I think the, you know, the scientific literature there is pretty strong about the various proxies, but the question I keep hearing is, well, where are our stocks? Where are our stocks within these studies that looked at a lot of stocks, you know, and we mentioned the difference in, you know, Pacific rockfish and cold water, and here we are in warm water, and those sort of things, and I think that's a really good question.

You know, we saw some information here, just on scamp, but we can certainly go through these things that have been assessed and report back to you on these are the SPR proxies that are in place, and here's some of the basic statistics about those proxies, and maybe here is what the estimate of steepness came out of the assessment, even if it wasn't considered acceptable and reliable at the time, and, you know, these are the stocks in which you saw in the bar graph figure, very few, that actually have an actual steepness estimate.

We can just, you know, basically summarize that for you for the assessed stocks, I think, to give you some of that perspective that you're looking for, and we may be able to -- Depending on how stuff is presented in some of these papers, maybe we can find a way to sort of say, if they've got like a big plot of all the stocks they looked at, you know, where are some of our stocks, and maybe circle them or something.

I think there's some simple things we can do to just kind of put this into perspective, and, you know, it may turn out, in a lot of cases, that you're like, yes, you know, SPR 40 makes a lot of sense for that stock.

The other thing Chip and I were talking a little bit about is maybe we can come up with some things that's sort of like, if this is going on within a stock, then maybe you want a higher SPR. If you have this situation, or that situation, you have a higher SPR. If you have this situation, maybe,

you know, you can justify a lower SPR. Just some ways to give you, I think, you know, some tools to make this decision and feel comfortable that you're -- That you're making the decision in terms of this, you know, important decision of where are you falling between 30 and 40, and also remembering, you know, we work in an era now of targets and limits, which, back in the early 1990s, wasn't the case.

You know, in some cases, they may have been looking at these SPR levels as being what you were actually trying to fish at. In many cases, if we're setting the limit at 40, then we would be trying to fish at 45 or 50, and so I think that's an important consideration too, when we interpret the history, and so we just want to try to help make this decision.

Then I thought, if you go to that bar chart, you really see why this is so critically important, and it's just not going away. If you look at that, you'll notice that only like fifteen stocks, out of what's maybe close to 200 here, actually have an estimated steepness, and ten of those are HMS stocks. You know, the vast majority are using a proxy, or a fixed steepness, which is a proxy.

Once you fix the steepness, you fix the SPR, because, as John said, there's a direct relationship between those two things, and so that's been an SSC debate quite often. It's like, well, you fixed the steepness, and you just made the determination of what the proxy is, and you'll see that a lot of our stocks, the little yellow ones, are there, and you can't even see the yellow that's estimated steepness for our species, and this is actually historically as well.

Remember John mentioned, and you guys discussed, the nonstationary aspects that today is not like yesterday situation, and, you know, if that's the case, and a lot of this relied on that long time series to try and get these estimates, well, if tomorrow is different, then I think, in the future, we're probably seeing even fewer stocks that have estimated steepness, and so, while that is the desire, you know, and I think Tim mentioned that earlier, that, yes, that's the desire, but I think the reality is we're going to be in this proxy world for a long time.

I think, you know, hearing from Luiz, and then letting us say -- You know, kind of say here's where you are now, in terms of your stocks, may help you kind of get your head around your current situation and help you make some of that decision.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, John. I tried to take some notes on all those points. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: John, that sounds really good. One other thing I'll throw out, and so you have a great ability to take technical information and boil them down into layman's terms, right, and, you know, based on some of the questions and things that were around the table, I would also suggest maybe even building in just kind of some -- Whether it's real or hypothetical examples of stock-recruitment relationships that we've been able to fit, the reason why we have all these proxies, the shotgun blast of stock-recruitment relationships, and the challenges we have with obviously estimating that, so that there's, I think, a stronger fundamental understanding around the table of the inherent challenges, and why we're having to set so many proxies, and, in an idealized world, right, what we would want to get to, and achieve, but why it's so hard to actually achieve that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I took some notes on that, too. This has been a great discussion. It sounds like we'll continue it at the next meeting. If you think of anything else relative to this topic,

you know, you can bring it up when we get to the committee report, but we'll try to summarize this in the committee report, of what we're suggesting coming back in June.

Anything else on this discussion before we break for lunch? All right. I am going to suggest, since we're ahead of schedule here, that, when we break for lunch, let's come back at 2:00 p.m.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Andy, the red snapper presentation is the next thing on the agenda, and that's been kind of advertised for like 2:30, and so we were thinking we don't really want to get into that particularly early, because I think there's a lot of interest.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, I mean, is it possible to come back at 1:30 and deal with an issue for an hour beforehand? Is there anything on the agenda we could work through?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Mike, is there something you think we could do? I mean, we have like black sea bass tomorrow. We were trying to be cognizant of people that might be listening, and planning to listen for some topics, and maybe try to avoid that, but, yes, and so we sort of thought about that, and we weren't really comfortable bringing black sea bass forward, necessarily.

MR. STRELCHECK: Maybe Amendment 46?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Maybe about an hour-and-a-half. The private recreational permit and education requirements was 10:15 to 11:30, and so about an hour for that. I guess, you know, that's the only thing that I see that we could come back at 1:30 and do, if you wish to.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and it sounds like we're saying at 1:30 we'll come back and talk about Amendment 46. Then we'll take the break and go into the secretarial amendment, wherever we are in that process.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right. At 2:30, hard stop.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Now we're back to 1:30. Thanks, everybody.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Come on back to the table. We're going to get started here. All right. We're going to get started here in Amendment 46, and the first thing that we're going to do is I'm going to go to Myra for an overview of the decision document.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Jessica. Welcome back, everybody. This amendment, you saw it last in December. There hasn't been a whole lot of work that we've done to it. There's still some tweaks that need to be done to the purpose and need and a couple of the actions, and so I'm going to linger on those things, and then I'm going to go over the remaining actions, kind of for context and so everybody remembers where we left off.

As you know, we've been developing this for quite some time. There are links to the various advisory panel meetings, and recall that you have two advisory panels that you've stood up to help put this amendment together. The summary reports for all of those meetings are linked in this decision document.

This amendment currently has five actions. The first one is to establish the private recreational permit for the snapper grouper fishery only. Action 2 would specify the species that would be covered by that permit. Action 3 would establish the required education component. Action 4 would specify the timing of when the required education component needs to be completed, and then, finally, Action 5 would establish an exemption to this federal permit and the education requirement based on whether the states can develop their own program.

Like I said, at this meeting, we'll review your guidance from December. We did have an IPT meeting, and so I'll go over the feedback from the IPT, and then we have the tentative timing up on your screen, is what we went over in December, and so we are intending to revise this after this meeting.

Our recommendation, the IPT's recommendation, would be that you delay approving this for public hearings until the June meeting, one of the reasons being that we still don't have the permit data that we need to advance this amendment, and so, if we do obtain those data before the June meeting, in time for us to run some of the analyses, you will be in a much better position to consider approving this for public hearings.

Here's a purpose and need. In December, you asked the IPT to adapt these statements to include planning for potential reporting and expansion to other FMPs sometime in the future and to further emphasize the intent to survey permit holders to enhance data collection at some point.

The IPT talked about this, and their recommendation was to not include it, and I'll scroll down to the recommendations in here. If you do that, then you'll have to build rationale for how the various actions meet that purpose and need, and so there would be a discrepancy there, and so what we were thinking is, if you want to include that in the discussion of the document, it will clarify that that is your intent, and we can just elaborate a little bit more on that, as opposed to including it in the purpose and need. The suggestion that's highlighted is an edit that the IPT is suggesting, and so, if you have any feedback, if you are okay with that suggestion, now is the time to talk about that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thoughts on the purpose and need statement? Thoughts about the guidance from the IPT regarding potential reporting and expansion to other FMPs? Any thoughts? Carolyn, and then Andy.

DR. BELCHER: I'm only going to tie this to, like I said, where Georgia currently is in the framework of what we're working on our permit. I think the highlighted area does help identify it a little bit clearer, because that's -- As we were working through the information sheet to help answer questions for the legislation, we were trying to get them to understand that we're really trying to understand this universe better right now.

Right now, this does nothing for obtaining additional data points, other than supplementing the current sampling frame for MRIP with state-funded additional trip intercepts, and so I think that highlight is a good thing.

Then, yes, the reporting part of it, I think, is the harder part, because I think that's still way down into the weeds of how you're going to get there. I mean, everybody has got a different opinion on

whether mandatory reporting is going to be the way to go, and that's still what species are you going to do, and that was part of our sale too, is that, like I said, we only have about eight species that are currently defined in Georgia law that are federal species.

That's how we were able to work through on that permit, because we do have those species listed, as opposed to just a straight -- A list of straight state species. We have those, and that's our starting list, and so, similar to how Florida has a core thirteen, we've got eight, and so -- They may overlap and they may not.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: With regard to the highlighted text, and maybe I'm thinking about this wrong, but I feel like we have a larger survey frame that we're essentially trying to refine, or narrow the scope of, in terms of targeting effort, right, and so I don't think increasing the survey frame is actually what we're accomplishing. We're really tailoring the survey frame, or modifying the survey frame, to better target snapper grouper anglers.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Myra is looking to edit that. Any other thoughts, or comments? All right. I don't see any additional hands, and I'm going to pass it back to Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you. So Action 1, a reminder that your preferred alternative is Alternative 3. It would require this federal permit for all private anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the EEZ. This is where we've gone back and forth, and should it be vessels, or should it be anglers.

In December, you requested that NMFS and the Office of Science and Technology work to provide more clarity on the survey methodology, and that has been requested, and that presentation is being put together for the June meeting, and so, unless you are considering changing a preferred, or giving us additional guidance, I don't have anything else for this particular action.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I asked this question when we started this process, and I'm afraid that we really need to take this into consideration. I would like to know what the service feels about this, as far as the magnitude of these federal permits with regard to vessels versus anglers.

If we're holding off until the permit data is available, holding off on this amendment, I'm just wondering how does the future workload for your agency play into this potential success of this amendment, and are there any strategies, pros or cons, for knowing that the magnitude of vessel permits would be much smaller than the magnitude of private angler permits?

MR. STRELCHECK: I appreciate the question, Amy, and I think some of the information we're planning on bringing back in June might shed some light on that, in terms of the utility of this, the ability to use the data in different ways. In terms of the, obviously, cost to the agency and the administrative burden, I don't think I'm really well prepared to talk about that, but I think that's something that's going to be critical, as this amendment develops, for us to carefully look at and understand the benefits and trade-offs, especially specifically to these two alternatives.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything else? All right. Back to you, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you. Action 2 specifies the species, and so this is where -- We talked about it this morning, that there needs to be some consistency. Again, you do have a preferred already selected, and I think, the way it's worded, it's going to be okay. I don't think we need to make any changes right now, but just be aware that the composition of that snapper grouper management unit is potentially going to be shifting, and so, if you leave it the way it is, I think we're fine.

There may be some -- You know, as far as the timing, you know, and, ideally, you would already have a modified snapper grouper FMU, but, since you don't, and we don't know exactly which amendment is going to be implemented, you know, relative to the other, I don't think there's much we can do.

Other alternatives that you have for consideration is to make it cover any species in the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, and I'll scroll down here in a minute to a table that shows what those species are. You also consider -- Are considering an alternative for it to be issued when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any deepwater species. Again, that's a subgroup of the snapper grouper FMU, and then, in December, you ask the IPT to draft another alternative that would tie it to the key stocks, and, again, here is something that the council hasn't yet defined, and so we have included it as an alternative, but, again, I think there need to be -- There needs to be more discussion on what those key stocks are going to be.

Here's the table. The Florida State Reef Fish Survey has thirteen species included. The deepwater species are marked over here, and the entire table includes all fifty-five species in the snapper grouper FMU.

Another thing to point out, and this is -- When you were discussing this amendment back in December, when you gave us guidance to review the snapper grouper complex, and figure out how to reduce the number of species in the FMU, and go through the evaluation, and so this is where all that was brought up in December. The question, I guess, is do you want to continue to include Alternative 5 for analysis, with the uncertainty that we still don't know what those key stocks are?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Before I go to Tim, so we're already changing the species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, which will ultimately affect the key stock list. I feel like the key stock list is also further from being defined, because we're still trying to define the fishery management unit, but it doesn't mean we can't include it here as an alternative, but I don't know how it can be analyzed, when we haven't defined key stocks, and so, Tim, you had your hand up?

MR. GRINER: Yes, and that's what I was going to say. I mean, we don't even -- We haven't really narrowed down what's in the unit yet. We just worked on that, and so I don't think -- I don't think how we could analyze, or even consider, an alternative that is based on something that's undefined, as it is right now, and so I would be in favor of removing that alternative.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Can you -- I don't have it up on mine. Can I look at the alternatives again? Sorry. Based on what we have here, I'm trying to think, and we may have the range, such that we could come back and, without the key stocks being its own alternative, be able to say we've now identified these as key stocks, and so these are the species we're going to do, and so I guess my question is I want to ensure that we're not limiting ourselves to not making the key stocks that list, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No, because I think what you're saying is it would be a subset of Alternative 2. Okay. Yes, and I agree with you that it seems like we're leaning towards taking it out, but I saw other hands. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and I'm trying to think as I talk, which is always scary. Be nice, Kerry, but yes, and key stocks may change over time, and so I don't have a problem leaving it in right now. It's not preferred, and we can always take it out later, and we may just say -- Instead of saying key stocks, we may just pick a list, you know, at the next meeting or something, and so I -- I don't have a problem leaving it in right now. It may need to go later, but -- We can't analyze something that we don't have, and so it's not going to take a lot of staff time, I don't think.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Myra.

MS. BROUWER: My concern with that, Charlie, would be how are we going to explain to the public what key stock -- What a key stock is, and, if we can't provide analyses for you guys to select a preferred, that includes some level of information on key stocks, then how are you going to approve that for public hearings, you know, but, if you guys are comfortable with that, that's fine.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie, then Robert.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and, to that point, sure. Then it works to go ahead and take it out, and keep it clean, and let you all do your work, and then, if we just decide a short list, at some point in time to put in later, then we'll put that list in.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Our work on the FMU is probably going to end up helping there. We might end up with a shorter list, Charlie, of the species, or the stocks, that we're actually interested in.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: This is a good conversation, and I agree with most everything that's been said. In the last couple minutes, I have been waffling back and forth to keep it in or keep it out. I think it's where we want to be, but it's not where we can analyze to be, right, and I do -- Myra's point was well taken. I worry, putting this out there, that the public may get a different idea of which way we're going, right, and we all know that we look at the complex, and it was a big part of our conversation this morning., was we look at it where we don't think that we should be technically, you know, permitting it for all these species, right, but, if we can't analyze it, we can't analyze it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, then Kerry.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I wanted to go back up to the alternatives, and just thinking with regard to the state exemption here, and so we referenced the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, but we heard, yesterday, or the day, before from Carolyn about a potential for a permit from Georgia. I'm just curious if now Georgia, with the species that you might have on your permit list, if those species are encompassed, and, obviously, it's not all of the Florida species, but do we need to be also thinking about that now, in terms of permitting differences between the states?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so how would you handle it? Would you handle it by removing Alternative 3? So can you think about how you would handle that conundrum, while I go to Kerry?

MS. MARHEFKA: Sorry. Andy has spurred me to think too, and I think what I'm struggling with is that, for me, right now, the remaining -- None of the remaining alternatives cover what I would have in my mind at the moment, unless you're talking about, again, a subset of Alternative 2, and so I wonder if you -- If Alternative 2 could simply be -- Lose Alternative 5 and reword Alternative 2 to say any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit or a subset that is determined on -- I don't know, because is that too vague, if we don't name what the subset is, but, you know, there's species I know that are missing, but, you know, there's a few species that I know that are of interest that aren't in the Florida survey. Just deepwater doesn't go far enough, and Alternative 2 is too many.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So let me try to reword what you're saying. You're saying don't use key stocks, but use some other subset term, yet to be defined subset of the FMU? Okay. I don't know how you would analyze it, and what do you tell the public?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I don't see why you couldn't just reword Alternative 2. Instead of any species, just to clarify it a little bit and say any and/or all species. That would let you know that it could be all of them, or it could be just some of them, or I don't know.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I feel like that should be two separate alternatives. Like one should be all of them, and then you should start subsetting those, because it's not very specific on what it is. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I don't know if it helps or not, but we were struggling with this, because, as we were trying to figure out how to help craft like what would this permit be for, trying to sell it as we're managing federal species, and it's really -- For us, it's, like I said, a landing permit for particular species, of which we have state legislation written for eight of them, and so the any species, or all species, I don't -- I mean, I feel like any species kind of lets it say there's a mixed bag of fifty-five that we've got right now, any of those you would have to have a permit for. If that list goes down, it still applies to any of those species. If it goes up, it's still any of those species. I mean, that's how I view it, but I don't know if other people have different --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. To try to summarize this discussion, it sounds like we're not putting in Alternative 5, and then we're keeping the other alternatives as-is. I'm just making sure, at least for now, that's where we are. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I feel -- I think Kerry is on the right track. I still think maybe a subset, or a subset species, and just put to be determined on it, and, even though we can't analyze it, it still gives us an option, and I don't know the timing on this, and how many times it's going to come back, that we might could make that subset, but I still would like to have that as a possible option, if possible.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I'm suggesting that maybe this whole subset thing goes into a new Alternative 5, because that's what we were trying to do with the key stocks, was make a subset, and so some sort of yet to be determined subset, but Chip came to the table. Let's go to Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I'm just trying to think of this through the expansion, right, and, if you don't have the full list of species in there, and we're trying to improve the estimates through MRIP, you might be in certain situations where it might not actually cover the species that you want covered, if you're only doing a subset, and so remember this is just to require a permit. It is not to require reporting, and so it's -- You're not increasing the reporting burden, but you would be -- More people would be required to have the permit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: I guess the only -- The problem I kind of keep coming back to is that it seems like we're just setting up a loophole. You know, I mean, you want to get a permit if you're going to fish for a certain species. Well, okay, and I'm not going to fish for that species, and so I don't need to permit, right, but it's going to be something that actually is in the snapper grouper fishery, and so they coexist with these others, but I don't have to have a permit, because that's not what I'm fishing for. So, you know, I don't know. It just seems odd that we're going to require a permit for one species that's in a complex, and not another one, and all you have to do is say I'm not fishing for that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree, and so -- But we're just trying to craft this alternative here. It's not the final thing, but it would be what this looks like before it goes out to the public. It sounds like staff is recommending we would see this again in June, because we're going to get more presentations, and hopefully more data, on the permits, et cetera, and so I'll take a few more hands, but, if you didn't notice, Myra crafted a new draft Alternative 5 that's more general there, and so it doesn't identify key stocks, so that you could possibly indicate to the public that we might subset it, and that's not saying we're going to, but we might subset it in some way. Tom, I think you had your hand up, and then Trish.

MR. ROLLER: I'm going to do what Charlie did and talk as I think, and so you never know what's going to come out. So I like draft Alternative 5, the new general language. I think, if we're going to put something forward like that, that's okay, but, going back to what Tim said, and Chip's comment, we don't -- I think we're looking at this a little bit too prescriptively.

It's not about reporting, necessarily. We also don't want to provide a loophole for this permit, where people say we removed tomtate from the complex, and so they just say, look, I'm just fishing for tomtates, right, and so, I think, as far as I'm concerned, per the discussion, having the permit for whatever that complex is may be more helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, and I think that's why that's our preferred thus far. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Would it help, since we really don't have key stocks defined at this point, just change that to assessed stocks?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We've had that --

MS. MURPHEY: We've had that discussion already? All right. Never mind.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Once again, maybe the whole new draft Alternative 5 tells the public that we might subset these species in some way, and we just don't know what that subset would look like or how it would be defined yet. Tim, did you have your hand up again?

MR. GRINER: Yes, I did, and it just brought up one more question, when we started talking about waiting on more information from the permit office. What exactly are we going to gather from the permit office in regard to this?

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and let me scroll down. So I think there was some confusion as to how the Office of Science and Technology would change the methodology of their survey to accommodate a federal permit. I don't know the details of, you know, all the components that go into that methodology, but, generally, my recollection is you guys were saying, well, you know, how exactly does that work, and how do the states funnel those data to OST, and what does it really look like, and, you know, we'll get to more discussion about that when we get to -- I believe it's Action 5, where it talks about the exemption, and so does that help, Tim?

MR. GRINER: Sort of. I'm just struggling as to why we wouldn't get this out to the public as fast as we possibly can. I mean, it seems, to me, that, if we're waiting on something like that, this is never going to get out anywhere. You know, I mean, we don't -- Like I said, we're kind of bogged down by -- If we keep -- It seems like we keep saying we're going to wait on something from the permit office, or the Office of Science and Technology, and I don't know that that's going to help the public any.

MS. BROUWER: I understand your confusion now. No, and so the permit information that we are still awaiting for is just, you know, the issues that have been going on at SERO, accessing the permit data in order to conduct analyses for the various amendments, and so as of -- I think, after August of 2021, we can't access those data, and so there's an incomplete time series for the analyses, and what we're talking about, this other presentation that was requested for June, is just additional information. It has nothing to do with the permits office. It's a whole other thing that you requested just to have more clarity as to how the states provide that information to the Office of Science and Technology to, you know, to conduct the survey, and so it's two different things.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I confused it. I apologize. Just more presentations coming, I guess. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I'm going to give up after this. I'm studying this, and, if we stay with Preferred 2, that's just going to be a permit to catch anything in snapper grouper, but, when we go to start doing reporting, then we can pick out of that what we want to report, and so, yes, I think that's probably going to be the cleanest way to do it. I think you were right to start with. I should have

known better, but it's your fault. I'll blame it on you, but, yes, and I agree with Tim. We don't need to make any loopholes, but, yes, and I don't have a need for a draft alternative. You know, if you're going to fish, get a permit, and you're done, and then we pick what we want to really survey.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so I think I just heard no new draft Alternative 5. Okay. I see heads nodding, yes, and that's where we are. Okay, so we don't want the new draft Alternative 5 either, and it sounds like we're sticking with our preferred. I'm going to pass it back to Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Sorry for the scrolling. Okay, and so taking us down to Action 3. This is the education component. Here, you don't have a preferred. Nothing has really changed. There were some edits that the IPT had recommended that you went over in December, and approved them, and so this is just showing you the cleaned-up version of that action, and I don't know that there's any action needed, unless, of course, if you were wanting to select a preferred at this time, but I realize we haven't put any analysis in front of you, and that is up to the committee.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any discussion here? All right.

MS. BROUWER: Action 4 specifies the timing of the education component requirement. Again, you have not selected a preferred. You see Alternatives 1 through 5, with various timing of upon each time the permit is issued, every other year, only upon the initial issuance, and then Alternative 5 is more of a compromise, the first time you get it and then each time that there are any updates to the education component.

Again, nothing has changed here, and, you know, still there is going to need to be some discussion, down the line, as to who would be responsible for putting together the education component, what would be the cost of such a program, and which agency would be responsible for it, and so all those discussions have not yet taken place.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are we good here with this? It looks like heads nodding yes.

MS. BROUWER: In Action 5, this is one that there will be a little bit more discussion. This is the one that would establish that exemption to the permit, if it were to be issued, upon the states starting similar programs and being exempted from the federal permit. So, for this one, initially back in December, we had Subalternatives 2a through 2d that had some language indicating the same entities, you know, specified in Action 1.

You had requested to think about whether "equivalent" or "comparable" would be better words to put in those subalternatives. The IPT discussed it, and there is no problem in referring back to a previous action, and so, as long as that entity is well-defined, it's okay for you to say the state permit is required for whatever entity Action 1 selected, and so that's what we've done here. We would have to be more careful in the discussion, restating what that entity is, but, for the time being, I think this wording captures what your intention was. I think, to explain it to the public, we would have to get a little more creative, but that's not a problem.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'll say again that it is going to be challenging. I'm not saying that we couldn't add a couple species to Florida, but adding all fifty-five species, and that having to go back to the legislature, I think is going to be challenging, and so I'm not suggesting the council pick different

preferreds, but just maybe there's another way to exempt a state that already has a program in place.

MS. BROUWER: Right, and so perhaps I can -- Sorry.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, Amy, and then Trish.

MS. MARHEFKA: Could there be some kind of wording, and this is really off the cuff, but some kind of wording that said, if a state doesn't have a certain percentage of total landings of that species, then it would be exempted? In other words, if you guys have yellowtail snapper, it's kind of crazy for South Carolina to have yellowtail snapper in the landings bear that out, and so, if you had something that really was based on the rationale for a state being exempted for that species, where that species was not prominent in those waters, then they were exempted, and we came up with whatever that number was, and does that make sense?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and I'm going to kind of echo what you said, how difficult this likely may be, not only in -- Perhaps in all of our states. The preferred entity, the preferred species list, it really does pigeonhole us, and we have to be exactly the same, and I think the whole conversation during our last meeting, with the word "equivalent" or "comparable" was to allow for a little bit of a dynamic approach with this. Having flexibility in mind, as states do and do not consider state-based data collections is really key here, and I don't -- I don't want this action to dictate exactly what a state may or may not have to do. I think having some ambiguity is helpful. I just don't know how to get there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I agree with what you're saying. I don't know how to get there either. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to throw this out here. I mean, at least for Florida -- Florida, their program is already certified, right, and. I mean, I was really surprised, at reading all the IPT comments, and how much bigger deal it turned out to be, but I was just -- When I was reading through this, and before, I guess what came to mind was Florida is certified, and exempt them. I mean, they're collecting data that's been certified by MRIP, and is useful data, and don't break something that's not broke, just because the rest of the state -- Or, you know, the rest of the -- You know what I mean. The rest of the states have it.

You know, as -- Maybe there should -- You know, thinking in the future, maybe there should be some flexibility, as far as what species, because North Carolina has got different species from other states, and so, you know, maybe, if we can build some flexibility in that, and just let Florida be grandfathered in, because they're already certified, and move on. I mean, maybe that's too simplistic, but that was how I was looking at this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Myra is taking some notes over here. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, one suggestion, and I'm not necessarily supportive or against it, right, is, you know, starting with the Florida Reef Fish Survey as kind of the list of species, and then working your way up the coast, to see, okay, what species would, you know, be most relevant for

Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and how is that list changed, and then it was Kerry, or someone else, and kind of *de minimis* status for some of those species that may not be harvested there, right?

You know, I have concerns about exempting, or removing, species because, you know, the whole point of this is, obviously, to improve data collection, and we've talked earlier about, well, I wasn't fishing for that species, and so, therefore, I didn't need a permit, but maybe we're actually closer than we think we are, in terms of that list of important species, and the few that aren't on Florida's list, or some that are on Florida's list that aren't important to the other states, we could understand that better through just a simple quick analysis.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Once again, Myra is taking some notes. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Maybe I'm -- Maybe I'm having a more naive understanding of what the preferreds were up above with -- Sorry, and not preferreds, but the alternatives relative to any. That doesn't say that you have to have any species that's on that list. It doesn't mean we have to identify all fifty-five. It's just that it applies to any of these species, and so the fact that you cover thirteen -- If anybody brings in the others, you're still going to be required under the federal permit to report those other species. It's just not Florida's. You're just not encompassing all --

I think it gets back to that how do you deal with the fact that the states may not be as comprehensive as the federal, because we're in the same conundrum you are. Whatever species above our eight that are identified, and three of them are actually not part of snapper grouper, we would have to add in to be -- We would have to bring in at least eight other species to be comparable with you, which would require legislative, but we're covering ours for right now.

Then, whatever the federal permit does, can we use ours in lieu, with the understanding that, if people are fishing in federal waters, you're going to be held to that higher expectation? I don't know, and, I mean, we've got some of that, I think, with reciprocity across the lines, right, with people landing whichever is more restrictive, or the language kind of shows up with some of that with other species, and I don't know -- Again, that's conscious train of thought, and not necessarily focused comments, but I just think about that. There's times that we've done that, where you're kind of held -- If you have this permit, then your expectation is this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I understand the concept. I was just imagining what it was going to be like when we're telling Florida anglers that you've got to do State Reef Fish Survey, plus you've got to get this additional permit, that maybe has a fee, and it maybe doesn't, and that you're giving them two separate lists of species, and, if you're going to get this bigger list, now you need a federal permit. If you get a smaller list, now you're doing all the requirements of State Reef Fish Survey, and I'm just trying to imagine kind of how this would play out. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Yes, and I guess that -- I get that part of that too, but I think it's the same -- For me, it's the same universe of people, for the most part, and so can that universe of license holders not be sent forward, with the understanding that, if you are fishing in federal waters, you have the understanding that these other species -- You're going to be -- When you're landing, you're held to the expectation that you're adhering to the federal. I don't know how to word that either. I just know that we've had those with some of the other rules before, with whichever is more stringent.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Maybe, and it's still -- I mean, I get the concept, but it still sounds like an additional burden for anglers that might not be needed, I guess, and like it's making it extra complicated. I don't know, and maybe we just come back and revisit this action. We keep doing that. We keep kicking the can to the next meeting, and the next meeting, and the next meeting but we're -- I don't think we're going to be approving this for public hearing today. We're talking about approving it after the June meeting for public hearing. Maybe we can come up with some more language for the next meeting. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Call me crazy, but since, the issue does seem to be around what species are available up and down the coast, why don't we just remove Subalternative 2b?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. My recollection of all this is it has developed because your technical AP recommended -- When the idea of an exemption first came up, Florida is the only one who has a program, and so we're looking at Florida's program, and, if you're going to be exempt, they recommended that, to exempt that state, you need all of these things.

This is my recollection. I may be wrong on this, but it should be in the record somewhere. It was the technical AP that provided a recommendation on these things, and so that's how the alternative was developed, based on that technical AP guidance that it needed to be the same entity, and you need to have the same species. It needed to -- Like the same period of time, and these other things, I think were council added, but I think the technical AP was same species and the same entity.

So, if the state licensed vessels, then the federal needed to license vessels, and they needed to license all the same species. Otherwise the data collection wasn't optimal, or something, and so that's why those things were put in there. It's ultimately the council's choice as to what you want to exempt, but I think you should look back at that technical AP guidance and at least be aware of what the implications are. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Just a question for you, Jessica. On the Florida side of it, so is that reef fish species -- Is that just for reporting, or is it permitting too? I mean, when you get that permit, is it just for those species, or is it for all the species?

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's just for those species. You're intending to use a vessel to target those species, and then we're getting reporting. We're doing dockside validation, et cetera, on those species, and so we're also doing things like we have an app that we're using for the Florida EFP, and we're considering, once we work the bugs out, maybe in the EFP, that maybe we use the reporting app for State Reef Fish Survey participants.

I mean, so there's a lot of different nuances, but we have dockside validation, and people are reporting on those particular species, and it indicates -- Like every press release, every discussion about these particular species, it indicates whether State Reef Fish Survey is needed in order to harvest those species, and those species are -- It's tied to statutory language, and so we would have to go back to the legislature to change it, and there's some challenges there, and so I don't know what to do about this action. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm not suggesting this is where we would eventually go, but is it worthwhile having a subalternative that gives a timeframe, and so, whatever version of a state can be exempt -- If the list doesn't match for five years, while they go through the legislative process, even if -- I know states don't want to do it, but I just don't know how to get -- Because this is the pickle we're in. You all were first, which is amazing, and kudos, but it, obviously, isn't a list that meets the needs of everywhere, and I don't know how to square this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay, and here's another idea, and so how about -- I guess we're going to leave Sub 2 in, which is fine, and how about we add another kind of broader subalternative to something like state permit is -- What am I trying to say? Okay, and something broader, that to the effect -- You guys can wordsmith this however, but, you know, species proposed by the state who has that permit, contingent on review and approval by the council, or something like that, so that there's some sort of checks and balances as well, and what's important, and so just trying -- Like Kerry, just trying to figure out how to square this, you know, for the future and the regional differences that we see.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Is this like ASMFC conservation equivalency? That's what I feel like we're trying to come up with here. It's like you say here's the Florida program, and, you know, can this suffice, I guess, but, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, I guess a couple of thoughts, right, and one is maybe we need to have a sidebar conversation with the state directors and the Fisheries Service and figure out what may or may not be palatable in terms of the, you know, exemption, and come back with some guidance in June.

The other point that was made, with regard to kind of timing, or kind of ability to meet the exemption requirements, we can, obviously, control the timing of implementation of a rulemaking as well, and indicate that we're going to defer, you know, implementation for some period of time, to allow compliance with this, right, but I feel like what we need is upfront knowing that where the states are going to land, whether or not there were that commitment on the frontend, and the ability and path forward to actually move forward with all the states, or some of the states, qualifying for that exemption request, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and Myra brought up something that I had been thinking of, about how the Saltwater Angler Registry works, where like you submit a document explaining how you do it, and what data that you can transmit, and how frequently you can transmit the data, and you're basically requesting an exemption for your state from the Saltwater Angler Registry, and so let me give an example.

Florida doesn't license people over sixty-five, and so there is a way that they can get a voluntary license, but they're not required, and so we submit a package. We are an exempt state, even though we are not requiring a license for people over sixty-five, and so that's why I liked where I think it was Trish was trying to come up with something there, and so Myra tried to capture, and, like for ASMFC, it would be considered like a conservation equivalency, but it's basically like a proposal

that the state would submit to figure out if what they're doing is adequate for this program, and so something like that, and we don't have to define the language here.

We're just telling staff that we're wanting them to consider another alternative here for this, for equivalency, but I liked Andy's idea too about having a conversation with the states, and so are we okay with this for now? I thought I saw at least one more hand up on this side of the room. Was it Andy, or was it Amy? Was there another hand up here? Amy.

MS. DUKES: It was me, but now I'm pondering Andy's thoughts, and so, I mean, we've got time on this. I think I just need to think on this a little bit more. I will go back to say, Shep, thank you for kind of reminding us about the AP's recommendations. It's been a while since we've really looked at those, and reviewed those, and so it might just be good food for thought for us to all look at those. Thanks.

MS. BROUWER: So I guess a question for the committee. Since we are already -- There's already a presentation that is coming to you in June, and would it be useful to get that beefed up a little bit more, with an update on how the Saltwater Angler Registry has been working, perhaps, or something that, you know, can make us all be kind of on the same page regarding that, the exemption, and how that process works, and has been working, and how the data -- You know, the whole thing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I like that. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: To that point, Myra, I know you sent a request after the December meeting, and we indicated we would defer until June, to bring back presentation. We have begun working with the Office of Science and Technology and the Science Center on this, and so, if there's anything you want to add to that request, let us know, and we'll be prepared for June.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so it's on there. That's apparently what NSAR is. I didn't recognize that acronym, National Saltwater Angler Registry. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Is it too bold to ask OST the probability of being able to add a state endorsement to the existing saltwater -- To NASR?

MS. MCCAWLEY: What do you mean add it?

MS. DUKES: So, if you're already getting your audience of saltwater anglers, and then you're adding an endorsement on top of that, could that be part of the NASR, almost kind of getting back to what you were talking about. I don't know if that's possible. I just -- No idea, and so it's almost doubling up on the NASR. Does that make sense? No? So one entity could have a state saltwater license, and that same entity could have a state endorsement license for snapper grouper species, and we provide both that information.

MS. BROUWER: Amy, did what I just typed kind of capture what you were getting at?

MS. DUKES: Yes, and I think it needs a little more. Let me -- Hold on. Speak to whether it is possible to add an endorsement to an existing angler in the NASR -- Yes, in the NASR data, to

demonstrate that that single angler has saltwater ability and potential ability for snapper grouper species, or something like that. I might be asking way too much.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I guess I have a question. So you're asking for the entity that gives you the exemption from that national database to be the same entity that would say whether you're exempt from South Atlantic Council's snapper grouper federal permit requirement. I'm just trying to --

MS. DUKES: Yes. Yes. That was a little bit better of a way to put that, and so yes. So, if we're already telling -- We're already telling NASR who our saltwater anglers are, and why could we not tell NASR who our saltwater anglers are who also have a state endorsement that would meet the exemption for this particular action?

MS. MCCAWLEY: But isn't it more than that? You're asking for those folks to also certify the state program, and I don't know that those are the right people.

MS. BROUWER: Would it be okay with the committee if we just worked on this a little bit more, and then maybe bring you something at Full Council that's a little bit better fleshed-out?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. Sounds good.

MS. DUKES: That would be appreciated. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We have given some guidance here. Staff is going to bring some items in here back to Full Council. Andy, are you ready to talk about the secretarial amendment? I believe that that was a time certain for 2:30. Are you ready to start that now?

MR. STRELCHECK: Three minutes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We'll break for three minutes, and then we'll come back and start this discussion.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Come on back to the table. We're going to get going here. What I think we're going to do is we're going to have Andy give us an update on the secretarial amendment to end overfishing of red snapper. He has a presentation, and then, Andy, are you good to, after the presentation, take questions from the council, before we go into public comment? Okay. I just wanted to make sure. I'm going to pass it over to you.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Jessica, and, before I get started, I'm actually going to pass it to Monica, and then I'll also say, in terms of the Q&A, we have John Walter here to answer science questions, and so, between the two of us, we'll try to address all your questions.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Yes, and I just wanted to briefly -- I know we've talked about this before, but I wanted to briefly tell the council what your options were in terms of the time period you had to comment on the secretarial action according to the Magnuson Act.

The Magnuson Act, in Section 3049(c), lays out a process when the service does a secretarial plan like this, and so the Amendment 59, which is the secretarial amendment -- There was a combined notice of availability and proposed rule that was published January 14, and that has a sixty-day comment period that goes to March 17, and section 304(c)(5) of the Magnuson Act has the council -- If you want to submit comments, you have to do it during that sixty-day comment period, and so, obviously, this meeting falls within that timeframe, which works out very well, and so the council would need to submit comments to the service on the secretarial actions by March 17.

The draft environmental impact statement was published on January 17. That had a forty-five-day comment period, which ended on March 3, which is Monday, and then the other date that's important to the Fisheries Service is -- That's the date of June 6 2024, which we've talked about before, and that is in a settlement agreement that the parties signed in the Tilman Gray, as we call it -- He's the first named plaintiff, and so we call it the Tilman Gray case, and, in that settlement agreement, we have -- By June 6, a final rule to stop overfishing of red snapper will be submitted to the Office of the Federal Register, by that date. The important date for you to remember, at this meeting, is to get your comments in, as a council, by March 17.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Questions? I see hands going up, and so first Tim, and then Robert.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Monica. Are the comments available anywhere to read as they come on, as they're submitted?

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Yes, and I think that NMFS staff could tell you where, but they're published, or they're publicly available, on probably regs.gov, but they can give you the exact location, and you can see what the comments are.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I would like to know a little more about the process through which this council would come -- Would prepare comments, and submit comments, to Secretarial Amendment 59. I don't know if that's a question for John, or who answers that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let's let Mike start.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so the plan is for this process to go through -- We were going to cover it in Other Business for the Snapper Grouper Committee, but, as you all ask your questions of Andy, and have any form of discussion going through, staff is going to take some notes, and there's going to be some time in Other Business, and then, ultimately, in Full Council, during the Snapper Grouper Committee portion of Full Council on Friday, for you all to prepare comments, and give those to staff, and then we'll compile those and develop a letter to be drafted. That will be reviewed by the chair before it gets submitted, but we will have time set aside within this meeting for the council to compile comments, and we'll follow-up with that, to get those in next week.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Mike. Any more questions on the process? All right. I'm going to pass it back to you, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Madam Chair, and so I'm going to give a very similar presentation to what we've provided during four public hearings thus far. I believe this is my eighth time giving the presentation, and so apologies if I stumble through some things. It's been a very productive process, a lot of good public input, not only through the public hearings in-person, but also, obviously, the comments that we're receiving online.

If you can go to the next slide, and so I think you all know we're here, but, for those that may not be familiar with this in the audience, back in July of 2021, we informed the council about overfishing occurring, and federal law, as you well know, requires that overfishing be ended immediately, within a reasonable time.

The council worked on an action, Framework Amendment 35, for a number of years, and ultimately decided to approve that, and then later rescinded it in 2023. In the meantime, as Monica has mentioned, we've had several lawsuits filed against the agency for failure to end overfishing, and, in August of last year, the Fisheries Service agreed to settle one of those lawsuits and develop this secretarial amendment, with a final rules agreed to for submission to the Federal Register by June 6 of 2025.

My staff, NOAA Fisheries, has been working actively on development of the environmental impact statement, secretarial amendment, and proposed rule since August of last year. This is the culmination of all that work, and we're sharing, obviously, our proposed rule with the council, as well as the public.

So,, in terms of the purpose, I already talked a little bit about that, in terms of the legal requirements, which are to end and prevent overfishing of South Atlantic red snapper. In addition to that, we're under a rebuilding plan. I'll talk about the progress that has been made, based on the new science, but we want to continue to maintain that adequate rebuilding progress, and then, additionally, focus on ways to reduce discards, and to provide additional fishing opportunities specific to red snapper, and further minimize bycatch, consistent with our mandates under federal law. Those are the purpose and need for this secretarial amendment, and, as I walk through it, obviously, you'll see kind of how we've focused on trying to accomplish that.

So, as we talked about, I believe at the December council meeting, we had a new stock assessment, or an updated stock assessment. We were informing you about overfishing occurring based on the SEDAR 73 red snapper assessment. That was completed in March of 2021. It included data through 2019 and indicated the stock was making rebuilding progress, but was overfished and undergoing overfishing.

With the secretarial amendment, we recognize that we had four or five years of time lag between when that assessment was completed, and, obviously, developing these management measures under the secretarial amendment, and so the Science Center worked to update the data in the stock assessment through 2023, and, based on the outcomes of that, which I'll go into greater detail here in a minute, the population is no longer overfished, and so that's a good news story, and is still rebuilding, and so we're just above our minimum stock size threshold target for overfished status, but it has continued to rebuild, based on the rebuilding plan that was put in place with 17A.

The stock is also determined to be undergoing overfishing, based on the council's overfishing threshold, and, as I alluded to this morning, we are proposing actually a modification to that overfishing threshold. The current threshold is F 30 percent SPR as the proxy.

I think all of you are familiar with these type of graphics, but, to get you oriented, the upper-left corner is the trend in spawning stock biomass for red snapper. We had a sharp decline in spawning stock biomass in the 1980s, and that leveled off in the 1990s, through the 2010 timeframe, and some small incremental increase over time, and then, around the time that we implemented the new rebuilding plan, the stock has been showing strong signs of recovery, with increasing spawning stock biomass for the last fourteen or fifteen years.

As I mentioned, we're at 76 percent of the biomass target. Our goal for overfished is to be above 75 percent, and so that's why it's no longer considered overfished, but until it gets to, obviously, our target, that red line, it would not be considered fully rebuilt.

On the right-hand side is fishing mortality relative to the fishing mortality benchmark, and, as you can tell, obviously, for the bulk of about three decades, fishing mortality was considerably higher than our benchmark. Then, in that 2009 or 2010 timeframe, when we implemented the rebuilding plan, we saw a sharp decline in fishing mortality, but it has been hovering above our benchmark now for well over a decade.

The challenge, and I think, you know, some of the frustration that we've heard, is, well, how can a stock be undergoing overfishing and still recovering and rebuilding, and, if you just click the slide one more time, in large part what has occurred is that the stock has been bolstered by really good recruitment, young fish entering the fishery.

You can see that the recruitment, in the last decade, or decade-and-a-half, for most years, has been trending well above that kind of long-term average. Obviously, when you get back in time, it's just an estimate, but, when you get into the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000 timeframe, you can see that recruitment was considerably lower, in terms of fish that are recruiting to and entering the fishery, and so that has helped to bolster the stock, in addition to cuts in fishing mortality, which have led to this rebuilding progress, and so this is, in large part, also why we are looking at revising the overfishing definition in the short-term.

As you're familiar with, we have a number of fishery-independent indices of abundance that are collected annually. I believe there's now well over a thousand sampling locations up and down the east coast of the United States that are sampled for red snapper and other reef fish, or snapper grouper, species.

The chevron trap index and the video index have both shown strong upward increases in abundance since the rebuilding plan began, and are consistent, obviously, with the results of the assessment, but also fishermen's observations that red snapper are becoming more prevalent. You can also see, based on the heatmap on the right-hand side of the graphic, where red snapper are most prevalent, and abundant, with the areas in red, or orange, being the most abundant, followed by areas of less abundance, and so prominently, obviously, off of Georgia and northeast Florida.

Overfishing can be kind of complicated to explain and understand, and what does it actually mean, and this is data from the stock assessment for 2023, and so it indicates essentially the age

distribution that we estimate in the population. You can see that kind of ages-two to five are indicative of that high recruitment, young fish that are entering the fishery.

In fact, they're actually above our expected age structure associated with the fishing mortality target, but then, if you get into the older age classes, you start to see us fall behind that expected age structure that you would want to achieve with a fishing mortality target of F 30 percent SPR, and so that's essentially where we've been challenged, is that we have a lot of fish in the population, and they're very young.

We have seen an increase in some of these older fish, into the age-six through ten, eleven, twelve age class, but they are getting fished very hard, and a lot of them are being removed from the population, either through directed mortality or through discarding and release mortality.

So the challenge, and we've been asked a lot about, you know, how can a stock not be overfished and overfishing and still rebuilding? Well, the challenge, and what we've talked a lot about around this table, is dead discards, right, and they have been limiting our ability to increase catch limits, and essentially been resulting in foregone yield, right, and so, when you catch a fish, and have to release it, and then some portion of those die from release mortality, that takes away from the amount that you can then ultimately put into the landing pot, and quotas, and allow for additional catch.

We are challenged, obviously, with high amounts of recreational discards, that have been increasing, based on the rebuilding plan, with more encounters. I've been talking about, during the public hearings, because we have focused, obviously, on discard reduction areas off of northeast Florida, and, well, why is that the case, and why are they focused on the recreational sector.

Based on data, and information, from our stock assessment, 98 percent of the dead discards come from the recreational sector, and seven out of eight dead discards are estimated to come from Florida, and primarily northeast Florida, and so that has been, obviously, a focus of our work, in terms of where do you get the biggest bang for your buck, in terms of achieving discard reduction targets, while also meeting other goals and objectives for the plan.

Then I've been surprised, but I've had some really good conversations, Q&As, with anglers about the release mortality rates, and so they have questioned the release mortality rates in the lower-right-hand corner of this slide. What we have shared with them is that these, obviously, were vetted, and reviewed, as part of the Southeast Data Assessment and Review process.

They were estimated based on work of several of our state partners. They do include information with regard to descending device usage and factor in, obviously, the benefits of descending devices, but that has been certainly a topic of conversation we've been hearing about during the public hearings.

The other thing that we wanted to try to get out in front of, because we've been transparent, as an agency, with regard to our recreational catch estimates, and so, with the red snapper assessment, we primarily used state-based landings from Florida for the landed catch, with some supplementation from other states, but then the discard estimates, and some of the catch estimates, are driven by the Marine Recreational Information Program.

We shared with you, back in I think late 2023, that, based on some pilot studies, that those estimates could be biased high, by as much as 40 percent, based on the ordering of questions that people receive through their mail-based survey, and so, when the Science Center updated the stock assessment, we asked them to run some sensitivity runs, and so they ran some projections that looked at reducing those catch estimates by 20 or 40 percent.

At this point, we don't know what those values will be. We've conducted some more science and research, and that information will be emerging in the coming year, but what I can tell you, and what is hard to really see on this slide, is that the projection runs, and sensitivity runs, largely overlay the base model run, and that can be counterintuitive, but what it's indicating is essentially, if you lower the catch estimates, then the model, and information that goes into the assessment, estimates a smaller population size, as well as lower estimates of recruitment that are entering the population, but the biomass trends, the fishing mortality trends, remain largely the same. There are some differences, but it's hard to see, obviously, with the graphic here.

There's eight actions that we considered in the secretarial amendment. This is the most complicated, in terms of explanation to the public. We had, obviously, a good discussion this morning about FMSY proxies, and so you're a little bit more oriented, in terms of Alternative 1, but our current proxy for overfishing is FMSY or -- Excuse me. The current overfishing definition is F is greater than FMSY, or its proxy, which in this case is F 30 percent SPR.

When looking at the results of the stock assessment, and I'll share a graphic with you in the next slide, we recognize that I think there was more flexibility with regard to setting that proxy, and so we have redefined the overfishing definition to include essentially a more generic definition, or a reasonable proxy that's based on the best scientific information available, consistent with National Standard 2.

In the amendment, what we are proposing is that the proxy be equivalent to the fishing mortality rate that maintains the rebuilding plan over the next four years, through 2028, and so that would get us through the next stock assessment, and that is based on projections, and information, that we received from the Science Center that also factor in that recent average recruitment that we're seeing enter the fishery.

If this ultimately goes through as final rule, the stock would no longer be undergoing overfishing, but, in order to increase fishing opportunities, we would still have to reduce discards, in order to get catch levels up and allow for more recreational fishing days, and I'll go into that a little bit further.

A complicated graphic, but what I wanted to kind of emphasize here is so Alternative 1 is the no action. That's our current proxy. That's the blue line, and so, if we kept that as our proxy, we would have to essentially reduce fishing mortality much more than we're proposing in this amendment, and the outcome of that, obviously, beyond the social and economic consequences, would be that we would rebuild very quickly.

In fact, it would project that we would be rebuilt by 2027. Well, that's very inconsistent with the rebuilding plan that we've adopted, which says that our goal is to rebuild by 2044. Obviously, if we rebuild sooner than that, that's a win, but we didn't view the Alternative 1, the no action

alternative, as something that was kind of in alignment with balancing, obviously, social and economic goals, as well as our goals for preventing and ending overfishing.

With Preferred Alternative 2, the black line is essentially your rebuilding plan, right, and that was adopted in Amendment 17A, and so, under Preferred Alternative 2, we would essentially adopt an overfishing limit that allows us to maintain that rebuilding plan and set catch levels corresponding to achieving that rebuilding plan.

In reality, there's a third line, that's not on this graphic, which essentially would be the ABC, or ACL, level that we would be setting in this amendment, and that line would actually be running above that green and black line by a small amount, because it sets the ABC and catch limit below our overfishing limit, allowing for some scientific uncertainty.

The bottom line is our proxy would be to maintain the fishing mortality rate associated with the rebuilding plan through 2028, or when changed by the council, and then, because of re-establishing the definition for overfishing as a reasonable proxy, it would give you also flexibility then, in 2027, or 2028, whenever you change future regulations, to then modify that further based on the results of new science and information.

You're familiar, obviously, with acceptable biological catch levels. This is typically provided to you by your Scientific and Statistical Committee. Obviously, with the Fisheries Service completing the secretarial amendment, and the update assessment, this was guidance that was provided by us as best scientific information available through our Science Center.

We have a very old, antiquated ABC, that is no longer relevant, based on an old stock assessment, and so we don't see Alternative 1 as a viable alternative. Preferred Alternative 2 would set an ABC at 509,000 fish, and you can see how that split between landed fish and dead discards, and then Alternative 3 would set ABC at a lower amount, 464,000 fish, and so those are both based on projections from the assessment, one aligning with 90 percent of that fishing mortality that maintains the rebuilding plan and the other 80 percent of the fishing mortality that maintains the rebuilding plan.

The other thing I'll note on this slide is you can see the commensurate overfishing limit, and so we're buffering for the overfishing limit, to allow for uncertainty, such as, you know, whether or not there'll be changes in recruitment. If recruitment doesn't maintain kind of at high levels, and drops off, then we've accounted for some uncertainty in the science.

Lots of information here, and so I'm going to try to just kind of get you oriented, and not confused by the numbers, but Alternative 1 is status quo, and so the commercial sector lands approximately 125,000 pounds annually, or has a catch limit of 125,000 pounds annually. The recreational catch limit is a little less than 30,000 fish. Those are based on the council's allocation of 28 percent commercial and 72 percent recreational. We are not proposing any changes to the allocation in the secretarial amendment.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would set catch limits based on the ABC I just talked about, as well as the new scientific advice from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The differences in catch levels are dependent on the discard, dead discard, reduction that's achieved, and so we looked at a reduction of 16 percent, a reduction of 24 percent, and a reduction of 32 percent.

Preferred Alternative 3 is our recommended catch limit, and I guess, you know, what I've been sharing at public hearings is the bottom line is the commercial catch limit would be increased from 125,000 pounds to 346,000 pounds. The recreational catch limit would be increased from a little under 30,000 fish to 85,000 fish, and you can see what the equivalent poundage is for the recreational sector, and so about a little less than a threefold increase in the catch limits, but all of those are contingent on achieving a 24 percent reduction in dead discards.

I won't go through this slide in any detail. This is catch limits that are commensurate with that lower acceptable biological catch that is not our preferred alternative. All of these catch limits would be lower than also our preferred annual catch limit, but are also analyzed and considered as part of the secretarial amendment, and so we considered a wide range of options, but all of these would still have to achieve similar discard reductions. The main difference is these also hold catch levels lower, based on a lower fishing mortality target.

We've been asked a lot about then, well, what does this mean for the recreational season, and, despite, obviously, the threefold increase that I've talked about for the recreational catch limit, the season is still estimated to be five to nine days, and that's spread across three to five weekends, because we're proposing a change to the season structure, but why is it so short, right, and there's a lot of questions about that.

Well, we are estimating, based on data that we get from the state, from other surveys, that anywhere from about 10,000 to 19,000 fish are caught per day, and so, just doing the simple math, you can divide 85,000 by those amounts, and you can quickly see how we can catch up the recreational catch limit in a short period of time.

With that said, if the season, you know, stretches out, and effort starts relaxing a little bit, the potential for the season to be longer could be there, but we just don't have that information at this point, in terms of how the season would change, and catch rates would change, based on extension of the season to more days.

As many of you probably remember from last year, we had put, in the interim rule, a provision about safety-at-sea and small craft advisories. That was quite a challenge for us, and, literally three or four days before the season was opening, bad weather was setting up off of North Carolina, and northern South Carolina, and it ultimately impacted, obviously, fishing off of those states, and, you know, even potentially further south, and so we've carried this forward, but we've further adapted it to include reopening off of a specific South Atlantic state.

I've used, as an example during the public hearings, and let's say that Florida gets to fish all nine days for recreational, but North Carolina could only fish seven. Well, then, at some point after the season closes, we would come back and advise North Carolina that we're reopening for two days, and they would have, obviously, the two additional days to fish.

What we don't want to happen is people fishing in unsafe conditions during small craft advisories or bad weather events, and so we have to have some metric to, obviously, make that determination. We recognize that weather can be good in certain areas of the coast, and bad in others, and so it's our attempt to, obviously, provide a little more flexibility with regard to season structure.

Putting all this together, we have an overfishing limit, and we account for the scientific uncertainty to set the ABC, and then we're setting the ACL equal to or, in this case, slightly less than the ABC, at 500,000 fish, and, as I mentioned, the ACL, and ultimately how much is going toward landed catch, versus discards, would be contingent on any sort of discard reductions we achieve.

I have six slides that go through the various subalternatives in Action 4. To avoid just repeating myself, I'll talk about the details on this slide and then just try to orient everyone to the differences when I go through the next five slides.

We looked at two different types of ways of reducing discards. One was time-based, and the other was area-based, right, and we're calling these discard reduction areas. I might inadvertently refer to them as closures, but they are not, in our view, closures, because we are allowing snapper grouper diving and spearfishing to occur in them, and we're allowing trolling for pelagics. You know, what we are prohibiting is hook-and-line harvest, possession of snapper grouper, as well as anyone trying to, obviously, target, possess, harvest those species using trolling gear, right, and so those are the kind of similar requirements that apply to all of the six subalternatives I'll be talking about.

The differences are either then the extent of the spatial areas that we are considering or the timeframes that we are considering, and so this is Subalternative 2a. It would include two year-round discard reduction areas between eighty and 150 feet depth. One would be off of Jacksonville, and the other would be off of Cape Canaveral, and we've tried to, obviously, make them polygons, for simplicity of both enforcement and, you know, recreational anglers understanding the boundaries, and so that would achieve a 16 percent reduction in dead discards.

A similar reduction in dead discards is the prior alternative. The difference here is, instead of doing the year-round areas, we would be doing a time-based discard reduction season from January 1 to February 14. This would apply between Cape Canaveral, 28 degrees north, and the Florida-Georgia border, and then, as I mentioned on the prior slides, all of the same restrictions, as well as access, would apply to this area.

I should have noted that commercial fishing would also be allowed in these areas. As I mentioned earlier, a small fraction of the overall dead discards occurs from commercial fishing, and we are looking at other alternatives in this amendment in order to address commercial dead discards.

Now you can see we step up to a 24 percent reduction in dead discards. The same areas as I showed in Subalternative 2a, but now we've added a third area between Jacksonville and Cape Canaveral off of St. Augustine, and so these would be year-round between eighty and 150 feet. We've had to, obviously, approximate the depth range, and so it will encompass some depths that are shallower than eighty feet, and some depths that, obviously, are potentially greater than 150 feet.

This is an identical area to what I showed in Subalternative 2b, but it would achieve a 24 percent reduction, and so this would be a time-based discard reduction area, or season, excuse me, starting December 1 and running through the end of February each year, and I'll pause for a second.

Then the last sequence of slides here, and so, as we've, you know, been kind of walking through this, now we've incrementally stepped up to a 32 percent reduction. We have established four

year-round discard reduction areas. This one, these would be actually between seventy and 110 feet, and so we're actually moving them shallower, closer to shore, as well as limiting the outward boundary of them to a shallower depth. There would be the Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Cape Canaveral areas, but then a fourth area would be also added off of Daytona Beach.

Action 4B, this is a two-month discard reduction season, plus a year-round discard reduction area off of Jacksonville. This would achieve a 32 percent reduction, and so this is coast-wide from Key West to North Carolina. This is not our preferred alternative, but it would achieve that 32 percent production in dead discards.

We also, and I haven't talked about this, maybe other than what's in the amendment, but we did look at some kind of depth-based areas that could extend kind of up and down the coastline, that were kind of more refined and specific to this. We ultimately moved those to Considered but Rejected. It's really challenging to kind of draw those depth contours, given the variability in depth along the coastline.

All right, and so I have four more actions to go through, and then we'll kind of wrap up with some public comments and information, and then open it up to Q&A, and so, for the commercial trip limit, the current trip limit is seventy-five pounds gutted weight. Based on the commercial ACL that we're proposing, 346,000 pounds, we would estimate that the season would be 146 days under the status quo trip limit.

Obviously, it would be a much smaller, or shorter, season if we didn't increase the catch limit by that amount. In order to help reduce discards, and increase economic efficiency in the commercial sector, we're proposing an increase in the commercial trip limit to 150 pounds. That would, obviously, shorten the season, because the catch limit would be met faster, based on that higher trip limit, but our attempt here is to try to balance, obviously, the accessibility and market of having, you know, red snapper open for a longer period of time, as well as the benefits of having higher harvest levels to reduce discards of red snapper that they're encountering on longer snapper grouper trips, and so that's our proposed trip limit.

We also have proposed changing the start date of the commercial fishing season. Right now, it opens the second Monday in July. The preferred alternative would shift the season start date to May 1, beginning in 2026, and the reason we can't do it this year, if the rule goes forward, is recall that we would be essentially filing the rule with the Federal Register in June of this year, and so it's not feasible to open prior to the time we're filing the final rule.

We also considered a June 1 start date for the commercial season, but the goal here, once again, is to try to help with some of the discards in the fishery, by aligning the start date with the opening of the shallow-water grouper season, which is closed from January 1 to April 30.

For the recreational season, a little more complicated, and so, because of the timing of the rule, we can potentially make changes to this year's season. What we have proposed is changing from the second Friday in July to the second Saturday in July, and so, rather than having three-day weekends, going to two-day weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, beginning this year, and then shifting the season forward a month next year.

This year's season would start the second Saturday in July, and next year's season would start the second Saturday in June, with two-day weekends, and, as I mentioned earlier, based on the catch limits, based on our projected landings rates, we would estimate that the season would go across three to five weekends, during July or June, with this adjustment.

We've talked a lot about the innovation that's happening, thanks to our state partners and Mote Marine Lab. As you're well aware, we have these exempted fishing permits that have been issued, that Jessica McCawley has given us updates on, and so those are ongoing. We also awarded, obviously, several other projects that didn't require exempted fishing permits.

We view this as a way to continue to move the ball forward and make changes in a positive fashion for management of this fishery, and other fisheries for that matter, and so we wanted to continue the success of that, by building a more structured process for experimental studies. I won't go through all of the text on this slide, but I think the two main takeaways that I've emphasized during public hearings, and one is that the current process is very ad hoc, right, and so we get exempted fishing permit requests throughout the year.

It's not very structured, and so what we're trying to do, with this proposal, is essentially provide that more structured process, that would be on a fixed schedule, so that we could get exempted fishing permit requests in, and we could coordinate that, in terms of things we need to do to, obviously, notice and publish those, but also coordinate with you, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

The fish that would be authorized for that, what we're proposing is essentially allowing up to 9,000 fish, which would be the difference between the acceptable biological catch and the overall annual catch limit that is proposed the amendment right now, and so, under the experimental studies that we've been running over the past year, I think we've authorized about a little over 12,000 fish total, and so two takeaways, creating a process and allowing for some small number of fish that would be authorized as part of that process.

Then the last action is more of an administrative action for catch accounting and monitoring, but proposing to shift the fishing year from January 1 through December 31, to align with that commercial proposed start date, as well as closer to the start date of the recreational season, and so our preferred alternative is May 1 to April 30. We also considered a June 1 to May 31 opening, to align with the recreational season, as well as the non-preferred alternative June 1 start date for the commercial sector.

This, obviously, hasn't been shared at public hearings, but I did want you to kind of get an idea of what comments we've received. We do have a high-level summary on the next slide, but public hearings were well attended. I will say the registered attendees don't equate to, obviously, the total number of people that attended. There were certainly a number of people that chose not to sign-in.

You can also see there's a pretty substantial difference between the number of people that attended and the number of people that actually gave public comments at the hearings. That doesn't mean that we haven't heard from the other people. We did, and I'll share with you in this presentation, share with people ways that they can provide public comments that are beyond the scope of just

the in-person public hearings, and tonight, obviously, starting at 5:00, or after your public comment wraps up, we'll be collecting additional public comments from the public.

We've also received 379 public comments on the notice of availability and proposed rule and eleven comments on the draft environmental impact statement, and Rick and I were talking, just before this presentation, about sharing that link, so that you can go online and see those public comments for yourself, if you want to review them.

I'll caveat this by saying, you know, we have a lot of comments that we're going through. This is just kind of a high-level synopsis. It is not intended to capture every idea and comment and piece of input that we received. We are required, obviously, to address all of the comments in our rulemaking, and are working to, obviously, do that. There has been, obviously, a lot of opposition to the three-month closure, and I'm using their words, closure, and concerns about adverse impacts to businesses, concerns about shifts in effort to shallow waters. In this instance, state waters.

There's also been some support for what we've proposed. They've made comments like bottom fishing populations need help, right, and there's certainly been more opposition than support. I'll acknowledge that, but there have been some positive comments.

Other things that we've heard is just don't take action, and there's certainly a lot of people that believe that we should wait for the Great Red Snapper Count to wrap up, the new assessment to come online, before we move forward. Some of the headboats have asked for an exemption from the discard reduction areas.

We've had a lot of input, obviously, and feedback and concerns about the science, concerns about how discards are estimated, or overestimated, and the impacts of that, obviously, in kind of trusting or distrusting the scientific information that underpins, obviously, the management. We've heard some comments, obviously, about, you know, unfairness, and that the commercial sector should also take on some of the burden of, obviously, these regulations. We've heard obviously, you know, maybe not as big of closed areas, or, rather than the time-based areas, to go to the area-based management considerations.

Some things have been outside the scope of what we've been hearing, such as proposing implementing size limits, or a slot limit, and then a number of comments, I'll say, just on the start date structure of fishing seasons and changes to commercial trip limits. I think we've heard both commercial trip limits should be decreased and increased. We've heard some concerns about having the season for recreational during the summer months, when red snapper is spawning, and so a lot of different comments, obviously, but this kind of gives you, I think, a flavor of a lot of the feedback we've been receiving.

With each of the public hearings, we've given a similar presentation, and then followed that by almost an hour worth of questions and answers, and so a lot of good questions have been coming in from the public on, you know, what's been proposed.

I think I have just a few more slides, and then I'll open it up for questions, and so the bottom line is Amendment 59 ends and prevents overfishing. As I mentioned earlier, in terms of stock status, the stock is no longer overfished, but is rebuilding. The rule proposes the highest catch limits since the rebuilding plan began, a little less than a threefold increase, but those increases are contingent

on achieving a 24 percent reduction in dead discards through that discard reduction area off of northeast Florida.

We're also looking at ways to reduce commercial discards, through the trip limit increase and season start date, and then defining that process for experimental studies that I talked about to further test management strategies going forward in the future.

This is my last slide before questions, and so we've shared this same slide with the public, and so there's a number of ways that people can provide public comment, and so, if you're here tonight in the audience, and want to give public comment, make sure that you either come up to me, or one of my staff, and we'll be happy to put you on the list of people for public comment that will start after the council's public comment period.

You can also go online, to regulations.gov. That's where you can also see the comments that have been posted so far, and you can do it the old-fashioned way and write us a letter, if you want to, and so we don't get many of those anymore, but the QR code also brings you to our Amendment 59 page for further information, and so with that, I will be happy to take any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Andy. I definitely have some questions, but I was also going to ask, so one more time, about the process. Is the public going to get a chance to ask questions this evening about the presentation, like they did at the other public workshops? I just wasn't sure how that was going to work.

MR. STRELCHECK: We hadn't, I guess, thought about that and set aside time, and so I think, at this point, probably we'll just take questions here, and then I'm happy to talk to people individually, if they have questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for that, Andy, and no questions at this time, Andy, but I did want to just say thank you, to you and all your guys, for all the work you guys did on this. I know it wasn't pleasant. I know it wasn't easy, but I think the outcome speaks for itself, and I really appreciate all you all did for this. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm trying to pull up a slide that I have a question about, and so I have a question. I struggle to understand this particular plot. Does it mean that, if we do nothing, the no action alternative, the blue line, that the stock is rebuilt in two years? Can you go over this graphic one more time?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so the blue line is the fishing mortality rate at 30 percent SPR, and, right now, that fishing mortality rate is about -- Excuse me. The fishing mortality rate, and so F current, is about 1.8 times higher than the fishing mortality rate at 30 percent SPR. So, if you reduce fishing mortality to have 30 percent SPR, based on the current F, you would get that blue line, which essentially rebuilds the stock in three years, but you essentially have to take a much steeper reduction in fishing mortality than what we're proposing in our amendment, because we're actually liberalizing, or allowing, for a higher F, consistent with the rebuilding plan.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Which is the green and the black line? What's the difference between the green line and the black line?

MR. STRELCHECK: The black line is the rebuilding plan projection, right, and so the green line is essentially our proposed new overfishing definition, which maintains the rebuilding plan through at least 2028, until the next stock assessment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I have more questions, but go ahead, Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, would that be the case simply with the change to the definition, without any additional actions, or is that -- Does that assume the additional actions you've preferred here are incorporated?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, if you go back, I think, a slide, and so, as I mentioned, we can change the definition, right, and it will indicate that overfishing is no longer occurring. What it doesn't do is essentially provide increased fishing opportunities. The catch levels would still remain very low. The seasons would remain very short. We wouldn't be, in my view, minimizing bycatch consistent with National Standards, which is one of the, you know, things I talked about in the purpose and need, but, yes, in terms of ending overfishing, yes, it would end overfishing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I guess my other question is, in the lawsuit, in the settlement agreement, weren't you only required to end overfishing, and so wouldn't you only need Action 1 in this document?

MR. STRELCHECK: We have new science, and information, and so you would need more than just a change in the definition. You would have to update the catch limits, the ABC advice, and justify how -- You know, one of the parts of the lawsuit was also a criticism that we're not doing anything with discards, right, reducing discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right, and I just didn't see anything about reducing discards in the settlement agreement itself. That was why I had a question about it. Other questions? Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and thank you, Madam Chair. Shep brought something up, the other day that maybe this might help clarify a little bit for me. Could you give me the definition of bycatch as used in this amendment?

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, there's a statutory definition, Tim. I think, maybe to answer your question, in terms of the discards, right, or dead discards, right, and so it is the estimate of fish that are, obviously, caught and released, for a variety of reasons, and then the proportion of those that ultimately die from release mortality, which is inclusive of not only barotrauma, but hooking location, depredation, number of factors, right, and so that's how we estimate at least the total discards, or dead discards, for red snapper.

MR. GRINER: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. Every time I get into this amendment, there's more and more questions, and more thoughts, but so the SEDAR 73 updated stock assessment indicates that the stock is no longer overfished. Does that analysis include the estimated 500,000 discards in that, and so, even with 500,000 discards, it's not overfished?

MR. STRELCHECK: So that's -- Let's see. If you go back a couple of slides, to the graphics in the stock assessment -- Keep going back. Right there. So, when we talk about overfished, right, it is a point in time where we're estimating the spawning stock biomass to the population, right, and our threshold, our minimum stock size threshold, to determine whether we're overfished or not overfished is 0.75 of BMSY.

Relative to that red line, it would be 75 percent up the, you know, the graphic, and so we are no longer overfished, because biomass has risen above that threshold, right? That estimate of biomass, as well as fishing mortality, encompasses all mortality that's happening in the fishery up through 2023, right, and so the 500,000 that you're referencing is essentially an output, or a projection, that occurs after 2023, but the actual determination of overfished is based on whatever happened in all of the years, you know, prior to the end of the assessment, right, and the estimate that we get of spawning stock biomass for that terminal year. Does that make sense?

MR. HULL: I think so, but it -- So, basically the answer might be, yes, it does take into account the discards, and it's still not considered overfished, even with the discards, whatever they were, prior or projected.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and so the -- Maybe said another way, so we, obviously, can't go above the acceptable biological catch. If we do nothing, right, we could still have the same level of dead discards, but a very, very small catch limit, on the order of 30,000 or 35,000 fish, from what I recall, and end the overfishing, right, but we would be essentially setting catch limits very low, relative to what's proposed in this amendment with the discard reductions.

MR. HULL: That's basically the no option, Alternative 1, status quo, which would then, according to the previous slide, say that, by 2027, it's totally rebuilt. No?

MR. STRELCHECK: No, because the option -- If we didn't change the overfishing definition, that actually is a more restrictive, or steeper, bar to achieve, because it requires a greater reduction in fishing mortality, and so you actually have to reduce landed catch, and/or discards, or both, more significantly than our proposed definition.

MR. HULL: Okay, and so I think where I'm trying to get, for myself, is, even with the discards that we're assuming, or projecting out, the stock continues to rebuild with those discards that are already assumed, and the only way that you can increase the landings, the harvest, is by reducing the discards and moving them over into the retained, and not discarded, but, if you don't do that, it continues to rebuild despite that.

MR. STRELCHECK: That's correct, as long as fishing mortality doesn't change, due to factors that may be outside our control, and like recruitment could drop, and, all of a sudden, if we're discarding or landing the same amount of fish, but there's less fish entering the fishery, then that could increase our fishing mortality rate, because there's just less fish to fish on, right, and so it's

contingent on a number of moving parts, including, obviously, how many fish are coming into and entering the fishery over time.

MR. HULL: I'm sorry to be dragging it on, but I'm trying -- I think I'm getting there, and so, basically, if you could figure a way to get those discards, and turn them into landings, you wouldn't have to do anything other than figure a way to turn those discards into landings, without bottom closures and all this other stuff, and the stock would continue to -- I mean, I realize you're not reducing discards, but those discards don't have to be discards. They could have been landings. Does that make sense?

MR. STRELCHECK: Kind of. I mean, I think the way I would word it is we have to make sure we're managing the overall fishing mortality, right, and you can do that in a number of ways, but you either have to have some mechanism to reduce discards, to allow landed catch to go up, or you're going to have very low catch levels, and high levels of discards that continue into the future, right?

As I said earlier, it's foregone yield, right, and so, the more discards you have, the less landed catch you have available than to harvest, and so there's that trade-off there, and, the more you can reduce dead discards in the fishery, the higher your catch levels go, and that's where you see, obviously, the increases in catch limits, depending on the dead discard reduction that's achieved.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, what sort of economic information did you take into account when deciding on kind of the size and shape of those discard reduction areas?

MR. STRELCHECK: So we have an economic analysis that's part of Section 4 of the amendment that does a comparison of all the alternatives. We selected the preferred alternative, the time-based discard reduction area, based on largely that analysis, which indicates it's the second, I think, lowest, with regard to economic effects, in terms of impacts, and it provides one of the highest economic benefits, with regard to red snapper-specific fishing trips and catch limit increases.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Yes, Gary.

MR. BORLAND: So, switching gears just a little bit, obviously, you're reducing fishing pressure for three months of the year in this region. What are the benefits that the recreational fishermen could achieve from, obviously, other fish, managed fish, in this complex? Have you done any work on that to increase any opportunities there that we are going to lose to the three months if this goes through?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so we haven't, I would say, delved into a lot of detail with regard to the benefits, and so there's, obviously, indirect benefits of reducing fishing mortality on other snapper grouper species, and how that could help, whether they're overfished or depleted or whatever, in terms of their recovery.

What we do know is that, I think twelve of the species that are in the snapper grouper complex are closed in December, either due to fixed season closures or accountability measures, you know, closed seasons, and then twenty are currently closed during the January/February timeframe, right, and so there's already a number of species that are already prohibited from harvest during that timeframe.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Gary.

MR. BORLAND: Yes, but, if they're not fishing, you're not going to have the dead discard problem that you guys bring up every time we try to make a rule or amendment, and so you're going to reduce the fishing pressure for three months, no dead discards, and you're going to get immediate reward for some fisheries, and I think it should be looked at, to give us an opportunity to maybe add to some of the bag limits that we can do on the other fisheries that are going to get benefit, collateral benefit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Andy. This is just tough. I mean, the only way really to lower discard seems to be getting some hooks out of the water, and what's the best, most efficient way to do it, and, like Gary says, if we're not - If we don't have fish -- If we don't have hooks in the water, maybe it helps with, you know, things like some black sea bass. Maybe it helps with some of these grouper species, and we can get -- You know, those rebuilding plans can, you know, be advanced a little bit quicker, and we can look at that, you know, in the analysis.

We also know that we've got right whales in the area in those months, and so it may give a little bit of protection to right whales, and so there's -- It's really tough on fishermen that want to go fish, but that's the worst weather that we're going to have, and I wish I knew a better way to get there from here that I could tell you, but I don't. You know, I know you could put some smaller boxes out, and scatter them around, but we also know that, a lot of times, when you push the balloon in one place, then it just puts more pressure in another place, and so you've got to figure that in the equation, too.

You know, all in all, I would support the plan. I know it hurts, and I'm thinking it's going to be a short-term thing, but there's a lot of moving pieces other than, you know, to consider, and, anyway, I've just thought about it an awful lot, and we all have, and so I'm inclined to support the plan. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: It's kind of just a follow-on to what Charlie was saying. You know, in all of this, there's still that uncertainty out there about MRIP. Some of these discard numbers could be severely overestimated.

We're going to shut down a commercial fishery, at a significant economic expense, and continue to allow these red snapper to -- I mean, the damage to black sea bass that could come from allowing these fish to go, that we should be harvesting, is significant, and so I think there are ways for us to manage this without getting hooks out of the water, to make sure we're not throwing fish back.

There are ways to eliminate dead discards, and I think we need to dig really deep, you know, and, Andy, I appreciate all the work, but I do still think there are some other alternatives here, you know, and I really get some of these comments that are saying that I don't think we need to take any of these dramatic steps right now, when we have a lot of information coming to us, the Great

Red Snapper Count and other things, and so I think there's a short-term action here that can be taken to comply with the settlement agreement, and then continue to figure this out without bottom closures, but thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Just because it was a new slide to me, can you go back to that one that Jessica referenced, with the black, green, and yellow lines, please? Yes, that one. We hadn't seen this one before, and so I wanted to study it again. All right, and so I know you did this with Jessica, but I want to make sure I'm right. The blue line is if we do absolutely nothing, and she rebuilds in, in essence, two years. I know it's 2024 to -- I don't know, and halfway through 2026 and 2027, and that is using an SPR of 30 percent?

MR. STRELCHECK: The blue line is the no action alternative for F 30 percent SPR, but, in order to achieve that trajectory and biomass to rebuild, you actually have to take much steeper reductions in fishing mortality, and so it's not that we do nothing. It's actually we do more than what's being proposed in this amendment.

MS. DUKES: Okay, and so then the F current -- What kind of SPR number is that?

MR. STRELCHECK: The overfishing definition is essentially, and I'll paraphrase, right, and it achieves -- You know, fishing mortality consistent with achieving maximum sustainable yield over the long term, right, and we have re-looked at the overfishing definition, based on that higher recruitment, and what we're saying is that we are maintaining the rebuilding plan in the short-term, right, on track, and so that is indicative then of we're continuing to achieve maximum sustainable yield, right, and so what SPR is that equivalent to, and I don't know specifically what it's equivalent to, but it rebuilds us on track with the rebuilding plan, which is essentially the proposal for the new overfishing definition.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MS. DUKES: So, if 59 goes through, and we have the ability to look at a reasonable proxy, this could be something that this council utilizes in the future, to mimic something like this. If we have a stock that is rebuilding, we could potentially use something like this on a different stock, and allow a little bit more harvest, but yet still make sure we're maintaining our maximum sustainable yield through our rebuilding plan.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, with the caveats that it needs to be based on best scientific information available, and I would say red snapper is probably one of our outlier species, where we have such strong recruitment coming into the fishery, whereas, many other species, actually the exact opposite is occurring.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, ma'am. Thank you, Andy. I know you've been over and over all this stuff, but so did you ever think about, in your progression of how do I got to where I'm at with reducing with these DD areas, once you satisfied the legal requirement of ending overfishing of then figuring, okay, so how am I going to reduce discards, of maybe going to something like some

management actions, kind of like the EFPs, where you change fishing behavior, which, you know, it's still experimental, but did you go through that thought process yourself too, and think about possibly that was a way to achieve increased ACL, through management actions, such as, you know, being experimental in the EFP?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, I mean, we have thought about this a lot, just like this council sat around this table thinking about, you know, solutions for this. The exempted fishing permits, you know, just started, I believe in August, if I'm not mistaken, and so we're writing this amendment in August, September, October. We didn't have that information before us.

We're, obviously, anxious, and interested, in understanding the results of that, but I think it's a little premature for us to try to incorporate those concepts into kind of a longer-term management strategy without first seeing the results of those studies.

I am certainly open to, obviously, this council coming back to the table and considering some of that, and you might very well, you know, want to come back to the table, after we implement the secretarial amendment, and decide that you want to make changes very quickly, right, and so that's certainly part of the prerogative of the council, in terms of updating and making changes to the management plan, but we did consider a number of things that I haven't talked about today. We have a Considered but Rejected section in the amendment. I can certainly point people to that section as well, but there was certainly just some things that, after kind of further vetting and review, we opted not to pursue.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm just kind of thinking about some of the comments we had at the North Carolina, and for, you know, Robert saying, you know, there must be some other tools, and so several folks at our, at the North Carolina one, they were very concerned with -- They felt like the descender device use needs to be beefed up. I mean, right now, I guess the rule is you just have to have it rigged and ready.

There's not a rule that says use it, and I don't know how much that would help in this, but just trying to think of another tool in the toolbox, you know, try to maybe beef up those descender devices. I know that was a lot of concern, and I think multiple folks made that comment, and so will you guys be rethinking that or --

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, as I mentioned, I think in North Carolina, and there's other public hearings, because we've gotten this question, and so descending device usage, and the benefits from that, are incorporated already into the stock assessment. The main challenge is determining kind of how many people are using those devices, because, as you pointed out, it's rigged and ready, but it doesn't mean you have to use it, and so there's an assumption, or estimate, made of how many people are actually using descending devices.

Descending devices are beneficial, but, in and of themselves, don't eliminate release mortality, right, and so you're going to still have release mortality due to barotrauma, due to, you know, hook location, due to depredation, but what the assessment has done, over time, is there's actually four time blocks for the assessment, and release mortality has been changed over time to account for improvements in release mortality and fishing practices.

I agree, and I think, you know, the work that this council is doing, and I mentioned this during public hearings, and I've commended the council about best fishing practices. We talked about Return 'Em Right. To the extent that those can continue to move forward, and more and more anglers, obviously, utilize those fishing practices, that helps with, obviously, our estimates of discards, and it reduces release mortality that then benefits the stock.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, just following up on the comment about the EFPs being kind of a new management strategy, really the aggregate bag limit, and two questions here. Have closures or, you know, the rotating closures that are proposed here, have they been used before, and my concern is that, if you close from the Florida-Georgia line to Cape Canaveral, and you assume that that means that people aren't going to be fishing there, well, I think those charter guides are just going to move their boats, and they're going to end up south of the Cape, and up in Georgia, and they're still going to be fishing, and so those discards are just going to get shifted out of that closed geographic area.

The effort is not going to change. It's just going to move location, and that's kind of -- When I read this, and, you know, we ended overfishing in Action 1, and then the proceeding stuff, to me, just seems to be getting at fishing effort, which I know we've talked a lot about, and that's why I come back to I don't even think -- I think there's still a possibility here that we're not even going to achieve the goal, because we're not getting to the core of that discards.

People can just move and go fish -- We might have three or four times more boats down south Florida, targeting an even smaller stock of fish, and creating more discards in different areas, and so that's why, you know, I think that -- You know, to Jim's point, and I know it was new, but I do think that eliminating discards alternative there is what we're trying to get at. This is getting at effort, and I think it's just going to push effort around. It's ultimately not going to cure the cause.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, you know, I think I said this at this council, at some point in time, right, and there's a limited number of tools in the toolbox, right, and so you have technological solutions to reduce, you know, discards, discard mortality, and you have effort solutions, right, controlling how much effort and how many people are actually going, targeting, and so you manage kind of the number of holes in the water, so to speak.

Then you have management, you know, solutions, or ways that you prevent, you know, from that activity occurring entirely, right, and so those are limited tools. All of them have, I think their pros and cons, challenges, and, you know, your points are well taken, in terms of some of the things that we were looking at with regard to potential shifts in fishing effort and how that could diminish or affect, obviously, the reductions that we're trying to achieve, but, once again, right, we continue to have a lot of foregone yield in this fishery, and a lot of our other fisheries, right, and that means less quota, or harvest, in terms of recreational fishing opportunities and commercial catch, and so how can we address that, and what are the things that we can do going forward.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, I appreciate that. I think, unfortunately, we ran out of time, but I think we were just getting to real good discussions, at this council, about some of those other alternatives, and opportunities. I think we certainly would have some interest in trying to get there, but we just -- We didn't have time, and, you know, kind of going back to the first slide, you know, those bullet points are pretty tight.

I don't -- You know, just for folks who get the information from that, I don't think they can fully appreciate, and understand, you know, having -- I just came onto the council, and, in one of my first meetings, we were presented with, you know, some of the questions around fishing effort, discards, you know, how this all comes together, and so this has been a, you know, collaborative effort. I would like to kind of try to see us work our way through that, and I am optimistic, at the end of this, that we can figure out a management strategy that does accomplish both things, reduces discards and gets both the rec and commercial sectors more fish. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we're over our time right now. If you have more questions, or if you have more questions after you hear public comment, or after you think about it overnight, or after you read the secretarial amendment, and we will have more time for questions when we start discussing the letter, when we get into Other Business, and so there will be more time for questions.

We are past our hard stop to get set up for public comment, and so we're going to go ahead and stop right now, and we're going to let staff get set up for public comment, and we will start public comment at -- We'll say 4:15, and so we're a little bit behind, but a fifteen-minute break while we get set up. Thanks, everybody.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on March 5, 2025.)

MARCH 6, 2025

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, Georgia, on Thursday, March 6, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going. All right, and so, instead of waiting to talk about red snapper during Other Business, while it's fresh in everybody's minds, and it seems like people have some additional questions, what we're going to do is we're going to dive back into red snapper and the secretarial amendment.

We're going to let people ask more questions, and start making comments, and so, when you make comments, staff is going to be recording some points up here for the council's letter on the amendment, and so it's okay if the questions/comments are mixed together this morning. We're

going to, you know, record that up here, so that we'll have a letter to look at tomorrow. All right, and so who would like to start this morning with questions/comments? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Thank you, Jessica. So, for purposes of our comments to Secretarial Amendment 59, I would like to suggest -- I think, in that letter, the council should be supporting Actions 1 and 2, which eliminate the overfishing issue, and, at that point, I think the rest of what's in there should come back to this council, for us to figure out how we want to appropriately manage this red snapper species going forward.

The other just comment I'll put in there, and I think Bob Zales got into it in his comments yesterday afternoon, but not here at council, is think that this closure also has significant impact on waterside infrastructure, marinas, ice houses, you know, a lot of the things that support even the commercial fishery, and I speak from experience for marinas in the Keys.

A lot of the support there is driven by the recreational sector, and recreational fishing, fuel sales, bait sales, and so, when you lose a marina, it loses most of its business, the potential impacts to, you know, shoreside infrastructure are significant, and it might lead people, property owners, to look for other uses, to build condos and other things, and so I think there's potentially some impact there that we haven't fully discussed.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. I was taking some notes on that. More questions, or comments, on the amendment? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I would have to agree that you've -- It seems as though we've satisfied the settlement, by ending overfishing, and the updated stock assessment showed that it's no longer overfished. Now the next issue is how do we handle the discard situation, and so I really feel that the bottom closures -- Now, if you listen to what it's going to do to these people, put them out of business, destroy them, it's just unacceptable.

There's got to be a better way to manage the discards. I think that we just need a little more time, and the council needs to immediately start looking at how we're going to do that, and I would hope that the amendment is adjusted to, again, answer the lawsuit, which it sounds like you've done, and then address the discards, give it more time, more thought, and let's manage the discard situation with, you know, managing management measures instead of, you know, these bottom closures that are going to cause all this economic harm. That's where I'm at. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Jimmy. Other comments, or questions? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Nobody wants to be where we are right now, and I've been here off and on for fifteen years, give or take, and I've listened to we need more data, better data, more time, for basically that whole time, and it's true that we do, but we don't have any more time right now.

We've got to do something, and what exactly to do, I don't know. I wish we could figure out a way to not have closed areas. I wish there was a practical way to not have all these dead discards that we're having to deal with, and so maybe, if Andy wants to, maybe he could explain some of the moving pieces on what our options really are, instead of us -- You know, it might help cut

down some of the guessing of what we would like to do, and maybe it might help if Andy wanted to do that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess -- Let me make sure I understand. Options for the council or options for the Secretarial Amendment?

MR. PHILLIPS: Both.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Andy, would you like to comment on that?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, one, thank you for, obviously, the comments, and questions, yesterday, and, obviously, the input we've been gathering for the last month on the amendment, and the reaction to it, and so, you know, I've heard, loud and clear, obviously, the social and economic impacts of our proposed discard reduction area.

Kind of in response to what Charlie is saying, and kind of what I've heard around the table already this morning, I guess I see potentially a couple of pathways, right, to satisfy the settlement, right, and one is the Fisheries Service could do Actions 1, 2, and 3. Right now, Action 3 doesn't include the catch limit that would have to be set if we do not reduce discards at all, right, and we could set a catch limit based on the ABC in Action 2.

That catch limit in Action 3 would have to be, obviously, equal to or less than that ABC, and, when you don't reduce discards, it ends up being a fairly small catch limit, like we've been experiencing now, right, and so that's kind of maintaining what I'll say is the status quo approach. It doesn't reduce discards, but it indicates we've ended overfishing. There's also, obviously, some uncertainty there, because we are taking a riskier approach for defining overfishing, and that's, in part, contingent on maintaining high recruitment, which may change over time.

The other options would be, in my view, setting the catch limits based on some reduction in discards, but the council, and the public input, and others kind of guiding that shift, or change, in the proposed rule, and the final rule, that looks at ways to lessen, or mitigate, some of the social and economic impacts, right, and so, to me, you could weigh-in, obviously, on Action 4, knowing that it sounds like there's strong opposition to our preferred alternative, and advise on other alternatives in Action 4 that might be more in line with, you know, what you would want to accomplish through the secretarial amendment, right, and so those I see are the pathways with regard to satisfying the settlement and addressing, obviously, our legal obligations.

I will say the other aspect, which was noted, obviously, in our need statement, was we have, under National Standard 9 requirements, obviously, to minimize bycatch to the extent practical, right, and so the secretarial amendment has done a bycatch practicability analysis. It has a purpose and need. All of that, you know, would have to be addressed, in light of not taking action to reduce discards, and how we would appropriately address that going forward.

I'm hearing some interest, and commitment, by this council to figure out better ways to address discards, right, but you sat around this table for three-plus years, and we didn't accomplish a whole lot, and so I'm skeptical that we're going to make that happen as well, and so those are my thoughts, and I welcome, obviously, input.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Judy.

MS. HELMEY: Well, thank you, Andy. Well, after attending the meeting last night, after listening to everybody, it's a sad thing, and it kind of brought me to remember about 2010, when red snapper was closed in our case, and it was a very serious -- Especially, just -- Not just for our company, but for everybody, and it's like a nightmare coming back true again, and these people that really are going to be affected with this closure, and I think you should consider anything but a closure, and the fact that we might can come up with something.

The council might can come up with something, since we do know that red snapper is not being overfished now, and it's not undergoing overfishing, and that actually there are a lot of red snapper, and everybody has been telling us, and you, that they're just -- You know, they're almost a nuisance, and so I just do believe that we can come up with a plan that might work, if you just, you know, give us time to do so.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Judy. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: These were just some comments, thoughts, I had. I'm kind of looking more towards the process of all this, and the science, and one thing that I was disappointed to see was that -- Well, first of all, the assessment didn't go through any kind of review, and that's just concerning to me, and I do understand that, you know, you were on a tight timeline, but, looking at the assessment, you actually had a draft in August, and then we didn't even find out about it until December, and I felt that lack --

That was just a lack of transparency that I really didn't appreciate, and I felt like, you know, maybe going through the SSC and all that was going to be way too time-consuming, but just getting somebody, academia or somebody, just -- I'm not saying that it's a bad or wrong assessment. I'm just saying I always feel better if I've seen something that's been reviewed externally, and I guess that same goes with the F proxy.

I don't really have an issue with the definition, but I would have liked to have seen -- I mean, that's a big switch, from what we've been using in F 30, and just sort of trying to eyeball through the assessment, on the one draft, or the one graph there, I mean, are we looking at less than 20 percent SPR? So, you know, I would have liked -- I'm not saying the F proxy that you all are proposing is right or wrong.

Again, I think I would have liked to have seen that reviewed, and, like I said, I'm just like eyeballing the graph, and I was like it could be between 15 and 20 percent, as best I can tell, and that's kind of low, and I'm not saying that's wrong either, but my point is I would have liked to have seen some review, even if it had to be a quick review.

I'm also -- You know, listening last night about the headboats, and the impact of the closure on the headboats, and I understand the impact of the closure is hard on everyone, but it really sank through for me on the headboat folks, because, if you think about the commercial guys are going to be able to fish there, and they have a very low discard rate. The headboats, they have probably some of the best data, and they have a very low discard rate.

I'm not sure, and I could see that they could maybe be also exempted as well as, you know, along with the commercial guys. I'm not really in support of the closure at all, but I really think you need to consider those impacts on those headboats. I actually kind of question the -- Are you going to get that discard reduction? You know, how enforceable is this area going to be? I think that's all my comments. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Trish. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, yesterday, Jimmy had asked about the Considered and Rejected section, and I was wondering if you could give us some just -- I think this council -- One of the things we're going to look at is aggregate bag limits, to try to address the dead discards, and I was wondering, you know, what thought process you guys went through, how far down the path you all went, and I looked in the Appendix A, but I could not find the information I was looking for.

MR. STRELCHECK: One second. Sorry, and I was bringing up the appendix and so we have alternatives in the Considered but Rejected section. It's Appendix A of the amendment. We had initially considered up to a 40 percent reduction in dead discards, which was moved to the Considered but Rejected. We also looked at establishing sector-specific annual catch limits and set-asides for red snapper, and we opted not to go down that path. That was essentially for the experimental studies program.

We also looked at establishing new management measures to achieve dead discard reductions. That would have included, I guess, some additional discard reduction seasons, and also some discard reduction areas, in terms of kind of depths for consideration.

We did not, as you're pointing out, consider aggregate bag limits, because that's still kind of work ongoing. I'm trying to remember if we considered, and I'm just looking through this quickly, some size limits or other information. I'm not seeing that, and so that's kind of the, you know, generalization, but you can look at Appendix A in more detail, in terms of what we considered but rejected.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I have a question about in the bottom closure area, and how did you imagine that that was going to be enforced? You know, so are you thinking that FWC would use planes? Would they use additional vessels from other parts of the state to come over to the Atlantic coast, you know, from our big boat program, or just how were you imagining, or were you just thinking some sort of dockside enforcement, where people were asked where they fished, and so can you talk a little bit more about that?

MR. STRELCHECK: We didn't get into the specifics of state versus federal, how it's enforced, how it would be enforced. Obviously, we did consult with our law enforcement office, with regard to the amendment. You, obviously, would be challenged with trying to enforce it dockside, like you're suggesting, because people will indicate, obviously, where they were fishing, or not fishing, based on the questions that are being asked, and so, you know, like so much of our regulations, we do rely on a lot of self-compliance with this, which I recognize is not ideal, but we don't have enough enforcement.

FWC doesn't have enough enforcement to go around to fully enforce all our regulations, and so we would use the limited enforcement resources we have, in partnership with our JEA agreements, and others, obviously, to enforce any regulations that are put in place.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Charlie, and then Gary.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, we've talked about the dead discards, and we want to land them, and I've heard discussion about maybe trying to improve the usefulness and the use of descending devices, which might give us a little bit of gain there, but it's not mandatory, and, again, it's kind of like some of our other regulations. It's almost unenforceable.

So, you know, if we had a lot of buy-in from the public, it wouldn't necessarily need to be enforceable so much, because the public would want to do it, and their buddies would encourage their other buddies to do it, and so we might could pick up a little bit of help there, but, to me, the reason for the boxes is to get hooks out of the water. When you get some hooks out of the water, then the dead discards associated with those hooks can be given back to the anglers that are still fishing, or can fish, or can fish after the season opens back up.

So I don't really -- I don't see how to get a significant amount of dead discards landed until we figure out how to get some hooks out of the water, in some places, to a degree where it gives us enough fish, and everybody, you know, would love for the closed area to be somewhere else other than their backyard. I get it. I'm off Georgia, and so we're kind of out of it, but it's still painful, and I'm still at the table and helping figure out the answer to the question, but, if we can figure out a way to lower the number of hooks in the water that are interacting, then that gives everybody else fishing -- Or, when they do go fishing, it's going to give them more opportunity.

I that what we want, or do we want to just keep dead discards at the level, and we're out of overfishing, and just not get the extra fish that Amendment 59 could give us, or do we just want to stay at our low catch levels, keep the discards high, and kind of keep paddling along where we're going, and so that's the kind of two paths I see.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Gary.

MR. BORLAND: Yes, and a couple of questions and a comment. Andy, I saw you have mentioned, and suggested, or preferred, four to nine days, or five to nine days, in the recreational season, and why the range? Why does the range seem large in the number of days, and what the recreational fisherman has to give to get those couple extra days?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so the proposed catch limit in Amendment 59 is 85,000 fish, and we estimate, based on the short fishing seasons in the last five or six years, and I forget how many years we were looking at, that catch rates on a daily basis ranged anywhere from about 9,500 fish to as much as 19,000 fish per day, and so the range stems from those different catch rates. If you use 9,500 fish per day, it results in nine days. If you use 19,000 fish, it results in five days.

MR. BORLAND: So you haven't made a decision on what catch rate you would use, and, obviously, being a short season, where you get all the effort in one day, it, obviously, pushes that number higher. Weather obviously plays a part in that, and so no decision exactly on which number you would use to that?

MR. STRELCHECK: No, and that would be something that we would, obviously, publish in the final rule, in terms of a season date. We wanted to, obviously, just give people an indication of, you know, what the catch rates have been over time. Obviously, there's a lot of factors that can affect those catch rates, as you're pointing out. Even though we've had short seasons, and some of them have been three or four days long, right, and so the effort can be spread out a little bit more. Some are affected by at least better weather, or worse weather, right, and so there's uncertainty, obviously, in that estimate, but we wanted to give, obviously, full disclosure, in terms of what would be the estimated season length.

MR. BORLAND: So another question. You've got -- In the ABC-ACL split, you've got it split into dead discards and landings. I feel like it's been admitted that there's uncertainty in the dead discard rate. What has been done to define that, or bring the uncertainty down in the dead discard data, to split it?

MR. STRELCHECK: So we're specifying an ABC that's inclusive of landings and dead discards. In the past, right, the SSC has just recommended it based on landed catch, but the dead discards have always been a component of that, right, and they've just essentially been removed off the top, and so I guess, in terms of your question, what's been done in terms of addressing the uncertainty, I don't think there's really been anything that has changed. We're just presenting the ABC in a different fashion than what it has been in the past, but any sort of ABC, or ACL, that's been specified by the SSC and this council previously has always been contingent on achieving, or maintaining, some level of discards, or dead discards.

MR. BORLAND: Thank you, and then the last comment is I support, obviously, Robert's idea, and Charlie, on an aggregate. I think we've talked about aggregate in the past. What's the appetite for the Science Center to look at aggregate bag limits, instead of single-species management?

DR. WALTER: Well, I think the appetite for the Science Center is pretty high, because we've actually been doing that work for a while. That's a lot of the work that was used to inform some of this, but we didn't have the empirical data, and so that was the work that Scott Crossan did originally, that started a couple years ago, to evaluate different management approaches.

It's being used to inform some of the things that were explored in the management strategy evaluation, which I'll remind people said that there needed to be a 40 percent reduction in effort to achieve the goals, and we're continuing with that work, and anxiously awaiting the empirical data coming out of the exempted permits, so that we can actually begin to model those, but is it going to be useful for this amendment right now?

Unfortunately, the timing is not going to be useful, in terms of taking action relative to this amendment, and the other issue, with considering some of those things, are that we did bring up a number of those ideas, I believe, during Amendment 35, but they were not considered viable at that time by this council. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess -- Sorry to interrupt, and I just wanted to ask a clarifying question, being that there's Amendment 59 and the MSE going on, and so does the change in the F proxy,

and this being the reference point for overfishing, does this change the perspective of the goals of the MSE, in terms of achieving overfishing? Does it alter any of those types of formats, because a 40 percent effort reduction was considered, at that time, to be relative to an F 30 reference point, and what's being proposed in Amendment 59 is a different reference point, and so you would be trying to reach a different target, potentially.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

DR. WALTER: There's very little chance that this reference point would be a long-term goal. This reference point is solely being put forth because of this high recruitment, and because it's rebuilding the stock, even under this fishing mortality rate, but, if recruitment went to an average, this fishing mortality rate would be overfishing, and I think that's what the MSE would be looking at.

It would not necessarily say that recruitment would be really high for the long-term. It might entertain different scenarios of recruitment regimes, and I think it should, and that's one of the things to explore, is whether we do have nonstationarity, and that's particularly pertinent for some of the other species that we're certainly seeing changes in recruitment, but, in terms of it being a long-term target, no, I do not think that that would be something that would be entertained there. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. More questions, or comments? Judy.

MS. HELMEY: Would it -- So, if we did use, like you said, the descending devices, Charlie, and more -- Making them using -- Recommending those, and what about single-hook bottom rigs? I know, if I went to single-hook bottom rigs, and some people use three and four hooks, just on my boat alone that would take thirty hooks out of the water. Thank you.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I think there's at least some small amount of research that would indicate there would be a benefit for that, but recall this council voted on that action, and opted to rescind it, right, and so we did not consider that as part of the secretarial amendment at this point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I have a couple more hands up. Robert, and then Tim.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I guess this is more for Judy and Charlie, but the issue is not the number of hooks in the water. It's what's being thrown back in the water after they're caught. It's the dead discards, and so, whether you're fishing three hooks or one hook or thirty hooks, if you're turning those into landings, the discards don't exist, and so I think, ultimately, there will be less hooks in the water, through an aggregate bag limit, because the first five or six drops will catch your bag limit, and then you'll stop fishing, but that's the issue, and we got to stay focused on what the issue is here, and the issue is dead discards, not effort. We keep getting bogged down in effort, and I don't think that's a winning formula, for us to focus on that. We've got to get to the dead discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John Carmichael.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I just wanted to follow up with John on the reference point. So you said that you didn't think the reference point that's being proposed here is appropriate for the long-term, and, under average recruitment, it would result in overfishing, but overfishing deals with a rate,

and not the recruitment. I mean, so are you saying that the reference point that's being proposed is a higher F than F_{MSY} ?

DR. WALTER: Yes. Right now. Good recruitment, serendipity, is giving us a lot of recruits, which means that we can fish the stock harder and still rebuild.

MR. CARMICHAEL: But, even when we have stocks that are well above B_{MSY} , we're still bound by fishing below F_{MSY} . We may have a yield that's higher than the long-term equilibrium MSY , because the stock is abundant, but our rate still needs to be below the MSY rate, and so I find this interesting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and I'm trying to bring up our definition, but we're not preventing MSY from being achieved over the short-term, consistent with our rebuilding plan, right? We've also laid out that this is essentially a dynamic reference point, right, and we're essentially saying a reasonable proxy, and we've indicated, in the amendment, that this would be the F to maintain the rebuilding plan, consistent with achieving MSY , which is essentially our overfishing definition, or goal, but we also recognize that we're going to have to relook at this once we have the new assessment, and new data, and new information, which everyone keeps talking about, right, and so the definition could change, based on that information.

I think that's why John is saying, you know, we're not certain if this is a long-term goalpost or not at this point, and, if I recruitment persisted out into the future, it could be, but, if it doesn't persist out in the future, right, then that needs to be shifted, and changed, but we were looking at, obviously, the current conditions of the stock and how we can continue to stay on track with achieving that MSY .

Can I go back to Robert's comment, and so I've heard this a number of times, and I think it's a false perception, and so, Robert, you keep saying, right, that discards are the problem, and not effort. The aggregate bag limits, or the, you know, projects that Florida is running, are constraining effort right now, right, and it's on top of allowing, obviously, those aggregate bag limits, or full retention trips, and so, if that's a long-term strategy that this council wants to consider, right, I'm open to considering it, but I think that would then have to be looked at in conjunction with ability to actually allow for a certain amount of fish to be harvested under sustainable levels to meet maximum sustainable yield targets.

There's going to then have to be the allowance of those aggregate trips, or full retention trips, in conjunction with some effort controls, in addition to any overlay of how we deal with discards on top of that, right, and so I just want to make sure that's clear, that, you know, this isn't as, I think, as simple of a picture of just implementing the EFPs as designed, because you have to have that effort control on top of, obviously, what's being allowed for harvest.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: That was the type of analysis I was expecting to hear from Appendix A. I would like to get into the details of that, right, but that wasn't done, and this idea that it's constraining effort -- I disagree. I think it's creating more efficient fisheries, right, and, if a guy

wants to load up his boat and go out, and all he can catch is one fish, and he wants to do it, fine. It's still creating all the economic input. He bought bait, he bought fuel, he bought everything else, and he has some access, and there's ways to maintain access in going through this, even if it --

You know, I think everybody wants to assume what the recreational fishermen want, and I think we've heard, loud and clear, the recreational fishermen want to be able to convert some of these catches to landings, and, you know, this effort, you know, discussion -- Again, I still think it's back to discards. An aggregate bag limit can be -- You know, the data is kind of showing us that, but I don't disagree that we have all the answers there, Andy.

I just want to get through the discussion, and analysis, on what would happen. What does it look like if we really implement an aggregate bag limit? I think we can greatly reduce all of the regulations, the complication. We can probably achieve some of the administration's goals through that move, free up some ability for us to do some other things, and so I think, in earnest, we need to really spend some time going through that, and analyzing that, and I think, to Jimmy's point, with Actions 1, 2 and 3, we have the time to do that. We have time to get through this process. This council can think through how we want to address dead discards in various different ways.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. Yes, and this is -- You know, it's very unfortunate we are where we are, but, you know, how did we get to where we are? We got here because of a lawsuit, and the lawsuit was brought by the commercial fishermen, and it's simply for accountability. We have to be accountable, and that means being accountable for the dead discards.

Robert is absolutely right that the dead discards are the issue here. It's all about dead discards, but I don't think you can separate dead discards from effort. Effort is what determines catch rates, and effort is what determines discard rates, and so you have to look at effort. I don't know any way around that, and so, however you want to do that, you know, you need to, you know, think hard about it, but you can't separate effort from discards. They are tied together, just like effort is tied to catch rates.

I would like to ask Andy, and what is the average weight per fish that is used? I get a little bit confused when I look at like Action 3. You know, we went into this, and you came up with an ABC, but it's based on number of fish. Then we go back, and we start splitting this out into the commercial recreational ACLs, and we're back to one of them has weights, and the other has numbers of fish. Could you tell me what the average weight per fish that was used in your calculations?

Also, I like the way that you finally have started looking at this with discards and landings. I think that's very, very important. Is there a way that -- Can you go back and separate landings and discards by sector?

MR. STRELCHECK: I'll yield to John Walter, in terms of the second question, but I don't think there's a way of splitting landings and discards by sector, from the projections that we have currently. Whether the center could provide that separately, maybe.

In terms of the average weight, and so we do present, in the amendment, average weights for 2021 to 2023. I have been asked a lot of questions about then what are the average weights for the various ACLs that we're considering, and, when you shift dead discards to a landed catch, reducing dead discards, the way the projections are working is that the average weights slowly come down, right, and so I can't -- I don't have a definitive answer, because it depends on the catch limit we're talking about, and so they are going to be variable, based on how much we've shifted from dead discards to landed catch.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Andy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Tim, thanks for that, and I guess, the way that you make me think about it, but I guess it should be -- You know, instead of stopping effort, we should be focusing effort, and turning effort into landings, rather than dead discards, and I think there's a way to do that, and so maybe a better way of putting it, and, you know, not just telling people, hey, you can't leave the dock, but tell them, if they leave the dock, here's how you have to fish in order to manage the dead discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I just have one -- I asked this yesterday, and I'm still not clear on it, and so, in the SEDAR 73 update, it determined that the stock is no longer overfished, and preliminarily, because of the high recruitment, but did that take into account the 500,000 animals that were considered discarded?

So, in other words, despite the fact that we discarded 500,000 animals, we still have achieved a stock that's not overfished, which, to me, if that's true, then why can't we take those discards and turn them into landings, and manage them properly, so that we would never -- We could manage it that we would never have a discard, ever. You would retain a certain amount of animals, and then you would stop fishing, and so is that true, that that took into account that, annually, there's 500,000 discards?

MR. STRELCHECK: So I'll try to explain it better today, and so I don't know where you're getting the 500,000, and so that is our annual catch limit. I don't know if that's what you're referring to, but --

MR. HULL: That was from SEDAR 73. It estimated there was somewhere between 500,000, and up to 800,000, potential recreational discards.

MR. STRELCHECK: So any status projection of the health status of the population through 2023 will take into account all mortality associated with landings and dead discards, right, and so it's going to be whatever was landed in each year, as well as whatever is estimated to be discarded dead each year, right, and it could vary, right, and so it's not like every year we're discarding 500,000 fish, or landing, you know, X amount of fish. It's going to depend on, obviously, our data and statistics and everything else, but all that's then factored in.

So, yes, the dead discard rates that have occurred historically are incorporated then into the assessment, to tell us what the outcome is, which, in this case, it gets us over that overfished threshold, and then, in terms of the catch limits, and the ABC advice, that's all based on projections from the stock assessment for 2025 and beyond.

Then, in terms of your second question, that's an idealized scenario, right, and, if we could say we have a 500,000-fish ACL, and we're going to land every fish, and not discard a single one, I'm all for that, but that means, commercial guys, you stop fishing when you catch red snapper, and you can't catch anything else in the water that year, and that means, recreational guys, you go out and you stop fishing when you've caught your red snapper, and you can't catch anything else that year.

That's all snapper grouper, right, and you can't target anything else, and so that's an option. I don't think economically that would be probably supported, but that's the reality of the challenge, right, because I don't think it's practical, and feasible, that we're going to end all discards. We will reduce discards, and come up with ways, and solutions, to reduce discards, and translate that into more landed catch, but eliminating them requires hooks out of the water, no one fishing at the point that you catch that full catch limit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and I'm going to start talking. I'm going to try to keep us moving, and try to bring up some points maybe for our letter, and see what people think about them, and so feel free to ask more questions and comment on some of these points.

So in our letter, do we want to spend time explaining why the South Atlantic Council did not take an action? Is that something that we want to include in the letter, and so, when we did not approve Amendment 35, or pulled that back, we talked about our concerns with MRIP data, about our concerns with the discard numbers, that they were self-reported, unvalidated. We talked about the abundance of red snapper. We talked about the upcoming Great Red Snapper Count, and the upcoming stock assessment, and those types of things. Do we want to include the reasons why we didn't submit Amendment 35 in our letter? Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I think, from the standpoint of the fact that it's an updated assessment, and those concerns were all relative coming out of 73, those concerns are still there, unless things have been addressed, and so I don't think it's bad to reiterate that this is where we were.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and I see people nodding yes. All right, and we heard some information, last night, about some economic information that maybe hasn't been included in the document. We talked -- You know, you heard people talk about secondary effects, other effects. You heard, this morning, and I believe it was Robert that brought up kind of what's going to happen to dockside infrastructure from the closures and those types of things, and do we want to bring that type of information up in the letter? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I mean, that's the comments that really got to me, were from our headboat operators in the area, and we know they have pretty good logbook data, that's validated. I would love to see, particularly in that area, what sort of trips are going to be losing that time of year, or any sort of further recreational data, and I bring this up just because I'm a North Carolina rep. I don't understand that area of Florida very well, and when people fish, and how people fish, and I'm sure it's very different from my state, and so I guess, just from that perspective, it would be

helpful for me to understand the impacts, if I were to see raw MRIP data, or particularly loss of headboat trips in that time period.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. Got it. All right. What about -- Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think we had some public comment, from Congressman Rutherford yesterday, that actually quantified some of that. I think he mentioned \$500 million associated to this closure. How much was specific to headboat, I don't know, but then the ancillary impacts to headboats, right, and you've heard there's a few places they can dock, and I'm just going to assume that most of the boats in those marinas, and facilities, are rec, or charter-for-hire, boats that are keeping that marina facility going, and what happens if you shut that down for three months? A lot of those boats leave, and so I think there's -- You know, it's complicated, certainly, but I think we might be able to maybe get Congressman Rutherford's office to share some of that info.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: On that same point, I think that's all connected, right, and so I think it would be helpful just to see that. You make a very good point there as to the impacts, and not just the whole industry. I brought up headboats, because we hear from them, and also because they have much better logbook data. I would also point out and thank Congressman Rutherford for bringing up that we need better validated data.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All of that is good. Maybe we can try to get some of that information that the Congressman had. Do we want to bring up the point that -- I believe Trish brought it up this morning, about the stock assessment being an update and not going through the traditional process, and not reviewed? Are we good with that? Okay. All right. So I'm going to go ahead and move on. So what are we going to say about the closures? I'm sorry. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I just want to make sure that -- I mean, I see a lot of doom and gloom, and heavy faces around the room, but I do think the letter should have some positive tone to it as well, and, speaking as a North Carolina commercial representative here, there's some pretty positive stuff in here.

I mean, there's some things here that are moving in the right direction, and I -- You know, I don't want to, you know, point them out verbatim, necessarily, but, you know, the fact that we are now looking at landings plus discards, even though we're not breaking them out by sector just yet, and this is an important step, and, you know, we've acknowledged here that, if we do reduce discards, in some way or shape or form, that, you know, you've gone from maybe having a season, not having a season, to one day, to now up to nine days, and that's a step in the right direction.

From the commercial standpoint, we've gone from a seventy-five-pound trip limit, which we don't target over -- A fishery for seventy-five pounds, and we're certainly not going to target one for 100 pounds, but it reduces dead discards, when we can keep 100 pounds of these fish, for 125 days a year, or more, and so it's all moving in the right direction. I know it's bitter, and I know it's hard to swallow, but I don't want this letter just to be -- You know, not to have any positive outcome to it. There is some positive here, but, yes, there's some negative stuff, too. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Tim, I agree. I think that, through the secretarial amendment, there's some actions being taken that we couldn't take here at this council. I think it buys us the time, and the -
- You know, the discussions are starting, right? There's a lot of good things that Andy and his team looked at, and I think there are a few that are missing.

I think we all agree on that, and we' would like the time to dig in and work through that, and this council should be the one to address the other items, beyond Actions 1 and 2, and I agree that 3 probably needs to move as well. I think that's the positive part of this, right, and so, if we can limit those actions there to end overfishing, and then we, sitting here, can figure out what the path is to actually manage this, and I think that's what -- I think that's what we owe to the folks of all of our respective states.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. So then Tim went part of the way where I was going, and so, yes, it seems like we -- Because I'm trying to dive into some of these actions, and that there, and Robert talked about it too, that there are some actions that we do like, and so we want to bring that up. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and, on the note of positivity, right, I think moving the start date earlier towards more align with the effort of our shallow-water group of fishery is a positive thing. No one has mentioned that today. Also, you know, as a North Carolina representative, the frustration I hear from fishermen, and I think this was really interesting, when we go back to our SEFHIER discussion, and current reported logbook trips, and you saw, in North Carolina, how a huge proportion of for-hire trips are full-day trips. We are more of a distant offshore fishery, and that has really curtailed effort for us in our state, just because we have a lot more wind.

These fish are a lot harder to get to, and so the language that would allow changes, right, is also a really positive thing, particularly if our state is under, you know, a small craft advisory, when the rest of the coast isn't, which I would point out that Florida had beautiful weather in 2024, and it was blowing thirty-five out of the southwest through the whole coast of North Carolina.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Got it. Okay, and so then what about the closures? Are we going to say something about that? Gary.

MR. BORLAND: You know, I feel like -- I agree there is some positives here, but I think the tough part is, if you live in northeast Florida, and somebody is telling you that you can't use your boat for three months to go bottom fishing, I think the pain that you take, and the gain, to gain two, three, four more days to go red snapper fishing -- The tradeoff is not worth it, and I think we that live in other states, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, south Florida, aren't sharing the pain, right, and so this is targeted to a specific territory, and it's such a broad range in northeast Florida, that I don't believe this is a shared pain.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That's a good way to put it. Anything else that we want to say about that? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: To Gary's point, even though north Florida seems to be, or is, a hotspot for red snapper, and I know you're catching red snapper up off North Carolina, and we, obviously, catch quite a few off of Georgia, and, if we wanted to try to share the pain, maybe we could suffer with

some limited closures, short closures, to help spread out some of the -- I think the fishermen off our states, and I'm just kind of going on a limb here, and we might be willing to say, you know, if we can take, you know, X amount of time, and give Florida X more days on the water, and maybe we take, you know, four weeks and do a closure off of some places off of Georgia and North Carolina and South Carolina. Maybe we could spread the pain out a little further. I don't know that that's ever been on the options or not, but I think it might be worth taking to the public and asking.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert. I'm sorry. Andy, and then Robert.

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't want to tell you, obviously, what to put in your letter. One of the things that I would ask, that would be helpful, is just if you walk through the actions and gave us some specific recommendations for each of the actions. You're kind of bouncing around here, but, you know, starting with the overfishing definition and working your way through. The reason I say that is because some of the things that you may have recommended earlier in the amendment could affect decisions that we would make later in the amendment and whether or not they're even feasible.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Well, I'll start with Andy's comment, and I think, at least from my perspective, I think that's -- You know, comments to the specific items is what I want to do here at this council, and I think the letter should, you know -- Or at least what I proposed was we're not supportive of any action beyond what's necessary to resolve the settlement happening through the secretarial amendment, right, and we want that to come back to this council.

Charlie, to your point, just red snapper, right, and I'm trying to think through what the implications of this are, but, if you have this bottom closure, and just for Florida, and, if you have this bottom closure, and then, later, you say, okay, well, we're going to give you more days to go fish for red snapper, you're just shifting the effort, and now have more boats, and more people, going, and the discards are still going to happen at that later time.

We're not affecting a management change that is going to get to the root cause, and so we have all these symptoms, and we keep just moving them around, and we're just going to kick this can, and so I think we have the opportunity now, but we need to get -- We need to dig in now, and, Andy, I hear the comments about our inability to do things in the past, but I think a lot of that was driven by uncertainty in information, uncertainty in data.

We started the EFPs, and I'm hopeful, when we come back to the next meeting, we're going to have some real data to look at in test case and see what we can do there, and, if not, aggregate bag limits, you know, reducing the number of hooks on lines, the other actions that are in here, and I think those are things we should all we should all dig into, and go through, but I just see this thing is shifting, you know, effort around and are the fishermen, you know -- Hey, let's close this for, you know, three months, and then you'll be happy, because you're going to get more time to go, you know, fish other species, but what about all the time they lost, that they could have been fishing for other things, that is just closed, and so thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're trying to get them the amendment pulled up, and so just stand by on that. Trish, and then Tim.

MS. MURPHEY: I would just like to add a request, in our letter, to what F current equals in an SPR. I really would like to see that in writing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and ,Andy, maybe -- I don't know if we put this in -- Ask it, in the letter or put it in the letter, but, Andy, could you maybe tell me a little bit about how you went from subalternative -- In Action 4, how you went from -- When you decided on a preferred, what was your rationale for Subalternative 3b, versus 3a? I mean, I guess what I'm kind of hearing is that the result of both of those alternatives would give you a 24 percent reduction, which would have the same effect on the ACLs, and the time, the seasons.

However, the 3a, which was not the preferred, would still allow fishing up to -- You know, inside of that eighty foot, and it would have dispersed closed areas, instead of one big closed area all the way to the shore, and I was just curious. If we're reaching the same end goal in there, what made you pick that preferred, and would the ability to fish up to eighty feet help the headboats any at all?

I mean, I don't -- You know, in North Carolina at least, you know, a lot of times, especially the headboats, or the smaller headboats, that are really running, or trying to run, shorter trips, you know, they are inside that. They're barely at a hundred feet, but, again, in North Carolina, especially the southern part of North Carolina, you're going to run a long way to get to a hundred feet of water. You know, it's a sand plateau, but I was just curious what was the rationale for 3b, versus 3a. Thank you, and maybe we ask that in the letter.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, I mean, so, obviously, our rationale is detailed extensively in the amendment, and our proposed rule, but, you know, I guess the bottom line, in a nutshell, is, if you look at the economic analysis, our economic estimates indicate a lower, or, you know, lesser, economic effects in closing for a three-month period off the northeast Florida than a year-round period for those three spatial area closures.

Whether or not, you know, that jives with, obviously, what we're hearing with the industry, I'm not sure, but, you know, that was essentially an important basis, obviously, for that decision, is looking at the economic effects and the fact that those year-round areas would impact fishing activity throughout the core summer months when the fishing effort is highest.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Andy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: To that point, Andy, would the service consider different subalternatives under Action 4 for different sectors, as a comment from us?

MR. STRELCHECK: So you are welcome to make whatever comments you want, right, and I think the answer is we have to ensure that any comments are within the scope of the action and

alternatives that we've considered, right, and so the most beneficial comments would be we don't like this alternative, you know, and we would prefer you shift to this alternative, right, and this is why, right, and explain your rationale.

In terms of what you just suggested, that isn't something that's currently considered in the amendment. I wouldn't want to weigh-in and say that we can't consider it, but certainly, if you want to offer that comment, we are willing to look at it and determine whether legally we could consider it as part of this amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We've got the document open here, and so here is the first action. It seemed like we're okay with the preferred alternative here. That's what I've heard this morning, and so we're going to be going between two different screens here, as Mike tries to capture some of this information, but are we good with Action 1? It sounded like -- Okay, and so I see heads nodding yes, that we're good with the preferred in Action 1.

All right. Here's Action 2. You can see the preferred there. I think, and what I've heard this morning, is that we're good with Action 2. I see heads nodding yes. All right. Here's Action 3. So, yes, and, if you want to see the table, then just speak up. You can see the preferred there. What do we want to comment on this one? Thoughts? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I had initially not thought that we could support Alternative 3, because it's tied to the 24 percent reduction in debt discards, and so I think if -- You know, it's one or the other, either 1 and 2, and, once you get past 3 then you're into other -- Having to support other actions, I think.

MS. MCCAWLEY: If we can't agree, or we don't know what we want to say on this particular action, we don't have to say anything, but thoughts? I see people nodding their heads, not knowing what to do, and I'm going to move on to another action. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think, once we get past Action 2, it's back to this is work that the council should be doing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so that's another comment, and so think about that. Are there actions in here that we want to write in the letter that these particular items should come back to the council? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, and this is where I'll note that we would still have to do Action 3. What's not in this list of alternatives is essentially an alternative based on the new ABC, right, and so I don't know the exact math, but the ABC is 509,000 fish. If we don't reduce dead discards, that's 475,000 fish to get subtracted from that, and so the difference is essentially what your new ACL would be.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm going to see if this helpful. I just wonder how realistic is getting that 24 percent discards, based off what's currently proposed and how to do -- Like the enforceability, you know, and folks even just saying, well, I'm out here catching sheepshead, you know, and I just kind of -- Maybe something to say on that, and how realistic is it to actually get that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So points about the way to reduce it. Okay. All right. Mike is making some notes on another screen. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, also, generally, I mean, we have concern about the discard data, and so splitting -- You know, Actions 1 and 2 are splitting, you know, the ABC and ACL into landings and discards, and confidence hasn't changed there, and so, again, that's highly concerning.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. We got both of those points. Go ahead.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: How are we going to track the ACL? I mean, how are we doing that? Is that more surveys?

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that, and so we'll put that in there, too.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So I guess just a question related to this action. Andy, as far as I know, we normally -- For our total annual catch limits in our amendments, we do those as landings only. We may have dead discards that get accounted for in the ABC, but, in the ACL itself, because that's the monitored portion of the regulations, we normally have the total ACL as landings only, and then we split it out between the sectors.

Does the inclusion of dead discards in the ACL in this action -- Because I think that would be the only one in the snapper grouper fishery where it's in the ACL itself. Does that change the monitoring at all, or I guess what is the reasoning to have the dead discards in the ACL specifically, as opposed to taking the ACL and setting it based on the landed portion of the ABC?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so we have put the discards in, obviously, to show the math essentially of what happens when you transition dead discards to landed catch, but, in terms of the proposed rule, and we're confirming this, but the catch limits are specified as landings only in the proposed rule, and not capturing the total annual catch limits, discards, and landed catch.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so this is the management measures to achieve the dead discard reductions, and so this is over multiple pages. If you need to look at this, we'll have to scroll through to look at all that, and so thoughts on what we want to comment on these actions? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I don't think it contains the universe of options to deal with dead discards, and we need to spend more time on it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. We've had that discussion this morning. How do we feel about closures? I would say that, of course, Florida is opposed, but how do other people feel about this? Are there additional comments that we could agree on, as a council? Other thoughts here? Is the comment to consider other measures, and that's enough, or what is it? Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm kind of wondering what we said in the earlier action about what's the chance of you really achieving that 24 percent, you know, with the fact that discard information is poor, the enforceability, and I just -- I kind of question that will it even work, I guess. Yes, and will it achieve what they say it will.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're taking some notes over here. Anything else. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and I guess, circling back around to hooks in the water, and to Robert's point, when I say effort, you could have, theoretically a thousand fishermen fishing four hours a day, and 500 fishermen fishing eight hours a day, for basically the same amount of interactions, and I think that's what aggregate gets away from.

It lowers the amount of time the hooks are in the water, providing productivity is the same, and we'll say it is, but still, to really -- I don't think there's a model out there that's not going to tell you that, if you get some hook hours out of the water, and I'm not even using effort, and I'll say hook hours, and, if we take some hook hours out of the water, it is going to lower discard mortality, and so how do we get there? Obviously, there's lots of options, but I think we're going to have to deal with it at some point in time, whether now, or the council deals with it down the road, but we are going to have to figure out how to get some hook hours out of the water.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm repeating myself here, but, since we're kind of going action-by-action, I think this is probably the place to say it. I think they need to consider -- If they go forward with these closures, they need to consider exempting the headboat fishery, based off the fact that they do have low discards. It's a big hit on them. I don't -- You know, maybe you could do some sort of trip limit for them, like the commercial guys or something, but I think we really need to keep - - Just be at -- Leave the headboats out of this, this closure.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert, and then Amy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, Trish, I'm somewhat curious why headboats have some unique ability to reduce dead discards over a recreational center console. I think we all use the same tackle. In fact, I might argue that there's probably more inexperienced fishermen on headboats than there would be on a private center console, and so I actually think that the discard data from headboats is probably more instructive of discards in the recreational sector as a whole than what we're getting from MRIP. I don't know if there's any validity in looking at that as a proxy for discards, as opposed to using effort surveys.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and I'll take some notes on that.

MS. MURPHEY: Good comment.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, they have good data. I mean, the reason we have -- We get better data from them, and that's where that's coming from, but I -- You know, I wish the headboat folks were still here, but I don't know that they have some secret sauce for reducing discards, or hooks that only hook certain types of fish.

MS. MURPHEY No, and I think those are great points, Robert.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have Amy, and then Tom.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. So I guess I'm thinking about this as a tiered approach, and so, if you look at Action 4, it's like it is clear that closures are not great, and it's not what we're for, but I'm wondering if we should think about it from a if-not-this-then-this. I think it's clear that we don't necessarily all agree that these closures are great ideas.

I think that, if you look at what Gary was saying, and I don't disagree that if we're all going to do this, we need to, you know, share the pain to share the gain, and there is an alternative in there that does that. However, that alternative shuts the entire coast down for two months and achieves like a 32 percent reduction, according to their calculations in dead discards, and so, to me, I think it would be neat to look at what that one-month closure would look like, and how that would actually bring the discards down, and I think, too, kind of taking that into consideration with the headboats, if they wouldn't do an exemption for headboats, could they look at perhaps Alternative 3Aa?

3a, yes, it's a closure year-around, but, no matter where you are, you have more availability, and more access to fish, the rest of the 365 days around those areas. To me, they're just marine protected areas. They're just huge in magnitude than what we're currently used to, but I'm just wondering if we should kind of tier that out a little bit, so that we can provide a little bit more than, nope, we don't want to do closures, but we got to give them more than that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So let me make sure I'm understanding, while Mike is scrolling over here. So you're saying close basically the entire council's jurisdiction, but maybe do that for one month, because there wasn't an option in there to do that, because they did it for two months, and it's above the number, the percentage reduction, that was needed in the preferred alternative for a different action. I'm thinking that you are thinking January, or February, versus December, because of when groupers opened and closed and other things, and so can you think about what month you're going to suggest for that? Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just clarifying the subalternative that you're looking at, is it 3a, or is it a different subalternative that you're discussing right now?

MS. DUKES: It's a little bit of 3a, and what's that other one? Is it 4b? 4b, yes, and so 4b is the entire area closure, and it's set for January through the end of February, and it's a 32 percent reduction in dead discards, and so what if it were to be just January? What would that discard look like, because it's not currently an option, and then maybe it's down below, in the appendix and I didn't see it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're typing that out. I'm going to go back to my list of hands. Tom, and then Robert.

MR. ROLLER: I just want to take a moment just to emphasize Robert's last point. It was a very good point, and that's something we should take into consideration.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Thanks, Tom. I was thinking more, and wanted to ask Andy -- From what I'm seeing, and it's in the amendment, I think the headboat data should be best available science, and, if you used that mortality rate, or discard data there, what does the analysis look like, in terms of the discards created by the recreational sector?

MR. STRELCHECK From the assessment, and, I mean, I don't know the exact statistics, but, you know, the headboat captains have indicated I think it's less than 2 percent of the overall discards come from the headboat sector, right, and so, if that's what you're asking, they represent a small fraction.

Now, with that said, you know, there's been consideration of how we could -- Or, you know, at least how would we do that, right, because we currently manage the quotas, or catch limits, with a recreational catch limit and a commercial catch limit, and so it's kind of like we're doing sector separation based on management options within the amendments, and then, okay, we do it for headboats, and are we not doing it for charter boats, right, so lots of questions here, but certainly, obviously, we're open to continued conversation and input on this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert, and then Mike.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, I'm not -- Perhaps I didn't ask the question -- I wasn't considering separating them all, but is there a way for us to use the discard data we have from headboats, you know, and apply it to the recreational sector as a whole, rather than using MRIP to estimate discards, dead discards?

MR. STRELCHECK: Based on the science and information we have before us, no. If the Southeast Data Assessment and Review stock assessment that's upcoming deems that as best scientific information available, and an approach to take, then yes, but that would have to be vetted through the scientists and determined, obviously, what the appropriate usage of that data would be. in terms of applying it. We also have State Reef Fish Survey data, and other information, observer data, and so all of that is going to be brought to the table as the upcoming data workshop kicks off for the new stock assessment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

DR. WALTER: So, to get the discards for a sector, there's two components. There's the discard rate, and then there's the total effort, and, here, the discard rates are, you know, Robert, as you said, probably fairly comparable between a private angler and a headboat, perhaps, because of the gear they use is similar. Maybe one might change a bit, but it's the number, and the effort, that you multiply that gets to that difference in why the headboat is a small fraction of the overall discards relative to private rec, and that's the key there, is that effort and the amount of trips that private wrecks take.

Then I think one other comment I'll make is that the discard reductions are not dependent on the magnitude of the discards, and they're a proportional reduction, and so, if you remove this much effort, regardless of what the discards are, and we saw that when that sensitivity run of having the discards, or a 40 percent reduction in discards, left the stock in the same state, with nearly everything the same, and it just said the stock was a little lower, and so these are a proportional reduction, a 16 or 24 percent reduction, in discards, and that would be independent of whether they -- What the absolute magnitude is. Thanks.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you. So, in this action with the closures, do we also want to bring up specifically law enforcement concerns, data streams, those types of things here? Yes,

and so another question. We were trying to type over here that then brought up another question. Just making sure, and maybe this is an Andy question, and I assume that, even if there are closures, that Florida's exempted fishing permits would continue. Okay. I see him nodding yes. I'm sorry, and, Kerry, did you have your hand up?

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I would just like to make -- I'm uncomfortable with how we address the law enforcement concerns, considering that this council has a long history of marine protected areas, and spawning SMZs, and we have gone very deep into discussing how law enforcement affects closed areas, the cost and benefit of, you know, a closed area, even when they can't be 100 percent enforced.

We will be looking at spawning SMZs coming up in the future. Our words matter how we lay that out here. There's a deep, deep record of this council discussing the benefits of a closed area, even when law enforcement isn't 100 percent, and so I just want to be very cautious with how we address that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, but, in the preferred, that expansive area, I don't know that FWC has the number of officers needed to really patrol offshore during a three-month time period in that large area.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and, I mean, sure. The same as the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries is not available to enforce the North Carolina MPAs either, and so it's just setting a precedent for that argument.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess just trying to understand, so that we can write this in the way that the council wants, and is the difference in this situation potentially the size of the area being different than the size of what our typical SMZs and MPAs would be? Is that anything that comes into bear here, or no?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. I think so. Robert, and then I think, Tim, you had your hand up.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Well, I think part of the discussion too is you can troll, but as long as you're not trolling for snapper grouper, and there's a lot, right, and -- You can in the MPAs? Okay. Well, back to making rules that can't be enforced.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, I guess, you know, part of me is struggling with, you know, is everybody happy with the fact that, regardless of how you do it, a 24 percent reduction in discards gets us moving where we want to be, and, if so, then, I guess, if -- Given that, overall, we can achieve a 24 percent reduction in discards, then we can have that overall new ACL that's presented in whatever that -- What is it, Action 3, and it's presented in there as, you know, your ACL is your landing plus your discards.

However you achieve that, we will be at that ACL, and so, to me, this is the perfect time to go and look at, okay, well, we think we can fish at this level now. We have this new ACL, and its landings

and discards, and we know what the sector allocations are, and so now we can separate this out and figure out how can the commercial sector fish on this, and achieve their 24 -- Their portion of the 24 percent reduction, and how can the recreational sector do it. It uncouples each other, and that's kind of what this whole thing came down to, is accountability. It's kind of how we got here in the first place.

This may be a good time to look at doing that. I don't think that, you know, these are the only two ways maybe to achieve that 24 percent. You know, when you really look at this, you're achieving the entire 24 percent basically in the State of Florida, right, but maybe there's other ways to do it, and spread it out. I don't know, but, you know, when I look at this, and I look at Action 3, and I see -- I'm not even sure the math works out for me perfectly, because, you know, I went through that yesterday, and never could get my arms around it, and that's why I ask about the weight per pounds.

You know, I look at their Preferred Alternative 3, under Action 3, and there's 500,000 fish in the ACL, which are comprised of 139,000 in landings. Well, the recreational component of that is 71.93 percent, but 71.93 percent of 139,000 does not equal 85,000 fish. It equals 99,000 fish, and so I don't know how -- I don't know where those fish went, but the same -- If you took the 85,000, regardless of how you got there, and you say that that is equivalent to 887,000 pounds of fish, well, that's a ten-pound average.

If you go back to the 139,000 pounds of landings, and you look at the commercial sector, that's now getting 346,000 pounds of fish, well, 28 percent of 139,000 fish, at ten pounds, doesn't equal 346,000 pounds, and so, first of all, I don't know where, or how, you get to these actual weights versus numbers in the final ACL, but, in the column before that, you have ACL and landings plus discards, based on a 24 percent reduction.

It doesn't matter how you get the 24 percent. We've just got to get the 24 percent, and so this is the time for this council to -- If you don't like the way that the service came up and gave you your 24 percent, get your own -- We can come up with our own 24 percent, and we have solved what they are trying to do, and what we're trying to do. They've given us the flexibility, in the first two actions, to get here, and now we've just got to solve this 24 percent, and I think we can do it, and so that's the way I look at this, and, you know, this is a perfect time to uncouple each other, right here. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we captured that. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you. Tim, related to kind of what you were discussing, remember, for red snapper, there is -- It's not simply apply a percentage, because we're converting between units between the commercial and the recreational sectors, and so this is -- This is that process that goes through allocation of you convert the total ACL in number to a total ACL poundage, and then you allocate that percentage to the commercial, and then you convert the commercial to numbers, and then you subtract the commercial numbers from the total numbers to get your recreational numbers.

I do hear your point though, and that may be something that you all want to include in your letter, of having more clear spelling out of that process in the discussion language, so that the numbers

could be followed. I did notice, within that section, that there was no total -- There was no average weight listed for the total fishery.

There were the sector-specific ones, but, in order to go through that allocation process, you need the average weight for the entire fishery, and you need the average weight for the commercial sector. You really don't need the average rate for the recreational sector, because that gets subtracted out from the total numbers, but those are the two critical numbers, and the average weight for the total fishery wasn't there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

DR. WALTER: I've got an answer. I think the question came up of can we provide the catch and discard streams from the projections by the sectors, and we can, at least from the -- Right now, there's three specific ones. There's headboat, commercial, and recreational and charter combined, but the recreational and charter could be separated out, and so, if the council wants to see that kind of information, and it does appear that a number of the comments here are looking at individual sector discards, and perhaps actions that might be specific to a particular sector, and, if that council sees that as useful, that could be provided. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: A couple of comments, and so, one, Kerry, thank you for raising the point about MPAs and enforceability, because that's one of my concerns, is building a record, you know, opposing what we might be doing, but then using that same rationale to support something the council is doing around this table, and so, you know, I would add the comment about enforceability.

Yes, the closures are hard to enforce, but are they as hard to enforce as the use of descending devices, and making sure people are using descending devices, Amy's potential year-round state seasons, and the difference between federal waters and state waters, current MPAs that have been mentioned, use of an aggregate bag limit and people stopping fishing, right, and all of our regulations, for the most part, require self-compliance, and limited enforceability is the challenge, right, and so I just wanted to emphasize that.

The other thing I will say is I appreciate this discussion. I think it's really helpful. I'm hearing a lot of why we shouldn't do something, right, which I think has been a challenge for us, and we've gotten bogged down for a long time, why we shouldn't do it, why this won't work, why this is a bad idea. We're also hearing some statements about, yes, there's some things that maybe you just haven't encompassed, that you haven't considered here.

I would love for you to tell us what we haven't thought of, and start at least putting those forward. We may not be able to actually consider them in this secretarial amendment, but to lay out some of those ideas and things that you would want to then pursue going forward in the future would be wonderful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I just also want to bring up, just in case people aren't aware, and so there was the Governor DeSantis Freedom Boating Act that affects how FWC Law Enforcement

boards boats and when they can board vessels and those types of things. They can't do safety checks.

The legislature would need to put that through a bill, et cetera, but it might affect, or change, how things are enforced, versus how they were enforced up until now, and so just -- I don't know if everybody's aware of those types of things, and so that might change how enforcement occurs in thinking about this large closed area, and so I just want to be clear about that, and it might require more definitive proof that someone has violated --

Like maybe law enforcement has to see fish coming over the side of the boat inside a closed area before they stop the vessel, and so just maybe people are unaware about those types of things. When I say enforcement, enforcement is changing in the state of Florida. On that law enforcement bullet, we're going to try to draft some language for the council to look at, to make sure everybody is okay with how that's worded.

All right, and we're moving on to the next action. All right. Thoughts on this action in here? I think I heard folks earlier say specifically that the preferred alternative of a commercial trip limit of 150 pounds was good, that people felt like that was good. You've also heard other thoughts, that maybe this action should be punted back to the council, and you've heard -- Those are the points I've heard so far about this particular action. Any others? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Just to Tim's earlier point, some stuff like this I think we think is good, but I just think, procedurally, again, this is something we should think about here at the council.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm sorry. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Can I ask a question? So you've, obviously, talked about opposing, or not wanting the closures, or the ways that we were proposing to achieve the discard reductions. I've also highlighted, right, that, if we don't reduce discards, the catch limit would be considerably lower than proposed, and so, you know, what I'm hearing is support for the 150, but I feel like that's contingent on the higher catch limit, and so am I correct in that, and, otherwise, punt it back to the council, or you want everything punted back to the council, regardless of where the catch limit is set?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Tim.

MR. GRINER: Well, I mean, I thought everything was kind of predicated upon the new catch limit, but, I mean, currently, we're operating under -- You know, we've been operating under that seventy-five pounds gutted weight, which, you know, that's not exactly how we fish, right? You don't necessarily know exactly what your gutted weight is as you're catching fish, right? We basically have a box, and that box holds a hundred. We know visually, pretty darn close, what a hundred pounds of fish looks like in that box. It's a hundred-pound box tote. It's a tote.

As we fish, we fill that tote. When we get to a stopping point, we are going to gut fish, and put them in the box, but we're not going to gut them and put them back in the tote to figure out whether, you know, you can put an extra fish in there, or, whether, you know, by taking the guts out of the fish, you know, now you can fit another fish in the tote.

So, really and truly what we're doing is we're fishing basically to fish -- To fill that hundred-pound box, and the guts are what the guts are, and so, when you get to the dock, depending on how those fish lay in the box, you may end up with seventy-five pounds of gutted weight, or you may end up with seventy, or you may end up with seventy-eight, or seventy-nine, you know, and you just can't be that exact. It's impossible.

So, to me, that leads toward just go for the hundred pounds. A hundred pounds, you know, is a good number, and so regardless of whether -- If we're going back to whether this action -- Whether we adopt these new numbers or not, you know, if it needs to kick back to the council, if the council needs to do this, I do think a hundred pounds is a good number.

You know, 150 does give you more fish, but a hundred is easy to keep up with. It's a box, and it's -- You know, it's kind of along the lines of the way we fish, and it does give us a little bit more time, more days, to keep those. It's not going to be appreciably different in, you know, what our - - What we make, or our economics of the trip. The big economics in the trip is that first hundred pounds, but not throwing those fish back. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and to Tim's point, you know, most of our boats are trip fishing, and so we're not coming back after we catch seventy-five pounds, 100 pounds, or even 150 pounds.

We're going to make our trip, and try to get our beeliners, or amberjack, or whatever, and so I'm not going to have a whole lot of heartburn one way or the other, and, if the season is stretched out a little bit, so we've got a few less discards, that's just gravy, but I wouldn't fall on my sword over, you know, really any of it, but yes, a hundred pounds, you know, make -- I've even bought little handheld weigh scales to give my guys, but the boat is rocking around, and they still can't get it right. We're going to end off ten pounds off, and it just doesn't matter, but, if you've got a set container that holds what you know it holds, that does make it easier.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We've got some bullets on there, and so check that out. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I guess, just for clarification, Andy, in Action 3, adjusting the annual catch limit, is that predicated on the reduction in discards, or is that -- It is? Then I just don't think we can proceed with that. To your point, Tim, I'm supportive of adjusting the commercial pound limit, but I think that's something we're going to have to do here at the council.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. The fishing season, anything on this one? I think I heard earlier that people liked this, and so are we good with that? Let's go ahead and take a fifteen-minute break. I see people are having to get up and go to the bathroom, and so let's take a break, and we'll come back and try to finish this up.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going. We're going to spend a few more minutes on this, the points for the letter, and then we're going to switch over to black sea bass, and so back to Sub-Action 5b, which was modifying the commercial fishing season. Is there anything that we

wanted to comment on this? It sounded earlier like people were okay with this, and so is this one of the actions that we want to bring up? Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I'm kind of contributing to Robert's theme. This is one of those things that, again, where we've struggled with other things, and that single species focus and the slip sliding of the season. That's the only thing that I struggle with, is how will all of that kind of shift, and overlay, and are we, you know, being short sighted in what other species we're looking at it relative to? Again, I'm not criticizing it, other than just to say it feels like, with what we're trying to do holistically for the fishery management unit, it seems like this is something that would be better suited to look at on a holistic approach.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other people seem to be in agreement on that. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Sorry. With all due respect, we're more likely to catch the red snapper when we're fishing for gags and the shallow-water grouper, and so it makes a lot of sense.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Mike is taking some notes on that, too. Anything else? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, at some point, don't we need to come to consensus? I mean, I don't think we can like, all right, we're going to support Action 1 and 2 and then, you know, 4 and 6, and piecemeal this thing, and so, I mean, how are we going to -- Is this letter going to -- I don't even understand, at this point, how this is coming together. We started with, you know, and I don't think we've vetted it, but is everybody okay with saying, hey, look, the secretarial amendment addresses the settlement.

Beyond that, it should come back, and then we've gone past that, and we're getting into detail that I think this is more appropriate for the council, you know the Snapper Grouper Committee, to talk through and not provide, you know, feedback to this letter that we're not -- Or to these actions that we're just holistically not supportive of happening in this manner. Assuming that -- You know, and that's where I think we need to find consensus here at the council, is what direction do we want to go.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Let's have that discussion, stop making comments on each action and have that discussion. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, I would argue that we're just one commenter. The Secretary could take our comment into consideration, but not follow through with it. I think it's important that they -- That whoever is making the decision has the input on the rest of the actions, on the chance that they carry through with the plan, and I would also argue we might not be in consensus, and so I think it's important to discuss every action. If you want to start it off by saying we feel strongly about only 1 and 2, that's fine, but I think it's important that we have discussions on the other actions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I'm perfectly okay with that, Kerry. If the council is agreeable, that we're going to say, you know, from our perspective, 1 and 2 are appropriate, and the rest of this is not, and it should come back to us, and if -- When we look at it, here are the types of things that we

would be looking through, so that feedback is there, Kerry, if they decide to proceed, but at least we've, you know, on record taken the position that this is work for the council to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: It seems like our -- That we're a little bit split, but let me see if I can try to restate what I think I'm hearing, and then people can react to that, and so it sounds like at least some folks are okay with, hey, we only think Action 1 and 2 are needed, and the rest of the actions should come back to the council and go through the regular council process. You're also hearing, hey, on some of these actions, in case they move forward, let's have some council feedback on the actions, if they move forward with it, and so we're hearing both, and I guess I would say are people okay with putting both of them in there? I guess that we need to resolve that. Trish, and then Robert.

MS. MURPHEY: I think it would be important to say both. I mean, I think we can start the letter saying, you know, Robert's point that we feel 1 and 2 is fine, and we should be doing the rest, but, as Kerry pointed out, they are looking for comments, and I think we need to take the opportunity to make comments on each one as well, but I think there's no reason not to start out the letter saying something like, you know, here's our general comments, with what you said, and then go through each one. I think it's important to go ahead and do all of it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I'm agreeable to that. I don't think it's both. I think that's one thing, right, you know, stating our position and then going through and providing the comments. I'm perfectly fine with that, and so I think we should -- I don't know if we vote on that, or sign of head, but is everybody okay with that, because I think that's important, to give direction. When we leave here, this letter is going to be drafted, written, and submitted, and this is the last discussion we're going to have together, and so is that the direction everybody is comfortable with?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Lots of hands going up. Let me go to Mike first.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just addressing the process, what we're going to do is, in between now and Full Council for Snapper Grouper Committee, I, and other council staff, will be working through the notes that you all gave us. We're going to draft up kind of more formalized bullets, and these would be the main points that would go into your letter, and those will come before the entire council for you to talk through and review them on Friday. Then, following that -- You know, that's kind of like your last shot to look at that, at those bullets, and then we would be passing the draft between -- I think it's the council chair and vice chair. Is that correct? Yes. The council chair and vice chair would have the final review before it gets submitted.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so Andy, and then Tim.

MR. STRELCHECK: I keep hearing we're fine with Alternatives 1 and 2, which I assume is Actions 1 and 2, but, if that's the direction you're at least providing the Fisheries Service, I would say you need to also add an Action 3, right, because we can't just set the overfishing definition, and specify an ABC, without an ACL, and the ACL needs based on the new stock assessment and science, and, if you're essentially recommending that we stay the course, and don't reduce discards, then that would be clear direction that I would want to have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Let me see if I can get all that. So Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and exactly as Andy said. You know, I think I'm in support of Action 3. You have to have Action 3 in there, you know, and all of its alternatives and, you know, I'm a big supporter of alternative -- Of one of the alternatives that achieves the 24 percent, you know, and so however you get that 24 percent maybe is what we need to work on, whether the council does that or, or how that is achieved, but, as Andy said, we, we have to -- I am in support of Action 3. We have to have an annual catch limit, and, typically, we're given -- We're given that, and we're kind of given that here, and so we never determine our own ACLs. That's something that, in typical course, the SSC would give us, but our new SSC proxy gave it to us, and so I think we have to include that as part of this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Well, I think what I'm understanding is, if Action 1 and 2 proceed, you're going to have to come up with a new ACL anyways, and Action 3 is determining what that ACL is, right, and so Action 3 is based on the 24 percent reduction, which Andy is pointing out we're not going to instruct to proceed with, and we're going to continue with the current rules, and so the ACL, I don't know what it -- I don't know if it's on here, but that just sounds like something that's going to happen organically as a matter of going forward with Action 1 and 2.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, and then Tim.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So the ACL would need to be set through an action, and that's what's being done in Action 3. I'm trying to kind of tease out what I'm hearing, as far as the comments around the table. The act of setting an ACL through Action 3, that is something that seems to be necessary. It's a necessary component. There may be some disagreement on the reduction of discards that's incorporated into Action 3, but the setting of an ACL is a required component, and so that would need to remain. Does that seem to capture what you all have discussed thus far?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would say yes, and so I had a couple of hands. Tim, and then over to Robert.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I credit Mike. That's exactly what I was -- What I was trying to say is that, yes, we -- You know, we have to have that, you know, that, whether you choose Alternative 1, 2, 3, or 4, that's a different story, but we have to have that annual catch limit in there as an action.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think we're on the same page now. It sounds like it may be Alternative 1, if we don't have any discard reduction measures included.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So it sounds like part of the hangup is the discard reduction clause with the ACL, that that's part of what we're not all in agreement on. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and so I'll go back to kind of an earlier comment, right, and so you're providing a recommendation. We have to look to see if it's kind of within the scope and range of what we considered, but what I'm hearing is a recommendation to set the ACL with -- Well, different discard reductions, depending on who's saying it, right, but, if there's no discard reduction

-- Right now, that alternative is not in the amendment, right, and we would have to add that to the amendment, and, as I was mentioning earlier, the ACL could only be 509,000 fish, or less, and the estimate of status quo discards is 475,000 fish, and so your ACL is essentially the difference between those two, in landed catch, and so you're talking about 34,000 fish.

That would potentially be a new alternative the Fisheries Service could add, but I just want to make sure everyone is clear that it's not in there right now. It would be something that we have to consider whether we have the authority to add or not right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, but I also thought that we had a bunch of discussion about the estimates used for discards across various sectors, and possibly using the number for the headboats and other things, and so that's part of what I'm having trouble resolving, is the percentage and all that that's being used. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: That was the point I was going to make. I actually think, by going through the process of setting the new ACL, we should take into account new information, whether through the EFP or discussion we had about, you know, headboat as a proxy for discards, which I think is somewhat new.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so, based on where I think we're going here, which is some statements in the beginning about the couple, two, or three, actions that the council feels strongly about, yes, go do these, and then we're saying it's in the South Atlantic's purview, the council's purview, to do the other actions, but, if you're going to proceed with them, here are the comments on those actions, and so I'm looking around the table, and people are nodding yes. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: As long as we're going down that path, there is another option here too, where Florida has got a long list of people who applied for EFPs. You know, the dead discards could get pushed into that program, and, although it's not open fishery for Florida, at a minimum, you know, folks who get an EFP, if we had more quota, or more fish, pushed to us, they could continue to fish in this area, and so there's just one example there of, you know, although you're greatly reducing the number of people that are getting out there, because you're doing it through a permit system, there's at least that alternative.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so maybe that goes under the management measure option, as another thing to consider. Okay, and we're trying to type that up. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I wanted to go back to the headboat bullet, because I guess I understand why you're maybe asking for it, but the catch level advice, the ABC advice, the overfishing advice all come from the stock assessment, right, and so we can't just swap out MRIP data with the headboat data. We did an update to the stock assessment.

What is being suggested there, to me, is more of a consideration for a new stock assessment that changes how the model and everything uses the data, and is run, and so I just wanted to get clarity or, you know, at least provide clarity, with regard to at least my interpretation of that, which is I don't think there's anything we could do, based on your recommendation, in the short-term with the secretarial amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: We had talked a little bit about setting the ABC and ACL based on discards, you know, being concerned, and did we get a note in there specifically about that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and I'm going to -- It seems like we have consensus on kind of the core structure of the letter, and so we're going to go back through the actions and see if in the next say ten minutes, we can get through some comments on the actions, if the Fisheries Service decides to proceed with those, and so we just talked about the commercial fishing season, that it's going to say both. This is one of the items that should be done through the council's process, but, if you move forward, we're in support of Preferred Alternative 2. So then, on Action 6, which is the fishing season, let's go back to that. All right. Thoughts on the season and the preferred selected here for recreational. Gary.

MR. BORLAND: I guess my only concern, or comment, is around just pushing it to Saturdays and Sundays. I mean, we know that there is -- There are people, recreational specific, that are in the service industry, or whatever, that do fish during the week. I do want to understand how weather plays. If we just state that it's only on Saturdays and Sundays, and, if we try to do a weather push, or they push the days, does that eliminate the weekdays, and that we could open it up on a Thursday, or a Friday, and so just more clarification around the specifics on that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Andy, do you have an answer for that? So, if this sets it to Saturdays and Sundays, and you need to reopen an area due to weather, or close an area due to weather, when you add days, you can't use anything other than a Saturday or a Sunday?

MR. STRELCHECK: Correct.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So maybe that's part of our comment, is the possibility of having at least one weekday or something. Gary.

MR. BORLAND: Yes, and I think we need some feedback from the recreational community on whether that really -- If Saturdays and Sundays is the only day. I just don't want to limit it to just Saturdays and Sundays, would be my comment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and we're capturing that. Somebody else had -- Tom had their hand up.

MR. ROLLER: I agree with the comments before me regarding like just looking at other days, but I understand if we're trying to accommodate as many people as possible, Saturday and Sunday, and we can't make everybody happy. Personally, I prefer to fish on Wednesdays, but, you know -- Now that being said, I am supportive of the idea of moving the season up. I think that's a good move. I would have been supportive of moving it into May even, more to correspond with our shallow-water grouper opening. If the idea is to reduce discards, and we reduce some of that biomass early in the season, hopefully that would reduce discards further along the line down the course of the year.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and we're capturing that. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, when we get through with the recreational stuff, can we come back, because I'm really not sure where we ended up on Action 3, as far as our alternatives, when we get through with the recreational thing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Quick question actually for Andy, for Action 6, because we're talking about the rec stuff, unless we've gone -- Yes, we still are. All right, and so, with this idea of weather, with this idea of we have a recreational ACL, and the projection is currently between five and nine days, the ACL will be monitored throughout that time period, and that projection of nine days could in fact go up if the ACL is not met, and could -- that would be on the fly, correct, sir? No, and it would be capped at nine days, regardless of what the ACL is at the end of the fishing days?

MR. STRELCHECK: So, the nine days is our projection, but landings aren't coming in real time, so we wouldn't have that in-season, but, to the extent that we got information, kind of like what we do in the Gulf, right, and determine that the catch limit hasn't been met, then we could reopen for more days.

MS. DUKES: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anything else on the recreational season? All right. Charlie has asked to go back to 3. Would you like to look at the bullet points and see if it covers all the points that we discussed?

MR. PHILLIPS: Madam Chair, I understand the bullet points, but did we need to have a preferred? I know Tim mentioned 24 percent, and then there's been some talk about not counting -- You know, Alternative 1, and so are we having a preferred, or are we just sending some bullet points?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't know that we can agree on a preferred. I think that that's why we didn't have one, but I'll put it back to the group. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think, if we're all agreed, that the preferred approach was, you know, for the secretarial amendment to accomplish what it is in order to satisfy the settlement, and you have to have 1, 2, and 3, because you have to set an ACL, but, if we weren't proceeding with the balance of the actions, there were no discard reduction measures being taken, and it effectively puts you back to Alternative 1, but I think there is some additional information that they're going to review in looking at to confirm that that is the ACL, but, as I understood it, that is -- If we got what we were asking for in our letter, that would be the outcome.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, and then back to Charlie.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So the effect of going through Actions 1 and 2, and then having an ACL based on Actions 1 and 2, that wouldn't really put you back at Alternative 1 of Action 3. That's what Andy was saying. That's an alternative that's not included in Action 3. It wasn't something that was there, where they set the new ABC, and an ACL based on the new ABC, but do not include any discard-reducing measures associated with that, but he said that it would come out somewhere around 34,000 fish. That's what you all would be looking at, and so it would not be

ted to -- Your preferred, in that situation, wouldn't be Alternative 1. It would be an alternative that's not listed under that action.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie, and then Tim.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and I just can't see us not dealing with discard mortality, and trying to at least get some kind of percentage, and I don't really know if it's 24 percent, or another percentage, but just hoping that we're going to look at another analysis that's going to give us some savings that we don't have now.

Yes, and look at it, but I would think we would at least ask for, you know, work towards some kind of dead discard reduction, which turns around into giving the fishermen more fish, and I understand we can, you know, keep doing pretty much what we're doing, and not have any closed areas, but we need to start doing something to get some of these dead discards down, some way, shape, or form, and thinking we can, you know, reanalyze stuff, and I don't know that it's -- It's not going to get us where we need to go, and so I would not support, you know, not working towards some kind of dead discard reduction.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I hear you. I'm going to go to Tim. I don't know that we can agree on the percentage, or the way to do this, and so we also -- In the action on closures, we're suggesting other alternatives to closure, and so I feel like we are talking about the discards, but just in a different way, and so I don't feel like we're just ignoring it, but I think we're having trouble picking a preferred on that particular action. Tim, and then Robert.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I hear what you're saying, Madam Chair, but I tend to agree with Charlie. I mean, we got in this position because of discards, and, in order to come up with a solution for the discards, you have to have a target, you know, and so whether or not the -- Whether or not the way you saw -- You get to the 24 percent is palatable, and that's the question, but you've got to get to the 24 percent, or the 23 percent, or the 32 percent, and you have to pick a number, so you have a target, so you have a way to get there and know when you're there.

You know in my mind if we don't -- If we don't do something, as Charlie said, to address these discards, with -- You know, with some kind of target number, then all you've really done is, at the end of the day, the council has shifted its response, and it has turned this over to a secretarial amendment that is just really going to look like trickery, right, and all you've done is circumvent, or change, the way that an assessment was done, and you haven't really done anything, other than just some trickery, or what appears to be trickery, and so I think it's imperative that we address, or come up with, some number, some goal here, for dead discards.

That is the problem. The problem is dead discards. You can -- We can all sit here and say that we don't like the way that we're getting that accomplished, which is -- You know, which is great, which is fine, and, you know, I think that's -- You know, that's very debatable, how you get there and, you know, how bitter of a pill it is to swallow, and who has to swallow the most of it, but the fact of the matter is we've got to address the dead discards.

Again, I go back to if it's -- If 24 percent of the number is that number, fine, and, if that means that the commercial sector has to go find a way to get rid of 24 percent of its discards, we'll do that,

and we'll go on our merry way, and the recreational sector, the charter sector, and the headboat sector can decide how they best want to get rid of their 24 percent, or whatever that number is.

I'm just using 24 as, you know, as a placeholder there, but the fact of the matter is we're here because of these dead discards, and kicking the can down the road, and not addressing dead discards, is not solving the problem, and so I'm with Charlie here.

We have to have something other than, you know, not addressing dead discards, and, as Andy said, you know, if you just leave that in there without this, then Alternative Number 1 is not the new Number 1. There's something other than that, and, when you look at that dropping from the 42 down to 34, then, you know, that -- I'm not sure, but that may be even worse than where we are now. Anyways --

MS. MCCAWLEY: I will go to Robert, but I don't feel the same way as you guys about the discards, and I don't feel the same way as you guys about selecting the preferred, and so, because of that, and, you know, normally the council spends multiple meetings debating a preferred, where, you know, we're spending a couple hours to talk about preferreds in a secretarial amendment, which is a different process for us, and so I feel like we're trying to come up with the lowest common denominator that we can agree on, which is some general comments on this without picking a preferred on the discards, because I don't I don't feel the same way as you guys, and I would also say that stopping bottom fishing, once some type of aggregate limit is reached, which we have had that discussion today as well, would also stop discards, and it's not included here, and so I just -- I'm trying to get to the lowest possible thing that we can agree on. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks for the comments, Jessica, and so I guess what I would add is it's helpful to the Fisheries Service also to let us know that you're not in consensus, and, you know, to be able to capture, obviously, if there's certain perspectives that want something captured in your response, and certain perspectives that want something else captured, and that's okay too, right, and it's all public comments, and input, and you don't need to have a consensus statement.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: To Charlie and Tim, I agree that we need to do something, we the council, and not the Secretary do this. You know, that's our job. That's what we're supposed to do, is set these rule, and I think they're taking care of the settlement. I also, you know, think that that 24 reduction -- What does that mean for next year?

I mean, if we proceed with this, we're just kicking the can. These discards are going to continue to happen. We have the same management structure in place, and this is just an issue that's going to come back and bite us in the butt, and perhaps even worse, not to mention I think the same thing is going to end up happening with black sea bass. We'll be here, three or four years from now, talking about bottom closures for black sea bass.

The management -- There's a management tool missing here, and we've got to get to that, and I think that we have the motivation right now. Everybody is talking about it. When this ends, we need to immediately turn around, and we need to pour our energy into figuring out how to stop dead discards, and fully explore the universe of possibilities for management opportunities to do

that, and I think we're -- With Actions 1, 2, and 3, it gives us the time, and the ability, for us to figure that out and get into it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to try to burn through the last couple of actions. If we can, we really need to move to black sea bass. I understand that this is a challenging discussion. It's a challenging discussion every time we have it. We are trying to -- I don't think we're going to come up with a preferred on that action, and so I said that, and I just -- We're saying it again, and I feel like we're circling a little bit, and so trying to focus us, so that we can get to black sea bass next. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Just changing subject, and Amy got me thinking, and so, yes, with the weather stuff, and I was still trying to figure out how that was going to work, because say -- You know, just with what happened this year, and Florida got to fish, and so just kind of putting a scenario out there for the future.

Florida gets to fish nine whole days, because they have good weather, and North Carolina -- We have hurricane whomever come through, and we only get three days, and how are you going to figure out -- How are you going to figure out how many days North Carolina will get, because it's really very possible that Florida gets that whole -- You know, what was open for those nine days, that ACL is gone, and so I'm just trying to figure out how you're going to figure that out, because I just see that would be really difficult.

MS. MCCAWLEY: What I'm hearing -- I don't know that -- Andy, you can answer, if you have a ready answer, but, also, it sounds like a point would need to be added about this to Action 6, about how the added days are determined, when they're determined, you know, seeking clarification on that, but, Andy, would you like to comment on it?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and we talk about this some of the proposed rule, but keep in mind that you would -- I'm blanking, in terms of the terminology, but there would have to be a severe weather -- What do we call it?

MR. DEVICTOR: Small craft advisory.

MR. STRELCHECK: Small craft advisory. Yes. Thank you. So, you know I would work with the states, and, obviously, we would work with the Weather Service, we would determine, obviously, how many small craft advisories occurred, and when, and then we would determine, obviously, how many days would be reopened.

With that said, I mean, you're suggesting like that we have this real-time monitoring that's able to happen with this fishery, and we don't, right, and so the goal would be to try to open the fishery as expected, whatever the dates would be, determine, obviously, the number days that were lost, and then reopen it as soon as possible thereafter, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We captured some comments about that, just lack of information about how exactly it would work, how it would be communicated, when, all that, and so I think we captured that, and so, if we can do it quickly, we could do some comments here on the last two actions. This established an annual experimental studies program.

As a person that has an EFP, I am concerned with the amount, the capping, because it's less than what was set aside for the EFPs that this year, so just some concerns, especially when you think about one of the suggestions that I think Robert had about what if you used an EFP and took some of the quota and pushed it over to one of Florida's existing EFPs, so that people are -- Essentially, recreational folks are essentially fishing in the closed area, and I think that that would be hindered by the cap that's set with this program.

The timing of it, at least the way that we were running the EFPs, the timing of it was a little bit off for us, and we'll certainly put those in the FWC letter, but I just wanted to bring that up for the group. Robert, you had your hand up?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I was I was just going to suggest that, you know, this action doesn't seem to be necessary, because the EFP program we're running -- This just seems like an additional layer of cost here, and it's not needed.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We got all that. I'm going to jump to the modify the fishing year and see if we were okay to the modifications on the fishing year, or do we have any comments on that? All right. Seeing no comments on the modification for the fishing year, it seems like people are okay with that, if they choose to proceed.

Okay, and so the preferred is to start the fishing year May 1. Are we okay with that? I see some heads nodding yes. If you're not okay, can you speak up with on that? All right. I see some thumbs-up, and so this has been a good discussion. A reminder of the process here. Staff is going to go in and try to craft a letter that we will look at tomorrow, in Full Council, and so they're going to try to take all these comments and summarize them and have something for us to look at. All right. I appreciate that discussion. Now we're going to switch into black sea bass.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so we're coming back to the black sea bass stock assessment response amendment, Amendment 56. Just standard background information is included here. At the last meeting in December, you all directed staff to take this out for scoping, and so we went ahead and did that. Scoping is summarized within the document there. You have links to the comments that were submitted online.

It was noted earlier in the meeting, but I'll reiterate that we did scoping for this a little bit different than past processes, in the sense that we did not hold webinar meetings for this scoping process. We recorded a video presentation, posted that online, and solicited comments in that manner, and so, through that method, we got a total of six written comments, that were submitted either through the online public form or via email. Some of those comments that were submitted via email are included in your briefing book.

The commenters included a few private recreational and for-hire fishery stakeholders from Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, as well as three NGOs. Some of the themes that that stuck out from those comments included one discussing how fishing has become easier, and more efficient, through the use of trolling motors, a comment that came from a couple private recreational stakeholders that opposed a closed season for black sea bass, and there was some support for changing the bag and size limits, and there was some support for single-hook rigs.

Then the comments from NGOs were all related to the seasonally-closed nearshore areas and in support of opening those seasonally-closed nearshore areas to commercial pots that are equipped with on-demand gear, and so, as a reminder of where we are within the timing of this amendment, right now, the Science Center is working on an update to the stock assessment that would provide additional catch projections for future years.

Those are going to come to the SSC in April, and they will come to you in June, after the SSC has had their review of those projections, and so, right now, we don't have the catch levels, but you'll see those in June. We are planning to have the IPT get together in between now and the June meeting, to start developing any other actions that you all would like to include in the amendment at this point.

The objectives for this meeting were for you all to take a look at the scoping comments, and we've gone through a brief summary of that, and then provide guidance to staff, and to the IPT, on the actions that you would like to consider in this amendment, as well as if you have any guidance on a range of alternatives that that the IPT needs to develop in between now and June. Moving down into the -- Well, I guess, before moving into the actions I'll pause and see, and are there any questions about the scoping process and what we heard via scoping?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Questions on that? I don't see any hands.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. Then I'll continue moving us down into the actions. Remember we have a few actions that are kind of in the required category, and we have several actions that are in the other actions category, and so required actions include a change in the catch levels. This is expected to be a reduction in the catch levels, given the decline that we've seen in the black sea bass stock.

There is also an action that has been that has been requested through the agency, and endorsed by the SSC and the assessment, looking at changing the status determination criteria from the current 30 percent SPR-based reference points to 40 percent SPR-based reference points, and so that would be another action that that you all would need to consider in this amendment.

Then having the discussion about sector allocation percentages, just as your standard after you get a completed assessment, that you all would need to have some discussion, and justification, for what the allocation percentages are or if you want to have any consideration of changing those allocation percentages.

The other actions that are -- That have been discussed thus far, that you all have looked at a couple times, include revising the accountability measures. This one would look at changing the current recreational accountability measure in which the agency sets the season at the beginning of each year. The next action is to change the fishing year start date. You may want to consider potentially aligning those start dates, especially as you head into what will likely be a rebuilding plan in the in the longer-term future, beyond this amendment. Right now, the recreational start date is April 1, and the commercial start date is January 1.

Next is consideration of reopening the nearshore seasonal closed areas for black sea bass pots, and reopening those in some capacity to pots that are equipped with on-demand gear. We've had some comments that were in support of kind of fully reopening those into the status that they were before.

We've heard comments from the AP, and, sorry, and I just saw what it looked like on the screen. I can zoom-in more, but we've heard comments from the AP that requested some consideration of reopening, but in a different capacity than what they may have been opened in the past, and so those are some of the comments that have gone along those lines.

Then, finally, looking at a variety of different recreational management measure changes, some measures that would potentially reduce discards, such as single-hook rigs, closures of nearshore areas for black sea bass retention that coincide with the spawning season, and this is something that was brought up, and it kind of brings to mind a reminder that this stock exists in a pretty significant capacity in state waters. There are a lot of black sea bass that are that are undersized that are caught in state waters, and that's a place where there's a lot of discarding, in state waters, but this management plan would only be applied to federal waters.

A few other actions that have been discussed are a reduction in the recreational bag limit, or a reduction in the recreational size limit. It's kind of been talked about changing the recreational size limit is likely to increase retention, and so the idea behind this was to increase retention and allow anglers to be able to hit their bag limit faster and then move out of areas where they would be catching black sea bass.

We did talk to the AP about this, at their October meeting, and they did say that there is some difficulty with that, that black sea bass are fairly pervasive in some areas, and it's hard to move to areas that don't have black sea bass specifically. They may exist in smaller numbers, but that doesn't necessarily mean that avoiding them would necessarily be an effective strategy.

Then, finally, there was discussion of a potential recreational seasonal retention closure. You all had discussed this to potentially line up with the shallow-water grouper closure, and so lasting from January through April, and opening the season up May 1, along with a variety of other snapper grouper FMU species that open on May 1, and so I've noted the other species in the management unit that are closed from January through April, as well as noting greater amberjack is closed only in April, and not for that entire timeframe.

The ask, at this point of the committee, is to take a look at the actions that you all have discussed at this point and direct the IPT on what do you want included in this amendment, what do you want us to draft up and to begin analyzing as we move forward in making progress on this, and so, with that, I will answer questions and take down notes as you discuss.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Mike. All right, and so I'm going to start in the required actions, and so I assume that we want to reduce catch levels, revise status determination criteria, and what do we think about changing the allocation, and so let's start with those three required actions and see where we are on that. Thoughts anybody? Tim.

MR. GRINER: Well, I guess I'll jump in Number 2 first. I'm not comfortable on revising the determination criteria at this point, and so I don't know whether we need to hold -- I mean, in my mind, we need to hold off on that. You know, I'm not comfortable with 40, for sure, and I don't know whether I would be more comfortable at 36, or 34, but I know I'm not comfortable at 40, without any more explanation, or data, behind it, and so maybe, when we have the presentation from Luiz, it will help me get a better comfort level for this particular species, but, you know, I

just can't really get comfortable that we're lumping 40 percent for every species without some real validity to it, and so I don't know um how to handle Number 2, other than just delay on it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: My thought was, you know, I think that's why we got in the place we are now. We had said 30 percent, and made it very specific, and so, if we worked on a status determination criteria that was broad, so we have the flexibility to build in -- I mean, just sort of like what they did in the secretarial amendment.

It's, you know, something appropriate, based off BSIA, or something, and I'm not sure how the Mid-Atlantic Council words it, but there are ways to do it with keeping the flexibility, so you're not locked into any one SPR, and so you just -- Something that -- I don't know what the wording would be, but something that would be appropriate, and so, that way, we won't have to change it, if we ever, you know, change SPRs on something, and then we have the ability to change SPRs within, if that helps.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I have Charlie, then Andy.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I agree with Trish and Tim. At some point in time, we may need to change it, but, right now, I don't think 40 percent, or 50 percent, SPR, and I think what has happened to this these fish is regime shift, whether it be predator-prey, the food web has changed, or red snapper are eating the recruits, or lionfish are eating the recruits, or the water is too hot, and there's just any number of things, but I don't think just automatically going to 40 percent is going to help us any. I think there's too many other issues going on, and so I'm not inclined to want to go down that road. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm going to go to Mike, and then to Andy.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So at least what I'm hearing from the initial comments is you're kind of focusing right now on the 40 percent SPR number, and what I'm hearing is to -- We need to include this action for consideration, given the information, the letter from NMFS along those lines, but we can -- What we can potentially do is develop alternatives other than just a flat 40 percent.

That would be one of the alternatives, but there can be other alternatives, such as what was suggested by Trish of setting -- You know, setting a principle that it would be a reasonable proxy based on BSIA, something along those lines. If there are specific points of other SPRs that could be developed, after you all hear additional information from Luiz, or see information from the assessment, then those might be able to go in as alternatives as well.

I would also say, relative to Charlie's point about potential regime shifts, kind of one of the -- One of the effects, if a regime shift were to happen, is what you're essentially saying, is that the reference point has changed, and that's what you're saying, so that the level of overfishing that's appropriate, or the overfished, you know, threshold for the biomass, and that's something that has changed if a regime shift has occurred, so there would still be some tie-in of that idea with an idea of changing the reference point. There would just be different backing, and, right now, there's -- I'll say there's ongoing discussion about the status of that in this region.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I have a couple of suggestions. Just from the standpoint of wordsmithing, I think we could say “consider revising the status determination criteria”, because we need to, obviously, do the analysis and evaluate the information. You know, we have, obviously, a recommendation from the SSC of what they would consider BSIA, in terms of 40 percent, but I agree with the discussion that that should be looked at carefully, and thoughtfully, and, as we’ve said before, right, we need to build a record as to, you know, any information that would be contrary to the scientific advice, and work with our scientific advisors, if that would be changed, and so, yes, I like this approach. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Are we okay with that? I see heads nodding yes, that we're okay with that. We’ve captured some notes there, so then what about Number 3, review sector allocation percentages? Is this something that we want to consider, or don't want to consider, as part of this document? Well, I you could consider and say that we have no intent of changing the allocation, and then that would be captured as part of this, so that's kind of what we did with golden tilefish, but thoughts? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I would think the allocation is perfectly reasonable, considering I don't -- I don't know when it was looked at last. I don't think it was that long ago, but I would think the allocation is probably okay where it is.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just adding another point that I don't think -- I'm not sure that I captured it within this document, it's in documents that you've seen before, but, the last time your AP discussed this, your recommendation from your AP was not to change the allocations at this time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Is that where we are? Okay. I'm looking around the room, and heads are nodding yes. All right, so let's dive into these other actions. What do we want to include in this amendment from this alternative list, and so this is a list, an existing list, based on previous council discussions and AP discussion. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Well, I would start a discussion about Number 6 , to reopen the nearshore areas to on-demand black sea bass pots. I would recommend that we do that. You know, this hasn't ended, this effort in trying to develop this technology, for not just that gear, but for lots of gears, and it needs to continue on.

I mean, from a practical point of view, where I live, I’m not going to be doing it, because I won't be able to catch any sea bass to make it worth my while, and so there are areas where there is bass, north, in North Carolina in particular, where they will be able to utilize the area with the gear, and so, you know, again, it's hard to manage this regionally, because of the way the center of abundance of the stock has changed, but I think we should allow the gear back into the closed area.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Jimmy. Yes, and I’m in complete support of reopening these nearshore areas to on-demand black sea bass pots. In fact, I think we

have to. I mean, that the only reason these areas were closed was because of vertical lines, to reduce entanglements for right whales. This eliminates that. Therefore, there is no more need to have these areas closed, and it does incentivize people to use these on-demand black sea bass pots, and I do think it's the wave of the future, and, you know, it solves the problem that closed the area to begin with, and so I'm in full support of reopening these areas.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Tim. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I agree with Jimmy and Tim, and I've worked with the gear, just like Jimmy has, and so, yes, and we've got public comments in support of reopening, and so, yes, I would definitely put that on our list of things to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It's on the list. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just to make sure that the IPT captures the range that you all are looking for, it sounds like there's support for including an alternative that would just completely remove all of the closed area time periods. Given there was some commentary from I think it was a headboat stakeholder at the AP about potential benefits that that industry has experienced in the timeframe that the closure has occurred, is there any interest in an alternative that would have, I guess, less of a time period of closure, or anything -- Any intermediate between completely, you know, as it is right now versus completely open? No interest in that? Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We've got that captured. What else from this list would you like to consider? We've got revised accountability measures, change the fishing year start date, revising recreational management measures, and you heard a number of things from the AP, including -- There's that single-hook rig, you know, option again, and you've got things like size limits, and what are other people's thoughts here? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Just pretty much all of the above. We can put them in there. I'm not so sure about the single-hook rigs, but I'm sure they would help. The uh size limit, and the bag limit, yes, and the recreational seasonal retention closure, and I guess we could look at it. I don't have heartburn either way about that, and so I would leave that up to the recreational guys.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Other thoughts? So Mike is highlighting some things here. Other thoughts? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: This is going to be the true difficult thing we face in this amendment, because remember we've had a lot of discussion on this, and we have a lot of discards in this fishery, and they're not occurring in federal waters. They're occurring in state waters, and I don't know how we address that, right, and so I fully support looking at single-hook rigs, but that's not going to help us with double-hook rigs in state waters, right, and so I don't have a solution here, but it's something that we're going to have to look at and discuss.

Now, I am wondering, and maybe it's worth the analysis, looking to the past, and I'll make my point of looking to the past, when we had a seasonal closure for black sea bass, to see if that did reduce discards during the time period in which it is reduced, and what I'm meaning is my experience, with a lot of these inshore discards, is it's just people fishing, right, and they're not fishing for black sea bass, and they're just trying to catch something.

Now, if we do have a closed season, is that going to be some sort of -- Is that going to de-incentivize enough people to not fish in areas where these fish are, because maybe people are fishing a mile off the beach, or by the rock jetties, and hope that maybe they'll catch one of these to keep, and maybe that reduces discards to a certain percentage, and I don't know, but it's worth looking into, because, to go back to the main coordinates, I am worried that we won't be able to get those reduction in discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, and so I have Kerry, Jimmy, and Tim.

MS. MARHEFKA: We were discussing this last night at dinner, and my understanding is that the discard mortality that's applied currently to the fish in state waters is the same as the discard mortality that's applied to the deeper water fish, and I wondering if there could be any investigation into maybe what the Mid-Atlantic has used, or ASMFC has used, for nearshore discard mortality, and, if not that, I would go so far as to suggest looking at similar species in other regions.

I mean, if we're comparing SPRs with Pacific rockfish, saying we should use those, maybe we need to find a similar species where there has been nearshore discard mortality studies, because, right now, it doesn't -- It seems like there might be some misunderstanding of what nearshore discard mortality is.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We captured that. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: I think we would get a lot more bang for our buck by reducing the size limit, and then maybe the states, whatever their size limit is, they would, you know, concur with the federal, and you'll -- And the bag limit, and then people can reach -- Have a successful trip and stop fishing. You know, I think that that would be where we're going to see a better reduction in discards.

If people continue to fish, just to try to catch a legal-sized fish that doesn't exist, well, they just keep fishing, and discarding, for forever, and so I'm thinking concentrate more on the size limit reduction, and probably with a bag limit reduction, and the states usually -- I know they're different, but I think Florida -- It's the same size limit in state waters as it is federal, and I don't know about your state, but it's probably different in North Carolina.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have Tim, then Tom.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I kind of agree with Jimmy there. I think, you know, you definitely need to look at the size limit, but, you know, I keep coming back to we have an overall problem here, that's just rearing its ugly head, in in my mind, is that something is just not right with these numbers.

There's no way -- I just don't see how that, for five years in a row, you can release three-million individual fish per year in the estuary and not have any increase in landed fish out of the estuary. Where are these fish? The mortality rate -- As Kerry alluded to, the mortality rate is very low for these fish. It's less than 15 percent that's used in these calculations. It's a very low mortality rate on these fish, whether it's offshore or inshore, and it doesn't matter.

The problem I see is, and these are in FES numbers, right, and this is a new assessment, and so they're all in FES numbers, and so where did 3.5 million fish go that were released and not caught? Where are they? Is it like Charlie said, and there's a regime shift, or are we -- Or do we just have a major flaw in the assessment here, and in the data stream, from MRIP? I don't know, but something's very, very wrong with the numbers.

In North Carolina, we're catching black sea bass again, and so I don't know, but you cannot have three-million fish released in the estuary and not be caught, or seen again, and they just absolutely fell off the face of the earth. It just doesn't happen. They're somewhere, and so the biomass is not in the bad shape we think it is, and we just don't -- Maybe we don't know where it is. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So be warned that I'm going to go back to think thinking while I'm talking, based off of Tim's comment, but I agree with Tim. I look at these numbers, and I do scratch my head, right, and we have a recruitment issue, yet we have discards going up, and so I'm wondering where that's coming from, though it is worthy to point out that remember these numbers are, a lot of them, from the COVID era, where we all know we had effort like we have never seen before, particularly in the recreational fishery, and particularly in accessible areas.

I mean, there was -- My experience was people fishing off of every dock, and every conceivable place where you could wet a line, and so now, that being said, I just want to go back to Jimmy's previous comment. In North Carolina, the state and federal size limit is the same, though I do think we do need to look at the size limit, to -- You know, we're having a lot of discards, and it would be nice to bring the recreational size limit down, to see if we can turn some of those discards into catch, though I do preface my previous comments that we need to be sure that we're not trying to like increase effort on this fishery as well, knowing that we have a discard problem in state waters.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We've had discussion, good discussion, on that, and so can you scroll up a little bit? Okay. Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just clarifying for the -- Let's see. I'll do the size limit first, and then I have a similar question for the bag limit and so, for the recreational size limit, the range that's been discussed so far has been pretty much between the recreational of -- What is it, twelve inches, or thirteen? Yes, and it's thirteen and eleven.

So, between the recreational of thirteen and the commercial of eleven, and so changing recreational to either be twelve or to be eleven, and aligned with the commercial, and is that the range that you all want developed in this action? I'm seeing heads nodding yes. Okay.

Then the bag limit reduction, and, currently, the recreational bag limit is at seven. What are the alternatives? I guess what's the lowest number alternative that you want to see analyzed in this action, and we can develop intermediates in between the extreme high and the extreme low.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thoughts? Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and could we look at an analysis of what happens if you lower the size limit and increase the bag limit? I mean, because I guess part of me is afraid that, you know, if -- That you're going to -- You might have the reverse effect on discards if you lower the bag limit, but you make it easier to keep a fish, because you're going to reach your limit a whole lot quicker than you were reaching your limit, but you're still -- But you you're still going to want to stay there and fish, and so I don't know. Is there is it worth looking at that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, based on the information that you all have received at a couple of previous meetings, the vast majority of trips that catch black sea bass are not approaching the limit. The vast majority of them actually catch -- They actually retain zero black sea bass, and that's a reflection of the, you know, high amount of effort, or number of trips that are encountering them, in probably the nearer shore areas, and encountering undersized fish, but there is a very low percentage of trips that are hitting four or five or six of that seven-fish bag limit.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and that's why I was saying is there -- Would it be worth doing the analysis to see if -- Would that be vastly different if the majority of those fish were eleven or twelve-inch fish, and you weren't reaching your existing bag limit because of that, but you dropped the bag limit, all of those fish that you were releasing are now you're catching, and so would -- I just don't want to hit that bag limit too fast, is what I'm saying.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess the potential concern with that would be we have heard the commentary from the AP that at least the recreational and the for-hire and headboat components - - That their priority in management is a longer season. They want to have the season open for a longer period of time, and so, if the bag limit were to be increased, that comes with the tradeoff of you're likely hitting your ACL earlier, and you're having a shorter season, and so we can develop that analysis, but that has been the discussion that we've heard thus far.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER As a final follow-up, yes, and I think that's why it's worth seeing that, because, if you're not catching them, you're not catching them, right, and, just because you went to eleven-inch size, it doesn't mean you're going to reach the existing bag limit, or an increased bag limit, and so, you know, I'm just saying that that gives you the opportunity to not have them as a discard, and that's all.

By increasing that bag limit, and not to say that you're going to reach it, or reach the ACL any faster, and it won't -- If you do, it won't be because of the bag limit. It will be because you reduced the size limit, in my mind, and so I just think it's worth looking at, because, like you said, you're not you're not reaching the bag limit anyway. You're either catching them or you're not.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: A couple other kind of longer-term views on bag limit is sometimes bag limits become a target, and a goal, and, if you're in a situation with a stock that's not doing well, and we're thinking about rebuilding, raising the bag limit, or setting a high bag limit, does give a perception that's that what I should be trying to get to, and so we would run the chance, I would

think, just with angler operations, that people may fish longer, trying to fill that bag, and we think that's a problem now.

We think they're fishing longer, trying to catch the legal fish, cycling through the small, undersized fish, and so that could be counter to our efforts to get people to kind of catch some fish and go home.

Then the other thing is what would happen in that situation is, when the stock started to get a little bit better, suddenly people start catching fish, and now you have this potential, which, while they're not meeting the bag limit now, it's not impacting, and restricting, and limiting, but, once the stock got a little bit better, suddenly it could lead to people catching a whole lot of fish, you know, and then they would be getting this bag limit, and you would then have to go in, and this is always hard to do, but you're in a situation where, when the stock is recovered, now you're ratcheting down to a much lower bag limit, and people are like what the heck?

When the stock was recovering, you let me keep seven, and now you're telling me I can only keep two, and so there are a lot of like other concerns that are totally beyond what you're saying, but what you're saying is right, but there are just further considerations that might make you think to tap the brakes on this, just for now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to talk about you know bag limit ranges. I know I talked to our biologists, and told -- You know, because I think we had a public comment that was drop it from seven to five, and our biologists felt like five was still too high, and so I was wondering if we wanted to, in your range of limits go -- I don't know, and maybe do five, but do three, and would you even do two, or one? I mean, you -- Mike, you did say that there's a lot of trips that don't catch any, and so would one be reasonable as well or -- But I just know that five is probably not going to get what we need.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess, just from my perspective of talking to fishermen, I think that one would be very unpalatable, knowing the types of trips that go after black sea bass. They're typically looking more for -- They're typically looking at these as these are meat fish, and they're not, you know trophy fish, or anything like that, and so probably more than one would be the expectation, but it's -- It can be within the range of alternatives. I mean, you all can set the range that you want analyzed, and then we can go through them.

Kind of along Tim's line, if you want to have -- I wouldn't go crazy with the number of alternatives exploring a higher bag limit, but, if we, you know, look at eight, and you can see the effects of eight, and you can see whether that's something that you want to pursue, just from looking at that one option, then we could develop something like that.

MS. MURPHEY: So I guess I'll look around the room the room for suggestions, but I guess at five, four, three, you know, whatever people think might be realistic.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, then Charlie, then Judy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, I don't necessarily see a one-fish bag limit as palatable. I just would suggest that we just let the analysts provide us the information, and we can look at that and determine kind of what the range of alternatives is we want to consider, based on that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and a little bit of history, because I was at the table when we did thirteen inches, and part of the rationale that was brought up was it's a bigger black sea bass, but, if you're not going to have very many, let's at least have big ones. What we didn't realize, and didn't get the analysis for, until we were well past public hearing, was the discards, and Carolyn and I talked to a charter guy, and what did he say, like six fish he had to catch before he could keep one, or something like that?

So we were actually -- It caused more reduction in the biomass, having a lower trip limit, with the thirteen inches, than what we would have had having more fish at eleven inches, and so we didn't -- It was just too late to stop the amendment, and change it at that point in time, and so we let it walk, but, yes, if we go back to eleven inches, it's going to cut the discards way down, and you should be able to probably have just as many fish, possibly even more, and take less fish out of the biomass, but, as far as, you know, we've got this number in the bag limit, and so we need to try for that, that's above my pay grade, and I know probably some of that that does happen, but, as far as the thirteen-inch, we really need to get back to eleven inches, so they're not discarding those fish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: The black sea bass is taking on a whole new look. If you're fishing in fifty foot of water, or less, you're not even getting ten-to-one. You're not even keeping -- With a thirteen-inch limit, you're not even -- At ten, or, actually, it would be more than ten-to-one to keep them, but, if you move offshore, into eighty foot of water, you might -- You'll go back to maybe five or six or seven to keep one, but most of the fish are not thirteen inches, definitely in fifty foot of water, and so if you were to -- But they would be if they were eleven inches, or twelve inches, and I'll say eleven inches, and isn't that the commercial?

If they were eleven inches, they would be able to keep some fish, and they wouldn't discard as many fish, because I'm thinking about how many fish I'm discarding at ten-to-one, and so I definitely am for the recreational size reduction. The bag limit, well, we just have to see where that leads us after we check everything. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I think we've had a lot of good discussion there on size limit, and so, if you look on the screen, there's a recreational management measure to close nearshore areas for black sea bass retention that coincide with the spawning season. I haven't heard any support for that. I'm thinking that we don't want to look at that. I see heads shaking no, and so just trying to take some things off the list here, and then, Mike, could you scroll up? Okay, and so how about these other actions? Any appetite to revise accountability measures, change the fishing year start date, and we already talked about reopening the nearshore areas, but other thoughts on fishing year and accountability measures? Judy.

MS. HELMEY: On the fishing year, can't we just keep it the same as the commercial?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We can, but we would have to change it, and so that would require a change, and so, if that's something that you want to look at, then we can add that into the document. Okay. Anything else that we want to look at here under recreational, or other actions, like accountability measures? Amy.

MS. DUKES: I think I would be curious to kind of look at this change in fishing year. You know, we listened to the AP, and recreational and for-hire fishermen know that the ACL is coming down, and, if they want to be able to catch something for a longer season, I worry about that January/February/March/April time period, when our shallow-water grouper is closed, and, if we start our recreational season on April 1, and perhaps we hit a recreational ACL in December, that's one less fish that they're really going to be able to target in that shallow-water grouper closure, and so could we do some analysis to looking at when recreational ACLs might be met, based on the minimum size and the bag limits that we're talking about further down?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we're capturing that.

MS. DUKES: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and Amy brings up a really good point there, because I think that's the criticism, and a worry we get from a lot of our for-hire, as well as recreational fishermen, meaning this is a fish -- It is the game in town for a lot of these closed times of year, whether it's the fall or the springtime, right, and, if you have something to go for, this is going to be it, and so some analysis to how we -- An analysis of when that could happen, and based off of what Amy said, would be really helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thinking out loud, which is dangerous, you know, two things. One, I'm struck by the potential differences up and down the coast, in terms of the health of black sea bass, and maybe doing a little better off of North Carolina, and not doing well off of Florida, right, and it's hard to say in between, but would it be worth even exploring some sort of regional approach for management of sea bass?

Then the second is, yes, I know catch rates are way down, but, also, the catch limits are going to be way, way down, and so I'm concerned that what we're proposing here really won't amount to much, in terms of what we need to accomplish, and then I guess the third thought would be not looking to Atlantic States to help manage this, but is there a way that we could figure out, you know, the state piece of this, in addition to the federal piece, because it's such an important component of this? I feel like we have the state directors at the table, but, if we can't figure out solutions in state waters, in addition, or in tandem, with the federal-water solution, we're still going to fall well short of our goals, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I really appreciate Andy bringing that up. I think looking at a regional management approach would be something that we should really consider. I mean, I was just

talking to Robert about this. This is such an important fish to the state of North Carolina, you know, and we know that their prevalence in Florida is a lot less, right, but this is a very iconic and important species for for-hire and recreational and commercial fisheries for a huge part of the year, and they're a lot more available my way, right, and so --

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Andy, thanks. I do appreciate you bringing up the Atlantic States, and how this is all working between the northeast shift of the species. Hopefully, by the next council meeting too, we'll have some really good results from the genetic DNA work that our MARMAP and SEAMAP folks have working on with ChesMMAP and NEAMAP, and so that will be something that we'll be able to bring to the table too, and so we'll need to get with those folks, to remind them of that June meeting.

I think the interesting part is, when you start looking at the South Atlantic stock, with what we have left, and the Northeast stock, I mean there's definitely some size differences there that we'll need to consider. The fish down here typically are smaller, and they are spawning sooner than some of that Northeast fish, and so it's just things for us to be considering when we're thinking about these results of the analysis.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Along similar lines, Chip wanted me to remind the council that the seminar series in May is going to be covering black sea bass genetics, and distribution, and so be sure to tune in for that.

Okay, and so what I've heard within this discussion is to take a look at January 1 as the fishing year start date for both sectors. As part of the analysis, we'll definitely include, you know, kind of the different effects analyses of having changes in bag and size coinciding with the different start date. Is that the only other alternative that you all would really want to look at at this point, is either the status quo or change both to January 1, or is there anything else that you feel like merits inclusion at this point for that action?

Okay and so we'll have that range for the fishing year start date, and we will -- We'll start working on -- I don't know that it will be fully formed on a regional management approach, but we will start looking at some actions, and we do have kind of an in-between meeting in June, between when you all would see a draft of the document, and so June could be a good kind of in-between point for you all to have some discussion about the IPT bringing forward some regional management approaches and you saying we like these, or we don't like these, and revising those before you get a draft that would be considered for public hearing in September.

The only -- I guess the only item that's left would be the accountability measures. Do you all want to have that item in for consideration, and we can have the IPT develop some different options, based on what we have as AMs for other species for recreational sector.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

DR. WALTER: Thanks. I don't want to go into accountability measures, but I wanted to just make a comment that I'm afraid we're headed down a path -- By not looking at anything other than, right now, size limits, and bag limits, for the most part, anything that will actually really do the reductions in mortality that are going to be needed.

Right now, we've got a stock that, if you believe the indices, and the indices are telling us that the stock is way down, and the updated assessment is probably going to reflect those indices, and we're going to probably have a situation that's pretty dire. It's going to probably lead to exceptionally low catches, and an exceptionally low ABC, but that still may not even be the thing that does enough discard reduction, and enough mortality reduction, and so it might be that, even with an ABC that's almost zero, it might still not allow the stock to recover.

We're in a bad situation, and it doesn't look like there's recruitment coming in here, and so what I'm -- My point is that there's measures that were looked at in the Crosson study that evaluated a number of different things that I think need to be considered here, and now -- We've talked about running out of time with Amendment 35, and I don't want us to run out of time with black sea bass, and I think there's time here to about evaluate things that might actually move the bar forward, do those discard reductions, and they may be unpalatable right now, but the key here is that we've got to be able to explore those.

Last time, for Amendment 35, this council chose not to explore spatial temporal management, not to explore most of the things, many of the things, that were found in other studies that were ongoing that actually moved the bar forward. Now they're at -- The time is now to be able to bring those back and to say, all right, we're going to look at this, and we may not like it, and we may not choose it as the preferred alternative, but at least it gives us an option on the table that might actually achieve what's needed.

the other study that's ongoing is the MSE, and the MSE is this council's tool to be able to evaluate many of these things, and I think we are missing an opportunity by not using that right now to evaluate size limits, bag limits, and then, if you believe the results of the MSE, none of those did the job you needed to get effort reductions in for black sea bass specifically, and so something else has to happen, and I think utilizing the MSE is the tool to be able to evaluate these, given the investment so far, and it might be a wise use of it. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. All right. Any appetite to look at anything else at this time? This is the last call for any other changes. Okay.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so the upcoming timing for this amendment is the IPT will start working on this document. We'll bring to you kind of an in-between decision document for you all to review in June. At that meeting, you'll also be getting catch recommendations from the SSC, some preliminary analyses that we have surrounding the action items that are included at that point, and you can provide any additional direction.

Then September 2025 is when we are expecting to have a draft ready for you all to consider for public hearings. We would then be looking at conducting public hearings in the fall, and final approval would be considered for March of 2026. We would have an in-between meeting, because this is a rather large amendment, and so you all would be able to review public comments and

provide any additional direction in between the public comment review and your formal review and approval.

This is kind of the schedule that's laid out right now. We do kind of have a bit of a caveat, noting the Regional Office staffing that's going on right now, and we'll continue to work with them, communicate with them, and update this, as needed, but this is kind of the tentative schedule that we're setting at this point, and I'll pause and see if there are any questions about the schedule that we have right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't see any hands. All right. Thank you, Mike, and so, other than Other Business, I believe we've gotten through everything on the Snapper Grouper agenda. Is there anything any other business to come before the Snapper Grouper Committee? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think we've talked about it quite a bit, and so, before we end the Snapper Grouper Committee, I would like to suggest -- I think we should look at starting an amendment for aggregate bag limit. Is this the appropriate time to have that discussion, Chair? So, as the committee, I would -- I guess -- Is a motion appropriate to do that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I actually had written something down. give me a second. **I move that the council start work on an amendment to consider options for both the recreational and commercial snapper grouper aggregate bag limits. The purpose of this amendment would be to reduce dead discards, while optimizing fishing opportunities.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Do you think -- Does that capture your motion, Robert? So it is to --A motion to initiate an amendment to consider options for commercial and recreational snapper grouper aggregate possession limits.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I don't know how -- So I'm thinking about the last part, the aggregate possession limits, and I don't know how that would work for commercial, and so I wouldn't even define that yet. I think that's something that we need to need to explore, whether it's, you know, a trip limit, or maybe it's trip limits for commercial, and possession limits for recreational, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you. I was just looking at the spreadsheet of doom, and it is looking very, very colorful. There's all kinds of things that are being initiated. We talked about a commercial amendment that you guys want to initiate, and we still have things like the unassessed species ABC, or whatever, and so, anyway, there's so much going on, and we all are still trying to figure out what the reality is going to be, as far as staffing, and so just caution. Maybe, when you take a look at the workplan on Friday, it might be a better time to see if we could even consider something like this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so, first, can we get a second on this motion? It's seconded by Gary. Under discussion. I saw Charlie, Tim, Kerry, Andy.

MR. PHILLIPS: Just some friendly wordsmithing. **I think I would just put “commercial trip limit and recreational snapper aggregate”, because I don't think there's any way we can do a commercial aggregate.**

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **I can accept that and would amend my motion accordingly.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Next in the list is Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I will go one step further, Charlie, and I would just remove commercial from consideration altogether. I mean, you know, we we've already -- We've gone through trip limits, and we're continuing to go through trip limit analysis on a species-by-species basis, which is what we need to do, based on the assessments we get, but aggregates just would not work at all for the commercial sector, so I would be in favor of just removing this commercial from the amendment altogether and just make it a recreational amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Kerry, then, Andy, then Trish.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I agree with Tim. I can't support this motion in its current form. I think we already have the Commercial Subcommittee, and we've spent an incredible amount of time working on what the needs of the commercial industry are, and I don't think this is the vessel um for that, and so, if we remove commercial, I can support the motion, and then get into the timing under the workplan, but, in its current form, I cannot support it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, this morning, there was certainly reference to potential other ideas that could reduce dead discards beyond what was considered in the secretarial amendment. I guess I am generally supportive of the motion, but would really want to broaden this to look at options for reducing snapper grouper dead discards, including consideration of a recreational bag limit, or aggregate bag limit, right, so that it wouldn't limit us to just looking at the recreational aggregate bag limit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I have Trish, then Anna, then Robert.

MS. MURPHEY: Robert, could you speak more about why you made this motion, because I'm just thinking about what Myra said about timing and everything, and Florida still has -- They're still not quite finished with their work on this aggregate, and so could you just kind of explain more why you feel like now is the time to start this?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Sure, and so a couple things. First to the commercial point, like I've only included that, Tim, because I thought, when you guys were talking in the in the Commercial Subcommittee, you know, a little bit of this and a little bit of that is what makes commercial trips, and so I thought this would be helpful. **I have certainly no issue pulling commercial out of this, and so i will -- I would ask that the motion be amended to do that, because I would like you guys support that.**

From my perspective, Trish, we've danced around this dead discard issue in every almost every aspect of everything we talk about. I think that this vehicle will give us the opportunity to address

multiple issues, and, at the same time, I think the overarching kind of mandate, from the current administration, is this is the type of action that I think would allow us to free up some regulations, reduce some costs, and so I know we've got a lot of stuff going on, and prioritizing is certainly something we need to do, but, coming out of the Amendment 59 discussion, we have to get to dead discards.

We have to do that, and I hear Kerry, and I'm not trying to slow down the two-for-one. I think it's a very important item, and I would like to see that move as well, but this is one that I think at least has to be on the colorful sheet for us to think through about prioritizing where do we want to be, and what are we going to do to address the dead discards, and so if we get what we want from Secretarial Amendment 59, we're on the clock. We've got to move quickly to a solution that's going to get there. Andy, I have no concern, you know, adding also exploring others, but I want the focus of this to be getting through the discussion on aggregate bag limit and what the impacts of that are going to be.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: One possibility -- If you recall back when we started off on the discussion of the FMU, and we presented you short-term and long-term amendments that were planned, is there is already penciled in there an amendment to respond to the snapper grouper MSE, and so maybe the compromise is to include this as something to consider in that amendment, because it's already penciled in, and so, you know, if the issue is a specific amendment on this one topic, put this in a topic of that broader amendment, which the intent is to look at the snapper grouper holistically, which I think is kind of where Robert is with this, and then maybe by then we'll have more knowledge from the Florida EFP studies to see how these aggregate limits are working.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: As I was listening to the conversation, I was thinking back to when we did visioning for the snapper grouper, and some of the discussions we had related to the public kind of wanting an aggregate bag limit, and a box of fish, and then they would stop fishing. When we did have those discussions around on the county table, we ended up finding it very difficult to do sort of a larger, you know, catch six fish, and then stop fishing, or catch ten fish, or a box, or a half a box, or whatever it would be.

Because we had such small restrictions we couldn't get around on some of these shallow-water grouper species, and I just sort of remember that we spent a fair bit of time having these discussions in the past, and so I think I'm going to vote against this at the moment, just for the record, but I think, if it does move forward, I would suggest that we pull up some of those previous discussions and kind of remember why we had so much trouble, because this is certainly an idea that we have we have discussed in the past. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, I just wanted to sort of go to John's point. You know, we had a clearly kind of laid out plan for a while, and so we don't need to hash it out now, but when we get into the workplan, that would be important, to me, to remember -- To have us have the discussion about

our short-term, medium-term, and long-term plan and the response to MSE, and so your point is where my mind was going.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more discussion on this motion? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: First of all, Anna, thank you for bringing that up. I know this has been discussed in the past, and there was conversations about that, and it is helpful to remember the history of how we got here in past discussions. I go to John's comments on this. Like we have this huge investment in this MSE, right, and this is very likely something that's going to be discussed in the MSE, and we also hopefully will have more information from the florida EFPs.

I would be supportive of making this a major consideration under the MSE, since we will be doing other things, but my other hesitation here is, until we get firm guidance on this deregulatory ten-for-one action, I'm a little bit hesitant to move forward with a new amendment now, knowing we already have this existing holistic approach through the MSE going.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would just say nothing -- There's no timing associated with it. I think that's part of John's point, is that just saying you want to initiate an amendment to consider this, and then we would go to the spreadsheet and figure out if it could be paired with something else, where does it get slotted in, and it doesn't say like that's coming back to the next meeting. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Then I just want to circle back to Andy's request. I am okay with adding to the to the motion, you know, the amendment should also cover, you know, alternatives to an aggregate bag limit to achieve the dead discard goals.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right. Any more discussion on this? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica, you probably will tell me this would be unnecessary, and, to your previous comments, I think I would be more likely to support this if it was made clear that we were -- We could potentially be looking at this under the MSE.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think that's just direction to staff that we would figure out in the spreadsheet, you know, that's going to happen tomorrow. All right. Are we ready to vote on this amendment, or this motion? **All those in favor, raise your hand; all those opposed, same sign. Anna's hand is up, and so she's a no. Any abstentions? All right. I've got ten in favor, three against. The motion passes.** All right. Any other Other Business to come before the Snapper Grouper Committee? All right. I don't see any hands. With that, we'll conclude the Snapper Grouper Committee, and I'll pass it back to you, Madam Chair, to tell us what time we're coming back from lunch.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 6, 2025.)

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Mikhil Mehta

Rick DeVictor

Monica Smit-Brunello

Shep Grimes

Bob Zales II

Dr. John Walter

Robert Beal

SG 3/5
Wed

SAFMC Committee Membership and Liaisons Revised January 1, 2025

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Kerry Marhefka, Chair
Amy Dukes, Vice Chair
Robert Beal
Carolyn Belcher
Gary Borland
Tim Griner
Judy Helmey
Jimmy Hull
Jessica McCawley
Trish Murphey
LT Tom Pease
Charlie Phillips
Tom Roller
Robert Spottswood, Jr.
Andy Strelcheck
Staff contact: Julia Byrd

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Tom Roller, Vice Chair
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Amy Dukes
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Judy Helmey
Jimmy Hull
Jessica McCawley
Trish Murphey
LT Tom Pease
Charlie Phillips
Robert Spottswood, Jr.
Andy Strelcheck
Mid-Atlantic: Skip Feller
Mid-Atlantic: Scott Lenox
New England: Mike Pierdinock
Staff contact: John Hadley

EXECUTIVE

Trish Murphey, Chair
Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair
Carolyn Belcher
Amy Dukes
Kerry Marhefka
Staff contact: John Carmichael/Kelly
Klasnick

GOLDEN CRAB

Jessica McCawley, Chair
Charlie Phillips, Vice Chair
Tim Griner
Jimmy Hull
Trish Murphey
Robert Spottswood, Jr.
Andy Strelcheck
Staff contact: Christina Wiegand

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Judy Helmey
Jimmy Hull
Kerry Marhefka
Jessica McCawley
LT Tom Pease
Charlie Phillips
Robert Spottswood, Jr.
Andy Strelcheck
Staff contact: Kathleen Howington

OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

Tom Roller, Chair
Gary Borland, Vice Chair
Amy Dukes
Kerry Marhefka
Trish Murphey
LT Tom Pease
Staff contact: Kim Iverson

SG Wed
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LAW ENFORCEMENT

Carolyn Belcher, Chair
Tom Roller, Vice Chair
Judy Helmey
Kerry Marhefka
LT Tom Pease
Staff contact: Myra Brouwer

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Gary Borland
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Tim Griner
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Jimmy Hull
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Jessica McCawley
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Charlie Phillips
Robert Spottswood, Jr.
Andy Strelcheck
Mid-Atlantic: Skip Feller
Mid-Atlantic: Joe Grist
Staff contact: Christina Wiegand

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Carolyn Belcher
Amy Dukes
Tim Griner
Jimmy Hull
Kerry Marhefka
Charlie Phillips
Andy Strelcheck
Staff contact: Chip Collier

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Gary Borland
Jimmy Hull
Jessica McCawley
Trish Murphey
LT Tom Pease
Andy Strelcheck
Charlie Phillips
Staff contact: Allie Iberle

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✓ Jessica McCawley, Chair
✓ Kerry Marhefka, Vice Chair
✓ Robert Beal
✓ Carolyn Belcher
✓ Gary Borland
✓ Amy Dukes
✓ Tim Griner
✓ Judy Helmey
✓ Jimmy Hull
✓ Trish Murphey
LT Tom Pease
✓ Charlie Phillips
✓ Tom Roller
✓ Robert Spottswood, Jr.
✓ Andy Strelcheck
✓ Mid-Atlantic: Anna Beckwith
Mid-Atlantic: Joe Grist
Staff Contact: Mike Schmidtke

SPINY LOBSTER

Jessica McCawley, Chair
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Tom Roller
Andy Strelcheck
Staff: Christina Wiegand

Dr. John Walter
Rick DeVictor
Nikhil Mehta
Shep Grimes
Monica Smit-Brunello
Kristin Foss
Kathy Knowlton

Sonny Gwin

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3/4

SAFMC Committee Membership and Liaisons Revised January 1, 2025

CITIZEN SCIENCE

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Charlie Phillips
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Andy Strelcheck
Staff contact: Kathleen Howington

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Trish Murphey
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SAFMC March 2025 Council Meeting

Attendee Report: (03/3/25 - 03/7/25)

Report Generated:

03/10/2025 08:54 AM EDT

Webinar ID

564-916-027

Actual Start Date/Time

03/05/2025 07:33 AM EST

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Attendee Details

Last Name

First Name

Adam

Bailey

Aukeman

Trip

Barbieri

Luiz

Barile

Peter

Barrows

Katline

Batsavage

Chris

Beckwith

Anna

Bell

Mel

Bianchi

Alan

Blough

Heather

Bogdan

Jennifer

Borland

Gary

Bristle

William

Brogan (Oceana)

Gib

Brouwer

Myra

Bubley

Walter

Bunting

Matthew

Byrd

Julia

Carrigan

Abby

Cass-Calay

Shannon

Cathey

Andrew

Cermak

Bridget

Charydczak

Jenna

Cheshire

Rob

Coffill-Rivera

Manuel

Coleman

Heather

Cox

Jack

Curtis

Judd

DD

D

DeFilippi Simpson

Julie

DeJohn	Frank
DeVictor	Rick
Dobbs	Jeffrey
Downes	Athena
Dyar	Ben
Evans	Joseph
Finch	Margaret
Foor	Brandon
Foss	Kristin
Franco	Crystal
Franco	Dawn
Garber	Chip
Gentner	BRAD
Gentry	Lauren
Gore	Karla
Gray	Alisha
Green	Matt
Griffin	Aimee
Griner	Tim
Haddad	Nick
Hadley	John
Hale	Robert
Helies	Frank
Helmey	Judy
Hemilright	Dewey
Hiers	Homer
Hildreth	Delaine
Horton	Chris
Howard	Lawton
Huber	Jeanette
Hull	Jimmy
Iberle	Allie
Iverson	Kim
Kalinowsky	Chris
Karnauskas	Mandy
Keppler	Blaik
Ketn	Russell
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Nikolai
Knowlton	Kathy
Larkin	Michael
Lazarre	Dominique
Lloyd	Victor
Lorenzen	Kai

MCCLAIR	GENINE
Malinowski	Richard
Marhefka	00Kerry
Marinko	Jeff
Markwith	Anne
Masi	Michelle
Mason	Gina
Matter	Vivian
McGirl	Maria
McGovern	Jack
McWaters	Mark
McWhorter	Will
Mehta	Nikhil
Merck	Nicole
Meyer-Gutbrod	Erin
Murphey	Trish
Murphy	Allison
Neer	Julie
Newman	Thomas
Oliver	Ashley
Ott	Emily
Owens	Marina
Package-Ward	Christina
Pehl	Nicole
Peterson	Cassidy
Poholek	Ariel
Poland	Stephen
Porch	Clay
Ralston	Kellie
Ramsay	Chloe
Records	David
Reding	Brandon
Reichert	Marcel
Robbins	Megan
Roller	Tom
Runde	Brendan
Rutherford	John
Seward	McLean
Shertzer	Kyle
Shultz	Chris
Silvas	Rachael
Sinkus	Wiley
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick

Smit-Brunello	Monica
Snyder	Dave
Solinger	Laura
Somereve	Jake
Spanik	Kevin
Spurgin	Kali
Sramek	Mark
Stam	Geoff
Stemle	Adam
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Stephenson	Sarah
Sweetman	CJ
Vara	Mary
Waldo	Jennifer
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walter	John
Wamer	David
Webb	Greyson
White	Geoff
Wiegand	Christina
Williams	John
Williams	Erik
Williams	Travis
Wilms	Olivia
Withers	Meg
Woodstock	Matt
Zapf	Daniel
colby	barrett
collier	chip
gwin	earlgwin
l	l
leonard	edward
moss	david
oden	jeff
sandorf	Scott
thomas	suz
vecchio	Julie
vincent	matthew
zales	robert
Alnes	Alex
Baker	Scott
Balderson	John

Beaty	Julia
Binion-Rock	Samantha
Carvalho	Avelino
Cody	Richard
Corey	Morgan
Dancy	Kiley
Darrow	Jamie
Davis	Conor
Delrosario	Leeanne
Denson	LaTreese
Dieveney	Beth
Flowers	Jared
Forrestal	Francesca
Gahm	Meghan
Gloeckner	David
Gomez	Josalyn
Guyas	Martha
Harrison	Alana
Hart	Hannah
Hendon	Read
Hollensead	Lisa
Howell	Mary
Kimrey	Captain Chris
Kolmos	Kevin
Lam	Sarah
Lee	Jennifer
Lewis	Savannah
Loeffler	Michael
Mendez-Ferrer	Natasha
Merrifield	Mike
Mitchell	Kathy
Moore	Jeff
Muffley	Brandon
Nietert	Dessie Anne
Norelli	Alex
Nuttall	Matthew
Ostroff	Jenny
Paul	Eric
Petersen	Andrew
Pierce	Brett
Reichert	Marcel
Rios	Adyan
Sagarese	Skyler
Salmon	Brandi

Shirley
Siegfried
Smith
Stein
Stevens
Stewart
Takade-Heumacher
Thompson
Turley
Vaughan
Wheatley
burgess
curtis
everett
lavine
scott
zales

Jody
Kate
Matthew
Sarah
Molly
Jimmy
Helen
Laurilee
Brendan
Nathan
Thomas
Erika
Joe
Nathan
craig
sean
bob

SAFMC March 2025 Council Meeting

Attendee Report: (03/3/25 - 03/7/25)

Report Generated:

03/10/2025 09:04 AM EDT

Webinar ID

564-916-027

Actual Start Date/Time

03/06/2025 07:54 AM EST

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Attendee Details

Last Name

First Name

Alnes

Alex

Adam

Bailey

Alger

Brett

Amick

Scott

Barile

Peter

Barrows

Katline

Batsavage

Chris

Beal

Bob

Beckwith

Anna

Blough

Heather

Bogdan

Jennifer

Borland

Gary

Brogan (Oceana)

Gib

Brouwer

Myra

Bublely

Walter

Buntin

Jesse

Bunting

Matthew

Byrd

Julia

Cass-Calay

Shannon

Cathey

Andrew

Cermak

Bridget

Charydczak

Jenna

Cheshire

Rob

Conklin

Christopher

Curtis

Judd

DD

D

Dancy

Kiley

Darrow

Jamie

Davis

Christopher

DeVictor

Rick

Downes	Athena
Dyar	Ben
Evans	Joseph
Finch	Margaret
Flowers	Jared
Fluech	Bryan
Foor	Brandon
Foss	Kristin
Franco	Crystal
Franke	Emilie
Gahm	Meghan
Gamboa-Salazar	Keilin
Gatchell	Courtney
Gentner	BRAD
Gore	Karla
Gray	Alisha
Green	Matt
Griffin	Aimee
Griner	Tim
Grist	Joseph
Hadley	John
Hale	Robert
Hart	Hannah
Helies	Frank
Helmey	Judy
Hendon	Read
Hiers	Homer
Hildreth	Delaine
Hill	Kaleigh
Horn	Calusa
Horton	Chris
Hull	Jimmy
Iberle	Allie
Iverson	Kim
Karnauskas	Mandy
Keppler	Blaik
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Lara
Knowlton	Kathy
Larkin	Michael
Lazarre	Dominique
Lee	Jennifer
Levy	Mara
MCCLAIR	GENINE

Marhefka	00Kerry
Marinko	Jeff
Markwith	Anne
Masi	Michelle
McGill	Maria
Mehta	Nikhil
Merck	Nicole
Meyer-Gutbrod	Erin
Murphey	Trish
Murphy	Allison
Neer	Julie
Newman	Thomas
Oliver	Ashley
Ott	Emily
Owens	Marina
Package-Ward	Christina
Pehl	Nicole
Pierce	Brett
Poholek	Ariel
Poland	Stephen
Potter	Caroline
Ramsay	Chloe
Ramsey	J
Records	David
Reding	Brandon
Reese	Dylan
Reichert	Marcel
Roller	Tom
Runde	Brendan
Seward	McLean
Shaffer	Charles
Shultz	Chris
Silvas	Rachael
Sinkus	Wiley
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Smit-Brunello	Monica
Snyder	Dave
Solinger	Laura
Spanik	Kevin
Spottswood	00Robert
Spurgin	Kali
Sramek	Mark
Stam	Geoff

Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Stephenson	Sarah
Sweetman	CJ
Turley	Brendan
Vara	Mary
Waldo	Jennifer
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walter	John
Wamer	David
Webb	Greyson
Wiegand	Christina
Wilhelm	Catherine
Williams	Erik
Withers	Meg
Woodstock	Matt
Zapf	Daniel
colby	barrett
collier	chip
curtis	Joe
everett	Nathan
gwin	earlgwin
hallett	fletcher
I	I
leonard	edward
moss	david
sandorf	Scott
shervanick	kara
thomas	suz
vecchio	Julie
vincent	matthew
zales	bob
Aukeman	Trip
Baker	Scott
Balderson	John
Barbieri	Luiz
Beaty	Julia
Bell	Mel
Bianchi	Alan
Binion-Rock	Samantha
Bristle	William
Carrigan	Abby
Carvalho	Avelino

Cody	Richard
Coffill-Rivera	Manuel
Coleman	Heather
Corey	Morgan
Cox	Jack
Davis	Conor
DeFilippi Simpson	Julie
DeJohn	Frank
Delrosario	Leeanne
Denson	LaTreese
Dieveney	Beth
Dobbs	Jeffrey
Forrestal	Francesca
Franco	Dawn
Garber	Chip
Gentry	Lauren
Gloeckner	David
Gomez	Josalyn
Guyas	Martha
Haddad	Nick
Harrison	Alana
Hemilright	Dewey
Hollensead	Lisa
Howard	Lawton
Howell	Mary
Huber	Jeanette
Kalinowsky	Chris
Ketn	Russell
Kimrey	Captain Chris
Klibansky	Nikolai
Kolmos	Kevin
Lam	Sarah
Lewis	Savannah
Lloyd	Victor
Loeffler	Michael
Lorenzen	Kai
Malinowski	Richard
Markwith	Anne
Mason	Gina
Matter	Vivian
McGovern	Jack
McWaters	Mark
McWhorter	Will
Mendez-Ferrer	Natasha

Merrifield	Mike
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Moore	Jeff
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Nietert	Dessie Anne
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Nuttall	Matthew
Ostroff	Jenny
Paul	Eric
Petersen	Andrew
Peterson	Cassidy
Porch	Clay
Ralston	Kellie
Reichert	Marcel
Rios	Adyan
Robbins	Megan
Rutherford	John
Sagarese	Skyler
Salmon	Brandi
Shertzer	Kyle
Shirley	Jody
Siegfried	Kate
Smith	Matthew
Somereve	Jake
Stein	Sarah
Stemle	Adam
Stevens	Molly
Stewart	Jimmy
Takade-Heumacher	Helen
Thompson	Laurilee
Vaughan	Nathan
Wheatley	Thomas
White	Geoff
Williams	John
Williams	Travis
Wilms	Olivia
burgess	Erika
lavine	craig
oden	jeff
scott	sean
zales	robert