SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER ADVISORY PANEL

Crowne Plaza Hotel Charleston
North Charleston, South Carolina

April 21-23, 2026

Transcript

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Chris Kimrey, Chair	Jeff Marinko
Haley Stephens, Vice Chair	David Moss
Vincent Bonura	Paul Nelson
Gettys Brannon III	John Polston
Scott Buff	Joe Mathews
Tony Constant	Paul Rudershausen
David Moss	Cameron Sebastian
Andrew Fish	Darrin Willingham
Chris Militello	Todd Kellison

Council Members

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Attendees and Invited Participants

Dr. Wally Bubley	Dr. Kai Lorenzen

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Charleston in North Charleston, South Carolina, on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Chris Kimrey.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Welcome, everybody. Here we are again, another AP meeting. I think just about everybody knows me. Chris Kimrey, and I'm a recreational guy from North Carolina. I'm lucky enough to be the chair of this. Hakey Stephens is beside me, vice chair, and we'll start with the AP, a quick introduction, what sector you're in, and we'll go around the table, and we'll start down there with Gettys, and maybe come this way.

MR. BRANNON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good to see everybody. It's good to be back, and sorry I missed the last one. I'm Gettys Brannon, CEO of the South Carolina Boating and Fishing Alliance right here in South Carolina.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, commercial, North Carolina.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, spear fisherman, Florida, commercial.

MR. CONSTANT: Tony Constant, from Beaufort, South Carolina. I'm recreational, and ex-for-hire.

DR RUDERSHAUSEN: Paul Rudershausen, biologist with North Carolina State University, Morehead City, North Carolina.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, operations manager of Hurricane Fleet, Little River Fishing Fleet, Coastal Scuba, headboat and charter, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

MS. STEPHENS: Haley Stephens, owner-operator of a charter-headboat, Ponce Inlet, Florida.

MR. BONURA: Good afternoon, everyone. Vincent Bonura, commercial fisherman and wholesale dealer out of Florida.

MR. MILITELLO: Good afternoon. Chris Militello, south Florida, recreational.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, south Florida, recreational.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, North Carolina, Holden Beach, commercial.

MR. POLSTON: John Polston, King's Seafood, commercial, Port Orange, Florida.

MR. NELSON: Paul Nelson, commercial, Ponce Inlet, Florida, and recreational occasionally.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, Jacksonville, Florida and north Florida, recreational and president of the Offshore Fishing Club.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Thanks, guys. I'm glad everybody made it. Next, I'm going to ask -- So we've got a couple of council members in the back, and let's see. We'll start with Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: (Ms. McCawley's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. KIMREY: I forgot we don't have mics back there. My fault.

MS. MARHEFKA: Kerry Marhefka, council member from South Carolina who represents the commercial fishery.

MS. DUKES: Hi, guys, and thanks for being here. I'm Amy Dukes, and I'm with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks for being here, guys, and you all can introduce yourselves way better than I do. Next, we need to approve the minutes here, so I can sign that and get that back to the guys over here. Did anybody look at the minutes? Any objections to the minutes on the AP? Anybody? So we're good on that? All right. Are you going to second the approval of the minutes?

MR. MILITELLO: Yes. I second to approve the minutes.

MR. KIMREY: We've got a second for approval of the minutes. Thanks, Chris, and so we've got that out of the way. Next is time for public comment. There's nobody in the room that I see. Anybody online, Mike? We have one person online, Joe Curtis, with public comment.

MR. CURTIS: Yes sir. Can you hear me?

MR. KIMREY: We can.

MR. CURTIS: Excellent. Am I free to go?

MR. KIMREY: You are.

MR. CURTIS: Okay. I just wanted to bring up to the AP that a lot of what I'm seeing recently with like Amendment 60 -- There's a lot of stuff happening with SG 1s, but there's very limited to no talk, from what I'm seeing, on the SG 2s. I would like to potentially see if that's something that could be brought up in discussion for a possible amendment to get those SG 2s back out on the market and moving around.

I just feel like, with the working waterfront shrinking, a lot of our snapper grouper fishery is going to outboard boats, just as ease of storage and all that good stuff, and the SG 1, you know, it suits a larger vessel, where the SG 2 could be used in a much more beneficial capacity on a center console fleet. I feel like it would go along with the executive order also placed out to restore American seafood competitiveness. That's really more or less all I had to say, and I hope that this is the right forum to bring this up.

MR. KIMREY: Thank you for your comment. It's definitely the right place to voice that comment. You might want to stay tuned, because we're going to be talking about that shortly.

MR. CURTIS: Awesome. Okay. Well, thank you very much. I'll stay tuned, and I appreciate it. Maybe I'll make another comment here on Thursday.

MR. KIMREY: Jessica, you're up for committee chair remarks and the council discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so I'm going to give you guys a couple of presentations. The first one, we're going to go over some things that the committee has done, both at the December meeting and the March meeting.

All right, and so first off with black sea bass. The council approved Regulatory Amendment 37, which is catch for each sector will be managed to the following annual catch targets, and so you can see the numbers there for recreational and commercial. Also, an annual spawning closure established for both sectors during February and March, and then the bag limit was reduced to three fish per person. Then, for blueline tilefish, the council approved Abbreviated Framework 5, which increased annual catch limits, and you can see the numbers there on the screen for blueline tile.

The exempted fishing permits, so the council reviewed and provided comments on exempted fishing permit applications for both red snapper and black sea bass, and then, for golden tilefish, a revised stock assessment, which was SEDAR 89. The results were presented, and the stock is not overfished or experiencing overfishing, which is good news, and there was a recommended ABC that's very close to the current levels, and so the ABC and ACL updates from the stock assessment will be included in another future snapper grouper amendment.

Vermilion snapper, the council reviewed sector allocations and made a determination that changes to the sector allocations do not need to be considered at this time, and so the council has a policy where there are certain species that hit the allocation review on a particular timetable, and so vermilion snapper was up. There's a stock assessment right around the corner, and so we are suggesting to review allocation again after that stock assessment is finalized.

Then the snapper grouper management strategy evaluation, and so the council reviewed results of the angler preferences and fishing behavior study that was conducted by the University of Florida, and I think you guys are going to hear about that, and talk about that, this week. Also, the Snapper Grouper Committee has been working on an innovative approach to management, and so we finalized this document. It's at the back of the committee report from the last meeting. It includes goalposts and principles that we can use to help guide our management discussions.

Blueline tilefish, the council is working with the Mid-Atlantic Council to determine a longer-term approach for collaborating in management of blueline tilefish. This includes allocation methods for the portion of the stock that's north of Cape Hatteras, and then a subcommittee of council and SSC members from each of these two councils has been formed and will start meeting this spring/summer of this year to discuss this.

The council, at the last two meetings, had a number of newly-initiated amendments, and so the council initiated Amendment 38, which is the headboat vessel limit, and so this was something

you guys had talked about a lot, and so we started working on headboat vessel limits for particular species. We're also starting to look at our spawning special management zones, because there's a sunset clause in there, and so we're going back and looking at those before that sunset comes about.

The council also started Amendment 40, which is reopening nearshore closed areas for on-demand black sea bass pots, and then there's some ongoing amendments the council continued to work on, including Amendment 44, which is the yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper amendment, and so this is updating annual catch limits and ABCs following those two stock assessments.

The council continued work on Amendment 60, which you just heard about in public comment, which is the commercial management measures, and we have a special subcommittee of the Snapper Grouper Committee that is looking at this, and they actually met yesterday and today to continue work on Amendment 60. Then Amendment 61, which you guys will also talk about this week, which is the revision of the fishery management unit, and so it's those list of species. You guys saw it last time, and made this very nice, and very helpful, table, and you guys are going to look at that again this week.

Other council activities and discussions, and so those Lines of Communication workshops, where you gave us some feedback on kind of how to set that up, how to guide the discussion, and so those conversations have continued at this point. We've had those Lines meetings in two different states, in Georgia in November of last year and in North Carolina in March of this year, and so, coming up later this year, and in early 2027, we'll hit South Carolina and Florida meetings, but we don't have those dates for those meetings yet.

There's a number of topics, and I tried to highlight those as we went through this presentation, but there's a lot of things that the council is working on that we're asking for your feedback on, and so everything from the commercial management measures, the fishery management unit revision, that list of species, the management strategy evaluation, black sea bass, the SG 2 permits, the spawning special management zone evaluation, and then we're also going to give you some updates on Florida's EFP project, which we talked to you guys about at the last meeting, and a small update on the state management EFP applications, and then Southeast Reef Fish Survey updates. I think that might be it. Do you guys have any questions for me?

MR. KIMREY: No questions for Jessica so far?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MR. POLSTON: Has there been any anything more said about the red snapper going to -- Is DeSantis going to be handling the red snapper? Has there anything more gone forward, or no?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No, not yet, and that's one of the presentations I was going to talk to you guys about, but so all four South Atlantic states submitted exempted fishing permits for the recreational sector to do state management, test state management, and so NOAA Fisheries has said -- The council has talked about them twice, and there was a public comment period that closed on I believe March the 10th, and now we're just waiting, and NOAA said that we should hear back on or before May 1.

So, of all those different state seasons, Florida's season would occur first, and, as you heard the governor say, they're hoping that that season would start May 22nd, and it would be a thirty-nine-day season, and so there would be a continuous time period in the summer, and then a series of, I believe, three two-day weekends in the month of October, and so the other states are fishing at different time periods.

They're fishing on particular MRIP waves, and then each state is using a state data collection program. Florida already has one, as you know, the State Reef Fish Survey, but we haven't heard a lot yet. I think that NOAA Fisheries is summarizing all the public comments, and then they're going to get back to us, but I'm going to give you guys an update on year-one of that Florida research EFP at this meeting.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so this is -- John had a nice little segue for me there, and so this is year-one of our Atlantic red snapper. We call these the research EFP, and so this is different than state management.

We talked to you guys about them before, and they were underway, more kind of in concept before, and we have some data that we showed to the council in December. You guys had a lot of questions, and seemed pretty interested in it, and so we're going to give you guys a presentation, and you can ask me some questions about it.

Just a reminder that this was three unique EFP projects. We're actually in year-two of these projects right now, but year-one was August of 2024 through July 2025, and you can see the goals of these projects listed there on the screen, to collaborate with anglers to obtain catch and discard data, testing some innovative strategies to reduce discards, allowing additional red snapper harvest, and we're using a reporting app. We're also requiring people to take an education course before fishing, and we're also trying to evaluate angler satisfaction with the management measures that we have in these projects.

There's two different study areas, and so there's three different projects. Two of the projects happen in northeast Florida, and one of the projects happens in southeast Florida, and so, the two in northeast Florida, one is called the hotspot fleet, one is the study fleet, and then the one in southeast Florida is the southeast Florida study fleet.

These are how those three different projects are different, and so we just talked about where they're occurring. You can see that the study fleet is applying to both private and for-hire vessels, and so that's the one that's vessel-based. Hotspot and the southeast Florida fleet are angler-based. There are forty total participants in year-one, and that's ten per quarter, and then 800 participants in the other two fleets, 200 per quarter, and then everybody is testing out a fifteen-fish snapper grouper aggregate limit.

In the study fleet, you had full retention of red snapper, up to sixty per vessel, and then, in the other fleet, you're allowed -- Depending on which fleet you're in, you get a separate bag limit for red snapper, and we had, in this first year, both an experimental group where they could keep red snapper and then a control group, where they're responding to surveys and doing other things, but

they're not supposed to be keeping red snapper. These people were selected via lottery, and the study fleet was selected via an application process.

Then the angler requirements are down there at the bottom. We asked people to do an education course. People had to download an app and do this hail-in and hail-out. We did some data validation, and so there are some vessels that had observers, and some vessels that had cameras onboard, and so we're validating that. We're validating at the dock, with dockside sampling. People reported on this app that was developed specifically for these EFP projects, so that we could test out how easy it would be for anglers to report through an app-based platform, and then we also followed-up.

We did pre-angler surveys, angler satisfaction surveys, post-angler satisfaction surveys, and we also did semi-structured structured interviews and some other things to try to get at angler satisfaction, and then we also gave anglers incentives, and so, once you started reporting trips, you qualified for certain angler incentives throughout this process.

Just a little bit more about those proposal components, and so we had this aggregate bag limit, which was designed for anglers to hit their bag limit quicker and then stop bottom fishing, and thereby that would reduce discards, and so we're testing out if this works, if the aggregate bag limit was fifteen fish in the snapper grouper aggregate, and it's considering current federal regs, and so, if something is already closed, then you weren't allowed to keep it, and it considered stock status and other types of things, and so, on a few species, we dropped the bag limit down even lower than what the council has, just because we were concerned about some species.

The education course, it was three modules focused on how to collect the data in the project, best fishing practice information that the council uses, and also a fish ID component, and so this was a way that we were trying to disseminate information, and then we had this app.

It also had like a computer component, so you could either fill it out on the computer or use your phone. It had a hail-out, and you had some trip information, and then you input information on your species catch composition and the discards, and you also had a little logbook that went with you on the boat, and so, that way, you would know what you're going to be reporting on the app, and you could fill it out on the water. You didn't have to submit this on your phone while you were on the water. You could just fill out your little logbook and then enter it into the app when you got back to shore.

Then I already talked to you a little bit about these semi-structured interviews and these angler satisfaction surveys to try to understand angler behavior throughout this process, and so really we're trying to look at a number of different things that the council had been considering over time for recreational red snapper, and so there were a lot of questions, and so we're trying to test as many of those things as we could in this project.

Here's just a summary of how many people applied, and so over 22,000 applications in year-one. You can see how many applications were received each quarter, and then the number of participants that were selected each quarter was the same.

A little year-one project here by the numbers, and I already talked about the number of applicants and the number of participants. There were over 1,000 fleet trips completed, over 866 education

courses completed, and there were over 5,000 red snapper otoliths collected, over 5,600 red snapper harvested, and 5,395 of those were sampled, and so almost all of those sampled.

Here's the data that we were collecting throughout this project, and so we're looking at information on the aggregate bag limit, fishing trip details, if there were seasonal variation or components, what the catch composition was, the species, the length, the age, the size, effort by quarter, the information being reported on harvest versus discards, comparison for the areas that they're fished, and so the different fleets, angler satisfaction, and then I mentioned that we were validating this multiple ways, whether it was observers, whether it was with video cameras, and then also dockside validations, and we're still analyzing the data, and so I'm just going to show you a little bit of data from year-one.

Okay, and so this is some of the first data slides here, and so we're looking at red snapper ages, or I'm sorry. We're looking at harvested species composition, and so the hotspot fleet on the left and the southeast snapper grouper fleet on the right, and so red snapper is on the bottom, in the light blue. The other fifty-four snapper grouper species are kind of in the dark blue, or purple there in the middle, and then any other species that aren't considered a snapper grouper or reef fish, and so like mahi or cobia, they're in that light pink color on the top, or gray maybe, and whatever color you see there.

The four bars represent the four quarters of the project, and so this graph is basically showing us that red snapper is the primary driver among all species harvested across both the hotspot and the southeast Florida fleet, and it's accounting for nearly a third to half of the total harvest in each quarter. These graphs are also telling us that, when people are out there taking red snapper, they are taking other reef fish at the same time, surprise, surprise, and this information also tells us that effective red snapper management could have an impact on all the other snapper grouper species that are in that complex. Also, another thing that we took away from this is that, when you allow red snapper harvest, red snapper is the predominant species being harvested compared to other species.

All right, and so this is looking at ages across the fleets. This is only data from August through December 2024, because it takes us some time to cut all these otoliths and age these fish, and so this graph is just showing around 1,300 fish, and, at this point, only about 5 percent of aged fish were greater than ten years old, and so that's just kind of showing you early numbers of where we are on the ages.

This figure is showing the ages of red snapper separated out by fleet types. Once again, the same time period, the same samples, and so we are beginning to see a higher percentage of older fish in that study fleet. That's the one that's vessel-based, and that was 100 percent sampling, and so you can see that and the hotspot fleet, and so both of those are in northeast Florida. You can see that we're getting some older ages in those particular fleets in that particular area.

I'll remind you that, in this project, there was a control group and an experimental group, and so the control group was fishing under current regulations, and not allowed to take red snapper, and the experimental group was allowed to take red snapper. The mean number of harvested fish are in light blue on the bottom, and the discarded fish are on the top, and so the control group is on the left, the experimental group on the right, and the hotspot, and so that's northeast Florida, that's on the left, and southeast Florida is on the right.

When you're looking at this comparison between the control group and the experimental group, you can see a decrease in the proportion of discards if you're in the experimental group, and so, as expected, when you allow the harvest of red snapper, the overall number of discards declines, and so, essentially, what our experiment is doing here is turning discards into landed catch, and so that was one of our overarching goals of the project, and that's what is happening here.

You can also see some harvested fish in that control group, and so not everybody followed the directions, but so that's why you do see some harvested fish there, and, also, another thing that we observed, and you can't really tell that from looking at these graphs, but, once anglers hit their red snapper limit, they were really content with their fishing experience, and kind of headed home. Ultimately, stopping fishing is reducing discards for red snapper.

This is showing harvest by quarter for both the hotspot and the southeast Florida fleet. The bars represent the number of red snapper harvested, and the black line is the number of trips, and so this is just the experimental folks, the folks that could keep red snapper, and so red snapper harvest was highest in northeast Florida in February through April and May to July.

This is likely due to better weather, and there were frequent storms in the fall, and rough seas in the winter, and so, in thinking about our state management EFP, this information was used about when to set the season, when to consider fishing based on angler preference, as well as the fishability in different months of the year.

This is looking at the snapper grouper aggregate bag limit, and so, once again, people were allowed to take up to fifteen fish in the snapper grouper aggregate limit, and this is showing how many fish in the aggregate they took in addition to their red snapper, and so these would be things like amberjack, grouper, other snappers, and anglers were required to stop bottom fishing when they reached the fifteen-fish aggregate, and this was in order to reduce discard mortality, but this figure is showing you that nobody really reached the fifteen-fish aggregate.

Some folks were not taking anything in the snapper grouper aggregate, and they were just taking their red snapper and going home, and you can see, in this graph that nobody really took more than about six fish in the snapper grouper aggregate, so, in year-two we dropped this down, from fifteen down to ten fish, and, basically, anglers were more excited about harvesting red snapper than they were about the other species in the aggregate.

Then, looking at the number of fish harvested as part of the aggregate across the two different fleets, the experimental folks that are in the hotspot and the non-hotspot, and you can see that some people -- So the red line is the fifteen-fish aggregate, and so some people went over that, and so, the people that went over that, when we talked to them -- One of the anglers reported harvesting up to thirty-four grunts on a trip.

They were using these grunts as bait, and that wasn't allowed, and so this was one thing that we found going through this project, that people did not know what species were in the snapper grouper aggregate, and so we had to explain to people over and over again that grunts are part of the snapper grouper aggregate, and so this was an interesting little outcome, and so we changed up our messaging in year-two to clarify that, if you are taking grunts, they are part of that aggregate.

Then one slide on angler satisfaction, and this was another component of the study, of what we were trying to understand, and this is showing the level of satisfaction across groups, both before and after participating in the project. The far left shows all the participants combined. The control group was in the middle, and remember those people weren't supposed to be taking red snapper, and then the experimental group on the right.

The pre-participation survey is on the left, in like the hashed bar, and then the post-participation survey is on the right, in that dark blue bar, and so we're trying to determine if the regulations that we're testing in the EFP impacted angler satisfaction, versus the current regulations that are set by NOAA, set by the councils, and the answer was yes.

Anglers in both groups, even the control group, had significantly higher satisfaction after participating in these EFP projects, but anglers who got to keep red snapper had a higher level of satisfaction, surprise, surprise, but, overall, anglers were satisfied with their harvest experience, reported that they were happy to report data in the app to FWC, and keeping red snapper increased their overall fishing experience.

Just a few takeaways, and this took a huge effort across the FWC, and so it wasn't just the people in marine fisheries management, and was folks at FWRI. We had to hire samplers that did nothing but sample the fish for these EFP projects, our licensing and permitting office, our IT folks that built the app, and just a huge amount of people that were involved in this.

We also, as you saw in the graphs, found out that that fifteen-fish aggregate was too large, and anglers seemed to be content with being able to hit their red snapper limit and then stop bottom fishing and return home. Discards were reduced, and we did turn discards into harvest. Effort seemed to vary by season, and I mentioned anglers were supportive of reporting their data to FWC in this app. Participation increased angler satisfaction, and we had a lot of positive feedback, and a lot of high interest, and we're continuing to analyze the data from year-one. I mentioned that year-two is underway, and then we'll be analyzing the data from year-two, but this informed Florida's state management EFP.

A couple lessons learned, and really keep requirements to a minimum, in order to ensure participation, and we were asking people, you know, not only to do all this reporting on the app, hail-in and hail-out, and we asked them to take all these education courses, and we also learned that not all fishing days are created equal, you know, whether it's a weekend day or a weekday, and the weather, or what the weather was, and so we learned some things about fishing days.

We found that anglers were open and responsive to changes in fishing behavior and management strategies, and anglers were willing and eager to assist in helping get better data, and so we felt like the project also was building trust, and relationships, which we feel like is key to conserving this resource for the future, and I mentioned that this, you know, informed our state management EFP.

Year-two is underway, and we made some changes from year-one. We added headboats to this, and we modified the red snapper retention limits, changed those up a little bit per person, adjusted the snapper grouper aggregate from fifteen down to ten, and we removed the control group. We felt like we didn't need that in year-two, and we really tried to streamline the way the data was reported in the app, so it wouldn't take so much time.

We want to thank everybody that participated in this, and we also had some sponsors of the project, and just tons of people that were very supportive of this throughout year-one and year-two. People are just really excited to be part of this program, and, with that, I'll take any questions from you guys.

MR. KIMREY: You got a question, Tony?

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and was the control group, or either of the groups, restricted to bait or line or tackle situations? Could they use anything they wanted?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I thought we used single-hook rigs. Yes, circle hooks and single-hook rigs were the restrictions.

MR. CONSTANT: What about live bait versus cut bait and descended or --

MS. MCCAWLEY: None.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony. Go ahead, David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. Thank you for that, Jessica. It was very informative and encouraging. A quick question about the apps. What did you guys find from a -- I don't even know how to phrase the question really, but like a responsiveness, I guess, or willingness to use the apps? I mean, obviously, in this case, it's a requirement, and I get it, but what was -- Like what kind of general feedback did you get on app use? Were people using them while at-sea, or did they wait until they got back?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Most people used them before they left the dock, and so you had to hail-out on the app, you know, declare your intent to take a trip. That way, we could meet you -- You know, a sampler could meet you at the dock. Most people used the app when they got back, and they used the little logbook that we gave them, like on write-in-the-rain paper, on the boat, and then reported this once they got back to the dock.

I would say, for the most part, people were okay with it when it worked. There was a lot of troubleshooting on there, including on just the hail-in and hail-out portion of the app. It needed some work. We had one of our biologists that was on call twenty-four hours a day on a cellphone to answer questions, and try to troubleshoot for you, and so I don't know if that intensive of an app was sustainable, but we are going to be using this same app, but we're going to try to make it a little bit more streamlined in the state management EFP that we put forward, and so this group kind of tested it, figured out where the problems were, and now we're trying to streamline it a little bit more and use it for the state management EFP for everybody.

MR. KIMREY: Go ahead, Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: When you added the headboat component, was that your- three or year-two?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Year-two.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Just so I understand, so you added the headboat component, and you dropped the aggregate down to ten in that, or was it ten? Ten?

MS MCCAWLEY: Yes.

MR. SEBASTIAN: So did you see much difference in the satisfaction with the headboat component with the drop in that, and, along with that question is, in Florida, what is your -- I mean, what distances are you traveling? Is it a shorter distance, because I'm thinking Carolinas, which is probably way longer than Florida, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I'm going to let Haley talk to you about her experience. Haley was in the headboat component in year-two, so I'm going to let her talk about some of her experiences.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Jessica, and thank you, Cameron, for the question. Haley Stephens. Yes, and so I think one of the biggest takeaways was, for the addition of the headboat component, how flexible and willing our local managers were to be able to include the headboat fleet, and so it was a great idea, and they really worked hard to make it happen.

Something to mention with the study fleet trips, the ones where you can harvest the red snapper, some of those are full retention, and so, if you're catching a red snapper, if it's twelve inches or thirty-six inches, you are required to retain that. Something that we found with that requirement is you're really getting a good big-picture idea of the health of the stock and the age compositions and things like that.

As far as angler satisfaction, it was through the roof. We did it several different ways. For the headboat component, it was thirty-six red snapper for the vessel, and so, for us personally, we ran trips with eighteen passengers onboard. It was easy to sell, and it was like a semi-private charter experience at still a very affordable, accessible rate, and it had less hooks in the water, but they were able to keep their red snapper, and so we did it a few different ways.

Some of the trips, the folks were individual, and, once they caught their two, we required them to stop fishing, and, hey, you've got to go, you know, chill out, do something else, have a beer, eat your lunch, whatever, and we also did trips where everybody just fished until the vessel limit was reached. Both were huge successes.

I think there was a lot of success with everybody fishing until the limit was reached, because they were able to continue fishing, and then something that we can't -- That's not really measured in the report is, you know, of course you talk about the management impacts, but the social impacts, and so, at the end of the day, you're waiting around at the dock to have your fish cleaned, and you're spending time with each other at the dock, kind of like the good old days, is what a lot of the feedback that we got was, and so people were certainly happy coming back with some fish, for once, and they did not mind stopping fishing or cutting the trip short.

When we sold the trips, they weren't necessarily a half-day or full-day. It was, you know, the understanding the trip ends when your limit is met, either each person getting their ten-fish aggregate or your vessel limit of thirty-six fish, every time it was the vessel limit. We had trips where we fished ten miles offshore, and we had trips where we fished thirty miles offshore. In all eight trips we completed, it ended up being about a three-quarter day, and so right in the middle,

and high satisfaction, and they were okay with taking the education course as well. A lot of feedback from the guests was that they learned some stuff that they didn't know about, and so a good learning opportunity as well.

MR. KIMREY: Thank you, Jessica and Haley. I have a real quick question, and then we've got a couple more, and I want to ask this question, but I want the answer to be as short as possible. I'm just a little curious in the process for the EFP application for research versus the state-level management. Is it sort of the same process?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and it's pretty much the same. However, the EFP, the research EFPs, NOAA had a call for action, and there was like a grant opportunity, and so there was some funding available to do it in that first round, and there were some specifics that they were looking for, but, yes, our state management EFP was written very similar, a similar format as the research EFPs.

MR. KIMREY: Same format, and goes through the same people, but just no money.

MS. MCAWLEY: That's right, where FWC has to be able to absorb the cost ourselves.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Okay. Great. Our next question is Paul, and one thing, real quick. We need to, before you comment or question, to state your name, please.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Paul Rudershausen, North Carolina State University, and so, Jessica, in the recent EFP that North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries submitted, they argued that discards, with a longer open season for red snapper would become harvest, and so, for each reduction, numerical reduction in discards, you could get an increase in the harvest, but I'm looking at one of your slides here, and, if you go back to the bar graph, could you speak to -- It looks like the total removals of your experimental group has increased relative to the control group. Can you speak to -- It looks like there's not that exact tradeoff that the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries recently argued in the EFP application.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so all states were also -- In addition to this information, we were using information from the Gulf state management EFPs, and the Gulf seasons, and so there's two papers, and I can send them around to you, that talked about how, when you lengthen the season, you're actually decreasing the effort, and you're changing the discard, and so there are two scientific papers about this, in addition to the information that we got here in year-one.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Right, but isn't there a numerical increase in the total removals in your experimental group on this slide, compared to the control groups?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so we were given -- I'm trying to understand what you're asking, and so we were given a certain number of red snapper that could be harvested by each fleet in each quarter per year, and so we knew, and we limited, and so it's not like this was open access. You know, there were only a certain number of participants, and so, yes, you are asking them to change their behavior, and so they're not just trying to get bigger fish, more fish, and they're actually --

Instead of just discarding red snapper that they're not allowed to keep, they can take those first couple of red snapper that they get, depending on, you know, which fleet you're in, how many you could keep, and then we're asking you to get those lines out of the water, and stop fishing, when

that is completed, and that's different than how it is now, because, right now, you could be out there trying to fish for something else, and you're continuing to bring in red snapper. You can't -- The regulations don't let you keep them, and you're then discarding them throughout the day, as you're trying to take other things. Does that help? Does that help answer it? Okay.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Andy, you had a question?

MR. FISH: Yes, sir. Andy Fish. In the past, the rec has had two days a year, and, in the past, three days a year. Now we're staring down the barrel of possibly thirty-nine days a year. We've gone over, or the recs have gone over, on a two-day season throughout the year, over their limit, and I'm curious as to where the new allocation of this many more fish is actually coming from.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So a couple things. EFPs do not have to abide by the quota, and so, these EFPs that you saw the results on, they are outside the ACL, and so they are not required to abide by that, because it's considered an experiment. What we're doing, in order to limit harvest and limit effort, is list the number of days that people can go out there and fish. There's other limits in there, you know, like size limits, and bag limits, and we also are going to be implementing the snapper grouper aggregate. We're going to be requiring people when to stop bottom fishing, get lines out of the water. We're talking about single-hook rigs, those types of things, but, yes, an EFP doesn't have to abide by the ACL. These did not.

MR. KIMREY: Does anybody else have a question? Okay. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Sorry, Jessica, and this is Darren Willingham, but this is a question for Haley. Sorry to do that to you, but so, when you had those trips out there, and you had eighteen folks onboard, if you had a group that you had one really good red snapper fisherman, and they brought, you know, fifteen fish over the side of the boat, did every one of your anglers leave with a bag of red snapper?

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Darrin. Haley Stephens. Yes, and so we pooled all of the meat together and distributed it equally, you know, given the size and abundance of the catch, and folks were more than thrilled about that, and, you know, kind of an unintended positive of that was we saw the camaraderie between the fishermen.

Usually, everyone is kind of fishing for themselves, and this brought everyone together, and, if your neighbor caught a giant one, after you had just caught an eight-incher, which I think is the smallest fish that we caught, and you'll see the reports, and it’s the smallest fish in the project, and I don't mean to brag, but we did. You know, they were excited for that, and another little thing that we did to keep that momentum going was we did prizes for the largest fish and prizes for the smallest fish.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you. Tony Constant. A question about the app. You had some, I guess, not necessarily trouble, but just some inconvenience working with the hail-in and hail-out.

Do you see -- Was that optional on the phone, or app, or is it just going to be presented to us on the app?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So we don't have an option for phone, but, if someone had a problem with the app, and called in and said I'm trying to initiate a trip, we would either walk them through, or we could enter it manually ourselves, to kind of get them going through the process. I'm hoping that, on the revised app, that everybody can initiate the trip themselves.

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and I can understand the rec sector looking at that, I mean, but I also see the necessity, and so you want to get a head count, so to speak, of the daily boats out. Is it not just the ability to say, yes, I'm leaving now, and push a button? Is it not that simple?

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's what we're trying to do in the state management. It wasn't quite that simple in these, because we were trying to link up -- So some of these fleets, the study fleet, was like 100 percent sampled, and so we had to sample every single one of those vessels, and so we had to make sure that when you're going, where you're leaving out of, when you're intending to come back, where you're intending to come back, so that we could have a sampler meet you, and to try to make sure that we didn't have more trips than we had samplers that could go out and meet you.

MR. CONSTANT: So are you looking for the return of the recreation line boat as well, like you do the commercial, meaning you return to look at their box? I guess in the sample, yes, but, in the ongoing, are you looking that way?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, we will have -- So we already have people that are State Reef Fish Survey that meet anglers at the dock, kind of like what MRIP does, but we will have additional people during the state season that will be out there. It won't be 100 percent, you know, and it won't be intercepting every single vessel, every single trip, but we will be trying to learn, hey, I'm initiating a trip, and where are they going out of, so we can try to flood those areas with the samplers to try to meet those boats.

MR. CONSTANT: Sure, and I agree. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony and Jessica. Any other questions? If not, we're going to move right over to Mike, and let him get going here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to run through three fairly quick updates. I just want to point you more to the resources than necessarily present, and so, first of all, this is Attachment 2b in your briefing book. That's just our update on snapper grouper amendments, letting you know what has previously been submitted, what is being worked on right now, and so we have several items that you've already gone through, been updated on, and the first heading that we have here are the submitted amendments.

These have already gone through the council's end of the process. We have the commercial logbook amendment, Amendment 55, addressing scamp and yellowmouth grouper. Regulatory Amendment 36, that was addressing gag and black grouper vessel limits, as well as on-demand gear stowage for black sea bass pots, and then Jessica highlighted, in her presentation, Abbreviated Framework 5 for blueline tilefish, and that increased the ACLs there.

Regulatory Amendment 37, actually kind of late-breaking, and it was submitted on Friday of last week, and so that has been submitted. I do want to point out that Myra noted that, in the presentation that was given by Jessica, the blueline table got duplicated, and so it was in the black sea bass slide, and so I do want to point out the black sea bass ACLs. They're noted here. Those are the ones that are in the amendment, but that's there for your reference, and so those are the actions that will be going into place, and Jessica already summarized those in her presentation.

The amendments that are under development right now, some of which are either paused, or some of which are actively under development, and some of them just got underway, and so they're all at different stages.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 is looking at yellowtail and mutton snapper, and that is underway, kind of under active development, and that one is kind of bouncing back and forth between the South Atlantic and the Gulf, as yellowtail snapper, and I think mutton snapper too, are jointly managed between the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 56 got kind of transitioned into a longer-term black sea bass amendment as Regulatory Amendment 37 came about, and so that was paused, so that 37 could be developed, and now the council has started the conversation surrounding 56, and this would be the longer-term plan for black sea bass. Kind of the next domino to fall in that process is waiting on an updated stock assessment that is scheduled to be completed later on this year. After that, the council will pick up some of the management decisions that are related to that and kind of setting a long-term plan for black sea bass.

Jessica highlighted the amendments that were recently initiated by the council, Regulatory Amendments 38, 39, and 40, addressing headboat vessel limits, spawning special management zones, as well as the reopening of nearshore areas for black sea bass on-demand pots, and then you have several amendments that are going to be discussed at this meeting, or, well, actually two amendments that will be discussed at this meeting, and so that will be 61 and Amendment 60.

As Jessica noted, related to Amendment 60, that's been developed by a commercial subcommittee, and so a subgroup of council members have been meeting to kind of put that together, and they met yesterday afternoon into this morning, and so a lot of changes have happened to Amendment 60, and so, when we get to that point, I'll update you on these are all the changes that council has made in the last day, between yesterday and today, and so some of the items there are going to be, you know, question items for the AP, but you all also will have another opportunity to comment on that amendment at your October meeting.

By then, it will be, you know, a little bit closer to its final decision type of form, and, that way, you'll be able to give your feedback and your recommendations to the council before they take final action in December, and then, finally, this table here just kind of walks through the process of what happens after the council takes final action, as it moves through the NOAA Fisheries process, and so you see all of the approved amendments that are here, and you see submission dates, and then the different steps of the process to go into final rulemaking, and so that is all there for your reference, just related to the amendments that the council is working on, and I can pause really quick and see if there are any questions on those items.

MR. KIMREY: No questions? No questions.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and then the next update for you is the council's workplan, and so there's been a couple of requests over time to come back to the council's workplan, both from the AP and from the council, just so that both bodies are aware of what the council is working on, and that item is in your briefing book as well, and, just kind of giving a brief breakdown of this table as you look at it, zooming out, the amendments that are actively underway are in this underway highlighted area up here.

You can see a bunch of snapper grouper amendments there, including those that were recently initiated. When you look through these different steps, those are kind of the different development steps, and, the ones that I want to really point out and highlight for you, when you see "PH", that's when the council is approving for public hearings, and I'll zoom in so you can see some of those a bit clearer.

You'll see, associated with some of these amendments, that PH is when the council approves for public hearings, and so, for example, Amendment 60, evaluating the commercial permit and trip efficiencies, the council will be considering that for public hearings in June of this year, and so they'll be considering that at the June meeting, and we have public hearings following that meeting.

Then the big, bold "A", that is the final approval date. That's when the council would make its final decision regarding an amendment, and so, for that same example of Amendment 60, they are scheduled to take final action on that in December of this year, and so you all would have that on your agenda in October, to get a look after we've gone through public comment, but before the council has made its final decision, and you'll be able to provide your recommendations related to that amendment, and then you also have the others here, and you can kind of see the projected timelines for those.

The other thing that this kind of gives you information on is what is the council -- You know, how much is the council accomplishing, and what are they working on in each meeting, and so you can see, within the June 2026 meeting, the highlighted items there, and some of them are amendment-related, and some of them are update-related, and some of them are logistical things.

This spans beyond snapper grouper, but, for those of you that want to kind of keep your finger on the pulse of the multiple fisheries that the council manages, this would give you that type of information, and so that's just kind of a fairly high-level overview. I can dive into more detail if you would like, but I'll pause here to see if there are any specific questions before I go any further there.

MR. KIMREY: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. Mike, what does the "S" stand for?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: That is the scoping step, and so that would be when the council approves for scoping.

MR. KIMREY: No one else with questions? Okay, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and then the last update/resource item is I'm going to be covering the SEDAR item. There's really no update for SEDAR, and we're not really requesting participants at this point, but I did want to highlight that the SEDAR Steering Committee has updated the schedule coming up.

The two main areas that you all want to pay attention to, as South Atlantic stakeholders, are the South Atlantic branch here on the left, and then Florida FWC, and they cover some of the South Atlantic assessments as well, on the right. I'll zoom in a little bit more, but, coming up for the South Atlantic branch, or actually underway, is the red snapper benchmark assessment, SEDAR 90, and some of you may have been following that, and I think some have participated in it as well. That is underway, and scheduled to be finished by the end of this year.

We also see that black sea bass is scheduled to be finished. This is actually, probably is, moved down towards the latter half of the year. Right now, they're waiting on updated information resulting from the MRIP, Marine Recreational Information Program, update of the Fishing Effort Survey data. Once that data update is complete, it will be plugged into the black sea bass assessment, and that will be updated.

Kind of on the horizon, and related to some of the actions that are going to be taken later on in this meeting, gag grouper is coming up in 2027, and so that is something that you'll see coming up there, and then, looking at Florida FWC, hogfish is underway, kind of finishing up, and that's one reason we're trying to come back to hogfish to get the stock risk rating, so that, once that assessment is finished up, that can go through the ABC control rule, the acceptable biological catch control rule, and that's the rule that determines how you go from a stock assessment to a post-catch level that the council has set up, and so that stock risk rating that you'll evaluate later on this week is part of that process. That's why you'll be doing that.

That is kind of the summary of the near upcoming activities. If you have any questions about SEDAR, you can try to ask me, and I will try to answer, but, if I don't know something, I'm going to send you over to our SEDAR coordinator, Emily Ott. She's actually at another meeting. We're running two meetings in the same week. She's got a sharks meeting over in the Town & Country right now, and so we're kind of splitting duties right now, but I'm sure that, if we get you in communication with her, that she'll get back to you on any questions, and so I'll pause here and see if there's anything immediate.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Quiet today.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, so I will close this out and we will move to the SEDAR folks, for them to provide their update.

MR. KIMREY: For citizen science, we knew what you meant, Mike.

MS. BYRD: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. For those -- I think I've met everyone around the table, but, for those who are listening online, that I may not have met before, my name is Julia Byrd, and I am the council's Citizen Science Program Manager, and I'm going to be tag-teaming this presentation with Meg Withers, our Citizen Science Project Coordinator, and so we basically are just going to give you updates on a few things that have been happening since you all met last fall.

First off, I'm excited to announce that, over the past couple of weeks and months, we've had a couple of new additions to the citizen science team. This kind of spring semester, we were very lucky to have an intern, Taylor Mickey, working with us. She was a sophomore at the College of Charleston, and she did an internship that was split between the council and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and so, for us, Taylor was able to help with the FISHstory project, and so she did a lot of scanning photos, and processing photos, to get analyzed. Her semester is wrapping up now, but we are really thankful to have her working with us the past several months.

Then we just recently hired Kate Chatman as our Citizen Science Project Assistant, and so Kate is a College of Charleston graduate student who is working with us part time on, in particular, the SAFMC Release project, and so, for those who participate in that project, you may be hearing from a new voice, Kate, and we're thrilled to have her on the team.

Then the rest of the presentation is really going to focus on -- We'll give you a quick update on FISHstory, and a quick update on what's been happening with SAFMC Release, but, before doing that, I wanted to give a shoutout to some of the AP members who have been kind of sharing information on the council's citizen science program projects, and some of our best fishing practices initiative.

Randy McKinley did presentations this spring to I think it's hundreds of students that are up in Wake County in North Carolina, and he shared some information on kind of our projects with them. Then a shoutout to Haley, who -- There's a big kind of Florida saltwater fishing expo that's in the Daytona Beach area, and she had some of our materials at the Sea Spirit booth, and so I just wanted to thank you guys for helping to spread the word about these projects.

When folks hear about them from you, it can be more impactful than hearing about them from us, and so just thank you so much for kind of continuing to help spread the word, and, if anyone else is interested in getting any of our materials to kind of hand out in the community, just let us know, and we can certainly do that.

Then, moving on to the FISHstory project, and s this is the project where we're using old historic fishing photos to learn more about kind of what was caught, and the size of fish that were caught, kind of before there were kind of for-hire catch monitoring programs in place in the South Atlantic region.

We've been kind of concentrating and working on a couple different things since you guys met last fall. One is Paul Nelson provided a ton of new photos for the project, and so we've been busy kind of scanning those, digitizing those, and getting them ready to be processed for analysis, and then also a shoutout to John Polston, who helped get those photos from Florida to Charleston for us to kind of process.

Then the second thing we've been working a lot on is we've been working with our FISHstory validation team, and so you guys may remember that, once we get all these photos, we have volunteers, using an online website called Zooniverse, that are helping us count and identify fish in those photos, and so our validation team is basically a team of fish ID experts that help us kind

of validate the fish identifications and counts and kind of subset of those photos that are kind of identified by our kind of larger Zooniverse volunteers.

What's really cool about this team is that it's a great mix of folks, and so we have twenty-three active members on this team, some fishermen, some state agencies, some federal agencies, some folks who used to either work for the federal NOAA or state agencies who are kind of helping us validate photos. A shoutout to kind of two folks on the AP, Richie Gomez and David Moss, who are members of this validation team.

Since last fall, they have helped us kind of verify information in about 400 photos, and now our analytical partners, that are led by NC State University Jie Cao's lab have developed a model to analyze these data, and so it's using the Zooniverse volunteer data, and then the validation team data is used to calibrate kind of that larger volunteer data, and so it's kind of a critical part of the analysis, and so that analysis is ongoing and underway right now, and Jie is looking at developing kind of catch rates for some of the species, catch rates over time for some of the species, found in the project, and so that's what's been happening on the FISHstory project, and I'm going to turn things over to Meg to chat about Release.

MS. WITHERS: All right, and so we have a few updates for you on the SAFMC Release project. First off, participants are continuing to record information about their released shallow-water grouper and red snapper in the free mobile app SciFish, and we're continuing to prioritize outreach for this project, and continuing to work closely with the best fishing practices team. Our messaging works really well together, goes hand-in-hand, and so that continues to be a really fruitful collaboration. I have some updates for you on the 2025 SAFMC Release data summary, as well as our 2026 participant recognition program and Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo.

All right, and so kicking things off with our 2025 annual data summary, as a quick reminder, we make these every year for the project. We look at the data that's been submitted, and we make these summaries. Initially, they are only available to SAFMC Release participants, because it's thanks to them, and all their contributions, that we're even able to put this together, and so they kind of get it for a month, and then, once they've been able to peruse it at their leisure, then it goes on our webpage.

This summary is now officially on our webpage, as of this week. There's a link down below, if you want to check it out, and all of the details, but it has things like where submissions came from, what species were submitted, length distribution plots, as well as some participant recognition program shoutouts, and you will recognize some of the names that are mentioned in those shoutouts.

Then, kind of on the participant recognition program thought, we have some updates for you on the PRP, just to throw in another acronym for you, and so, as a quick reminder, the PRP was launched a few years ago, with the aim of really thanking our SAFMC Release participants for their contributions to the project, and recognizing them for all of their achievements, and I really want to thank you all, because, at your last meeting, we brought a bunch of questions to you to kind of help us move forward with the PRP, and kind of shift some things around, and you all provided some really incredible guidance and feedback, and it was incredibly useful as we were pulling things together for 2026, and so thank you so much for all of your input.

For the 2026 PRP, we have some new milestones, and we have some familiar milestones. One of our newer milestones is our referral program, and so folks meet a milestone when they refer a few fishermen to the project who sign up, but some of our milestones are kind of staying the same, or staying similar, and we're still recognizing folks for their quantity of submissions, for the diversity of species that they're submitting, as well as for submitting both or the smallest and/or the largest of each project species.

Then a shoutout and a thank you goes to Sea Grant for continuing to adopt our photo milestones. Sea Grant kind of has these photo guidelines, and so, when someone submits a photo, Sea Grant kind of goes through the photos, and they select photos to win that milestone based on the guidelines that they've set forth, and then that person earns a Sea Grant thank you packet, and so a big thank you to Sea Grant for continuing to help us to kind of boost the PRP and have some diverse ways in which we can recognize folks.

Then we're really excited to share with you all that, this year, thanks to an Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program grant, we are able to incorporate items into the PRP this year, and so, for example, if someone submits five SAFMC Release entries, they earn a rope handle bucket. If they submit twenty entries, they earn a Sea to Summit dry bag, and there's a whole overview document that has all of the details on the milestones and what items go with those milestones. We've already been getting some positive feedback from folks that they're enjoying the items that they have earned, which we're really excited about.

Then another way in which we are engaging our SAFMC Release participants is through the Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo, and so I know a lot of you all have seen this before, but it's been a while, and so I just wanted to provide a quick refresher on what the rodeo is, and so this was a challenge that was hosted by Sea Grant last year.

It came about because Sea Grant was looking for ways to get more best fishing practices gear in fishermen's hands, and then we, at the same time for SAFMC Release, were looking for ways to get additional entries and photos that could be used for data validation, and so we worked on the rodeo with Sea Grant.

The rodeo ran from May 1 through July 31. Folks could earn up to four entries into Sea Grant giveaways per month if they included a photo of their released fish with their SAFMC Release entry, but they could double their entries into Sea Grant giveaways if they included a photo of their fish on a ruler, or next to an item of known length, like a soda can, and took the photo in a way that would allow us to conduct length validation.

Then, at the end of each month during the challenge period, Sea Grant would draw two names out of a hat, and those folks would win the monthly giveaway from Sea Grant, and there are also some giveaways at the end, and so we shared some information last year with you all about this. The rodeo was a great success. It boosted the data that was coming to the SAFMC Release project, and Sea Grant was able to distribute best fishing practices gear, and partner with awesome folks in the fishing community, and so we're really excited to share that the Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo will be coming back in 2026.

It will follow essentially the same structure that you see on the slide, so the same thing as last year, and that means that it will be kicking off on May 1, and so we are working on spreading the word

with folks, and letting them know that the rodeo is happening, but we could use some help in spreading the word.

If you think anyone in your fishing community might be interested in participating, or if you're interested in participating, please feel free to kind of share information about the rodeo. We have flyers printed out, if those would be helpful to take with you, and they're also available on the Sea Grant Release Rodeo webpage, which is linked on the screen, and, if you're interested in learning more, I'm happy to share more information with you, and so those are our SAFMC Release updates, and my contact information, as well as Julia's contact information, is up on the screen. I'm happy to take any questions.

MR. KIMREY: Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: This is Darrin Willingham. Thanks for that presentation. To Julia or Meg, so north Florida, old fishing club that I'm a part of, and I was talking to folks about a pile of these photographs that we have. I said, well, that would be amazing. However, I got pushback here. I got pushback, and so I need you to help me help them with this.

The pushback was, if you go back several years ago, especially with NOAA's presentations on the red snapper, and even the South Atlantic Council's presentations on the red snapper, they would go back, and then they would also show us data that went back to the 1950s, and then when we requested, well, how did you get all that data back to the 1950s, they said, oh, well, we computer modeled that and went back to the 1950s, and then that data was, obviously, used against us in the recreational sector. That being the case, what's the FISHstory data being used for, because I am getting kickback from our members.

MS. BYRD: So, Darrin, in general, the FISHstory data, we're able to get kind of -- We're estimating kind of size compositions of selected species that are found in the photos, and then we're looking into developing kind of a relative index of abundance, and so looking at catch rates over time from the photos, and so the South Atlantic -- At SEDAR 90, the South Atlantic red snapper stock assessment is the first time that we've shared kind of length data from the FISHstory project at a stock assessment.

Those length data are kind of -- Like you mentioned, there's some information on catches from that historic time period. There isn't any information on the size of the fish that were caught, and so we kind of shared information on the size composition from red snapper from those FISHstory photos at the data workshop that was held last April, and the data workshop panel recommended those data for use in the assessment, and so that's the first time those data have been considered for use. That assessment is still ongoing and underway right now.

Then kind of the other species that's been measured in the project thus far as king mackerel, and so those data, those length data, will be presented at the king mackerel stock assessment, which I think is supposed to get underway in 2027, and so I guess I can understand the pushback

What I would say that FISHstory does is these historic fishing photos help provide some kind of quantifiable information on what was caught in those historic time periods, and so, right now, the length data is what has been kind of presented at an assessment workshop, and it's just providing

more kind of concrete information that could hopefully help inform the model about the size of fish that were caught back in that historic time period.

If you're interested, and I think last fall it was, I shared kind of the red snapper kind of length composition information, or I can show you our data workshop working paper, which really digs into it more, if you're interested in kind of checking out those data, but, yes, I'm happy to talk more with you, or, if it would be helpful to come down and share information about the FISHstory project, I'm kind of happy to do that too.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin, and, Julia, it took me a moment to kind of figure out where Darrin was going with that, but, you know, all know that, on the days the fishing is great, people take lots of pictures.

On the days the fishing is not as great, there's less pictures taken, and so I think one thing that I'm curious about is, in reference to FISHstory, you know, is there a variable coming out of that to say, hey, we're seeing all these pictures, historic pictures, of great catches, and we're taking length data and, you know, trying to compile age, I'm assuming, off of that for these fish, and, is it possible that our data could be skewed, because there could be five-times as many more trips that weren't documented, or we don't have photos of catches that were smaller? I mean, do you think it's possible that, you know, the winning catch photos are skewing the data?

MS. BRYD: I think that's a great question, Chris, and something that has come up at multiple different meetings, and it actually came up at the data workshop, when we were talking about kind of the red snapper lengths coming out of FISHstory, and so what I can say is, I mean, that could be possible.

What I'll say is the photos that we're using for analysis right now show kind of catches at the end of a trip, where all of the catch is kind of displayed on a leaderboard, or kind of on the dock, although they're not -- If they're laying down, we're not able to get lengths from them right now, and so we're not using photos that are just one person holding up one big fish. We're trying to make sure the whole catch is kind of represented within the photo.

What I can say with our archive now is that there are examples of trips that have really big catches. There are examples of trips that don't have really big catches. There's examples of trips that have really big fishes. There are examples of kind of photos where there aren't that many fishes, and I don't -- Or they're smaller fish, and so I think, you know, it is a concern, and something that we need to think about as we move forward, especially as we're growing our archive, because we may be moving towards more pictures of where it's one or two fish or things like that, but it's something that we're kind of thinking about as we expand the analysis, but by -- We're trying to kind of limit some of that by choosing which photos are included in the analysis, and so does that answer your question a little bit?

MR. KIMREY: It absolutely does, and, you know, I wanted to follow-up, to anybody that was trying to pay attention to my gibberish in trying to present that question that, you know, there was a very little regulation back then, and so people weren't forced to let fish go, and so lot of those pictures would have, you know, potentially fish in them that wouldn't even be legal to keep today, and so I'm assuming that would also level out the potential for skewing.

MS. BYRD: Yes, and so we -- So like with the kind of red snapper length data, we looked at when that size limit went into place, and kind of how that changed what we may have seen within the photos, and so when that -- When the size limit, and I can't remember the year, 1982 maybe, went into place, we saw -- We didn't see fish over that in the photos that we have within our kind of archive thus far.

Then the other thing I'll say too is -- I mean, I think this -- You guys will probably know more than me, but, at least back in this historic time period, these kind of commemorative photos, where you -- You know, there were kind of photographers that came to the dock, and they were the same photographers, and that's what they did.

They took photos at the end of a trip, no matter what was caught, and so, that kind of tradition, that seems to be -- That may be why we have a lot of photos where they were kind of good fishing trips, where you caught a lot of fish, and photos where there weren't as many kind of fish, when as many fish weren't brought back to the dock, too.

MR. KIMREY: Excellent. Thank you. Anybody else have a question before we take our break? We're going to come back -- We were scheduled at 2:30 for the reef fish survey presentation, and we're going to take a twelve to fourteen-and-a-half-minute break and come back. It is 3:02. For those of you that lack in mathematics, that would be somewhere around 3:16 and-a-half.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. KIMREY: All right everybody. Let's make our way back to our seats. We're running a few minutes behind. Let’s see if we can get rolling here. All right. You all did great on your break and came back. You're only half-a-minute late, which we figured that in, and so we're good. All right, and so next we're going to have Wally do a presentation on the Southeast Reef Fish Survey. You got it.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Chris, and so typically we do the Southeast Reef Fish Survey, or SERFS. What we're going to do now is still have that component in it, but we're also going to be talking about some of the other fishery, regional fishery, independent surveys that we're involved in, and so, in this case, what will be of interest to you all would be the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey, and so we're going to have some information about that as well, and so I'll go through this.

I want to thank pretty much everybody on the slide. There's a lot of names here. I'm starting to do a lot less and less, in terms of putting this together, and just kind of flapping my gums instead, and so I want to thank all these people up here, because they're the ones who really put all of this stuff together, and it allows us to show to you every year what kind of information that we're gathering.

All right, and so just a broad overview of this. As I mentioned before, we're going to look at some of these regional fishery-independent surveys that we have. The one that you're probably most familiar with is this MARMAP or SERFS chevron trap video Index. We'll also talk about the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey today for you all.

We'll get into some of the stuff, just to give you an overview of the survey design, and so how these programs go about doing what they're doing, how we created these indices of abundance for the SERFS survey, and then we'll get distribution abundance and length information from selected species as well, stuff that you all might be interested in.

I do want to have some caveats to start with, and so this isn't an update on the stock status, and so you'll see the trends that we have, that they're going up or they're going down, but, in general, in these stock assessments, this is just one of several inputs, and so, while sometimes it does a really good job mirroring what the outcome is, other times not as much, and so I just want to put that out as a caveat.

Also, the way that we put these together might not exactly be the same way we do it during an assessment, and so, for an example, red snapper, when we put these together for the stock assessments, we start in 2010, when SEFIS, one of the other partners in SERFS, came onboard. Here, we'll present it back to 1990, because that's where we have the data from, and so just letting you know that the information might be slightly different, and so just be aware of that.

Then it's also not quite the same in terms of -- I just kind of mentioned the constraints, but other aspects of this isn't exactly how it's used in the stock assessment framework, and so take this for what it is. This is one component. This isn't everything, but it is a good look, I think, of what is -- What we're seeing out there when we're on the water.

I threw out some acronyms there already, to kind of orient you to this, and so the SERFS, the Southeast Reef Fish Survey, is from 2010 on. That consists of MARMAP, SEAMAP South Atlantic, and SEFIS, the federal partners, and so MARMAP and SEAMAP South Atlantic are both South Carolina DNR represented, and this is the Chevron video trap.

Prior to that, it was just MARMAP, and it was just the chevron trap, and so, from 1990 to 2009, we were putting the chevron traps in the water, but we didn't have these video cameras, or at least consistently have these video cameras associated with them like we do now. We're typically using three research vessels here. We have the R/V Savannah, the R/V Palmetto, and R/V Lady Lillian that we will actually be able to execute this survey with.

To give you an idea of this chevron video trap survey, the target is low to medium relief hardbottom habitat, and so we're trying to look for structures that will hold fish. We don't want to drop a trap in the middle of sand. That's not going to give us that much information, and so, through the years, we've identified 4,300 or so stations here. You can see all these little blue crosses. A lot of them are overlaying with each other, but there's roughly 4,300 there. You can count if you want, but you're probably not going to go there.

The way that we go about doing it is every year we select about 1,500 of those stations, to randomly select it, and then we will go out and sample there. We also use what we like to call commonsense execution of these as well, and so we have these 1,500 stations. If, partway through the year, we're seeing that there's big areas where we haven't done any sampling, we'll make an effort to try to get to those areas, and so we're trying to spread out our sampling effort over the entire region as we're doing this.

The depths are about 15 to 110 meters, and we go roughly mid-April through mid-October, and we do this for basically right whales. The gear that we usually use has vertical lines leading to buoys, and so, anytime there's right whale migration through the area, they don't want this gear in the water, and so that's what we've had to do.

We pair all of this data. Anytime we're putting gear in the water, we're also getting information about the environment too, and so, in this case, we're getting water temperature data, and so bottom temperature data is really going to be important for some of these things, and we've seen that has an effect, and so we're taking that, and then, since 2011, and I mentioned this before, that SEFIS came onboard in 2010, that all of the video traps -- All the traps now have two video cameras.

In 2010, we only had half, but, if you look at it, you can see one side of the trap is pointing out, and the other pointing over the opening of the trap, and so we're trying to get information. The red circle with the arrow is the one where we're actually getting the counts from. The yellow one is used to help get habitat information too, because we don't know which way the trap is going to be oriented when it hits the bottom.

It could be two feet away from some really good structure, but, if we only had one camera, and it's facing the opposite direction, it's going to be kind of confusing why we see all these fish around, and we don't see any habitat whatsoever, and so that's the reason that we have these two video cameras that are essentially facing opposite directions.

An update of what we did in 2025. Between the groups, we had eighty-five days at-sea. We deployed 1,518 stations, and so we reached kind of the goals that we were looking for. As you can see, we distributed it pretty well across the coast.

No real big gaps anywhere as we were going, and we also are still -- The universe is still evolving, and so occasionally we'll try to -- If we see some kind of habitat, and as we're driving over it it looks good, and we don't have stations there, we'll sometimes explore it, and so that's what those thirty-eight stations were, is we found some habitat that might be good. We drop some traps on it, and then we'll decide if we want to add that to the universe, based on what we catch, and what the videos are showing us as well.

Throughout this time, we had sixty species that we encountered. Every single individual fish that we bring up, we count, we weigh, and we measure, and so, in this case, it was over 13,000 fish that we dealt with last year, which is actually a lot smaller than what we've had in some previous years. We also take life history samples from the fish that we're getting. In this case, it was twenty-six different species that we had identified that we wanted to take these life history samples from.

We took otoliths from 3,700 fish, so we can get some age information from them, and then we took reproductive tracks from roughly 1,800 of them that we'll look at and get information about maturity and fecundity of these fish, figure out how many eggs they're producing, when they mature, what age and size that they're maturing at, and the sex ratio, too. We can determine if it's male or female, and that helps with some of the data that goes into the assessment process as well.

All right, and so let me orient you to how a lot of these slides are going to be. They're basically going to be species-specific slides, and they're all going to have very similar information, or at least presented in a similar format, and so let me orient you to that format.

For the chevron trap information, it's only going to be -- A lot of this information is just going to be the catch data, at least in terms of things like the distributions, and so, the distributions here, what we do is we split up each species in the catches into what we call quintiles, but, basically, we bin it into five, starting from low to high, and so, the colors that you'll see on here, the more warm and hot colors, like reds and oranges, mean that we encountered more fish there. The cooler colors, like the blues, mean we encountered fewer fish, and then the white areas are the areas that we didn't sample.

This will show you the last five years or so of catch, so we can just -- If we only showed you one year, it would be a lot sparser. There would be a lot more white areas there, but we also don't want to put in thirty years' worth of data there, because that might mask some things, and so we're just trying to give you the most recent information that we have here.

All right. Don't worry about this too much. This is just the model structure that we use to try to standardize the index, and what I mean by standardizing is we're looking at some of that information that we're taking, like depth, day of year, latitude, bottom temperature, or, in the case of the videos, the bottom habitat types.

We're trying to adjust what our year-to-year samples are, so we're really comparing apples to apples, because, in some years, maybe the water temperature is cooler when we're sampling, or when we start sampling. In other years, maybe it's warmer. That could affect the catch, and that could affect the videos, and so what we're trying to do is account for the variations between year-to-year sampling, so that we're really getting a good idea of what the population abundance is doing and not what the habitat or how the weather allowed us to go and sample, and so maybe we could only sample in Florida at the beginning of the season, and then we had to wait until the very end of the season in North Carolina.

All this information is attempted to be accounted for through the standardization process, and so we have information about the numbers of fish in the traps. We also adjust for trap soak time. Most of the time, we have them in the water for about an hour-and-a-half, but that can vary a little bit, and so we're trying to account for that as well.

The video data that you'll see, it's called the sum count, and so what they'll do is they're looking at ten minutes after the trap lands, and the reason it's ten minutes afterwards is because, once it hits the bottom, if there's sand there, it kicks up a bunch of sediment. If you started counting right then, you might not be able to see stuff, because it's going to be murky, and so they wait until ten minutes after it's on the bottom, and then, every frame, every thirty seconds, is what they're counting.

They're going through thirty seconds, stopping it, counting how many fish are on there, going through again thirty seconds, stopping at a frame, and counting how many fish are there, and so what they're doing is they're looking at this over the course of the entire video, and so there's forty-one different occasions that they're reading it when they're counting videos.

Here are the index plots that you're going to see, and they're all set up the same. You'll see that the top one has a picture of a chevron trap. That's going to be the catch. The bottom one has a GoPro camera housing, and that's going to be the video index. SEFIS didn't come onboard until

2010, and we didn't have two cameras on every one of the traps until 2011, and so you'll see that time series is a lot shorter there, because it only starts in 2011, versus the traps start in 1990.

What you'll see is the red line is really the important one. That's that standardized index that's accounting for all of those things like latitude and depth and bottom temperature that we have for the year, and so that's adjusted. That's the one that we feel is most comfortable with. The gray lines around the outside are the confidence intervals, and so there's going to be some error associated with this, and so that's what those gray lines are, and then those black dots are what -- They're called the nominal value, or basically just the count.

That's what the actual value is prior to that standardization process, and so this will come into play a little bit, but I mentioned we can adjust these based on things like temperature or depth, and so you may see sometimes where those values are in a certain direction compared to the actual standardized index, because of those adjustments that are being made, and it will be set up like this.

The catch data goes to 2025. The video data only goes to 2024, because the catch data -- Once we get it on the boat, and take those measurements, we essentially have it right then and there. We have access to those data. The video data, they have to take them off, and they have to have somebody sit in the dark room and stare at it for hours, and count all those fish that you saw on that screen earlier, with like four million, and so it takes a little bit longer.

I will say that they've basically got it done. The SEFIS folks are going to have their trends report, their report, out in the very near future. I've seen a version of it, and so they've made a really good time on it this year, but not quite in time to get it into this presentation, and so they're going to stop in 2024. Trap catches are going to stop in 2025.

One other bit of information that I would have is the length composition, and so it's not just the numbers and the types of fish that we're getting, but we're also getting biological information. Obviously, only to catch information, because those GoPros aren't going to give us the size, but what we did is we're just plotting these all out. We're taking total length of every single fish.

These plots are going to have everything binned into one-inch length bins. The bubble size in these is based on the number of fish in that length bin divided by the total number of fish for that species for the year. The red line, just like in the previous ones, is going to be the average for the year, and so that's something you should kind of -- Your eyes will be drawn to that one.

We've also added a couple other things, and so this green arrow that's going to be shown on here is, if there's a commercial minimum size limit, it's going to give you an idea of where the length of the population that we're encountering is in relation to that commercial minimum size limit, and the pink arrow is going to be the total length at 50 percent maturity for females, and so this is a really important component, because, typically, when you're managing for these fish, you want to let them have at least one opportunity to reproduce, and go from there, and so this will give you an idea of the fish that we're encountering in relation to that as well.

So that's -- It's been a long time trying to get everybody situated to this, and now I'll get into the actual data that we had from last year. Some of these species we're going to go through -- In this case, there's twelve of them here that have either chevron trap catch only or we have the catch and

the video data for these species, and you can see these are put in the order of how often we encounter them in the traps, and so tomtates were the most abundant species that we had, black sea bass, vermilion, so on and so forth.

We also have a couple species that don't trap that well, but they show up really well in the video, and so we have things like greater amberjack and mutton snapper that we have enough of that we're going to present here as well.

Getting into these actual data, and, again, it's going to be very similar, and so I'll just kind of flip through. You all should have these as well if you want to refer back. Tomtate, as you probably know, is in pretty shallow water, pretty widely distributed, and what we saw last year is a big dip, and this is going to be a common theme that we're going to have, and I'm going to chat with you about this after we get through the stuff with the traps, but you see this really big drop-off from 2024 to 2025 with tomtate. Here's the average size. Tomtate are extremely consistent, as you can see. It's almost a straight line that goes right across.

Black sea bass, also shallow water, generally. You can see most of that is focused on the inner shelf. Unfortunately, that stayed down. We've had a big decline since 2012 or so, and it has just dropped, and it is at the lowest level that it's ever been in our survey. This is showing up for both gears as well, and so the video and the chevron trap are looking very similar.

AP MEMBER: Just based on that, did you stop doing the sea bass survey? I'm sorry, and you can mention the right whales. Were those surveys done during the right whale times too, or does that play into a factor, because that could be some skewed data, if you're doing when the sea bass are prevalent, and now you're not.

DR. BUBLEY: No, it's not. It's always been -- Since that survey, since 1990, it's always been in the same general timeframe. That's something we've paid attention to, and we don't want to mess that up and go forward with this, but, yes, it has always been this time.

MR. KIMREY: I think we've talked about this before, Wally, but, in 2012, you know, we had a closure on bass for a while in the season, and it looks like there was a spike there. I'm assuming that's when they -- During the closure.

DR. BUBLEY: I don't know if it's the closure, per se. That could have had a part of it as well. I really think -- I mean, this is just my personal opinion, but I think it's a recruitment issue. I think the conditions haven't been right, and that's causing a lot of this, because, just what we've typically seen in these traps, when we do some of the shallow sites off of Charleston, and those are some of the ones that we've always done, for decades now, we would get inundated with these little black sea bass.

It's stuff that recreational and commercial fishermen don't care about, because they're that big, but we're not seeing anything like what we used to see now, and I think that is the big issue, is that they're just not -- They're recruiting like they used to recruit, and so I don't know exactly what that means. We haven't figured that out, but, the amount of black sea bass we used to catch -- This year, I think we caught about 2,000 black sea bass, I think, in the traps. In that 2012, we probably caught 25,000, and so, I mean, this is a huge difference between the numbers.

MR. KIMREY: Well, that's where our bass went. You all got them all. So one more really quick thing before we move on, just because we're sort of on this topic. Didn't -- In 2025, from the line at Hatteras to the state line at Virginia, didn't you all run some traps up there, because I didn't see anything on here.

DR. BUBLEY: We did the previous year. In 2024 we did.

MR. KIMREY: That was 2024?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I'll actually have an update with this, because I think next year, this coming year, and so we're going to start our first cruise in about a week, we do have plans to sample some of those ones north of the Hatteras line to the Virginia border.

All right, and here's black sea bass. You see the average is roughly around where the commercial minimum size limit is. These are all mostly mature female fish, and so black sea bass are protogynous, and so they all start off their life as females, and transition to males as they get older, and so we're seeing mostly mature individuals in the traps.

Vermilion snapper are very widely dispersed as well, a little deeper water than some of these other species that we've seen. We've seen -- It's been kind of bouncing around the last ten years or so around -- I forgot to mention, and so, the dotted line on the top and bottom, what we did is we kind of adjusted the scale of it so that that line indicates what the average has been for the entire time series, and so, if it's above that line, it's above the average for that time series. If it's below it, it's below that line.

We can see this is a little bit below the last couple of years. The video survey doesn't have it quite as low, but it is still below for that as well. Here is the length frequencies, and you can see, from the 1990s, it has increased a couple of different times. We've had kind of a stepwise fashion up to about 2000, and started to be a little larger, and then, about 2012, or 2013, it was a little bit larger as well. Mostly mature individuals as well. I don't think we've ever seen an immature -- Well, we may have seen an immature vermilion snapper, but there are very few, and, by the size that they are, they can swim right through the mesh, and so we don't really encounter much, in these traps at least.

Stenotomus is known as scup, longspine porgy, and they're really tough to tell the difference between them, especially if they've been in the trap and get beat up with other fish that are in there, and so we just lump them together. These used to be a very common kind of baitfish that you would see in here, in shallower water. As you can see, from early 2000s on, it has kind of dropped, and it has stayed low. There's a size limit, and mostly mature individuals that we're encountering, the females.

All right. Red snapper, you can -- Obviously, the distribution has shifted towards the south more. It’s relatively shallow, but, off of northern Florida, central Florida, we see a lot of them. We see the index for both of the gears is still above the long-term average.

We had a dip in 2025. Like I said, I'll address that in a little bit, because that happened with a lot of species, where we saw a down year that year. Here's the length frequency of this fish, and this kind of gives you an idea of why these plots are really informative to us, is -- You think about red

snapper, and those bubbles are really big on the left side, because we didn't encounter them a lot. I mean, you would wake somebody up from their bunk if you caught a red snapper back in like the 1990s, or early 2000s, because it was something, but, obviously, we started catching a lot more.

It's kind of neat to see this, though, because, if you look here, and so about 2006 or so on, if you trace it up, you can see that cohort, that age class, that's getting older, and bigger, and you can actually see it. You can see that a couple times here, but now we're starting to catch a lot more, and so it kind of gets washed out, and so you can't at least visually see it nearly as well as you can see it for years like that. The vast majority of these are mature individuals, but we do catch some immature individuals with red snapper as well.

Gray triggerfish are pretty widely dispersed. The last couple years have been down lower. They've been kind of bouncing around that long-term average for a while, and now we've had a couple down years. Average size is well above the minimum size limit in the mature females that we're seeing here.

Porgy, a little more deep water. They're towards the outer shell that we're encountering them, and that has kind of taken a tumble the last few years. Probably, since 2015 or so on, it has just dropped, and it has stayed pretty far down with this. That matches up with the video readings as well. Average size has increased a little after 2005, but it has maintained pretty constant throughout this time period, right around where the minimum size limit is for the commercial fishery, and most of these individuals are mature females as well, just the ones that are females.

All right. White grunt, the opposite distribution pattern of things like the red snapper, much more northerly distributed, at least in our region. There's kind of a gap, and then they pick up again in the Keys and the Caribbean. You'll see where most of our catch though is happening, is off of North Carolina. The last couple years have been down. The average size is relatively stable for the last twenty years or so, mostly mature individuals.

Gag grouper, and so that's around the long-term average. We noticed a really big year class probably four years ago, I think, and I think they're starting to show up in our gear now, and so that's the instance, with these, where both video and the trap have it right around that long-term average.

We don't catch nearly as many. That's why it's a lot spottier here. You will see that a lot of the ones we encounter in these traps though are immature individuals, and below the minimum size limit for the commercial fishery, and so, once they get to a bigger size, they don't seem to be nearly as interested in going into the traps at least. We'll still see them on the videos, which is why it's really nice that we have that complementary gears all together, and so, even though we can't see the big ones in the traps that often, we do get a chance to see the numbers of fish that are outside of the trap.

Almaco jack, we basically -- I can't remember if this year or last year was the first year we actually produced an index of it, but you can see, from maybe 2015 on, the index has jumped up quite a bit, and so we've started to encounter, and catch, a lot more of these individuals, and so we've now got enough that we can actually produce an index like this. The individuals we're encountering, a lot of them are immature, and you can see the commercial maximum size limit, and they're slightly above that.

Scamp grouper, and so another one that -- This one has gone down, and stayed down for a relatively long period of time, and this is one instance where it is important to know that -- The length of that time series is really important here, because, if you're looking at just the video index, you're like, oh, it looks about long-term average, right, because we only have fourteen years' worth of data there, but, when you're looking at what it was like in the early 2000s, and the 1990s, that's where it raises some alarm, and so it's -- Again, it's nice to have kind of these combination of gear to look at, but you also have to understand that the length of that time series really is important to give you the overall picture of what's happening.

The scamp size limit, you see that big dip a couple of years ago, and that's probably a good sign, because it looks like there's a bunch of smaller fish that were coming in, and so maybe they're starting to get bigger and bigger as they're going through this process, and so we don't know exactly what's going to lead to -- Where this is going to lead to, but it is encouraging sometimes to have those smaller individuals that show up in the gear.

Red grouper, we have a weird kind of disjunct population here. We've got a lot of them off of North Carolina, and then we've got them off of Florida, and not a whole heck of a lot in between. A little bit of an uptick the last couple years in the trap. The video is close to the long-term average for that, but, again, the same kind of context of the timeframe of how long the gears have been in there.

Here's the length frequency, and the same kind of things. You see -- It looks like it could be a year class that's kind of going through here. Unfortunately, we don't see any of the small ones the last couple of years, and so hopefully it's not just a one-off, but that gives us an idea maybe of what to expect. All right. Greater amberjack here is just video. That value is above the long-term average, and, mutton snapper, the same thing. That value is above the long-term average from what we've seen.

All right, and I told you I'd get back to this, and so this is an information on the average bottom temperature that we're getting from our traps, and we only went to 2005 here, and you see that 2025 wasn't exceptionally different from the previous twenty years, but, if you look at it compared to the last five years, it was -- There was a pretty big drop that year.

What we saw was that the -- Actually the maximum -- Or the minimum bottom temperature that we saw last year was lower than any of the ones that we had seen before, and so, while it ended up averaging out in the totality of the sampling, we did see some really cold temperatures that may have affected some of the catch.

You'll also notice we don't have -- Like here was 2024, and this is 2025. You see a lot of red off of north Florida. We were expecting warmer temperatures there, and we didn't see that, and some of this colder water was kind of encroaching in, and not just here, and it was along the coast as well, and so we think -- What's that?

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

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, it's all mid -- I mean, it's the same season, and so it's mid-April through mid-October, like half the year, basically, and, yes, it is -- It is the same timeframe, for the most part,

that we're dealing with, and so we were seeing this shift in of some cold water, and it was actually going up the coast as well.

There's a thought that a lot -- That some of those species that had really big, sharp downturns in 2025 could be due to this water temperature, because, if you look back at some of those indices of abundance, what's happening is those nominal values are lower, and that standardized value has been pulled up a little, because it realized there were colder temperatures, and so it can account for something, but maybe not all of it, and so we're trying to adjust for it, but we're getting some ideas of what might have caused that, and so we're hoping that, this year, we'll get a chance to see what's going on out there, and get an idea of what the bottom temperatures are when we're doing it as well.

All right, and so SERFS-related activities, and so we'll get to the northern expansion shortly. There has also been an interest in looking at the southern expansion, to cover the entire council range, and so, right now, those traps, we stopped deploying them around St. Lucie Inlet, and there's a number of reasons for that.

Currents, and the fact that the shelf is really narrow, are two of those big things. Those traps, if we try to put them down in high currents, are going to sail. I mean, they, obviously, have that mesh, and they're open, but, if you get high currents, that thing is going to take off, and we don't know where it's going to land, if it's going to even land, and it's just going to just drag everything along, and it's going to be trawling through mid-water, basically.

Some of the species that we get down there as well are things like hogfish, mutton snapper, black grouper, and yellowtail snapper don't trap that well and so, by us putting the chevron traps down there, we might not get as much information.

We also have a little more sensitive habitat, like corals. We don't want to be dropping this big six-foot-by-five-foot trap, that weighs eighty pounds, a hundred pounds, onto these very fragile corals, and so there's been some concern with that, and we even have to get special permits by things like the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, because their boundaries have extended to the point where they basically cover almost everything that we would be trying to sample now.

A lot of things, a lot of reasons, why we haven't done it in the past, but we're attempting to do it in 2026. If we can get our permits through the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, instead of using these traps, we're going to use camera pods, and we're going to compare it to a camera system that they have in the Gulf as well, so we can try to connect this.

On the West Florida Shelf, and through the Gulf of Mexico, they have some of these other camera pods that they're using. We want to put a gear in here, and, in this case, it's this one right here. What we're trying to do is mimic the height of what the chevron trap is, and so we have stereo cameras set up on it, so that we can actually get length information too, and so it's going to be like your eyes, binocular vision, is -- By looking at the video in one camera and the other camera, we can actually get a measurement of how long that fish is, and so it's a little more time consuming to get there, but at least we can get some length information as well as the catch information.

What we want to do is we want to set up some stations in the Florida Keys, and anything south of where we're currently stopping, so we can potentially connect the Gulf with the Atlantic, but also get some information about what's going on in the Keys.

We also want to look at the northern expansion. This comes to the question that was asked before. We found some sites up there, thanks to some fishers that were willing to give us some points, and, if anybody has any information about up there, we would be thrilled to have it, because, right past Hatteras we could find a couple spots, but it was pretty sparse, or at least the habitat definitely changes a lot once we got past Hatteras, and so we're going to try doing this again, sampling this year as well, to see what we get out of that.

All right, and so we also have another grant, a state wildlife grant. We're wanting to look at artificial versus natural reefs, and so what we're doing -- There are plenty of artificial sites in South Carolina, and so we're pairing those with some natural reef sites that are in general location to them.

One part that's really neat is that we did now are -- We did some sampling in the winter, to try to get some ideas of what was going on with the artificial reef sites, and so, if you watch this video, and it will play again, is we used the on-demand gear, and so you have the buoy and the rope on the gear, basically, and so that keeps it from out of the water column, and so we can put this gear in the water even during the right whale migration period because there's no vertical lines in the water.

If you look at that inset video when it comes back up, and it's kind of neat. If you send an acoustic signal down to it, there's a little bar here, and what it does is just spins, and releases that rope, and everything floats to the surface, and so we got a chance to use that for the very first time this winter. Everything worked really well.

We were excited, and glad that it did it, and so, next year, the plan is to do this again in the winter, and get some experience doing this, so we can try to get some information between artificial reefs and natural reefs at multiple seasons. In this case, we'll do winter, but we'll also do some summertime stuff, but, in the summer, we don't need to use these on-demand gear, because we can have those vertical lines.

All right, and then the last survey that I'll talk about is the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey. Many of you may be aware, but this is a cooperative longline survey, and so we've worked with a bunch of fishermen in trying to gather data on some of these species that we don't really have a lot of information for in the stock assessment process, and so getting -- We're trying to produce things like an index of abundance, get age and length composition, and other life history information as well.

It's been going on since 2020. The plan is to continue on. This year, we have stuff lined up, and we're about to put the bid solicitation out there for people who are interested with this. We partner with the National Marine Fisheries Service, as well as industry participants. We typically have four cooperating fishermen each year. We may actually expand it even further north than we're already at, which will get more fishermen involved.

We put a standardized three-mile-long mainline, 150 hooks per mile, down, and we're trying to target things like blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, and snowy grouper, and so the ones that are lacking information, but are still important and are being assessed.

The way it's designed is we have four zones, and so we have a northern zone that starts mid-North Carolina, or southern North Carolina, and works its way north. We've extended that into the Mid-Atlantic, thanks to the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council. They provided funding so that we can continue doing the exact same survey, but up into the Mid-Atlantic, basically the Delaware Bay. We also have another zone off of -- From southern North Carolina through southern Georgia, and we have central and north Florida, and then we have south Florida and the Florida Keys.

In total, we have thirty-four of these strata, and that's -- Each stratum is based on one degree latitude, and so latitude or longitude, depending on -- If it's in the Keys, it's longitude, and so we have seventeen total zones, or latitude strata, and then we have two depth strata, and so we have a shallow one that starts at seventy-five meters and goes to 145, and we have a deep one that goes 146 to 366. What we do is we have them deploy six of those three-mile sets in each one of those strata each year, and that gives us a total of 204 stations per year, is what we're targeting.

In 2025, we didn't get started until late August, and that's been an issue, because we haven't gotten funding until too late, and then trying to work through this. Just like with the trap survey, we have to stop by mid-October, because of right whale migration, and so we have to have all the gear out of the water, and so starting in late August, and having to be done by mid-October, is kind of a rush, especially when it's right in the middle of hurricane season too, and so we've been trying to work at how we can adjust that.

We spend up to fifty days out at-sea. This past year, 194 of the 204 stations were completed, and over 3,000 individual fish were caught, eighty-seven species, and we had 886 individual fish worked up for life history, covering twenty species.

With these ones, it's going to be slightly different. We don't have a long enough time series to produce those indices of abundance, and so we're just going to show you kind of the summary data of what our catches were, and we'll give you maps of where they were caught, and so, the bigger the bubble, the more fish that were caught there.

In 2025, we caught 240 total blueline tilefish. It was a decrease. The length range was thirty-nine to ninety-seven centimeters, and 176 of those fish were worked up, and Length range was 39 to 97 centimeters, and 176 of those fish were worked up, and you can see that there's a lot of fish north of Cape Hatteras, or around the Cape Hatteras area, and then there's a fair number of fish in the Keys, and then, in between, it's kind of patchy. That's very consistent with year-to-year. These are the two previous years as well, and you can see a similar pattern that's shown up there.

Golden tilefish, 757 total fish were caught. The length range was from twenty-seven centimeters to 150, and 545 of those were worked up for life history. You can see the distribution pattern, and, as I said, it's kind of neat to see, now that we've gotten multiple years' worth of data, is we're getting consistent patterns. That gives us confidence that we're doing a pretty good job of identifying where these fish are, and actually sampling them, because, over these years, if we're

doing roughly 200 per year, and we have this for four or five years, that's a thousand or so sets, and this will give us an idea of where these fish are actually at.

Snowy grouper, a lot less of them were caught, and that's part of the issue, is, the way that we've chosen how to pick these stations, is we just randomly have points selected within those strata. Snowy grouper really like structure, and so it's just a shot in the dark, basically, when we do this randomly.

That's why we have to have larger numbers, because we're hoping to run into some habitat that snowy grouper might be on. All the fish that we caught last year were worked up, and the same kind of concept before. The distribution pattern is really similar. Once you get to Cape Hatteras, we don't see them any more north. I don't think we've ever caught a snowy grouper north of Hatteras in the three years that we've done it above there.

In summary, for the life history information, one of the reasons why this is there is the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council actually funded us to look at the age estimates for all the fish that weren't funded to be aged at this point. That's pretty much everything except for blueline tilefish from Zone 1 for a couple of years. That's 3,500 individual fish from twelve species.

These ages have already been utilized in three different stock assessments, and so, while we don't have that index of abundance, what we do have is that age information that can go into growth curves, that can go into maturity analysis, and, even though this survey is only five years old, it has already been used in these three assessments, and so it's kind of neat that it's being utilized, or applied, right now, even though it's relatively new. Then the hope is, I think with the snowy grouper assessment, and that's in 2027, I believe, that we'll actually be able to produce an index of abundance for that as well.

Here's just some of the information about the life history data for the catches that we've had, based on the numbers of fishes that we've aged, the length range, and the age range. Most of the blueline tilefish, or the average, was less than ten years old, but you can see we have some really old fish. We have some forty-year-old fish that were caught.

Golden tilefish, of the 2,000 or so that were aged, covering that whole size range, the same kind of thing. We've got two to forty-one years here, and, snowy grouper, about 400 of these fish that were aged. Pretty small, and a twenty-one-centimeter fish is not a big snowy grouper, and we're going from anywhere from one to forty-four years old.

That's basically the very -- It might not seem brief, but it's about as brief as I can make it, I think, to try to get all the information of what we've had over the past year. A lot of people were involved to make this work, and not just in South Carolina DNR, but NOAA and other partners that we've worked with, and so I'm happy to have any questions that you guys might have, and some video of the deploying of the traps.

MR. KIMREY: Chris.

MR. MILITELLO: Chris Militello, south Florida. When you're dropping the traps, is tide a consideration at all?

DR. BUBLEY: It can't be, because we have to put out as many, and we account for stuff -- Do you mean just the current speed or what stage of the tide?

MR. MILITELLO: I mean like is the tide coming in, or is the tide coming out, or --

DR. BUBLEY: I mean, that's all stuff that we can potentially account for, and, yes, it's -- Obviously, it gets pretty complicated out there. There's a lot of stuff.

MR. MILITELLO: I mean, maybe it's not possible.

DR. BUBLEY: Trying to get the number of traps that we get in, the only thing we can do is potentially account for it, and say what time of day it is, try to account for the tide, and see if that's affecting any of the catch.

MR. MILITELLO: I mean, it matters when I fish. The tide matters a lot. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chris. Anybody else have a question? John.

MR. POLSTON: John Polston. Are you -- Talking about the snowy grouper, and you were saying that they, you know, like structure, which we all agree with I'm sure, but is that taken into consideration when you said they're really not potting, and, also, is the consideration taken in -- Where you said like, gag grouper, the large ones won't pot, and the smaller ones do, and you said you had a few small ones, but are those things being taken into consideration? Are you dropping on wrecks and places like that in South Carolina, the Atocha, I mean, the wrecks and all that?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and, at this point, we don't have anything -- Anything that deals with artificial reefs, we haven't been dealing with, which is why we're doing that one study where we're trying to at least get a start with this, to see how it compares natural versus artificial reef territory. With things like snowy grouper, we'll catch some small snowy grouper, but those traps only go out to about 100 meters. That's kind of the lower end of the range where we encounter snowy grouper, and snowy grouper have a really sharp pattern of, the deeper you go, the bigger the fish you get.

When we're putting those traps in there, in the shallow water, we're typically only getting the small snowy grouper. With the deepwater longline survey, that's where we're getting the bigger fish, because it's a longline gear, a 12/0 hook baited with squid, and we're catching bigger fish using that. I think we have a better representation in the full-size class with that longline survey than we do with the trap survey.

MR. POLSTON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else other than myself? I have a couple of quick questions as well.

DR. BUBLEY: Sure.

MR. KIMREY: First off, I'm curious, and you may not know the answer to this, but has there been any -- Since you started using cameras on the chevron traps, have you all done any kind of comparison to see if the cameras themselves affect the fish? Is there any way to control that? I mean, because we all know how sensitive they are to, you know, electricity.

DR. BUBLEY: We haven't had an opportunity, and we also haven't seen any drastic changes from when the cameras were onboard versus what we're catching, and so nothing at least apparent that's jumping out at us, but, yes, I think trying to control for that might be difficult. I will say, with some of these species, like gray triggerfish, they really, really like the little red light that's on that camera.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and, I mean I've witnessing that myself.

DR. BUBLEY: They will just stay right in front of it.

MR. KIMREY: You know, so I was curious about that, and the other thing is, you know, since chevron traps kind of came to fruition in 1990, which is not long after artificial reefs started gaining popularity, right, and I mean, you know, not too long before that, artificial reefs really didn't exist. You know, the big boom was in the 1980s, and it's my understanding that artificial reefs don't create fish, and they redistribute fish, and they increase access to those fish. Do you think there's a correlation with artificial reefs, you know, maybe redistributing some of the fish, so they're not showing up in your chevron trap study, because you're not on the reefs?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I don't think it's making as much of a difference as we've seen, but it could be doing that, and it's still up for debate whether they redistribute fish. It's definitely redistributing fish, but does it allow for more habitat for a larger biomass to come up after the fact, and that's still up for debate, and a lot of people have looked at it, and no definitive conclusions have come up, but, again, that's one of the reasons why we did this study that we're looking at, is looking at some of this artificial reef stuff, because that's really lacking in this region.

We don't have nearly as much artificial reef in the South Atlantic as they do in the Gulf. They've got a lot of artificial reefs out there, both intended and unintended, and planned and not planned. People go out there and put their chicken coops down, and they have their own private artificial reef, and s it's not quite the same here as it is there, but that is a gap that we're trying to look at right now, which is one of the reasons why we want to start looking at the artificial reefs and comparing them to the natural habitat around it.

MR. KIMREY: Right, and, you know, obviously, we're not comparable to the Gulf, for a lot of reasons, but, you know, my thing is, like regionally for me, and I can't speak for everywhere in the Southeast region, but I know, where we're at, there are definitely artificial reefs that, for certain species will produce as good or better than a lot of our live bottom, and they've only been there for thirty or forty years, and so you would have to assume that they are definitely redistributing fish, and, if you're not testing those sites, you're not getting an accurate picture of what's happening.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and the thought is -- Again, I don't doubt that they're redistributing, because I think you may have made this comment before. I mean, you can put something down in the water, and, a week later, you'll see full-sized fish on it. Obviously, they didn't settle there and grow up in that week, and so they're being redistributed, but is that -- Do those fish that go to those habitats -- Does that open up that natural habitat for more fish, and so that's the big debate, is is it just shuffling the same amount of fish around, or is it shuffling some of the fish around, but that's allowing more fish to occupy those natural habitats, and so that's where it comes into play.

I agree, it's a big -- It's a gap in the knowledge that we have, but, also, it is small related to the amount of hardbottom habitat that is out there in the South Atlantic. Artificial reefs are still a tiny, tiny proportion of that, and so we want to look at it. We would love to get some more information, get some more funding, look at it a little bit more, but, for the time being, it has kind of been ignored, unfortunately, but I agree that it should be looked at.

MR. KIMREY: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so I was looking at the South Carolina bottom contour, and it looks like most of the traps are all getting dropped at like 120 or 130 feet, from what the sort of map showed, and, you know, from what -- If that is the case, you know, we see a ton of like -- Especially the bass and the grays up there in the shallows, and so how are those getting accounted for that are -- You know, a fish that I see a lot more in shallower waters?

DR. BUBLEY: We do drop a fair number of traps in the shallower water. I mean, it's usually -- The shallower depths we usually go to are about sixty foot, and so, anything inside of that, we don't see -- We don't have information on that. but we do have some of these shallow-water sites, and, really close to Charleston, that we're regularly going to, and so we see them, but we do have, yes, those deeper sites, and then we have kind of a gap.

If you look at that map where the station universes are, there's -- From like forty meters to sixty or seventy meters, there's almost no stations there, and that's probably because there's no bottom there. It's mostly sand in that area. We've looked at it, and we've been over this, and, I mean, this -- The trap survey has been going on for thirty years. MARMAP in general has been going on for over fifty years, and so they've been out on the water quite a bit trying to identify these, trying to work with fishermen.

I mean, we've gotten -- A lot of those sites in that universe are thanks to fishermen that are willing to give us some locations that we can work with when we've gone through there, and so we feel like we have a decent idea of what's out there. Obviously, there's -- Sure, there's plenty more that we don't know about, but I think, when you see big gaps like that, there's probably a reason for that.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else? Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. This is just a comment that was made to me probably about two months ago. We run five boats every week, all year round, and all we do is commercial fish, and a couple of the guys made a comment to me here not long ago, and I've really never thought about it, but, when you get within about ten miles of these closed areas, we're starting to notice that the bottom we've always fished is just basically there's nothing there, and you're talking about the redistributing of the fish. My question is, is these closed areas, is that some of these fish that are on these other bottoms? Are they migrating into the closed areas, or does that even sound relevant or -- I've had two of my captains tell me this in about the past three months.

DR. BUBLEY: I mean, obviously, if they're in the closed areas, they're not going to be available, but I think some of the thought process with those closed areas is, while they may provide a refuge for the fish that are there, there also might be spillover too, because, if those fish are allowed to

live, and reproduce, that those other fish have to go somewhere, and so are they redistributing back out?

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

DR. BUBLEY: We do. Actually, a vast majority of those closed areas were chosen based on our sites that we had there prior to there, and so we knew that there were these locations, and a lot of those sites were chosen because they knew that there was bottom there.

MR. KIMREY: Anyone else? Mr. Fish.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and I've long been against artificial reefs, where you think you're doing the fish a favor, but I just wanted to -- In my experience, I feel like, if you've ever looked at an aquarium, and you move the rocks around, the fish will go in there, a saltwater aquarium, and they'll excavate the rock to make it like they want it, like certain type of blending and stuff like that, and I think a lot of these artificial reefs, that suck up, like a crack pipe, all the fish that are in the area, and then those fish like a hot water, and I'm serious. Then, all those fish that would normally populate those reefs, they quit irrigating, and keeping the reef alive, and that's just my opinion.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else? Go ahead, Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I was just curious. I know you all weigh the fish, and measure the fish, and what do you all do with the fish after that?

DR. BUBLEY: So, if they're still alive, we will throw them overboard. If they're not alive, we filet them and donate them to food shelters.

MR. KIMREY: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, you know, I've done a lot of work with artificial reefs over years, and I've done like tons of buildings and stuff over the years, and so, you know, one of my takes on the artificial reef part of it is sort of twofold. One, you get a lot of people out there who don't know what is going on anyway, and so they go to the artificial reefs, which sort of keeps them off a lot of the natural bottom as well, because that's just where they go, because it's the only thing that they can really fish for.

From what I've dove around, you know, an artificial versus a natural, it really doesn't seem to have changed over the thirty years that I've been doing it, that, hey, if we sink a big project here, and there's a lot of bottom here, that the live bottom really doesn't seem to change at all, to be honest with you, but what I do see is, on the artificial reefs area, you have that stacking of bottom fish and midwater fish and topwater fish, and you see you've got this whole ecosystem that's created in usually what used to be what is called a desert.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else? Are you good, Wally?

DR. BUBLEY: Sure. Thank you all for having me here. I'm going to have to bolt out of here, because I have to teach a class tonight, but I will be around for the next day-and-a-half, and so, if you guys have any questions, I'll be back tomorrow and Thursday, and so happy to answer.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks a lot, Wally. I always enjoy your presentations, and lots of cool questions. Mike is coming back, and we're going to switch up a little bit. I think we're going to skip over bass and go to golden tile. Correct, Mike?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so we're getting into the golden tilefish discussion, a very brief presentation, and then a lot of it will be coming back to you, the AP, to provide some answers to questions that the council has.

We're going to be talking about the golden tilefish recreational sector, and, here on this table, you kind of see the breakdown from the NOAA annual catch limit monitoring website, going back over time back to 2019, and we stopped it there because, if you go back further, then the dataset changes even further.

You know we talked about MRIP, and how it has changed, and the current effort survey is the FES, the Fishing Effort Survey, and, before that, we had the CHTS, the telephone survey, and, if you get even older than that, you have MRFSS, which was further back, and so I didn't want to present all the way back to MRFSS, but we have the telephone survey and effort survey data, but the main thing you want to see, when you look over time is you kind of see a very similar pattern as you go, as you look through time with golden tilefish recreational.

You see patterns of high proportions of the ACL being caught, and then you also see patterns where it's mostly being caught in the beginning of the year. There's a frequent pattern of closures, and, especially as you get into the more recent years, there have been some very early closures of the recreational sector for golden tilefish. 2024 was in the end of February, and 2025 was March 21st, and then, this year, the landings haven't been published on the website yet, but the closure already occurred on March 27th, and so this has been a pattern that got brought up.

I also want to note, looking at the MRIP landings, I've noted the high percent standard errors. One issue that comes up with tilefish and other deepwater species is that they don't get intercepted by MRIP a lot, and so there can be a large amount of uncertainty when it comes to these data, but, even a large amount of uncertainty, when you see a very distinct pattern, and you see a very consistent distinct pattern, then it can kind of give you the idea of something that is happening in the fishery.

What we're seeing here, with the landings over time, is that a very high proportion of the golden tilefish recreational landings are occurring in Florida, and not really much elsewhere. There are landings that come out of North Carolina, but they're a very small percentage, and there are actually no estimated harvests in MRIP for South Carolina or Georgia going back to 2019, and so that's just kind of the pattern that's being seen here.

Some of the reasoning that is, you know, kind of behind those numbers, with the recreational closures that have occurred, there's been feedback to the council that has led to -- That discusses a lack of access for anglers in the northern part of the South Atlantic region. Part of this has to do

with poorer weather in areas like North Carolina for them to be able to access the offshore fishing grounds.

Off of Florida, golden tilefish fishing grounds are closer to shore, and there's better weather during the winter months than further north, and so that allows access at the beginning of the season, and there was this issue raised, and it got brought up by North Carolina Council Member Tom Roller in December, based on some feedback that he had received in his state.

We actually, when we went out for the Lines of Communication meetings in North Carolina in March, a lot of that feedback was also conveyed directly from fishermen to the council members and staff that went on those meetings, especially as you got to the northern area. When we were in Hatteras, and when we were in Manteo, we heard about this issue from some fishermen up there, and so, within that state in particular, they pointed out this issue where the fishing season basically closes before North Carolina even has decent enough weather to get access to the fisheries.

The council wanted to pose this question to the AP, asking should the council consider any changes to the golden tilefish recreational sector to allow increased access for anglers in the northern part of the region, and some of the changes that have been talked about are potentially adjusting the fishing year, and so, currently, it's the calendar year, but, if you change the timing of the fishing year, then, basically, the ACL resets at a different time of year, and so, if the ACL were to reset, you know, at a time period when the entire region is able to have a decent chance at weather, then you may see a bit more equity and access there.

There's been discussion about possibly aligning that season with the May 1 opening of blueline tilefish and snowy grouper, as it is a deeper-water fish, and so there may be some overlap of effort that can go along with those species.

There's also been some suggestion of maybe thinking about some type of split season. That may prove difficult for a species like golden tilefish. One of the reasons why it has that high uncertainty with the data estimation is because, like I said, it doesn't get encountered by the samplers a whole lot, and so one sample of golden tilefish, one catch of golden tilefish, that gets encountered by an MRIP sampler, it means a whole lot.

It gets expanded a whole lot, and so that can create a lot of big fluctuations, and, if you split the season up into parts of the year, then you may have big fluctuations, you know, accounting for that one part of the year, and so that's one thing that's been discussed, but that does have some logistical data issues that may be tied to it, and so just posing those questions to you all, and I'll, you know, definitely record the discussion, get some notes down of what your recommendations are for what the council should do with this.

Ten the last question is how high of a priority is this issue? Is this something that you all think that the council should, you know, act on as soon as possible? Is it something that doesn't really rise to the same level of priority as other issues that the council is dealing with, and so, getting some feedback from you all on how the council can approach this, that would be helpful, and so that is all I had, and I'll leave the questions on the board, in case anyone has any questions about the information presented, and then I'll start recording things on the other screen.

MR. KIMREY: Go ahead, Andy.

MR. FISH: Well, I think it should -- I'm not a recreational, but I do snowy grouper fish when king mackerel is bad at this time of year, and I go out there, and I see sport boats, and I know tilefish is closed, and snowy is closed, and the only thing they can catch is -- What they're trying to catch is a yellowedge grouper or a gray tile, I believe, but I think it should align with -- I think the yellowedge, the snowy, and the tile should all align together. If I was going to send a recreational fisherman out there, I think -- You know, they're out there trying to catch one, and they're interacting with the others, and they're all in the same depth, and I just think it should all align with the yellow edge, the snowy, and the tile.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. Anybody else have a comment? I have a question, but I don't know who to ask, because I'm not usually familiar with golden tile. We catch bluelines, you know, and I say we as in me, my boat, and we play around with the snowy a little bit. I rarely make it to where the goldens are, usually because they're never in season, and it's not worth taking the ride, but when does that open, golden tile recreational?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: January 1.

MR. KIMREY: January 1, right, and that's what I thought, and so like when does it typically close? When does Florida suck them all up?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: March.

MR. KIMREY: March? Okay. That's what I thought, and I was just making sure, and so -- That would probably be about the time that the Hatteras crowd is hoping to catch them, I'm guessing, right, and it usually closes now, and so it would be -- If you did a regional thing, it would be an allocation, a minuscule allocation, but they could open it whenever, maybe, Mike?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: The options that have been brought up are basically change the fishing year, and so the ACL resets, and you have the time period for fishing to start at a time of year when the entire region has the weather to go target the fish. Now, that very well may lead to -- With the way that this -- The ACL is not very large for golden tilefish, and, if the entire region is going at the same time, that may very well lead to a very fast closure.

I mean, we've seen, you know, the fast closure when there's one state going after this species, and so it may lead to a fast closure, but at least then, you know, the entire region is involved in the fishery at that point, and you don't have, you know, one portion of it that has, you know, kind of the access from the weather, versus one portion of the region that doesn't have the access due to the weather, and so that's kind of where the tradeoffs come in.

MR. KIMREY: But if they did -- Let's see, and what is the question I'm trying to get out here? From a management standpoint, what is the most streamlined way to create access for the North Carolina guys? Is it through changing the start date? Is it through sub-regions? Is it -- You know, what's the most streamlined way to do it?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I mean, I'm going to -- I guess I will speak on, you know, kind of how I've thought about this, but I would not necessarily say this is the way that the council has to go.

MR. KIMREY: In your opinion?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: In my opinion, just from seeing, you know, the trends, and how these data work, if you split up that small of an ACL among regions, then, if one person catches a golden tilefish, that entire allocation, you know, that fraction of 2,741, that entire area is going to be closed down. It's going to be above -- You know, you're going to be above your ACL for that region, just because of the uncertainty in the data, and so I don't know that that is the best way to go. I would -- I think probably the most equitable way to go is everybody has the access at the time, but, yes, that's about as much as I can say on it.

MR. KIMREY: So, basically, there's no streamlined way to do it, and there's nothing that's going to be hugely equitable, because it's such a minuscule amount to start with. I mean, I'm looking at this table here, at North Carolina, 2.07, 0.87, and 0.15. I mean, it's -- Even if you split it between just North Carolina and Florida, North Carolina is going to get just a couple of fish. I mean, right? It's not going to be many.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and then there would also be the conversations of how do you split it. I mean, a lot of times, allocation discussions are reliant on landings, which they don't have to be. The council can allocate based on other pieces of information, but the landings have been coming from one state, and so that's normally the main source of information that's there, and it's kind of recognized that, because of the nature of this fishery, and how seasonal it's been, that that may not accomplish the goal that the council is looking for.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Thank you. Anybody else have any questions? Okay. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: This is just my opinion, but this would be a low priority.

MR. KIMREY: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Tony Constant, and this affects the Carolinas more for our sword fisheries. Sword fishermen, they run out, and they're in that deeper water, and they're catching goldens and blues, and, like you say, North Carolina, you're not getting a shot at it, but. I mean, to me, the obvious spot to split this region is Latitude 31, because it's one state, and that's basically the Georgia-Florida line, but that would take -- It would forever. You're talking about, you know, having it streamlined.

I agree with Andy, too. It makes a lot of sense to put them all together, and it would be relatively streamlined, but it wouldn't change things. I believe Florida would still shut the whole season down, and probably quicker. Our guys who go out of South Carolina, and we have a really good sword fishery here, we do catch a lot of blue and golden tiles, but mostly blue. That would help them a lot, if it would be later in the season, by far, especially guys up north.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and I think that's -- You know, there's a handful of anglers that could really benefit if they had a little bit, you know, later access, later calendar year-wise, to the golden tiles, but, you know, it's -- It's just my opinion. It's a tough nut to crack. You know, is the juice going to be worth the squeeze on this one? I mean, as bad as we want to help everybody, is it really going to be anything that we can do?

MR. CONSTANT: If you split it between what's being harvested, they're going to get twenty-five, and we're going to get 200.

MR. KIMREY: You could have the opposite effect, if you weren't real careful, you know, based off of some of what we were talking about with Mike.

MR. CONSTANT: I agree.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. John.

MR. POLSTON: Well, you just said that it could help if it was open say a little bit later or whatever, and what about the consideration of having the recreational open at the same time commercial does, January 15, instead of January 1?

MR. KIMREY: Well, you know, I think the bulk of the concern on this issue is pretty much the Outer Banks of North Carolina. They've got a pretty decent fishery for these fish, but, not only does it overlap with some of their other fisheries, when Florida is catching them all up after the January 1 opening, but it's also really, really tough weather for us, you know, in that January, February, and March timeframe.

Off the Outer Banks of North Carolina, it can get rank, and so, you know, that's part of the problem, is it's not just that they're getting caught up, but it's that they don't have access, and a lot of it has to do with weather issues, because it's a long ride for us to get to where they live. Even out of Hatteras, it's still a pretty good ride. Chris.

MR. MILITELLO: Chris Militello, south Florida, and so then, Mike, why is the data like really high in January and February? Because that's when it's opening, I'm guessing, but then it drops, and then it goes up again.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: My guess with this, and, obviously, not being the person, you know, running the sampling, but my guess, from looking at the pattern, is there's a high amount in January and February that is going to be primarily Florida, and then, the times when you get that boost in May and June, that's if the season hasn't necessarily been closed yet, and when further north is able to then start accessing, and they start getting the weather to go out there. There are, as I understand, potentially some trips that, you know, would be targeting the deeper-water species up in North Carolina, and so that's my guess of what is going on with that pattern.

MR. MILITELLO: Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: What about the -- Hold on one second, Gettys, but what about some of the Florida guys here that fish these golden isles? I mean, how devastating is it to the Florida people if it doesn't open say until May 1, you know, to coincide with the snowy fishery? Paul.

MR. NELSON: A May 1 opening would help discards too, because they're all going to be open at the same time in the deep water. I agree with Andy on the May 1 opening. I think that everybody has a fair shot, and, if they're out there, they're not going to be discarding dead animals that they have to throw back because they're not open.

MR. KIMREY: Well, I mean, that makes sense to me. Like I say, it's not exactly my area of expertise for being a fisherman, but, you know, anything we can do to reduce discards, give people access, and keep fish, by killing less, is very important. Paul.

MR. NELSON: I think, when I commercial fished them, they were spawning in January and February, and so that's probably why they bite better then too.

MR. KIMREY: Gettys, you had your hand up?

MR. BRANNON: Yes, sir. Gettys Brannon, and so, no matter how we look at it, it's still about 3 percent of ACL for recreational, compared to commercial at 97 percent, right? So I think the question earlier was, as far as priority, and, I mean, I think, obviously, if that number was a little higher, it may become more priority, but, when you look at how we're getting the ACL percentages, to what Chris was saying a second ago in January and February, and throughout the year, you see that these years are shifting drastically.

I mean, you go from 1,512 percent to 112 percent to 616 percent, and so we know what -- Oher than that just being MRIP, what those errors are, the recent seasons of data, and like you see the 2019 at 15,638, to 2,800, 3,000, 2,000, and I don't know if I'm reading -- Maybe I'm not reading it right. If we go from 2,000 to 38,000 back to 2,000, it just seems like what are we basing our decisions off of?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and the error, for I think pretty much every one of these years, would be in the very high category. You know, when it comes to MRIP sampling, it would be above 50 percent standard error. That's the nature of when you have a very small number of intercepts. That's just what it's going to be, and that's one of those things that's not necessarily within the council control, you know, for the sampling of it, but that's something to recognize when we're looking at the numbers, of what's kind of driving that information.

There is a high amount of error, but, even with high amounts of error, when there are stark contrasts, when there's big changes that happen, then you can kind of get an idea that there was a big change. Maybe the number itself isn't reflective of that change, but some big change occurred there, if that makes sense.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Gettys. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Haley Stephens. So, just going back to our last presentation on the SERFS surveys and the golden tilefish deepwater longline surveys, that's where the majority of this population is being seen, is in south Florida, and so, I mean, it makes sense why the majority of the ACL is being harvested there, if you look at -- Compare and contrast those two, you know, and, in the wintertime, the weather is completely different, even from south Florida, in Jupiter and Palm Beach, versus us in north Florida, Daytona and Jacksonville, et cetera.

For me, personally, as a charter headboat, this is not a priority. We have never caught a golden tilefish. I understand that it is important to some folks. Maybe, when David gets back, he can weigh-in on this too, because I think he's a little bit more familiar with it, but, even looking at it from a more bigger-picture perspective, maybe this highlights, you know, the need, and the investigation, for localized snapper grouper management in the future.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: So just a couple of thoughts on this. It sounds like you've got a congressman, or somebody, a representative up in North Carolina, that's listening to some feedback from some of his local captains, or fishermen, or something like that, and so I think there's something that's inherent in this, that they're reaching out to the council. They're reaching out to the South Atlantic Council, saying, hey, help us with this, and we see a real problem.

I don't know how big of an issue this is to have to push through. Is this a couple-of-year process, Mike? Is this a couple-of-year process to try to get through and just say, hey, yes, let's move this to May, and it makes sense, and move it to May? The folks going out of Florida to do deep-drop, okay, we can handle that. I mean, I speak for myself, but we can handle that change, and then giving the North Carolina fishermen just at least a better shot at trying to get that species.

As my colleague points out, yes, reducing the amount of dead loss there would be fantastic, you know, especially if you're catching them when they're spawning, and so I would side with Andy, and several others, that a May 1 time would be great, but, priority-wise, you know, is this going to put extra burden on the council, or is the council reaching out to us to say, hey, give us some feedback, give us some direction, and let's knock this out for them.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I think that, as far as the council priority, the council is kind of trying to get, you know, kind of a pulse feel from the AP, and get your perspective, and that can kind of inform where they put it in there, you know, that big colorful table, their workplan. This is one of those actions where they could do this through a framework amendment, and that does move a little bit faster than a full plan amendment, but it would still take them probably two to three, and probably three, meetings in order to complete that form of an amendment.

This may something that they want to pair with another action that is already running, and so if -- I think it's been kind of stated, and what I'm hearing around the table right now is it doesn't seem to be a widespread high priority. It seems to be fairly on the lower end, but there also does seem to be some agreement that -- I haven't heard any opposition from anybody to a May 1 start date for all of these deepwater species, and so it's kind of, if the council is able to fit it into their workplan, and it doesn't slow anything else down, then that's something that they should pursue. Is that -- I'm seeing nodding heads. Is that thumbs-up? Okay. I think that, if that's the perspective of the AP, then we can bring that message back to the council.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Just to follow-up with that, then the council then shows to that recreational fisherman, fishermen team or whatever up in North Carolina, that, hey, somebody is listening, and now you're reinitiating that trust between the recreational folks and the council.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else? Thanks, Darrin. Vincent. Now we've got a golden tilefish expert, but he's commercial, and so here we go.

MR. BONURA: No, and I had a question here on the PowerPoint. It was asking about the split seasons, and I was wondering if any of the other deepwater species had a split season or not, I mean, on the recreational, or on this amendment? On the commercial there is, yes.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: But not the recreational. No recreational split seasons.

MR. BONURA: Okay. I mean, on that one, I wouldn't say I would agree with Andy and everyone else here. Why not have all the deepwater species align to reduce and discards and have less bycatch on other species?

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Vincent. It does seem that the general consensus is this is a fairly low priority, only because it affects kind of a smaller subset of people, and not that we're still not concerned for them, but the May 1, coinciding with the snowy, seems to be a pretty well-accepted possibility to ask the council to look at, because of the benefits, not only for access for the northern anglers in the region, but also to hopefully reduce discards maybe some in the deepwater fishing, and does everybody seemed to agree with that?

Now there's one thing I want to add, because we have one AP member that wasn't here. He was at actually another meeting, and he wanted to put a little input into this, David Moss, and so we might touch on it again when he's around, but it seems like we've pretty much got it narrowed down already, excluding David's input, and so if everybody is good. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and I just wanted to ask the AP, and so, when the council had grouped snowy grouper and blueline tilefish together, they recognized that those two species frequently co-occurred south of Cape Hatteras, and so that's why golden tilefish isn't necessarily grouped with them. There was information, or kind of an indication, that they were -- Golden tilefish, you actually had to go off the normal spots, and go into the mud bottom to catch the golden tilefish, and so, north of Cape Hatteras, they feel like they are very separate.

It's easy to go to catch -- To go to areas where you're going to catch golden tilefish. It's easy to go to areas where you're going to focus either on blueline tilefish or snowy grouper, and so, south of Cape Hatteras, are you all -- Is discards an issue for these species? If you're going, and you're going to stop at a spot, and either catch blueline tilefish and snowy grouper, can you catch golden tilefish at that, or do you have to go to the mud bottoms more to catch golden tilefish? I'm just asking about the whole discard issue, making sure that, you know, we're addressing the right thing as we write this amendment up, or start to think about it.

MR. KIMREY: Paul.

MR. NELSON: When you're drifting for snowy grouper, and you get off into the mud next to the wrecks, you catch golden tile with them, and, on the gray tile side, the gray tile and snowy kind of live in the same habitat, on the live bottom that we fish off our coast, but, when you drift the wrecks, out in the 600 and 700 foot stuff, and you drift off of them into the mud, the tilefish will bite.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Paul Number 2.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Paul Rudershausen. Chip, I think you're specifically asking in the northern part of the region, off the coast of North Carolina, and my observation, my relatively limited observation compared to Paul Nelson of Florida, is these species, these three species we're talking about, off the coast of North Carolina, do not cohabitate. You know, it's the bluelines and the snowy over shallower depth strata, and then the goldens much deeper, and so I don't see this

discard mortality issue being that off the coast of North Carolina, like it might be elsewhere farther south.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. I mean, for me, I have limited experience fishing golden tiles, but you know, I've caught snowy and blueline, and, what Paul said, I mean, I've actually had happened. You know, we'll stop and try to catch a snowy, and hit a little spot when we're drifting, you know, some of the deeper stuff, when you get out there to, you know, seventy or eighty fathoms or whatever.

It's not hard to drift off your spot and end up with, you know, a blueline, or even inshore of it. Sometimes we're fishing the smaller snowy, and you drift off and end up with bluelines, and so there is a crossover, in my experience, with those two. I don't know if that relates to golden tile, because I just haven't fished them enough, but I know that it's possible in the recreational sector.

There's enough people that really don't know enough about it that there's no telling where they're going to end up. There's no telling what they're going to catch, and so the potential, in my opinion, for discards is always there, because a lot of people are just not always where they think they are, catching what they thought they were wanting to catch.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: A point of clarification, Chris, and, yes, the blueline and the snowy, of course, are in similar habitats, where the goldens are, obviously, deeper, and over that mud bottom, instead of structured bottom, off of Carolina.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Got it. Anybody else? Are we good? We went from being behind to being ahead. Anybody got anything you want to add for today? That's it, and so you're not going to try to squeak out a little bit of bass, and you're going to just wait on that? Okay. So will we start with bass tomorrow, Mike?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: You and I will talk.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. All right. Have you got anything else you want to add, Mike?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No. We're good? Anybody else before we adjourn? Okay. Thanks, guys. Good job.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: We'll be back at 8:30 tomorrow morning. 8:30 tomorrow.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on April 21, 2026.)

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APRIL 22, 2026

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Charleston in North Charleston, South Carolina, on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Chris Kimrey.

MR. KIMREY: Good morning, everybody. Hopefully everybody is well rested and ready for the full day. A few changes this morning. We're going to start out with citizen science has a video presentation, and then we're going to go into black grouper and sea bass, a tidbit from yesterday, and we're going to follow black grouper with sea bass, and then we should be back in order, and hopefully moving along in a steady pace.

I'm not sure -- I don't know a lot about this video from citizen science, but here we go.

MS. WITHERS: Good morning. I'm back, and so we really quickly wanted to share a video with you all. It's kind of a call-to-action video for the SAFMC Release project, where we got to hear directly from some of the project participants, and so you're going to see Nigel Bowers, Jake Harmon, and Captain Matt Simon talk about the project, and so, since you all have provided such valuable input on the Release project so far, we just wanted to share this kind of new outreach product that we have, where we get to hear directly from some of the awesome fishermen in our project.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and so, for folks on the webinar, the audio wasn't -- It was going out to you, and it was not going in the room, and so we're going to come back to that video after lunch. We will go into black grouper right now, and we'll get the fishery performance report questions and app pulled up, and Chip is going to talk you through the information.

DR. COLLIER: Thanks Mike, and, if you go to the fishery performance report discussion questions, you'll see a click here for the fishery overview. I'm going to be operating it from our computer, so we won't get interrupted, like we have in the past.

What we try to do with this fishery overview is just give you a little bit of background on the species of interest, you know, just trying to make sure that people are understanding kind of the dynamics that have been occurring recently, just giving a little refresher. I don't provide any text with these things, because, as soon as I provide text, I'm giving my point of view, and we're here to get your point of view, and so I'm going to be going through and showing the information that's available right now.

If you go to the Shiny app, you'll see these three different tabs. It usually lands on this page here that includes all the past fishery performance reports that have been provided by advisory panels, and not only the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel but Dolphin Wahoo and CMP, but, if you click here on the Snapper Grouper AP, this one is just looking at black grouper right now.

You have a range of years, and so, if you have questions on different years, you can look at how it changes over time, so you can better focus in on certain things. I know there's quite often questions about how these fish grow, and different things like that, and so we provide some of the basic life history information. These are coming from the past SEDARs.

If you look at black grouper, at around age-ten, you're looking at about a forty-inch fish, and so just giving you a little bit of context about how big these fish are. I know fishermen typically think

in pounds, and so you can also convert from inches to pounds, and so, going out to a forty-inch fish, that's going to be about a thirty-five-pound fish, and then there's some information on maturity as well down here at the bottom, and that's just looking at the length of the fish and the proportion that are mature. If you're looking at a thirty-inch fish down here, a very small percentage are mature. Once you get up to about thirty-five inches, that's when these fish are becoming fully mature for black grouper.

Now going into the index of abundance. Unfortunately, I only have information through 2015. That was the last attempt at a stock assessment for black grouper. There is more recent information available through Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. They do have some abundance indices that are available, and I tried to put it on this plot, but that graph all the way to the right is the dive survey that is done in the Florida Keys, and the scale is just totally different, and so I couldn't get them to match up.

Basically, the most recent years, it seems like it's been fairly flat, but, if you want to look at those indices of abundance from the Florida Keys those are available. but these are the pieces of information that were considered for the last stock assessment, and we have an index of abundance from headboat, an index of abundance from MRIP, and then we also have the RVC, and so the dive survey.

Going into yearly landings, we have both recreational and commercial landings separated. Right now, it lands on commercial. If you would like to look at recreational, you just click on this button here, but I'll go through recreational first.

The red line here is the ACL for black grouper. You can see the commercial fishery has been under the ACL for the past few years. I will also indicate that the reason the most recent stock assessment for black grouper ended was because of questions on the identity of the species. Basically, reporting of landings can be challenging when there's a combination of black or gag grouper. Some areas call gag grouper black grouper, and so there's a little bit of confusion in the landings on what species is what, and that's one of the reasons that the last stock assessment had ended. Folks are working on it, trying to address some of these issues, and I haven't heard a final report on that.

Usually I provide you state-level landings, in order to give you some flavor of where all the landings are coming from. All the landings, or most of the landings, are coming from Florida. It is a Florida-centric species, and really down in the keys quite a bit. Down here, we do have release numbers. I don't have any for the commercial fishery, but if you click on recreational, you can get into release numbers. Those do pop up. Those are collected through MRIP.

Once again, these are the recreational numbers. The most recent, or the way that the recreational information is tracked, is I think MRFSS, and so that is a very old tracking system, and so I'm not providing the ACL up here for black grouper. What this is, this is the most recent information. These are based on those fishery effort surveys, and so the most recent version of the recreational data collection system. Once again these are the state-level landings, and then you also have your releases.

If you want to look at monthly, this is where, you know, the time period really matters. If you look at this, and you see high landings in January and February, and you're thinking, well, black

grouper is not allowed to be landed in January and February, well, the reason for that is, back in 2000, you could, and so, if you move this up to the more recent time period, when it was limited to the May through December fishing season, you can see that there is -- That January does drop quite a bit, and so it is doing what it is supposed to do, and you can look at how landings change over time, and, if you want to look at certain time bins, I have this set up to look at information from 2000 to 2024.

You can do the same thing for recreational and commercial, and then we only have revenue and price for the commercial fishery. You can see how that has changed over time. We provided an ex-vessel value here, and then you can see price per pound down here, and both of these values are normalized to -- It says 2022 up there, but I believe it's 2024 values. No matter what, it's all consistent economic values that are developed. Go ahead.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Where do you get the price per pound? Is that like from our filling out our expense on the bottom of the VTR books, or where you all base that, from calling fish houses or --

DR. COLLIER: So these are coming from ACCSP values, and so it's going to be the dealer reports. That's where we're getting it from, and, unfortunately, for black grouper, we do have this one last tab on economic impacts. Unfortunately, we have not been able to finish that quite yet. There's been a lot going on, and we haven't been able to run these models yet, and so, once they get updated, we'll put it in there. It will be after you guys are done talking about your FPR, but quite often I don't hear about jobs and impacts and different things like that in the discussion, and so we'll get that updated for you and provide it to you in some static figures. It's just going to be the last four or five years, is what we usually incorporate into those.

So, with that, I will now hand it -- Unless there's any questions on the information that's provided, and I know this is very boring for most. If you want additional information included in this, please let me know. These things are pretty flexible, and we can add it in there. I do geek out a little bit on this, because it's fun to code. No questions? So I'll hand it over to Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. I'm going to walk you guys through the questions to fill out this fishery performance report, and Chip just walked you through that awesome tool, but now we need your feedback. Obviously, black grouper is kind of a localized fishery. Chip just talked about how we're most kind of focused on that north Florida area, but any information that you guys can give us would be super helpful.

The way I am going to run through these questions is I have slides that have a couple questions on each slide, and so we've got a couple slides to break them down into chunks, and then I'm going to be recording information that you guys provide on another screen. We'll clean it up, and then that report will get finalized, and so I just kind of wanted to go through that first before I started, and so, if you're seeing me furiously typing away up here, that is what is happening.

With that, we can dive right in, and so the first set of questions deals with just the overall fishery changes, and so have there been any substantial changes in the black grouper fishery since 2021? If so, please describe the timing, location, and what you think has caused the change.

MR. KIMREY: Dave.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. I don't know the exact date, but I can tell you that, like in the Middle to Upper Keys for sure, the way that the fishery is prosecuted now is -- From a charter and recreational standpoint, it has changed significantly. You know, the old-school way of dropping a lead down, with a grunt or yellowtail or whatever, not many people do that anymore, because of the dreaded S word, and so they fish differently.

I can tell you that, also, on May 1, it has gotten to be, especially in the Keys, like worse than lobster mini season, and a lot of people don't like going out. People, like charter guys, and even a lot of the rec guys, don't like going out, because it's just madness, and then, sorry, but one of the big problems that people complain about a lot are the spear fishermen, again especially in the Keys, and that you might be on the spot, even yellow-tailing or something like that, and then, all of a sudden, a dive boat comes, and drops like ten people in the water, and that's blown up.

I would like to go on the record by saying it's not Andy Fish, but there are more and more spear fishermen, again, especially, you know, in south Florida, and bottom fishing in general has changed all throughout south Florida, because of the way that we have to do it, with dealing with sharks and stuff.

MS. IBERLE: Sorry, and so you're saying that you're not kind of just dropping live bait, and how -- What have you shifted to? Like how are you primarily targeting them now?

MS. MOSS: No, and, I mean, it's just -- The unfortunate truth is, if you drop a live bait now, if you do catch -- If you do hook a grouper, which might be one out of every four drops or something like that, because the facts are that you're going to hook a lot of sharks, and you're probably not going to get that grouper up anyway, and so the people in the know have switched to tactics that they can get them up and away from the reef quickly, and that's all I would like to say.

MR. KIMREY: David, so, these tactics, are they legal tactics, or are you just trying to be top secret, because I'm very curious now, as is the rest of the group, I'm sure. Thanks, Dave. Real quick, and I hate to kind of ask for help on this, but, I mean, you spear fishing guys, you all, you know, are in the area where a lot of these blacks are, and have you all seen any changes? Has everything seemed the same? Are you seeing the same number, the same size, since 2021?

MR. FISH: Generally Cape Canaveral and north, we don't see very many at all. I don't really see them until North Carolina, and it's very rare for me. They're deeper once you get up there.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. What about you, Jeff?

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko. Since 2021, we've made multiple trips from north Florida back to North Carolina, multiple times a year, and I would say it is still the same. I haven't seen any change in these years. They like specific areas, specific rocks, and it's got to be a specific thing, but we still see some in north Florida, and we still see some in North Carolina, and a few sprinkled in between. I think it's been the same, but I think the bulk of the fish are down south, and so, I mean, we land less than a thousand pounds a year, for sure, more than 500, and less than a thousand.

MR. KIMREY: All right, but the sprinkle you see has remained steady?

MR. MARINKO: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: About the same, as far as on the upper end the range.

MR. MARINKO: Maybe a few more smaller fish, and I know, even like central Florida, like my homeport of Sebastian, Florida, all my buddies are like, well, we're getting black groupers now, and we never used to get black grouper there, and so they have migrated a bit further north, I would say, but, no, I haven't seen any major change.

MR. KIMREY: We're hoping they swim all to North Carolina, you know, so we can catch those. All right. Thanks guys.

MS. IBERLE: Anything else on just overall changes before I move on? Okay. All right, and so now we're going to switch gears to fishing behavior and catch levels, and so this first question is when and where are the fish available, and has this changed? I will stop there, or, actually, I guess this would be a question for the AP, and would you like me to go through all the questions on the slide, and then stop for you guys, or go through each one? How would the AP like? I see Dave's nodding for going through all of them, or stopping?

MR. MOSS: I would say go through them.

MS. IBERLE: Go through them all? Okay. I'm not seeing any major objection to that. Are you good with that?

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and, I mean, because it is such a small concentration for range, I think we're going to have to lean on a few AP members, and we probably need to roll through this and see if we can figure it out.

MS. IBERLE: That works for me. All right, and so when and where are the fish available? Has this changed, and then we heard a little bit about this, but has the size of the fish that you're catching changed? If so, please describe the trend. Have there been effort shifts to and from black grouper? If there have been, you could try to describe that, including the timeframe for when that shift occurred?

Have there been considerable changes in fishing techniques or gears? Obviously, you don't want to give away secrets, but if we're hearing, you know, that things have changed, that's useful information, and then how much fishing for black grouper typically occurs, and this might not be relevant, but typically occurs during the day versus at night, and so, with that, I'll hand it over to the AP.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Dave, go ahead.

MS. MOSS: Unless anybody else from south Florida wants to speak up, and so what has happened since the May 1 season is it's gotten worse and worse every year. I'll say worse and worse, but, basically, if you don't get them like that first week of May, and, again, talking about like the Keys, and even Miami a little bit, they've either been caught, shot, or moved offshore, and so it's -- There

are still people that will fish for them after that first week of May, but your chances of getting them are less and less.

I would say, and this is anecdotal, the size has probably gotten smaller over the years, the average size. You know, it used to be not totally uncommon that you could get like a nice thirty pounder or something like that, and you don't see a ton of those anymore.

Yes, there's been -- So, yes, the size has changed a little bit. Effort shifts have changed. Again, you're seeing kind of fewer and fewer people bottom fishing, and some of that is predation issues. There's definitely been shifts in technique, and night fishing has shifted a little bit, again because it -- This is probably anecdotal, but you tend to get more sharks at night. That's kind of the common thought anyway, and so not many people -- Usually, if you're night fishing, a lot of times you're going for yellowtail anyway, especially as you get further up like by Miami and Broward and Palm Beach Counties.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. Have we got anybody else from south Florida and the Keys in here that has any comments on -- Richie is not here. No offense, David. Go ahead, Vincent.

MR. BONURA: Vincent Bonura, and I've got a couple of guys who have bandit fish for them off Broward and Palm Beach, and it's been pretty good the past five years. Probably the first couple weeks of May are the best, and these guys are fishing into maybe mid-June, and then, after that pretty much all the fish are, I guess, caught, or gone, or offshore, or moved out. Who knows, and I don't know.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Tony. Thanks, Vincent.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks. Tony Constant. I would say, in the last ten years in South Carolina, we sporadically pick them up, mainly May and June, and I agree it hasn't really changed in the -- But it is very sporadic, I would say. Out of all the grouper in May and June that we catch, I would say 5 to 10 percent is all.

MR. KIMREY: So, David, you said that you think the fish have gotten smaller. You know, they have the same size requirements as gags, I believe, twenty-four inches, and, you know, they're lumped together, because of identification and all that kind of stuff. You know, they, obviously, get really big, and I don't know if anybody knows that -- The fish in South Florida that are being caught up, according to Vincent and you, during the first part of the season, I mean, that sort of happens on a lot of the bottom where we're at with the gags.

It's like they kind of get hammered pretty quick, but what I wonder is the range. I know the range of these fish can be much deeper than a lot of spear fishermen are going to go, and a lot of, you know, close-to-shore stuff in south Florida that people fish on the regular isn't real deep. I mean, I'm curious as to what percentage of the fish in south Florida, that are in the area that are being highly targeted, makes up the whole stock. Does somebody know, or have any idea about that, because that would be hugely important to trying to make decisions moving forward. It's a localized stock, and it's an area that's a concentration of fish, but how many fish are outside of that area where they don't get targeted?

Like for us, and I know Jeff can attest to this, we occasionally see black groupers, but they're deep. They're out in the deep. You know, he's one of the few divers that's going to encounter them, just because of the depth. You know, we have the guys deep dropping that catch a few here and there, but it's so sporadic, and so I wonder, the deeper stuff, you know, what the numbers might be outside of this heavily-targeted range. Go ahead.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. To your point, I think it's probably a little bit higher than we thought, or think. Like I know Vince, when he catches them, he's out deeper than what the average rec guy will fish, you know, especially like up in Broward and kind Palm Beach, and even Dade. You know, our edge of the reef, or whatever, is about ninety feet, which is, you know, maybe a mile from shore or something, and that's the area that gets hammered up there.

In the Keys, it's a little bit different. The edge is about three-and-a-half miles or so, depending upon where you are exactly, and then there's some stuff that you can fish out a little bit deeper. Most of the rec guys are fishing max like 150 feet or so for them, and they don't fish that much deeper, and he'll fish deeper, which is probably why he's doing better with them, and so probably larger stock out deeper.

Again, this is anecdotal, and, in talking to some of the charter guys in the Keys especially, like I said, after that first week, if they're not caught, the common perception is that they've all been scared. I'm not going to use a bad word, but scared, and they just move way deep, so that they can't get targeted as much.

MR. KIMREY: Vincent, the fish that you're referring to, are they typically larger fish because they're deeper? I mean, these things are, you know, kind of like all the rest of the groupers. The bigger they are, the deeper they are, a lot of times.

MR. BONURA: They're all probably in the fifteen to eighteen-pound range, is about average, and then I think the -- Usually, they catch a lot of gags earlier, and then the blacks later as well.

MR. KIMREY: What about the really large fish, you know, the big seventy-five and eighty-pound blacks? Do you all catch those?

MR. BONURA: No, and we don't have any of those down our way, or I haven't had any.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Thanks. Did somebody else have a question? Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I would just like to say that last year was probably one of our best grouper seasons, you know, other than the red grouper, for North Carolina, for what we do, but it was pretty productive, but, just like Vincent said, you know, everybody gets geared up for something that's closed, and they hit it really hard for a month or two, and then they go to something else, but ours has been really productive the last year. You know, the previous years, I can't say that it was as good as last year was.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and, you know, I think that's the general consensus up our way in North Carolina. You know, our rec guys and the commercial guys -- You know, our gag fishing last year was really good. Now, just a year or two prior to that, it started out very slow. You know, we had all that cold water up our way, and the gag fishing was terrible in the first part of the season, but

last year it was good. It was steady. Most people knew how to catch them, and could catch them. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I think one thing that -- I'm sure it's like this everywhere, but the boat capabilities, and the sizes, and I call it the circle. The little circle that you fish just got further and further away, because of the boat capabilities, and the trolling motors, the C-MAPs, and just everything has just got so sophisticated for what the average weekend person is going to do.

When you go to the boat ramp, and I'm not saying it's their fault or ours, but, if you go to the boat ramp on a Saturday, you can't get a parking place, you know, and so I just think the capabilities -- The boats has got bigger, faster, longer, and it's just a lot of it, and so I think that little circle for the bigger fish -- Like our guys, we probably won't even start with probably 130 or 140 foot, you know, unless it's a certain time of year, but, you know, it's that capability of them getting there has got greater.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and thanks Scott. You spoke of C-MAPs. When I built my new boat last year, I put the charts in it. I went ahead and got them, and, you know, I had my father's numbers, and my numbers we've accumulated, and counting him would be sixty years. You know, I fine-tuned all these ledges, all the way from Oregon to South Carolina, and, when I first loaded it, I was so excited.

I wanted to see how everything laid up, and, you know, we've got ledges, and I had them laid out perfect. We spent years marking spots, and fine-tuning and all that, and I was so proud, but then it hit me that I'm like now everybody has got that exact same thing, and it took us sixty years to make, and so, yes, unbelievable. Anybody else? David.

MR. MOSS: I'll just throw something else out. Sorry. David Moss. What Scott brought up, that I see true too, in the Lower Keys especially, and so, back in the day, you would take these either multiday boats, or even a faster dayboat, out to the Tortugas, and you can catch blacks and muttons and things like that.

Now, with all the boats that everybody has, everybody is like blowing past it, and part of the reason is because of the sharks, because it's such a pain in the neck, and they're blowing past it and going out to the really deep stuff, and everybody and their brother is deep dropping, and hitting Pulley Ridge, and going for, you know, queens and tiles and things like that. I would say, again kind of anecdotally, some of the behavior has shifted from the old-school grouper guys, and they're now keep dropping, and doing more of that, and a little bit less of the grouper fishing, just because it has gotten to be a pain in the butt.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and I don't think anybody can dispute that, the more pressure you put on those deeper-water fish, with the capabilities like Scott is talking about, and we all know about it, the technology, fast boats, going further, you know, endless fuel budgets for weekend guys, and, you know, $4,000 Hooker reels. The more pressure you put out there, especially right on top of where the big, mature fish live, there's no way it's not going to have an impact. It might take it a while to show up, but it's definitely going to have an impact. It's going to show up eventually, if it hadn't already. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and I want to say something about the range of the fish, because what I was seeing, the last ten years, was exactly what Vincent described. We were fishing from 150 feet plus. Their average weight has been ten to eighteen pounds, probably, and you just catch a sporadic few after catching a few gags. It's the exact same scenario.

MR. KIMREY: Scott.

MR. BUFF: I would just like to touch on what David said here, and this really probably isn't the place for it, but the sharks are just horrendous. I don't know how we're going to get this under control, but -- I don't know about everywhere else, but here, at times, we're probably losing a third of what the boat is catching from sharks, and I don't know how you fix it, but, at some point in time, that needs to be addressed.

MR. KIMREY: It's a topic of hot discussion everywhere, you know, and I think we all know why. You know, it used to be that everybody didn't really like sharks, and so they didn't treat them like sea turtles, but now, I mean, there's a huge following of people that don't want sharks killed, and the regulations changed and all that stuff, and so, you know, you've got more people, and less fish, excluding the sharks, you know, and you have to balance it out.

I would love to see some sort of, you know, solution, even if it involved harvesting them. You know, if we created a viable market for them, that was a little easier to handle than what we've got now, maybe we could, you know, with proper regulations, at least send them out a little bit, and have them go somewhere, go to a restaurant or wherever, and you know what I mean? There's always somebody that will eat anything. We've just got to figure out how to get them there. John.

MR. POLSTON: The problem is that the market, the meat market, has been destroyed. First of all, the sandbar was protected, and overprotected too, I will say, and still to this day they're being protected. Even if we have any type market at all right now, which is very small, if you catch a sandbar, you have to release it, and take it back, and if anybody thinks -- Does anybody think that there's no sandbars around, because that's the shark problem, is the sandbars. It's not blacktip, and it's not spinner shark, and it's not tiger shark. It's sandbars.

Until a meat market is recreated again, and you get shark meat back in the grocery stores, like it used to be, because then that was all shot down by the tree huggers, and we need -- That's what you need. You need a meat market back, and that's not going to happen unless the government gets involved and educates the public.

MR. KIMREY: I agree. Sandbars are definitely a problem, even up our way, and I don't think it's as bad for us as it is places south of us, and every year it seems to get a little worse, and we all know that, you know, sandbars are part of the protected group, but there has been some recent talk about sandbars. You got anything you want to hit on, or you're going to step out on that one? Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Haley Stevens. Maybe during lunch we can all get in the van and go over to the sandbar meeting that's happening across town. I would like to touch on black grouper, if that's okay, Mr. Chairman. Haley Stephens, Ponce Inlet, and so my scope is going to be coming from the north-central Florida area. I was curious, because there was a separate discussion about shallow-water grouper, particularly gag and black.

Recently, I looked back on our logbooks dating back to 2012, and our charter-headboat has not caught a single black grouper in that time span. I don't think that we've ever caught one. With that being said, we are still doing that very traditional bottom fish style approach, single rig, eight-ounce lead, and it us half-day or full-day, in areas sixty to a hundred foot of water, and so, as far as where the fish are available, not where we're fishing. Has it changed? No. We have not shifted our fishing behavior. Maybe if Mr. Moss wants to share some of the secret techniques, we could get that dialed in, and all of our effort has occurred during the day. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. We're coming for you Dave. Anybody else have a question? Okay, Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I would just like to say that some of the stuff that really gets to me is some of the fish that are so overprotected to where they become a nuisance. That's kind of where we're at with the snapper and the sharks. You've protected them so much that now we don't know what to do with it, and I always wonder what that does to the other mass of the fish. How does that affect the reproduction of the other fish?

Some of our fishermen this year, and I've never heard this, but they were catching snapper, and, of course, throwing them back, and they were slam full of little beeliners, and so how much protection for the snapper is affecting the other fisheries, and same with the sharks. It's just become a nuisance.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and, I mean that's always a topic of much discussion, and it's a valid concern, in my opinion, is the cause and effect. You know, you've got this hugely increased amount of sharks, and just like with the snappers. I know our way, during the commercial snapper season last year, you know, a couple of the guys that are fishing SG 1 where I am, they were catching snappers that were full of bass. I mean, they're calling me like well this is the problem with bass, is the snapper is eating them, and who knows how bad that problem is.

Nobody has tried to figure it out, because it's such a daunting task, but there's no way you can increase a predator in an area and not expect it to eat, and, when you've got that many snappers, and that many sharks, that have just in recent, in ten, fifteen, twenty years, have increased at an exponential rate above everything else that's in decline, it's certainly going to -- They're going to consume whatever, and so it's something that needs to be figured out. It's just I don't know if anybody knows how to figure it out, you know, what that effect is. Does anybody else have a question before we move on? Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Thank you, guys, for all the great info. We've still got a couple more questions under fishing behavior and catch levels, and so I'll go through this kind of next set. Some of them we might have already answered. If so, we can just breeze over them. Do you actively avoid fishing for black groupers in certain areas to avoid catching undersized fish, or highly-regulated fish, and you kind of chatted about that a little bit, or maybe sharks, or to lessen bait loss, and how feasible is it to avoid black grouper?

What do you see in terms of discards in the commercial sector, the recreational sector, and how often are you discarding black grouper, and then what are the reasons that you are discarding them, and so is it a size limit, or are you not wanting to retain them? I don't think that's the case.

Do you encounter black grouper as bycatch when fishing for other species, and so I'm hearing a little bit that you're encountering them when you're fishing for gag, and then do you think that discard mortality is a significant factor for these species? Has this changed, and, if so, please describe, including kind of the timeframe for when that change occurred. I know, Dave, you were talking about having to bring them up maybe quicker to get around the sharks, and so I don't know if that's changing maybe the prevalence of barotrauma that you're seeing in these species, and so, with that, I'll turn it over.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, and so, when they use the particular technique I was talking about, the only reason I'll say no is because they're targeting them to keep them, and so they'll only do that during the open season. As far as bycatch, yes, in the wintertime when they're closed. Sometimes, if you're out fishing deep for muttons, which isn't always the best thing to do in the wintertime, but sometimes you'll get them, obviously.

If you're fishing -- I mean, yes, I guess is the easy answer. If you're bottom fishing out deeper in the wintertime, which doesn't happen that often, because usually the weather is not great, and it's not always the best spot to go, but you'll encounter them, and they're closed, and so you have to let them go.

Again, anecdotally, I'm trying to think -- Like it's not a ton of short ones being caught. It's more short red grouper caught, like on the patches, especially in the colder months, and not a ton of short blacks, that I know of, but I'm just running off the memory there of what people have told me, and the way that people avoid them is we've just shifted effort to other things, like I was saying, and a lot more people are deep dropping and doing other things.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Dave. Does anybody have anything to add to that?

MS. IBERLE: That will shift us into social and economic influences and so, for the commercial sector, how has the price and demand for black grouper changed? Is there an increased demand for a specific size of black grouper? I know this was kind of relevant when we last did the performance report for yellowtail. We heard that that plate size was really in demand. How has demand for charter and headboat trips targeting black grouper changed, and so, with that, I'll turn it over.

MR. KIMREY: Does anybody have anything to add to this? I'm will ask a couple questions if not. Okay. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: Yes, and the black grouper are in high demand, high dollar. Everyone wants them. No specific sizes really, but all the grouper are in demand.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Vincent, and that sort of was going to be one of my questions, and, you know, for you guys that sell lots of grouper, is there a difference in price between -- Even though I know it's at different times of the year, but snowy, black, and gag? Are they -- Are you getting different prices for them, and does it matter what size they are? Does the price vary?

MR. BONURA: The price varies a little bit depending on species, but it's not that much, but, I mean, pretty much all grouper are in high demand, and it's a high-dollar fish these days. Everything has gone up in price. Expenses have gone up. The cost of catching them has gone up, and everything is going up.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and I think that applies to everything, and so what about you guys? Do you get a different -- Like, if you've got a forty-pound gag, versus a forty-pound black, is there any difference in price, or marketability?

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. I've never gotten a break on gags for a price, or any grouper for that matter. I do know my fish house in Canaveral will write down snowy four and under, or four and up, but I've always got the same price. Red grouper and snowy grouper generally pay less than gag and scamp, about a dollar, generally.

MR. KIMREY: Scamp and gag the same price? Okay, but very little difference, for the most part, and size doesn't play a big role, even though -- I mean, on your snowy, they're -- You know, I'm sure they're writing them down different, because of the marketability of a four-pounder versus a thirty-five-pounder. Does anybody else -- John, have you got anything to add to that?

MR. POLSTON: Not necessarily to add that people haven't already said, but for sure the reasoning a snowy and a red grouper, or a snowy and, well, any other type of species, other than a gag or a black or a scamp, the reason they're going for less money is because of yield. You get less yield on those fish. It's not that they taste any different, or, I mean, they do taste different, but, in general, it's just because of yield of the fish, but you were asking about, by the year, the price, and has it made a difference, and yes. Every year it keeps getting more expensive. Every year, and, I mean, it's been ungodly how it's been going up, literally fifty-cents to a dollar a pound per year, commercially.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Scott, you got anything to add on the groupers?

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I would just about say exactly what Andy said, you know, and it's about a dollar a pound different, and, like John said, the smaller fish, you basically -- You have to sell the good fish and throw the smaller ones in the boot, and get rid of them, because nobody wants them, because the yield, you know, and so there is a different pay, what we do, on the smaller, like the snowy, because they're pretty small, but, you know, as you know, once you catch them, it's done, but about the same. You know, it's a dollar difference. The scamps and the blacks are the same, and that's what everybody wants, you know, and reds and snowy are a little bit different on the price.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and so that's a pretty good breakdown on what we've got to add to the discussion from the commercial side. Does anybody have anything else to comment on? Okay, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. A couple more socio-econ questions, and so, among the species you target, how important are black grouper to your overall business? That could be charter or headboat or commercial, and what communities do you know that are dependent on black grouper? I'm not sure that maybe black grouper is a cornerstone, but providing information on how it might fit into, you know, a community that's relying on maybe a group of species.

MR. KIMREY: Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I would just like to say -- I can't put a number on it, but, if you take each one of those fish, it's like a tool in the toolbox. The whole thing makes the circle move, what little bit the circle moves at this point, but I don't know how John and them are, but like, where we're at, we're at just barely holding our own with what we have now, but I don't know what percentage the blacks would be to that, but it's just an important part of the overall circle.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, and there's that couple week kind of slot, right, when it opens, that, again, especially in the Keys, it's just madness, and it's almost like a -- I would say a lot of the charter guys think it's kind of like a necessary evil, and they don't like it, but they know that they're going out and they can do it.

When I say that they don't like it, it's because it's craziness. It's just like the lobster mini-season now, as I said before, and so there's that couple of weeks right in May where it's madness, and then it kind of tapers off a little bit, and everybody -- You know, it gets a little bit more to reality, and it's not just blacks. I mean, it's blacks, reds, everything that's open, but there's --

MR. KIMREY: I would say from my perspective, you know, on the for-hire side, you know, I almost -- In my life, I have almost never encountered only but just a couple of blacks ever, but it's got to do with where I fish, where I live, you know, my homeport. In fact, I don't spend a lot of time out in the deep deep, but, just like Scott said, it's -- For me, because of the style of charters I run, you know, I don't really sell bottom fishing trips.

I sell gag grouper fishing trips, and we call them grouper trips, but, where I'm fishing it's 95 percent gags. We occasionally see a red, and occasionally see a scamp, but it's pretty much gag grouper, but, you know, it's just like Scott said. All that together, in in our area, from the restaurants to the charter business weekend, it's that full spectrum of groupers, and so, you know ,black is part of that, and it's barely a part of it for us, but, in other places, it's a bigger part, where they're more predominant, like for you, and so anybody else? Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I don't know that this is the place, but, for the last few years, we've not had what I would call a normal beeliner and triggerfish fishery. It's been off somewhat, for whatever reason, and you can look at the ACLs and tell that, from what the catches are, but every one of these species has been more important than they ever have, because our fishery, where we're at, beeliners and triggerfish was our bread and butter.

You know, you can count on ten boxes every trip, but we've not had that in the last two or three years, but it's kind of like the grouper fishery, you know, and we didn't -- We haven't had what I would call a really good grouper season, except for the past couple years, and, for whatever reason that is, I don't know, you know, water temperature, and fish move, climate change, whatever that is but the tilefish and the snowy and the grouper fishery has really become more of what we're leaning on to make the difference up, instead of having those two fisheries to make, you know, let's call it 50 percent of our income.

We haven't had that in the past two or three years, and all my guys are like, well, they come in cycles, you know, and they do this, and they do that, but, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter, when you're paying bills and trying to keep the doors open, and so I just wanted to throw that in there. For whatever reason, it has just not been normal for us, and so that's something that has really helped us, is to have these other fisheries.

The way they're -- I like the way we broke down the snowy and the tilefish too in the two sections, so I don't know if that that would be something that would work for the grouper as well, but I think that really keeps it from getting closed, and getting out of the market, and then, you know, it keeps -- Like, for our guys, they'll just get focused on something that they can do like when the snowy is open, when, you know, the tilefish are open, and they'll just hammer that stuff for a month, and then they'll get focused on something else, so I just I don't know, and it's just thoughts.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Anybody else? Okay, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: In terms of marketing charter-headboat trips, I know you talked about kind of selling -- Instead of selling bottom fishing trips, you're selling, you know, grouper trips how, and often is gag used to -- Not gag, but is black grouper used to sell trips, and like is that a species that you're really seeing pop up as people are saying, oh, you know, here's one of the fish that you're going to catch on this trip, and that's used as kind of the pull.

MR. MOSS: Again, it's hard to say, because like anymore it's -- I'm not a charter fisherman, but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express. For the most part, the people, again in the Keys, they just know May 1 is grouper season, and so they come down for groupers.

MS. IBERLE: So it's more than time.

MR. MOSS: Yes, and they know, again, you know, especially like in Key Largo and Islamorada, you're going to get -- You're going to get a black, or you're going to try to get a black, and maybe a red grouper thrown in there, and, if you're lucky, a scamp or something like that, but, for the most part, it's just hit the opening day grouper season.

MR. KIMREY: Okay, and some important questions. I think this is wrapping up socio-econ, but I think these questions are pretty crucial to what we've been hearing, and not just the bottom fishing community, but how have changes in infrastructure affected fishing opportunities for black grouper, and have fishermen and fishing communities adapted to the changes, and so we'll start there.

MR. KIMREY: Does anybody want to elaborate on this? I mean we've talked about this, in relation to other, species hundreds of times, and it's the exact same story. We should have recorded it and just hit play. Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I was just going to say that same thing that you're trying to say. We're losing fish houses everywhere, and so, of course, that changes everything. I mean, that's the answer.

MR. KIMREY: Go ahead, Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens, and, back to the last slide, Allie, and I think I've pretty much covered it, but, no, we do not use black grouper as a marketing tool to sell trips. They're not being targeted. They're not being marketed in the north Florida region.

As far as social and economic impacts, like Chris said, we could just play on loop how many times we've been over this. I guess the only newest thing lately is we've paid as much as eight dollars a gallon for diesel fuel in the past few weeks, and so those margins are getting thinner and thinner every day for our snapper grouper fishery.

MR. KIMREY: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, you know, yes, we've talked about a lot of this before. The one new wrinkle that I see in the whole social economic influence area is actual boat yards, and the astronomical price that anyone who operates a vessel is going to have to contend with going forward.

I know, where I am, they've shut down multiple boat yards with EPA rules, and so they're off the market totally, which means we're going to have to take our boats to marinas where they do all the work, which is going to exponentially increase our expenses to get the job done, and it's going to be pretty catastrophic for guys who are just, you know, on the edge, and so the loss of boat yards is sort of the new thing that I see is going to definitely affect the entire industry.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss. Yes, and, again, the same thing down the keys. There's actually a captain that I know that says all the time that the billionaires have pushed out the millionaires down the Keys.

A lot of the old school boats have been replaced by, you know, the forty-two-foot Freemans, with quads and all that stuff, and so, in some ways as I said before, it shifted the fishery, where some of those guys that used to fish for grouper back in the day are now pushing way, you know, out into the new world to deep drop and stuff, but there's also more people than ever, and so, while it has shifted effort in one aspect, there's more and more people moving to Florida all the time, and so it has shifted effort, but there's still plenty of people trying to prosecute the fishery. It's just they're doing it in really expensive boats, with really high-tech electronics, and trolling motors with Spot-Lock and all that stuff.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else? Moving right along.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and that brings us to management measures, and so are there new management measures that the council should consider, or are there -- Sorry. Are there existing management measures, such as size limit, trip limit, bag limit, season that should be changed? I don't believe this species has a trip limit, and then are the current ACL and allocations appropriate for each sector, and so, essentially, what we're looking for here is, you know, is there anything that you think the council should consider moving forward as far as changing the management, considering more management, and so I will turn it over.

MR. KIMREY: John.

MR. POLSTON: In my opinion, absolutely, and I believe the grouper should be under a two-month closure, and not a four-month closure, because that's when they spawn. There's plenty of fish, from back when Ben Hardig was on the council and stuff, and he put it down on the microphone that he showed all his books, and that's when all the fish are caught, is January and February. That's when they spawn. That's why everybody has always caught more than during that timeframe, and so you're going to get 90 percent or better if they were only closed for two months, instead of four months, and that would change a lot of things in the conversation we all just had, because the availability would be more.

I know the argument is it doesn't matter, and we're catching a quota anyhow, and so it's going to be shut down that much faster, but at least the availability would be there more for the timeframe. For the twelve months you're talking about, you would have another two months of availability, and then see how things shake out after that, because -- I'm not trying to push against management, but, at the same time, over managing is just as bad.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Is there anybody here that knows why they chose a four-month closure for shallow-water grouper over the two months? Anybody? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Paul Ruderhausen, and I'm not sure specifically on a species-by-species basis, but I know that this has jumped off the page at me, that, if we can think about managing some of these species on a sub-regional basis, because, at the northern end of the range, we still get spawning in that March and April timeframe, and so I feel like this is one of these species where the spawning activity might be completely different for a black grouper at the southern end of the range compared to potential spawners farther north.

MR. KIMREY: Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. I thought the original closure came from it was a pre -- They called it a pre-spawn, and it was also more of North Carolina versus Florida getting the majority of the fish. That's the way I understood it, and I think it was closed March and April, and it was still open January and February. I mean, they added the January and February, because they called it the pre-spawn, and it was a north versus south landings, because, in our spawn, which is when Florida gets our fresh groupers, in January and February, that's about the only time we get a consistent gag grouper.

MR. KIMREY: All right, and I think I vaguely remember some of that, but I'm not very familiar with it. Did you have something, David?

MR. MOSS: (Mr. Moss' comment is not audible on the recording,(

MR. KIMREY: Right. Yes, to span the whole region, which makes sense. So, real quick, I wanted to -- I wanted to step back to Paul's comment about the sub-regional management, and everybody here, and probably people listening, know how I feel about sea bass, but what he's saying, in respect to spawning sub-regional management, could come in handy, and so that just led us to why there's a four-month closure, because they were trying to cover the region, you know, Florida versus North Carolina, two months and two months, and so, I mean, that makes perfect sense.

You know, just to harp on sub-regional, we're getting to the point, with this management stuff, if they can prove it with the science, there's a lot of things in management that we need to re-evaluate, and figure out a way to separate some of these things, and, of course, you know, I'm going to use sea bass as an example, because it's the best example, but some of these spawning closures is another example where sub-regional management might be an option, if it could be figured out how to do it effectively. David.

MR. MOSS: I don't want to get yelled at for not turning on the mic. It was also, as I recall, and Chip may say it better, but it was also to put all the species that were in that shallow-water grouper complex, because they all spawn kind of a little bit different, and so not only encompassing the whole region from North Carolina to Florida, but also reds, gags, scamps, blacks, everything, to try to get them all under one umbrella, so to speak.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and we know a big part of that is, if you've got one open, and you can fish for the other, you can alter the release mortality, and all those issues to deal with, and so, you know, there's a lot of logic to it, but, as we move forward, you know, things are changing, and I think management needs to evolve with it. No matter how daunting the task, that's where it's at, and that's sort of what people are demanding, and, you know, the EFP is an example of that, coming up on red snapper there, you know.

Back to what Scott was talking about with the beeliners, vermilion snappers, and triggerfish our way, there's definitely been a difference the past few years, and especially in the wintertime fishing this year. We had -- The guys were having to run much further than they used to catch those vermilion snappers and triggers this year, and, you know, they think part of it is because of the colder water, but it could be some other variables, too.

As far as going back to Scott talking about the gag fishery, or the grouper fishery, you know, our gag fishing was really poor the year before they implemented the rebuilding plan, and then it got really good, and, you know, we joked, and we were like, wow, they just started this, and it only took a few months, and now look at our fishery, and it's awesome, but since then -- It's been a couple of years, and so, you know, it's possible, and maybe because there's less pressure on those groupers, you know, and, instead of six months out of the year, it's been a couple months out of the year, and maybe the actual rebuilding plan worked a little bit.

Maybe that's why it's been better the past few years, because, if you're taking less fish, and less pressure on them, you would hope that there's a change, or otherwise what's the point of having the rebuilding plan, and so, anyway, does anybody have another question? Chip. Here comes the voice of logic.

DR. COLLIER: No, and that's not true at all, but the question came up of why did the council select the time period, and, as you guys pointed out, a lot of it was due to reproduction from south Florida all the way up to North Carolina. It seems like there is a temporal progression of spawning up the coast for the different species of grouper.

In addition, the council was having to do reductions along the lines for several species, and so gag and red grouper have gone into rebuilding plans, and, as you're going into rebuilding plans, you have to reduce harvest, and they're trying to balance out reducing bag limits, size limits, and also

seasons, and that's typically the three things that they're looking at, and, you know, they're having to balance those.

One of the ideas is, if you're protecting -- Having that added closure in January and February, that was adding additional spawning protection, and so people seemed to like that idea over decreasing that bag limit a little bit more, or changing the size limit, and so it's a variety of things that the council is having to balance, and, also, as you guys pointed out it's a bycatch issue as well.

You know, you didn't want people going out there targeting red grouper and catching gag grouper, or black grouper, or scamp, and I know there's different techniques to catch all of them, but, you know, the general recreational fisherman might use the same techniques to catch them, and so they're trying to balance all these issues. You know, as you all know, it's complicated, and, you know, trying to get the best one, but, as you all point out, maybe regional management is a way to go, and I think that's a good approach to talk to the council about, and see what they feel, and, you know, maybe it will come back to you with new ideas on how to manage some of these fisheries, and hopefully things start to improve, like you're seeing for some, like you mentioned, Chris.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chip. It sounded very logical to me. Anybody else got anything to add before we move forward here? All right.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and that brings us to the final kind of chunk of questions, and let me see. I'm going to take it slide-by-slide. Okay, and which pertain to environmental, ecological, and habitat factors for black grouper, and so do you perceive that the abundance of black grouper has changed over the past ten years, and you've talked a little bit about this, and when and where are the fish available? Has this changed, and, again, we've kind of touched on some of these, and has the size of the fish you typically encounter changed?

I feel like we've hit on a couple of these, and so I'm going to go to the next slide, and kind of run through these as well, and so have you noticed any unique effects of environmental conditions on black grouper? If so, please describe.

What are your observations on timing and length of black grouper spawning seasons in your area, and so what you're observing as far as bringing fish onboard that you're observing in spawning condition, and what do you see now in terms of recruitment? We've talked a little bit about this. Are you seeing more small fish, or large fish, and has the locations of those different sizes changed? I think I'll pause here and let the AP discuss.

MR. KIMREY: It's so rare for us not to talk too much. Does anybody have anything? Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. As far as the recruitment stuff goes, I just want to make a point here that -- I know we're not talking about the sea bass, but I'm going to use it for an example. I'm right there close to the Cape Fear River, and you're close to Morehead, to the inland, and, for us -- When I first got into this in 1998, there was ten or twelve trap boats where we were, and that's all they did. All year-round, they trapped, and it wasn't just sea bass. They trapped all year-round, probably half of them, and now there is none of those boats, and our sea bass is just nowhere near what it used to be in those in those times.

I guess my point is, what I'm saying, is I've always wondered, in our area, and even the king mackerel fishery, where we've had for years in the river at certain times of the year. and it's not there like it was, and so is there something in our river, or the waterways, that are affecting the recruitments for our area, but as you -- Like, for Chris, once you get from like Topsail going north, their sea bass fishery is ten-times better than ours, and we have the same thing when you get to Little River, and you go in that little area.

There's still some trap boats there depend on that fishery, and so it's just a thought, and so I don't know that that has any effect on the recruitment part, and so, you know, a lot of the -- We catch them a lot on the docks around the fish house, and it seems like we used to catch more of them than we are now, the small sea bass and the small gags and stuff, that, you know, were in the estuary, you know, before they went out.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and I think there is -- I don't know much about it, and I've just had little tidbits of conversation with people in the science community, but I think there is a lot of talk about recruitment issues in sea bass, and somebody here may be able to elaborate on that more, but, you know, for whatever reason, they're definitely a little more abundant our way, and I don't know that they're as abundant as they once were, but they're definitely not as depleted as other places in the Southeast region, and that I can promise you. Does anybody else have anything to add? Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I was just going to comment on the large fish and small fish, and usually the large fish, you know, the eighty-plus pounds, they're out in the 200-plus-foot stuff, and the small fish are inshore, and we don't really dive much of the 200-plus stuff since the gags have been reduced greatly.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. Nobody? Okay. Well, there's this one guy, Dave, and he's going to go real quick.

MR. MOSS: Sorry, and I was trying to keep my mouth shut, but you keep looking at me. David Moss. One of the interesting things is, and this was quite a few years ago, but, when Riley's was closed, a few years later, you started to see more and more juvenile muttons on the patches and stuff in the Keys, and you don't see as -- You haven't seen the uptick in juvenile blacks like you did with muttons, and even red grouper, and there's a lot of smaller red groupers being caught, especially in the wintertime on the patches and stuff. They don't really see that with the blacks.

I was saying earlier, again, and this is a little bit repetitive, but not catching as many of the big fish that we used to, and part of that I think is because targeting, and we're not really targeting them as much in the same way, and, as I've said, the bigger fish are always further offshore, and it's, a lot of times, tougher for the rec guys to figure that out and what to do.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. Moving right along.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Again, some of these we might have touched on. I feel like this first one we've touched on, and so you observed changes in catch, depth, or apparent bottom type that you're fishing on? How have sea conditions affected fishable days? I know we're starting to hear a lot about less fishable days, and have you noticed any change in the species that might be caught

with black grouper? I know we're hearing you're catching them with gag, but is there anything that you're encountering them with that you haven't previously?

MR. KIMREY: Anybody? We've got very limited knowledge on this fish. Okay. Our resident says a shake of head no. Anybody? Okay. Moving on.

MS. IBERLE: That's pretty much it for me. This is what ChatGPT thinks a black grouper looks like, if you were wondering. This is the ChatGPT version, but is there anything else that you think would be helpful to provide the council in this report with regard to black grouper? I'll kind of open the floor up to you guys. You've provided a lot of great information, and so thank you, thus far, but anything else that you think would be pertinent?

MR. KIMREY: Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. What's kind of stopping us from just treating them, which we kind of do, as just as a gag, I mean a black and a gag? Everything I think is the same, and I know they're very regional, and they're really from the Keys, and, I mean, Jeff gets 500 to a thousand pounds, and, I mean, they're really kind of unicorns, and they're really kind of just -- What's stopping us from just lumping them in with the guys and everything, which we already do?

MS. IBERLE: When the council last modified management measures for gag, black grouper kind of got roped into that amendment, and it was Amendment 55. Not in the rebuilding plan, but, you know, the council brought up that exact issue, and, you know, they were thinking, if we're going to be changing things for gag, they also wanted to do it for a black grouper, and so it has been kind of regarded in that way, and not so much as scamp and yellowmouth were, and that could be an option that the council can consider.

When we were thinking about scamp and yellowmouth, the catch level that was provided was for scamp yellowmouth, and so you were thinking of those species as a single species when you were looking at that catch level, and so you weren't saying, okay, here's the catch level for scamp, and here's the catch level for yellowmouth. It was just scamp yellowmouth, and so that was kind of a big deviation in how we treated those two species, which have a similar situation, at least the way I think of it, as gag and black grouper.

They aren't considered the same when you're thinking of it catch-level-wise, but everything else, and there's the twenty-four-inch minimum size limit, and there's the -- there isn't a trip limit, but the vessel limits and the bag limits are the same for the rec sector. I will say the council is starting work on a headboat vessel limit, and black grouper is included in that, as well as gag, and so they're thinking of them tandemly as they develop that action, but we're in the very initial stages of that, and so tune in in June to hear how that goes.

MR. KIMREY: John.

MR. POLSTON: I was just going to hit on what Andy said. From a dealer's point of view, for years and years and years, I know how we did grouper, and I probably haven't had a hundred black grouper over the forty years I've been in business there, but my point is I think there's a lot of misrepresentation.

Obviously, O know what a black grouper is, and have for years, but we didn't start calling anything gag grouper. Everything was black grouper, and we call black grouper carborita. I grew up calling black grouper -- We call them carborita grouper, which is another slang for them, around in our area, the Ponce Inlet area, and they called them carborita, and it --

Obviously, truly the name is a black grouper, but I'm just saying, for the misrepresentation, it may not be a bad idea just to group them together with the gags, and a gag also turns -- As we know, when it turns to a male, it gets the black fins, and the black, you know, dorsal and everything, and some people misunderstand that, and they think that's a black grouper, and it's a male gag grouper. I'm just saying, for simplicity of it, it's probably not a bad idea just to lump them together with the gags.

MR. KIMREY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I just wanted to -- Just recalling probably conversations at the council table from -- It might have been about a year or a year-and-a-half ago or so, but there were some conversations related to black grouper, and I know there was some pretty emphatic discussion from Florida representatives talking about not lumping black grouper in with gag, the main reason being gag had experienced its downturn, you know, kind of the decline in the stock, and they didn't want there to be kind of the same type of stricter management measures for that, and so there was, you know, kind of that discussion that there are fishermen that are able to identify the difference between the two.

They get lumped together for commercial purposes because they seem to kind of sell the same, but there are, you know, kind of -- The fishermen themselves, the recreational guys, the guys that are doing it on a regular basis, they seem to be able to tell the difference, potentially, in Florida, and so that was some of the discussion that surrounded, you know, those two and the idea of, just because one has declined, you know, in a rebuilding plan, that the other doesn't necessarily need to fall in and have the same case for it, and so that was also part of the discussion as well.

MR. KIMREY: Is there a separate ACL for black grouper and gag grouper?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Right. I thought there was, and so that's the motivation in Florida to separate the two, because they can fish off of different ACLs, right, Mike, I'm assuming?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Okay.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, but they're all closed at the same time, right?

MR. KIMREY: If they weren't lumped together, they could separate them, right, Mike, and is that what they're trying to do? I'm just trying to figure out the logic here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: They both have a --

MR. MOSS: (Mr. Moss' comment is not audible on the recording.)

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I'm just saying on the microphone what David was just explaining. They both have the same spawning closure in the spring, but, in the case where say gag, if they -- If gag hits its annual catch limit, then only gag would close, and black grouper would remain open, and so that's how -- That's not to say -- I mean, we can create complexes.

We have complexes of multiple species, and I'm not saying that it's off the table for the two of them to be grouped into a complex. I'm saying that's just some of the conversation that came up fairly recently regarding gag and black and the reasons why -- You know, there were some points made as to why they should remain separate at the time, but that doesn't mean that it's not something that the council could do in the future.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike.

MS. IBERLE: One more point of clarification. I had mentioned scamp and yellowmouth grouper, and, as of right now, those two species still have separate ACLs. That amendment that changed it, and consolidated those two species, when you're thinking about catch levels, is in the NMFS review and implementation process. It hasn't been implemented yet, but it has gone through the council process, and the council has approved it, and so I did want to just state that, since it's technically not implemented yet.

MR. KIMREY: Well those two, in my opinion, are a lot harder to identify, a lot harder, and so, anyway, does anybody have anything to add here? Okay. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: One more thing to add would be, in the south Florida region, would be the water quality and runoff, and the estuaries, and grass flats, and our mangroves are all like disappearing, and going away, and this is a huge issue with, I guess, recruitment on little fish and all that stuff, too.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Vincent.

MS. IBERLE: That's all for me, and so I appreciate it. Sometimes, when I'm going back through and reading my nonsensical typing, I have to reach out to people and be like, wait, what did you say, and so, if you see an email from me, I might be clarifying something. If you have any questions regarding this, shoot me an email, but thank you guys so much for all the input, and then I will turn it back over to you, for maybe a break, and I don't know. It's up to you.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and I was going to ask Mike. Thank you, Allie. Do we have a hand?

MS. IBERLE: We're going to -- I completely forgot, and sorry, Judd. We're going to turn it over to Judd to kind of wrap up this process as a whole, and do the stock risk rating, and so I'm going to hand it to him.

MR. KIMREY: I forgot about that, too. I just saw that pop in an email. Sorry, Judd. We did not forget you on purpose.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you. Judd Curtis, council staff, for those who I haven't met yet. Before I launch into populating that stock risk value matrix that was part of your briefing book materials, I thought it might be helpful just to provide a little bit of context on how that stock risk rating ultimately fits into the South Atlantic ABC control rule and then the management process. It seemed a little unclear the last time I went through this, and so hopefully this will help when providing some insight into that process.

Most of the things that you all familiar with, right, these benchmarks of the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, and the annual catch limit, and the definitions there, and so the overfishing limit, right, is the annual catch level of a fish stock that corresponds to the MSY, and that's the maximum amount that can be caught without jeopardizing the stock's ability to produce that maximum single yield.

The ABC then is the next kind of benchmark, and that is an SSC-recommended maximum amount of fish that can be annually harvested, after you account for that scientific uncertainty and management risk tolerance, which you'll see is where the stock risk rating and biomass levels also fit in, and an ABC control rule is supposed to help define that process on the transition from an overfishing limit into an ABC value.

From there, you also have additional potential management actions that generate your annual catch limits, that then get further divided in the management process, right, but the ABC control rule actually defines the process between that OFL and the ABC.

There's a few mechanisms by which we get information for how to inform that ABC value from an OFL, and really there's two components that you'll see here. You have the biomass level that is derived from the most recent stock assessment or various analytical products, in the case of black grouper, where we're not going to have a full stock assessment, and there will be a management procedure that will help inform some of the biomass information, and then that second arrow, that stock risk rating, which is ultimately determined by the council, with input from the advisory panels and the SSC and SEP.

As a review, the stock risk rating, which you'll see in the matrix, is based on several different categories. There's a couple categories in the biological sphere, and there's several human dimensions categories, and then we also have an environmental classification as well, and you can see some of the subheadings there that we'll go into when we pull up the matrix itself.

Ultimately, once you have the stock risk rating derived from that matrix that is approved by the council, and then you have either a stock assessment or analytical product that is producing a biomass level, you can combine those two sources of information, and you look at this table, and that's how you derive what's called this P*, or this probability of overfishing, and that is what is used to derive both an OFL and then an ABC value for the next upcoming stock assessment, and that then feeds into the catch levels.

The steps on how we go about doing this, and we've done this a couple times before, is, before an assessment is conducted, the SSC and the AP recommend these risk values from the matrix that contribute to an overall stock risk rating of either low, medium, or high. Those are recommended to council, and the council then reviews the recommended risk values from the SSC and the AP and determines a final stock risk rating.

Then, once an assessment has been conducted, that P* is derived using an estimate of the relative biomass, and then that council stock risk rating, and, depending on the levels of uncertainty within the assessment, that P* can fluctuate a little bit, but that's an assessment output, and not necessarily generated from the stock risk rating.

Then, in order to determine future catch levels, the projection analyses are run using that P* approach, and OFL, or the overfishing limit, always corresponds with a P* of 50 percent, and so that's a mandated 50 percent requirement by MSA to prevent overfishing, and then the P* value, defined using the stock risk rating and you all's input, is used to derive the ABC value, and so that P* would look -- It would be a value of anywhere from like 20 percent to 45 percent, based on the table and the various stock risk ratings and the biomass levels of the of the assessment.

There is some other caveats within the ABC control rule up to the council's purview, and they can adjust that P* value up or down, depending on additional concerns, and the SSC also has, and the council has, the ability to deviate from the control rule if they determine it's not appropriate, does not characterize the scientific uncertainty well enough, but this is the default process on how we go about deriving that scientific uncertainty and management risk to develop an ABC value.

Any questions on just kind of the overall process before I launch into the ratings matrix, and apologies that was not part of your briefing book. I thought this up last night, while I was reviewing the matrix, and thought it could be helpful, but Mike has emailed it out to all of you, so you have it for your materials.

MS. STEPHENS: P*, is that a proxy? What is -- Can you explain P* to me like I'm five?

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and so P* you can think of as the probability of overfishing, and how it kind of corresponds to either the overfishing limit or the ABC value. What you're thinking of, as far as a proxy, or a maximum sustainable yield determination, applies explicitly to the OFL determination, and so whether you're using a proxy or an actual estimate of MSY is -- It comes out of the assessment process and input from the SSC, right, based on scientific uncertainties.

That would then provide a value. However you derive OFL, whether it's this proxy value or an estimate of MSY, you would get an overfishing limit value. The P* value then is a way to assess the scientific uncertainty and management risk that went into the development of that OFL recommendation, and so, if there was a lot of concern in the uncertainty surrounding like an MSY estimate, that might get carried through as additional uncertainty during this process, if that makes sense. The P* for an ABC is always going to be lower than 50 percent, because it can't be any higher, per MSA's requirements, but then how much lower it is than that 50 percent is guided by the stock risk ratings, and the ultimate biomass level of the assessment output. Does that make sense?

MS. STEPHENS: That was a great explanation. I think it was more like a to a six-year-old , but I got it. Thank you.

DR. CURTIS: A good way to think of it is a buffer for scientific uncertainty and management risk, for the P*, for the definition of P*, and so, initially, right, and this is part of the whole revised

ABC control process, that the P* approach was meant to capture just scientific uncertainty, and then management risk was applied between the ABC and the ACL.

The council felt like they wanted to include some of that management risk in the initial P* approach, and so this is -- This is captured in the stock risk ratings, right, and we have an opportunity to weigh-in and get scientific and fishing advisors their input on what they're seeing from the data, and then also on the water.

Okay, and so the process by which we generate this information, right, there's several categories, and you see on the left column, right, that are broken down, and we'll start with the biological attributes, and then we'll go into human dimension attributes, and then environmental attributes.

The next three columns are your risk of overexploitation, categorized into high, medium, or low, 1, 2, or 3, and various notes that have been compiled by staff, from various sources of information, and those are used to come up with this default score that we have on the table to just discuss, right, and these are all negotiable, and, if you can provide adequate justification for changing it, then we put those into the AP scores, with the justification, and the SSC does the same, and the council will review those scores and make the ultimate judgment call. Okay? Any questions on process? Great.

Okay, and so the first two biological attributes are pulled from typically stock assessment information. As Chip mentioned, we don't have an approved stock assessment from the last decade, but there was a data workshop conducted as part of SEDAR 48, which was in 2017, and so this is the source of that information.

The data workshop panel determined that estimated natural mortality fell between 0.16 and 0.2, and so that would put this into the high risk of overexploitation category, a 1, and age of maturity was determined -- Or the age at 50 percent maturity was determined to be 6.5 years, falling also into that high risk of overexploitation category of 1, and some additional details there, and like black grouper are protogynous hermaphrodites, and the age at transition is estimated to be at around sixteen years.

There is a management procedure for black grouper that is being conducted currently, and this year hopefully we get to see a final product of that, and that may have some additional biological information that could change these potential default scores, but we won't know until that final report is available, and so this is the most recent information that we have currently on this species, and so any comments, or desires to change from these default values? Okay.

Moving on to the human dimensions attributes, the first attribute we have is the ability to regulate the fishery, and this has to do with exceeding or staying below the ACL over the last five years, and you see the different metrics for the risks of overexploitation of high, medium, and low. In this case for black grouper, for both the commercial and recreational sectors, for the years 2020 to 2025, the ACL was never exceeded, per SERO's ACL monitoring page.

Because these are consistently kept below the total ACL, we gave this a default score of 3, or a low risk of overexploitation. Okay, and I'll just fill out, I guess, the default scores, Chair, if that's okay with you, unless I see a hand rolling up.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and I hadn't seen anybody, you know, ready to voice any interest in any changes, and so maybe if we run through them, and, when we get to the end, we'll ask one more time. So far okay? Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: So, Haley, I -- This is Darrin Willingham. I was glad to hear the six-year-old interpretation of that, and so thank you. I'm still scratching my head on this though. Since we've got data, and even the most recent data is still nine to ten years old, how are we being asked to have input on this? Our data is poor at best right now, and so why are we even being asked the question? I'm not trying to be rude, but just trying to understand the process.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and the data is old, and that's exactly why we're bringing to you all that are on the water and seeing this, you know, as recently as possible, and so, you know, for some of these, like the stock assessment information, right, that is over ten years old. Some of the information here from the ACL monitoring pages is recent, as of 2025, but a lot of these data are the best information, the best estimate, that we have for a lot of these sorts of information, and, if it doesn't pass the sniff test, that's why we have you all to comment on that, and hopefully add some insight on what you're seeing on the water for the council to consider.

MR. WILLINGHAM: The thing that always disturbs at least the recreational sector is the Magnuson-Stevens Act and that best available data, in quotes, and so the best available data here is pretty much non-existent, and so now it seems like that that P* thing that we were talking about, and that's just going to be a -- So we're the buffer to the lack of the biological attributes part of it, and is that the idea?

DR. CURTIS: Not necessarily the buffer, and so all these components from both the biological and the human dimensions aspects -- All these scores are calculated and given equal weight, or, well, the first two are. The environmental is treated a little bit different, which I can explain when we get down there, but -- I lost my train of thought there.

They're not acting as buffers to each other, or like a tug-of-war between the two, and it's just different sources of information, one biologically based, which comes from stock assessments, and this coming from other sources of information.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Gotcha, and I cheated and went back to your ABC control rule introduction page, which was talking about the overfishing limit, and then, obviously, where we're coming in is just to try to advise the council in their stock risk rating, but all of that is still going to end up being the acceptable biological catch, which is concerning when we really don't have up-to-date data, and that was just my point.

MR. KIMREY: Mike, input for us?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I just wanted to give a couple of pieces of context related to the ABC control rule and some of the points that have been brought up at this point, and so, as far as the information like at the top of that page, the biological attributes, we've got natural mortality rate, and what's the other one, Judd?

DR. CURTIS: Age at maturity.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Age at maturity. Generally, those two metrics are not going to be fluctuating a whole lot from year to year, and like your natural mortality rate is going to be, over time, relatively constant, and, your age of maturity, fish are going to, you know, evolve over time, and they could react to certain fishing pressures, but generally -- Like think about humans. Generally, you know, humans mature, and roughly -- We have a two to three-year timeframe where we know humans mature, and we're not expecting from year to year for that to change, and so think about it in that way.

Those two metrics, they get evaluated by, you know, individual studies, and they may get checked up on over time, if people notice changes in the fishery, but that's why you're going to see some older time stamps on some of those pieces of information, because you check in, and you evaluate it for that fish, and then it may not -- You know, you may not come back to it unless somebody says, hey, these fish seem to be, you know, spawning at a size that we've never seen them spawn before, something like that.

Another thing that I would, you know, throw out, and, you know, try to encourage at least your thoughts on this, or to, you know, to give your input, is, best scientific information available, some of that is going to come from you all. Some of it isn't going to necessarily -- Like some will be, you know, measured numbers, and there's a certain amount of measured numbers that are going to go out there, but fishermen are a large source of information, and your perspectives on the water are a large source of information, and that's part of the scientific process as well.

It's not just the numerical, but it's also the perspectives that you give in your observations, and so part of this is being able to incorporate not just the numerical data source, but also the data source of the on-the-water observation, so that we can kind of try to get closer to what the reality is that you all experience there.

MR. KIMREY: Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, and so thanks, Mike, on that, but I will tell you there's that lack of trust in the process that sits there with the recreational angler, and just I know we're talking about black grouper here, but, you know, if you use that same idea and go back to just red snapper for just a second, and I can tell you that our northeast Florida fishermen have been saying, for how many years ,the data does not represent what's going on, and then they don't feel like they're being listened to, and so I just worry about that.

My problem is when I deal with data, it's usually more of a medical data, and so it's got to be a little less guess, if you will, and so that's why I'm trying to process that, but, when you're saying, Mike, about the -- You know, you take the fishermen's data, and take our input, and it doesn't feel like that, at least back with the red snapper process. Thanks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin, and I'm going to add just a touch to this, because this is something that's very important, and it's one of the things I've pondered most on during my journey through fisheries management. You know, the old and outdated data thing is a real problem, but nobody in the science community is using older data because they want to. It's just sort of something that happens.

Something else to -- This is a great example, but the general public, a lot of times, are looking at their perspective, and it's a very narrow perspective to the big picture, like with red snapper. Everybody knows there's a lot of red snapper, but not everybody knows, or understands, and maybe at this point more people do, but, originally, when the stock started getting robust, people didn't realize the release mortality was so high on those.

That's one of the things that held the stock hostage, but they just know they're seeing snappers, but like, with black grouper, you know, they might be running off of old science, but this is an example, and this AP has kind of proven it, from observations, as limited as they are, that not all old data is incorrect, and so that's something you need to remind yourself. This AP today is pretty much -- I think you would agree that they've seen very little changes in black grouper, and so that's why we're here.

They're leaning on us, and, hey, our data is a little outdated, and do you all see any changes in it, and, for the most part, it sounds like people with knowledge are saying they don't, and so that -- In my mind, that helps me validate that data that is old. Okay, we've got a group of people here that are saying it's not changing, and let's move forward with what we've got, and have a little bit of a sound conscience of why we're doing it, because, you know, everybody would have fresh and shiny data on every species if that was possible, and that's for sure. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: This is off the topic of black grouper, but, just to speak to what Darrin is talking about, this, again, is -- We're beating a dead horse here, but this is the best available data we have, and I know the scientific research community -- One of my principle jobs at North Carolina State University is to identify and work on cooperative research projects, and that money has been slashed over recent years, and so that would be great to have these kind of, you know, things like spawning biology of black groupers be researched a little bit more heavily, or a lot more heavily, using these cooperative research funds, but the federally-managed cooperative research program has been completely eliminated since I think about Fiscal Year 2023 or 2024, and that would go a long way -- Restoration of those funds would go a long way to understanding, for example, spawning biology of black groupers.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Did somebody else have their hand up? Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, and, responding to you, Paul, but thank you for that, and one of my biggest things is clean data, and that best available data has been -- It was almost like a knee-jerk response back when you talked to NOAA Fisheries, and they would say, oh, well, but we're seeing this, and, yes, but what's the best available data, but your data is poor, or the data skewed, or the data is 40 percent overestimated, or something like that, and, well, that's nice, but what's the best available data.

It's almost like you get stuck in that federal loop, that vicious cycle, and so that was concerning, which is why we have taken a lot of pride, up there in northeast Florida in our fishing club and the community, is trying to educate folks, even with the exempted fishing permit stuff recently, is don't try to play the system, and let the system pan out. Give them the data, and give them the best available data, and help create that data, versus garbage in and garbage out, and so thanks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. Anybody?

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thanks for those comments. Those are helpful as we generate not only the stock risk matrix, but then, right, the fishery performance report, and all that information is useful not only for the council, but it also goes to various analysts, and, in some cases, as they're conducting a stock assessment, to kind of groundtruth some of the data that they're seeing, that they're pulling, and going into their assessment models. The potential for --

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: Sorry, Judd. David Moss. So, as I'm looking at this, and you've got -- There's a little note there, under AP comments, about the shark depredation counting towards -- Contributing to dead discards, and I would honestly take that off of low, and move that closer to medium, because -- I mean, again, beating a dead horse, but it's a problem.

DR. CURTIS: Let me explain that category, and then we can consider that. The potential for discard losses, this is looking at how many of these fish that are either harvested or dead are resulting in dead discards as the total component of your catch, right, and so a fish that is basically wasted, and it's not going in the box, and it's not living to fight another day.

In this case, I've broken this up into commercial and recreational. The commercial discard logbook data is not available for any of these species. That has been determined to not be credible, and so NMFS has not been using any discard logbook data in assessments moving forward for now.

Recreational information is coming from that MRIP time series, and you see two percentages there, and so the first percentage, the 10.7 percent, is the percentage of the total catch that are dead discards, and that's calculated from the various harvest, the dead discard rates, divided by the total catch for that particular species. It was beneath that 20 percent threshold, making it a 3. I've also included just the discard mortality rate, and so that is of live fish that are brought onboard, and how many perish due to discard mortality, and that was just derived from the gag stock assessment, because we do not have any information from black grouper specifically.

To Dave's comment, I was taking notes during your fishery performance report discussions, and I made a note there, under the AP comments that the shark depredation, right, is contributing to dead discards. If that's something that's significant enough, that maybe moves the needle for you all, we could consider -- You can consider putting a 2, a medium risk, on that category.

MR. KIMREY: We'll start with Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: David, just a point of clarification. Are you concerned about dead discards from depredation on the ascent or on the descent?

MR. KIMREY: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. What I'm concerned with on this particular item is I agree with the dead shark discards, but I feel that, if we change the number, we're taking that on management of black grouper instead of sharks. The problem is the shark, and not the grouper.

MR. KIMREY: That's an excellent point, Tony. Yes, a really good point. Who else had their hand up? Did you have -- John.

MR. POLSTON: I may have misunderstood you or whatever, Judd, but did you say that the -- That you don't take commercial data into play, because it's not credible?

DR. CURTIS: The commercial discard logbook data specifically, and so there is observer data that has been collected that goes into the estimation of commercial discards, but, as of a year ago or so, the commercial logbook discard information is not being considered.

MR. POLSTON: Okay, and for discards and stuff like -- Yes, and I can understand that, but I was saying we're the only guys that literally have got our fish measured, and otoliths taken and stuff like that, and so hopefully all that data is being considered.

DR. CURTIS: Yes. Absolutely. All the landings data, age composition, length composition data, and any biological information they can gain from that, is certainly being considered. It's just specifically the discard information coming from the logbook.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John, and surely you can see why they might not consider the discard date on the commercial side. We all know why, and it makes perfect sense to me. Okay. Moving right along.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so then a consensus of still maintaining a 3 then, and just having the comments? All right. The next category is the annual commercial value, and this is broken into two categories, a percentage of total annual revenue and then a percent of total trip revenue on average, and this is over the years 2019 to 2023. This information comes from ACCSP and then the dealer reportings. Average annual revenue for 2019 to 2023 was 4.0 percent, making it a medium risk, between 1 and 10 percent, and the average total trip revenue for the same years was a 9.1 percent, fitting into that less than 10 percent category as a 3 risk.

MR. KIMREY: You guys speak up if anybody thinks we need to change these as we're rolling through here with Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and the next category is the recreational desirability, and this is -- You can think of the targeted trips coming from the Marine Recreational Information Program, and so we have two categories here. The average percent of all trips from 2019 to 2024 was less than 0.1 percent, and then the average percent of all snapper grouper trips specifically for 2019 to 2024 was less than 1 percent, making this a 3, a low risk of overexploitation, which seems to echo what you all discussed during the FPR discussions, and it's not a heavily-encountered fish, or a targeted fish.

MR. KIMREY: Andy, a quick comment?

MR. FISH: Sorry. Andy Fish. Back on the commercial percentage of discard lost, in our area, there are fishermen that target fish, and they quit going and targeting grouper because of the shark depredation and the discards, or not landing, and sorry for being behind there.

DR. CURTIS: Thank you. Recreational desirability, the targeted trips, any discussion there? No? Okay.

MR. MILITELLO: Chris Militello, south Florida. I just -- I don't do a lot of this, and that's why I haven't said much at all about it, but they're just not there, and the fact that it's a 3 -- Why isn't there concern, or is this just a point that you're making?

DR. CURTIS: Think of this category more as, when you're going on a fishing trip, or taking clients on a fishing trip, are you specifically targeting this species, black grouper, and what we've been hearing is it sounds like you're all targeting kind of a general -- We have a grouper, general grouper, trip, and not necessarily a black grouper trip, and so this is why you have such a low percentage of trips targeting this specific species, right, and you may encounter them while you're targeting other groupers on grouper trips, but no one is going out specifically for black grouper.

MR. MILITELLO: Yes, and I agree with data on that one. Thank you.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, and, yes, I mean, the weird -- Well, I guess it's not weird, but it's so regionally specific, right, and especially with southern southeast Florida. While that's kind of accurate really, and going down to the next one of social concerns, and so, on May 1, people absolutely want to go and catch a black, but they are going for a grouper in general, and so they want to catch a black, knowing that they may not, but they'll, you know, get a red or something, or a scamp, along with it, but there's definitely people that want to go and catch like a big black.

Again, you know, where I say that this is weird is that, as a proportion of the whole region, like North Carolina to south Florida, obviously, it's so concentrated from like Broward County south, and so, as a proportion of the whole region, yes, it's really small, but, in that area, starting May 1, there's definitely people that want to go and catch a nice black.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, David. Anyone else on recreational desirability? Not seeing any, go ahead, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you, and so, David, thanks for that comment. I moved that down to the social concerns, which so we currently do not have any default value for this, because any social communities analysis is currently unavailable, and so the suggestion, from our expert social scientist, is to use fishery performance report information instead of any data that we can generate from a social indicators assessment.

I started listing a few of the comments there, and I captured David's comment, but the metrics for this particular category is supposed to be reliance, community reliance, on this particular species, and that's broken into either less than seven communities, seven to thirteen, or greater than thirteen communities, and so this is, you know, kind of your best judgment guess on how many communities across the coast might be reliant on the species, and this will frame the default score that we provide to the council, or that you all provide to the council. Any other comments that are relevant here for social concerns, please contribute.

MR. KIMREY: Go ahead, David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, and I'll say, again, it's so regionally specific, and it's also not regionally specific, but timeframe specific, right, and so it's like that that one to maybe two-month period of May and June, you know, before nobody -- I shouldn't say nobody, but you're certainly not targeting them, because they're just not around anymore, but there's that brief little window, in that small little geographic location, where it's important.

DR. CURTIS: So, without slapping a number on it though, you think it's probably a low number of communities that are relying on this coastwide.

MR. KIMREY: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. This may be a good reason to keep them separate from gag in the long-term, is because it solely affects that one area, and it would affect it hard if it was grouped.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving into our third category of environmental attributes, and so this is conducted a little bit differently in the overall matrix calculations. It's either all or none, and so you can either -- If people are seeing things on the water that are, you know, of concern, we can jot down notes of this, and recommend a score, but, typically, we're looking for pretty substantial issues that could be really driving a change in the stock behavior and dynamics, because, if there is just little pockets of things, it may not be as critical but for the entire stock-wide, and so thinking of, you know, environmental non-stationarity concerns, previously known as climate change, that is specifically affecting that stock more than maybe other stocks.

In the case of I think when we did gag, we did note that water quality issues and runoff may be affecting reproduction and juvenile habitats. If there's -- If a species, a particular like keystone predator in an ecosystem that is known, et cetera, and so kind of very long -- A large scale, and broadly scaled across the coast-wide environmental concerns for this species.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, and so you've got some of it in there, the water quality issues for sure, and extend that as the coral reef issues, particularly down in the Keys, obviously, as they've had, whatever it is, ninety-something percent of, you know, coral reef loss down there, and it has definitely affected, or I'm assuming I should say, and we all know what happens when you assume, that it has not just affected the blacks directly, but everything they feed on, you know, all through the chain. I can only assume that that's had reproductive effects as well, and perhaps why we're seeing some low recruitment over the years.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. I mean, does that correlate to climate change, and like the reefs got smoked by the hot water, and, I mean, is that climate change, or is that cycle? I mean, how do we determine that of here? I don't know how to determine that. We know what happened, but I don't know that anybody knows exactly why. I mean, there's a lot of guesses, right? Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. It's actually a lot more than just guessing. A lot of it has to do with pervious and impervious soils, and south Florida is rampant with the impervious soil now, because of the development, the progression of VRBO and Airbnb. South

Carolina has really held to a different standard , and we do a lot more here, as far as impervious and pervious soil runoff.

In Beaufort County alone, your tax base is based on your percentage of the two, meaning pervious and impervious soil runoff, because, if I basically pave my lot, and then we have a ninety-five-degree day with a thunderstorm, that water then heats up to ninety-five degrees and runs into the estuary and kills all the microorganisms, and it just works straight down the food chain. This has been going on for a long, long time down your way, and I feel sorry for you guys.

Here in South Carolina, we protected a whole lot, and this is probably a statewide basis, and not something we're going to solve in this room, but it is -- It really needs to look at -- The feds, in my opinion, really need to look at it down in south Florida. It's a really bad issue, and it has already happened to the Everglades, and whether it will ever come back -- We might not see it in our lifetime.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony, and, I mean, I agree with everybody that pays attention and knows that hard-surface runoff is a huge issue, and nobody really wants to deal with it. They're trying to get ahead of it in a lot of places, but it's -- I don't see them tearing parking lots up and putting in retention ponds anywhere, and we need to be mindful, especially in respect to this matrix, that that is one molecule of a variable in the equation that makes up climate change, and so we're trying to answer this specific question.

MR. CONSTANT: I agree with you, and so --

MR. KIMREY: You know what I mean? Paul, or sorry, Tony, and did you have some more?

MR. CONSTANT: Well, yes, I did, and like, in South Carolina, actually residential houses are made to put in rain ponds to gather your stormwater before it leaches into the estuary, and so, yes, we do keep a handle on it, but --

MR. KIMREY: It's still on the backend, like I said, and I don't see them tearing up parking lots, and tearing down apartment buildings and condos, and putting retention ponds in, or, you know, forestation, which creates cooler runoff, versus the opposing hot runoff, and do you see what I'm saying?

MR. CONSTANT: I do.

MR. KIMREY: It's the backend, and they're not going backwards, and we never will, unless there's a reset.

MR. CONSTANT: It is just a piece of the puzzle.

MR. KIMREY: Yes. All right. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Just taking Tony's comment a step further, and thinking about Vincent's comment a little while ago of whether we should move this risk rating to the high category, a 1, instead of the default of zero, if we had information, and I'm sure it's available, and I don't know it off the top of my head, but we know that black grouper larvae recruit inshore to the estuary, and

so, if we had information on what's going on with the turtle grass beds, or other seagrasses in Florida Bay, that would be one link to help answer this question, and I see David's hand is up, and so that would be maybe working in the favor of considering moving this to the high risk rating.

MR. KIMREY: Excellent. Thanks, Paul. David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss. Thank you. Paul, I was actually going to talk about the loss of inshore habitat as it relates to forage fish, but you're absolutely right. It's a nursery in the estuaries. As we have significant estuarine degradation in southeast Florida, or, well, south Florida, and the west coast as well, that affects it all. It affects the juveniles that have just spawned, and it affects the forage fish and all that stuff, and, as has been said, you know, it also -- That has served in the past to help clean the water, as it goes offshore, and it's just not there anymore, and it's lost everywhere, I mean, from Mosquito Lagoon all the way down.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. Yes, and, I mean, there's no way there's not recruitment issues created by that, and I don't care what anybody says. Anybody else got anything to add? All right. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, and just some clarification here, and so I'm just playing with some of the numbers here, and I'm trying to figure out what -- So, the advisory panel suggestions to the council, how is that presented? Is that in words, or is that this final risk score, or how is that presented to them, and how do they use it?

DR. CURTIS: It's presented in the same painful way I'm presenting it to you all, and so we get the SSC scores, and the AP scores, and then I present these to the council during their meetings, and they consider all the recommendations, and the scores from each of those two advisors , and come up with their final council score.

MR. WILLINGHAM: So, to take it a step further, so a 1.9 final risk score, if you go up to the top there, and that -- Sorry about the dead horse beating. However, if you go up there, where you've got the default score for the biological attributes, and you've got those at 1, right, but, if you take those to 3, you know, because, again, scientifically, we're not really sure what that data is, and so it's the best guess right now, and that takes it to a 2.9, you know, just filtering out the math. If you make that score a 3, and you end up with 2.80 for the final human dimensions score, and you don't put anything in for environment, and it gives you a 2.9, what does that mean to the council?

DR. CURTIS: That would change -- Let me just do that exercise. For -- I put just a 3 as an example, to show you all how this affects the final output, and so you can kind of -- It's kind of faint, but the final risk score changes a 1.9 to a 2.9, and there's thresholds, in numbers, that then apply to various low, medium, or high risk categories.

From there, once you have that risk category, if you recall this presentation, and this table, as part of the ABC control rule, the council takes the stock risk rating of either low, medium, or high, coupled with the biomass status of the most recent information, assessment or management procedure, et cetera, and then that becomes the P* for the acceptable biological catch value.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Gotcha, and so, if we went with the way that it is presented right now, the 1.9, again not knowing what the biological part is, the biological attributes, are we giving them a

fair assessment of what we really think, or what we really know? You know, it's just -- Does that make any sense, Paul? Does that make any sense, what I'm talking about, because, you know, we are part of the equation, even though the council does have, you know, final, you know, thoughts, final presentation, to NOAA.

DR. CURTIS: To that, Chair, and so let me take a step back to what Mike said earlier, right, and a lot of this biological information -- While some things like catch data, recent catch data, may be a lot more highly uncertain, a lot of these biological parameters are pretty well close to fixed, shall we say, and so there's not going to be a lot of movement, or even further papers and studies may not shift that number too drastically, because it's already -- It's pretty well known, and those biological characteristics are not going to shift very rapidly.

That being said, if the AP comes up with a consensus and says we want to call this a 3, based on some other information, and you can provide an information in there, the council will then consider that, along with any SSC information and deliberations, and their final score.

My guess is that you're going to have to come something pretty scientifically justifiable, that's better than the latest SEDAR information, and the papers that went into that, the peer-reviewed scientific publications that went into that, to generate those numbers for natural mortality and age at maturity, but it is within your purview to do so.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Thanks.

MR. KIMREY: David. Thanks, Darrin. Appreciate your question. Good question. Trying to -- You know, things have consequences, and pay attention as you're going along. David.

MR. MOSS: David Moss, and I might mis-explain this a little bit, but there's also -- Darrin, as part of this, there's nuance to everything, right? As you were saying, if you change one of those numbered factors at the top, it's going to change the overall score, which is one of the reasons that we have council members, like Amy and Kerry and Jessica, sitting here, because then they help relay the nuance of this, you know, and, while we're in a data-driven world, and I get that, there's nuance to all of this, and so they help relay that information, ideally, to the rest of the council as they make their decisions moving forward.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Thanks, David, and this is Darrin Willingham again, and that's the -- That's the beauty of having the council members here, and so thanks, guys, because I remember, back with the sea bass stuff, I was pulling my hair out, but, you know, at least the council members are here, and are able to take it back to the to the main council. Thanks.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving back to the environmental attributes, any other information that you would like to pass along as part of the AP comments? I don't want to put words in the panel's mouth, but it doesn't sound -- There's some comments, but not necessarily enough to maybe put a 1 down for this environmental attribute, where it's an extremely high risk of overexploitation, due to environmental attributes.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I don't know if I need to make a motion, but I would like -- If a motion is necessary, I would like to make a motion to put the environmental risk rating as a 1, and so that cell whatever -- Yes. That cell there.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul, and sorry, but we're going to have to take a break soon. I wasn't looking at my phone for any other reason, and some AP members are struggling with a potty break, but we're almost done. We're almost done. Does anybody disagree with that 1? All right. Moving right along.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. That is it. Take your break I think now, and we'll be back to do this again for hogfish shortly.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Judd. It's 10:44. A fifteen-minute break, and I figured you all would be running faster than you are.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. KIMREY: All right, everybody. Let's wind down, and we're going to do yesterday's sea bass. Myra is going to -- She's going to take us through here, and let's get rolling. We're missing, still missing, a few people, and should we go or wait? We've got a few empty seats.

MS. IBERLE: I think it's just Cameron.

MR. KIMREY: Let's go ahead and get started. Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so I'm going to talk to you a little bit about black sea bass. It shouldn't take too long. I'll start off by giving you a little bit of background, to make sure that everybody is on the same page, and then we have a few questions for you at the end.

How we got here is there was an assessment, SEDAR 76, that was done in May of 2022. Subsequently, there was an update, in 2025, and the assessment showed that the population of black sea bass was declining, overfished and overfishing, but there was a lot of uncertainty about the mortality rate, and, you know, about how we could rebuild it.

The SSC had several discussions, and the council had several discussions. Normally, what happens after an assessment is we do an amendment to put in place the new catch levels, and so the council did approve Amendment 56, Snapper Grouper Amendment 56, for scoping in June of 2024. We did those scoping hearings at the beginning of last year, and then, in the spring of 2025, the SSC had some meetings, and provided ABC recommendations that would start in 2027.

However, the council had more discussions at their June meeting of last year, and they wanted the stock assessment to incorporate revised recreational estimates. As you all know, the fishery -- The Fishing Effort Survey is undergoing some revisions, through the MRIP program, and so the assessment kind of needed to include those data, and so that's when the council decided to start working on a different amendment, because they couldn't implement the catch levels from the stock assessment, but there were some pretty concerning declines in the population, and so they started Regulatory Amendment 37, and they paused work on 56.

The idea of Reg 37 was to address the decline in the black sea bass population quickly, and put in some management measures to reduce fishing mortality, and then, in the meantime, Amendment 56 was kind of put on hold, and we are still waiting for those revised recreational estimates. We're

hoping that those are going to be done at the end of this summer, is what we've heard, and so work will eventually continue on Amendment 56 to go ahead and put in place the catch levels based on the assessment.

In the meantime, we worked on Reg 37, and that one was approved in December. We just submitted it to NMFS last week, and, when that is implemented, there's going to be a reduction to the catch level, and so since they couldn't -- Since there isn't an ABC that the council can put in place, what they did is they put in annual catch targets, which is lower than the current ABC.

They did that by looking at the average landings from the last five years, and so 2019 through 2023, and then cutting that in half, and so those ACTs are being put in place at that level, which is about forty-eight-and-a-half thousand pounds for the commercial sector and 63.1 thousand pounds for the recreational, and so it's a pretty substantial change. Current levels right now are at 276,000 commercial and 366,000 recreational.

They also want to put in a spawning season closure for both sectors in February and March, and then they also want to reduce the recreational bag limit, from seven to three fish, and so that will take some time to get implemented, and then, in the meantime Amendment 56 will be sort of waiting for us to start back up. Like I said, we would put in the new ABC, and then other things could be put in place at that time too, such as changing the fishing year date, and so we have -- Right now, recreational begins in April, and commercial begins in January, and so maybe they would want to make that consistent.

Another action that they have been talking about is this consideration of reopening the nearshore seasonal closed areas to on-demand pots, right, and so in What are we? April. So, in March of this year, the council decided to -- Instead of waiting to do that in Amendment 56, to go ahead and get started in this new amendment, and so this is Regulatory Amendment 40.

I'll give you a little bit of background on those closed areas, make sure that everybody understands what's in place, and also for those on the webinar, but those were put in place mainly to reduce the risk of entanglement to right whales, and so, back in 2013, there was a closure that applied to the entire EEZ, and it was November through April, and so, November through April, all pots out of the water for the entire EEZ.

That was in place for a few years, and then, in 2017, the council changed it, and put in place what is currently effective, and so there are two seasonal closed areas from November -- The entire month of November and the entire month of April, the closure applies inshore of the line that you see there, from about Daytona Beach through Cape Hatteras, and so that's for the two months.

Then, in between those two months, from December through March, that closure extends further offshore, particularly off of Georgia and Florida here, and it goes down to Cape Canaveral, and that is, you know, because this area here is like primary calving grounds for the North Atlantic right whales, and so that's what is in place right now.

As you heard yesterday, now, you know, there's this on-demand technology that allows pots to be deployed without having vertical lines in the water, and so the council wants to allow access to these areas for that type of gear, and so that's what they're considering, but, since Regulatory Amendment 37 is going to put in place a reduction in catch levels and the two-month spawning

closure, they want to know should they be considering a reduction in the trip limit for pots, and so that's what I want to talk to you guys about.

I'm going to show you a few graphs, with just some preliminary summary of landings by gear, so that we can talk about whether this is something the council should take up at this time, and so here is the breakdown of landings by gear, and so pots are in orange, and hook-and-line is in blue, and it's for, you know, 1978 through 2024, so you can see that pots have dominated the commercial fishery for that time period, and, you know, you can see a decline over here, and that's been -- You know, as you know, what's been happening in recent years.

This is kind of small, but there's just some things to point out, and so this is pot landings by trip, and so you've got the number of trips on the vertical axis on the left, and pounds whole weight horizontally, and we're looking at 2005 up here, through 2024, but one thing to note, besides just sort of the trend, is the scales are very different. At the very top, at the beginning of the time series, you have -- You're looking at 120 trips, zero to 120 on the vertical axis, whereas, when you get down here, the scale only goes up to ten, right, and so it's a very significant difference.

We've got Florida through South Carolina, aggregated for confidentiality purposes, in orange, and then North Carolina is shown in that teal color. The red stars denote confidential information, and so you can see there's a sprinkling of confidential stuff up here, but then, as you start getting closer to recent years, there's a lot of information that is confidential, and what that means is that there's fewer than three data points, and so there's fewer than -- You know, and so it's -- There's not a lot of information, and that's what those little stars mean.

Then here is the breakdown by month, and so you can sort of see this the trends in seasonality. Again, the same time period, beginning in 2005 through 2024, and the scale is, again very different, and we're looking at 100,000 pounds whole weight up at the top, in 2005, and then, when you get down to the bottom here, the scale only goes up to a little over -- Like to 10,000 pounds.

You can see the seasonality. You know, kind of up here, you see the trend where the winter months are important, and, you know, it dips down in the summer months, and it picks back up, and then, when you get over here, this is where the closures actually happened, in 2010, and I forget the months, but, sometime in 2010 and 2011 and 2012, there were closures, because the ACL was met, and then, in 2013, over here, you see how the graph reflects the initial closure months of November through April.

Back in 2013, I believe the fishing year started in June, and I see Chip nodding over there, and I think that's, you know, why these months are empty over here, and then in 2017 is when the current closures were put into place, and so you can sort of see how that's reflected in the distribution here. Again, the confidential data, and lots more of that in more recent years.

That's the summary that we have for you, to sort of get you thinking about this question, and next up, I guess, like I said, we're going to be waiting for those recreational estimates, and hopefully we'll have those by the end of the year. The regulatory amendment will get developed through this year to address the closures, and maybe a reduction in the trip limit.

The stock assessment will need to be revised, and it will have to go to the SSC. The council, I think, is going to see it probably in March of next year, and then we'll start Amendment 56 back

up to put in the catch levels, and so, at this point I would like to pause, and see what you guys think and if you have any recommendations for whether the council should consider this reduction in the trip limit for pots, and what you think some trip limits to explore in this amendment could -- What some of those trip limits could be explored.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Myra. Real quick, John, I've got a couple of questions before get rolling here, hopefully. Is the -- Is it a shared ACL between the potters and the other commercial guys?

MS. BROUWER: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. I thought it was. Just making sure, and are they definitely -- Let me phrase that. The council is most likely going to open up that shallower water stuff with the ropeless gear, and that will be only for ropeless gear, and so, if you don't have ropeless gear, you still can't fish there?

MS. BROUWER: Correct.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. I think I had another question, but go ahead, John.

MR. POLSTON: My question is, the way this was presented to us the last time we were all talking about the black sea bass, is that the black sea bass -- They're being considered overfished, but overfishing is not occurring, and you go by that by how much is being landed, and there's been basically nothing landed in the State of Florida, okay, and so how are we going to accomplish anything by dropping the quota down if they're not being caught anyhow, and that's one major important thing.

I'm not speaking for the Carolinas or anything like that, but, in Florida, this is being none caught, and you guys know that, by looking at the statistics, and so that means something else happened, factually, and not guessing, but, factually, something has happened to the black sea bass in the State of Florida, whether they got ate, whether they migrated to the north. Whatever happened, something has definitely happened, but it wasn't they were caught, and so, getting to recreational landings or whatever, that's not really going to accomplish it, at least for the State of Florida.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John, and you guys know I'm pretty passionate about my sea bass, and I'm going to make a real quick comment. In North Carolina, we've got some commercial guys here that fish North Carolina, and there would be much higher commercial landings of bass in certain times of the year if it wasn't for the trawl market.

The trawl market destroys the sea bass market for the hook-and-line fishermen, and even the pot fishermen in our area, and so they're not targeting them. Therefore, you're not showing catches, you know, and that needs to be figured into this equation somehow, because the -- It's affecting the catch levels because of the market, and the guys here that are familiar with it know exactly what I'm saying. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff, and just exactly what Chris said. I've got a lot to say about this whole thing, and I guess most of you all know this, but, in 2017, I guess when it was put in place, or before 2017, we used to pot fish quite a bit, but then, when you couldn't pot fish inside of ninety foot in the wintertime, because that's when the fish were more congregated, is in the

wintertime, and so they've done away with that, and so that's going to affect your charts that you were showing from 2017 until they open -- Well, it's not even open yet, and so, once this year -- If you open that pot gear back up, to where they can trap inside of ninety foot in the wintertime, and that's what the fishery was --That's what it was done for to start with.

Basically, they've closed this on the prime times that you can fish it, and so this data is really misleading, and so we don't do it anymore, and there's only -- Just so you all know, I think there's eighteen permits for this, maybe, or nineteen, something like that, and so we don't even use ours. We haven't used them in a while, but we did work with Kim and Charlie Phillips on developing this gear.

The gear is really cool, and it's really neat. It's so simple, and I don't know why nobody never thought of it before now, and it worked really well, but I don't know what the answers are, but this -- The data we're looking at is really misleading from what the actual fishery would be if this stuff was open, and, just like Chris says, when -- The reason we don't do it is, when those trawlers are open, you just -- You can't do nothing with these fish, and I've often wondered, even with the sea bass, because they're more plentiful Chris's way than they are ours, and, if it's like the triggerfish and the beeliners, all this climate change, and moving them fish northward, and, a lot of the stuff that you see on the photos and stuff of the northern fishing, it looks like what our fishery was twenty years ago.

You know, how much of all that is playing into it, but we hardly even sell them anymore, and we put -- This is really a shame. We can take and cut fifty pounds of sea bass, and put it in a retail market, and we might not even sell it in a whole week. It's just -- Which that used to be one of your premier what everybody wanted, and you could gut them, and scale them, and put them in the market and sell them whole, but that just don't -- It just don't happen anymore.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. John, did you have a comment?

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and, well, just -- Scott pretty much said what I was going to say, as far as the fish migrating to the north, and if ours went -- We'll just say went to Georgia or South Carolina, and South Carolina on up the line, and now the trawls that are catching -- That you're speaking of, and no matter what is done -- Once again, no matter what is done with the quota in the South Atlantic, it's not going to affect anything because of the -- If nothing is done in the North Atlantic, or the Mid-Atlantic, whichever one you want to call it, about the guys that are trawling thousands and thousands and thousands of pounds of them, if nothing is done there, there's never going to be a hope for anything to stay in this area.

I mean, my thought was the red snapper, how it has spread out, and not just to the north, but it has gone to every area, and everybody says there's red snapper. They've gone south, offshore, inshore, and north, because there's so many of them, and maybe they would do a reverse if there was not so -- If there was so many into the north, where they're crawling, maybe they would start coming back south, because there's not enough food for them, but, yes, obviously, there would have to be fish to do that, and the fish -- It sounds like they're getting really destroyed by the trawlers, as far as the population of them.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John, and, just real quick, for those of you that don't understand, when we're referring to the trawlers catching sea bass, it's the Mid-Atlantic up. It's not in our region,

but they catch so many that they flood the market, and they just pretty much destroy the price, because they're catching them, and they just had a huge increase, and what was it for the Mid-Atlantic on the bass? Was it a 20 percent increase in the ACL or something?

As they're taking ours down to a nub, theirs is increasing, you know, and so it's affecting the commercial side, and it is definitely affecting the recreational fishermen, and I keep hoping that one of these days they're going to prove our bass are moving up there, so we can get to keep them, but, anyway, does anybody else have a question? Andy, go ahead.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and it's not so much a question as a comment, and I reached out to my one buddy, Chops, who is a North Carolina pot fisherman, and I think he was one of the guys that did a lot of the starting of the deployable, and he says it absolutely doesn't need to be going any lower, and he's right at the edge of making a profitable business where it is right now, and I just wanted to say that for him.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy, and so the catch limit needs to stay the same, or be increased, to stay profitable? Okay, and I was just making sure that I heard that right. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I'll say something, and this just observation. I published a paper on this, I don't know, a decade ago, that the black sea bass pot fishery is one of the cleanest fisheries I've ever seen. It's a really, really low discard rate, and, of those discards, there's a really low discard mortality rate, and so my belief is that the more -- The higher fraction of the commercial ACL that you can harvest via pots, versus hook-and-line, you've got a lower overall number of discards.

I hope the council kind of takes that into consideration moving forward on the allocation within the commercial sector, what he just talked about, and talking to Chops, as far as the number, or the percentage, or the poundage on a daily trip limit, of the pot gear. If we maintain that at the current rate, then there's going to be a higher fraction of bass landed via pots, and, therefore, the overall number of commercial dead discards is probably going to stay at a low, really low, rate, if all that made sense.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul, and, you know, in my younger years, I did some bass potting, and it is a hugely -- Back then, I didn't realize it, but, in hindsight, it's a very clean fishery. It really is. Anybody else? Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, northeast Florida, and so I'm trying to hone back in on what we're trying to deal with here, and so you're asking pretty much a question of do we want to advise, from this advisory panel, this closure of these more nearshore pots, and is that -- So what are you asking?

MS. BROUWER: The question is, because when Regulatory Amendment 37 gets implemented, the catch levels are cut significantly, and there's the spawning season closure implemented in February and March. The concern is that there would be a derby fishery for what is -- You know, what potters can catch, and so should the council look to lower that trip limit, to extend the season and access, or, you know, are the guys going to be able to continue to make it work somehow with those reductions, and so that that's the question.

MR. WILLINGHAM: So I would say, from a recreational fishing standpoint, 37 -- To most of our constituents down here, at least in northeast Florida, we feel kicked in the teeth by that, and no offense to the council, but, you know, dropping us from seven to three, and then nailing us right when we catch them in January and February and March, and so you take away February, and you take away March, and you just killed us, from the recreational sector.

We always had a little bit of a, you know, grumbling because of these pots, and I think they allow everything to get out except an eleven-inch fish, because that's what you guys can keep, an eleven-inch fish, and then there was no movement for us. We still have to try to measure a thirteen-inch fish, if we can get one, and there was no movement to drop it to twelve inches for us, just to give us a little bit of love, and so that should not be a negative, to stop the commercial fishermen from being able to use these pots, but it doesn't sit nicely.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Haley Stephens, and so a couple of observations that I've experienced on the water. We've caught the same sea bass three times on the same rock with a green tag. As a lot of us know, our hook-and-line fishing, they are pretty subjective to barotrauma. A question I have, and so, in order to be able to participate in the pot fishery, is there a separate endorsement in addition to your SG 1, and that effort is relatively small, and I think someone mentioned about eighteen.

MS. BROUWER: There are thirty-two endorsements, and I don't know how many are being fished, but those were -- Thirty-two were the original number that were issued.

MS. STEPHENS: Sure, and so thirty-two total pot endorsements in the entire South Atlantic, and my view on this would be, if the right whales were the issue, I think that it was a great idea, and super innovative, and kind of like the meat of what we all want to come up with, a solution where you're able to protect, you know, the whales, but you're also able to allow the fishermen to fish on the permits that they have, and, if the on-demand gear, you know, addresses some of those concerns, and it's done successfully, through some of the EFPs and projects that we've done, I think that's wonderful, and I think that we should let the commercial fishermen fish with the permits that they have. I would certainly be in favor of supporting those. I'm in favor of supporting reopening the inshore pots with on-demand gear.

MR. KIMREY: Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I think we were talking -- Myra was talking about whether there should be -- I thought this was the topic du jour, is whether there should be a daily trip limit for pots for the specific thirty-two endorsement holders. Just to what Scott mentioned earlier, when you whittle down that thirty-two to a certain number that are actively fishing traps, and, furthermore, folks that are experienced with that on-demand gear, you would have a really low number, and so I think the chances for this to develop into a derby-style fishery is probably really low, and so my vote would be to leave the daily trip limit alone for the pot fishery.

MR. KIMREY: Cameron, you got anything to add there?

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and so Cameron Sebastian, and what is the current season right now for trapping? What season can they have, because one of the benefits the charter-headboat has definitely derived from the ninety-foot rule is, you know, it gave us a buffer from being wiped out with the black sea bass for a lot of years, and so it's going on, what, eight years now, and, for us to lose that, and pretty much lose -- If all the fish that are above eleven inches are now gone, I mean, it would be definitely devastating for our charter-headboat to all of a sudden have no fish again.

Now, whether there are eighteen guys who are doing it, whether they are or not, and, I mean, innovative individuals are always going to find ways to make money, and so, you know, it's concerning to me, and, now this is just going from the trapping viewpoint to open that area, about the negative impacts it will have to any recreational, or charter- headboat fishermen as well, and we used to have a pot endorsement, and we lost it whenever they made the rule, back in the 1990s I think, that they -- If you didn't show so much on it, and we lost ours, because we also run a commercial operation as well.

I guess my thing is, you know, if the dates could be massaged so that it would still allow the charter-headboats to keep and retain some fish at the beginning of the season, and, if I remember correctly, it was mostly an October, November, December kind of fishery, when we were doing it, and then it sort of -- The weather and everything knocked us out after that, and so, if the year could be adjusted, you know, I don't have a problem with keeping their daily trip limit the same, if it could be worked in with, you know, what we're trying to achieve as well.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron, and so I'm going to -- Scott is going to ring in on that, but, the pot season, is it a limited season inside of -- It's not, is it? You can bass pot whenever commercial bass is open. Okay, and I thought it was, and I was just making sure. Go ahead, Scott.

MR. BUFF: I just want to point this out, and I can't say this 100 percent, but I'm pretty sure -- I only know of five people that are doing this, okay, and so I don't know about up your way. I know Chops does it, and there's a couple guys in Little River that does it, and so they're we're talking about five, or eight, or maybe nine, and ten at the most, that even use these things.

The biggest reason that stuff was said, as I said a while ago, is, when the water is colder, those fish congregate, and they're in shallower water. That was the reason that everybody did this before, in the 1990s, and I lost mine too, but we've done it when everything was closed, because that's all that was left open in the wintertime, and just to have some revenue, but, if you drop this -- Like Andy said, if you bring this down below ten boxes, them guys can't afford to do it, and so there's no use even having the fishery, for what that's worth.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so what I've heard then is that the council should not consider reducing the trip limit, and leave it as-is, because it can still be profitable, and you guys are in support of reopening the nearshore closed areas to on-demand pots. Okay. All right. I have a few more questions for you.

Okay, and so some of what the council has heard from fishermen is that there's been higher catches, or there were higher catches last year in some areas, and so we just want to get a little bit more information to inform, you know, what's going on in future talks about black sea bass management, and so have you noticed this where you are fishing? Have you noticed any changes

in the average size of fish? Are there any specific spots that, you know, are still there, or have changed where you target and catch black sea bass?

Depth range, or have there been any changes there, where you're accessing the keeper fish relative to earlier years, and have you noticed any other changes, and so if you could talk just a little bit, you know, before lunch here, and we have about twenty minutes or so, about what you've observed this past season, and I'll be furiously taking notes over here.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Myra. We'll give Myra a second to get warmed up for high-speed notetaking. Go ahead, Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, yes, for the question of the 2025 and 2026 season, we definitely caught more, more and larger, bass than we have in the past across our -- You know, across all of our boats in the hook-and-line fishery.

The sizes have gone up, and so they're catching more keeper fish closer to shore than they have in the past, and, you know, the overall catch and release is about the same, and it's been consistent for, as we can tell, and I believe Amy confirmed this with me last time, but, in our area, there really hasn't been any change in all the years, because the sea bass -- In our area, it seems to be a relatively robust fishery, where they maybe have vacated Florida and moved up this way, but we have definitely not seen any changes on our eight or nine boats that we run on a daily basis.

The reality, for us, is, once you get past May, on our half-day stuff, it's just a fun, entertaining catch-and-release. You know, we sell basically entertainment, and so, you know, that's sort of the deal with the bass, unless you're going off twenty miles. After twenty miles, you start getting some keepers after May.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron. Did you have your hand up? I think Andy was -- We'll go right down the row, and so we'll go with Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So, out of Morehead, I recreationally fish bass by myself four or five times a year, and I always go to the same reef, the Little Ten Reef, and Chris and the other Onslow Bay crowd know that well, and the single biggest thing, to answer your question, Myra, or to give you my opinion on the bottom note here of any noticeable changes, or did you see any in the 2025 fishing season, it's really driving home two points.

One is increase the increased number of private recreational vessels out in the water, and I would go to Little Ten Reef a decade ago, and this is eighteen to twenty miles south of Beaufort Inlet, and be the only boat in the water a decade ago, and now I picked one of the coldest days in January to go out fishing, and I had a good fishing, as Chris can attest, on black sea bass this winter, but I'm seeing ten, twelve, fourteen other vessels, in the middle of winter, when the water is forty-five degrees Fahrenheit, on the same reef.

The other big thing, that I think hopefully the council will, you know, start really wrestling with this aggressively, is increase in private boat recreational efficiency. Spot-Lock, we've talked about it here, and LiveScope, and these kind of electronics are just really changing catchability right before our eyes, and I see every vessel out there with Spot-Lock except myself, and so I think that's really important for the council to consider, is changes in recreational efficiency moving forward.

I think a lot of those changes in recreational efficiency are being captured when you look at those recruitment indices that Wally at South Carolina DNR showed us the other day in his MARMAP survey data.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Yes, and Ten Fathom Rock is eighteen miles from Beaufort Inlet, and it's natural coquina. It's big ledges, and it used to be -- It's always been well known, and it's so much more accessible now, between the GPS, the fast boats, the Spot-Lock, the lack of availability for other species. It's a very well-known spot, and it gets beat a lot, but you're still catching fish there, aren't you?

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I'm still catching fish there, and so that could be that, you know, efficiency, increased efficiency, is offsetting whatever change in numbers that, you know, some of the MARMAP fishery-independent survey data showing us.

MR. KIMREY: You're still catching fish though, sea bass. You're still catching sea bass. All right. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you, Chris. Tony Constant. In the southern part of South Carolina, we've seen a huge decline in seabass, as far as the hook-and-line, even after the pots left, but I have no issue with the pots being in, other than the fact that we're reducing the numbers to the point where, I mean, it will save you guys some fuel, I know, but, gosh, you're going to meet your catch limit really fast.

One overwhelming thing I see, with looking at the charts that we were looking at earlier, is that everything about this decline in this fishery also coincides with the closure of red snapper, and their increase, and, until we start addressing that exact fact, I think we're never going to fix sea bass, at least on the rec sector.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony, and, again, that very well could be a portion of the change we're seeing, you know, one of the one of the variables in the very large equation.

MR. CONSTANT: I'm sure of that, and climate change too, because it is definitely a migration out of Florida all the way up, but, I mean, fifteen or twenty years ago, we would -- If a group, a family, wanted a fish fry, well, three or four guys would go out and catch a bunch of sea bass, and we would be done in half a day.

That is not going on, and it hasn't been for five to eight years at least, and there's just simply not enough sea bass, nor are the limits allowing it, but, if you bring the pots back into those waters, what is that going to do to that nearshore fishery? I mean, it will save the commercial guys some fuel, and I get it, but you're going to reach your numbers so quick, and you're going to pull them right back out, because you're lowering them by --

MR. KIMREY: Well, just remember though, from the commercial side, as ACLs are met quicker, and more efficiently, that's basically pot fishing, and, you know, we've got PhD scientists telling us -- You know, I've done it, and Scott has done it. As those ACLs are met quicker, with a fishery that's already clean, you're reducing the release mortality, just by getting it done quicker, and with a quicker fishery. Even though it may affect one sector one way, we're here to manage the fish,

and so, if it can ultimately help the fishery in some way, in my opinion, that's how we need to look at it.

MR. CONSTANT: I can see that point very good. I also -- But I guess the point I really wanted to hit was that, until we do start putting the red snapper into this variable, I believe that we're still going to be up against it.

MR. KIMREY: Well, the very first fishery federal-level meeting I went to, and it was actually MREP, and Roy Crabtree said that everything revolves around red snapper, and it still does, and that was a long time ago. Okay. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. All my buddies out of Wilmington were raving about how good the sea bass fishing was this winter. They said it was the best they've ever seen, and some of them are younger kids, and the best they've ever seen, but they were catching the 300-pound limits in an hour-and-a-half or two hours, going thirteen miles, and they said it was great.

MR. KIMREY: Where was that, Andy?

MR. FISH: Wilmington.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and so everybody knows that I charter fish out of Morehead, Beaufort Inlet primarily, and I ran a bunch of bass trips in February and March. It's pretty much my only nearshore target, and I don't -- I say a bunch, and I run a bunch for it to be offseason, you know, and it's the exact opposite of our high season. The weather is cold, blah, blah, blah, but, when I ocean fish, and people want to keep fish to eat, that's my primary target.

Real quick, and not to take up much time, this year, when I ran my bass trips, I used one hook per rig, if we were bait fishing, and, most of the time, we didn't bait fish, and we used artificials, because it's a cleaner fishery, and you catch bigger fish, you know, and so it's cleaner. There was a few days the bite might have been a little off, and we had dirty water or whatever, and we would bait fish, but I would use one hook.

Most of the time, I would have three or four anglers, and we would catch our limit of seven per angler in an hour, you know what I mean, of actual fishing, and then, the rest of time, I'm bouncing around and looking for other stuff. I'm not going to say killing time, but I'm trying to give them a full version of the trip, but it rarely took more than an hour to catch a limit for my whole boat, with one hook, whether it be on a jig -- This was March and February this year. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So, Myra, this doesn't answer your question immediately, but doesn't the APAIS creel data clear this up a year from now, and like, again, looking at the last question slide of any noticeable changes, and did they occur during the 2025 bass fishing season, or this past winter 2026, and I think the APAIS data can really provide some quantitative evidence to what we're musing, or the opinions we're sharing right now around the table, because that will be out shortly and show whether there is any changes in catch per unit effort.

MS. BROUWER: Yes. Absolutely, and, you know, this is just -- You know, there were a few folks that came out to the Jekyll Island meeting in March, and I think Chops was there, and some of the AP members at the table were there, and the council just had these questions and said, you

know, let's go to the AP and ask them how it's been, and so they just want, you know, information directly from the folks who are out there fishing, and so that that's why. Just general information.

MR. KIMREY: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Haley Stephens. You know, just thinking back to like 2010 to 2018, the black sea bass were our bread and butter on the headboat. The fishing was great. As far as changes in spots, those notable spots, where we used to catch the sea bass, are just completely overrun with red snapper, and, at the risk of beating a dead horse, we can speculate all day to why we think the fishery is doing what it's doing.

From the scope of our area, the proposed spawning -- Or the spawning closure that's going to be February and March is the time when we do catch those fish in our area, when that water is cold, and I knew that going into our last meeting, and I realize that, you know, taking that on the chest for us in our area meant benefiting the industry to folks like Cameron and Chris, you know, to at least have a bag limit that you could kind of work with, and I'm okay with that, because we do have to think about this fishery as a whole, and the industry as a whole, and, if sacrificing those two months when we actually catch them is benefiting these guys, that was -- I was totally fine with that.

I can say this on the mic, because Councilman Jimmy Hull is not here, but we are seeing them come back to Ponce Inlet. This year has been the best bass fishing that we've had in Ponce Inlet in over a decade, and so I just -- I know we want to be mindful of what's going on now, but I also want us to be mindful about the future, what's going to happen if and when these fish do come back. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley, and I'll add that it sounds like most people have had a really good year bass fishing, and I just want to add this tidbit about the life cycle of those fish. These fish -- On my boat, and I left this part out, thirteen inches is the minimum length, total length. Most of the time, with my anglers, and I have a lot of repeat customers, and I try to promote conservation, and we're not keeping fish unless they're fourteen-and-a-half inches, most of the time.

If we lay him up there, and he's thirteen-and-a-quarter, and he looks healthy, and I think I can get a good release, I'm like, guys, let's get a bigger one, but keep in mind, these bass that we're seeing this year, these fish weren't spawned last year. To get to that size fish, it takes a number of years, and so it tells us that there's some sort of cycle that has brought these fish back to the areas that we fish, and they didn't just grow since last year, and so be mindful that. Sea bass are slow growers. Okay. Who had a question down there? Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, northeast Florida, and so, in answer to your question there, Myra, of any noticeable changes during the 2025 year, that thermocline that came through, and I don't know how much it affected everybody else, but it tortured us, and it had to have tortured you, Haley.

If you looked at our kingfish tournaments, it was ridiculous what was happening, and we had tournaments with 700-plus boats bringing in a total of forty-three kingfish, which is unheard of, and then what was happening at the same stinking time? Sea bass were there, because the water -- The divers were so cold, being down at sixty to eighty-foot depths, they were like, man, forget

this nonsense, and we went out there, and we started cleaning up on sea bass in the middle of July, and so that's an answer to that question. Yes, there was some weird stuff going on.

Also, the depth, and we've got some young fishermen in our club who are -- You know, they go out as many times as they possibly can, because they're not married, but, anyway, they're catching them two miles inshore, and we've got some things called little jetties inside the Mayport Inlet, and they're catching sixteen-inch-plus fish there, nice greenheads, two miles inshore, and so there's some bizarre stuff going on.

From a recreational standpoint, we're not as forgiving to the, you know, taking away our, you know, February and March. I mean, we love you guys, but you guys are fishing from January 1 on, and we don't see that as fair, and so, for 37 to have already escaped, and probably passed the council up to going to National Marine Fisheries Service, that's frustrating to us. I can tell you, and Chris is probably the same way, how many twelve-and-three-quarter, or twelve-and-seven-eighths, or twelve-and-a-half, have you had to release, and, I mean, it's a huge amount for us.

MR. KIMREY: Well, I mean there's definitely some fish, I call them squeakers when they're on the cusp, but I do my best to change my tactics, and location, so I'm not fishing through a ton of undersized fish, but, in reference to the calendar year on the commercial side versus the fishing year for recreational side, the spawning closure is across-the-board. February and March is across-the-board for -- So, you know, that's part of it, and I understand what you're saying. The rec is not the only ones giving up February and March. It's everybody, you know, and so take a little -- You know, let that be a little bit of an easement to you.

MR. WILLINGHAM: So commercial fishermen with the pots are not fishing in in those months either?

MR. KIMREY: Once the regulations go into effect.

MS. BROUWER: Right, and that's -- It hasn't been approved yet, but that's been submitted to NMFS.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Right, but it has made it through the council?

MS. BROUWER: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: If I'm not mistaken, just to follow-up there, it's commercial fishing is prohibited in March and April with either type of gear, and so those fisheries are completely closed.

MR. WILLINGHAM: This is Darrin Willingham again, but just the caution is on this is, once you put something through, being able to turn it around and bring it back is just -- It's brutal, and so this -- You know, dropping us from seven to three, taking away two months, and no give for the thirteen-inch, and that's just brutal to the recreational fishery.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. You know, we came back from much stricter sea bass regulations not that long ago, and, you know, just be mindful of that, and gag grouper is a good example that

they're giving us something. They're giving us a little back, and the rebuilding plan is apparently working, and so, you know. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I agree with everybody at the table. This is really bitter pill to swallow, because nobody, like me, that goes out and wants to catch a few fish during the winter to take back to the frying pan, and this is going to be closed for a couple of months, and this is, you know, a bitter pill even for a casual recreational angler like myself, but I'm reminded of the presentation that John Carmichael gave a couple of years ago, and it's still online.

He's very well spoken, of course, and he talked about this relationship where, when you have a decline in recruitment, a decline in spawning stock inevitably will follow, and so he lays that out really well, and I encourage all of us to read this, his presentation of a couple of years ago, and we saw yesterday that the black sea bass is at historically low levels of recruitment in the region, and so I think these are efforts by the council to protect the dwindling amount of spawning stock biomass that's still out there. Like Chris just said, you know, the black sea bass is going to come back, and it's just a matter of when, and so, if we institute these management measures.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul, and I think it's pretty well accepted that recruitment is a big part of the problem on the sea bass. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham. Just to respond to that, and with the data that we did see yesterday, where they were using the -- What are they called, the traps? What is it?

DR. BUBLEY: Chevron.

MR. WILLINGHAM: The chevron traps, and the question that came up to my mind was, you know, and maybe at the back corner of the room can answer this, but, when they're starting these placing these traps, are they starting up in North Carolina and then working their way all the way down to Key West and back? They've got three vessels out there, it looked like from the pictures, and maybe that was an underestimate, but are they actually trapping these, or attempting to trap these sea bass, during our, you know, strong winter months where we would expect them to be there?

MR. KIMREY: So I think I can accurately answer this, and somebody feel free to correct me, but Walley said April through October, and it's a weather issue, and so it may not be the height of the bass fishing, and I don't know where they're starting and where they're finishing, but the range used to typically run from Cape Hatteras down -- How far in Florida, Wally?

DR. BUBLEY: (Dr. Bubley's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. KIMREY: Yes, to St. Lucie, and they actually have extended it a little bit.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Right, and, that having been said, so they're putting these things out here, the chevron traps, and they're getting the black sea bass, but they're getting them between April and October, which is not the time that we have them there, and so, to me, that gives kind of a false impression of what we actually have there during our seasons.

MR. KIMREY: Only if they hadn't always done it that way, and so if they're -- If they're sampling April through October since 1990, then they're sampling the same timeframe, the same months, they've always done it, and then it would indicate if there's a decline. If they wanted to come up with a false number, maybe they should go there in the high season and be like, oh, there's plenty of bass, and it's February, but you're always running the traps at the same time, and so that is the constant, using the same timeframe year after year after year. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I'm as bummed about the black sea bass numbers as anybody, if not more so at this table, but those MARMAP data are incredibly precise data, and, for years now, since COVID, those data, on a year-by-year basis, have shown that we're in very low, historically low, levels of recruitment.

Something is going on in the environment with black sea bass in the Atlantic Coast that -- This is now a super valuable fishery, as north far north as the Gulf of Maine and the Maritime Provinces. The Gulf of Maine lobster crowd is getting these as valuable bycatch in their lobster traps. Something is going on.

The Mid-Atlantic is whatever, 2.5 or threefold of MSY, and so super abundant up there. and Chris talked before about the trawl fishery up there, that's, you know, flooding our market in the wintertime, and so I feel like something is definitely going on in the environment with this stock, and I think, again, that's reflected in that really precise MARMAP data that we saw yesterday.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Cameron, then Haley.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, just to reiterate my view on the black sea bass, and coming within the twenty-mile zone and whether the catch limit should be reduced, you know, I've been in the fisheries for a long time, and, you know, if the daily trip limit stays the same, the pots will come out of the water sooner, which ultimately means you also have less degradation to the bottom composition.

I mean, I've seen the traps underwater, and I see the way they're pulled, and I see what happens when you go to pull a trap, and you're drifting, and it goes across the reef, and it's generally not -- It's generally not going to be very beneficial for the marine life, the corals, and the soft fans and stuff like that, and so, to keep the trip limit the same, so they can make the money, all I would say is just, if there's a way to maybe adjust the year, the fishing year, that pots are going to come back within that zone, maybe this would be the time to do it as well, so recreational and commercial would have their sort of fair share, because we have to release everything under thirteen inches, and they can keep everything between eleven and thirteen, and so their share is still going to be in the water, whereas ours is going to be out at a quicker timeframe.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Haley Stephens. Yes, and that's a really good point, Cameron. I think that's worthy of further discussion. A question. The pot endorsement, is that a limited entry -- Okay, and so no one else can enter. Theoretically, thirty-two is the maximum, and then, if we move forward with the on-demand gear, you know, that's not cheap, right, and so you have to choose if making that investment for that innovative gear is going to be worth it, based on your trip limits, your size, your season, et cetera.

I think back to when we were at the council meeting in Nags Head, and a commercial fisherman told me he was getting like eighty-cents a pound per sea bass, and so just to assume that, you know, there might be thirty-two limited entry permits out there, and how many of our commercial fishing friends are actually going to go through the time and investment, and, if they do, is it even going to be profitable?

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. I know, the guys in our area, they play the market. They go bass potting when the price is high, because it will fluctuate depend on those trawlers north of us, big time, and I mean like big time, and they also, a lot of them, have a niche market, where they want display fish to put in markets, or they have restaurants that are specifically asking for those jumbo fish, and so they figure out a way to maximize their profits, and, you know, it's a game. I feel like some of our guys probably won't make the investment for the ropeless gear, because it's such a small part of their commercial operation, but some of the guys that are hardcore bass potters probably will. Go ahead, Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thanks, Chris. Scott Buff. I just was going to say exactly what you just said, and I don't mean this the way it sounds, but I think we're wasting a lot of time on something that's really going to apply to about five or six or seven people, for what that's worth, but this stuff is very expensive, and I don't think anybody in my area is going to spend the money for it, because you can't spend $10,000, and I'm just using numbers, on gear and get two or three thousand back in your winter months, and this isn't something that somebody is going to make $100,000 on in two months.

You know, I've done it when it was open open, and you could do it anywhere, and, also, I was thinking about this after I shut up, but the sea bass is mostly -- I may be wrong, Chris, and you can correct me if I'm not, but, in our area, your sea bass are generally a forty to sixty foot, and that's where they live. Once you get out to eighty to a hundred, you're going to get some bigger fish, and there are going to be very few of them.

That water temperature in the norther area, and I think that's why we're getting the migration. If those fish like the colder water, which is what it seems to be, is that why they're going north, and is that why they're catching so many of these fish, and, if you look at a lot of the pictures that are posted, the magazine pictures and stuff, you're seeing fish in areas that they've never even had before, and so I think that that's a lot of what we're seeing, as far as the sea bass is concerned, but people are not going spend the money to buy this gear, just your average people. Andy, why don't you ask Chops, and he's probably got some of it, because he helped work with it, but I don't think that most people is going to buy it. We're not.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and I can't say for sure. I'm just speculating, because I know the guys that are pot fishing around us, and I don't think they can justify it. In my opinion, they can't justify it. It's one of the things they lean on a little bit when it's really good, and the market is right, and they don't feel like doing something else, and they can run their pots, and make a little money, and so I don't see them putting a huge investment into it.

MR. BUFF: Also too, that's something that has got to be redone, and so this is not just about one time, okay, and so, some of the breakaways that we used, that's like a reinvestment over time, and it's not that expensive to resupply it, but it still costs for every trip.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Does anybody have anything to add here as we're moving right along? We could probably talk about this a lot more, but I feel like we've achieved our objective, and so unless somebody has something to add. Okay.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, guys. This was really useful.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Myra. Are you finished up? Okay. Great. Mike, are you coming in? All right. Mike said we get three minutes for lunch. No, and we're going to basically take about an hour and five or ten minutes, and try to be back at 1:15 for lunch. We are a little behind, and so we've got to keep it moving. Keep it moving. Thanks, guys.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. KIMREY: All right, everybody, and let's make our way back to our seats, please. All right, guys. Mike got an announcement. We're going to get rolling here. We are a little bit behind, and he's got a quick announcement, and then we're going to swing it over to Kai, and he's going to give us a presentation on the MSE stuff.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to give a reminder. As you looked through your agenda, you may have noticed, for one of the items coming up tomorrow, the spawning special management zones evaluation, and this evaluation tool that's here is basically a survey for you guys to fill out, and for you to kind of set up the discussion that you'll have tomorrow, and so I'll ask that you please make sure that you -- If you haven't already, please fill that out at some point today, before we go into tomorrow. That way, Chip will have the information he needs to set you up for that discussion.

DR. COLLIER: Thanks, Mike, and, also, going back to this presentation here, we've been talking about the management strategy evaluation for snapper grouper for quite some time. We've been looking -- You guys have gotten presentations on the models, but now this is an outreach effort that Kai and his group did trying to communicate with more fishermen about what they want in the recreational fishery for snapper grouper.

Kai is going to give an overview of what they found in this survey, just trying to think about how we can incorporate additional findings, or even think about different ways to manage the snapper grouper fishery overall, and so, with that, I will give it back to Kai.

DR. LORENZEN: Okay. Thanks, Chip, and thanks everyone for having me. I want to report on a research project that we did in support of the development of the management strategy evaluation, and I want to emphasize here that this really is -- It's a research effort that is geared towards gaining a deeper understanding of how recreational anglers think about the management of these fisheries. It's not a public input process to a plan development or something, and this is sort of a little bit removed from that, and so we're looking at sort of a deeper understanding of how anglers think about these things as part of research.

As part of the snapper grouper MSE, and really the task we were given was to gather information on private recreational angler attitudes and preferences to further develop the snapper grouper MSE. We did three things to get there. We had a stakeholder working group that helped us with initial deliberations, and the aspects of designing and pre-testing the survey, and that included

several people who are in the room here, Haley and Dave and Jeff, and who else was there? We had Jack Cox and Chris.

We did a literature review on angler attitudes and preferences, and that really highlighted two things that, when everyone studies those things, anglers turn out to be quite heterogeneous in their attitudes and preferences, and so not all anglers think the same, and, also, anglers look at management measures mostly in terms of two things.

One is how does it affect them and their activities, but then there's also, you know, kind of how much they like it, and whether they feel it's important to have that for conservation, or there's some other reason, and so it's not just how it affects the individual angler, but it's something about, you know, their understanding of what the fishery needs, and their political leanings and whatnot, and so there are other aspects that come into how people look at management measures. Both of those things are important, because we found, like many other studies, that these people are quite heterogeneous, and that they have some interesting preferences.

If you want to find out what anglers think, we have different ways of doing that. One is, obviously, public comment at meetings, and, you know, you guys hear a lot of those, and then sometimes we do email surveys of fishing license holders, where we might ask them about preferences and so on.

What we did for this project, as the main survey here, is what's called an incentivized panel survey, and so we did something a little different, and sort of unusual in the in the world of fisheries stakeholder surveys, and the reason we did that is that we really wanted to get a good idea of what the anglers at-large think, and not just the people who are very, very involved, who come to meetings and so on, but we wanted to know also what the people think who were anglers, but they're maybe not fishing so much, and they're not coming to meetings and so on.

The idea here is that, by doing that incentivized panel survey, we avoid what we call selection bias, and selection bias is that basically those people who are particularly interested in a topic, or have very specific strong opinions, respond to opportunities to voice their opinions, and so that's strongest at public meetings, because you have to know that this is going on, and you have to probably read some background, and you have to turn up, and you have to speak, and so, if you're not very interested, and have a strong opinion, you're not going to go and speak at a public meeting, right?

Email surveys are a little different. You get something in your email inbox, and you can go and do the survey, or not, but it still takes time out of your day, and so, basically, unless you are somewhat interested, and feel you have something important to say, you probably aren't going to do the survey.

The incentivized panel is different, again, because there people actually get paid to do the survey, and the way this works is that survey companies maintain these survey panels, and so they have panels of people who take different surveys, and they might be taking a survey about what burger they like to eat, and what car they like to drive, and they might take a fishing survey.

They set up these panels, and they're sort of demographically representative of the population, and then so, in this case, we contract the survey company, and then they send something out, and they

look for people who meet the qualifying criteria for this survey, and, in this case, that was they had to be in one of the states under council jurisdiction, and so Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, and they had to have been a snapper grouper fishing in the last two years.

We're looking for people who are in the fishery, but then, if they are, they get paid to do the survey, and the idea is that that reduces, or removes, a lot of the selection bias that we get with the other ways of finding out what people think, and that's why incentivized panel surveys are really sort of the gold standard for surveys, and so, for most social surveys that you read about in the media and so on, those are done with incentivized panels.

Okay, and so that's what we did. We also, by the way -- The main the main thing is the incentivized panel, but we also did an email survey of Florida reef fish permit holders, partly because we wanted to see how the responses, and the demographics of respondents and so on, differ from what we're getting from the incentivized panel, and the reason we did that for the Florida reef fish permit holders is that Florida had -- You know, the fishing licenses are public record, and FWC is happy to share those, and so we can survey Florida anglers much more easily than anglers in the other states, who are less happy to share that contact information.

By going to the reef fish permit holders specifically, we have people who at least, you know, have, you know, taken out a reef fish permit, and that doesn't necessarily mean they're actually using it, but it gets us closer to the people we want to speak to, and they still then -- Unless they say, yes, I went reef fishing in the last two years, we wouldn't use them in the survey, and so this is a long background, but I think it's very important for you to understand how this was set up.

I've already talked mostly about this, and is just the frame of the study. The incentivized panel is the main thing, and then the secondary email survey. This is what we had in the survey, and so we had informed consent. People have to say that, yes, they're happy to do the survey voluntarily, and then we had questions about their fishing behavior and experiences. We asked them about sort of general opinions about management strategies and tradeoffs, and then we had what we call a discrete choice experiment, where we asked them about specific combinations of management actions.

I want to say here that those combinations were based partly on the discussions we had in the working group here, and it's a wider set of options that that we are giving people to respond to than those that are necessarily on the table for any particular management plan, because we're trying to understand, you know, more broadly what anglers prefer, and don't prefer, and so it's not just things that are currently being considered say for red snapper management. Then we asked them about some novel options, some things that are not -- That haven't really been in the discussion, and then we asked them about some demographic information.

I want to start with general views on fishing regulations and tradeoffs, and this was a question where we said, you know, on a scale from sort of one to five, and so strongly disagree to strongly agree, and this is broken down into people who are primarily interested in red snapper, or primarily interested in gag grouper, and you can see that regulations are necessary to prevent overfishing, and there's general agreement.

Stricter reef fish regulations would lead to increase populations, there's also agreement, but not as strongly, but it's closer to four than to three, which is the neutral here. I would rather have less

restrictive regulations now, even if that led to it being harder to catch keeper-size reef fish in the next ten years, and so most people disagree, and I would rather have more restrictive regulations now than if that led to better fishing in the future, and there's agreement, and so you can see that generally people are willing to give up something now to get something better in the future, and, generally speaking, they believe that regulations are necessary.

MR. WILLINGHAM: What are the numbers in parentheses on the previous slide?

DR. LORENZEN: Those are standard errors. Then we have stricter regulations acceptability, and this was a check all that apply. Catching more reef fish per trip, so if -- Basically, you see you would accept stricter regulations if catching more you -- If they led to you catching more reef fish per trip, and so there's over half that say yes to that, catching larger reef fish, and needing to travel shorter distances is a bit less, and then we also had the question of, well, I don't believe stricter regulations would lead to any of these, and that's very much a minority opinion, and so only 9 percent on both.

The discrete choice experiment, and I'll show you what that looks like in a moment, and this is something that helps us analyze preferences and tradeoffs without asking directly, because what we do is we let participants choose between options with different attributes, and I'll show you that, and it's easier to explain in an example.

We did that separately for red snapper and gag grouper, and that's mostly because the attributes of the management are very different, right, and so the South Atlantic red snapper season is days, and the gag grouper season is much longer, and so you can't ask people about preferences for these two fisheries with the exact same choice experiment, but you have to have one that is specific to the to the fishery.

We asked people to indicate which of these species they most cared about, and they were then channeled into the relevant discrete choice experiment for the species they care most about, and 83 percent of respondents said they cared most about red snapper. Gag had a paltry 17 percent, which means we have a lot more -- In a sense, more reliable information on the red snapper preferences than for gag grouper.

Now we get into red snapper, and these were the attributes that we put up, and so there was a harvest season of two, fifteen, and sixty days, a reef fish targeting closure, either none, three months, or six months, an aggregate bag limit of none or a sort of medium or a high, and then some had a mandatory stopping rule, and so, once they reached the aggregate bag, they would have to stop, and some didn't, and then there was a reef fish permit that they would have to get and pay for, and it was $50, $100, or $150.

The reason that permit is in there with those payments is actually this is what the economists use to figure out how much you're willing to pay for the different things that you want, and so it's there not just as a management option, but it's what they call a payment vehicle, and it allows us to gain additional understanding.

This is an example of what that discrete choice experiment looks like, and so we asked people to choose between two options, and, in this case, you can see it has sixty days versus fifteen days of harvest season, a six-month target enclosure or none, different bag limits, different permit costs,

and either yes or no to a mandatory stopping rule. Then people -- Every person who did the survey would have done I think four of these, and so you get several different combinations of options, and, every time you have to choose I like Option 1 better, or Option 2, or I would not fish for red snapper under either option, and so you can opt out.

The important thing here, and this is really why the DCE, or discrete choice experiment, is such a nice way of finding out what people find important, and how much they prefer or dislike something, is that people have to look at all of these things and then decide which option they take, and so, by doing that, they reveal something about what they find important, for example. If you're really all about the harvest season, you'll take Option 1, unless there's something else in that option that you really, really dislike, and so on and so forth, and so, by giving people a lot of these, we get a fairly good understanding of, you know, what's really important to people, and what isn't, and whether that is something that they like or dislike.

That's better than just giving them something where you say how important is this, and how important is that, and how important is that, because they would go and, yes, this is really important, and this is really important, and here they're revealing to us, through the choices they make, how important that really is. Do we have a question?

AP MEMBER: A quick question, and yes, sir. How many of these specific sort of survey questions were in in the study?

DR. LORENZEN: So we had them split between red snapper and gag grouper, and the levels -- So every person who did the survey I think got four of those, and they only got either the red snapper or the gag grouper, and the levels are here, and so, every time we put those choices together, basically, it randomly takes different levels for those different attributes.

DR. STEPHENS: Thank you, Dr. Kai, and is this a screenshot that we're looking at? I know it says example, but is this how the survey that went out to stakeholders is presented?

DR. LORENZEN: Yes.

MS. STEPHENS: Okay. A follow-up question. Is reef fish targeting closure defined, and, if so, how and where?

DR. LORENZEN: Correct, so the survey had explanations of all of these things, and so the reef fish targeting closure would be this is a time where you're not allowed to target reef fish, and so it's basically not bottom fishing at that period.

MS. STEPHENS: Does it say anywhere in the survey that it's a bottom closure?

DR. LORENZEN: Well, it describes it as a reef fish targeting closure, but it explains that it means you can -- You know, you can pelagic fish or something, but you can't, you know, fish reef fish habitat.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham. Just trying to follow up more on Haley's concept, is it a bottom fishing closure? Is that what you're saying?

DR. LORENZEN: Basically, yes. I mean, it's a -- You cannot target reef fish, right?

MR. WILLINGHAM: Okay. A bottom closure.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes.

MR. WILLINGHAM: All right, and I'm looking at the structure of this, and I just remember the Type K questions from school that they finally got rid of, where it was like a, b, c, d, or e, or one in the a and b, and c and d, and which one of the ones -- So, when you get down to Option 3, which is I would choose not to fish for this, that doesn't really give you -- To me, it doesn't -- It kind of tries to force you into this one, this one, or say you're not going to fish for red snapper, and it narrows it too strongly. I mean, maybe it's --

DR. LORENZEN: Well, yes, and so the idea is you are meant to have an opt-out in a in a discrete choice experiment, because so, if these are both options that you really don't like, you should have the option of saying no, I'm not -- I'm not going to do this, because, otherwise, if there wasn't the opt-out, then you would have to choose one or the other, right, even if you really dislike both. I mean, this follows normals of practice for designing discrete choice experiments, and so they're all are all these about what you're meant to do on one of those, and you have to have an opt-out, and, actually, not that many people used the opt-out.

MR. WILLINGHAM: I just -- I mean, I know you went through a lot of trouble, a lot of, you know, pain to make sure that there was no selection bias, but then it kind of hones-in and forces you to answer this, and forces you to answer that, or, you know -- To me, it's just -- You know, when you're trying to look at that, it's like, oh geez, and I have this, or this, or I don't answer at all, and so what does that mean when you actually look at the data later, and I'm curious.

DR. LORENZEN: Well, it's not you don't answer at all. You say I hate both of these, and I would not go fishing if these are the only options, right?

MR. WILLINGHAM: I'm anxious to see the rest. Thank you.

DR. LORENZEN: Okay, and then we get these coefficients about how people think about those different options, and I would like to explain how you read these coefficients, and it's basically so, if it's zero, it means I don't care about that attribute. If it's positive, it's a positive preference, and, if it's negative, it's I don't like it, and it's a negative preference.

Then, also, there's information here that tells you how statistically significant that coefficient is, and so these are for the red snapper, and you can see, for permit, a mild dislike of the permit, and then, the longer harvest season, both fifteen days and thirty days, people are in favor of. Targeting closures, interestingly, here that it shows you that also people are actually in favor of, and I'll come back to that.

Aggregated bag limit, people don't care about very much, and certainly not the smaller one. The larger one gets a bit more positive, but, actually, they're both not significant, or there are no stars next to it, and then there's the opt-out, mandatory stopping, and it also kind of leaves people relatively cold. Opt-out is strongly negative, which actually just means that very rarely people have opted out, and so they usually have chosen one or one or the other option.

This looks kind of interesting, and maybe surprising, but partly the reason we get this is that it throws together people with quite different attitudes and preferences, and, to get at that, we do something called a latent class analysis, and so that's looking at segmenting respondents into different groups based on their choice, and so it identifies preference patterns.

Then this becomes more interesting, and so, in this case, we found there are three classes of people really, and there's one class that is really, really strongly in favor of longer harvest seasons, and so the Class 1 here, and so clearly these are people who like a long harvest season, and they're probably very interested in harvesting, and they really dislike targeting closures, which makes some sense, right, if you really like one, and you dislike the other.

Then you can also see here so they're not very favorable to the smaller aggregate bag limit, which makes sense, because they're -- They really want to harvest, probably, and they're a bit more positive about the larger aggregate bag limit, and negative about mandatory stopping, and so this is about 42 percent of people in the survey were in this group, and then there's another class that is very different, and so they actually are opposed to longer harvest seasons, and they quite like, positively, targeting closures.

This would be a group of people who, in a sense, have a very conservation-minded view of the regulations here, and I know this throws people, when you say, so what, they're actually in favor of a targeting closure, and what's wrong with them, and, well, it's to do with the perception that there's a reason to have that, right, and so these are people who say I know I don't want a longer harvest season, and actually -- So these are these are people who have a very conservationist mindset, in a sense.

You know, just think about something, and so, when we were talking a little bit about spawning closures earlier on something else, and so, for example, if you ask people, and there was no spawning closure question in in this survey, but, if you ask a lot of anglers about whether they like spawning closures, they will say yes, and it's something that a lot of people are very positive about, and it's an example of something where people will come out positively in favor of a restricting regulation, because they feel it's important, and so this is where, you know, we're getting to this it's not only how it affects you directly, because it's negative, and you can't go fishing in the spawning closure, but people feel that it's an important and good thing to do.

This group basically is somewhat in favor of a targeting closure, and then you have the other survey, and they're negative about the aggregate bag limits and so on, and then there's a third class that is sort of a little bit of everything, but the main thing here to see is so it's not that, on average, people both like a longer harvest season and the targeting closure, but it's that basically we're mixing together two groups, and one group really wants a longer season, a longer harvest season, and does not want targeting closures, and there's another group that is sort of the opposite way. Okay, and so those are -- You know, to put it in more just a verbal description, those are these groups that we've already talked about.

Then we asked about a set of novel options, and one of those was harvest tags. The second was a sort of spatial closure idea, where you have -- This is exactly the descriptions that people were given, and so you say 50 percent of the water is closed for nine months, and open for three, and 50

percent is open year-round, and so these are -- The open and closed areas would rotate, and so this is sort of a flexible area closure model.

Then there was one that's an education requirement, where we said, well, you have to pass an intensive course to get that reef fish permit. The course would teach best catch and release, and ethical fishing practices, and it would cost you $25, and so what we find here, and this is, again, for the red snapper people, and this is everyone together, and you can see that, actually, they're all somewhat positive about all of those options, interestingly, and so the biggest being like somewhat, interestingly, they're actually here sort of more positive about the spatial management than about either the harvest tag or the education requirement.

That I think is also sort of interesting, because, of course, the spatial management is more restricting, right, than needing -- Well, maybe not the harvest tag, but it's more restricting than an education requirement, but my reading of this would be that, okay, if you have spatial management, there are certain things that you can't do at certain times, but, if you have to get a harvest tag, or you have to do that education thing, you have to do more before you can even go fishing, and people might be more averse to having to put that extra effort than they are to having some restrictions to where and when they can fish.

Okay, and gag grouper is a similar setup, but with different season lengths, obviously, and there so, because we had a lot fewer people do the gag grouper than the red snapper, and, actually, also, people were generally a lot less fired up about the options, and so you can see here a lot of things are quite close to zero, and so there are really no very strong feelings being revealed here about different management options.

We also did the latent classes, and, basically, again, it falls out there are some sort of people who are access-oriented pragmatists, we say here, and so, people who want flexibility access, they're unlikely to leave the fishery, and then we have the more conservation-oriented people, and some people, who are just really in favor of quite strong management, dislike like longer harvest seasons, and like the stopping rule, and so there are people who really want more regulations, but, since we had relatively few people do the gag grouper, well, you know, the results we have there are not as robust as what we have for the red snapper.

We also asked people so how would you change the number of fishing trips targeting red snapper, or gag grouper, in response to their preferred option, and so this puts all the options together, but the important part here is so that it was rare for people to say they would stop fishing, or decrease their fishing a lot in response to anything that we had, and some said they would just decrease a little, and most people said it would stay the same, or increase a little bit, and that is sort of interesting.

We're still analyzing this in relation to the specific options that we asked about, but I think it also kind of shows you that, of course, there is -- For a lot of anglers, there's a fair bit of resilience in this, and so, if you have regulations that you can't target reef fish at a particular time, they probably won't stop targeting the reef fish, and they will target them at the time when they can, and so on, and so there's not -- You know, it's not like -- You would get some level of effort response, but it would not be a lot of people fishing a lot less, and it would be a lot of people would find ways to fish roughly the same as they did before.

Okay, and I think the summary -- It's in the thing, and I'm not going to read all of that out, but I've already pretty much discussed all of these things, and, as I said, it's in your presentation file, and so it's coming back to finding out what anglers think, and I wanted to come back to that comparison with the email survey.

We also did that, and so here's demographic information for the incentivized panel and the email reef fish permits, and you can see one thing that differs is that we had 60 percent male and 40 percent female in the incentivized panel and 88 percent male and 12 female in the email survey, and this is sort of more the breakdown that we're quite used to from email surveys, and probably, you know, reflects participation also, to an extent.

Then we have -- In the incentivized panel, we have a more -- Sort of an age distribution that is stronger in the lower range, and so, when you look at the reef fish permits, very few people made more than $50,000, or even more than $100,000 a year, and so you have a stronger representation of higher-income people in the reef fish permit. Age-wise, it's very dominated, the permit, by thirty-five to sixty-four-year-olds, whereas the other, the incentivized panel, is more evenly distributed, and, of course, the reef fish permit, we had 100 people who were resident in Florida, versus the panel, and that has a distribution across the Gulf states, or not the Gulf. Sorry. The South Atlantic states.

Now, the interesting part -- There's also one important difference here, and was that the avidity -- The data is not on here, but I checked it, and so, in the incentivized panel, on average, people said they spent seven days a year snapper grouper fishing, whereas in the email panel, it was 16, and so they are substantially more avid, as we say, that that they fish more.

If we compare the discrete choice experiment results from the incentivized panel and the email survey, you can see that, in the email survey, and this is the average of everyone in the email survey, we got a stronger preference for longer harvest seasons, quite a lot stronger, and we got a negative preference for targeting closures, although it's interesting to see that the preference for a stronger --

For a longer harvest season is much stronger than the dislike of the targeting closure, and that was that was kind of interesting to see, and so they really, really care about the longer harvest season in particular, but, you know, this is maybe more what you would expect when you, you know, hear public comment, and you interact with anglers who, you know, come and interact with us, and then what you find in the email survey is maybe more what you're expecting.

If we compare that with our panel survey, you can see that, basically, the people who responded to the email survey, they're more similar to our Class 1 in the panel, and so it's that harvest-oriented a class of people in our panel survey, and so their responses are similar to what we have in the email survey, and so it seems -- When we do email surveys, it sort of overrepresents the people relative to the anglers at-large that are in this harvest-oriented group, but it also strongly represents people who are quite avid, which makes perfect sense, right? If you're an avid angler, you're more likely to respond to a survey about fishing than if you fish very occasionally.

There's also -- I think one thing, as we are sort of trying to understand particularly that harvest season and targeting closure views, I think, when you think about it, so, if you're not fishing very much, and you mostly are fishing to get -- To harvest something, the deal of having, you know, a

longer harvest season, and some level of -- Some targeting closure for a few months or so, it does not affect your fishing all that much, right, because, if you're spending five days fishing, you will focus those on the harvest season and on the time where you where you can bottom fish.

If you're a very avid angler, then the same regulations are much more constraining to your activity, right, and so there's some connection here between however people are -- How they view things and, you know, what management they prefer or dislike.

Okay, and so then, in angler population at-large, and so, again, you have to remember this captures the sort of anglers at-large, including, in particular, all those sort of people we virtually never hear from, either in in meetings or in email surveys, because they just don't do that, and so these are people who are not like engaged, or probably avid enough, to turn up for these things, but what we're looking at is trying to understand that whole angler population at-large, and so this really refers to that view of that large sort of at-large population that are broadly supportive for, you know, restrictive regulations, and have opinions on harvest and targeting closures, and most fishers seem open and interested in -- Open to and interested in novel options, and so restrictive regulations may well increase overall satisfaction, if they improve fishing, but they will also likely be opposed by a subgroup, and we know that, obviously.

Okay, and some uncertainties, and so I'm almost there. One thing that, of course, people ask is so should we trust the panel data, and I think, particularly if you're used to what you get in in public comments and so on, and even sometimes in email surveys, the first sort of knee-jerk reaction is to say this looks strange, and this is not what I'm hearing.

Now, the reason why you're not hearing that is that, you know, as we explained, there's a sort of selection for people with particular levels of interest and, you know, particular opinions to come to these things, but panel studies are expected, in a sense, to be most representative of the general angler population, because they don't favor those people who are most avid or regulation opposed. In terms of representing what that the angler population at-large thinks, from first principles, this is what we expect to be most representative.

We have species-specific uncertainty, as I already said, and we have much better information on red snapper than on gag grouper, because of the lower level of interest and number of responses, and then those discrete choice experiments also have some what we call hypothetical bias, because you are basically confronting someone with sort of hypothetical scenarios. It's not quite the same as them actually doing it, but it does give us a better appreciation of how people make choices than typically by just asking them, you know, how much do you like this or that or the other, because we're forcing people, through their choices, to reveal what they really care about, and I think that's sort of the -- That's the end. Yes. Thank you, and I'm here for questions.

Maybe, before we get into questions, again, I wanted to circle back to where we started, is to say that, really, what we're trying to do here is to gain a deeper understanding of how anglers at-large think, and this is not -- This is not management advice, and it's not input to a current plan development or anything, and we're trying to understand how anglers at-large think, including in particular those that we rarely hear from, and that is really, you know, what we're trying to do here, and so you can mull over those results, and I'm happy to take questions.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Kai. Any questions? Gettys.

MR. BRANNON: Thank you, Dr. Lorenzen. Gettys Brannon here. Just a few questions in looking through this, and so, on the audience selection with the survey, how are they qualified? Did you say it was if they fished within the last two years?

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and I'm pretty sure that's what it was. I can't remember if it was the last two or the last one year, but I think it was the last two years.

MR. BRANNON: Out of those people, and some of this was through a survey company, and you mentioned that they could have been asked questions about what burger they liked before they go to this, and were they opting in with $10 per survey that they were taking?

DR. LORENZEN: So the $10 is roughly what we had to pay the survey company, and I think not all of that would come to the person who does it.

MR. BRANNON: The reason I ask is because you see Facebook ads nowadays, and you see all kinds of stuff about getting incentives, you know, incentives, or cash, or gift cards or whatever, to take surveys, and I just question -- When I think about it from a polling perspective, if you look at the scientific -- I hate to say this during an election season, but a scientific political poll, and you don't poll those that have only voted two out of the last four elections, and you poll those that are four-for-four, or three-of-four, voters, because they have a knowledge of what they're looking at and what they're talking about.

When we get into the definitions and questions here about spatial closures versus reef fish targeting closures, do we expect that the casual folks are going to know that there's a difference there, or is there a difference there, and I guess what I'm saying is, when we look at this as a whole, I think the audience targeting could already set this up to have -- I appreciate what it's doing, by taking it away from the avid folks, but I think we might be getting too far out there in incentivizing somebody that was, you know, taking a test on burgers to comment on fishing, and not know if they're qualified to do that or not. Are there any guardrails in place for that?

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and, I mean, obviously, this is not like on, you know, Facebook trying to find random people, and so the companies maintain these panels for their, you know, demographic composition and so on. At the same -- Of course, we have to trust that people who say that they've been reef fishing have been reef fishing.

The question here of should we have asked for a longer period or something, I think the problem is so, if you make it very long, you get people who really aren't fishing anymore, and so I think two years is a decent sort of period, because you don't want people -- You know, you get this a lot with input, right, if you work with -- Often, the people who are really fishing don't like taking surveys and so on, but if the people who used to fish, who have more time at their hands, then they might do it, and so it's kind of tricky.

I agree that, you know, everything -- Although we're aiming to really remove as much bias as we can, there's always, you know, little wrinkles as to, you know, what people choose to respond, and you can see that, you know, for example, the income distribution here is such that -- So it has a stronger representation of less wealthy people, which I think it's meant to sort of emulate the income distribution of the population, and that's what they're trying to do with the survey, and so

it's partly that, but, also, yes, if you have relatively little income, you probably are more inclined to, you know, be on a survey panel, I mean, so there are all those things.

Also, you know, that's why, you know, we pair it with, in this case, the survey of the -- You know, the email survey, where we're getting a different demographic, and one that more typically responds to the email surveys that we do, and I also want to say that, of course, we still have the survey instrument, and we did offer, at the council, to, you know, share this, and so, if say states wanted to rerun this with their license holders, we're happy to support that.

I think the council can't do it, because it's asking more than eight people their opinion on something, but, you know, the Paperwork Reduction Act, but absolutely if, you know, say the states, or some other organizations, want to try and run this instrument, which we have ready, then we're very happy to do that, and that will -- Again, depending on how you select your respondents, and they self-select, then what they -- Whether they respond, you might get somewhat different answers.

MR. BRANNON: Thank you. Yes, sir, and that was the next question I had, was actually about the income distribution. I saw on the cross tabs that it does look like the reef fish permits are probably a little closer to what the true demographic of the folks that are fishing often, that are out there, but, to your point, I noticed that as well, but thank you for that.

Then, also, I wanted to ask you, and I know I asked a little while ago, how many questions they were asked, and do you have the full poll, or the full survey?

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and I have that. I don't have the -- I mean, so, basically -- I mean, I don't have it in my hand, but I can -- I'm also very happy to share the survey, and so, if you guys want to see the whole survey, I can totally -- I can send you a link. It's difficult to print it out, because it has very complex -- By the way, it sort of channels you into, you know, the species you most care about and so on, but I can -- I'm very happy to share, you know, survey access, so you can play with it.

MR. BRANNON: I appreciate that. One other question I had for you, and then I'll wrap up here, but, on the scenarios that we were looking at a little while ago, especially if we take into account that we don't know if we're asking -- If we truly have a reef fisherman or not, and were all of these pre-baked options, that really concede that, if you have more regulations, you end up with more days, because, as we know, one of the main issues with this entire system, is that we've seen, for the last I don't know how many years, that more regulations on red snapper has not resulted in more days.

I get, again, going back to the broader picture of trying to get more folks to be engaged, but, if they're only fishing once every two years, or maybe even five or six times every two years, I'm not sure that they're qualified to really dissect what these options mean, because it sort of gives you the false choice that regulations equal more access, and that's not the case.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and I don't -- I mean, of course, we don't know what, you know, thoughts they had when they responded, and I think it's an interesting question. Obviously, you know, this will have included a lot of people who don't have very in-depth knowledge of the fishery, or management, and that was kind of one purpose, because we -- You know, but, of course, they're

all sort of stakeholders, and they're all people who buy fishing licenses and so on, no matter whether they really understand all the intricacies or not.

It's useful to know how they think about it, even if that is based on perceptions rather than deep knowledge, and, of course, once you get to, you know, talking with people who are very engaged, you still have, you know, people who have very strong perceptions, and sometimes unrealistic perceptions and so on, and so there's really a question, you know, if you say are you qualified, where do you draw the line, and when is someone really qualified to have an opinion that we should listen to, right? Essentially, when you do public comment, I mean, anyone who comes and says something --

MR. BRANNON: I definitely think everybody is entitled to an opinion, and that's not what I'm saying at all. I just want to know that we're looking at this as sort of a dataset that we don't know if the ones that have wanted, you know, extreme closures, or more favorable towards extreme closures, if they fished once in the past two years, or if they fished twenty times in last two years, or, in the case for many around the table, you know, countless amount of times the last two years.

I think it would be interesting to see, on the cross tabs down, you know, into the data, and getting more granular, to see how the volume of trips taken by these respondents corresponds with their attitude towards some of the broader scale of do we close down an area, or do we close down a specific group of species of fish to target.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and so, obviously, there's a lot more information in this survey than I was able to present, and we've even completely analyzed, and so this is something we're still looking at. A little bit -- I mean, you did see that sort of the people who did the reef fish permit email survey were way more avid than the people who were in the incentivized panel, and they were, you know, stronger in favor of a longer season, and against targeting closures, and, you know, again, of course, yes, if you are more avid, those restrictions are more restricting to you than if you're not so avid, and that may be something to do with it, although I'm sure there's more.

MR. BRANNON: Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Gettys. John, did you have something?

MR. POLSTON: I just had a quick question. All these surveys and stuff I think is great information and stuff, but is this going to have anything to do with actual management, these surveys, or is just this more or less an FYI for everybody to know these people's opinion?

DR. LORENZEN: Right, and so I think maybe we can eventually call Chip back to talk about the MSE, but so, at the moment, it's mostly the latter. It's information that we have about, you know, what sort of anglers at-large, including those that we really very rarely, or never, hear from think about these management issues.

It should help us, and so the management strategy evaluation basically builds a big model of the whole fishery, including, you know, how people respond to regulations and so on, and then we use information about people's preferences to see, you know, how good a management option is in terms of, you know, does it meet the people's preferences or not.

Having this information, and also understanding that there are, you know, different groups, with quite different preferences, is very useful, but we're talking about longer-term information, and so it will eventually -- Hopefully that MSE will eventually be used to look at management options, but there's no immediate now we need to do this or that, because of the results that we have here, but I do think it's sort of a fascinating insight into both, you know, what anglers at-large think, including the ones that we rarely hear from, but also how the responses that we get to things like email surveys of license holders, which, you know, we often do, and they're cheap, and they're free almost, and so we kind of like doing those, but this helps us understand how that selects for, you know, people of a relatively high level of vividity, and probably with more sort of specialized knowledge and opinions, than the people who are not in that category.

MR. POLSTON: The only other thing I was just going to say is, I mean, I understand the concept and everything, but the reason we're here, the AP, and the reason that we have a council, and the reason we have the SSC and everything like that, is it's supposed to be based on science, and not what people's preferences of what they want, and stuff like that. I guess it's okay to know what people want, and stuff like that, and that's probably helpful, but we're -- I thought we were supposed to be basing everything, how we open the fisheries, and who can catch it and who can't catch it by the science.

DR. LORENZEN: Well, this is sort of social science, right, and so it does have -- All of these methods we have to better understand, you know, angler preferences, and also angler behaviors, and, when you think about it, it's true that science is -- You know, certainly when it comes to setting the ABC, we're meant to only look at the biological science, right, but, in a lot of decision-making, clearly, you know, we can consider, you know -- You do that in in your AO deliberations, right, and you talk about, well, if we do this, how is it going to affect people, and how much people are going to like it or hate it, and this is kind of a deeper dive into how people think about certain management measures and so on.

I think, you know, other than the ABC setting, of course, a lot of the management is not just based on science, but it's based on sort of two things, right, and it's based on, you know, what you deliberate in the in the AP for example, and the council does, and it gets the public input, and so this is another source of information that tells you something about how people look at these things, and, again, particularly people we don't normally hear from, and who are not at the table, because, I mean, all of you are at the table because you're knowledgeable, and very engaged, and, you know, for most of you it's your livelihood, right?

We listen a lot to people who come to meetings, and, you know, are present, but we're also managing fisheries for all of the American people, right, including the people who don't turn up, and then this tells us something about what the people think and prefer who don't turn up for management.

DR. COLLIER: Just to build on what Kai has been saying, you know, ideally, this study would have come out, and had one group of people, and said this management alternative is awful, and we could take that into the MSE and say we don't need to evaluate that, and everybody said -- Everybody agrees that that's a bad idea.

Unfortunately, everybody has different opinions, and so I think that's what Kai's group found here, is different groups of people, and they have different concepts of how they think the fishery could

be operated. It's not necessarily that we have to evaluate those all. I mean, ideally, we could have crossed some of these items off the list, and been able to move forward with the MSE in a simpler process, but I think, you know, these things could still be evaluated in different ways, and that's why the researchers went beyond what some of the folks kind of wanted to see.

They wanted to push the extremes, to say, all right, what do you absolutely hate, and I think we found some of those that they didn't like very much, and so that's informative to management. It's, all right, those are no-go, and let's avoid those, and it can find where management can go a little bit, but, you know, when we were putting the survey together, I think the main researcher kind of indicated that we're not going to get every answer in the first survey, you know, and we need to get information from what people want out of their fishery, and it's not just this AP, and it's -- You know, that's why we have public hearings, and we don't just come to the AP and say this is the amendment, and this is how the council will move forward.

We have to go to public hearings to get input from everyone. Unfortunately, when you go to our public hearings, there are very few people that show up. Five or six people, we don't feel like that's a pretty good sample size to understand what's going on, and what people want, and so this was an opportunity to reach out and get a broader concept, or get broader feedback, on what people were thinking.

MR. POLSTON: Honestly, I get the concept of what you're trying to do, but I also know, and I've been in it a long time, that you guys talk about, all the time, that you don't have enough time or money to be doing certain things, and is this -- What you're doing now, is this honestly accomplishing something, rather than doing another, you know, survey on another species of fish, or something like that, which has a lot to do with people, you know, commercial or recreational fishing, and that was -- I mean, devil's advocate or whatever you want to say. You know, I'm not against it, and I just -- That's what I was saying.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, I mean, because the MSE is looking at recreational -- Is concentrating on recreational fisheries, you know, we felt like we needed to reach out to that group. You know, when we talk to the AP, and, you know, the commercial side of things, it's a smaller group, and we feel like you guys have really good connections, and so it's not as hard to get really good feedback on how the commercial fishery operates, or the charterboat fishery operates.

The private recreational fishery is a different beast. We're talking millions of people, and it's hard to get all the concepts, and all the ideas, of how they want their fishery managed, and we just have not -- I mean, even looking at the AP this year, in this group, we have more representatives of private recreational fishing, but, in the past, it's been maybe one or two individuals have represented the private recreational fishery. It's usually somebody from the Keys and somebody up off the Carolinas.

I mean, I don't feel like that's a great representation, and so just trying to reach out and do it, and you're absolutely right that we always have limited budgets. We did have some additional funds, because of COVID, where we weren't traveling in the past, and so this was an opportunity to go out and get more information for a study that we had going on. We don't have funding to do this research in the future, which is unfortunate, but social science is an important aspect of fisheries management that we quite often overlook, and it could be valuable to get more information on it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chip. Paul, you have a question?

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Thanks for the presentation, Dr. Kai. My question was, and maybe this goes along with what Chip just said, and could you go back, or maybe hindsight is 20-20, and you would have to conduct a whole new study, but weight the influence of each survey respondent by their input in the fishery, meaning, if they fish a greater number of days targeting snapper grouper in the southeast U.S., you could weight that response more heavily in your statistical modeling compared to an angler just fishing once every, whatever that is, 365 days times two, and once every two years?

DR. LORENZEN: So that's an interesting point, and so, yes, because we did ask people how many days did you go snapper grouper fishing in the last year, and so that's what I talked about, sort of seven on average in the panel, and sixteen on average in the email survey and so on, and it is true that, you know, as citizens, all of these people, you know, are valued the same, but, of course, the people who fish more spend more money in the fishery, and they're more -- They have a bigger impact, and so on and so forth.

Also, those are the people you see more, because the people who fish much more often are now out there more often, right, and so there's actually, in terms of who you meet out on the water, and in terms of how much impact people have, and those are not -- They are not all the same, and so, yes, you can totally weigh things by, you know, the amount of trips they take, or the number of trips or so on.

This is also something that, you know, where it comes back to if you -- You might say, okay, and so now how do we use this in our view of how to manage, and even in the MSE, and, you know, we have an implicit weighting, right, and we often weigh people who are more avid, and who turn up to our meetings and so on, and we sort of weigh their opinions more strongly than the people we never see.

There's also -- But they also are sort of having a greater impact in every way, both, you know, on the fishery and economically and so on, and so those are all things that one can think about and, you know, apply different weightings and so on, and so we're not done with just this information, but we can derive more of those considerations, and then, yes, provide that information. Thanks.

MR. KIMREY: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris, and thank you, Dr. Kai, for all your continued hard work on this. Will this survey be used to inform the snapper grouper MSE?

DR. COLLIER: So, yes, it can be used to inform the MSE.

MS. STEPHENS: Is that the plan?

DR. COLLIER: Well, yes, and the plan is to incorporate this into the MSE. Now, the exact findings, we're going to have to work out how to do that, right, and it's -- The council has recommended that we investigate an aggregate bag limit first, and go beyond that.

If we're not getting where we need to be as far as sustainability targets, then we would consider closed areas, closed seasons, in addition to those aggregate bag limits, and so, if there was a higher preference for one of them, and my brain is not working right now which one would be better, but, you know, we were trying to figure out, all right, could we do this and not really upset the apple cart as much in one direction or the other, and, you know, I feel like there's some groups that indicated we're okay with a shorter season, or a longer season, you know, and we're going to have to evaluate all these things. We did not come up with a single answer that says you can eliminate this alternative as being non-viable.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chip. May I, to that point? Dr. Kai or Chip, the incentivized panel, were those saltwater license holders? I know, obviously, the reef fish survey are, but, the kind of randos that we're talking about, are those South Atlantic license holders?

DR. LORENZEN: Well, I mean, if they're fishing, most of them should be saltwater license holders.

MS. STEPHENS: So we're assuming?

DR. LORENZEN: Wait, and so let me let me finish this, and so we're -- Obviously, we don't know, because, in Florida, we can get the license database, and we could check, you know, if people are license holders, or are the other people with the reef fish permit. They actually are not all license holders, because you don't need a license when you're over sixty-five in Florida, but you still need a reef fish permit if you want to go reef fishing, and so you have to go and, you know, get that free reef fish permit, but, for the other states, we don't have that. We don't have that access, and so we -- I mean, we have to assume that, if people are going reef fishing, they have a they have a recreational -- If they're recreational reef fishing, they have a recreational license, but, you know, we can't check that. Of course, in the survey panel, also, we do not have their personal information, and so the company doesn't tell us that this was Joe from Columbia, you know, and so we don't have that.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. You know, I know that the snapper grouper MSE has been in development for a while, and I've had the privilege of being involved, to some extent, and I know what a big project it is. I know how time consuming it is, and how many folks, and I would assume, since we're just assuming a lot of things, it's probably expensive, you know, but that's not really any of my business.

I just -- I wonder if there is utility in calling it what it is, whether you call it a targeting reef fish closure, spatial management discard reduction area, and I just wonder if there's so many terms out there for what we're actually talking about that, if you were to run the survey back, and do some type of a and b testing, to see if that does yield the same result, because we all know that a challenge in our fisheries management, and stakeholder engagement, is transparency.

You know, I don't feel like it's any secret around this table that trust and rapport with what the council is doing is relatively low, and I know that we've been working really, really hard to gain some of that back, and I feel like we are making really good strides, and we are making a lot of progress, and so I just -- I wonder if, you know, moving forward, we can kind of keep those things in mind.

I already know the answer, but, just for the record, this is purely recreational anglers that we're surveying, and this may or may not have included a charter boat, because you don't know who we're actually surveying, and I wonder if the results may have been different had you asked a for-hire or charter fleet, but the struggle with us in the South Atlantic is that we are all lumped together, and so decisions that could potentially be made based on purely recreational input, you know, what that would look like, and I know that our Regional Administrator pointed that out at the last council meeting.

Just while I have the mic, and then I'll wrap up here, you know, I hope that all of us are sitting here thirty years from now. I do, but, if for some reason we're not, four, eight, ten, twenty, thirty years down the road, a fear of mine would be that we look back, a different group looks back on this, and says, oh, and it turns out recreational totally is fine with bottom closures, and so I do just want to keep that in mind.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. Kai, did you want to --

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and I just wanted to follow-up on Haley's question about, you know, the charter, and so, yes, we only did recreational anglers, and they may be fishing from their own private boat, or they may be fishing from a charter boat, and so -- But we did not specifically seek out charter captains, or, you know, charter operators, and so this was really people who individually recreationally fish, and that may may have included someone who also is a charter captain, but we -- For certainly the panel, we don't know that.

It would, obviously, be interesting to do a survey on charter captains, and we can totally do that. I mean, we could modify this, and, as you pointed out, I mean, the charter sector is kind of caught in the exact same regulations in the South Atlantic, right, as the private recreational, and you can -- Yes, it's absolutely possible to -- You know, you would probably make a slight modification.

Instead of referring to their personal fishing, you would refer to their, you know, charter operation, but we can totally do that, and particularly if, you know, we can get. you know, a list of contacts that we can, you know, we can contact, and we can totally do that.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Gettys.

MR. BRANNON: Thank you, Dr. Lorenzen. Gettys Brannon again, and just a couple of questions, after hearing some of Haley's questions, and so, in the order that the questions were given to the respondents, did it start out sort of in the same flow it was -- That it was presented?

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and it's the same flow.

MR. BRANNON: So it starts out with regulations are necessary to prevent overfishing?

DR. LORENZEN: Do you mean the specific -- So I thought you meant the survey overall, and you're looking at the --

MR. BRANNON: I guess where I'm going with this is that's sort of asking if like taxes are necessary to have core functions of government, and so like you have to have some sort regulations for overfishing, and so I think it starts out with a premise that's already guiding the answers in a

certain direction, if you don't know much about what we're looking at, but, to Paul's point a minute ago, I think, if we could weigh out how many times the folks have been fishing, you can understand that understanding or not, but I think Haley had a basic question that I want to go back to, that I think is important if you're going through a survey company.

The only reason I'm dialing-in on this a little bit is, if it's going to the MSE to inform, you know, management decisions, and we didn't ask if the respondent had a fishing license, I think that is a -- I think that is a core flaw to the survey. I think, if you're going to ask someone what their views are on fishing, you have to have some qualifying questions upfront, and not knowing if 89 percent, or 98 percent, had fishing licenses I think is probably not a good place to start, but that's just my opinion, and I kind of geek out on surveys, and so I'm sorry for forgetting the weeds, but I do think that that was a basic question that that doesn't need to be overlooked.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and the problem is that you don't need a fishing license to legally reef fish, right, and so, if you're over sixty-five, you don't need one in Florida, and I don't know about the other states. If you're on a on a headboat, you don't need a fishing license, generally, right, and so, you know, you can't disqualify people on that basis.

I mean, if they are reef fishing, they are reef fishing whether or not they have a fishing license, or, I mean, we don't -- We don't know. I mean, they could have said, yes, I'm reef fishing, and they're not, but I think it's unlikely, because, also, you know, one of the things that I think is interesting is that there was nothing -- I mean, there may be some patterns that are a bit surprising, but there's nothing actually that doesn't make sense when you look at those, because, you know, we do have people who have those different opinions and so on, and, if we had a lot of willy-nilly people, who are just clicking and clicking through, also those would have ended up in in some bizarre category, but these actually -- They sort of generally make sense.

I think we -- You know, we had discussed the question of the fishing license, and decided not to use it, because it -- Because of the complexity of when you need a license and when you don't, and it's not as informative as --

MR. BRANNON: I do think though, especially when we're looking at the crosstabs here, it's only 9 percent that were over sixty-five, and so we're assuming that that more than -- You know, the average person that goes fishing has a fishing license, and can we agree on that, or is that -- Are we saying that that's --

DR. LORENZEN: Well, not in Florida. We have a lot of old people who fish who don't have a fishing license.

MR. BRANNON: That's probably true, but I'm just wondering if we can't dial-in, maybe on stuff you already have, to give a more -- Because even the sample size, and 1,936 is a -- That is a huge sample size. That's a good sample size.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes.

MR. BRANNON: So, I mean, even if you could dial-in a little bit further, and I just started getting a little nervous when I heard that it's going to be taken into account for the MSE, and informing some of those decisions, and we don't even know if these correspondents have fishing licenses or

not, and I don't know, and that just -- That does give me heartburn, and I just needed to have it on the record, but I do appreciate it, and I think this is a thought-through study.

DR. LORENZEN: Thank you, and we can absolutely, you know, dig down more into the information we have, and, obviously, we can't now ask those people if they had a fishing license.

MR. KIMREY: Gettys and Kai, thank you. We're going to let Jessica speak real quick, and then we've got to roll. We've got to keep moving, guys. A lot of these questions can followed-up on outside of the meeting, and this isn't really a talking point. This is more an informational sort of thing.

Before we go to Jessica, just remember the MSE is -- They're developing this as a tool, and it's fluid. It's going to be fluid, and so, you know, I know that that spatial closure -- It struck a nerve with a few people in here, and everybody was like, oh, and just remember, you know, we can come back to it, and you can talk about it offline. but we've got to keep moving. Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I just wanted to -- I heard something about the fishing license that I just wanted to correct a little bit, and so, in Florida, even if you're over sixty-five, and you don't need a fishing license, you are still required to sign up for the State Reef Fish Survey annually, and so, even if you bought like a five-year license, or a lifetime fishing license, you are still required, or if you're exempt, to go in there and sign up that it is your intent to go offshore to reef fish in Florida. I felt like I just wanted to clarify that, that it's not like we're missing a ton of people over sixty-five here. We can't, you know, kind of go back to that universe of people in Florida, but we do have that universe somewhat narrowed down, and so I just wanted to point that out.

MR. KIMREY: Thank you very much for that clarification, and I'm going to let David have twenty seconds, if he wants it. Otherwise, we're going to move along. We're going along? Keep it brief if you can, man.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, trying to keep it brief, and I'll just talk at a bunch of things here. I know you made comments earlier and said it's not a management advice tool, but, once this becomes a peer-reviewed article in a journal, then somebody is going to pull that out and use it as management advice.

Also, I noticed, in the actual document, there was 7,889 responses received, but only 1,967 of those were deemed useful for analysis, and then, when you drop down to your conclusions, you say, well, should we trust the panel data, and my question is nope, and then, if you go to the seven conclusions that were in the paper that was presented back on February 12, and I'm trying to be as brief as possible, it says most respondents cared more about red snapper than gag, and we know that, and the model results suggested that overall responses wanted a longer harvest season, and no question about that, more than two days, and then the way just the verbiage -- It says they disliked the fee-based permit, but actually preferred three to six-month closures over no targeting closures, and that's where I go back to that question about the Option 1 and Option 2 and no option.

If you look back at that, that kicks out as one of those possibilities, you know, and even it's saying that they didn't really care about the aggregate bag limit, but, if you chose neither Option 1 or Option 2, then that skews the data, and so thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks. You did good. You kept it brief, because I could see you were about to explode down there. All right, and so check it out. Here's what it going to happen. It is 2:40. We're going to take five minutes, and we're going to come back, and it's going to be a long afternoon, okay?

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. KIMREY: All right, everybody. We're still way behind, and we've got to keep rolling here. We're going to step away from the recreational MSE workgroup findings surveys, and we're going into something that's probably going to be interesting. All right. Here we go, and this is this is Mike. We've got Mike taking us through here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we're going to be going through Snapper Grouper Amendment 60. This is the council's amendment where they are looking to make some changes within the commercial fishery. They've got several items. One of the things that I do want to note, before we dive into all the specifics that are here, is the council has kind of designated a few members, mostly commercial representatives and then state agency representatives, and they've kind of formed a subcommittee of council members.

They've been the ones that have really been doing a lot of the legwork of developing this amendment, and I need to hit the play button. I always forget to do that, but they've been a lot of the legwork for this amendment, and that subcommittee met earlier this week. They met Monday and Tuesday of this week, and so mentioned it, I think earlier within this meeting, and I don't know. The two meetings back-to-back kind of blur together a little bit, but there have been changes to this document, and I've tried to add some of those.

They're not on the website right now, but I've tried to add some of those into the document being presented today, and so you'll see some places where there's a line through an item that the council -- That the subcommittee took out of that area, or you might see some highlighted language, and I'll point that out as we go through, but I just wanted to give you the warning ahead of time that that's why those changes are there from what you originally got in your briefing book a couple of weeks ago.

This item, or I guess this amendment, got started up, I guess going back to March of 2024, when the when the subcommittee, was formed and they've been working through this item. It has gone through scoping at this point, and the last council meeting in March -- There's kind of a summary, and they kind of further worked on some of these actions, these items, and we'll see kind of the results of that, as well as their meeting earlier this week, further in the document.

Your objectives for this meeting, for the AP, kind of your action items, are for you all to provide some initial review and some initial input on the actions and the alternatives that are being brought to you. If there's any additional information that, you know, you've been following some of the some of the meetings, and you haven't seen something that it would be useful to be presented for the council considerations, then, you know, stating that, and we can go and try to locate that information.

Then any stakeholder perspectives that you have on the considered actions that may not show up in some of the traditional data sources, you know, how it may be affecting businesses, or how it

may be affecting, you know, customer demand for certain things. If you have any perspectives along those lines, then that would be helpful information as well. Also, anything that you don't see in the document, that you think should be there under some of these actions, then feel free to note that.

The purpose and need has changed somewhat. I'm not going to highlight all of those, because we kind of got marching orders from the subcommittee, and then we need to make those adjustments and bring them back some draft language, and that's not specifically the action items, and so I'm going to hold off on that. You'll see that again in October of this year, when we bring this back to you in a more closer-to-complete form.

The timeline of this amendment, and I guess I've misstated. March of 2025 is when it was initiated, and not 2024, but you'll see the timeline of this amendment, kind of the steps that it's gone through, and the steps that are remaining, and so I want to highlight that we're here in April, and we have the AP meeting, some initial feedback. In June, the council will consider this amendment for approval for public hearings, and then public hearings would potentially be held in summer of this year.

In September, the council would review the public comment that's provided over the summer. In October, this amendment is going to come back to you all, and so this is not your last chance to see it. There's several pieces of analyses that have been presented to the council that I'm not going to present today, just for time considerations, and because, once again, you'll see this again later on, but all that information is on the council website. If you have questions about specific information that you may have seen at the subcommittee meeting, or that you saw at a previous council meeting, let me know, and I can direct you to any of the presentations that have already been provided, but I'm not going to go through all those pieces of information for today.

We're going to really focus more on the actions, and kind of the big picture today, and we can dial-in a little bit more in October, after things are a little bit closer to final form, and so that's kind of the overview of the timeline, and then the council would consider this for final approval from their end in December of this year. That's the timeline that we're currently working with.

The next thing would be the actions and alternatives, and I'll pause here, just to see if there are any initial questions about the council's process up to this point in developing this amendment and before we dive into the actions.

MR. KIMREY: Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I was just curious, on the public hearings in summer 2026, what platform is that going to be on?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: If you have input on what platform that should take place on, that might be something to inform, because, I mean, a normal process for us is to use webinars, and some public hearings are done in-person. We've done both types of platforms, but, if you think that there is a need for a specific one -- Like we will do webinars likely regardless, but, if you think an in-person hearing is really needed for this type of amendment, then feel free to let the let the council members know.

MR. MARINKO: I just didn't want to miss it, and so I was trying to make sure I knew when it was. Because of the June meeting, and it's not there, and you're just going to approve it, and then, in September, you're going to review it, and I was wondering. I mean, I'm busy that time of year, and so I'm trying to make sure I at least make a note, or a reminder, so I don't miss it. That's all. I don't know -- It doesn't matter to me.

MR. KIMREY: Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: You don't have a ton of time, but I would really be interested in hearing a very short discussion about the preference of fishermen you know, online or in-person, and I often make the argument, because of the age of the commercial fleet, that in-person is something that is needed for something like this, but I don't want to keep making that argument if it's not true, and so, if you guys have strong feelings, say it. If you don't, don't worry about it, but that would be helpful to us.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Kerry. Jeff, are you good?

MR. MARINKO: Yes, and I don't -- In the summer, I'm always more webinar kind of, because I have Starlink on the boat, and so I can at least comment that way. In-person, if it was in-person only, almost zero chance I'll make it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. Back to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so, not seeing any other hands, I'll go ahead and get into actions and alternatives, and so the first action is consideration of removing the two-for-one policy for the snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit, and so just a couple of background points, for those that are -- That, you know, may not necessarily be commercial, and may not be as familiar with what's what goes on in that aspect of the fishery.

There is a limited number of commercial permits, and there are two types of permits. There is the SG 1, which is also called the unlimited permit, and that means that you're constrained by your trip limits for each species, but there's no overall overarching limit on the amount of snapper grouper that you can catch on that boat as long as you are subject to the trip limits that that you have, that are in place for each of the individual species.

That as opposed to the SG 2 permit, or this is also called the 225 permit, and, those vessels that have a 225 permit, they can catch snapper grouper species. They're still subject to the individual species trip limits, but there is an overall you cannot catch -- You cannot harvest more than 225 pounds of snapper grouper overall on that on that one trip, and so they have an overall snapper grouper trip limit, and the SG 1 do not, and so we're only talking about the SG 1, that unlimited permit in Action 1.

Actually, just to make sure I note this for everybody, the 225 permit, there's a place for a discussion within this meeting for that permit, and it's not being addressed in Amendment 60. Changes to that are not being addressed in this amendment. The council does want to get a bit of a pulse check on what the commercial fishery wants to do with that permit in the long-term future, but that is something that would be a future action, another amendment at another time, and this action only involves the SG 1 permit itself.

In relation to the snapper grouper SG 1 permit, that permit can be transferred from one person to another. It is transferable, but, in order to transfer a permit, in order for someone to acquire that permit, they need to acquire two SG 1 permits and then exchange them for a single SG 1 permit, okay, and so that means -- As that policy has gone on over time, a market for these permits, and they've gained monetary value, and so you would you would be purchasing these permits from another permit holder.

There are no new permits that are being issued for these SG 1, or the SG 2 for that matter, and there are no new commercial permits that are being issued within that fishery. It's just the transfers of those that already exist.

This action would consider removing that two-for-one policy, and so, if somebody wanted to acquire that SG 1 permit, then they could do so on a one-for-one basis. They just need to find somebody that they could purchase one single SG 1 from, and then there would be a one-to-one exchange, rather than the two-for-one exchange.

The reason why this action has come about, and there are people who -- We've heard voices in favor of it, and we've heard voices opposed to it, and so, you know, we're certainly looking for the perspectives on that, but one of the reasons why this has come about, and is being considered right now, is because we've heard that there is difficulty for those that are trying to enter the fishery of being able to meet the cost of two permits.

There has also been concern about the number of commercial fishermen, the size of the fleet, the aging out of the fleet, and the difficulty for younger people to be able to enter into that when there is that level of initial expense of having to get two permits in order to exchange them for a single one, and so that's some of the motivation as to why the action came about.

There are only two alternatives here that the council is putting on the table at this point. It's either keep the two-for-one policy in place or remove the two-for-one policy and allow transfers to be made on a one-to-one basis. The limited access nature of the permit is not going away, and it will still be limited access, and the council, within the within the subcommittee meeting earlier this week, they stated the intent of this action, and kind of overall within this amendment, is to maintain the current number of permits. It's not to increase the number of permits, and it's not to further reduce the number of permits. They're looking to maintain the number of permits that are currently in the fishery right now. I do see a hand, and so I'll pause and take John's question.

MR. POLSTON: Mike, the only thing I wanted to just point out, and I don't see where -- The way I think the rule, or the law, is actually written is it's two-for-one if the entity changes, and that's not up there, and if you guys got -- You know, you're going into a new law, because, you know, there's corporate permits out there, and I can sell my corporate permit, and it doesn't have to be two-for-one, but that doesn't say anything about that up there, and so I just wanted to point that out.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, John, and we'll make sure we clarify that. We'll note that, rather than saying "person", we would say "entity", but, yes, and appreciate that. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I hope I don't make you all's head hurt on this one, because this is a pet peeve of mine. Number one, I talked to Chris about this a while we was on lunch, and I never really thought about it, but the monetary value of these permits, in mine and Chris's opinion, and they're only opinions, is, basically, if you buy two, you're paying the price for one now, and so, when they do go one-for-one, or if they do go that route, your monetary value is going to come down some, but, in a short period of time, they're going to go right back up, and so, number one, that rules out the actual money to get into the fishery.

Number two, a lot of us bit the bullet and paid that money to get into this fishery. Number three, when you throw all of these permits into this fishery, you're going to start having closed seasons, because you're going to overfish it, and I've asked for this two or three times, I think in the last two meetings, and what is the number of a sustainable fishery with the quotas that we have today?

How many one-for-ones are there still left, and how many corporates, and that would give everybody a little bit of an idea of how many are these going to change, and there's one person on our council that is driving this thing, and there is also the problems of people leasing these permits.

The reason they're wanting to put them back in to service is because some people don't want to lease these permits out, because they don't want the liability, and they're not going to use them, and so -- That brings me to my next thing that me and Chris was talking about, and, these ACLs for our allocations on the commercial side, we're -- We haven't met our beeliners or our triggerfish, I think in three years, and so what's going to happen, a little bit down the road, is that we're going to start losing some of this to the rec side.

People that really live in the commercial side need to pay attention what they're doing, because we're going to lose some of our fish. It's coming, and we can't afford to lose no more, and so I'm going to ask this again, and I would like to know how many single permits are left, how many corporate permits are there, and how many permits is it going to take to make this sustainable, because, when me and Jack and Chris was going to do the EFP, and I said this in the last meeting, the study that they done, and they had some attorney do this, the number was around 300.

I think today there's still 500 and some permits that are still active, and so you're going to throw almost double the amount of permits that we have back into this little circle, and, when things are decent, the people that do it for a living can't even sustain to stay in business, and so I just -- I think, before somebody really pushes this, and wants to do it, there needs to be a little bit more information given to the AP board, and, like I say, I've asked for this two or three times, and it just gets swept under the rug, but these ACLs, for what we're getting, and they're not reaching them, and the rec side is going to wind up getting this fish in about five years, and, if you all don't believe me, you just watch and see it happen.

Everybody needs to think about that, and, while I'm on this, and this ain't the right place for this, but, as far as these ACLs are concerned, and I'm going to use the beeliners specifically, I think there needs to be some kind of system in place that, if we're going to run a ten-box trip limit for -- What I have is the old school boats, which a lot of our boats are thirty-five and over.

Why could we not have some kind of system to where, as we get down into the last thirty days of that ACL so let's just call it June 1 until July 1, if we're at 50 percent of that ACL, or 75, why can't

those trip limits go up a little bit to try to catch the ACLs, because we're basically stuck at ten boxes, and the triggerfish are the same way.

I don't know what the total was, and maybe one of the council members has it, but they used to combine this stuff together to where your ACLs was of the whole year. Well, now you've got it in two portions, and so it's -- Unless you go back and look at it, you don't know what you left on the table, and so it's just my thoughts, and look, and I don't care either way. It's just my opinion, and we do this for a living, and we've got people that does it for a living, and I fished this when we had closures, and you didn't know what you're going to do for three months, and it's hard to keep your boat captains, and your mates, when they can't work but seven or eight months out of the year.

I just think there needs to be a little bit more information in this than what we're just getting up here on the board, because I think that what we're getting is just a little bit misleading, because nobody here realizes really what's going to happen.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thanks, Scott, and so, just in in response to several points made there, as far as the trip limits themselves, those are being -- There are several trip limits within this amendment that are being considered for increases, and vermilion being one of them, and we'll get to that later in this document.

As far as the information that you that you've noted, so there have been two presentations that you may find very helpful from the Southeast Regional Office Permits Office. They were given in March of 2026 and then earlier this week when the subcommittee met, and so, if you look on the board, there are several breakdowns here, but your question, as far as individual ownership versus business or corporate ownership, you see breakdowns there.

As far as the number of total permits, this is another example of one of the breakdowns, and there are several different categories that these are -- That these breakdowns have been put into, and so like the number of permits in 2024 was 512 SG 1, and this table was looking at those permits that had landings, versus those that were latent, and I'll talk again a little bit about the latent permits within the context of this amendment, but these are two of those areas where the council has gotten some information.

I'm not going to go through all of it today, just because of time constraint, and because all this information is available to you online, and I'm happy to follow up with you individually afterwards, so I can point you to where these are, but both of these presentations are on the council website, and so you can look through them as you kind of think through this, and we'll go through this in a bit more depth when the AP meets again in October. That's where we'll get a bit more of a deep dive on the on the specifics of it.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and can you go back to the slide before the one you were at? If you go down to 2024, and you look at your landings, that just proves my point. You've got 336 permits that are active, and they're catching what quota we're catching now, and so you're going to throw 176 more permits, which is over half of what are being utilized today, back into this fold, and so, even if half of those are being used out of the 176, you're going to add almost another 100 participants into the ACLs that we have now, and that's my point.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Understood, and thank you, Scott. I think we have another hand, Chris. Darrin.

MR. KIMREY: Sorry, Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Not a problem. Darrin Willingham, and please be brief, and what was the purpose of doing a two-for-one? Was it to reduce the amount of SG 1 permits to as low as possible, just for the recreational guys?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Not as low as possible. I wouldn't characterize it in that way, but, yes, to reduce the number of permits at the time. The two-for-one policy went into the time at the same place as the limited access nature of the permits. Before then, there was not a limited -- There wasn't a cap on the number of permits that were available, and so it was both to -- The limited access was put in to cap the number of permits, and then there was necessary reductions, as determined by the council in the 1990s when they put that policy in place, to reduce it.

They did not set, at that time, a target number that they were trying to get to. They characterized it as an optimum level of production from the fishery, but that is not a clear indication of what they were shooting for at that point, but the council has spoken on they think that the current number of permits is a level that does not need to be reduced further than what it is, and so I think that's why they're considering this.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. Scott, did you have a comment?

MR. BUFF: Yes, and Mike partially answered, but what is optimum level? How do we figure out what that actually is, because, in the study that we done, and that was in -- I'm going to say 2010, or 2012, and Jack could give you these numbers, and I was hoping he would be here, but he's still vacating, I guess, but, anyway, that number was somewhere in the in the middle threes, and we're still 200 roughly over that. It would just be nice if we had that, and what is the optimum level on today's fishery, and I would like to know that, because that was what it was put in place in the beginning, and I guess everybody has their own opinion, but I don't think we've got there yet.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and not to not to leave it hanging, but I think that's -- What Scott asked is kind of part of the debate of this action, and so certainly we'll, you know, record the perspectives of who feels one way or the other, because an optimum level from, you know, one study is not necessarily objectively optimum to another perspective, and so that's the place where I think the council is looking to the fishery, and also thinking about what they want to see of the of the fishery moving forward.

We do have a couple of, you know, items that the council discussed related to this action, and so they're also -- You know, there's the big question of do you think the two-for-one is necessary moving forward, should it remain in place, and a follow-up discussion that has kind of started, but the council, you know, wanted to get a little bit of a of a pulse check on what the what the AP thought, and there have been several comments along the lines of controlling necessarily who is a -- Who has a commercial permit, and the idea of commercial permits that are owned by people that --

People or entities that don't actively use them, that -- You know, that number of latent permits -- In any situation where you have a limited access, there are going to be a number of latent permits that exist, and that happens for one reason or another. You might be latent one year because you're spending the year getting your boat worked on, something like that, and so latent doesn't -- Latent is not going to be zero percent. It will never be, realistically, zero percent, but 30 percent is quite high for the number of latent permits.

There have been discussions about, you know, permit ownership and the and the leasing of permits, and so one of the follow-up discussions related to the idea of changes to the SG 1 permit, and that is not necessarily in this action, but possibly can inform the direction that the council may go on in the future, is what are your perspectives on some type of use-it-or-lose-it provision to lessen the number of latent permits, and that doesn't mean, you know, if you're one year latent that you lose it.

The council would have some nuance to their discussions, and they would think about, you know, a multiyear type of consideration, or some type of, you know, if you have an exceptional circumstance, there would be ways to accommodate that, but, going in the general direction of taking some form of action to control the entities that are owning the permits, to lean that more towards those that would be actively using those permits.

Like I said earlier, their intent is for the current number of permits to be maintained. There is some intent to reduce the number of the latent permits, and that would make the number of owners to be more active participants than not, and then the goal being to promote a professional commercial fishery that is geared towards harvest that is intended for sale, and so that's kind of some of the council's motivations related to this action, but, if there's any discussion on whether use-it-or-lose-it requirements may be a good thing sometime in the future, I can pause here and hear that discussion right now.

MR. KIMREY: Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. I'm against the two-for-one. I don't think our fishery can sustain it. I've had a lot of ideas for me and my peers, and we made comments in Jekyll Island. One of the things that I just thought of, with seeing all these latent permits, is what if the latent permits without landings from certain dates, either an amount of poundage or something, and what if they don't qualify for the two-for-one, and what if they -- If they still are the two-for-one, and am I saying that right? If they still -- They would be in the old rules if this changes. If they do away with the two-for-one, the latent permits still have -- You still have to buy two, is what I'm trying to say.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, just to make sure I'm understanding, you would want the two-for-one -- You're talking about having the two-for-one provision remain in place if a permit has been latent for a certain amount of time?

MR. FISH: Right.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: It would be a one-for-one exchange if the permit is not latent.

MR. FISH: Yes, and I want the status quo right now, and I want latent permits, if this is -- It sounds like it's already done deal, doing away with the two-for-one, but, if the two-for-one does

away, only the latent permits would qualify, and so those people wouldn't be getting hurt. They would still be getting their status quo, if their permit is worth $50,000 now, and, since they're not using it, they're still qualifying for the status quo.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So you are against removing the two-for-one.

MR. FISH: Yes, but when it happens --

DR. SCHMIDTKE: But, if it happens, then --

MR. FISH: They would be under the old rules, and you would have to buy two latent permits to make one permit.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Two latent permits to exchange for one.

MR. FISH: This permit would not be allowed to be leased, because if you're thinking of -- I'm not an economist, but, the new guy trying to get in, which is the reason this is getting forwarded to us, or to everybody, to get rid of the two-for-one, is so that the new entrants can get in. I'm all about new entrants, but I think they need to do it like everybody else did, and, if they can get in, these permits are just going to start it. If they're fifty-grand for a single, and a hundred-grand for a corporate, I would imagine it's going to meet in the middle somewhere, and then it's just going to creep right back up to whatever the market will bear. All these guys that are the corporate permit guys that make a living buying and selling and leasing, they're going to snap them all up, faster than any entry-level fisherman could. Just my opinion.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, in that scenario, they would need to acquire two latent permits to exchange for one. If somebody who had an active permit, a non-latent permit, wanted to transfer that, would that entity be able to transfer on a one-for-one basis in the scenario that you're describing?

MR. FISH: Sorry, and could you say that again? I'm sorry.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: In the idea that if, you know, two-for-one is removed, and that means active permits would able to be transferred one-for-one?

MR. FISH: Yes.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Latent permits would still have the two-for-one applying to that?

MR. FISH: Yes, and I would prefer them not to be able to lease them, in either one of those scenarios. Starting at whatever date they do away with the two-for-one, or you have to buy two latent permits, that they cannot be leased. They have to be fished, or themselves to become latent.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and I kind of like Andy's idea, and I think that may be some happy middle ground for everybody, but there is going to have to be some rules that set in place what we're calling latent, and like I've even got -- I've got a boat that we've had in the boatyard for three

years, for two reasons. Number one, we couldn't find motor parts, and, number two, I can't find nobody to run it if we put it in the water.

We're trying to put it in now, but, in March, it was three years that it hadn't been run, but, on the other hand, this leasing stuff, and I think this is one of the big pet peeves with everybody, is people leasing permits, and I don't know how you would ever get rid of that, Andy. I've thought about it too, and there's people that does this for a living. They buy permits, and they just lease them out, and they're nine or ten-grand, and that's what they do for a living. It's like a rental house that you don't have a power bill or a property tax or nothing. I mean, it's just a hundred-grand piece of paper. It's 10 percent, you know, and you're getting $8,000 or $9,000, but, at the end of the day, I don't know how you're going to get around the lease program even if you go one-for-one, because there's so many ways around that to put it -- I don't know, and maybe you guys could elaborate on that some.

I even -- I think that you can actually even put somebody down as a part owner, and let them use that permit, without even calling it a lease, and so you're just -- There's a hundred ways around, getting back to that permit, without somebody having to buy it, and the monetary -- I said this a while ago, but, if you buy two today, it's $50,000, you know, and so you're paying $100,000, and, if you buy one, you're paying $100,000, and, like Andy said, I think that's going to be somewhere -- Let's just call it $75,000, and it's the middle, and it's just going to gradually go back up, because all these people that are leasing them are just going to keep buying them.

Now they can buy them really quick, because they're just got to get one. It's hard to find people, and, just so everybody here understands this, you've got to have two permits that don't expire before you can transfer them, and so they can't go dead in that timeframe that you're trying to put them two together, and so it's not like I've just got to find two, but I like what Andy said. I think that's going to maybe give everybody some warm and fuzzies.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. We'll go to Mike, and then Haley.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, just kind of continuing to roll with the idea that's been presented, and Scott kind of alluded to it, but also thinking about the timeline that the council has this amendment on, and do you all have any initial suggestions that the council could discuss on what would qualify as a latent permit? What is the timeframe? How long does a permit need to be latent to say that, you know, this thing isn't being fished, and it can -- It still needs to be a two-for-one, you know, exchange in that case? Are you talking three years, or four years, or what do you -- Any initial suggestions?

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and I don't know. I know everybody has hardships, but everybody -- How did they do in the past? I know, with the sea bass pot endorsement, you had to have 25 000 pounds within a certain amount of time, and I know that -- What was it to qualify for the SG 1 versus the 225? I don't know what those poundages was, or how many years back they went on your landings, but if there's a precedent that has been set, and I don't know, but is there rules for that, when you all came up with something to take the SG 1 to the SG 2? What rules -- Who was playing Caesar on that line kind of thing?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, I mean, I could look up the qualifications. I think it was maybe a three-year time period, and it was a minimum amount of landings that was associated with that in

establishing who got an SG 1 at that time. Basically, anybody else that had landings in that time period, if they were below that threshold level, they got an SG 2, and so that's kind of the difference.

It's a bit of a different scenario here, with some similarities, and some differences, and so I think, you know, in this case, we have latent permits, but there would still need to be that that definition, I mean, and that's kind of what I'm looking to you all to say. Like, if you saw somebody -- If you saw such-and-such record, you know, and you saw this person owns a permit, and they don't have any landings, for how many years would you say they're not a fisherman?

MR. FISH: What exactly -- On that one graph, what is the -- What was the line for meaning latent, just no landings in that fiscal year kind of thing or --

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and that one -- I mean, this just showed several different scenarios, and that wasn't necessarily defining, but what this shows -- What this what this figure showed is these are latent in that individual year, okay, and so latent in that individual year, but then, below it, how many permits were latent for two years, and how many had been latent for the last three years, and how many were latent for the last four and five, okay, and so different levels.

That would -- This information would help inform, once that line is set, how many permits this affects, but the setting of the line is something that I think there would need to be a decision made on what defines this, and that's not necessarily something that numbers are going to tell you, and it's people need to set the line, and then the numbers are the fallout of that.

MR. KIMREY: Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and I think maybe Kerry might be able to tell you, but I think, on the sea bass, it was 3,000 in five years, and is that correct?

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, it's not relevant necessarily, but it was four years, a thousand pounds in four years.

MR. BUFF: There was also -- Wasn't there some sort of provision there for like a hardship, that you could come back and argue your point with the council to keep that permit?

MS. MARHEFKA: (Ms. Marhefka's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. BUFF: I think that they're -- You know, even like what she said, if we done the four, and a thousand in the four years, and then you would have some kind of provisional for somebody that has had a hardship, or, you know, that has used the permit, but hadn't been able to use it in that time period, but I don't know. I like Andy's idea, and I think that's the route we all need to go, and I kind of -- I like that, and so for what all that's worth.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. I spoke to an old-time commercial fisherman from Florida on my way here to the meeting, and I believe that's, you know, what you guys said, the thousand pounds to qualify back in the 1990s for the SG 1. You know, they shared with me

that it can be challenging to get a thousand pounds of snapper grouper down in south Florida, and so this particular individual was relegated to the SG 2, because they didn't qualify, and this is, you know, a relatively older gentleman, and he informed me he is the youngest person down in that area with an SG 2.

You know, I -- If this moves forward, just kind of taking into account some of the different users, I would just want to keep that in mind, so that they can keep their SG 2, potentially, and then is it my understanding that, for the leasing, you're not actually leasing a permit, and you have to lease the vessel?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Correct, and you would be leasing a permitted vessel, but that the permit itself isn't considered the lease. It is you are leasing a vessel that has a permit on it.

MS. STEPHENS: Sure, and so I don't know if now is the time for that discussion or not, but, if you were to add some type of qualification, so that we don't -- If leasing is a concern of the commercial sector, and, again, I don't have a stake in the game, but, you know, is that an issue, where if people have SG permits on johnboats, and, if it is a problem, then is there anything that you can think of?

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. Before I take Scott and Andy, it's a vessel permit, and there's lots of ways to lease vessel permits. Go ahead, Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and it is just what Chris said, and, like I said, and I'm going to say this again, there's really no way to get away with that. Even we lease one from somebody else, just because the guy don't want to use it, and so I lease it put it on a boat, but it's you're actually leasing the boat to the permit holder, and so it is not a permitted boat, and so you're leasing your vessel to that person.

What happens is a lot of these people don't want to lease those permits, because you're taking a liability for that boat, and so that's why they're wanting to go back to the one-for-one, because then you could put that more permit back into the system, and I guess, like what Andy is saying, you know, if we could eliminate another third of those, or half of that third, that might give us a viable, you know, stability for being able to fish all-year-round.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and I'm not super privy on the leasing, but I think part of the problem too is you lease a grouper snapper from somebody, and most people don't just do grouper snapper. You have to be in multiple fisheries, and so now you've got to lease a kingfish permit, and so I'm not sure even how you lease that, and you have to lease that through the same guy, basically, and so now you're -- It's a whole --

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

MR. FISH: Right, but, I mean, it gets harder and harder to do multiple fisheries when you're leasing it. Sure, yes, but that's --

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

MR. FISH: Yes, and it starts getting really tough for your average hook-and-line guy, who has trouble even getting online.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. We'll go to Vincent.

MR. BONURA: Only one entity per vessel can have permits on the vessel, and so, if like you own your own kingfish permit, or a different permit, you can transfer that permit into the corporation who is leasing your vessel.

MR. KIMREY: John.

MR. POLSTON: I just wanted to check something, real quick, and could we go back to where you had the latent permits, the last whatever, where you had the years and stuff? Okay, and so, basically, more or less, the latent permits haven't changed in four years, and where I'm going with this is Scott says, over and over again, that's going to be new participants getting into the fishery, but if there is that many latent permits out there right now, which could be done something with, how is that going to be new participants getting into the fishery, if they've been sitting there for four years and nothing has happened yet?

MR. BUFF: Because they will be able to sell them now. They can't sell them. They've got to get two-for-two now, or two-for-one, and you can't use it right now, and those people are not wanting to lease those permits, because they don't want the liability.

MR. POLSTON: I understand that, but there's been a lot of two-for-ones done, and why wouldn't they go ahead and do a two-for-one? Why don't they take the fifty-grand and --

MR. BUFF: (Mr. Buff's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. POLSTON: Well, I understand that, but I'm not really trying to argue the point. What I'm trying to say is, if they've been sitting there for four years, why do you continue to say there's going to be that many new participants jumping in, where they're 175 permits latent out there right now that something could be done with? Yes, it has to go through the two-for-one process, and I'm for getting rid of the two-for-one, and I don't even have a dog in the hunt. All my permits are corporate, but the reason I am is I think, if you stop doing the two-for-one, yes, you may get some new participants in there, but back to the point you made.

We're not catching the quotas right now. We're not catching the beeliner quota, and we're not catching the amberjack quota, and so, yes, it could get closed up quicker, or possibly we may start catching the quotas, if you have a few new participants, and so I'm just saying that I don't want to shrink our fishery more.

I mean, I'm in it to make money as well, but I guess the point I'm trying to make is you don't want to really shrink your fishery, and you're saying how long can it be sustained, and, you know, nobody knows that, because we don't know how many fish are going to be caught, and so I'm just, I guess, once again, being the devil's advocate. You want one thing, for every action, there's a reaction, and, if one thing gets put into place, and it's the wrong thing, it's too late, you know, and that's what I'm saying.

We don’t have a lot of permits now, and that’s why I’m for, and that’s going on the record, John Polston, and I’m for getting rid of the two-for-one, and, once again, all my permits are corporate, but that’s my reasoning for it. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. We’re going to go to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just some clarification there, you know, related to the information that's here. If you look on the screen right here, and so this number, this 34 percent, and this number of latent permits here. kind of the reason why I think Jessica Stephen from the Permits Office -- She is the one who put this information together, and presented it, and I think one of the reasons why she did it in this way was to show that, although you have a pretty consistent percentage of latent permits, it's not necessarily the same people that are latent every year, because you see, over the last two years -- You know, two years -- You have this percentage of your latent permits had been latent for two years in a row, and this percentage has been latent for three years in a row, and this percentage of your latent permits has been in that status for four years.

The latent permits are coming in and out of that status, you know, for one reason or another, and different things happen in the business, and people get their boats worked on, and so it's not always the situation, but there are some -- I mean, you see some that have been latent for all of the last five years, and those may very well be people that own the permits, but are not producing landings with those permits, and so I’m just letting -- Just providing some context to the information there, that it's not -- This doesn't indicate that they're always the same people that are sitting out that year, and that the people that sit out may come in and out over the course of those years. There's certainly been quite a bit of discussion, and I think there's a hand, and so I’ll hold off moving us to the next action until we're ready.

MR. KIMREY: Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, and, obviously, no dog in the hunt here, but, when you go back to that, and you showed that there are 512 of these out there, but pretty much four-year and five-year latency, the ones that have been there, that's -- That was 45 percent of 512, and that's 230 of those, to your to your point, that have been sitting there latent for four to five years, and is that what you're saying?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So forty-four permits have been latent for the last four years, and that constitutes 25 percent of the permits that were latent in the most recent year.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Thank you for the clarification.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: At the risk of stating the obvious, and, again, I don't have a dog in the fight at all, but just as someone looking at that table of data you just brought up, I’m wondering what the urgency is for the council to move on this amendment in Action 1, because these numbers are incredibly consistent over the last five years.

I don't sense the urgency to get more participants in this by moving forward with this amendment, because I don't see any really change in those numbers, either the percent active or the number -- The percent active or the percent latent over these over this five-year time series, and that's my ten-cents.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Mike. Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I was just going to go on the record saying I'm for Alternative 1. Like Scott said, we're struggling, and we don't really need more participants, and that's my feeling.

MR. KIMREY: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: I do have an SG 1 corporate , and so, you know, I'm sort of the same boat as Jeff, is that, you know, we go to these meetings time and time again, and the numbers keep getting reduced and reduced and reduced, and, you know, to bring more participants in at this this time, I just don't see it.

MR. KIMREY: Anybody else before we move on? Real quick, Mike, I would like to say my two-cents' worth. You know, there's a lot of mixed feelings on this two-for-one, and there's been a lot of outcry, for a number of years, to do away with the two-for-one, and everybody has their own mindset on it.

I received quite a few calls in the past week from different commercial fishermen and dealers, and most of them were in favor of doing away with the two-for-one, and making it a one-for-one, and it has to do with all things we've talked about, as far as hoping that, in some way, by doing away with the two-for-one, that they can increase access to the to the greenhorn pool, the up-and-comings, and/or making it easier for some of these people that are sitting on latent permits to sell them.

With the charts, just like you all just talked about, a lot of those latent permits are not the same permits that are latent each year. Just because they're latent, it doesn't mean they're not being used, and we all know that there's a lot of permits that are showing latent because maybe they're being used, but there's not a sale on those fish, you know, and big checkbooks, fancy boats, keeping what they want under the permit, and maybe they're not selling their fish, you know, and they just have the permit because they can afford it, but, you know, I would caution everybody to be mindful that -- For me, not meeting the ACL, and Scott and I talked about this, from a commercial perspective, if we're already not meeting the ACLs on a lot of things, eventually, and I'm not picking sides, and I'm just stating what I can consider to be obvious, is the ACLs may change.

You know, the rec side might end up with them, you know, and so, if there's a few more permits out there, it might help that, or you can do it with vessel limits, but, once we get to SG 2, I've got, you know, a long opinion about that, and I'm sort of torn on the SG 1 being two-for-one or not, and I used to be hardcore all for it, and now I'm sort of in the middle, and so I don't really have an opinion to state, but I'm sure, when we get SG 2, there will be a whole other line of discussion on that. Now we're moving forward, Mike. Real quick.

MR. BONURA: Yes, and I just wanted to add here my opinion on this, and I'm still on the fence, honestly, about the two-for-one, and getting rid of it, but I do know, for sure, the leasing of the vessels is a mandatory thing we need, because it is a good way for the younger generation of people, who don't have the funding currently, and they can actually get a hold of a permit, and go fishing, and then work and save up capital, and hopefully eventually purchase a permit of their own.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Vincent. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and, just before we move off -- Just this is kind of what I heard, and there wasn't really consensus from the AP at this point, and there's mixed opinions, and that's all well and good. You all don't need to vote on actions or anything like that at this meeting, and you will see this again, like I said, in October, and then it may be useful for you all to take some form of vote on your recommendation to the council, but you'll have another crack at this later on this year.

The next action that the council is considering is looking at bottom longline gear specifically, and the intent of this action is to allow vessels to be able to switch to or from bottom longline gear more easily. Right now, there is a restriction on the species that can be possessed on a boat that has longline gear onboard, and so, if there's a trip with bottom longline gear onboard, the only species that can be possessed are those that are highlighted here of snowy grouper, yellowedge, misty, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

What is being talked about is, if people have bottom longline gear onboard, would they be able to use that bottom longline gear to fish for whatever species they're able to use that for, and then be able to switch gear and use a different gear on the same trip, and be able to possess something beyond those species, and so we're not talking about changing the species that can be harvested using bottom longline gear.

It would still be the -- Any gear requirements for harvest would still be in place right now, and it would just be you need to put your -- This would allow you to be able to put your gear away, and there would be requirements on what is appropriately put away, or put your bottom longline gear away and switch and harvest something else on the same trip, and that's kind of the intent of this.

There is overlap of this action with the bottom longline shark fishery, and that's kind of another one of the pieces that comes in to this equation of people being able to fish bottom longline for sharks, and then be able to put that gear away and use something, hook-and-line or some other form of gear, to then harvest snapper grouper species, and to do that all on the same trip.

The alternatives that have been talked about thus far, the first one is to just remove the species restriction, as far as like the possession requirement, and you can only harvest -- The species, other than those in that restriction, would only be able to be harvested if the bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed, if it's put away, and "appropriately stowed" would mean that the hooks are not baited, and there are no longline, bottom longline, hooks on the deck of the vessel.

Alternative 3 would kind of have that same requirement, but then go a step further, because law enforcement has brought up the point of, well, how do we know that the fish that are onboard that vessel were caught using one gear or another, and, you know, that they weren't using some

restricted gear to catch the fish that we see on the vessel, and so there have been kind of two avenues that have been brought up to address this.

Alternative 3 includes an at-sea notification, where, if you want to switch to or from bottom longline gear, then you would -- There would be a system set up where you would notify law enforcement of, hey, I'm about to switch gears, and then that notification would be required, but then they would have that record of, okay, such and such was fishing, you know, hook-and-line for this part of the day, and, at this point, they switched their gear to bottom longline, and so that's how we know that they have fish from these different gears.

The subcommittee did direct that wreckfish kind of be incorporated into this action as well, which would allow wreckfish harvesters to switch to or from bottom longline gear. Similar to the other species, bottom longline gear is not allowed to be used to harvest wreckfish, and that would remain in place. It would just be, if you're out wreck fishing, then you would use, you know, your allowable gear, and your bottom longline gear can be onboard, but it has to be stowed. It has to be put away, and then, if you, you know, didn't catch your wreckfish, or something like that, then you could go somewhere else, and set your bottom longline gear, and catch what is allowable with that gear.

Alternative 4 is something else that has been just directed by the subcommittee to add in, and I'm going to say three words that at certain times have ruffled some feathers, but I do want to provide the proper context, okay, and the letters are VMS, and this would only be a requirement under Alternative 4 for those vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear, and so it's kind of, if you want this additional flexibility of being able to switch to or from bottom longline gear, then that vessel would have VMS, and that would be a way to have kind of that monitoring for law enforcement to be able to see that record of this is what -- This is what this vessel did.

That has been brought up as an alternative, and that's going to be added. That was brought up earlier this week, and that will be added in the next iteration of this document. That is not a requirement for all commercial vessels to have VMS. That is, if you want the flexibility to switch to or from bottom longline gear, then this is the way to do it, and this is the requirement that you would have associated with that specific action.

Staff, in follow-up of this, we would be looking into types of VMS systems, advantages and disadvantages, and we're also going to be looking into if there are any options for financial assistance in acquisition of VMS systems, if that's the way that the council ends up going, but any initial feedback from you all on preferences, among is this an action that commercial fishermen want to be able to do? What types of notification do you think is appropriate, if any, for being able to accomplish this, and, also, kind of give law enforcement the things that they need to be able to make sure the rules are being followed.

Then a question of is there any initial feedback on would commercial fishermen that want to have access to switching in the same trip to or from bottom longline gear -- Would they be willing to have VMS as the requirement, in order to gain that flexibility, and so those are some places for discussion, and I'll turn it back to the committee, to listen to what you have to say.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike. What do you think, Andy? VMS?

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, commercial, Florida, and I actually made a comment in Jekyll Island for multiday boats to have a VMS if they chose, if they could have more than the daily trip limit. If this goes through for them, I think it should be allowed. If you want to opt-in for a VMS, you should be able to do multiday trips, and multiday trip limits.

Nobody likes VMS, and nobody wants it, but that's what it has come down to. With bigger boats, slower boats, that kind of stuff, nobody wants VMS, but, if they can go and have multiple limits on multiple days, they would be -- They would happily sign up for it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. What about you, Scott?

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and I've had some use with the VMS, just to throw this in there for you guys, and it's a $4,500 bill to get the VMS, and it's $65 a month to keep it up. One of the things that I did not like with the permitting system is, to renew your Gulf reef permit, that VMS has to be active at that time, and, when you're transferring those things, and moving them, they're very, very delicate, but the VMS itself is kind of helpful too, because you can do without a sat phone, because you've got communication.

It's also -- Ours was based on email, and so, if something goes on, or the fish that the boat has got on -- They can send that stuff back to the dock, which was very beneficial, because you could have it ready when they got there, but the actual getting the unit, putting it on, buying the unit, it was a pain in the rump, just for what all that's worth, but it was beneficial.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. John.

MR. POLSTON: I also have had a lot of dealings with VMS, because I've had swordfish permit. I've got swordfish permits, and yada, yada, yada, and Gulf reef fish, but they're not cheap still, by no means, but they're way less money now, the VMS are, and I think they're somewhere around two or three thousand, but the one -- Not that that's not a lot of money, but the one thing I want to point out is the government will reimburse you if you -- They will do it one time per boat.

They will reimburse you for the dollar value of the VMS, and I know they had done it -- Or at least up to two years ago they were still doing it, and they will do it one time per vessel. They will reimburse you for the VMS, and, like Scott said, they're good as far as hailing-in and hailing-out, and they can also tell what your boat is doing. They can see if you're longlining with that VMS. It makes a track, and they've contacted me.

My boat was wreckfish fishing, but the VNS still had to be on there, because I have a Gulf reef fish permit on there, and he was out there wreck fishing, and they sent me a thing saying -- No, and he was inside the box or whatever, and he was literally vertically dropping, and doing nothing wrong, and he was totally legal to be there, but they were letting me know he was inside there, and why is he inside there, and I knew what he was doing, and he wasn't doing anything wrong, and the same thing on -- It just -- They can be very helpful.

If something is wrong, it's a good form of communication, but, as far as monthly, I believe I'm paying through the -- Whoever it is I'm dealing with, I think I'm paying like twenty-five a month now, and so it has gotten a lot more affordable, and not that it's still not a, like you said, a pain in

the rope, but it has gotten a lot more affordable, as far as using is concerned, but, as far as what Andy said, as far as multiple unloads, I think that would be --

We haven't gotten to it yet, but, on the next one down, on Number 2, as far as efficiency is concerned for the fisheries, it can't get no more efficient than that, because, if you could do even at least two unloads, that would save you a ton of money, because of the fuel. You're not asking for no more fish, and you're not asking for anything other than less fuel expense, by being able to come into the dock with a double unload, or a triple, or whatever it may be, and so, anyhow, thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Anybody? Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: I've been listening to all the conversations of the sub-council and all that stuff, but I still haven't -- Because there are no divers on the council, and can I go longline golden tilefish, go diving, and then catch sharks in one trip? Can I go golden tilefish longlining, go diving for grouper snapper, and then catch sharks on the way in? Can I do all that in one trip with this?

I mean, that's the extreme, but I'm just trying to -- Because there's been no verbiage of, you know, diving, and not that it's different. It's the same permit, but, as of right now, no, you could not, and I know right now you could not, but that's what this whole thing is all about, was multiple gears, and, you know, obviously when I switch gear, I would call and all that, but --

MR. POLSTON: I did want to say one other thing, and I'm sorry, on the longline. I think the law reads right now, as far as the longline is concerned, you can -- It keeps saying up here that you can stow it below, but some boats are so small that you can't stow the gear below, and so you can disable the longline, and that's still -- There's no longline there if you disable it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: I just wanted to add, on the hooks, if they're being baited as we're hauling the gear back in, and so having the hooks not baited is a major, huge detour in changing gears, because it's about four hours of cutting and baiting hooks and everything, and so there has to be a real -- I mean, that's got to be changed to where you can have the hooks, you know, pre-baited. You can put them away and all that, but having them racked and un-baited is going to be a huge problem, a giant problem.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. Yes, and I heard John mentioned the word that we're all kind of thinking about, and that's efficiency, and it's very similar to what I said about the sea bass pots. If you have these permits, you should be able to fish on them, and, given the cost of fuel, you know, how do we make this more efficient for the commercial sector, and I would certainly -- I don't have the alternative list in front of me, but I would certainly be in favor of, you know, the gear stowed requirement and the notification to be able to switch those gears.

I'll just give you guys kind of an example, and think about, in our area, you can go out and catch your seventy-five pounds of red snapper, and that's not a very profitable trip, but, if you have the opportunity to run inshore and set your longline shark gear, you know, that's definitely going to

make your trip worth it, and so, if the folks are willing to do VMS, and I know one of the big hang-ups on this was law enforcement, and the question of is it enforceable, and let's look at the recreational sector.

We're required to use circle hooks, and law enforcement, a lot of times, is just trusting that recreational people are using circle hooks. I'm sure there's people out there that still aren't using circle hooks, and I'm not one of them. I love the rule. I love my circle hooks, but to say, you know, that we wouldn't push this through based on potentially bad actors, I don't think it should be a hang-up. With the at-sea notification of, hey, I'm switching gears, and you can see it on the VMS, and you're stopping to bait your hooks, or undo your longline or whatever, it should definitely go forward.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just giving some context, based on the last couple of last couple of comments, and so, Vincent, one of the reasons why the hooks being un-baited was included in the action is the council is looking for something that would make it basically difficult, so that you're not quickly -- Like the process to switch from one gear to the next is not quick, but you can do it within the same trip, and so, like the idea that it takes some time to bait the longline, that was kind of an intentional thought from the council of you're not able to just kind of throw your longline, you know, out there.

You're not able to switch back and forth, and you're fishing one gear at one time, and then you have to take the time to either set it up, or to disable it, to put it away, but there's a -- You know, there's a time involved in that that's not a very quick amount of time, so that there's that intentional switch between the two gears, and so that was kind of brought up, and part of that is from an enforcement standpoint, and it was motivated, you know, to be able to show to law enforcement that, hey, I am no longer -- Very clearly no longer doing this, because the gear that I would use to do this is not usable in its current form, and it would take me some time in order to make it usable, you know, in that way.

Then just the other comment, and so, with relation to a lot of the law enforcement comments, that's why like some of the notifications, or the -- You know, the VMS didn't come from law -- Well, actually, they did bring it up at the Law Enforcement AP related to this action, but that was kind of the -- Their push isn't necessarily against doing this, and it's, you know, being able to find ways to validate it, and so things like the at-sea notification, or being able to have a VMS, or some other form where you could validate that, okay, this switch is happening, and we have something other than just the fisherman's word to go on, and so there's multiple sources of information there that law enforcement can see that, you know, what is being said is actually the case of what's happening.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike. Have we got everything that everybody -- Go ahead, Vincent.

MR. BONURA: Here's one thing to throw a corkscrew in this. How about the buoy gear, and we actually use the exact same gangion, or leaders, that are on the longline as well, and, on the longline, fifty fathoms or deeper, you can legally longline, and so, really, what does it matter what you catch if you're in 300 feet or deeper? We've caught amberjack and almaco out in 800 feet on the mud, and, I mean, I think, realistically, all you need is one rule. In 300 and deeper, you can

longline, and, if you're in 280, or 300 and shallower, you can't. I mean, realistically, why do we have all these rules?

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

MR. BONURA: Well, that's an HMS species and not an FMP that we're here in this room about. You know, that's not really our problem.

MR. KIMREY: Did you get enough of that in your notes, Mike?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. All right, and so we're moving right along here. I mean, the VMS, that might work for some of you guys. Give a little and get a little. Moving right along.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and, just to make sure I have kind of the perspective that's been given regarding that, and so it sounded like VMS is, you know, still not something that people like, but, if you all are gaining something in terms of access to, you know, flexibility in your trip, or you're gaining something in terms of having multiple trip limits, or higher trip limits, something of that sort, then it would be something that you would consider, and is that -- Is that a true statement?

MR. FISH: It should be optional. It would be nice if it was optional. If you were only doing one day, you didn't have to turn the VMS on. If you wanted to do multiple days, maybe you turn your -- You have to turn your VMS on, or, I mean, I don't know. I'm just trying to find a way to catch more fish on multiday trips, and the shark guys are trying to find a way to be able to catch their sharks and the red snappers, and that's what this is.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thanks for that. All right. I'm going to move us down into -- Now we're getting into the actual trip limits, and so you'll see this section here, and the council was starting to go in a direction of possibly being able to temporarily adjust trip limits based on the harvest relative to the ACL in the previous year.

As they started to get into that discussion at the subcommittee level, that was going -- Just because of the nature of the many different varied trip limits, and the different timings of different species having different fishing years, and when things would go into place, and the fact that some of these determinations would need to be based on projections maybe halfway through the year, and that involves a lot of uncertainty in what you would be looking at, the subcommittee said that they would rather not go down this route.

They removed all of the temporarily-adjusted trip limit alternatives, and so that process they were thinking about of basing it on harvest in the previous year, and they're only, at this point, considering what we've termed as static trip limits, and so your regular trip limit, and so it would be just a flat trip limit change, and not kind of the fluctuating thing that, if you've been listening to the conversation, that they were thinking about in March, and kind of started on at the beginning of this week.

They've taken those out, and so, as you go through the actions that I'll show on the screen, and there's a very colorful table there, and the table doesn't really mean anything at this point, because they've removed the actions related to that table, but you'll see some actions that have been crossed out, and so we're going to get into the species-specific trip limits.

I can jump back to this table as we need to, but this is just kind of a preliminary table that you can take a look at on your own screens, if you have them, the performance of different species relative to the ACL, the commercial annual catch limit, over the last -- The most three recent years of completed data, and I know 2025 is preliminarily up on the website, and that's available as well. Kind of at the time that we were putting together the numbers, we had it through 2024, and so that's what we have information-wise at the moment, and you can see how different species have performed relative to the ACL, along with the current trip limits for these species.

You'll see there's some examples, and like golden tilefish has had some closures, has had years where they've gotten fairly close to the ACL, or gotten slightly above, and you see other species, and like vermilion snapper has been brought up pretty prominently, where they're not really approaching their ACLs.

In the case where you have two different lines in a table, and so like gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, vermilion snapper, and red porgy, those are species that have split seasons, and so part of the ACL is allocated to the first part of the fishing year, and part of the ACL is allocated to the second part of the fishing year. That's just an explanation of how those how those go about, and, typically, that process is, if that ACL in season one is not completely caught, then the remainder rolls over to season two. Season two doesn't roll over into any future year, but that's just a brief explanation of that table and the information that you're viewing there.

Now getting into the specific species trip limits, first we have greater amberjack. The current trip limit for both seasons is 1,200 pounds. The council is considering increases of that trip limit to 1,500, and they've recently added an -- They recently added an alternative for 1,750 or 2,000.

The subcommittee decided that they would have a recommendation of a 2,000-pound trip limit for both seasons for greater amberjack, and, for several of these species, kind of going back to that presented information, that I'm not going all the way through in detail today, and I can bring it back to you in October, but I can also reference you to the website, so that you can see these trip limit analyses.

Several of these species, and greater amberjack being one of them, when you look at the trip limit that has been -- Kind of how that's been caught, and how many vessels are actually catching the trip limit, how many trips are actually catching the trip limit, very often, for several of these, it's a very small percentage that are actually hitting or getting close to the trip limit, and, getting close, we are typically terming that within 10 percent. If you're hitting 90 percent or higher of the trip limit, we're saying you probably slowed down your fishing so that you don't exceed it.

What happens in this trip limit analysis is, if you are in that category of you're hitting, or you're getting close, then we're assuming that, if the trip limit goes up, you're probably going to go for that higher trip limit, and you're going to get close to harvesting that, but, if you're not hitting it right now, if you're not getting close to the trip limit right now, then that percentage of trips probably isn't going to just jump up to a higher trip limit and be able to harvest that, and so that's

kind of a brief explanation, and I can point you to the presentations that have the numerical breakdowns, so that you can see those percentages.

That is why you see, in different circumstances, sometimes, you know, a 50 percent, or a 100 percent, increase being proposed, is because, for the case of like greater amberjack, the analysis that was completed showed that you could potentially -- This doesn't necessarily mean that it would play out this way, but you could potentially increase the current trip limit by eight-times under that -- You know, that form of analysis, and assuming current effort, and you would -- That's when you would start to approach the annual catch limit.

Now, we have other -- There are other things that are that are in play here, and there's the talk about the two-for-one, and how that affects, you know effort, and so the council isn't jumping into an eight-times increase. The council also wants to see what happens, you know, in a smaller stepwise increase, but they have talked about -- For greater amberjack, their recommendation at this point is to change the trip limit to 2,000 pounds in both seasons, and so I can pause here and see if there are any initial perspectives. Like I said, this is not the final, and you will have another chance at this, but, if you have any initial reactions to a 2,000-pound trip limit for greater amberjack, then we can hear that discussion now.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike, and I'm going to make a quick comment. You know, I can't speak for any area outside of mine when it comes to amberjacks, but we've got a couple guys fishing around Morehead that are pretty good at catching their trip limits on jack, and they do it very routinely, and so, you know, regionally, it sounds like that's not necessarily the case, and is that what you're saying, when you're talking about the amberjacks, is there's a lot of people that are selling amberjacks and not reaching their trip limits, and is that what I gather from that, because, in my area, I know we've got a few guys fishing center consoles, and they do jack trips, and they're fishing with handlines, and they're routinely catching their trip limits.

DR, SCHMIDTKE: I couldn't necessarily comment on the state-by-state nature of it, you know, looking at one versus another, but, as a as a grouping together throughout the region, the overwhelming majority of the trips, and, by overwhelming majority, I'm talking like ninety-plus percent of commercial trips do not hit or approach the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack.

MR. KIMREY: All right, and so, you know, part of the reason why is because not everybody has marketability for those amberjacks. You know, the guys I'm speaking of have got a niche market, and they get they get really good money for them, and they've sort of got a little clique together to sell those jacks, and it's not really available to everybody, and that's good for them. They've figured out a way to make money on them, and apparently the stock is doing pretty good, so we keep hearing.

I know, in my area, when they're doing a lot of jack fishing, it affects other people that want to catch jacks, because they start as close as they can to the beach, and they go from reef to rock to AR, and wipe them out, and those are schooling fish that hang out in the same area as nearshore, you know, and there's more that move in, and they move out, but they really put a hurting on them.

You know, with these trip limits, it sounds like increasing the trip limits on jack, amberjacks that is, the greater amberjacks, is catering to just a handful of guys, and is that what I've deducted from your comment also?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I don't think it's -- I don't think the council's discussion has looked at it as catering to a small group, and we'll see that there's seven -- I think seven other species that are included in this. What the council did is they saw the overall problem of there are several species for which the commercial annual catch limit is not being approached, and it's not being reached, and so they looked at the at those species, and they're trying to think how can -- How can the harvest be increased, and, you know, how can that harvest be increased to get closer to the annual catch limit.

There are certain things beyond the council's control, but one of the things that is more within their control is the trip limit, and it's not even necessarily that increasing the trip limit will cause that the harvest to hit the ACL, because, in several situations, it still is not going to approach the ACL, but it's kind of that idea of if it's not going to -- If it doesn't indicate that it's going to hurt the stock from a sustainability standpoint, then why be restrictive to the current level, and why not explore a higher level of fishing, to see if that can be -- You know, if that's within the annual sustainable level, and it seems, from initial analyses, that that seems to be the case.

They looked at what species are not hitting their ACL, and greater amberjack is one of those, and so that's why they're exploring this type of option, but it's not -- I don't know that it necessarily came from one specific group, because we're talking about several different species that they kind of had the same mindset on.

MR. KIMREY: So, you know, what what's driving the need? What makes the council want to meet the ACL on these? You know, the amberjack, where is this coming from, and it's coming from something. I guess what's what I'm -- I don't know how to properly phrase my question, but why does the council think that they need to meet the ACLs on commercial greater amberjack, where it's only a few boats that are even getting close to the current daily trip limits? Why?

Before we go any further, and sorry to interrupt, but jacks are doing good, and are they trying to figure out a way to make them not be doing good? That's where I'm going with this, because, in my area, the jacks are taking a beating. Maybe stock-wide they're doing really well, but, in our area, they take a beating, and it's murder, man. It's straight up murder, and the guys are making money with them, and the stock in general is healthy, and they're -- You know, it's not like we don't get more jacks, but I'm just saying -- I'm just trying to figure out what's driving this, and that's all. Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I was nominated by my other council members, who will throw things at me if I say things wrong, because I am one person speaking on behalf of thirteen, but our intent really has been -- We've heard a lot, and, obviously, we all know the fleet is -- We have a couple of issues. The fleet is aging, and access into the fishery, and then sort of how can the commercial fleet that is still here be efficient and be profitable.

We are weighing a million thing when we try to make changes to make those things happen, and there isn't -- There is no one person that came to us and said can you please raise the amberjack trip limit, or can you please raise the beeliner trip limit, and it's the council's way of saying where can we help, balancing all the things that we have to balance, and these are -- This is sort of where we've landed now, and that's why we're asking you all to weigh-in.

You're absolutely right that that does only affect a handful of people, but it's not -- We don't think of it as like that's going to affect John Smith in Morehead City. We think of as there's a couple of commercial fishermen who are on a pile of amberjack, and, while they're on it, they don't have to go away leaving them biting, and they can put a little more money on their boat to cover the cost of fuel that just went up to -- If it's eight-whatever, and it's not here, but wow.

Do you know what I'm saying, and so all of that while looking where biologically we have room, and we know we have some room biologically, because we know what we're allowed to catch with our ACL, and then we're just trying to balance everything.

What we're asking you guys is, on balance, do you think that's a good idea or not a good idea, and we hear different things from everyone, but please understand that no one has like gotten to us, and no one has like, you know, sort of gotten in our ear and said we need this, and we need this, and this is our way to try to help, and that's really what we're trying to do, and there are some things that are suggested sometimes that, yes, might make sense to you all, but don't make sense when we look at the totality of everything, and so this is where we've landed to try to help.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Kerry, and your other council members that sent you from the back table. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. While I appreciate, and understand, and I like the way all that is going, and sounds, that and the beeliners and everything, but, in the 2023 and 2024 season, only 40 percent of the amberjack was caught, and I think it was still thirty-six inches there. In 2025, we go to thirty-four inches, and we only catch 50 percent, and I do not think the amberjack are doing well at all.

From Stuart to Jacksonville, they are a fraction of what, by any standards -- There's guys out of Ponce that used to go quite frequently, and they don't even go, and a lot of it is because of the jacks, but it's also because they're not there. I would like to see some stakeholders weigh-in on what they see, and I don't see it. I've seen it in the heyday, and it's not even close. It's not even remotely close to what it used to be, and I would just like to see some error on the side of caution.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy, and, look, now that, Andy, you know, kicked the elephant in the room, I've been fishing, you know, the coast of North Carolina my whole life, and I've been a for-hire guy for twenty years. A big part of that, I have recreational anglers who like to target amberjacks. I can promise you one thing out of Morehead City, and we have decent amberjack fishing a lot of times, but, since these guys have gotten this two and three-dollar-a-pound market for the jacks, our amberjack fishing has changed immensely. I don't think the jacks are as healthy as everybody is saying either, now that Andy said it, you know, but the science says different. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I was just going to say what Chris said a while ago about there's a few dayboats at our place that they catch their trip limits every trip, and we've got a couple of big boats that they'll catch their limits too before they come home, but I think the jack fishery is just a unique person that does it, but, as far as back in the day, everybody knows there's nothing like it was then, I mean, because not one fishery we have, but we're still doing pretty good with them.

I would just like to say that -- I never thought I would say this, but I think going to 2,000 is too much. I think that's really going to put some people on these dayboats -- They're really going to hit that, because now, instead of a $2,500 or $3,000 trip, they're looking at $5,000 trips, and so that's something that I think that it's a little much. 1,500 would be great.

MR. KIMREY: They do it, and I see them with 1,200 in those twenty-five Contenders, with a pile of ice.

AP MEMBERS: They're not amberjacks. They're pinker jacks.

MR. KIMREY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess, kind of following up on Scott's comment, so is the feeling -- It sounds like, from Scott's comment, the feeling isn't necessarily don't increase amberjack, and it's don't increase them by that much, and so what is that lower level of increase that you may be interested in? You know, there are other -- Even though the subcommittee recommendation is 2,000 at this point, they're considering 1,500, or 1,750, and, if you all have another alternative that you think they should consider, throw it out there. We're early enough in that process to go ahead and get that on the board, so that they can have that have that available to them.

MR. KIMREY: I'll go on record saying I think it should stay where it's at, just based off of my personal -- What I see around a bunch of commercial jack guys, and in my travels with jacks, I'll go on record saying I think it should stay where it's at, the 1,200 trip limit. John.

MR. POLSTON: I would have to go the opposite of that, and I know the history of all the guys there in Florida, and Paul is one of them, and Chris Endicott, and you can go on and on about the guys who used to go out daily fish and them, and a lot of them dropped out of it because the quota -- The quota used to be higher, and it got dropped down and dropped down and dropped down, to where the guys -- Eventually, it's not worth it, right?

The price has gone up some since then, because of availability and stuff, and we -- I consider we have a very good market on amberjack, and I've been called by North Carolina to peddle their amberjacks, and I refused them, because I try to take care of my own guys, and not because I don't like to make money, but my point is it definitely is not going to hurt anything. It's not going to hurt anything if we raise the quota, because Magnuson-Stevens says we're supposed to be doing MSY, right, and we're not even getting nowhere close to that, and so why are we not doing -- I mean, everything else, we've got to shut this down, and we've got to shut this down, and we've got to shut this down, because of the Magnuson-Stevens, and why can't we raise it?

Whatever you guys come up with, I mean, I'm good, but raising it would definitely help some of the fishermen, and I know now young guys that are doing dayboat fishing, as you say, and I don't know if they can hold 2,000, but, one guy I know, he ices his fish properly, and he can definitely get -- He gets his quota and leaves them biting, and so -- He tries to catch some vermilions to go with it, and so, yes, increasing his value for the day would definitely encourage him to go fish more, or anyone else that wanted to do it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: If you guys haven't figured out by now, I'm a big advocate of fishery-independent data, you know, to try to index the real abundance of some of these stocks, and, again, I'm going back to this SERFS survey data that was presented yesterday, and I'm looking at greater amberjacks right now, and the consistency between the two gear types, the chevron traps and the GoPro video index, and I'm with Chris on this. I don't see the biological optimism that maybe some folks in the room do, and I think we should keep the 1,200-pound trip limit.

MR. KIMREY: Andy.

MR. FISH: When you say biological optimism, does that mean you don't think it's robust enough to increase it, and is that what you mean by that, or what are you saying?

DR, RUDERSHAUSEN: I'm not even saying that, Andy, and I'm just looking at the SERFS index and seeing that recruitment is either at its long-term average, if you look at the chevron trap index for the most recent year, or slightly below the long-term average, if you look at the video index.

MR. KIMREY: Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. I'm just going to go back on what John said. The ACL is the ACL, and, back to what I said earlier about the recreational getting part of our fish in five or six years, and that's just going to be another one of them that's going to get another change, and so I don't know that 2,000 is the right number, because I think you're going to have a bunch of boats that are going to gear up just to do that, and it's going to put a lot of pressure on those fish, but a couple hundred pounds might would -- There's no way that, if we give the commercial boats an extra 300 pounds, that we're going to go from 50 percent to 100. It's just -- It's not going to make it, but that's just my thoughts. We've got the ACL, but we're not getting it done, and we need to try to get these ACLs, or we're going to lose them, and I'm telling you all.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Again, you know, from my perspective, and my opinion, I definitely want to do anything we can to help the commercial guys, but I think, when you almost double, or you're at least doing a -- What is that, a 40 percent increase on a daily catch limit, and I think you can change the fishery.

There might be people that don't have a market for jacks now, because they don't feel like messing with 1,200 pounds, if they can only get a buck-fifty, but, if you take it to 2,000 and they can still get that buck-fifty a pound, they might say, hey, it's time to become a professional jack fisherman. Those things should be considered by the council, as well as amongst us, before we move forward, and, you know, being a little bit conservative with some of this management. According to the science, we don't have a problem, and let's not create one. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I've got to apologize. I misspoke, and I was looking at the almaco slides from yesterday, but I'm looking at the greater amberjack slide now, and that video index is right around its long-term average, and so I just want to make out that clarification.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Paul.

MR. NELSON: The video data may not be as accurate either, because most of the fish are outside of 250 foot that we fish for, and they may not be caught in the video survey, and I'm all for, you

know, giving a little bit more to the commercial, you know, because it does help in the long run, things with the younger guys coming up. If you went to 20,00 pounds, I may come out of retirement.

MR. KIMREY: There you go, Paul. You just proved my point. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: I would sort of agree with Andy, and maybe we meet in the middle. I mean, I haven't shot jacks with bullets in a long time, but, man, if you pop it at ,2000 pounds, I might have to run a sleeve of bullets up my arm and hop back out in the water. If it weren't for all those damn sharks, I could make some money, and so I would say maybe the recommendation would be like to go -- To do it in between, to do a 1,500-pound, and you're not -- That's a 25 percent increase, and not a whatever it was, a 75 percent increase. Meet somewhere in the middle, and make everybody happy, and I won't get eaten by sharks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron. Anybody else? Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So it sounds like there are some members that want the trip limit to stay where it is, and there are some members that are not supportive of as big of an increase as 2,000, but could be supportive of a 1,500-pound, and so that's kind of like the overall thought that I've heard from the group, and I don't see any hands stopping me, and so I'm going to move us next to vermilion snapper.

Vermilion snapper, the current trip limit is 1,000 pounds. The council is considering increases to that trip limit as well. The options right now are 1,500, and they've added an option for 1,750, and then 2,000 as well, and so 1,500, 1,750, and 2,000. At this point, the subcommittee has recommended a 1,500-pound trip limit, and so I'll pause there and see if there are any thoughts initially from the AP on that one.

MR. KIMREY: Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and I agree with the 1,500 trip limit. Some of my guys have asked me to bring that up, and, with these ACLs not being caught, that's going to help with that, and, also too, guys, just remember -- Now, I'm not saying we give them the world, but the fishermen are pretty disgusted with where they're at with the council, and always getting something took out of their pocket, and so I think anytime we can give them something back, and maybe they're starting to believe in the system a little bit, because they don't get to come in here, and see what goes on, and kind of understand how all this comes about.

All they see is the comes and goes, for what goes in my pocket or what comes out, so I think that that this, and the triggerfish, and I think that's where we're going next maybe, but it would be nice to see those limits be raised up a little bit, and, you know, I don't have to tell you all this, but diesel fuels up like $2.50 a gallon, and it's almost double what it was, what we're paying for it, and so, now, instead of them guys having a $600 or $700 fuel bill, they've got an $1,100 or $1,200 fuel bill, and so all of these will help if it comes in time to, you know, to be there before the fuel goes back down, but it would be nice to give the guys something back.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and I also have buddies in Jacksonville, and that's pretty much a big-boat fleet, and those guys catch a majority of the of the quota, it would seem, for the amount of boats there are, and they would -- Their average trip is eighty miles one way, and I think they would benefit greatly from an increased vermilion.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. I mean, for the little hook fishing, you know, the stuff that aren't meeting ACLs, especially for the multiday boats, long rides, I wouldn't think that most people would have a problem with increasing those trip limits, and I know I certainly don't, especially on the vermilion and when we get to the trigger, and so does anybody else got any comments on that, the 1,500 recommended from the subcommittee? Scott said it sounded good, and does anybody disagree with that? How about we take that? All right. Let's move along.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Next up is red porgy. Red porgy is in a bit of different state from the other two, but it -- In terms of red porgy has been down for quite some time relative to longer-term levels, but, at the same time, the level that is here, the annual catch limit, is supported by a stock assessment, and there was a very big cut to get the fishery down to fifteen fish, where it is right now. The council is considering increasing that to thirty fish, or forty-five fish, and the subcommittee's recommendation at this point is forty-five fish for both seasons, and so I'll pause here and turn it back to the to the panel.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike. Is there anybody here that has got any input on the red porgy? I know this has been a topic of hot discussion in years past. If the subcommittee is recommending an increase, I'm sure there's a lot of people that would like that. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and, here again, I think it's going to be a good thing for the fishermen, but maybe forty-five is not the right number. If we went to -- Is it fifteen now, or is it is it thirty?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Fifteen.

MR. BUFF: Fifteen, and I think thirty would -- I mean, that gives us 100 percent, and I think you're going to get a little bit out of that, you know, and it's not going to be a bunch, but, you start adding all this stuff together, you know, and they're actually going to be able to pay their bills.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Let's see. We've got Cameron, and then we'll go to Jeff.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron, and I think the thirty fish would be a good step in the right direction, and Scott is exactly right. You know, just adding a little bit here and there, it makes these guys that spend a week out at-sea, and risk their lives to make a living, you know, and it puts more money in their pocket, and it makes it more lucrative for them to do.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron. Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I don't really fish a bunch of red porgy, but a lot peers do, multiday boat guys, Carolina guys, and forty-five fish, at a two-pound average, and, I mean, it's still less than a hundred pounds of fish, and we're not talking about a lot. I vote for forty-five fish, for sure, just based on that.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. Anybody else that -- You know, we're hearing thirty and forty-five, and, I mean, for the sake of moving on -- Anybody on that, or we're moving on. Chris.

MR. MILITELLO: Chris Militello, south Florida, and didn't you just say that there's been a decline in the red porgy?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: That's over a very long timescale, and yes. Over a very long timescale, there has been a decline, and red porgy has been in a rebuilding plan for a very long time.

MR. MILITELLO: So none of you guys want to take that into account? You just want more fish?

MR. BUFF: We're not catching the ACL, and that's what you're saying.

MR. KIMREY: Even inside the rebuilding plan, the ACL isn't being met.

MR. MILITELLO: Because there's a problem.

MR. KIMREY: No. Well, there's probably a lack of effort. I mean, they've looked at the big picture. Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: The discussion that the council has had related to this is what -- Even when a stock is rebuilding, there are allowable levels of catch, and those allowable levels of catch are like by virtue of, you know, the assessment, and the rebuilding plan, that these would be sustainable levels of catch. The sustainable amount of catch for red porgy right now is not being caught by the commercial fleet, and there may be various reasons as to why, you know, there may not be the effort for them.

MR. MILITELLO: We don't know those reasons.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Right. We don't necessarily know all of those reasons, because there's -- They may vary from fisherman to fisherman, but what the council has discussed is the idea of do -- You know, do we think does the council, or you all think, that adding the fifteen fish, or the thirty fish, and would that any further jeopardize the stock, and the council --

The discussions leading to today, you know, have been the council doesn't think that necessarily, that adding those fifteen fish, or thirty fish, would jeopardize the stock, because all the projections indicate that you still wouldn't be getting very close to your annual catch limit, and that seems to be the -- That's been determined to be the line, so to speak, that annual line that you don't want to cross of, once you go past that line, then you're in unsustainable territory.

There also has been thoughts of like whether red porgy has kind of settled out, and it's just kind of existing at its low level, and that may be the case as well, and so all that has kind of come to the council table, and it's been discussed, but the main idea being that --

MR. MILITELLO: So the reaction here is -- Just to your recommendation that, hey, we think this can be sustained, because --

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Well, not my recommendation, but --

MR. MILITELLO: Well, the council.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Sure. Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Are you good with that explanation, Chris? Okay. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. On Chris's comments, and as well as yours, Mike, we're saying we -- The red porgies, and we've been listening, and they've been on a rebuilding process for a while, and it wasn't that long ago that they weren't, and how long has it been on that project now? Is it just --

AP MEMBER: Twenty-six years.

MR. CONSTANT: Twenty-six years? Okay, and the ACL is not being met, and maybe it's the ACL that needs to be adjusted. I mean, before we tripled it anyway. I mean, to the point of tripling the catch to meet an ACL, but, if we have a fish in a rebuilding process, it would seem like we at least need to address -- Maybe the ACL needs to be lowered. That all said, it seems to me like that thirty number would be a better number, doubling the catch.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony. John.

MR. POLSTON: Mike, I would just like to go on the record. On the amberjack, it's saying up there that Scott suggested 1,500, and he was good with that, but I would like to go on record at 1,750. I just -- I don't think that's going to break the horse's back, and it's not the 2,000, but it's a little more than the 1,500, and a little more help for the fishermen. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Paul.

MR. NELSON: As far as the red porgy goes, I don't know any beeliner fishermen -- We don't target red porgies. They're kind of like a bycatch when you're catching a beeliner, or catching something else, and we don't go particularly looking for a school of red porgy, to catch our thirty head, or fifteen head, whatever is allowed at one time.

There's one here, and two here, and you just add them up at the end of the day, and, if you end up with your fifteen, you end up with your fifteen. If you don't -- But they are -- They're not like we're just targeting them to go catch red porgies. That's probably why the quota is not getting filled.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. I mean, I've seen that myself. I've landed on a pile of some of them, and some of them were a lot bigger than two pounds, I mean, but doesn't happen every day, even with the guys that are really good at it. It's sort of a -- You know I mean? They can be targeted, but, real quick, before we move on, because we definitely need to, wasn't it fifteen fish prior to fifteen, or sixty? Sixty fish, and, before that, it was a poundage. I remember when all that was happening, but I couldn't remember the details of it. We're just trying to give a few back. Darrin, real quick.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, real quick, and so, from the recreational sector, you know, we've been whittled down to one fish, for two months, and have a nice day, but, when we're sitting out there at 150 or 180 feet, we actually get into them, and they're large, and we have to just get away from them, because they become a nuisance, because we can't keep them, and has a council considered anything by giving us some of ours back? It used to be three per person, and they chopped us down to one per person, and so just a thought.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin, and, in relation to this amendment, they've developed it, you know, kind of this being commercial, and I would have to refer you to the council members to talk to them about, you know, doing something recreational-wise.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Gotcha. I just -- I mean, if they have a heart for the commercial guys, don't forget the recreational guys that also got smacked.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Thanks, Darrin, and I'll add one thing to that, Darrin, and, you know, the number of commercial boats is dwindling, and the number of recreational boats is not, and so let's keep that -- You know, it's amazing how many rec boats there is. We all talk about it all the time, you know, you and I included, and it's just the number of those boats is -- It's crazy. Chris.

MR. MILITELLO: Chris Militello, south Florida, and I don't think that's true.

MR. KIMREY: You don't think --

MR. MILITELLO: Since COVID, the number? I'm an insurance guy, man. I'm telling you, that since COVID, the number of boats that are out there is not greater, and it's less than since COVID.

MR. KIMREY: Well, maybe in the short-term, but, if you look just a few years, as COVID broke out, and then COVID tapered off -- Yes, you're feeling the pinch right now, because you had a huge bubble in your market, but I'm just talking about in general, all the way back to prior to the rebuilding plan for red porgies versus now, and there's definitely exponentially more recreational boats, and nobody can dispute that, than there was twenty years ago.

MR. MILITELLO: Twenty years ago, yes, but since COVID -- It spiked, and now it's falling down again.

MR. KIMREY: Well, COVID was an exaggerated bubble, and everybody saw that. I mean, you know, people were selling boats for twice what they were worth, just so they could get one, and people like you are making a big chunk of paycheck. All right, and where are we at here, guys? Moving along, and just picking on you, Chris. You're still my friend, right? All right. Thanks, man. Anybody else? Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Moving on to hogfish, and this would be the northern stock of hogfish, Georgia through North Carolina, and Florida is a separate stock, and we'll actually hit that at some point tomorrow, related to a stock assessment that is underway for that one, but, for the Georgia through North Carolina stock, the current trip limit for that species is 500. The council is considering an increase to either 750 or 1,000 pounds for that species.

MR. KIMREY: We're going to refer to Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Yes, and Jeff Marinko. I like hogfish. No, and I think 750 is a good number, because we weren't that far from the ACL. Hogfish populations last year were awesome in Carolina, and I see no problem with those. I think 750 is a good number. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Although I have seen a decline in them overall in the last thirty years, I think the 750 number would be a good way to go with them, for the guys who are actually doing a lot of it right now.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron. Anybody else got any feedback on the subcommittee recommendation of 750? It sounds like the couple people we've got here that are in the hogfish zone for the Carolinas or are down with it, and I'm a little bit too far north for it to matter to me. Anybody else? All right.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Next up is red grouper. The current trip limit for that is 200, and the council has -- They're only considering one other potential alternative of 300 pounds, and that is the subcommittee's recommendation at this point, is for increasing to a 3000-pound trip limit for that species.

MR. KIMREY: What have you got, Jeff?

MR. MARINKO: I like 300 pounds also. There's many times that we stop, you know, on a four or five-day trip, and it's ten fish or so, and 300 pounds will help just a little bit more, for sure. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and I'll go with Jeff. I mean, they're not as abundant as they used to be, but, I mean, if you're looking at moving it up, that's a good number to make a trip, and maybe a few less days out on the water.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron. I mean, it sounds like -- I don't see that many red groupers hardly ever anymore, but it sounds like it would only come into play on occasion, right, that increase, or do you think you could do it every time? Half the time? A quarter of the time? All right. Who else have we got? Anybody? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So, again, is the intent of this, Mike, to try to get -- Increasing the trip limits of some of the species we've discussed this afternoon to try to get closer to the ACL for these respective stocks, and is that the core intent of this of these actions?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I think so. I think that sounds kind of in line with what the council has discussed, is trying to get some of them closer to the ACL, those that have pretty notable gaps between the current trip limit or the current harvest and the ACL.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So I'm just going to kind of like maybe follow-up with what Chris mentioned a few minutes ago, and parrot, or paraphrase, Roy Crabtree, that said that it's a lot

bigger, or a lot more insidious, issue in a fishery where you have an ACL that's not being met, rather than blowing by the ACL, and you can maybe take some management measures to address going past the ACL on a regular basis, and so we're talking about a lot of species here this afternoon, red porgy and red grouper, that, again, based on this fishery-independent survey data that was presented yesterday, they're at really low levels of abundance.

I wonder if we're not meeting the ACL based on other reasons, and they could be environmental, or they could be human-driven or whatever, but there's a lot of species here that we're not ticking up against the ACL, and so maybe the council needs to revisit some ideas for these respective stocks of considering revising the ACL, instead of making -- Revising the trip limits to come up towards the current ACL for these stocks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul, and I'm going to ask this question to the council, and Mike, staff or whoever, and, I mean, increasing these ACLs, did any of this derived from the EO?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think this originated before the EO, and like the idea -- The thought was brought up before the current presidential administration was in place, but, after the EO was issued, then the council kind of recognized that this action, that we're already in progress of, aligns with some of the intents of the EO that were stated, and so I don't want to say it was motivated by the EO, because it started before that, but, once the EO went into place, the council is also now recognizing that in their rationale for why they may, you know, be looking at these actions.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike. He's very good at neutrality. Anybody else? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I was just thinking about the EO when I was making my comment a second ago, about, for some of these stocks, that the ACL is not getting hit, and, I mean, I'm stating the obvious here, that the commercial crowd is getting crushed by fuel prices, and so, if we want to restore American seafood competitiveness, we should, I think, also -- You know, instead of focusing on trying to bring some of these catch rates up towards the ACLs, we should try to focus on figuring out how to get the price of diesel fuel down dockside, so these guys can get more competitive with the international market.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul, and so we're past our 4:30 mark, and let's knock in a few more comments, and see if we can at least finish -- I just closed my computer, and what is after red grouper? I'm sorry, and I don't remember off the top of my head.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Triggerfish.

MR. KIMREY: Triggerfish? Let's do it.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Then golden tile.

MR. KIMREY: Golden tile, and is that the last two?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Go ahead, Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff. Let's go ahead and knock it out, and we'll be done with it. It won't take long. I don't know that this is really relevant, but can anybody tell us the effort level that was put in the last five years? Can you go back and pull trip tickets from year to year, and participant numbers? Would that give you -- I know, where we're at, effort levels -- I mean, there's hardly any boats left, and so effort level somewhere in here has got to calculate for some of the ACLs not being met, and I'm assuming most of you all know this, but I think -- Isn't it like 80 percent of the permits are in Florida, and isn't that correct, or 75? It's a big number. Kerry, do you know that?

MS. MARHEFKA: Sorry, and do you mean the effort levels?

MR. BUFF: Well, that and -- How many permits are in Florida? I'm just throwing that out there for, you know, the effort level that was done for -- Maybe somebody could pull up here in the morning, and we would have --

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Anybody? So can we move along, do you think? If we're fast, guys, and remember we can always talk about this over a cold beer, once we get out of this room, and let's see if we can knock out these few, and Mike already -- We ran Mike out, and he had places to be. We've got Myra, and we don't want to get her mad at us too, and so let's try to get it done pretty quick.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so next up then is gray triggerfish, and so the options there are don't revise the triple limit, and the subcommittee wanted to see alternatives for 1,200 pounds and 1,400 pounds, and, again, this is one that -- I believe this one has a split season as well.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Myra. Anybody got anything to add to this? Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and sorry about that. The commercial stuff, that's what we're here for, for me, and I'm just asking the question, and why would we go to 1,500 on the beeliners when we're still 50 percent, and I can't recall those numbers, but I think they were really close, and so would we give 500 to the vermilion and only 1,200 or 1,400 to the triggerfish? I was just curious why that is.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Does anybody have an answer to that question of why they're different? Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. I'm not sure why the weight would be that different, but I know, on the rec scale, that gray trigger has been on and off the closed list for a few years, here and there. It's been closed for a while, and open for a while, and so we're -- I mean, and then we're talking about giving another 400 pounds to it, and, on the rec side, we might be closed next year, and I don't know.

MR. KIMREY: Well, I mean, there's been times the ACL in gray triggers has been met, and I remember it. I remember them closing it, and it's been a few years back, and vermilion too for that matter, but, you know, I guess that hasn't happened recently, and so they're looking at an increase in it. Where is -- I should have never closed my computer, but is there a preferred alternative from the subcommittee on gray trigger? I see 1,200 and 1,400, and is there a preferred?

MS. BROUWER: No, and this was very -- I mean, they just discussed this over the last twenty-four hours.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Right, and so Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and I heard the meeting, and I do think triggerfish should stay at a thousand. I know, on my boat, what we see, and that's kind of my own private stock assessment, but we don't see that many triggerfish, and have you guys been catching limits? I was just curious, and, yes, I would vote for a thousand, and leave it there.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. From a recreational perspective, we lean on triggers sometimes, when other things won't bite, especially if we're deep enough to get them good, and the past year or two has not been as good as the years previous. Tony. For us anyway, just as a generalized personal stock assessment.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. On the rec sector, I catch some triggers, and they're deep, and they're a good-sized fish, but, with the red snapper closed, they get hit hard by rec boats that are going offshore, you know, 150 feet plus, and they are the alternative meat from red snapper, in a lot of cases.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and I'm just going to go back and say what John said a while ago. If the ACL is the number, and we're not meeting it, then we need to -- You know, if we're not going to meet it anyway, what is it really going to matter? There's going to be times of the year that we can catch these fish pretty good, but then, if we're still on a thousand pounds, we're not going to even get close.

I understand what you're saying, Jeff, but, if we don't do something to try to correct this, the recreational side is going to take these fish, period, and so it's either -- I guess the way I look at this fishery is we've got a pie, and it's however you split that pie is how we're going to eat the pie, and the numbers are the numbers, just like for the recreational guys. You've got what you've got, and however we divide it up, but, if we don't catch them, we're going to lose them, in three or four or five years, and so that -- My point is not today, but five years from now.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and so what would you -- Would you be more inclined to lean toward 1,200 or 1,400 pounds?

MR. BUFF: Well, my question, to start with, is why would we only go 1,200 or 1,400 with the triggerfish, when the beeliners were -- The percentages were the same on the ACL, but we went with 500 on those, and I would lean more towards the 1,400, just because I think it's going to get us closer to where we need to be.

MR. KIMREY: All right. Thanks, Scott, and so we do have a certain portion of the people in this room that think it needs to stay where it is, and then there's some others that don't, and so, I mean, I think that's going to be our recommendation.

MS. BROUWER: So, Scott, are you saying, just for my clarification, that the trip limit for triggerfish should be similar to the beeliner trip limit, since they're caught together?

MR. BUFF: What I was getting at is that the ACLs that we're not meeting, not catching, are almost identical, and so why would we give 1,500 and 400, and, also, Chris, we've noticed that a lot of our triggerfish has been moving north, and I think they're doing more what the beeliners -- I mean, not the beeliners, but the sea bass, because you all are catching them more and more up your way than what we're catching them our way, and so I think we're back to the climate change thing again, and I didn't say that's what they had to be, Myra, and I was just asking why.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Anybody else on gray trigger? Myra, are you good with that?

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and so next up is hook-and-line trip limit for golden tilefish, and so that's currently at 500 pounds gutted weight, and so the subcommittee is considering adding alternatives for 600 and 750 pounds gutted weight, and so how do you guys feel about that?

MR. KIMREY: What have you got, Scott?

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and what is the -- We've met the ACL for that for the past few years, correct?

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

MR. BUFF: Last year we did not by how much?

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

MR. BUFF: So we were 10 percent short or 63 percent?

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

MR. BUFF: So we definitely need to up it some as well, because the things that I see with our guys -- The guys that catch their limits, they're going to catch their limits regardless. The guys that don't catch their limits, they're never going to catch their limits, you know, and they're just not the same quality of fishermen. The boats that produce are the ones that do, and the ones that don't are the ones that don't. They fill those boxes in, I guess, and so I think that we could up that a couple hundred pounds. If we're at 60 percent, you know, that would give us a 25 percent increase, which would put us close to 90, but, here again, a lot of this stuff is going to go back to effort.

Like our guys, this year so far, they've been hammering the tilefish. The tilefish and the snowy, and that's basically all they've been doing, and like that takes your effort off everything else, the beeliners and the triggerfish, and so I don't know what you're seeing your way, but that's what our guys are --

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Andy.

MR. FISH: I think the golden tilefish should be more, if it's not being met, and I see a thing about this, and I guess it's like a step-up if we're not even -- Kind of like kingfish and mackerel does, if we don't meet a certain percentage of the quota, and I'm in favor of the step-up program as well.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Scott Buff, and John was just saying something, and we've talked about stuff all day, but never brought this up, and the weather for us is just the biggest factor. You know, it's the weather is good, and is the fish biting, and, over the past two to three years, the weather has really killed our production, and so we can't -- Our boats normally -- If it's below twenty-five, they're going to go, you know, and the normal rec guy is not going to go over ten or fifteen, but our guys are going to go. They might set a day at forty out, but they're going to go, but the weather has just been horrendous for the whole winter. It's just been terrible.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and the bad weather is -- It seems like it's more frequent, and, you know, it's not figured into a lot of this, unfortunately. When they're looking at the big picture, you never see a category that says boats laid out this many days, and I wish there were some way to figure that in, because it is a huge part of why some of these fish are being caught and not being caught. Anybody else? Vincent.

MR. BONURA: Yes, and I would agree on this, on upping the golden limit to the 750, or maybe even 1,000 pounds because the golden endorsement holders have a 4,000-pound trip, and three-quarters of the annual catch limit, and so a quarter of our catch limit, is 1,000 pounds.

MR. KIMREY: Thank you, Vincent. Anybody else, other than everybody is ready to go? Is everybody ready to go? Okay. All right. I think that's it. Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you all for sticking a little bit longer. We appreciate your input.

MR. KIMREY: 8:30 again in the morning, everybody.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on April 22, 2026.)

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APRIL 23, 2026

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Charleston in North Charleston, South Carolina, on Thursday, April 23, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Chris Kimrey.

MR. KIMREY: Okay, everybody. Let's get rolling here. Welcome. Good morning. This is the final day of this meeting. Everybody looks fresh and ready, which is good, because we're behind

still. I know you're tired of hearing me say it. I'm going to be even a little more adamant today to keep things moving.

I want good discussion, but let's not be redundant, just because we are so far behind. We're going to start out with talks on the SG 2, the 225, and what the potential future of that might be, and so I'm sure there's going to be a lot of discussion, and probably some different views on that, and we need to hear them, and hash it out best we can, and move along.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll get the presentation pulled up. All right, and so I'm just giving a fairly, hopefully fairly, brief presentation to provide both some historical context and then some information on the current situation with the SG 2 permit, where it is right now, and so you all can provide feedback on how it could potentially look in the future, what you would like to see out of that.

Going all the way back to Amendment 8 that went into place -- The council finished it in 1997, and this is the amendment that established the limited entry for the snapper grouper commercial sector, and the intent within that was to reduce commercial effort, which was characterized at the time as overcapitalized, and it formed two permits, one of which we talked about yesterday, and that was the SG 1 permit.

That's that unlimited snapper grouper permit, and that was given to vessels that had at least 1,000 pounds of snapper grouper species in any year from 1993 to 1996 and that had a valid permit at any time between February of 1996 and February of 1997. That permit, like we talked about yesterday, that's a transferable permit, via the two-for-one policy currently.

The SG 2 permit was the other permit that was formed within this amendment, and that has a total snapper grouper trip limit of 225 pounds, and is also subject to any species-specific trip limits, but overriding that is the 225 pounds. That was given to permit holders that did not have 1,000 pounds in any year from 1993 to 1996, but did have that active permit at that time, and so that was created to be a non-transferable permit.

The rules regarding that are that the owner may transfer the permit to a replacement vessel that has the same owner as long as the replacement vessel is equal to or less than the size of the replaced vessel. It cannot be sold to a new owner, and it cannot be transferred to immediate family, and so those are kind of the stipulations that went along with that SG 2 permit.

There have been discussions brought up within the AP, and council and elsewhere, about kind of what has happened with SG 2 permits that are owned by business entities, and so there has been some effective changing of ownership for SG 2 permits that has happened in the form of businesses that hold the permit. If it's held in a business name, and the business is sold, then it remains with the business, but there may be new ownership, or new partners within the business, that then have access to that permit, and so that is something that has been brought up, and it's been discussed several times over, that's associated with that permit.

Looking at the numbers over time, there's been discussion about, you know, kind of how the numbers of permits have changed over time, and there have been kind of checkpoints within the timeline of looks at where the numbers have been for SG 1 and SG 2 permits.

As we've gone through, I linked in the presentation the 2018 socioeconomic profile that was developed by Kari MacLauchlin-Buck. I didn't include the tables from that, just because I wanted to keep it fairly tight in the presentation, but you're able to click on that link, and you can explore that that paper, and that has permit breakdowns through 2016.

A more recent breakdown was included in a white paper that John Hadley led the development of in December of 2021. That looked at several aspects of the commercial permits, including summaries of changes in the permit numbers over time, and so I did pull a couple of tables from that that paper, just to show you, and so we see, here on the table, vessels that qualified for the SG 1 and SG 2 during the origin, during Amendment 8, and then we see the change to 2019.

I highlighted the rows that have SG 2 information. Those are highlighted in yellow on the screen, and so there were 448 original vessels that qualified for SG 2. In 2019, there were 148 SG 2 permits. Just due to the nature of those, given that they are non-transferable, they would have a faster attrition rate, because, if you are not able to transfer them, and you're not able to use them anymore, and you don't renew them, then they kind of just go away, and so 148 in 2019. You see kind of the numerical and the percentage changes between 1998 and 2019 associated with that permit.

Looking at the number of vessels in individual years that were near 2019, and so you see kind of the number of vessels with SG 2 permits in 2015, and annual values, and so 121 and then leading down to 108 in 2019, and then, more recently, in March of 2026, and I alluded to this yesterday, and Jessica Stephen gave a presentation. She's with the NMFS Limited Access Permit Program, and she's the branch chief with that program.

She gave a presentation in March of 2026 that, like I noted yesterday, had several breakdowns of both the SG 1 and SG 2 permits, and just a couple of tables from that to provide some reference here, and so these are the SG 2 permits by year and by homeport state. You'll see the bulk of the SG 2 permits are held in Florida. There is some held in North Carolina. The number in Florida has declined more rapidly than the number in North Carolina. That has remained pretty -- That has remained consistent for the last four years, going back to 2022, but the number overall is eighty-three at this point.

Then, looking at the permit ownership, we talked about the difference between individual ownership versus a business or corporate ownership, and so you see the decline that really is happening is in the individual ownership, which makes sense. It's a bit more difficult for the permits that are owned by individuals to change hands. They don't change hands, whereas those that are owned by a business are able to keep those permits, because the business can change ownership, and the permit would still be tied to that business, and so that's kind of the change that's been observed in the most recent years.

I can double-check the attendees list, and Jessica may be online, if there are questions. I'm not sure if she was able to make it today. I don't see her online right now, but we can always reach out to her with questions and follow-up if we have them.

Looking at the active versus the latent SG 2 permits, and so active just means there are any landings, any landings of any form, and latent means there were zero landings for that year, and so you see the number of permits, those that have active -- That have landings. You see those in

this column by number and this column by percentage. The percentage of latent permits for the SG 2 is much higher than that for the SG 1, with about 60 percent being latent, looking across the most recent five years.

Given the council is considering removal of the two-for-one policy through Amendment 60, one of the follow-up questions that came from the public, and from council members, is what happens with the SG 2. They decided they're not addressing the SG 2 in Amendment 60, but it does, you know, kind of lead to the question of, you know, in some future amendment, future action, what could the SG 2 potentially look like, and what role should the SG 2 permit play in the snapper group of commercial fishery, and so a few questions here to, you know, lead into the discussion.

If the two-for-one policy for SG 1 permits is removed, should the SG 2 permit continue to exist in its current form? If not, what changes should the council consider, and just some examples of potential changes are should there be a change to the poundage limit, and should there be changes to the transferability, or the accessibility of this type of permit? Should there be changes? Should the council make changes that would affect the number of permits of this form, and then any other comments that you have regarding the SG 2 and what it could look like in the future, and we can hear that discussion as well. I think that was the end of the presentation, and I'll turn it back to the chair, if you all have any questions, and then leading into the discussion.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Mike, and so I'm going to start this discussion off, because I've had a lot of people reach out to me when they saw this was on the agenda. After the last council meeting, I think there's a pretty good portion of people that are excited about the potential for the removal of the two-for-one on the SG 1.

There's equally a lot of concern for the SG 2, because of the evolution of how our commercial snapper grouper fishery has gone since 1997, when they implemented the SG 1, the two-for-one, and the SG 2 for the people that didn't qualify for the SG 1, and I'm just going to drop my perspective on it, and you all can do with it what you want. That way, my opinion will be out of the way, and I'm not trying to steer anybody one way or another, and this is just how I feel.

After spending a fair amount of time talking to people from North Carolina to Florida and everywhere in between, recreational and commercial people, you know, the snapper grouper fishery has evolved, for us in the Southeast Region, into something that's pretty much a boutique fishery. It's just not robust. It's not widespread like it was when I was growing up, and some of these other older guys.

There was a lot of snapper and grouper-complex-type fish being sold, exponentially more than there is now, because anybody could sell them, and, so, as it has turned into this boutique-ish type fishery -- I don't know that, in 1997, everybody realized how long the two-for-one would run, or where we would be. You know, back then, I thought there was plenty of fish, and there always would be, and I think a lot of people had that opinion on the fishery.

I feel like where we're at now, from a commercial perspective, that we need to do everything we can to protect every permit. If they're going to do away with the two-for-one, that's because they think it's the right thing to do to preserve that number of permits. I think that same logic should apply to the SG 2. There’s -- I was told eighty or eighty-one, and this 2025 number was eighty-three.

Either way, it's a few permits from being the same number that I was originally told, and we need to do everything we can to protect those, and, as we're doing that, you have to be mindful of the reason the number of latent permits is so high. These permits are latent because you cannot transfer them. You can't even -- Unless you were lucky enough to be one of the twenty-three people that transferred into an SG 2 as a corporation, and it doesn't mean you can transfer the corporation, or, I mean, the permit. It means you can transfer the corporation, and the permit goes with it. That's where that number of twenty-three comes from.

Anybody that wanted to transfer that permit had to sell their entire business, because it was attached to the business, and not the individual, and so I want everybody to understand that. That's where that number of twenty-three comes from.

All the other permits that are sitting latent are latent because the owners of those permits can't do anything with them. Either they chose to stop fishing, or they've been forced to stop fishing, because they've aged out or whatever, and they've kept the permits, but they can't do anything with it. They can't even transfer it to their son or daughter, and so they're latent because, if they're not fishing, there's nothing else they can do with it, other than renew it and sit on it, and so be mindful of that as we move forward.

It's my opinion that, even though a large number of these permits are latent, I think we should do everything we can to protect the eighty-three, or eighty-one, or whatever the actual number is moving forward, and make them transferable, and remember that there's a lot of positives.

Now, I know there's some people that are going to disagree with it, but, if you look at the big picture moving forward, and the end game, there's never going to be, most likely, more snapper grouper commercial permits issued, ever. That's where we're at. As fishing evolves, recreational pressure increases, and population increases, the fishery is going to decrease on its own, no matter what we do in management, and so we don't want to just let those permits go away, because you're not going to be able to get them again.

We always talk about access to up-and-comings, or the greenhorn pool, you know, the new people, and, sure, some of these permits are going to end up in the pockets of rich guys that aren't actually commercial fishing, but some of them might not. Even if they do end up with people that aren't true commercial fishermen, it's a smaller permit, and it may create access, at a lesser price point, for people that are trying to get into the fishery.

It's my opinion that we should protect them, every one of them, for that reason, and the permits that are sitting latent, you know, maybe there should be a timeframe. You know, if they did something to where they're transferable, you've got X number of months, or until this date, to transfer them or whatever. They can't just sit on them forever. The permits that are working, you know, if they're transferable, it creates lots of opportunity for people, and some of it will be for true commercial fishermen and some of it won't.

Another thing is, as the snapper grouper fishery evolves into what it's becoming, and we all know what that is, and, you know, it seems like it's less access most times, and more people always, this permit, if it's transferable, is an opportunity to get more people selling fish, but you're not increasing the pressure, because it's such a limited permit.

You know, in my head, I see all these things, the endgame looking forward. As much as we can as an advisory panel, it's my recommendation that we protect every one of those permits, figure out a way to convince the council and everybody above them to make them transferable, and, you know, see what happens from there, because, if we don't, we're never going to have an opportunity to ever get those permits back.

You know how it works. You never get it back, especially in the permit world. Sometimes they'll give you fish back, but you ain't getting those permits back when they're limited entry and they go away. I'm going to start with David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. David Moss. I'll start with a question, and whoever can answer can answer it. Was the idea of making it non-transferable just to do exactly what it has kind of done, is chip away at the number of permits that are actually fishing?

MR. KIMREY: It absolutely was, and that was the presentation that Mike -- You know, if you had less than 1,000 pounds catch history for three years, from 1993 to 1996, you didn't qualify for an SG 1 and so they would issue an SG 2, because you did have, you know, a permit on record, and catch history prior to that, or, you know, maybe not, but you had a valid, you know, snapper grouper permit.

The plan was to allow you to fish out, if you wanted to fish on a part-time basis, until I guess you aged out, or quit fishing, and so it has done exactly what they designed it to do, but real quick, remember, when they implemented SG 2 in 1997, almost thirty years ago, the permitting was -- That type of permitting was new to the fishing community, and, I mean, who knew that it would run thirty years, and the number of permits would decrease, and who knew that it would evolve into a hundred-plus-thousand-dollar permit by the time you went through the two-for-one to end up with a corporate permit that was transferable without the two-for-one restriction? You know, I just feel like, if we're smart, we'll be real careful with this one, and probably try to push it into something that it hasn't been. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. Thank you for that background. I appreciate that. Like you, I've had a couple of people, when they saw this on the agenda, ask me if we could talk in favor of removing -- Or making it transferable, and, like you, and I might anger some people, but the one issue that I see, which may not be an issue, especially by me, is just wealthy people stocking them up, so that they can keep more than their rec limit whenever they feel like it.

That said, the flip side to that is they're not out there every day. You know, they might go out there, whatever, once a month, once every couple of weeks, and, yes, they may hammer them, but it's not like they're out there every day, and so I can't imagine it's going to have a huge impact on the fishery, and, at the end of the day, if they're allowed to, they're allowed to, and their money is just as good as anybody else's if they want to buy it, and so I'm okay with it, but that's just one rec guy's opinion.

MR. KIMREY: Well, I don't think we're ever going to stop people that that that have large checkbooks from doing things with their checkbook to defeat the system, but this is a very small number of permits, and, you know, I would say that the juice is worth the squeeze on this one. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff. Number one, I just want to say that Kerry reprimanded me last night for a comment that I made yesterday, and I was completely wrong, and so it was not just one person pushing this. This has been going on for quite some time, as she led me to know, and so I want to get that out there, and I apologize. I was incorrect, but I was the biggest advocate for the two-for-one all the way through.

Me and Chris talked about this yesterday, and me and Kerry talked about it yesterday afternoon. I was always hoping it would go three-for-one, to get rid of some more of them, but I think, in the direction that the fishery is going, even this SG 2 -- You've got two fisheries now. You've either got a multiday boat or you've got a dayboat, and so I think this SG 2 would help that dayboat, and get somebody started, and then that that might open another door.

I think, for people believing that the SG 1 going one-for-one is going to help a young person get in, I disagree with that, because the cost value still won't be the same. We talked about this at breakfast this morning, and the cheapest way for somebody to get in our fishery is to buy a boat and lease a permit to get started. That is the cheapest way that you're going to get into this, and so that's just my opinion.

I completely agree with what Chris and David said. I think that we need to find a way to preserve these. There won't never be no more of them, and Kerry told me yesterday, when I was getting reprimanded, that the council feels like that we are down to that number that we need to be at, and so, if that's the case, then that's where we need to be, and so I just wanted to throw that out there.

I know this isn't the place for this, but, when you guys send these emails out for the fishery, and it just says amendment this, or amendment that, I pretty much keep up with what goes on with my fishery, but it would be nice if, in that amendment detail, in that email, that it had just a brief thing, you know, to what it actually had to do with. It don't have to have ten sentences, or an essay, but just what it's actually -- Like Amendment 60, in the email, could have said two-for-one permits, and that's all you need, just so you don't have to basically stop what you're doing, and go look that up, and figure out what it is. Just a comment.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and off-topic real quick, before I forget, does anybody receive the newsletter from the Gulf Council? It's very well done. Nothing against the Southeast Region, but I pay very little attention to the Gulf Council, because I don't fish there, and I never have, other than a few times, but their newsletter they send out, and sometimes real-time during their council meetings, is awesome, and so I kind of wish we had something like that with the Southeast Region. John.

MR. POLSTON: Just to move things along, I agree with everything everyone has said so far. The only thing that I didn't hear that has been said is, in my opinion, I think we should treat the SG 2 permit -- However, we decide to manage SG 1, I think we should do the same thing with SG 2, whether it be transfer, you know, one-for-one, or two-for-one, and just that's something I didn't hear said yet, but, everything else everybody said, I agree with. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, for the SG 2, in my view, you're looking at a small number of participants with a very, very limited amount of fish that they can take in the first place. Now, being in the family business that I am, you know, if I had one of these permits, I would at least like the opportunity to be able to pass it on to someone within my line somehow, and, the way it looks right now, that's just not a possibility.

You know, we've discussed, pretty much every day, you know, guys with big checkbooks, and companies buying it up, and so I don't know if the council could put in a provision that it has to go along some type of familial line down the way to keep it alive, or, you know, something along those lines, but, that way, the permits stay alive, and, you know, like you said, they're not going to come back, and so it could be a way that, you know, somebody who is invested in the industry, and has their hands dirty with it, could continue to do it on a limited basis if they wanted to.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Cameron. Does anybody else have a comment? Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and so I feel like we should leave it the way it is, and I'll tell you briefly why. I know it's a small number, the 225, but our trip limits are also very small numbers. I mean, you could pretty much catch a limit of snowy and a limit of red snapper at 225, and I'm going to use red snapper as an example, because it's the extreme, a five-week season, and let's throw another whatever, even if it's fifty boats into it, and most of them are in Florida, where the red snapper hotspot is, and I can see our seasons -- I can see it hurting us, the SG 1 holders, and I'm not looking for that. We're already struggling. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff, and I think anybody that's paying attention sees the potential for that, but I think, as an AP, we need to take less of an individual stance, and more of a long-term approach to this, and that's how I'm looking at it.

I mean, I'm not saying I'm right, and I'm not saying you're wrong, and that's just my opinion, but, also, remember it's such a few number of permits, and there's -- You take that number and reduce it down to how many people are actually fishing, and I would think the effect would be minimal, unless everybody -- But it is definitely -- You know, it definitely could help you out with the whole ACL issue we talked about yesterday, not meeting ACLs, and so, you know, it's a double-edged sword. Go ahead, Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and I see this as a red snapper -- The red snapper problem that has been created, and this would be a very hot permit for anybody and everybody that wants -- That's already an avid fisherman, that wants to go red snapper fishing, to go make $450 with their four friends. You burn $150 worth of fuel, and have $250 left over, and the red snapper quota is going to get eaten up half as fast, because it's going to create this niche thing, because of the red snapper bonanza, and so I'm against -- I think the people that that made this in 1996 might have been thinking about the long-term, and I think we should respect their decision a little bit, just because it sides with me. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. So you think eighty permits is going to double the commercial red snapper harvest when there's five-hundred-plus SG 1 already?

MR. FISH: I think there's I think there's probably only, and this is just a guess, but forty boats participating in the red snapper fishery, and I'm just -- This is just a guess, and I would say --

MR. KIMREY: Forty boats during the commercial? There's that many in Morehead City. There's a bunch of boats just in Morehead that --

MR. FISH: Participating in the red snapper?

MR. KIMREY: Absolutely, and you know what they do is they catch their seventy-five pounds coming and going on other species. On occasion, they will make a snapper trip, but, most of the time, they're coupling it with other things, because that's how they stay profitable. For us in North Carolina, to get any decent snapper fishing, you've got a fifteen or twenty-mile ride, and, at $5.40 a gallon, it's hard to be profitable with seventy-five pounds of snappers, when you're riding that far.

MR. FISH: That's what I'm kind of getting at. They just want to catch them. It's not a business sense.

MR. KIMREY: Well, if they had an SG 2, they would be catching and retaining them legally, instead of poaching them, like they're doing already.

MR. FISH: I would rather they get poached, and then they're not on my quota.

MR. KIMREY: Well, there you go. John.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and just one more thing. I've heard two comments already about the red snapper, and the permits that we're talking about hurting the red snapper quota or whatever, but we're not talking about hurting the quota. The problem with what you're saying is with the amount of red snapper we're allowed to catch, seventy-five pounds.

We should be allowed to catch a lot more than seventy-five pounds, and we all know that. I'm not beating a tom-tom, but I'm just saying we should be allowed to catch a lot more than seventy-five. You're saying get rid of the permits, because so we can't, you know, burn up the seventy-five pounds too quick, and that's not the problem.

Once you get rid of the permits, they're done, they're gone, but we can hopefully, in the near future, do something about a larger quota that we're allowed to catch, and then that won't play into as much as the permits. You wouldn't care if we had four-times as much quota, I wouldn't think, if those eighty permits stayed around, and I just wanted to say that.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. Chris has been waiting a while.

MR. MILITELLO: Chris Militello, south Florida. Help me understand, and why do they have to go away? Why can't there just be eighty, and there's always eighty, and, if you don't meet your quota, then you're out, and it's there for someone else to buy, and why does it have to be that way?

MR. KIMREY: Well, that's how it was designed when they established the SG 2 permit. It was designed to be non-transferable, attached to either an entity, which would be a business --

MR. MILITELLO: Well, why can't we change that?

MR. KIMREY: Well, that's what we're trying to do.

MR. MILITELLO: Okay. All right. So, I mean, there's a lot of talk about once it goes, let's make a transfer, and let's just -- If there's eighty, let's leave it at eighty. If no one has it, if they don't meet the -- If they don't catch enough fish, you're out, and it's up for the next guy.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chris. A recreational guy, and he kind of sees it the way I do. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just tying idea to the terminology that gets used with this, the idea has been brought up, and the council has talked some about it, of using a permit pool. Basically, if your permit is not used, or goes into an inactive state, however the rules are defined, then it doesn't go away anymore. It would go into a pool, and then people would have access, and so you still limit the number of permits, and there's still a cap on the number of permits, but people are able to, you know, access permits through the pool, as opposed to permits going away forever.

MR. KIMREY: One more point I need to bring up, that I didn't think of, but I was just enlightened on, is it's really not even eighty-three permits, because twenty-three of them are corporate, and so they're here, and so it's really only sixty permits that would be coming into play, and not eighty-three. Scott.

MR. KIMREY: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff. On the other side of this too, I think it's really hard to preserve what I call the old-school fishery, with the multiday boats, and so, you know, that's something that I think about all the time. Over the past twenty years, we've lost so much waterfront, and people are crazy, and just -- I mean, why would you not sell a piece of property, that you're basically just skirting what you can get by with, when you're setting on a million-dollar piece of property on the waterfront, and that's what is happening to our fish houses.

On the other hand too, every one of these boats coming and going that would bring fish, that are not bringing fish now, and the dayboats are a big deal for those fish houses, because they go multiple days, and this would even help some of that, or entice some of them to do something different, and maybe even bring some new people in. Here again, like I say, when I come on Tuesday, I was hell-bent about this whole thing. I didn't want nothing to do with it, but I honestly believe that it's probably the right direction to go, even with putting these where they can be transferred.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and there's so much overlap, and I see this in my area up close and personal, because I'm from the area. I've been there, and I've watched the area grow. I know the restaurant owners, and I know the fish house owners. I know the ones that used to own fish houses, and I know the ones that are commercial fishing. I know everybody, and so I see this whole picture.

With this fishery -- Like, in our area, we are tourism-based, and it's seasonal, and we have a high season, and they lean -- The restaurants in our area, they lean on our snapper grouper guys on center console boats for a big part. I mean, a huge part of their fresh seafood, which is one of the most desirable things that brings people to our area, and, just like Scott said, that's dayboats. Most of that is all dayboats.

They're putting their boat overboard every morning, and they're running out there, and they're catching what they can catch, and they come back, and they sell it to either a local market that cuts it, or, the ones that are properly licensed as dealers, they sell it right to them, and then they do it all over the next day. This permit is something that fits that boutique local little fishery so well, and it just -- It pains me to think about it going away or not being transferred to preserve the ones we have. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and just some quick fisherman math. 124,500 pounds, divided by a seventy-pound-a-day trip limit, is 1,660 trips. Divided by forty boats, it's forty-one days of trips, based on the 124,000 pounds. I'm just equating that into, if you add this boutique permit, and you double the boats, and you're going to go -- You're going to halve the twenty-one-day red snapper, just based on my fisherman math.

MR. KIMREY: Well, and I respect your fisherman math, and it may unfold exactly that way, but -- there's probably somebody in this room that knows the answer to this question, but I think there's a lot more than forty boats that are catching seventy-five pounds of snapper a day during the season, and, just like John said, it's more of an ACL issue. It's not there's a shortage of snappers. It's a shortage of access to the snappers on the commercial front, and, look, we're making progress with that.

You know, the EFPs and all this stuff, you know, maybe, if we can get discards down, and figure out a way to spread it out, your ACL in the red snappers might go up, but I don't think we should base the decision on this permit on one fish, or one opinion. Again, endgame, access, what's going on, where we're going to end up, and that's -- In my opinion, with my little brain, that's how we need to look at this permit. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Good morning. Haley Stephens, and so I'm thinking about this in terms of the future, and I think there's already been a lot of really good discussion, and I would be in favor of keeping it. I wouldn't mind seeing it being able to be transferred, or sold.

When I'm thinking about it, from the perspective of a mother of two young boys who are absolutely crazy about fishing, I think about when they're fifteen or sixteen years old, and, you know, I don't necessarily want them running off in multiday boats, as they're entering potentially the commercial fishery.

Something like this really does fit that bill of the greenhorn, where they can enter the fishery at a relatively potentially reasonable point, without having to do a huge investment in the SG 1, because mom is not going to buy that permit for him, and you know, this could be something that they could potentially acquire themselves, and get started, and hopefully grow and continue these traditions and these heritages that we always speak about.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. David Moss. Andy, I completely agree with you, and I can predict that that's probably going to happen. I think a lot of people are going to enter the fishery to do exactly what you just said, particularly for red snapper, and people will travel. They're going to come up from where I'm at, because they can, and they've got the money, and all that stuff.

That said, we talk about, at this council all the time, not doing these broad-reaching things because of one species, which I think that that's probably the one that's going to affect the most, no doubt, but we talk all the time about, you know, not doing all kinds of things because of one species, and that's exactly that there. I think that it would probably benefit a lot of people, as we've heard from a few people, and it's going to help some entrants, as kind of a starter kit if you will, to get into it.

As much as I completely agree with you, and I can almost guarantee that that's going to happen, I would hate to see us not allowing people to enter the fishery, and there's certainly enough barriers as it is for commercial guys to get into it, because of one species, and this is, again, what we constantly do here, and so that's my opinion.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. With the proposed EFP being at thirty-nine days in Florida, and is that what the proposal was, Jessica, thirty-nine days, versus a forty-two-day commercial season, I mean, that might ease the tensions a little bit in itself for somebody wanting to jump onboard with an SG 2, if they've already got thirty-nine days to keep them.

You all know these panic fisheries, you know, this derby fishery, and that's going to be less of a thing with the potential for thirty-nine days of fishing. It's going to start out great, and I've seen it in North Carolina with the flounders. You know what I mean?

It starts out, and we get a two-week flounder season. You start out and, the first couple of days, everybody is going crazy, and then, by the end of the second week, it's sort of like people are just fishing normal again, and so you know, there's no way to say for sure. There's definitely, Andy, going to be a lot of what you're saying, definitely, but, to the extent that it's a catastrophic failure, I don't know if that's the case or not. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: I forgot most of what I was going to tell you here, after all this, but I would agree with Jeff and Andy, actually, on this one about -- I think undoing this would have a larger impact on the fishery than canceling out the two-for-one, and maybe we should start with one before undoing the other, and, instead of opening up everything all at the one time here, maybe undo the two-for-one first, and give that a few years, and then potentially open this.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Vincent, and that's sort of what there is. They're working on the amendment with the SG 1, doing away with the two-for-one. The SG 2 is not in that amendment. It's just the SG 2 came up, and so that's sort of what we're doing, the SG 1 first, and now they're trying to figure out what they want to do moving forward with SG 2. Mike, did you have something to add?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No, and that was about it.

MR. BONURA: It looks like it's all in one amendment.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No, and Amendment 60 is addressing the SG 1, the two-for-one. That's all that is included. The council just saw that, because the two-for-one was established kind of as a package deal back in Amendment 8 with the establishment of the SG 2, they wanted to see, okay, if they're making the change to this part of, you know, what went in with Amendment 8, how do people feel about this other part, and, you know, what are potential changes down the line that the

council would look at, but they've already said the 225 is not going into Amendment 60, and, just as the staffer, if they want to keep their current timeline, they're not able to put it in at this point.

MR. BONURA: Okay. I've got you, and, I mean, I guess, the opinion of mine, I wouldn't say to leave it alone, status quo, where it's at, and then figure out the future of the fishery in the future, and not now.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Vincent. Does anybody else have a comment moving forward? Good job. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Just to slow things down, just trying to figure this out, are we making an advisory position to the council from this meeting on this issue, or is that going to be an October thing, or are we even doing that in October for SG 2?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, for the SG 2, I think this was more to hear perspectives. There doesn't need to be a formal consensus recommendation from the advisory panel. It was more for council members to, you know, those that are here, hear the discussion, you know, and we'll convey the summary of the discussion, and, you know, there are some different opinions here, and that will be conveyed in the report that they receive, but it's more to provide them context of, you know, thinking into the future, what future actions should they or should they not put on their horizon.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Perfect. It sounds like that has already happened.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin, and I agree 100 percent. Unless somebody has something to add, everybody stew on this, and nobody be mad at each other, and let's move on to the next topic. Anybody? All right. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. If you give us a quick moment to transition, we're going to go to the next agenda item, and that will be Snapper Grouper Amendment 61, and so John Hadley is going to come up here to lead that.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, sir. Go ahead, John. Thanks for being here.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you. Good morning, everyone. I'm John Hadley, the staff lead for Amendment 61 on the council staff side, and I just wanted to bring this before you all again. You discussed this at your fall meeting last year, and so I'll, you know, briefly orient everyone on Amendment 61, you know, as a refresher, if nothing else. The idea here is to go over the amendment and get an update on what has changed since the last time you reviewed this amendment, and then get any additional feedback that you may have to help the council as they move this amendment along towards public hearings.

So, with that said, so as, you know, as a refresher, this amendment is evaluating the species that make up the fishery management unit for the snapper grouper complex, and so the council has taken a sort of overarching look.

There's currently fifty-five species in the complex. They've narrowed down the number of species that they're examining to fourteen species out of that fifty-five, and really looking at whether or not these species need to be maintained under status quo, and so remain regulated under full federal

management measures, where appropriate, such as annual catch limits, accountability measures, size limits, where appropriate, or potentially move these species, or groups of species, around in some way, potentially either removing them from the fishery management unit altogether.

You can kind of think of this as kicking them out of the FMP, the Snapper Grouper FMP, or sort of a middle ground of looking at designating them as ecosystem component species, and so that would remove some measures, such as annual catch limits and accountability measures, but there are still some other measures that can remain in place, such as a permitting and reporting requirement.

Very quickly, as an update on where this amendment stands, and, again, you did see this last fall, when it was in its scoping phase, and so scoping hearings have been conducted, and the council reviewed scoping comments, as well as the AP's comments, at the December 2025 meeting, and further refined the amendment.

They also wanted to look at sort of a little bit more of a deep dive into how other councils have addressed ecosystem component species, and so that information was brought back to them in March, really taking a deep dive into how the Mid-Atlantic has examined ecosystem component species, as well as other councils, and so, at that meeting, they further refined the amendment, and, you know, the tentative timeline is before you there.

Assuming this amendment stays on track, it would be further developed, and potentially going for approval for public hearings at the September 2026 meeting. If that is the case, public hearings would take place in the fall, this coming fall, and then the amendment would be further developed for a potential final vote for secretarial review at the March 2027 meeting, and so sort of at the halfway-ish point, if you will.

Again, the objectives for this meeting, I'll go over in a bit, but the idea is to just bring you up to speed on what's new, what has happened since the AP last discussed the amendment. I'll go over a refresher on your previous AP recommendations, and then I'll turn it over to you guys to provide any additional feedback, or, if you have any changes to the recommendations, that we want to change this, or we didn't mean that, you know, we can certainly change that accordingly. I'll take a break here, to see if there are any questions, before I go over what's new since the last time we discussed this. All right. If there's no clarifying questions, I'll keep on moving.

As I mentioned in March, you know, the council has kind of taken a deep dive into what other councils have done as far as ecosystem component species. They also had a very in-depth discussion on how they want to structure this amendment, and really took a deep dive into looking at what was the list of seventeen species.

They had a great discussion on, you know, do we really want to move forward to these species, or do we not, and how may we want to structure this amendment, and so the council offered guidance. You know, they took an overarching view at the fourteen species at the time they were considering, and said, okay, out of that list of species, what might we consider actually removing from the fishery management unit, and so, again, sort of thinking about kicking it out of the FMP.

In that case, those species that may, and so “may” is a is a key word there. This isn't definitely going to happen. It's a maybe, but the species that came up for potential removal from the FMU are bar jack, misty grouper and spadefish.

Then, moving down the species that the council may consider designating as ecosystem component species, or potentially looking at a sort of alternative management approach, includes the porgies complex, with the potential for a scup only option, the grunts complex, and so looking at potentially moving that entire complex over to ecosystem component species, or potentially parsing it out a little bit, looking at tomtate only, potentially moving all of the grunts out as ecosystem component species, but maintaining white grunt under its own ACL or species-specific management.

Also, looking at moving some species out of the deepwater complex, and designating them as ecosystem components, and then also spadefish, and then, finally, the species that were removed for further consideration in Amendment 61, and so these are the species that are just going to be maintained under status quo management, were cubera snapper, queen snapper, and banded rudderfish, and so those are the species that were sort of taken off the table, and so that’s how the list has gone from seventeen species to fourteen species, and so those are no longer -- Those last three are no longer up for discussion, and they will be maintained under status quo.

There's a table in here that goes over that kind of what is still in the amendment, and so you can see the species there are included, the entire list, along with their commercial, recreational and total annual catch limits.

One thing I will point out is the species there in gray are not being considered for removal from the fishery management unit, but are included for context, since they are part of the deepwater complex, but the other species are being considered in the amendment, and so this is where I'm going to go over what is being considered in the amendment, and then also the AP feedback that you provided last time, and so, as far as, you know, which direction this may go -- I’m happy to answer any questions.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Sorry to interrupt you. This is Darrin Willingham. Can you briefly go back over the definition of ecosystem component species? What are we talking about there?

MR. HADLEY: Yes. Absolutely, and so I believe the word-for-word definition is towards the end here. I'll scroll down, but, generally speaking, ecosystem component species are species that are no longer in need of -- There it is right there. They are stocks that are determined not do not require conservation and management, but a council desires to list them in the FMP to achieve ecosystem management objectives.

The idea here is that they may not be elevated to the level of a species that really needs full conservation and management, and so, by that, they don't necessarily need annual catch limits, and they don't necessarily need accountability measures, but they are still important in that fishery, in that complex, you know, under the list of species within that fishery management plan, and so, in that case, they may be -- One of the one of the items that the council may deem appropriate is that these species are important to collect data, and so data collection certainly falls under the category of ecosystem component species. Does that help?

MR. WILLINGHAM: It helps some, but then so are they just going to be just put on the back burner for quite a long time, and when would the council ever turn to it and say, hey, we need to count these fish now all of a sudden?

MR. HADLEY: So that's certainly up to the council's discretion, but -- I'll get into that a little bit when we get into the potential actions in this amendment, but, generally speaking, having them as ecosystem component species sort of elevates them a little bit for data collection, and, within that, the council does have the option to maintain a permit and reporting requirement, and so that keeps the data portion intact on the ecosystem component species.

Additionally, there is the option to add sort of a high level trip limit, or a bag limit to those species, and so something that sort of adds a -- It pumps the brakes and adds a cap, so to speak, on harvest, so they're not totally unmanaged, and so there's different levels of ecosystem component, but, generally speaking, adding a species as ecosystem component, at the very least, elevates it for data collection purposes, so there is the monitoring aspect to that.

Another item I should mention is the council did direct staff to provide an annual report of unmanaged species, including ecosystem component species, landings in the South Atlantic region, and so there will be an annual update on unmanaged species landings, there again with the idea of, you know, seeing, okay, there's a fishery developing for this unmanaged, or ecosystem component species, and we may want to take a better look at it and see if -- Do we need to bring it into the fishery management plan under sort of, quote unquote, full federal management.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: John, real quick, and so, unless it is removed completely from the FMU, from a recreational standpoint, it's still managed federally, right, and, from a commercial standpoint, you would still have to have an SG permit to sell them, correct?

MR. HADLEY: That is an option for the council, and so, if the council says we want to maintain these -- I'm just going to say the porgies complex, you know, and I'm using an example there. We want to maintain the porgies complex as ecosystem component species, and we want to keep the permit requirement, what's in place right now, and so, the for-hire permit and the commercial permit, we want to keep that in place, and that's sort of the direction that the council has been going when they've been examining this, as far as, you know, maintaining that permit requirement. It's just some of the other measures come off, such as accountability measures or annual catch limits.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Yes, and I think that was some of the discussion last time, was trying to figure out, unless it was completely removed from the FMU, and, you know, some of this stuff, from a commercial perspective, would be wide open, and so I think that's an individual basis per species, if it's an EC, is what you're saying, from the council?

MR. HADLEY: Yes, and it's really the -- If the council specifies that they want to have some sort of aggregate trip limit, that's certainly within the realm of possibilities for them to do so. If they want to say we want to keep the permit requirement, that's within the realm of possibilities for them to do so, but they have to specifically say that, and that's what they will be doing in developing this amendment.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Thanks, John. I was hoping maybe that would help everybody understand, or help me anyway. Thanks, John. Go ahead.

MR. HADLEY: So I'm going to scroll back up here to the table, and so this is really a summary version of what is going to be considered in this amendment, and so, you know, there's always the no action alternative. The council can choose to leave any of these species, or any of these complexes, in place as-is, sort of the status quo option, where, again, they maintain the annual catch limits, accountability measures, any other measures that are currently in place.

There's -- Sort of Alternative 2 there is removing the species from the fishery management unit altogether, and so you can think of that as just taking them out of the FMP. They're no longer within the -- Under federal management of any type, and then, again, the middle ground, looking at designating those ecosystem component species, and so there's a few subalternatives here that the council can choose, and so look at -- They could just say we want to maintain these as ecosystem component species in the FMP, and there's no associated regulations with those. There currently are five ecosystem component species that fall under this category that the council has had in place since the comprehensive ACL amendment.

Within that, the council could kind of take it one step further, and they could say we want to designate these species as ecosystem components, and also maintain the permit and reporting requirement that currently is in place, and then sort of another option the council has is to say we want to designate this group of species as ecosystem components, and we want to put some sort of aggregate trip limit on the commercial side, or a bag limit on the recreational side, for these ecosystem component species, and so, you know, there is the option there.

You could sort of choose 3b and 3a, and so the council could say we want to designate these species as ecosystem components, and we want to maintain the permit and reporting requirement, and we want to have an aggregate trip limit, and so, you know, that's within the realm of possibilities.

With that, I'm going to provide a quick refresher over what you discussed at your last AP meeting, and, again, you know, the idea here is I'll turn it over to the AP after this, to provide any updates that you may have, and additional information for the council to consider, but remember this is was -- If you'll recall from last fall, this was a pretty in-depth conversation, but this has been a super helpful tool for the council, I will say.

You know, you discussed each species, where they should fall, whether they should be status quo, or potentially ecosystem components, and we came up with this table that showed the consensus recommendation of the AP. I will mention there are a few species there that are struck out.

Again, they were in the AP discussion, but they're no longer up for discussion, and so queen snapper, cubera snapper, and banded rudderfish are sort of off the table in this amendment, and so I just wanted to note that, but you had your porgies complex and blackfin snapper that you wanted to keep under status quo. Then, the other species, you were thinking could fall under ecosystem component status, noting that the permit and reporting requirement would be important if the council were to do so.

I highlighted some of the relevant AP comments. I'll go over them very briefly, but, you know, the ones that are still -- That are applicable to the species that are still being considered in the amendment. You noted that the council should decide on retaining or removing all porgies as a single unit, since there are some ID issues among the porgy species.

For the porgies complex, there was concern over new directed commercial targeting of species if they are removed from federal management altogether, and increasing -- The potential for increasing discards of co-occurring federally-managed species, and so, in that case, I think the concern was that people will go target porgies, but, in the process, they may catch vermilion snapper, and other federally-managed species as bycatch, and so there were some bycatch issues noted there.

You also noted that scup are an important species in the Raleigh Bay area of North Carolina, and you covered misty grouper, noting that they are a long-lived species and may benefit from management, and, overall, the AP noted there was support for removing some species from federal management, under the notion of streamlining the regulations, and streamlining the management of the FMP, and allow additional directed resources and initiatives geared towards key species. You recommended maintaining existing data collection and permit requirements, if any species are listed as ecosystem components, and so those are the sort of consensus recommendations and comments from the AP.

There were some other comments noted. You know, some AP members felt that all species being considered in the amendment should be removed, to allow for state management, and consider maintaining all deepwater complex species as status quo, with some bycatch concerns, and it was noted that spadefish could be removed from federal management, or the FMU altogether, if states are willing to take on management, but the AP did not want the species to be totally unmanaged, due to potential effort shifts.

Additionally, it was noted that white grunt are a critical species for North Carolina. It was the number-two most common species in the headboat survey. Headboats in the Florida Keys would benefit from having the grunts removed from the federal aggregate, and so there's some potential benefits there.

The AP noted that they would like to keep -- Some AP members noted that there's a desire to keep limited entry, the limited entry commercial permit requirement, to avoid an increase in effort and bycatch on co-occurring federally-managed species, and the AP did not have a recommendation on an aggregate limit at the time for EC species, and would like additional information.

Finally, after the AP's main discussion, there was a sort of sidebar conversation, and that was noted in the report, because I think it was an important one, and it was noted that blackfin snapper, after they're recorded, are often lumped together with yelloweye and vermilion snapper, since they're a similar, I guess, market category, if you will, and they have a similar appearance, and could cause issues if blackfin snapper are removed from the fishery management unit, and so, with that, I'm going to turn it over to the AP.

There are three discussion topics, or three discussion questions here, I should say. You know, is there anything that stood out in the guidance from October that you want to note, or change? Does Table 3 still reflect the AP's consensus recommendations? Additionally, as I mentioned, there are

five ecosystem component species that currently are in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. There's bank sea bass, cottonwick, longspine porgy, ocean triggerfish, and rock sea bass. As the council continues to discuss ecosystem component species, should those be brought into the discussion, sort of looking at it from an overarching perspective?

Then, finally, if you have any -- We're working on pulling data for landings of -- The landings, or trip-level landings, on the potential ecosystem component species, but, if the council does have -- Does pursue an aggregate commercial trip limit, or aggregate recreational bag limit, for ecosystem component species, do you have any sort of recommendation of where to start with that, and so the IPT, the interdisciplinary planning team, which is developing the amendment, sort of has a starting point, initially, of 1,500 to 4,500 pounds per trip for commercial trips, and then twenty to forty fish for the recreational aggregate bag limit, and so that's just the starting place.

The council hasn't reviewed this yet, but I think your AP -- You know, the AP's input, at this point, on, you know, is this a good place to start, or should we look higher, or should we look lower, and that sort of thing would be helpful for the council, because this is something that they will be discussing at their June meeting, and so, with that, I'll turn it over to the AP.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John. I've got a quick question, maybe for you, or maybe for a council member. If the species are removed from the FMU, but a permit requirement still stays in place, what's the permit? Where is the permit for the -- Is it just going to be for the commercial sector? I'm trying to figure out --

MR. HADLEY: Yes, and so good question, and so if they -- So you're talking about ecosystem component designation, and so, if they're removed from federal management, you know, full federal conservation and management, so to speak, there can still be a permit requirement, and so they're still within the fishery management plan. They're just not under the list of species that have full federal management. I know it's a little bit of a funky --

MR. KIMREY: So they're still under the same FMP, and they're just removed from the --

MR. HADLEY: Yes, correct, and so they would still be in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, and they would still be covered by the commercial snapper grouper permit and then the for-hire snapper grouper permit requirement, and so that's within the FMU.

MR. KIMREY: That's what I assumed, but okay.

MR. HADLEY: It's a little bit of semantics. I know it's confusing, but since they're still in the -- You know, the bottom line is that they're still in the FMP, which they would be if they're ecosystem component species, and then they could still fall under a permit requirement that's currently in place.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Perfect. Thank you. Just making sure I understood that, and a few other people are asking as well, from all over. Thanks again, John. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Thank you, John. A quick question before we get into discussion. Are the species that are included in the FMP, or the FMU, is it like a Magnuson requirement that they receive a stock assessment?

MR. HADLEY: No, it's not. It's not, and it's -- I guess you could say it's encouraged, but it's not a requirement, but there is -- If the species is federally managed, it does have to have an accountability measure, and it does have to have an annual catch limit, and so that's not necessarily a stock assessment.

It could be a data-limited species, which most of these are, or I guess all of them are, and so that's the motivating factor. A lot of these species, they're likely never going to have a stock assessment. The data just isn't there, and they're not necessarily -- You know, most of them are not, you know, keystone species, and so the council has limited resources for stock assessments, limited resources as far as how they can develop annual catch limits, and so a lot of these are in the data-poor side of things, and will not have a catch limit or -- Excuse me. Not have a stock assessment to go along with it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. Great explanation, John. Anybody want to get this party started? We've got a couple of questions here we need to look over. Darrin. I can always depend on Darrin. Thank you, sir.

MR. WILLINGHAM: That's not true. I didn't say squat for SG 1. Anyway, Darrin Willingham. So I remember when we had these intense discussions back in October, and it still doesn't make sense to me that several of these species are even considered, especially the grunts. The white grunt, I know you guys made a good point that it's -- That's an important species up in North Carolina, and it doesn't do anything for us in Florida.

The tomtate and the sailor's choice, that's just taking up space, I think, personally. I think that would be a great one not to put under that ecosystem component, but actually say goodbye to it, take some of that workload off of the council, because, I mean, we see how long this process takes, and it takes years to get this stuff through, and, if we know that none of these fish are ever going to be counted, then why not just take them out of there?

I also feel strongly about the Atlantic spadefish. I mean, we have a plethora of Atlantic spadefish off of St. Augustine and Jacksonville, and that doesn't make sense that we wouldn't take that off there, and, the porgies, are we actually ever going to see a count of these porgies, or do we just take that out of the management? Thanks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. Jessica, you up?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. I was just going to try to help, and John Hadley was going to pull up this table, and so you guys might remember that you all used this table the last time. The council found this table super helpful, and let me just kind of add some thoughts here, because this is a very confusing discussion, and so let me try to channel John Carmichael.

This fishery management unit has fifty-five species in it, and we think, at the time when the species were added, that we're like -- The people were like, hey, what are all the things that you can catch when you're out there on the reef, and, you know, looking at some of the more popular species, and some of the less popular species, they just kind of threw everything in there, and like they threw the kitchen sink in there, but now that it's been fifty years since Magnuson was created, and

you guys know that we don't have the Cadillac of stock assessments for all fifty-five species, and we never will, and so they aren't really receiving good federal management.

Some people on the council are like, oh, I'm really scared to take anything out of the fishery management unit, because then it won't be federally managed anymore. It's not really being federally managed right now, because it's data-poor, and we're not going to have a formal stock assessment for it, and so it's not really receiving a bunch of protections. It has a quota on it, and you know how bad the MRIP data is, and so you could intercept, you know, one of these fish, and that might shut down an entire fishery throughout the entire region.

There was a lot of good discussion that you guys had at the October meeting, where some folks were wanting to just like, well, let's remove all of these species. That is one, I guess, line of thought here, but there's really only one state, and that's Florida, that could easily pick up the species that are taken out of the fishery management unit and put regulations in place and extend them into federal waters.

The other states, like North Carolina, but it's multiple ones, they really kind of default to the federal management system, and so it's challenging for them to go through the state process to put regulations in place in state waters and federal waters for a species that's coming out of the fishery management unit, and so that's why the council is not like, well, let's just take everything out, and we'll just punt it over to the states, because there's really only one state that can easily do that.

When you all were making this table, what -- One of the things that council got from this discussion was that you guys thought that the permit, having the permit requirement, which you all talked about a little bit this morning, and having reporting on it, were super important for some of these species.

What the council tried to do, at our last discussion, and John Hadley showed you some of that information, is we tried to say, based on the table, based on you all's input, are there still some species that can come completely out, and you saw that -- I think that we picked out three, and like spadefish was one of them, that we feel like doesn't need federal management, and that doesn't mean it won't be tracked, and so the council is now going to be using a process that the Mid-Atlantic Council uses, where we get and look at all of the commercial data annually.

It would be for the managed species, and it would be for the unmanaged species, because I heard a question this morning about, well, how do you look at this, and how can it come back in, and so the council will be looking at this annually.

If we see some issue, or if you guys identify some issue, then we can consider bringing it back into full management, and so, just because it goes into ecosystem component, it doesn't mean it can't come back in, but it's beneficial to not think about, okay, we're going to have, you know, the greatest data in the world for all of these species. We don't think that that's ever going to be possible, and so pulling some of these things out, so they might be grouped under one ACL, or not be tracked with an ACL at all, but you would have to have a commercial permit, and the reporting requirements would still be in place, but it's kind of a challenging discussion to think about which bin to put which species in.

I can tell you that, the input that you provided, and you guys worked on this table last time, and this is what the council used, and how we use the AP's input, and so, if someone is like, oh, well, this species is really popular off of my state, that's great, but is it really popular throughout the entire region? How important is it that it stays in the fishery management unit? It will still be tracked, and we could still require the permit for it. It's just kind of walking that line.

I'll also tell you the council is embarking on this partly because of the seafood competitiveness executive order, and we had to submit a list of items that we were going to work on, and this is the number-one thing on our list, is revising this unit. NOAA Fisheries also came to the council and is talking about their process for, now that they have fewer employees, and they have fewer employees doing stock assessments, doing a lot of the work, and they are telling us that we have too many species in the fishery management unit.

I mean, most councils do, but this is our example here, is the fifty-five species in this fishery management unit, and they're basically saying we've got to get down to the core of what we're really managing, and what's really important, and so that's what this exercise is. The way you all set up this table, and how you had the discussion, and provided the data to us on these species was perfect, and I'm happy to help.

You know, we're here to help when you all get down into the discussion to, you know, provide information on what the council said about the species, but John Hadley showed you some of that summarized information. There were a couple of species that we decided were so important, and I think it was a couple of groupers, that we were like let's not even consider it for removal, or ecosystem component, and we went ahead and said, no, those couples stay in the fishery management unit, but I'm here, and I can help answer any questions as you all dive into this discussion, and you all's input was very important as we talked about this at the council meeting.

MR. KIMREY: Thank you, Jessica. Great explanation, and, keeping us moving here, really, as an AP, what we need to do is look at this chart, and see if there's anything we want to change. From my perspective, queen snapper, cubera, banded rudderfish, I'm glad they're off the table. They're hugely important, even though they're -- Well, not the banded rudderfish, but, you know, some of them are less frequent that they really need management. So, looking at this table, who thinks we need to make changes and/or recommendations? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I'll just second what Chris said. We spent a lot of time on this. In essence of moving this program along, and adjourning the meeting soon, that we keep this the way it is, and so I'm going to second what Chris said.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Haley Stephens. I've certainly had a lot of time to think about this, and digest it as well, and, you know, looking at -- I'm really glad to see that the banded rudderfish was removed from consideration of removal. I may be standing on my own on this one, and I'll put my recreational hat on, but the bar jacks are a very important species to us.

A lot of the times, they are co-occurring with those rudderfish. They're very easy to target, and as, you know, some of the more popular snapper grouper species have become unavailable for us in

the past few years, we have really had to lean on these traditionally less desirable things, like the rudderfish, and like the bar jacks, and almaco jacks are not being considered in this, correct?

You know, I bring that up for a couple of reasons, and identification can be challenging to some folks, but, you know, I'm just speaking from one area, and one boat, but the bar jacks and the rudderfish are incredibly important to us, and I would like to see -- You know, I'm okay with the ecosystem for the bar jacks, and so that's okay, but the grunts are also very, very important to us, and another concern I have with the grunts, and the tomtates, is, if that were to go somewhere else -- You know, for our operation folks do rely on that as a non-commercial food source.

They are taking the grunts. They are eating the grunts. It is a very good quality, that is accessible. You know, that could also turn into a bait fishery, if we aren't careful with our commercial permits and, you know, folks being able to go out and target the grunts and come back and sell those for bait, and they don't travel well. It's not, you know, going to do super well in a live well.

I'm okay with the way that the table is. I'm comfortable with the ecosystem. Based on the way I think about the ecosystem component, it's like an in-law house, you know, and grandma is not living with you in the main house, but she's in the backyard, and you can keep an eye on her, and we're not totally kicking her out. We're still taking care of her, but those are my two-cents.

I would also point you to a public comment that was made on the Amendment 61 document on the council's website. I thought that had some really interesting perspective from a commercial fishermen regarding some of these jack species, and so, if you have time, or interest, there are some good points there as well.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley, and this -- This is pretty much a yes or no question for me, just so we're clear, and so you think we need to make any changes to this table, yes or no? I couldn't deduct that from all your great comments. I just wanted to clarify.

MS. STEPHENS: If nothing else, I would like to see the bar jack remain status quo. Otherwise, I'm comfortable with the way everything else is.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Great. Before we go to the hand I had over here, does anybody want to add to Haley's comment on the bar jack? Is there anybody here that has any concerns one way or the other? I mean, I think bar jacks are important, and I'm okay with them being ecosystem. Where we're at, we catch them, but I don't think anybody is going to wipe them out, but we've got a different bait situation in North Carolina than they have in Florida, and so I don't know if that's a thing. Anybody? Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, Chris, and that's a really good point. You know, we can't just focus on what one area and one state is doing. We really do have to take a holistic approach to that, and so I'm okay either way, as long as it's not being kicked out completely. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks Haley. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. Haley, just a quick question on what we were speaking about the bar jacks, and I know you and I had a quick conversation yesterday evening about this, and I understand that a lot of these are kind of like this, for lack of a better term, mixed-bag

component for you guys, and I can certainly appreciate that. I know, by us, the same thing, and, you know, there's a lot of subsistence that would want to keep a lot of those.

If the bar jacks, and this is even with Jessica's great explanation, and perhaps I need the four-year-old version, but, if the bar jacks are in the ecosystem component, then there's less of a chance of you having an issue of them ever being closed, correct? Like they will still be open? Okay, and so that's why I'm trying to weigh like what's better for you guys.

You know, again, for us, these grunts are kind of a bait fishery. We use them when we want to go catch groupers the old-fashioned way, but that's why I don't know -- I don't know what the right answer is, and I can certainly empathize with what you guys are trying to do.

MS. STEPHENS: Yes. Sure, and so, just like in terms of fishing behavior, the bar jacks, the rudderfish, they're very curious. They're very dumb. They'll come right up to your boat, and you're not catching them on the bottom. You're catching them, you know, just a few feet down with an eight-ounce lead in a chunk of squid, no problem.

With that being said, the current bag limit is very high. Currently, it is already twenty of these per person. From a recreational standpoint, we will pull off of a spot to stop catching them, because we need those for the next day, and the next day, and I'm glad to see the consideration for the commercial permit, because, if that were to go to wide open, you could just sit there and wipe out the entire school, because it is a schooling fish, and, whatever you didn't catch that day, you come back and catch the next day, and then it's gone, and I think, you know, I'm glad to see the rudderfish were removed, because I think we kind of had that issue back in 2020, which is why there were some adjustments, and I'm cool with whatever you guys want to do.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. Dave, are you good?

MR. MOSS: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I had John Hadley put, in blue here, the -- This is from earlier in the document, but to show it on your table, and so these are the three species that we're suggesting removed from the fishery management plan altogether, and so I wanted you to be able to see that. Plus, the ones that have a strikethrough are the ones that the council said status quo, maintain federal management.

For example, based on what Haley is saying, it sounds like you might not agree with what the council did at the last meeting with bar jack, and it sounds like you might not agree with the category that the council put it in, and so maybe you want to provide some comments on that, and so just trying to indicate up here what the council did that was kind of different from what you guys said, so that you could react to it and see it on this table, and so the blue and then the strikethrough, and so see that there are three species on the left-hand column of queen, cubera, and banded rudderfish.

Those three, the council said take out, and they would no longer be considered for removal from the fishery management unit, and so those three species would stay in the fishery management

unit, and then the three species in that second column are now under the category of removed from the fishery management plan altogether.

Then pretty much everything else is as you guys indicated it, other than the porgies and all that, and I believe that the porgies we put in the ecosystem component with a permit category, and we put the grunts in there as well. You guys already had the grunts, but you had the porgies over here in status quo. We put them in ecosystem component.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jessica. Is it safe to assume that the three fish that you have for removal from the FMP will be -- State management will follow for each state in the Southeast region, and isn't it safe to assume they'll do something?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, Florida will. That's what I was trying to explain.

MR. KIMREY: I understand that Florida is in place with the science to make it happen, but you know, North Carolina just about always follows the federal recommendation, you know, and you even said that, which I'm very aware of, but can't the states implement some kind of management, even without having the science to back it?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, they can. It's just the mechanics of the process, and so FWC can do that fairly easily, and so I want to say South Carolina has to go through I think the general assembly, and we would just go to our commission. Once it's removed from the federal fishery management unit, the Magnuson allows the state to extend -- To make regulations and extend them into federal waters, so that they're essentially regulating in federal waters.

That means, at least in Florida, that the saltwater products license, restricted species endorsement, those types of things, trip ticket reporting, all of that would occur when we extend the species, and so the other thing, that John didn't get into here, is there's been two or three other rounds of this, where the council has gone through this process and kicked out some species that were say caught off of Florida, or they were part of our marine life, which is our aquarium trade fishery, and so we made it so that, once they were removed from the fishery management plan, it was like a seamless transition as FWC extended those regs into federal waters.

It's not that the other states don't want to do that. It's just a lot more challenging, and so you can imagine going through the general assembly, as opposed to some commissioners who are the final stop for the regulations, like we have, and it's just more challenging for them, but, knowing that, we are still suggesting these three species for complete removal, and then, in this case, Florida would pick -- You know, is considering picking them up and extending regulations in the federal waters.

MR. KIMREY: Right, and I get all that, but my original question is it's safe to assume that, if they're removed, the states are going to do something, whether it be in South Carolina, through the general assembly, or in North Carolina, through the commissioners, or in Georgia, and is that safe to assume?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No, because it's too challenging for the states other than Florida. I was looking back to Amy, and she's shaking her head no. I just don't know that it's advantageous for those states to go through their process to do it. North Carolina doesn't really have a simple process

to do it. They're defaulting to the federal regs. South Carolina, I think that they have other priorities that they're trying to take through the general assembly, and picking up management of these species, I don't know that --

MR. KIMREY: That was just something I wanted -- That was how I understood it. That was just something I wanted to make abundantly clear to the AP members, that, once they're off the FMU, other than in Florida, they're on their own, and it may or may not be an issue, but that's going to be the case. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Covering old ground here, we had discussed, at the last AP in October, pretty strongly that misty grouper should stay, as it is in that X in the left-hand column, in the FMU, and so that -- Where the council is going, in that blue bar in the second column, is definitely different than what the AP had I thought concurred in the previous meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we looked at the landings for all this, and so the council changed their opinion based on some information from NOAA and the landings, et cetera.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jessica. You good, Paul? Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. I wanted to concur with Amy. Going through our legislature, it may be a little troublesome to get species in, and our spade fishery in South Carolina is basically ten to fifteen miles offshore, and so you're looking at federal waters, and so I don't know, and would the Atlantic States Management pick this up?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No, and ASMFC is looking at species that occur in state waters that are moving through those -- You know, across state lines, but in the water, and so, once again, I think Florida could pick it up, but we're thinking -- So they're not really -- None of these species are really getting a lot of active federal management right now. That's why we're trying to figure out where is the best place for them. Putting them in the column of the ecosystem component, and requiring a permit, is maybe the most precautionary place to put them, but we're also saying the spadefish -- You know, really is it --

MR. CONSTANT: They’re a healthy stock.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right, and like does it really need to be managed in a federal fishery management unit with all of these other reef fish? That's kind of where we're coming from. We looked at the landings, and we looked at the intercepts. We looked at whether these species are confused with other things, and so let me give an example, but the council didn't go this way.

When we did our EFPs, and people had to abide by that overall snapper grouper aggregate limit, there are some folks in the fishing club here that are like, wait a minute, grunts are in the fishery management unit, and so they're using them as bait, and we're like, hang on, and that's in the federal fishery management unit, and it can't be used that way, and so we realized, in going through these EFPs and trying to establish this overall aggregate, that there's still a lot of misinformation, even by avid anglers, about what is managed in that fifty-five-species complex.

Thinking about that, we find it advantageous to go through this exercise and talk about what is really in need of active management, what is kind of on a watch list, and then what can come out and then, for a State like Florida, could extend the regulations in the federal waters.

MR. CONSTANT: Once into the ecosystem, are they still in the aggregate?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, that's part of what John Hadley is saying, and so we can still track them. You still -- If you're commercial, you have to report on everything that you're harvesting anyway.

MR. CONSTANT: I was more thinking of rec.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, so you can require the existing permit, or some other type of permit that you could create, and we are talking about putting some aggregate across all ecosystem component species, and so maybe not in the existing aggregate, but maybe in a different overall number aggregate, but there's some debate, discussion, about this, because different councils handle ecosystem component species differently. That's why we're getting a little hung up.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jessica and Tony. Haley has got a quick comment. After that, has anybody got anything to add? Okay, and so we'll go Haley, then Darrin.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris, and, with respect to the time, I know that we've got to move it along. With the fact that almaco jacks and rudderfish are remaining status quo, I would just ask that bar jack be considered to remain status quo, and I'm not sure if I'm misreading the blue bar under remove from FMP altogether.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would say you're interpreting it correctly, and so the way -- I would just say that we would be taking notes from the AP that you're suggesting that you don't agree with the council's category for bar jack.

MS. STEPHENS: I don't know council's category for bar jack, but I would just ask that it be considered to be -- To remain status quo.

MR. KIMREY: Does anybody else think that the bar jack needs to remain status quo? Haley feels pretty strongly about it, but, as an AP in general, we kind of need to figure that out, to make a recommendation to the council, because, so far, it seems like that's the only potential change we want to make to this chart. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Not talking about the bar jacks, but, again, I want to see misty grouper state status quo too, which would be different from what the council believes.

MR. KIMREY: Okay, and I think we had a good discussion about misty when we originated this chart back in October, and we came to the consensus, and this is good. This is why we're here. We came to the consensus, as an AP, that misty grouper needed to remain status quo, and does anybody feel like bar jack, outside of Haley, should remain status quo?

I don't, and I feel like, in Florida, that they're going to probably implement some kind of management on it, because they have the ability to do it. In our area, I don't see it as an issue, but

as anybody else feel the same as Haley on that status quo for bar jack, because we have to make a recommendation as an AP, and she can do it as an individual. Are you good with that one, too?

MR. NELSON: Paul Nelson, and I'm good with status quo.

MR. KIMREY: So, yes, and we're getting some support for that outside of Haley. Okay. David, go ahead.

MR. MOSS: Just so I can make a quick comment to that night. Again, this is not a fishery that I prosecute one way or the other, and kind of speaking for Haley here, and I think I understand her concern, and it's not necessarily a Florida issue, because we understand that Florida is probably going to pick up, or could pick up, management of this.

The concern is more for the north, and just that they could be kind of -- I'm probably not saying this right, but unmanaged, unregulated, and just get hammered in another facet, and then Haley ends up feeling the effects down south, because they're -- I don't know how transient they are. I mean, you know, we'll catch them by accident and stuff here and there, and it's not like we keep them, but I think that that's your concern, correct?

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, and, just real quick to that point, when I think of, you know, these kinds of like sub-group of jacks, outside of our greater and lesser amberjack, it's the bar jack, it's the rudderfish and it's the almaco, and, so, you know, if we've got almaco is not even considered in 61, and we've got rudderfish, you know, remains status quo, in my mind, it only makes sense, for the way that these fish do congregate, and the way that you do catch them, that you kind of keep them all lumped in together, instead of kind of all over the place.

MR. KIMREY: Haley, is that more for identification purposes that you think it should be that way, because of misidentification, or is it because you think of the pressure on stock? Like, for us in North Carolina, and I could be wrong, but I feel like there's very minimal pressure on bar jacks, and I don't know if you guys in Florida, central and south Florida on the Atlantic side, are using them for bait, or if you're eating them, or you're doing what, but, for us, there's very little pressure on them.

They are occasionally used for bait, and pretty much, unless it's just somebody that randomly wants to keep one off a headboat, there's -- Nobody is doing anything with them, and so that's why I'm not terribly worried about them. I just don't think there's a lot of pressure on them, but it's different, and so is it identification or pressure you're worried about?

MS. STEPHENS: To that point, just the way that these fish congregate, and identification, and so both.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham, and so I don't think that this chart should stay the same. I really -- I'm listening to Haley about the grunts, but do we really truly, truly think that sailor's choice and grunts are going to leave our fisheries, or leave our waters? I don't think so. I mean, they're such a nuisance, when you're actually trying to catch something else, and then, if you get out there on a partyboat, and all you're catching is grunt, and people want to bring that back in,

wonderful, but, if you're trying to look at that as a species that you're going to target, I don't -- I don't think so, and so I think they should be moved to the remove from the FMP, and so that's the grunt side of that, tomtate and the sailor's choice.

Just as a procedural thing, I remember, back in October, we kind of put this together, and then somebody made a motion, and somebody seconded the motion, and we finally voted on that thing, and that was it, and sorry, and it passed. Thank you, and that's the way it's going to be. Do we need to go through, and I know it's not a timely thing, but do we need to go through each one of the questionable ones, and take a vote, you know, a motion, a second, and a vote, on each one of these things? That way, we get an exact account for this for folks.

MR. KIMREY: So it is my opinion, Darrin, that we do not need to do that. It looks like, to me, there's only one or two that are in question, and we can probably discern the majority without going line-to-line and having a vote on everything. It looks like, to me, we've got some question about bar jack and misty grouper, and it also looks like that there's pretty substantial support for status quo on those two fish, and we can make that recommendation, unless there's huge opposition from somebody else in the AP. I know some of you guys are neutral. John.

MR. POLSTON: Just to move things along, and we spent a lot of time on this last time, and we said what we wanted, and it's up there. Just because the council wants to move it, it doesn't necessarily show what we want, and so, yes, status quo, as far as I'm concerned, makes sense.

MR. KIMREY: John just made a really good point. The council is the council, and we're the AP, and so, you know, we make a recommendation, and they actually do stuff, and so let's be mindful of that. Does anybody have anything to add here? It's about time for a break. I know I really need one. Anybody? Okay. It is 10:10. Let's take ten and come back at 10:20.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. KIMREY: Okay, everybody. Let's mosey back. We're getting close here. We're making up time. We're going to be diligent about getting this done. We do got to go back to John briefly, and this is going to be almost a yes or no question, with minimal discussion, if discussion is required, and Paul is pointing at me, and I couldn't hear what he said, and so I'm going to be quiet and listen.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I just want to say one more thing about the misty grouper, and urging for the council, because we did reach consensus, or so I thought, at the last AP meeting on where we thought -- What column that should end up in, and I brought back Amendment 14, which is the deepwater area closures, South Atlantic Council Amendment 14, and misty grouper is right in the abstract of Amendment 14, meaning that was one of the species whereby the council was motivated to create this deepwater MPA complex, and so, again, I'm urging the council to consider what the AP recommends for misty grouper.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. Can we make note of that somewhere?

MR. HADLEY: We can certainly make that in the summary notes for this meeting.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Okay. Perfect. That way, it will be on record, and he was heard. Even if they didn't listen to him, at least he was heard, and so we're going to you, John, for this last little tidbit here on the trip limit stuff here.

MR. HADLEY: All right, and so, jumping down to Question 3 here, and, again, this is something that the council is going to have additional landings information, and I apologize for not having that for you right now, but, you know, in thinking about that option, the potential action for the council to implement either an aggregate commercial trip limit or an aggregate recreational bag limit for EC species, and so you can think of this as just pooling all those EC species together, and, you know, you could have up to a certain amount commercially, and you could have up to a certain amount recreationally.

You know, the council is going to need to come up with a range to consider, and, you know, the IPT discussed this, and, again, getting data on it, but, just as a starting point, thinking of, you know, a range of 1,500 to 4,500 pounds on the commercial side and twenty to forty fish on the recreational side.

You know, again, you'll have another view of this with data in the fall, but, you know, I wanted to bring this to you, to sort of get a gut check of is this realistic? Is this -- You know, do you think it should be higher? Do you think 1,500 pounds is too low? Do you think twenty fish is too low, and we should kind of bump it up, or bump it down, and, you know, that sort of gut check comment on, you know, is this a good starting point.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John, and so this is going to circle back to us with more information, most likely, and so I'm definitely open for some discussion on this, but remember it's not the end all-be-all, and we don't have a lot to base it on, other than just straight up opinion, and so I would say that that we should let the council, you know, beat this up a little bit, and send it back to us, since it's -- You know, it's definitely not indefinite as of today, in any way, shape, or form, and it's coming back around to it, and does anybody have a comment, or anything they want to add to this, before we move forward? Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, Chris. Tony Constant. I think what I just kind of noticed, and it’s a little bit obvious, but we now are splitting the aggregate, and so we still have an aggregate catch for the snapper grouper species, and now we’re going to split that into another aggregate, meaning that now we can keep twice, and do you follow? Obviously, the species change, but, where we were keeping twenty fish here, now we can keep forty.

MR. KIMREY: I do kind of see where you’re going with that, which is -- Which is part of the reason I said, with the information we have here -- The council is going to beat that apart. They're going to -- You know, they're going to hash that out a whole lot more when this comes back to us, and maybe we'll have a better explanation.

MR. CONSTANT: If we have the aggregate on the commercial sector as well, they would be -- I don't know, and what is it, 1,500 to 2,000 pounds now, and they can double that on the -- It’s another 1,500 or 2,000. Is there no --

MR. KIMREY: Did that help you at all? Okay. Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko. Yes, and I just -- I feel like those numbers are really high, and I have a big boat, and I love to fill it up, but those seem crazy. You know, 3,000 pounds, picking the middle number, of white grunts, and 300 pounds a gag, that's crazy, and so, yes, obviously it needs to be lower, but we'll look forward to what you all say.

MR. KIMREY: Right. Thanks, Jeff, and, you know, I think anybody that read that, you know, read that felt the same way, and so I figured that's why we'll let them circle back to us with explanation in the future. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and the same on that with the rec sector. That is almost sixty fish, where we're at twenty, if it was the middle.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks guys. Anybody else? Moving right along. John, are you good?

MR. HADLEY: All good. I appreciate the discussion, and, as I mentioned, the council will be reviewing this in June, and I know, in previous discussions, and I'm sure in June as well, they've really relied on the AP, and so thank you very much.

MR. KIMREY: Perfect. Thanks, John. I think now we're going to go into hogfish.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Sorry about that. It took the computer a second to catch up to what we were doing. I'll get hogfish pulled up here, and so you all have already completed the fishery performance report for hogfish. You completed that in 2024, at the beginning of the ongoing hogfish stock assessment.

We're getting towards the end of it, and that was kind of right at the beginning of when this process was being established of using the stock risk ratings in the ABC control rule, and so we didn't get the risk rating at that point, but we're going to come back to it now, because that assessment is about to finish up, and then they will have to use the ABC control rule to develop the catch levels coming out of that assessment.

Just a few brief highlights from what you all said about hogfish, and so the last stock assessment, prior to SEDAR 94, which is ongoing right now, was SEDAR 37. That was completed in 2014. At that point, hogfish in Florida, and, as a reminder, we're talking about Florida hogfish, and so not the Georgia through North Carolina stock that was discussed yesterday. This is just east coast of Florida.

At that time, Florida hogfish were determined to be overfished, and so they are currently in a rebuilding plan, and you all commented, in your fishery performance report, that there is limited directed targeting, due to the low retention limit. There's a twenty-five-pound commercial retention limit, and one per person recreational. The commercial gear is typically spear, and then there's some overlap in the commercial fishery with spiny lobster divers.

Some commented on noticing an increased average size, larger fish in deeper water, and there was some comment on there being a level -- Some level of demand, and some cultural value for hogfish in the Florida Keys, but that was for the species of hogfish, noting that most of the hogfish that is sold in those areas is actually imported from other areas of the U.S. or other countries.

Then there were also some comments on environmental concerns about freshwater runoff pushing fish into deeper water off of Florida, and so those are some of the notes, just highlights. The full report that you all compiled is in your briefing book, if you need to look back at that, but we're going to go through the risk rating, and Judd kind of familiarized you all with this yesterday, and so I'm more or less going to be looking to, you know, each of the categories.

I'll note what the score is stated there, and, if you all see anything that looks like you have, you know, additional information than kind of the default that is used to develop the score, then we can go ahead and take those notes, but, if not, then you can review that, and we can just keep moving on through the next score.

First, looking at the biological attributes, as we noted yesterday, these are typically based on specific studies, and estimated through those studies, and then used in the assessment process, and so natural mortality for hogfish falls within the medium range. They have a max age of twenty-three years, and so that puts them in the medium category, and then the age at maturity is fairly early in life. It's between one and two years.

There is a note there that they are protogynous hermaphrodites, and they do transition based on social cues, and so that can sometimes provide some additional note, as far as how they would be maturing, but the default score is based on that information. We have a two for natural mortality, a three, and so, overall, a 2.5, and that would be -- Two being medium risk, and low risk for age at maturity. Any questions, or comments, related to biological attributes for Florida hogfish? All right. Not seeing any hands, I'm going to keep us moving then, and, if you all want me to stop, please raise your hand, and I'll stop, and we can address comments as they pop up.

Ability to regulate the fishery, this has to do with management's ability to keep the catch within the specified ACL, the annual catch limit. Neither sector exceeded its ACL within the most recent five-year range, and so that is a low risk. It seems that management is -- That catches are staying within the ACL that's been specified. Any comments related to that one? John.

MR. POLSTON: What is the range that they're catching towards ACL? I mean, there may be a possibility we need to raise the poundage a little bit, if we're not getting anywhere close to it, and what is the -- How close are they getting to the ACL on the hogfish?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I can pull that up and follow-up with you. I think the conversation of raising the ACL is probably best put for after the assessment is completed, which will be later on this year, and so hogfish -- Before they make any changes, those would come back to the AP at a future meeting, and so I think that may be put there, but I can get specific levels for you if you need them, and may I can follow-up here. Okay.

All right. Not seeing any other hands, moving next to potential for discard losses, and so, on the commercial side, the assessment decided not to use the commercial discard data, and the kind of explanation was provided yesterday of due to uncertainty about that particular piece of information from the logbooks. On the recreational side, the discard mortality or, excuse me, the discards comprise 28 percent of the catch related to recreational hook-and-line, and 5 percent related to the recreational spear fishery, and so that put it in a medium risk category, as far as how much discards are contributing to the overall catch. I'm going to take a brief look around, to see if there's any commentary related to discard losses. John.

MR. POLSTON: Are they split into recreational and commercial? Is that what the two numbers are for there, the two and two?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So as far as --

MR. POLSTON: As far as the discards are concerned.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, the commercial, I believe they're not using discard information, and some of that may fall into place because of the nature of the commercial fishery. With it being heavy spear, there's not going to be a whole lot of discards, and with the information of the uncertainty tied to the commercial logbooks for the discard information specifically, and so are you looking at like because of hook-and-line versus spear?

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and that was the whole reason I brought it up, because there's zero discard for commercial, because 99 percent of it is all speared, and so there's zero discards, and so it would make it a 3 instead of a 2.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and these two would be the recreational side, and so that would be recreational spear fishermen, is what's shown there, and then hook-and-line is estimated at 28 percent of the catch is discarded, and so that's kind of what put it in that category, but, yes, understood, and like the commercial -- The commercial is, you know, kind of seen as not many discards, and kind of, you know, if any discards are going to be coming from that, because of the spear fishery.

MR. KIMREY: Andy.

MR. FISH: Just for the sake of argument, but I can watch a lot of YouTube videos, and the recreational -- You do see a lot of fish pull off on these recreational videos, and is that factored into this type of equation, as far as a discard? If the fish pulls off, does he die? Do you guys factor that kind of math into your doctor math?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I love the doctor math. I'm going to let that doctor address you.

DR. COLLIER: So what I would say is, during the data workshop, the experts are in the room that would be talking about all the issues related to discard mortality, and they try to take these anecdotal pieces of information, as well as quantified pieces of information, and put it all together in order to estimate discard mortality, and so I would suspect that they discussed the potential for dead discards in the spear fishery, but they might not have all that many, as far as numbers of fish, and so that that might be a difficult thing to quantify.

While I have the mic, to follow-up on John Polston's question, both the recreational and commercial ACLs, they've been about 50 percent since 2000, or since 2022, and so they're not -- They're not getting to the ACL for hogfish for the Florida stock.

MR. POLSTON: (Mr. Polston’s comment is not audible on the recording.)

DR. COLLIER: John, you're absolutely right. It's, as we look at the information, it's showing that there's room for growth in the recreational and commercial side, but there is an upcoming stock assessment for this fish, that's in a rebuilding plan, and so the council has been fairly cautious with trying to rebuild this stock. It was at pretty low levels in the last stock assessment.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just heard, from Chris behind me, that there was industry in the room when they had the discussions at the assessment about discards, and commercial discards as well, and so there was input from industry there, and so any recommended additional notes or changes on that category? All right. Not seeing any hands, we'll keep moving to commercial value.

Commercial value, we have 3 percent as the estimated average annual contribution to revenue, and then 13 percent for the contribution to trips that hogfish are caught on, which places it in the medium category for both. Any comments or recommended changes to that?

All right. Continuing down to recreational desirability, and so this has to do with the trips that, when they report what they were targeting, how much they are targeting hogfish, and so the only -- The only group within the recreational fishery that discussed that was spear, but that comprises a pretty small number of trips, and so, even though there's a notable 23 percent within the spear component, the spear component is very small compared to say the hook-and-line component, which is why you have the total percentage of trips that report targeting is less than 1 percent, and so that places it in the low risk category. Any comments, or recommended changes, related to that?

Not seeing any hands, social concerns, and this is the place where we're kind of looking to you all to get a gauge on what communities within the South Atlantic fisheries are reliant on this species, and I guess this would be quite Florida-centric, and so are there any Florida areas that are highly reliant on hogfish for things like selling trips or having, you know, table fare at restaurants, fishing markets, anything like that? Is there any level of reliance on this species? How would you place that, and so I'll pause here to see if there's any discussion on that matter.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. David Moss, and so, from southeast Florida, I wouldn't say that there's necessarily a reliance on it. A lot of kind of your average every day, quote-unquote, spear fishermen, that that's their easiest target, especially the guys that are up on the shallower stuff. A lot of times, they'll bring their equipment along when they're lobster diving and stuff, and that's always the first thing they take, because they're not difficult to shoot, as everybody knows, and so I don't think it's a market driver, necessarily, but a lot of people like to shoot them, because they're easy, and anybody can kind of do it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. Anybody have anything to add to that for social concerns before we move along?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and so, based on that comment, I would probably -- That sounds like it's a low-risk category there, and so I'll enter that as a 3.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: Sorry. The one, the one thing I'll kind of add, and emphasize, is, because they're not the brightest bulb in the chandelier, they are pretty susceptible, and so, again, especially like off -- Directly southeast Florida, like Broward and Palm Beach particularly, where there's not a ton of reef tract there, and still a lot of traffic.

There's not many legal fish, because, the second they become legal, they'll get shot, and so they, they are susceptible, and even in the Keys as well, you know, and you've got a little bit more geography there, but, because they're easy targets, they don't last long.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks David. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish . I think in the Keys, where they're more abundant for sure, with the twenty-five-pound trip limit, you're kind of not going to see a social concern, because they're -- You're not giving the industry access to the fish at a twenty-five-pound trip limit. They're not -- Once they can't get it in any kind of quantities, the people quit, and the restaurants start -- They can't advertise, and they can't do stuff like that, is my point.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you. I've noted that as well. Any disagreement with placing that as a low risk? All right. Not seeing any hands, and then, finally looking back to our environmental attributes, remember this is an on-off switch. Either it has something from the environment that makes it really susceptible to things like overfishing, or possibly having a population decline, something like that.

I guess one other aspect is if it -- With the ecosystem importance, it's basically, if hogfish goes down, does it bring other things down with it, and does that -- Does it cause problems of affecting other types of fisheries within that area, as possibly a keystone predator, or a habitat builder, something like that, and so I'll pause here to see if there's any additional level of risk that should be added from an environmental standpoint.

MR. KIMREY: David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. At the risk of repetitive, again, it's just -- It's vulnerable in that they're not difficult targets, number one. The other thing that I'll say too is we've seen, like in the Keys, and we've talked about this habitat degradation, and the areas they like are kind of dwindling, and so you've got this triple whammy of there's more people down there, the habitats, we're losing the habitat, and they're easy to get to, or easy to shoot. I would probably potentially maybe think about putting it as a medium-ish, but that's very southeast-Florida specific.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and this would be specific for, I mean, that area, that population, and this one -- I guess it's either there is a risk or there isn't, and so it's either all or nothing. We haven't really gotten into the realm where we're able to easily categorize the level of risk from an ecosystem environmental standpoint, and so, I guess, do you want to -- Should it have an additional risk point or not?

MR. MOSS: I mean, again, what I'm speaking of is very southeast Florida, and so like I don't know further north what they're like. I mean, I know you guys just do hook-and-line, but what do you see? What do you guys see when you're --

MR. KIMREY: Andy, or one of you all? Go ahead, Andy.

MR. FISH: I don't dive much out of Cape Canaveral anymore, but we still would -- If I were to, I would think -- I did see three on one dive in December, which was amazing. They were small-ish, and so I did not mess with them, but, when I used to dive out of Canaveral a lot more, we would get maybe ten fish in a lobster season. We would start diving in August, and so, for three months, we would shoot approximately ten hogfish. It was kind of a -- Not a unicorn, but it was definitely not something you see, you know, often at all.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks Andy. Jeff.
MR. MARINKO: Jeff Marinko, and so I was just thinking, in the last like fourteen months, I've done three days down in Palm Beach and Jupiter, lobster diving with a buddy of mine, and we saw some hogfish, little guys, but we saw them, and then the whole Sebastian, Cape Canaveral, Ponce, Fort Pierce, the Rockies, and hogfish like a live bottom. They like plants.

We don't have that in that central Florida area. There's really very, very few hogfish there, but, as you get St. Augustine and Jacksonville, we've got live bottom. A lot of it is out deeper, but we shoot twenty-pounders there. It's a totally different fishery, and so there's big, big hogfish to the north Florida, and there's no hogfish in the middle, and there's little guys to the south. That's basically my -- What I get out of this. I've got to mention the, you know, ecosystem is a problem in south Florida, the concrete jungle, you know, and so I just mentioned that, but I think hogfish, in my twenty-year career, has pretty much looked the same in Florida.

MR. KIMREY: So following up, Jeff, do you think it's a yea or nay for risk?

MR. MARINKO: I guess I would go with the two.

MR. KIMREY: It's got to be a yea or nay, a one or a zero?

MR. MARINKO: I don't -- I guess the zero.

MR. KIMREY: What about you, David? A one or a zero?

MR. MOSS: Which one is which?

MR. KIMREY: (Mr. Kimrey's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. MOSS: See, again, across all of Florida, it's very different, as we were saying, and so if you -- That's where it gets different, because, in South Florida, I would say it's at risk. Up north, it's not, and for all the reasons that we just said, and so, in south Florida, we've got habitat degradation, as you said. They like live bottom, which we've got dying bottom down there. We've got a lot of people, and you'll see short ones, but there's not much in the way of bigger ones down there, and so I don't --

MR. KIMREY: If I was shaking you and wanted an answer, what would you --

MR. MOSS: If you shook me, I would say that it's at risk.

MR. KIMREY: Because I have no opinion, because we're trying to get it out of you Florida guys.

MR. MOSS: So, for south Florida, I would say that -- I would put it as a 1.

MR. KIMREY: Perfect. No shaking required. Is everybody good with that? I mean, really, we've got to get that answer from somebody that knows, and it's not half the people in this room, for sure. Like me, I know nothing about hog fishing.

MR. MARINKO: Like I said, I don't feel like it has changed that much in the last twenty years, from what I see, but I never primarily dove that south Florida stuff. It's always been the north Florida stock, and it looks the same to me.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Jeff. Did I see another hand? Vincent. I thought I saw somebody over there, but go ahead, Vincent.

MR. BONURA: I've got a couple of guys in Lauderdale and Palm Beach who scuba dive for them and catch them. They're catching larger fish, nicer fish, but I would also agree with Mr. Moss over here on it could be a potential issue, maybe, in my opinion.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks Vincent. Andy.

MR. FISH: According to the app put out by this illustrious place, there's been 311 hogfish landed in Florida for three-and-a-half months, and so just to put that in some kind of computer perspective, whatever you want. 311 pounds landed as of April 7.

MR. KIMREY: That's the commercial landings. Okay, and I thought you were saying that was the number, and I'm like how do you know that number? Okay. Bodies, not pounds. Okay. Anybody else. Moving right along. Darrin.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Darrin Willingham. Just from the northeast Florida perspective for the hogfish, I mean, the guys that aren't afraid of people making fun of them are taking live shrimp out to a hundred feet, and they've been catching them, and so we haven't seen a problem with them, and so I don't think there's an environmental issue, from our perspective.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin. Yes, and we've got anglers who catch them too with all kinds of little tricky things. Anybody else? In very specific areas. We've got to keep them spear fishermen away from them, but they already know about it. Anybody?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so I guess -- Are we going with, you know, the common -- I guess what do you all think is reflective of the stock area? Do you think it's the south Florida or the north Florida? Which one do you want to put in here?

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. I would say there's a lot more landed in the Keys, in south Florida, than anywhere, and so maybe we should weigh more on going with what the Keys situation might be.

MR. KIMREY: I think that's an excellent point, for what little bit I know about it. Thanks, Andy, and so who wants to make that determination? David.

MR. MOSS: (Mr. Moss' comment is not audible on the recording.)

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. All right. Thank you. I appreciate the feedback. That, you know, kind of puts the final risk score as a 2, once the categories get, you know, kind of aligned, and these scores get entered. Right now, it sits at a high, but I'm not sure how close it is to a border, and so, once these get entered, it may shift one way or the other, but thank you for your input and for putting those scores together. At this point, we can switch over to Chip to talk about spawning SMZs.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Mike, sorry about this, and this is Darrin Willingham again, and so was it just change of going from the environmental attributes from high, as a 1, to zero, and it took it from low to high in the risk score, and is that right?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and probably --

MR. WILLINGHAM: The ones we have on in our packets, it started out as low, and I think you only added a 3 somewhere in there, if I'm correct, up in the mid portion, and so I was just curious how it went from low to high.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so what ends up happening is the range of scores here, and this is kind of how it was developed, set up, is that, for all of the snapper grouper species, plus I think dolphin and wahoo, they're divided into thirds, and so the lowest third -- I guess the lowest score third would be the high risk. The middle third would be the medium risk, and the highest score third would be the low risk.

What ended up happening is that range of medium risk is quite small, and so, even though the range of point wasn't all that huge of a shift, it does switch it, and it skips over the medium risk, and it did go into the high-risk category, but that also means that, once we enter this score, black grouper score, the lines shift, which is why I'm saying the 2 is the number that's there, but the lines may shift, and so I don't know if it'll stay as a high risk, or if it may shift into a medium risk, once we enter those in, in the context of all the other species that are scored. Does that make sense?

MR. WILLINGHAM: Intriguing. That's my comment.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. Thank you.

DR. COLLIER: Darrin, just to build on that a little bit more, the reason that it does shift like that is, if you are seeing an ecosystem impact, or something along those lines, that means we likely need a larger buffer between the OFL and the ABC. We're seeing something that's negative for the population, and so potentially be a little bit more conservative for that species.

MR. WILLINGHAM: I appreciate that. It's just the him-hawing that we were doing here at the table for the advisory panel, and just to see that go from green to red, and it's like, oh, really, and so that was just a thought.

DR. COLLIER: Okay. I'm going to start off with Attachment 12, which is going to be a quick introduction to the spawning SMZs. All right, and so why did the council create the spawning SMZs? These were created in Amendment 36, and, when I'm looking at some of these managed

areas, I always like to go back to the reason why the council did it in the first place, and so these were established in 2017.

The council kind of did a lot of work from 2012 to 2016 trying to put these -- Trying to consider how to work these, and their essential purpose and need was to protect important spawning habitat to enhance spawning. This is a little bit truncated from all the words that are in there, just trying to make it slide friendly, but that's basically the important take-home for this. Another component of it was to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality, specifically focusing on species like speckled hind and warsaw grouper. There was some desire to really think about how to protect these species at that point.

I will say that these areas are fairly small, and so this is likely a lofty goal for the size of the areas. We're talking less than twenty square miles if you add them all together, which is a pretty tiny area in order to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality.

Another purpose and need for this was to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield, and also achieve conservation goals, while minimizing, to the extent practical, negative social and economic effects, and so they were thinking that protecting some of these important spawning areas, where some of these fish may aggregate, or end up in higher densities, this could protect additional spawning habitat, and, therefore, there would be a spillover in other areas.

To give you a rough idea of where these locations are, if you look on the map up here, we start off with Cape Lookout, and I have them up here as very small, just to give you a relative idea of how small they are. When we're talking about these, these are about the size of downtown Charleston, and so it's a pretty small area, or any downtown area essentially, but then you'll skip down to managed areas and come out to Devil's Hole. That area is kind of an elbow out there off the break, with some areas of deep drop, where it's a steep drop, I think around a sixty-foot drop in one of the areas.

We have two other areas, Area 51 and Area 53. These are artificial reefs that the South Carolina DNR put out there with the intention of creating a protected area that they weren't going to originally put on the map. As these spawning special management zones became a tool, they wanted to include them, and get them protected under that, and so they were listed as spawning special management zones.

Then, moving all the way south, we have Warsaw Hole, which is west of Key West. It's way out here, and it's hard to see, but this is an area where a sinkhole is. It's fairly large sinkhole, where it drops around a hundred feet, and it is a wall that goes straight down on one side, and then there's a gradual increase on the other side.

The regulations in these areas, it prohibits fishing for, harvest of, and possession of snapper grouper species, and so that means, if you're stopped in the area, if you're anchored -- You cannot be anchored in the area, and, if you are anchored in the area with snapper grouper species, you could get a ticket. There is a transit provision that allows you to possess snapper grouper species if your gear is stowed properly, and that's the typical definition of stowed properly, where you would have to have the gear out of the basically gunnel, and stored underneath the deck, or in proper storing areas.

Once again, there's no anchoring in these, and then, for the natural reef areas, and so that's going to be the South Cape Lookout area, Devil's Hole, as well as Warsaw Hole, which is that further south area, and those have regulations that would expire after ten years, and so the council is looking to consider if they need to extend regulation for these spawning special management zones in those natural reef areas, and so that includes South Cape Lookout, Devil's Hole, and Warsaw Hole.

The focal species for this, recognizing that we don't -- That not all species might get in higher densities to spawn, they really wanted to focus on some species that might be going to certain areas to spawn, and so they were focused on the groupers. Greater amberjack was another one that they focused on, and some of the snappers, and not all the snappers, and so the snappers include blackfin, cubera, mutton snapper, red snapper, silk snapper, and yellowtail snapper. At least the one that pops out to my mind that's not included on there is vermilion snapper, thinking that they go to a variety of areas to spawn, and then they also included golden tilefish and blueline tilefish.

Now, the areas that are there right now, it's not expected that there's great habitat for blueline or golden, but they were included just in case new areas were created to protect these species and more information came along.

Habitat information, the goal of these is to protect areas where multiple species are known to spawn, and, in a situation where you don't have any information, you might be able to use some of the bottom mapping information to conclude that multiple species might use this, and, thinking about this, there's little areas that are out there that have promontories that are suspected to be good locations for spawning of multiple species. It doesn't necessarily have to be the best area, but potentially house multiple species for spawning.

Then, once again, going into the artificial reefs, these were designed to be protected areas in their application, when South Carolina DNR put the application in with the Coast Guard, or not the Coast Guard, but the Army Corps of Engineers. Sorry. The artificial reefs were created well before the spawning and spawning special management zones were regulated. Just to make certain that everybody is aware of this, these were sandy areas prior to the reef placement. These weren't put on reef areas and then added to it.

All these areas have been mapped. We know kind of the profiles of them. There has been some characterization in the areas, where some underwater video has been taken, so you can see what's in the habitat.

A lot of research has been done recently, and so some of the research is looking at connectivity through larval dispersal models. We had a seminar series on this, where they described the connectivity for a variety of these areas, and, if you're interested in that, and I'll give you the highlights, some of the areas seem to be effective for certain species, but, overall, these are very tiny areas, and so their overall contribution seems minimal, but they definitely can produce spawn that come back into the South Atlantic region.

Biological samples have been collected through sampling done by the -- Sponsored by the Nature Conservancy, as well as LGL Associates, and, also, South Carolina has been engaged with that, looking at the reproductive tissue to determine if fish are in spawning condition, and, for the natural

reef areas, there have been focal species in spawning condition in the recent time periods for all three areas.

Looking at Warsaw Hole, the warsaw grouper have been observed down in that area in spawning condition. About half the fish that they're seeing down there are in spawning condition, and they've also observed greater amberjack in spawning condition in that spawning special management zones. Those are two of the species why that area was created.

In Devil's Hole, gag grouper, as well as scamp grouper, have been observed in spawning condition in that area, and then, moving up to South Cape Lookout, red grouper has been observed in spawning condition in that site, which was one of the species that was considered for it, as well several -- As well as red snapper has been observed in spawning condition there as well.

We had a presentation to the workgroup on what's being done in the artificial reef as far as monitoring. That's being monitored by the South Carolina Aquarium. They do not have spawning condition on some of the fish, but they did provide some of the fish that they are seeing in the area. Some of those species include black sea bass, gag grouper, red snapper, and then some of the fish have been observed, at least in Area 53, in spawning condition. There was a master's thesis that looked into some of that.

Another source of information has been the Southeast Reef Fish Survey. Wally gave you a presentation on that earlier. They do go to these sites every so often, at least for the two northern sites. They'll visit them, at least on the shallower side, and so there's additional information that's being collected there.

Why this is important is you don't want to just put it out there and set it and forget it. You want to make sure it is achieving your goals, and so the council created a System Management Plan Workgroup that's designed to work -- To look at these managed areas and develop a report for them to evaluate.

We also want to make sure that we get input from the advisory panels. You all are out there on the water, and you're going to see a lot more of this, and know a lot more information than anyone else, and so the key parts of these evaluations are should we keep the area as-is? Should it be modified, moved or changed, or should we change any other regulations, and some folks have completed the evaluation. Two have completed the evaluation, at least those of eight o'clock this morning, and so I'll give the feedback that they provided in a second presentation.

If you want to go back and look at some of this information, these are all links to presentations that have been given to the council, or given at council events in the past, and so, with that, are there any questions on the background of the spawning special management zones before I go into the evaluation tool?

All right, and so, this morning at eight o'clock, I put together this presentation for you all based on the responses that I got, and so the tool is still open if you want to provide responses, or if you want to provide them here. I know some people feel more comfortable doing it in a written form, and some people do feel more comfortable in an open forum like this, speaking on the record, and so you have both options available to you.

We devised this evaluation tool in different components. The first one starts off with the planning for the spawning special management zones, and you're going to see the responses here, and, for some of these, I'll have to refer back to them, because, unfortunately, when I was putting this together, it did make it a little bit more difficult to get all the words down here at the bottom, and so, if you're looking at the responses, in general, if you're getting something more on the left side of the response, that's going to be more negative, and then, on the right side, that's going to be positive.

Unfortunately, the way that this came out quickly in the Google forms, there's not like a flow to the colors. They can't go from a bluish color to a reddish color, and so I'll just have to explain them, but, for the most part, the purpose of the spawning special management zones are clearly explained, and one individual said it wasn't, and one individual had indicated that it was.

The objectives are consistent with the council purpose for the spawning special management zone, one had agreed, and another one had strongly agreed. The boundaries are appropriately defined to encompass known spawning areas, one disagreed, and one was neutral, and then, for the final part of this, there is sufficient documentation on the spawning special management zone, one was neutral, and one strongly agreed.

I'm going to go through all these, and then you all can give your responses at the end, or we can do it part of the way through, so you don't fall asleep on me, and which would you prefer? Do it at the end? All right, and so I'll go through it a little bit more quickly.

Additionally, we were looking at some other pieces of this. The roles and responsibilities for implementation and monitoring are clearly defined, one disagreed, and one was neutral. Stakeholder engagement panels, they felt like the stakeholders weren't engaged, and then one was neutral. Then, decision-making, one disagreed that it was transparent and adaptive. but one did agree.

The two areas that were evaluated as of this morning, we have this in purple, which is the Warsaw Hole, down here off South Florida, and then in yellow, which is one of the spawning special management zone artificial reefs, and we're going to start off with Area 53, which is the artificial reef, but all the areas have these exact same questions for it.

There's adequate resources available for monitoring and enforcement of the spawning special management zone, disagree that enforcement is sufficient, disagree, and then, data collection programs are active and effective, that was neutral. Management measures, and so, going into the management measures, making sure the gear restrictions, possession restrictions, and transit requirements are implemented as intended, one disagreed.

The outreach and education materials effectively communicate rules and rationale, that was neutral, and, enforcement actions and compliance is good within these areas and regularly checked, that was disagreed.

Going into the outcomes of this, the biological outcomes, looking at the indicators, abundance, spawning activity, there was indication that they disagreed that this was being effective for that. Habitat condition was neutral, looking at making sure that the habitat is not becoming degraded, and then non-target impacts, and so displacement to areas around the closed area and crowding,

they strongly disagreed with this one. Compliance was neutral. Compliance levels are high, they indicated it was neutral, and then the last one was stakeholders support the spawning special management zones, and they disagreed.

With this, they recommended that we modify the regulations for the Area 53, which was to allow basically cycling through different spawning special management zones, open it up every so often, and don't keep it closed constantly, and so that would be a different way of managing these areas, as opposed to keeping them closed all the time. This would allow some flexibility in going out to the areas.

Going into Warsaw Hole, looking at this one, going through the exact same questions as before, they strongly disagree that there's adequate resources, strongly disagree that there was sufficient enforcement, and data collection was neutral, once again. Management measures was neutral. Outreach and education was neutral, and then there was strong disagreement on the enforcement actions and compliance in the area, indicating that there's potential poaching in the area going on.

The outcomes of this, it does -- Well, one individual indicated that there is some biological indication of spawning in the area. The habitat condition seems fairly good. As far as non-target impacts, that seem to be neutral. Compliance, once again, is on the negative side, and then the stakeholders seem to be aware of the area and are in favor of it.

This one, they had indicated that modification was necessary. In the written comments for that, they had indicated that it should have been a larger area, in order to protect more habitat, and so, with that, those are the two that have been evaluated so far by the Snapper Grouper AP. We have a lot of questions to go through, if you want to go through them, or, in the interest of time, we could just leave the poll open for you all to comment on. Otherwise, we're going to be sitting here going through those same questions for you all, in order to go through it.

It's a lot to go through. I haven't figured out a good way to communicate with the different advisory panels on these, just because you need to evaluate the entire management program associated with the spawning special management zones as well as the individual sites, and do the individual sites need to change, because some might be working, and some might not be working. We can't throw everything out because one individual site isn't working, but I would be happy to take any input that the advisory panel may have, you know, just recognizing that we do not have any comments on South Cape Lookout, Area 51, and Devil's Hole.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chip. You know, I looked through, and I just did it again while I was listening to you. I looked through a lot of the questions, and specifically the Cape Lookout SMZ. I've been out there a few times around it, and some of the questions, and this is just my opinion, and maybe you can steer me in the right direction, but some of it is very vague, and I almost feel like I have no input, you know, as far as Cape Lookout.

I mean, sure, there's people out there around it, but I just don't know that I've got anything to add, or even answer about the questions. Either I'm unfamiliar with it, or I don't know the correct answer. I mean, does that make sense to anybody else that looked at it? It's really almost like we're not qualified for the survey, I mean, in my opinion, at least for me.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and that's basically what I was going to say, but I was just going to say, in my opinion, you might want to add a box of a not applicable, because none of that is to me, because I know nothing about any of that area, and I'd rather say nothing about it than say something wrong, and just like, oh, maybe I'll Christmas tree this.

MR. KIMREY: Absolutely. I agree. Even though I've fished around the one that's close to my house, and, I mean, it's a long way from the beach. I get out there on occasion, and I really -- I don't have any input for it, and I don't have any from the community coming back my way. I'm not out there enough to say whether it's being properly policed, or, I mean, I've talk to the NOAA guy, and all he told me was you can fish all the way up right to the line. Last time I was out there, I was like -- I stayed a mile off of it, and he said, well, you're not going to catch anything there, and you've got to get a hundred feet from it, and so, I mean, that's literally all the input I have.

MR. POLSTON: But if you added in an A on there, like I said, the people that really know nothing about it, we could check that, and be truthful about it. The guys that do know something about it, whoever that might be, could comment accordingly. Thanks.

MR. KIMREY: Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish, and I just wanted to comment on, in most all areas, from North Carolina to I guess the north Florida is what I'm familiar with, the ignorance on these, that these even exist, to the recs and the commercial, is pretty amazing, that they don't even realize, and, with the CMOR mapping, is the one I'm familiar with, there's a whole lot of data on these special areas, and so there's a whole -- Like there's a whole lot of definition, and so that kind of encourages people to go there, because now they got it, and they go, oh, let's go there, but there needs to be more to educate -- Or some kind of way, because it's amazing that the people have no clue.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, just to everybody's point that, you know, there's not a lot of information that's being provided to you all, and, you know, the workgroup has had meetings related to this, and it's day-long meetings. We don't have time to give you all the day-long presentations of all the information that's being available, and that's why I was trying to give you those additional resources that are available.

Unfortunately, within the spawning special management zones, there hasn't been a ton of research. You know, it is those limited studies that are available, that have been conducted recently, either presented at seminar series, or at the workshop, or something along those lines, but it is a challenge to get the information to you all in a digestible format, and so I take that to heart, but I still haven't figured out a good way to do it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chip, and, again, for me, unless there's somebody that has opposition, because we've -- This is so vague, and unfamiliar to most of us, and, I mean, I think we just need to go with somebody that's more qualified, I mean, to make the decision on this. I mean, the survey, we can go through and answer, but like, to John's point, the last thing we want to do is skew the survey, because we don't even know how to make an educated guess on a lot of the questions, and it's not just the questions about the specific areas. For me, it's even the questions that apply to the social side, you know, like what's happening. I just -- I don't feel like I'm qualified to take the survey, and I don't know how else to say it. Darrin, then Paul.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Thanks. Darrin Willingham. I will say, on the Jacksonville, the area out there, the MPA out there, up until about three months ago, I never even heard of this thing, and I'm the president of the Offshore Fishing Club, which, I mean, that doesn't excuse ignorance. However, I heard about it from one of our members that got stopped by an FWC officer, and that's due east off of Jacksonville, right at the ledge. We fish that all the time, and so there is a -- I mean, just to Andy's point, I mean, I didn't even know it existed, and how is it in all the rest of the other states? Do they know it exists, or what have you?

MR. KIMREY: I think a lot of the community knows it exists. I mean, in my world, but I'm also dealing with a lot of professional fishermen, whether they're full time for-hire or, you know, commercial bottom fishermen.

I mean, anybody that that has modern electronics, and can read a chart, you can't miss it. It's on there. You just have to figure out what that little fancy box means, which you know, a lot of people do, and some people don't put that much effort into it. You know, if they've got the CMOR chip, they're seeing this crazy relief, and they go right past the fact they're not supposed to be there, and I'm sure that happens too, you know, and so I don't even know the proper answer to your question, Darrin. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and it has been a struggle to get the information out there, and the site you're talking about is a deepwater MPA. It's a little bit different than the spawning special management zones, but, you know, quite often they get lumped together. It is a protected area that you're not allowed to fish. The regulations are the same, and we just put a different title on them.

I see your point there, and what we have tried to do with all these areas is try to get them on maps. Unfortunately, we cannot get them on the NOAA maps. That is not going to happen. We have worked with Garmin to get them put on there. They are in Fish Rules. Unfortunately, within Fish Rules, they do not have a bounding box that shows up on the maps, but, if you were to click on a species within the snapper grouper complex, whether you can possess it, it would say that you're not allowed to possess in that area, and so that does make it a bit of a challenge. It's also in the commercial Fish Rules app.

We have been told to get up with that CMOR group, in order to put -- To ask them to put a box on there, and so we're going to work with that group, trying to get it there, but it is a challenge. When we finally figured out the right person to talk with at Garmin, it still took about two years to get it on there. It takes a long time in order to get little pieces of information out there, and, you know, our past brochure that we had, at least for the deepwater MPAs, we never really developed a hard copy for the spawning special management zones.

As soon as we put it out there, we had to move one of them, and so the regulations weren't there, and it's just a challenge when you have a printed copy. You know, if somebody gets an old piece, it might have information that's no longer relevant, as these areas move around a little bit, and so we do need to communicate better on these areas, and so this is -- These evaluations are one way to communicate them.

People find out about different things as you evaluate and learn more, and so, even if you all don't have comments here, you know, this is an outreach opportunity as well. People heard about these spawning special management zones, and there are research programs going on that is collecting

information in them, but, yes, it's hard to get you all the information in the timeline that's appropriate.

MR. KIMREY: Tony. Thanks, Chip.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you. Tony Constant, and I'm going to ask Amy. Has South Carolina DNR dove on 51 and 53? I would think they have. I remember back when they were put in, and, that said, could NOAA hire -- I know we've got a few exploration boats, and I don't know if there's any funding for it, to dive on some of the other spots.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Tony. Great question, and yes. South Carolina DNR does have active and continuing research projects on both Area 51 and Area 53, and, because they are active and ongoing research projects, it's really important that it stay within a protection zone, so that we can actually be able to know exactly what we're doing from the start to the finish of that experiment, and that is exactly why they have been protected through these actions.

MR. CONSTANT: I figured you did. I know you dive almost everything after it was put down out there, and I'm just -- You know, I know Bo Von Harten has a small boat that he runs in, and then you've got the Palmetto that you all use for the traps, the SEDAR traps, and, I mean, is that something the funding can come up with to send some divers out?

MS. DUKES: So that's what I'm saying, is that we are diving on Area 51 and 53, and there are active science experiments basically going on in both of those areas continuously that are funded through the Department of Natural Resources, whether that be state revenue funds or some sort of grant that we're currently working on.

MR. CONSTANT: I guess where I was headed with it is some of the other spots that are just off -- I mean, is it something that NOAA could hire those boats, because I don't know if they're 100 percent busy.

MS. DUKES: So the Department of Natural Resources recently did purchase an ROV, and our intent is to start getting some of that footage from some of the other MPAs in the special spawning management zones. In addition, the trap survey that Wally provided that presentation on the first day, several of the stations associated with our SERFS program are in and around those marine protected areas, and those special spawning management zones, and so we are actively collecting data in and around those areas year-round. Well, every year, I should say, when we're sampling from April to October.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Amy and Tony. Does anybody have anything to add to this? Chip, what do you think we need to do here moving forward? Maybe revisit it? I don't know. All ears.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so I think the big thing to hear from you all is whether or not -- Is there a strong feeling on whether or not some of these areas should stay or go? I think that would be the most important comment that we could have.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Well, that helps. Thanks, Chip. Is that with or without the completion of the survey? Do we need to try to get everybody to do the survey on their own time, and get it back to you, whether we're qualified, or feel like we're doing the right thing or not, or do we want to

just take a consensus from the room? I mean, I know how I feel, and that's just a little percentage of AP, but a consensus from the room about these management zones staying open or not.

DR. COLLIER: So what my plan was is to take the conversations here that's had at the meeting, as well as the input received online, and put those together in a single paragraph, or a couple paragraphs, on the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's thoughts on what to do.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Perfect. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I just think about this, with looking at the South Cape Lookout SMZ, and this is like death by a thousand cuts, and so, to have something be effective, you need a certain percentage of anglers to know about the law, and hopefully a high percentage, and you -- For those folks that know about the law, you need them to pay attention to the law, and you also need enforcement, and I don't see much of that.

I'm just piling on other comments, and I don't see knowledge and interest in abiding by this law and enforcement being high enough at that South Cape Lookout SMZ, in my opinion, to be effective. I just don't see it. We don't have much enforcement in Onslow Bay, and I just -- It's so far offshore, and I think a lot of folks, especially the weekend warriors -- I just don't think they know much about this region, and there's a good chance they don't care about it either.

MR. KIMREY: For ours, the reality is, if you don't have a Coast Guard boat doing fisheries enforcement, we have zero enforcement. There is nobody -- It's not that enforcement doesn't do a good job, and there literally is no one to enforce it. Our NOAA guy doesn't have a boat, and our state guys don't go that far. There is nothing. I mean, unless you've got a good Samaritan with a helicopter, nobody is enforcing it, and we don't have one of those. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you. Tony Constant. One of the things I see in this is that it's pretty important to have a constant norm that we can always check. I mean, that's the only -- We have to have a stabilized environment to find out if we're killing the others, and so I would say that it's real important to keep these zones. Yes, education is going to have to get out there, and I do know that -- I know South Carolina has a -- DNR has a plane, but it's -- Like you say, it's not in their waters, but it would be a small plane, and so, you know, an assessment is a lot cheaper than running boats all around the ocean trying to catch somebody, but, yes, I think it's a very important thing to keep, in my opinion.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony, and I'm that way, because I feel like I'm so ill-educated in the whole topic. I would just as soon let the people that know a whole lot more about it figure out where to go next. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I just wonder if the time closures are much more well-known than area closures. Everybody knows May 1 is grouper opening. That's very widely known amongst a whole bunch of different fishery stakeholders. These area closures I think are still way too cryptic to have any positive effect on rebuilding some of these overfished stocks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. The enforcement thing is always a pet peeve of mine when it comes up, whenever we talk about any of this stuff, because, at the end of the day, people are going to break rules no matter what the law is. I mean, you drive down 95, and there's nobody going seventy, right?

You make these rules with the hope that enough people are going to follow them that it's going to have an impact, and so I think that the bigger issue, for a lot of these, is the outreach component of it, and making people aware that they exist.

I understand too what you're saying, Paul, about the time closure as opposed to an area closure. However, in the case of Warsaw Hole for instance, it's multispecies aggregations, and so you've got -- You know, in the summertime, AJs come through, and then in the wintertime is when the groupers come through, and then, you know, you've got the warsaw there, and then, you know, I know somebody who went by there, and there's absolutely poaching going on, but there's multi-species throughout the year, and that's the idea for some of these.

I think that they're important. I think, as we continue to have recruitment issues with a lot of the different species that we see, if we can protect spawning habitat where we can, I think it's important to keep doing that, and, again, when it comes to enforcement, yes, people are going to break the rules, but the idea is that enough of them follow it that it's going to have at least somewhat of an impact, in my opinion anyway.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David, and I agree. I mean, you don't make the rule for the five people that are going to break it. You make the rule for the ninety-five people that are going to follow it. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff. I would say this is a little bit of a topic around our place time to time, but, with all the electronic stuff that is available now, is there not a way to put buoys in the four corners of these, and, here again, I'm just asking. I don't know how none of that works, but is there not a way to mark this with some buoys, and maybe some kind of electronics, that tells what traffic's in there?

I think our biggest problem is that a lot of these fast boats, and I'm not blaming recreational, but they can zoom in and out, and I think, as far as like you guys, and us, the commercial side of it, we know they're there, and this is a topic that we have quite regular, but I think, if you took them away, and I would like to have them took away, but I don't think that's the right thing to do, but, at the end of the day, you're never going to get them back.

There was such a big fuss for this in the beginning, and so I just think that, you know, we need to do our best to educate people, and maybe figure out some way to keep people out, and you hear the little snippets here and there about this one went in there, and this one done that, and, you know, all these docks, they all talk back and forth.

I could probably tell -- John can probably tell what we're doing in North Carolina, and I could probably tell him some of the trash that comes from his place, you know, because, all these guys, they know each other, and it's like, with Facebook and phones now, it's instant, but that's just my two-cents, for what it's worth.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and it seems like the general consensus I'm getting is that most of the AP thinks they need to stay in place, and maybe have more outreach to educate the people that aren't in the know that they exist, you know, and, like Darrin said, you know, ignorance isn't an excuse, but, if they're not well known in certain areas of certain sectors, the enforcement is less important if they become more well known. You know, a lot of people are breaking the rules because they don't realize the rules exist, and there is a lot of rules, and it takes a lot of effort to keep up with fisheries management. Surely everybody in this room can appreciate that statement. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff. I just wanted to say, on the back of what we were talking about, that most, I think, or all, of the newer electronics has got most of this stuff marked, and so the people with the newer boats really have -- They have no excuse. You know, some of the older stuff, that, you know, might be on some of our older boats, it's not going to be on there, but, the newer boats, they know it's there.

MR. KIMREY: Well, I run Garmin, and I just built a new boat last year, and spent a fortune on Garmin, but it's all over my stuff. Like, if you don't know, you need to turn on your plotter, because it will be in your face. Somebody over here? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I like Scott's comment that I think marking these with some type of physical marking will go a long way to people that aren't really paying attention to plotters, or have outdated information on their Garmin.

The financial reality of it is that I know, and you can speak to this, Chris, that recently the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, within the last ten years, took away all its marking for its artificial reefs, and we've got a lot of artificial reefs up in North Carolina, due to financial constraints. Until someone can cough up the money to install markings, physical markings, at this South Cape Lookout site, it's going to remain unmarked, because of those financial constraints, either from the state side or the federal side.

MR. KIMREY: Right, and so what Paul is referring to is all of our artificial reefs in North Carolina used to have buoys on them, and it was six figures a year to maintain those buoys, and the way they justified removing those buoys is because everybody had electronics, and they didn't need the buoys anymore, and everybody has got a GPS, and everybody has got color scope, or almost everybody, and that's how they justified that.

You know, I see your point. It might be nice to put some buoys out there, but it's probably not going to happen, especially those deepwater buoys. It's deep out there around ours, the Cape Lookout. You know, it's not like you're putting fifty foot of cable on a cinder block. You need some pretty serious stuff out there to put buoys out. Anybody else? Are you ready to go, Ashley? Let her rip.

MS. OLIVER: I'm Ashley Oliver, an outreach coordinator for the council, and so you guys keep talking about outreach education, but that's a very broad term. There's a lot that we could do with that, and so I guess my question to the AP is what do you think would be the most effective route for something like this, to get at those folks that don't know that these exist? There's social media, and there's magazines, and there's, you know, tackle shop outreach, and that's a lot of stuff that we do now, but what to you guys would be the most effective?

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Ashley. David, you got it figured out over there?

MR. MOSS: Yes. I've got it all figured out, and we can go home. No, and I don't know anything. I think that the best thing -- The unfortunate truth is to get it marked in all the electronics. I think it's kind of a double-edged sword when you do the social media outreach, because, on one hand, you're making people aware of it. On the other hand, you're making people aware of it.

We saw with Warsaw Hole. It wasn't always called Warsaw Hole. It used to be called, I think, Fifty-Fathom Rocks. Then, as we did this, it got called -- It got named Warsaw Hole, and now people that want to poach go there and try to catch warsaw, and so I do think that the best avenue is just to make sure that it's on the electronics. Most of the people that are going out there, that's what they rely on anyway, and it's not like really many people are running the old school, or run numbers anymore, and so just make sure that it's on all the electronics, and marked as a no fishing zone, a spawning site, whatever, and I think that's the best way to go.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David, and this is sort of in the realm of what we're talking about, and I mentioned the Gulf email earlier, how informative and easy to understand and read that is, and I wish we had something similar, and we do have things, but I wish we had something that mimicked that a little more for the Southeast Region.

Something else, and this is sort of an unusual approach, but if we had -- For enforcement, if there was some way that there was -- I don't know if you would call it a newsletter or what, and you don't want to project it as a heavy hand, or an iron fist, you know, but, in my area, there's such a lack of enforcement that people have the opinion there's no enforcement.

If we had an enforcement action update in some way, and this wouldn't just apply to the SSMZ, but to everything, where people saw that, hey, occasionally people do actually get in trouble, and you don't want to present it as, you know, a big hammer, but just have it mixed in with something else, where people could actually see it, and, how you get the general public to read that, I don't know, because like I follow South Atlantic, everything I can on social media, but a lot of people don't.

Just like he said, you know, just because you say it, it doesn't mean it's going to be well-received. You know, you're telling people about it, which is good, but you're telling people about it, which is bad, just like the announcement of shallow-water grouper. You know, we got so much more this year than we had previously, and, on my social media, I had a lot of guys that were really excited about it, but I still had those comments, even though it's twice as much as we had last year, that are like you should still be mad, and I'm like I want to -- Anyway, you know, so that's where we're at in society, right?

Back to, you know, the enforcement action, there's other facets of the world that do that. Like, if you're in the professional world, you know, they put it in their newsletter that, hey, this is all the great stuff that's happening, and this is all the great stuff that's coming up, and, by the way, if you don't do what you're supposed to, this is what happens, and it lifts that enforcement act. I think something like that might be a way to get people a little more aware of the potential that, hey, if you're in here fishing, you're doing something wrong, and it is possible that you're going to get in trouble. Andy.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. Maybe once this reef, recreational reef, bottom fishing permit gets enacted, that we've been talking about for thirty years, you would have to take a class, or take an online special management zone, stuff like that.

MR. KIMREY: Well, you know, we wanted an educational component attached to that, but, unfortunately, that is on hold for now, as best I can tell, for who knows when, right, guys, staff? That's on hold for who knows, for whenever?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and that's on hold.

MR. KIMREY: For maybe forever, and who knows. Anyway, who was next? Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff. I think that, once somebody gets caught in one of these, and they make an example out of what is going on, that that will go a long ways. I know one of our guys got caught, a few years back, doing some things he wasn't supposed to be doing, and, you know, there's really no way for us to keep him from doing what he's doing, but, when you keep asking these people what they're doing, and they keep telling you no, and then everybody starts working together to get the end result, and so, once they caught him, they threw the book.

One of my guys got a year of supervised probation, fifty-two weekends in house arrest, and twenty-six weekends in jail, just for having illegal fish, and, believe me, he deserved it. I mean, he asked for it, but, at the end of the day, until they make an example out of a couple of these boats -- That will go a long way, and so, you know, because I think our problem is -- I call them the cowboy fishermen.

They lived back before the computers and satellites and all this stuff, and they just run and gun, and do what they want to do, because they lived back in the dark age, to where now, you know, computers and paperwork is pretty quick, and so I think some of that stuff would go a long way, if we could get something to where somebody was in there that you could make an example out of, but, how you do that, I don't know. What I was talking about, with the buoys a while ago, was not actually just marking them, but some way to track the traffic that's in the system.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Wasn't there somebody else over here? Haley, then Darrin.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris. Haley Stephens. As some of you may know, I'm not a huge lover of bottom closures. With that being said, what I do like about this is that, some of them, you went and created areas where nothing else existed, and, from what I've seen, and from what I've heard, just listening to council discussion, and listening to some of those seminar series, is that there is evidence that it's working.

You know, whether or not you can quantify if it's helpful or not, and, I mean, I feel like it is. I feel like it's not hurting anything, and, like Councilwoman Amy said, this is an ongoing research initiative, and I would like to see that effort be able to continue. I think it was at the last council meeting someone brought up -- So this has a sunset, and it's ending? That's why we're talking about it?

DR. COLLIER: Correct. Three of the areas have a sunset, and so the artificial reef areas do not have a sunset on the regulations.

MS. STEPHENS: Just in my personal uninformed opinion, I would have no problem seeing the SMZs continue.

DR. COLLIER: You know, I see this group, the advisory panel, as, you know, if you all don't agree with them, that's fine, but, you know, you can advocate for some of the regulations that are out there. If you believe that these could have a beneficial impact, you should be saying that they do, and, you know, Paul was mentioning that South Cape Lookout, because of enforcement, it's never going to work, or may have challenges.

Well, there are spawning fish that have been observed in that area, and so it is functioning as a spawning special management zone. These fish go to that area, or are in that area, and seem to be in that area for a long period of time. If you look at the age structure for the fish that were collected for biological samples, they tend to be very old. I think one of the red groupers was over twenty years old. If you look at the age structure in the population, I would say that would be a unicorn of the fish, and so it does seem like there are some benefits of this.

You know, just advocating some of the aspects that are benefit, or that are there, which is spawning fish have been observed in all the areas, and that's great news, and it's not only a single species. It's usually multiple species that have been observed, and we only sample. We've only sampled a couple months out of the year. We haven't sampled all months. You know, we've been targeting certain species, whether it's scamp grouper that's going to be spawning in May, or April and May, or June, or warsaw grouper, that is spawning in early parts of the year, and we haven't gone at times when gag grouper are potentially aggregating, or black grouper are potentially aggregating.

You know, all that timing of the sampling is all dependent on that. Unfortunately, we don't have the funds to sample these sites year-round, and there -- I don't see additional funding coming for it, and so we have to rely on little pieces of information that can inform judgment, as opposed to having the entire encyclopedia of what's going on in the area, and we want to rely on the experts in the room, to get their feeling about what's going on and what could be useful.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Chip, and I was trying to keep up with some other comments I was getting on there. Sorry about that. Does anybody -- For each of those zones, is there anybody here that thinks that they need to go away? Do you think one of those needs to go away, Darrin?

MR. WILLINGHAM: This is Darren Willingham. I was going to ask Chip about that. Would the -- You had mentioned that the north Florida marine protected area is not part of what you're talking about, but it's confusing to me, because it's in the -- It's on the site, and is it the depth of it, because they're all considered the deepwater, per the South Atlantic Council site, and so I'm confused why that's not there, and are we getting anything out of that? I mean, to your argument that, yes, this area is protected, I always go with there's no fences out there, and these fish go wherever they want to go.

I know there's arguments both ways on that, but I -- You know, to the comments, I mean, how do you protect this? You can't, and this is -- By your site out there, it says ten-nautical-miles-by-ten-nautical-miles due east of Jacksonville, and I'm going to tell you that I fish that area, all right, and

I'm going to tell you a pile of us fish that area, right there at the ledge, you know, and it's not just for the pelagics. It's for, you know, triggers, and some nice bottom fish, and so I would say, if it's not being used for anything, then I would push to say, hey, get rid of that.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Darrin.

DR. COLLIER: So, just in response to that, there are different regulations, or different amendments created these different areas, and so, if you start off at the first one, which is the Oculina Experimental Closed Area, that was established way back in the day, I believe back in the 1990s, and so that was the first one, trying to protect Oculina rocks and known areas where gag and scamp were probably spawning.

Then I think it was Amendment 17 that created the deepwater MPAs, or Amendment 14. Sorry. Those are the areas that -- One of the areas that you're mentioning is the North Florida MPA, and so we do have a website that has a lot of this information on it. It's under the Managed Areas and under -- It's under Habitat and Ecosystem, under the Managed Areas. You can go to the website, and you can find information about all these different areas, why they were created.

The deepwater MPAs have a slightly different goal than the spawning special management zones. The deepwater MPAs were -- They go beyond just protecting potential spawning areas. They were designed to protect juvenile fish from being -- Basically from discard mortality, letting them grow up, and reduce overall fishing mortality in that area, in hopes of getting some larger fish.

Those areas, we have information on each of the sites on our website, and then, you know, we do have new things that the Nature Conservancy put out on our website as well, talking about why to protect some of these spawning areas, and then we do have a kind of an information brochure. It's like a web thing that you can click through for the spawning special management zones, trying to be adaptive to different ways people will get information.

Hopefully I answered some of your points, Darrin, but the deepwater MPAs were not created with a sunset clause, and one of the reasons that the spawning special management zones have a sunset clause is the lack of research that's going on in the deepwater MPAs. They want more information. The council has wanted more information on these areas, to understand how they're functioning.

Unfortunately, there's not a lot of information that's available to compare what's going on within the deepwater MPAs and outside of the deepwater MPAs. Although there is information being collected through South Carolina DNR, through the trap survey, it's not a design survey to look at inside and out, to understand really what's going on, and it's going to be that level of research that's needed to understand how these things are performing.

MR. WILLINGHAM: Chip, just to further understand what you're saying, are they using this thing off of northeast Florida, or are they not? Are they using that north Florida MPA? Has anybody looked at it, and do you know if they looked at it in a period of time? Has it been twenty years, since the 1990s, or have they looked at it recently?

DR. COLLIER: They were created in 2008, I believe, or they went into effect in 2008. I have not taken a deep dive in the information that would be available for them, and so I don't think we have information that's been analyzed for this. We have information that's been analyzed for other

deepwater MPAs, whether it's South Carolina DNR that has looked at it or some research that's been done up off North Carolina, through North Carolina State looking at these.

Based on the information that they've seen, there's been very little change in the size of fish, age of fish, and densities of fish in the MPAs. However, it does take a long time, for some of these species, to notice a difference in their abundance. It can take upwards of a decade to observe a difference, and I haven't really looked into the information in the more recent time, and especially that north Florida one.

MR. WILLINGHAM: So is the bottom line -- Is the council just looking to say do we keep this -- Do we resurrect them from the sunset clause, or do we just let them go night-night, and I see Mike.

DR. COLLIER: So, for the spawning special management zones, yes, that's what we're looking for, is should the regulation stay for those natural areas, or should they be removed or modified?

MR. KIMREY: Thanks Chip. Does anybody have anything to add to that? I mean, as a whole, does AP feel okay saying that we're pretty unsure about the SSMZs? Andy.

MR. FISH: I guess my question, or my comment, was really for the MPA. Like that snowy wreck, I think the one that's due east of the North Carolina, or South Carolina, that is a fifteen-mile-by-ten-mile trapezoid. That is a huge problem, and I would -- Not speaking from experience, but I would say that is probably the best fishing on the whole South Atlantic, of the coast, and there's a lot of bottom in there, and it's not all sand bottom.

I know a lot of people would benefit from being able to fish in there, but I think I'm confused on the SSMZ, but there should be a sunset, I think, on something, especially something as powerful as a crack pipe artificial reef that was placed in the middle of nowhere that sucked up all the fish that would be normally on the bottom. It should be opened up.

DR. COLLIER: So you're recommending the System Management Plan Team Workgroup kind of work through an evaluation of these deepwater MPAs after they finish up with the spawning special management zones?

MR. FISH: Sure.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Andy. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. I think -- Andy just kind of hit on it a little bit. I think that one of the issues that we're having today is we're conflating two issues here with the sunset of the spawning SMZs, which aren't fifteen miles. Most of them I think are like a mile-by-a-mile. They're pretty small areas, and they're very specific for multispecies spawning aggregations, and those are -- There's three of them, and those are the three that are due to sunset. We've also got the deepwater MPAs in here, and I think that there's some confusion amongst everybody as to which to play with and which to leave alone.

It's personally my recommendation, for the SSMZs, that we look at removing the sunset, and keeping them effective, because I think that they are effective. I mean, I've helped look at one,

and I can tell you that we did three trips there, and all three had different species of spawning fish that were there, and it's a good thing, and the nice thing is it's kind of out the middle of nowhere, and so, for the most part, people aren't going to go there anyway, but it's nice to know that there's some protection for it. Again, and I'll say it again, as we see low recruitment in a lot of these different species, I think it's important to protect these kinds of high-traffic spawning areas where we can.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, David. Tony, then Paul.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks. Tony Constant. On what Andy was talking about on that particular live bottom that's so large off the South Carolina coast, I will say we have numerous numbers really close to that that's really good fishing, and so I don't know if those fish migrate in and out. I do have friends who fish that edge. Like someone was saying, you would be within a hundred yards, and I've never -- I've traveled through it, but I've never bump the edges of it so much, but because I have probably fifty to a hundred numbers nearby, but I will say the fishing around it is very good.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Tony. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: A question for Chip. Can we kick this can down the road a little ways, and also for Wally. Is there potential to get some of this MARMAP data and do like inside the South Cape Lookout, and did I get that right, SMZ, a trap catch comparison outside the box versus inside the box, so we can have some actual data to look at maybe in a future AP meeting?

DR. COLLIER: So I would say we can't kick it down -- We can't kick it down the road, unfortunately. In the future, we could do a comparison of that, but, like I said, you know, it needs to be a designed survey, in order to address whether or not you're being effective inside and out, but the main point of these spawning special management zones, as David has been mentioning a couple of times, is is it protecting spawning fish, and there are fish that are spawning in the area. Is it the best? We don't know, but it seems to be achieving part of the goal, which is protecting spawning fish, and those spawning fish, their larvae, are able to recruit back into the South Atlantic region, which is an added benefit.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So is the Cape Lookout area -- Is that a shallow-water grouper complex, or is that deepwater? I'm not familiar with the precise depths within that SMZ.

DR. COLLIER: So, I mean, there are definitely some shallow-water groupers in there, and so they've seen, like I said, red grouper in it, and it depends on whether or not you consider red grouper a shallow or a deepwater, and it's kind of in the middle, but the area is different than other areas, where you think -- It is a lot of pavement more habitat than it is structured habitat in other areas, and red grouper don't necessarily like those high structured areas. They want habitat that they can build a nest in, in order to spawn, and so they do behave a little bit differently than some of the other groupers.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Again, I'm just thinking about this as a pinprick compared to the entire size of the spawning area on the shelf in the southeast U.S. This just feels like a really small area, and, again, beating a dead horse here, but very difficult to enforce. For the red grouper, are those late winter or early spring spawners in that neck of the shelf? Then they already have this afforded

protection for spawning by this time closure is already in place, and so, again, I'm just trying to think of the bigger picture here, and how really effective these things might be, or might not be, you know, based on the size relative to the entire spawning area of the shelf.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Paul. I'll go to Scott in just a second. Overall, unofficially, a show of hands. Do we think that these things need to stay in place, or do we let the sunset clause run its case, and they go away? All in favor of yea, raise your hand, for keeping them. A show of -- Just an unofficial, and then everybody thinks we just need to let run out, and open it all up, and kill them all.

Okay. All right. All right, and so we got that out of the way. It looks like, as an AP, we're okay with the people that really understand those, and hopefully will collect data out of them one day in a systematic way to prove they work, and we're okay with them working to keep them open. Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. Scott Buff. I just wanted to reiterate what Andy said. That piece of bottom right there, the Devil's Hole, that's probably the richest piece of bottom on the South Atlantic, and not only is it -- It was very, very productive, probably better than it's ever been now, but that took a huge area from a lot of people, because you could actually --

People could fish that from just about anywhere in the fishery, except in the lower parts of Florida, because people would drive that far to do it, but that is a huge piece of bottom. In my opinion, that actual piece there should have been divided into another piece, to where we could actually could have fished, but, you know, it's -- Like he said, it's over fifteen miles long, and so, you know, it's just a -- That was a big area that they took from a group of people that could have used it, but I do agree in keeping all of it.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott. Anybody else? Anybody else? All right. There we go. All right, everybody. We survived another one. Real quick, does anybody have a public comment, and we'll certainly let you do that.

Before I lose my train of thought, we've got two AP members that are terming out. Vincent and Jack Cox are not here, but they've done -- They've completed their third three-year term, and I expect, at least for Vincent, he'll take his little break, and then he'll figure out a way to weasel his way back in here, because he loves this stuff, and so we want to thank them. Then, from there, if there's nobody with public comment, we'll let Scott speak. Does anybody else have anything? Okay, Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you, Chris. I hope everybody don't get tired of me talking about the same thing, but one thing that -- I say this all the time, and our waterfront is going away, the working waterfront. I don't understand. I guess, in the north Atlantic, it's more of what's a so-called business, if you pay attention to what goes on up there, but there's tons of grants available for the northern states, and our waterfront is gradually just going away. Eventually, at some point in time, it's basically going to be mostly dayboats, because people can't afford to keep the waterfront for what it's used for, and so that was the big part of it.

Also, another thing that I wanted to bring up, and I don't know how all this works, but, in North Carolina, and the federal, we basically report three times, I think it is, and so you've got paper

logs, and you got two on the computers with trip tickets. It sure would be nice if, in some way, shape, or form, all of that stuff intermingled, because it would transfer the data straight to us, so everything we actually do is on paper and the computer, and so it would really be nice, like I say, if somehow they could stream that.

The thing with the emails, and it would really be nice on those amendments, if you could just put that little tag in there about what it's actually about. That way we know if it concerns us or not, and I think that's it. I think we've -- I've been here quite a while, and I think this is the best group of people that we've ever had. I really believe that. I hate that Jack isn't here. He adds a lot to it, but it's a really good, diverse group of people. Thanks.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Scott, and we appreciate that, and I would take this time to thank everybody, all the AP members, all the staff, and everyone else, for a pretty productive meeting. We had a lot. We got behind a little bit, and we caught up our time, and I'm going to let Haley speak before we adjourn.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chris, and thank you guys for those last messages as well. We're certainly ending, wrapping up this meeting, on a note of gratitude, and I couldn't agree more with what an incredible group of experience and education. Holy cow. I do want to give a shameless plug of exciting news.

If you have never attended MREP, the Marine Resources Education Program, it is a phenomenal program. It is where you get to be educated on federal fisheries science and management. That workshop has been held in the Gulf previously, in St. Petersburg, but we will be coming to Charleston for our next workshop next year, and so, if you have not attended, I would certainly encourage you to apply. It's free to attend. Your travel is covered, and your hotel is covered, and all your food is covered. You have a couple of steering committee members, and David Moss just joined us on the MREP steering committee, and Christina, our social scientist, as well as myself.

Right now, we're looking at potentially February of 2027, here in Charleston, and so, if you would like to learn more, please feel free to reach out to any of us, and anyone out there in internet land who might be listening. It is open to recreational, commercial, everybody. Thank you.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, Haley. If there's anyone listening, or here, that has not done MREP, it's -- I did it when it was two parts down in Florida, but I highly recommend that if you've never done it. Something else for the AP members that are terming out for their three-year term, if you're reapplying, you have till May 8 to do that. It's pretty quick and simple. It's online, and it's easy to find. Thanks to the vice chair, all the staff, all the members. I think that's it. John.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and that was my question. I was going to just ask Mike on the way out. My first term is over, as of this meeting, and I did reapply, and so do they email me and let me know if I'm -- I hope you don't vote.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so the council will review applications for the AP spots at their June meeting, and then, following the June meeting, there will be an email announcement letting you know the results of the application.

MR. KIMREY: Thanks, John and Mike. We're out of here.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 23, 2026.)

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Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
June 24, 2026

SG AP Tue 4/21/26

First	Last	Suffix	Seat
Chris	Kimrey		Charter
Haley	Stephens		For-Hire
Vincent	Bonura		Commercial
Jon	Braun		Commercial/Charter
Gettys	Brannon	III	NGO
Scott	Buff		Commercial/Recreational
Chris	Conklin		Commercial
Tony	Constant		Charter/Recreational
Jack	Cox	Jr.	Commercial
Andrew	Fish		Commercial
Robert	Freeman		Charter
Richard	Gomez		Charter
Joe	Mathews		Recreational
Randy	McKinley		Commercial
Jeff	Marinko		Commercial
Chris	Militello		Recreational
David	Moss		Recreational
Paul	Nelson		Commercial/Charter
John	Polston		Commercial
Stephen	Ranney		Charter
Paul	Rudershausen		Scientist
K.P.	Scott		Charter/Commercial
Cameron	Sebastian		Charter/Commercial
Darrin	Willingham		Recreational
Todd	Kellison		NOAA web

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Kerry Marhefka

Amy Dukes

Kai Lorenzen

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SG AP Time 4/21/20

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SG AP Wed 4/22/26

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	Jon	Braun		Commercial/Charter
✓	Gettys	Brannon	III	NGO
✓	Scott	Buff		Commercial/Recreational
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✓	Tony	Constant		Charter/Recreational
	Jack	Cox	Jr.	Commercial
✓	Andrew	Fish		Commercial
	Robert	Freeman		Charter
	Richard	Gomez		Charter
Web	Joe	Mathews		Recreational
	Randy	McKinley		Commercial
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✓	Chris	Militello		Recreational
✓	David	Moss		Recreational
✓	Paul	Nelson		Commercial/Charter
✓	John	Polston		Commercial
	Stephen	Ranney		Charter
✓	Paul	Rudershausen		Scientist
	K.P.	Scott		Charter/Commercial
✓	Cameron	Sebastian		Charter/Commercial
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K.P.	Scott		Charter/Commercial
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Darrin	Willingham		Recreational
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Report Generated:
04/23/2026 03:06 PM EDT

Webinar ID	Actual Start Date/Time	Duration
415-986-411	04/21/2026 01:16 PM EDT	3 hours 32 minutes

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Barrows	Katline
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Beaty	Julia
Beyer	George
Bianchi	Alan
Brouwer	Myra
Bunting	Matthew
Byrd	Julia
Dukes	Amy
Finch	Margaret
Foss	Kristin
Gore	Karla
Guyas	Martha
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Huber	Jeanette
Iberle	Allie
Kellison	Todd
Kersting	Anne
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Lara
Marhefka	Kerry
Mathews	Matt
McWaters	Mark
Mehta	Nikhil
Moore	Jeff
Moss	david
Murphey	Trish

Newman	Thomas
O'Meally	Conor
Offner	Tia
Oliver	Ashley
Salmon	Brandi
Smart	Tracey
Spanik	Kevin
Stephens	Haley
Talia	Jenna
Walsh	Mick
Withers	Meg
Wolfe	Jordan
curtis	Joe
Bajema	Jordan
Bradshaw	Christopher
Corbett	Ellie
DeBrango	Gregory
Hervas	Susana
Kolmos	Kevin
Lazarre	Dominique
Mallory	Ryan
O'Donnell	Kelli
SAFMC	SAFMC
Sardar	Aashir
Sedberry	George
Silvas	Rachael
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Thomas	Suz
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Attendee Report: April 2026 Snapper Grouper AP Meeting

Report Generated:
04/23/2026 03:09 PM EDT

Webinar ID	Actual Start Date/Time	Duration
415-986-411	04/22/2026 07:38 AM EDT	9 hours 37 minutes

Staff Details

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Yes	Not applicable for staff	Council
No	Not applicable for staff	Byrd
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Last Name	First Name
Aines	Alex
Bajema	Jordan
Barrows	Katline
Bates	Sydney
Beaty	Julia
Beyer	George
Brannon	Gettys
Brouwer	Myra
Byrd	Julia
Carmichael	John
Cox	Jack
Curtis	Christina
Dukes	Amy
Evans	Joseph
Finch	Margaret
Foss	Kristin
Gore	Karla
Guyas	Martha
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Hill	David
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Iberle	Allie
Klibansky	Lara
Lazarre	Dominique
Long	Stephen
Marhefka	Kerry

Mathews	Matt
McMullen	Ryan
Mehta	Nikhil
Moss	david
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Newman	Thomas
O'Meally	Conor
Offner	Tia
Oliver	Ashley
Schmidtke	Michael
Silvas	Rachael
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Spanik	Kevin
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Talia	Jenna
Thomas	Suz
Walsh	Mick
Withers	Meg
Zapf	Daniel
curtis	Joe
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Kellison	Todd
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Mallory	Ryan
McWaters	Mark
Moore	Jeff
O'Donnell	Kelli
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Attendee Report: April 2026 Snapper Grouper AP Meeting

Report Generated:
04/23/2026 03:10 PM EDT

Webinar ID	Actual Start Date/Time	Duration
415-986-411	04/23/2026 07:59 AM EDT	4 hours 13 minutes

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Attendee Details

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Bajema	Jordan
Beyer	George
Bianchi	Alan
Bradshaw	Christopher
Brannon	Gettys
Brouwer	Myra
Bruger	Catherine
Byrd	Julia
Curtis	Christina
Curtis	Judd
DeVictor	Rick
Dukes	Amy
Finch	Margaret
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