

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER ADVISORY PANEL

**Crowne Plaza Hotel Charleston
N. Charleston, South Carolina**

April 2-3, 2025

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

James Paskiewicz, Chair
Chris Kimrey, Vice Chair
Vincent Bonura
Jon Braun
Scott Buff
Chris Conklin
Tony Constant
Jack Cox Jr.
Andrew Fish
Robert Freeman
Richard Gomez
Joe “Matt” Mathews

Randy McKinely
Jeff Marinko
Chris Militello
David Moss
Paul Nelson
John Polston
Stephen Ranney
Paul Rudershausen
K. P. Scott
Cameron Sebastian
Haley Stephens

Council Members

Trish Murphey, Chair
Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair
Amy Dukes

Kerry Marhefka
Tim Griner

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Kim Iverson
Kelly Klasnick

Ashley Oliver
Dr. Mike Schmidtke
Suzanna Thomas
Christina Wiegand
Meg Withers
Dr. Julie Neer
Emily Ott

Attendees and Invited Participants

Dr. Walter Bubley

Greyson Webb

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 N. Charleston, South Carolina, on Wednesday, April 2, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman James Paskiewicz.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Good morning. I would like to call this meeting to order. This is the spring Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting, and I would like to say thank you for the staff for setting everything up, and thank you to everybody who came to spend some of their time, that you can't get back, to come here and bring our heads together and see what we can do with this fisheries management stuff.

We're just going to jump right into this, and we're going to look for the approval of the agenda. If everybody has reviewed it, and if nobody has any issues with what's on the agenda, we can go ahead and approve that. Raise your hand if you have any issues with the agenda. I don't see any, and so I think the agenda is approved.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Make sure you get the introductions.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm sorry. That's my fault. Let's go ahead and start down here in this corner, and everybody introduce yourself, where you're from, who you represent.

MR. SCOTT: Thank you. My name is Kenneth Scott. I'm a new member. My wife and I own the Miss Hatteras partyboat in Hatteras, North Carolina. I've worked in both the charter and commercial fisheries for snapper grouper, and I am happy to be a new member for the advisory panel.

MR. MARINKO: I'm Jeff Marinko, and I'm also a new member, and I own a dive boat, 100 percent dive. We do absolutely no fishing, and I'm just here to give my insight on what we see down there. We travel up and down the coast, from Florida to North Carolina.

MR. FREEMAN: Robert Freeman, and I represent the recreational fishing, and as well as commercial, out of Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.

MR. FISH: I'm Andy Fish, Florida commercial. I range up to North Carolina from Florida.

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

MR. MCKINLEY: Randy McKinley, commercial, wholesale, and retail seafood dealer in Topsail Beach, North Carolina.

MR. RANNEY: Stephen Ranney, and I'm out of Hilton Head, South Carolina. I am a for-hire charter captain.

MR. GOMEZ: Richard Gomez, charter-for-hire, Lower Keys.

MR. BONURA: Good morning. I'm Vincent Benora, a commercial fisherman and wholesale dealer out of Florida.

MR. KIMREY: Good morning, everybody. Chris Kimrey, and I'm for-hire, from Morehead City, North Carolina.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Good morning. James Paskiewicz. I represent commercial fishermen, mainly yellowtail snapper, pretty much all of the Keys, and I am a wholesale dealer as well.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Good morning, everybody. Paul Rudershausen, Morehead City, North Carolina. I'm a research biologist for North Carolina State University.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, charter headboat, operations manager for Little River Fishing Fleet and Hurricane Fleet and Coastal Scuba. We also operate a commercial headboat, and do some commercial spearfishing as well.

MS. STEPHENS: Good morning, everyone. Haley Stephens, Ponce Inlet, Florida. I'm the owner-operator of F/V Sea Spirit, a charter headboat. We make our living as for-hire fishermen. We also participate in commercial and recreational efforts.

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

MR. NELSON: Paul Nelson, Ponce Inlet, commercial and recreational for-hire.

MR. POLSTON: John Polston, King's Seafood, wholesale and retail and boat owner, with different several permits, Daytona Beach, Florida.

MR. COX: Good morning, and I'm Jack Cox, from Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, representing commercial snapper grouper hook-and-line and bandit fishing.

MR. CONKLIN: Chris Conklin, Murrells Inlet, South Carolina. I have a retail market and what's left of a fleet of commercial bandit boats.

MR. BRAUN: Jon Braun, and I'm a new member from Southern Saltwater Adventures, for-hire. I also do a lot of recreational and commercial spearfishing.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, everyone. Although I do know most everybody's name in here, a couple of the new people I don't, and so if you could make sure your name tag is kind of angled this way, and that would help me out when we're going into discussions. Thank you. So now I guess we'll go back to the approval of the agenda. I didn't see any hands initially. I still don't see any now, and so the agenda is approved.

Moving into the minutes from our last meeting in October, if everybody has had a chance to review those, if there's no discussion about that, or any changes that need to be made, and I'm looking for anybody that needs to raise their hand on that. I'm not seeing any, and so it looks like we can approve those minutes from our last meeting.

I guess now we would be looking for public comment. I'm not sure if we have anybody in the room, or online, and there's some time for that. So nobody present in the room, and no hands up online, and I guess we'll be moving into the committee chair remarks, and that will be Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks, you guys, and so this is a committee chair update for you guys, and so we're going to talk about what happened at the last council meeting. All right. First up is Amendment 46, which is the recreational permit. This is the one that you guys have been talking about a lot.

The council received public feedback from the Private Angler AP, both at the December meeting and at the recent March meeting, and then council had further discussions, refined the language that's in the amendment, and requested analysis for several actions and alternatives, and then the council will talk about this more at the June meeting, and they will consider the document for approval for public hearings.

Amendment 56, which is the black sea bass amendment, we talked about this a lot. Scoping was conducted in January and February, and then the council decided on an initial list of actions that will be addressed in the amendment. This was a really long list. I think you guys are going to get some updates on this amendment, and you can see the list of things that we wanted to look at in there.

All right, and we also talked about golden tilefish, and so this will be an abbreviated framework amendment. The recent stock assessment, which was SEDAR 89, indicated that golden tilefish is not overfished and not undergoing overfishing. The council initiated this abbreviated framework to revise the catch levels. This is the council's fastest method of revising these catch levels.

Then the council also directed staff to include consideration of changing the recreational season start date in another amendment, and so there were a couple other things on golden tilefish that the council wanted to look at, but we didn't want to slow down updating the catch levels, and so we are thinking about putting those items in a different amendment. You guys are going to talk about this later in the meeting.

The council also got a presentation on maximum sustainable yield proxies, and so the council has been having several discussions about these proxies, which are used in overfished and overfishing determinations, and there will be another presentation that the council will receive on this topic in June, and so this is also -- I call it SPR, but it's like what SPR percentages are used in the stock assessment and used when thinking about how to set catch levels.

Commercial management, and so the council has formed this commercial management subcommittee. It met in November, and then it met again at the beginning of the March council meeting, and the council initiated an amendment that will address two main commercial issues. The first one is really kind of honing-in on the two-for-one snapper grouper policy, and also considering limiting the number of permits that can be owned per entity, and possibly establishing income requirements or use-it-or-lose-it provisions.

The council also wants to look at ways to increase the trip efficiency, and so this may include step-ups, increasing trip limits, if landings are below a threshold by a specified date in the season, and also establishing non-target or out-of-season allowance for species that are not overfished.

I'm looking to see what is new on this slide. The green. The subcommittee will continue to meet. They're going to meet at the beginning of the June meeting, and report-out to the council as necessary, possibly at quarterly meetings, and I just mentioned that they're going to meet at June.

The for-hire limited entry amendment, and so the council previously initiated this amendment to include snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, and coastal migratory pelagics, and. in June of last year, the council paused this amendment development until permits data is available from NOAA's Southeast Regional Office, and we are still waiting on that information.

The for-hire reporting amendment, the for hire AP provided recommendations to the council in March. The council approved this for scoping. You guys are going to talk about this more later in this meeting.

Red snapper management, and so the council was informed that an update to the SEDAR 73 assessment had been completed, and NOAA Fisheries released Amendment 59, which is a secretarial amendment that's intended to end overfishing and reduce dead discards of red snapper. This secretarial amendment, like all secretarial amendments, are developed outside the council process by NOAA Fisheries.

This particular one was developed as part of a settlement agreement from a lawsuit, and so the council discussed this at the March meeting, and developed a comment letter that was submitted during the public comment time period to NOAA Fisheries, and then NOAA Fisheries is required to submit a final rule to the Federal Register by June 6. Any questions for me? I'll be here for the duration of the meeting. We also have some other council members over here, Kerry and Amy, that can help answer questions as well when things come up. Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: Good morning, Jessica. Thank you for that. What kind of feedback are you getting from recreational fishermen in reference to reporting?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm trying to think about how to answer that. I don't know that we've talked to fishermen, like private recreational fishermen, about reporting. I don't know that we've talked to them a lot. FWC has an exempted fishing permit, where we are testing out some different management alternatives for the snapper grouper fishery, and trying to reduce discards, and there's a reporting app for private anglers, as part of that, that's being tested, but I think, in general, I don't know that we've had a lot of conversations, as a council body, about private recreational anglers reporting. John.

MR. POLSTON: I'm familiar with what the council came up with as far as the closure for the red snapper fishing, speaking of red snapper, and I wanted to ask you, because I know you're into the legal part of it, if -- We'll say that is accepted, or not accepted, but NOAA themselves accept it, or don't accept it, and who takes precedent on what happens?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would say that -- I mean, it's up to NOAA. They're the ones that entered into the settlement agreement. Do you mean NOAA versus the council, and who takes precedent? I would say NOAA, in this case, and they're the ones that have the authority to submit this secretarial amendment, and they did this as the result of a lawsuit, and so there was a settlement agreement that they entered into as part of the lawsuit.

There was a lot of discussion at the council, in various comment letters, and so the settlement agreement indicated that they just needed to end overfishing. The secretarial amendment had eight actions. It was really just kind of the first action that ended overfishing, and so there was a lot of discussion, at the council meeting, about are some of those actions in there, including things like the closure, and should they be something that goes back to the council, for the council to look at, that maybe they're more council-centric-type actions. Jack.

MR. COX: Jessica, why is the council having any discussion on the commercial permits, use-it-or-lose-it, because, you know, we have been beat down, from 2,500 permits, down to a little bit over 500, from Cape Hatteras all the way to Key West, and there's a lot of us that are aging, and having health issues, like myself, and so, you know, it makes me nervous thinking, okay, well, you know, Jack has not been able to use his permit very much in the last five years, and he's had some health issues, and why is there some discussion going on with that?

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, but I don't recall, and this isn't to say that -- I'm not questioning, but we're sitting around there not recalling that being exactly what we intended. I believe that, through feedback from the public, and maybe even from this panel, what we heard was some concern about sort of the idea of someone who never intends to commercially fish, whether it's an NGO, or a business, hoarding the permits, and not using them, and like is there a way to look at that and sort of make it clear that the council's intent is that these permits are for people who intend to be involved in the practice of commercial fishing. I don't think anyone -- I think everyone recognizes what you just said, and no one wants to get in that place at all, and so I wouldn't -- I think we all hear that, and I wouldn't worry. That's not -- I don't believe that was our intent.

MR. COX: Okay. thank you for that, because, when you read that, it kind of leaves it open-ended, and you don't know where it might be going.

MS. MCCAWLEYL Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Randy McKinley, and I just had jotted down two questions. Why is it that NOAA has taken a long time getting the permit data, and then second is did the council -- Was the council involved in any bit of that, with Amendment 59, or was that something that the council had no input in, and NOAA did it on their own?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So let me answer the second one first, and so, the secretarial amendment, NOAA did that on their own. In fact, they conducted a whole stock assessment on their own. They didn't tell us that they had conducted an updated stock assessment until the December council meeting, but we didn't get to see that until I believe maybe January, when the secretarial amendment came out, and so, yes, this was done completely by NOAA, and then they just took comments from the council as kind of another member of the public.

You know, we commented, during the public comment period on that secretarial amendment, and so council wasn't part of it, other than to make comments after it was already out, and then, the permit data, I'll look to Mike. I don't know that we know -- There's a problem I think with the system, that we can't get the data, but I'm going to let Mike answer that other question.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I don't know that I can answer the question very well, but, as far as I know, there was, I guess, some form of error going on in the system, and some update that was required

with the search tool that they used to go through and pull those data, and so that process has been going on, and, as they've gone through updating the system, they found errors that were not the one that initially triggered them to look into it deeper, and so they've been fixing things along the way as well. We are hopeful. We continue to get updates from the Regional Office, and we're hopeful that it will be available soon, within this year, but we haven't gotten kind of the final word on that just yet.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions for me? All right. I'll pass it back to the chair.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you very much, Jessica. At this point, I would like to acknowledge a couple of panel members who are joining via webinar. We'll go ahead and see if your mics are on, and you can introduce yourselves.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, Chris Militello, go ahead and kind of give your introduction.

MR. MILITELLO: Good morning. Chris Militello, recreational fisherman, south Florida.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, and then Scott Buff. There you go, Scott. I think you should be unmuted now.

MR. BUFF: Thank you. Scott Buff, Holden Beach, North Carolina, commercial, bandit, and retail market and wholesale.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you, and, while I have the mic, I just wanted to recognize, as was stated before, we do have three council members here with us, Amy Dukes, Kerry Marhefka, and Jessica McCawley, and we also have, online, Trish Murphey, Tim Griner, and I'm scrolling through to see if we have other council members, and apologies if I overlook a name as I quickly scroll. I think that's who all is in attendance at this point, and so I just wanted to recognize the council members that are in attendance as well.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, gentlemen. It looks like we'll be moving to the Florida Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permit Discard Research Project Update, and, again, that's Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for that, Chair. This is the same presentation that we gave to the council at the most recent meeting, and so a little bit more about our FWC Atlantic red snapper EFP project, and then I'll be here for the duration of the meeting, if you want to ask more questions.

We have three unique projects happening off of the coast of Florida. They started in August of last year, and they will run through July of this year, and you can see the goals there of these projects. We're trying to work with anglers to obtain better catch and discard information. We're trying to test innovative management strategies to reduce discards. We're primarily testing a fifteen-fish snapper grouper aggregate bag limit. These projects allow additional red snapper harvest. We developed a reporting app, and an education course, and you also use the app to do kind of a hail-in and hail-out, and then we are also evaluating angler satisfaction with these projects as well.

This is showing you how many people applied for these projects over the four quarters, and so we are in, or are about to be in, the middle of the final application period for the fourth quarter, and so, for the first quarter, just to kind of show you the setup there for this table, there were 7,722 applications for 410 seats, and so that's 410 seats across all three projects.

So, for example, one of the projects, the study fleet that occurs in northeast Florida, is just ten participants, and so 200 for another one of the projects, and 200 for the other, and ten for the one, and so then you can see that we've had a lot of interest, a lot of people applying for these. The way that you apply for two of the projects is through our Go Outdoors Florida licensing system, and then the study fleet, which is the ten participants, you fill out an application online, on our website, during this application period.

We already had a question over here, and so people are selected, and so the people that apply through the Go Outdoors licensing system are selected via lottery, and so we have a control group, and people that are actually taking red snapper. If you're in the control group, and report on a number of your trips, then you get what we call preference points in the licensing system.

It's used for like our quota hunts. You get preference points in the next quarter to be in one of those experimental groups, if you apply, but, otherwise, those folks are selected via lottery, and then, in the study fleet, there's a lot of questions on the application, including why people want to participate, size of the boat, safety equipment, all sorts of things like that. All of those factors, including where people are going in and out of in northeast Florida -- All of those things are considered in selecting people for the study fleet.

This is the types of data that we're collecting as part of this project. I mentioned that we're testing out this fifteen-fish snapper grouper aggregate bag limit. We're also looking at where people are fishing, where the effort is. We're getting biological information, and so things like otoliths, DNA, sex information.

We're looking at fishing behavior and angler satisfaction, and so FWC has an entire kind of social science team, and that social science team is working on this project, where we do surveys before they start the project. After they start the project, we do surveys with people in the control group, to understand how they feel about the current regulations, and then we're also doing things like semi-structured interviews and other parts of this to try to understand what people think about this project, what motivates them to participate in the project, how they felt about gathering all this extra data, et cetera, and then we are validating the data that's coming in with this reporting app, dockside intercepts, and then, on some vessels, there's a camera system onboard, and some vessels have observers on board.

Just a little bit about the second quarter project statistics. So, once again, those folks were fishing November through January. There were 192 trips completed and 132 dockside intercepts. There were over 1,500 red snapper harvested, and 1,300 of those were sampled for biological information.

You can see a photo there. That's a study fleet trip, and so the study fleet can max out the boat with thirty-six red snapper, and you can see the flag there. If you're a study fleet participant, you fly that flag, so law enforcement can see from a distance that you're on a study fleet trip, and then, when those people come back, there's a significant time and effort from our FWC samplers, and

she's the second one from the left there, that are going through and sampling everything in the catch, and so the study fleet is very, very involved, lots of time, once people get back to the dock, to sample all those fish.

A couple of takeaways. Certainly we'll have, you know, full reports, and write-ups, when we get to the end of the project, but right now just a couple of things, and so people are really excited about these projects. There's a lot of interest. You saw how many people were applying for only 410 spots.

For years at public workshops, when we talked to fishing clubs, people that come to the council, they talk about wanting to provide data directly to FWC, and we are doing this by testing this exempted fishing permit app that the FWC developed specifically for this project. If this app, you know, works out well, it's something that FWC, the state, is considering expanding to people for the State Reef Fish Survey, which is the way that we're looking at people that are going offshore, and so we're kind of testing this app, to see if people like it, and we might want to expand it to other projects.

Most anglers are limiting out on red snapper before they reach this fifteen-fish aggregate bag limit, and so you can see that on the graph there, and so that's a graph showing fish coming in from the study fleet, and so the way that it's worded in the study fleet is you have to stop fishing once the vessel reaches that thirty-six red snapper limit, or each person onboard reaches that fifteen-fish snapper grouper aggregate.

You can see that not really anybody is reaching the fifteen-fish snapper grouper aggregate per person onboard the vessel, because there's so many red snapper out there that they are limiting out on red snapper and only catching a few fish in the aggregate before they have to stop fishing.

Then, just a little bit about what we're seeing coming in on these surveys, that anglers are preferring this EFP-type management over the potential closures that are on the horizon, as mentioned in the secretarial amendment. I think that's my last slide, and so I'll take any questions, and then I'm also here for the duration of the meeting, if you think of other questions for me. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Thank you for the presentation. Just a couple basic questions, and I must have missed it, but what was the purpose of this study, and, just following up on the slide that we still see here, the fifteen aggregate bag limit seems really high, and that's a testament, or that's reflected, in your XY graph at the final slide.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so they're the goals, again, of the project, and then, yes, and so, the fifteen-fish aggregate, we determined that number of species to test because we did an analysis on, depending on the different seasons of the year, how many snapper grouper species could an angler come home with, and, when we looked at that, depending on the season and what's open, what's available, each individual could have between forty-four and forty-seven, maybe, depending on the season, snapper grouper species, because, you know, there's fifty-five in that complex. We, you know, dropped that down to fifteen, but I think I agree with you that fifteen might be too many, based on what we're seeing so far, but that was our test.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Just to follow-up there, was an angler allowed to either have throwbacks, or was this the first fifteen legal snapper groupers that were boarded by the angler?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So that's a great question, and the three different projects work a little bit differently, but, if a species was closed, then they had to put it back, and so like let's take, for example, goliath grouper. You can't bring in a goliath grouper and count that as part of your fifteen-fish aggregate, because there's not any harvest in federal waters for goliath grouper.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So just the final thing here, and this is probably pie in the sky, given all the funding limitations that we know about for these types of research, but, yes, I would like to see -- If we're looking at testing innovative strategies to reduce discards, it would be great to see some type, or some semblance, of this study repeated, but reducing that aggregate limit to perhaps three to five fish, because I would contend, you know, based on your data, there's very few anglers that reach that aggregate fifteen, especially the private recreational anglers that are fishing on their own vessels that, on a typical trip, as per your XY graph, they have reached that fifteen aggregate limit, and so it would be great to see that reduced, and then see how the angler behavior changes based on that reduction.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that feedback. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so did I hear you correctly that it was an and/or, and was that right? They can catch up to thirty-six reds, or up to fifteen per person, and, if one capped first, then it stopped everything, and is that correct?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, but only in the study fleet, and so there's two other fleets that are operating, and they operate differently, and so the study fleet is like a vessel setup, where the whole vessel is participating in this project. The other two projects, where people are drawn via lottery from that Go Outdoors Florida licensing system, that's based on the individual.

The individual draws it, and they get a lot less snapper. It's just them participating. They could go on a private vessel, or they could go on a for-hire vessel, or they could go on a headboat to participate in that, and, depending on which project they're participating in, it's either three or four red snapper, and they're also testing out the aggregate, but it works differently than it does in the study fleet, where you're kind of maxing out the vessel with the red snapper or the aggregate. Haley?

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Jessica. Haley Stephens. I just want to offer my praise to FWC and this EFP project. I've actually participated in the EFP project, as part of the lottery, because, like I mentioned, I'm also a recreational fisherman, on my free time, and we have heard nothing but praise and success.

Just to offer my insight to the group, while we have it, the hail-in and hail-out is so easy. You scan a QR code, you touch a button, and you're on your way. The reporting is incredibly easy. It is a different software than I'm used to with my charter headboat. However, it is incredibly user-friendly, and I'm confident that even someone who's not experienced could navigate it very well.

With that being said, the FWC office has been so helpful, and so responsive, and so, if someone were to run into an issue, somebody always responds, and does it really quickly, and the educational component was really great. It, you know, was kind of a refresher, but it is a little bit

extensive. However, I think that that extensive nature of it was important, and required for something like a project like this when, you know, we're trying to preserve this resource.

It deserves that respect. It deserves that dedication of time for the educational component, and so I think we might see a lot of these particular topics talked about a little bit more as we move into different discussions, and, just my personal experience with the experimental group, I believe, the three red snapper, no one is targeting red snapper, and so it's really interesting to go out and try to target these fish, and, in doing so -- We've completed two trips so far. We have one more to go, but, in three baits, we have harvested three red snapper in the ten-pound range and came home, and so there are zero discards.

You talk about reducing discards. I personally have had zero discards, with a 100 percent satisfaction, and so praise to FWC. Great job for your team, and I would encourage others to support this as much as possible.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for the feedback, Haley. Was there a hand over here on this side of the table? John?

MR. POLSTON: My question is, at some point, or at what point, does the reality that the guys that are on the water start to line up with what we're being told is our science? The words out of your mouth was, there's so many red snapper out there, but we're still seeing -- Everything we read is overfishing, and discards, and, you, now, we're so worried about it, when red snapper are accounting for over 80 percent of every fish that every fisherman catches in the water.

We're catching red snapper in ways I've never in my lifetime. I've been on the water. I've held some sort of a license for almost thirty years on the saltwater. I've never, ever caught red snapper trolling at higher speeds in deep water. We're catching them high speed trolling for wahoo at fifteen knots. I caught six red snapper, two weeks ago, fishing for wahoo by the R4 tower, pulling at six knots, pulling bonito and blue runner.

One of the blue runner that was eaten was fifteen inches long. These snapper are aggressive, and they're hungry, and they're eating everything, and we're never going to see an aggregate where you're catching fifteen before you catch snapper when the red snapper are eating everything. They're eating all the sea bass, and they're eating all the small grouper. They've pushed the grouper as -- If anybody here -- I heard some people talking about diving.

I'm sure they're seeing the same experience as I am from St. Augustine north, and that's that you're seeing the large grouper, and now they're reducing our grouper numbers, and our time. We're seeing that the large grouper -- You still see some on the reef, but all of the grouper in that twenty-inch range, twenty-four-inch range, you're not even seeing them on the reef. They're down reef, down current, fifty to sixty yards, because they don't want to compete with the snapper for food, and so that's where they're at, and so you're getting less catch numbers because they're not even there. They're off the reef, but none of that aligns with what NOAA says is science.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So let me try to answer that. I think that the initial question was kind of when is the science going to catch up with what people are seeing on the water, and so, as part of the secretarial amendment, NOAA Fisheries did a -- I'm going to call it a quick stock assessment, and

so using the same model, and just updating some of the information, and even their model kind of said that, you know, said that it's no longer overfishing, and it's not overfished anymore.

It's still in this rebuilding plan, but now -- That was outside the council's assessment process, what we call the SEDAR assessment process. Now, the formal SEDAR process stock assessment is already underway, which will bring in all these new datasets, the Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count, all this additional information, and they will run --

It will take a while to get through that stock assessment, but I'm thinking that that stock assessment is going to show the same thing, that it's rebuilding ahead of schedule, et cetera. Then I hope, and fingers crossed, that the council can then respond to that new information as well.

MR. POLSTON: Well, I just want to say, by dragging their feet in typical government fashion, through the bureaucratic garbage that we have to go through, for them to spend fifteen years trying to figure out that red snapper are not overfished, and they're decimating the population of lots of other fish. Then so what it seems to be, to me, is typical government fashion, cry about a problem, let that problem create more problems, so they always have something to fix, so they always have tax money rolling in. That's what it seems to me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for the feedback. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you. Tony Constand, out of Beaufort. This study was north Florida, northeast Florida?

MS. MCCAWLEY: It actually went all the way to the Keys, and so two of the three fleets fished from the Florida-Georgia line down to Cape Canaveral. One of the fleets fished from Cape Canaveral through the Keys.

MR. CONSTANT: Okay. The reason it sounded like it was a Canaveral north was, in Beaufort, I would say, as I pay attention to what we do, bottom fishing, that graph is real similar to what we do daily. I would say we catch seven to ten different species, and that's about how many more snapper we would catch than the other species as well. Kudos to FWC again, along with Haley. I would like to see the other states pick this up, if we can get some funding.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Jessica. Thank you, Tony. Just real quick, as we talk about trying to bridge that gap between what we're experiencing in real time on the water, versus management, you know, the EFP sets the perfect precedent of, you know, being able to manage that in a more timely fashion. We have our dock agents meeting us there to do the intercepts, to collect the otoliths, weight, size, the whole shebang, and so that helps bridge the time issue. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Randy McKinley. Did I understand you right that this could possibly, and explain it, that this could possibly negate the closure in Florida that NOAA wants to do? I mean, is this -- I mean, everybody wants this, but what is this really helping, except for the study?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Great question. I don't know that it could negate it, and so, because of this lawsuit, the settlement agreement, and the secretarial amendment that proposed the closure -- This EFP was underway before the secretarial amendment was put out there. I don't know that it could negate it. I don't know that it satisfies what was in the settlement agreement, and it was a settlement agreement between the folks in the lawsuit and NOAA Fisheries. You know, FWC wasn't involved.

What we're trying to do here is kind of find other ways to reduce discards, besides using closures, and figure out what anglers think about that, and so we're primarily testing that fifteen-fish aggregate, and, you know, telling people, after you get to this point, you know, you've got to stop fishing. You can go fish for something else, but you've got to stop snapper grouper fishing. You've got to stop bottom fishing, but we're also testing kind of some other components that the council has been looking at, like the education course, you know, a reporting app. We're testing some other things as well, and trying to see what anglers think about that through this project.

MR. MCKINLEY: So not having like a lottery for certain people, and not -- Just this is a study.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and it's just a scientific study to try to look at some things, and get better data, get some information. The red snapper that are being sampled as part of this project are going for DNA analysis. I mean, so this project has a nexus with some other projects, but I don't know that just this testing, through this exempted fishing permit, could negate the closures. It's just testing some things that the council is looking at. Tony, did you have your hand up? Okay. Anybody else? Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to -- Just kind of hearing the discussion, and hearing Jessica's description, I do want to tie this project into another one of the council's initiatives, because it can kind of help make a connection.

You all have discussed, in previous meetings, and you've gotten presentations on management strategy evaluation, that MSE process, okay, and this is kind of real-life MSE, in the sense of this is taking a management scenario and testing it out, to see what happens with it, what happens when you put in this alternative management scenario.

Now, MSE does that through simulation. You can do it quicker, and with a wider variety of different options, but this is if you were to take one of the scenarios that we would potentially plug into an MSE and actually do it in real life, and so, as you see, it takes much longer. There is -- You know, there's a usage of the resource that occurs, and so there's pluses and minuses to one method versus another, but that -- As you come back to MSE discussions, most likely at your next AP meeting, and you hear them at the council, that might be a way that you can kind of make that connection of something that Florida is doing right now, is testing an alternative management scenario, and that is something that is done through simulation mode in an MSE type of framework.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Mike, will NOAA use this, and the MSE that we're currently using, and will they -- When this project is finished, will they use this data?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Not that I'm the decision-maker on that, but it would be information. Yes. Yes, and I think that that would be potentially usable information within that. This type of information gives insight on angler behavior, and that's something that that MSE is going to be looking at, you know, different methods of reducing dead discards, and so, yes, it's certainly information that can be very valuable for it. Whether it gets used or not, I don't want to speak, because I don't make that decision, but --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jack.

MR. COX: I just want to say that sometimes lawsuits help things get pushed along a little bit, and this is a good thing here to change gears and make things happen.

MS. MCCAWLEY: James.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Jessica. What I think is really interesting here is that this study is the exact opposite of reality, whereas these -- You know, these particular anglers are going out there and conducting a study, and they're retaining the red snapper, and not necessarily targeting the red snapper, maybe trying to catch all of the fifteen species, or, you know, the entire aggregate, but they are hitting the wall with red snapper, and, for everybody in this room that goes fishing, it's the exact opposite.

You know, you're not retaining any of those red snapper, but you're still dealing with the discard issues, and this is perpetually keeping us stuck in the mud, where we can't really do anything, and I was thinking, along with what Mike was saying, is that the MSE -- You know, it may be, and this is really the first time I've kind of been trying to like really put together where the MSE comes into play, and my whole thing, the entire time I've sat on this panel, is the timeline, is how do we respond to studies like this how do we respond to datasets like this, and how do we make real changes in fisheries management?

Clearly the red snapper need to be harvested, and clearly we need to do it on a quicker timeline than what's in front of us. How do we do that, and I think the MSE is really the only way of giving that flexibility to cut through the bureaucratic red tape and get us moving, and now, I mean, I can't say that I'm fully ready to adopt everything that the MSE puts on the table, but I am rooting for a quicker timeline, so that we can move forward with fisheries management, because what we're doing right now is adding to the perpetuation of the problem, and I think John was mentioning that, and I think all of us share in that frustration around the room, that we're just not doing the best that we can for our entire user group.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anything else for me? Andrew.

MR. FISH: Andy Fish. My only issue with the whole study is it seems to be -- It is a targeted, and this is a just a big giant fish grab. They're going to the best red snapper spots, and they're catching their thirty-six head of ten to twelve-pound average, at least in my area, and I just question whether the study is getting actual usable data like in an open fishery, where let's say the red snapper was open, and everything was in an equilibrium state, but now it's just an overrun of red snapper, and they're going to the best spots, with the most populated areas of red snapper, and so I just question whether it could not be real-time data, or whatever.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I appreciate the feedback, and remember that only ten boats get to do that a quarter. Not everybody gets to do it that way, and we do ask them questions, to see if they are trying to get that fifteen-fish aggregate, or did they just start out, like you're saying, by going to the red snapper spots, and so we're trying to get to that, but I appreciate the feedback. John, and then Haley.

MR. POLSTON: Still on the red snapper subject, as far as this year, supposedly, from what I understood, we should be going into the new catch levels in July, like for commercial, the 100. Is that going to be put in place this year, or has that not been decided yet?

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

MR. POLSTON: That's if it's passed? Okay, and that was basically the question, it passing, but doesn't it kind of have to be passed before June 6, or NOAA steps in and does whatever they're going to do?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So Mike and I were debating that, and so a of couple things. So this is a secretarial amendment. The council just gets to comment on it. The council doesn't get to make decisions on it, or kind of do anything with it other than provide our feedback. You're right that the lawsuit, the settlement, says that it has to be submitted, all the way through the process, by June 6 of this year.

Mike and I were discussing it. I think that there's two pieces in there. I think that there's a setup that would change the season for 2025 and then a separate setup that changes the season for 2026, and David is nodding his head yes, and so I can't remember exactly what it was. I could go look it up, but, yes, I think it's got two different setups for seasons, one for this year and one for 2026 and beyond.

MR. POLSTON: With that being said, would the quota be status quo for this year, seventy-five pounds, or would a new quota be -- But just the opening time be different?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike and I were discussing it again. I think, in the alternative that was the preferred by NOAA, it would go up. Yes, I think so. I saw more hands go up. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Jessica, and I don't want to spend too much time on this, because I know we do have a lot to go through today, but, just in response to Andy, so, of our two EFP trips that we've completed, our first trip was conducted about twenty-five miles offshore, and so in greater depths. Our second one was about six miles offshore, in about sixty feet of water. The fish that we did harvest were almost identical, and the location is validated through the dockside intercept, and the different depths that you fish, and the different coordinates, and so it does kind of paint the broader picture.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think Paul had his hand up, and then we'll go back to Andy. Did you have your -- Okay. Andy.

MR. FISH: I was just saying, if I was paying \$5,000 for a red snapper EFP charter, we're going to the best spot.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anybody else? All right. Thanks, you guys. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you very much, Jessica. I think that we have some really good information coming out of the State of Florida, and, you know, maybe some of the other states can adopt this. Are you taking over, Mike?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes. All right. Just really briefly, I want to point your attention to Attachment 3 in your briefing book. That is kind of a summary of all of the amendments that are currently underway for the snapper grouper fishery under the council, and you'll see, just kind of going through the list of the amendment, a brief description of the purpose, and the action summary, and then the development level where it is in the process.

You can take a look and kind of browse through each of these different processes. The top ones here are going to be the amendments that have gone all the way through the council's approval process. There are a couple of them that still need to be submitted, or at least one that needs to be submitted, and that's Reg Amendment 36. That's in its final editing phase right now, and so that should be sent off before -- Certainly before the next council meeting, and then there are a few that have been submitted and are under review at NOAA Fisheries. They're going through the NOAA rulemaking process for those.

Several of these amendments you'll be discussing this week, so I'm not going to dive into those, and I'll make that a little larger on the screen. I'm not going to dive into those here, because you'll hear summaries of what's going on with those later on in the week, or you heard kind of where it is in the process from Jessica's presentation on the last few council processes.

She noted Amendment 46, where the private recreational permit and education requirement is. That just kind of gives a description of what's coming up next, and so they'll -- The council will be looking to approve that for public hearings at the June 2025 meeting. We will be talking about black sea bass tomorrow, and I'll talk, in just a little bit, about golden tilefish and what's happening there.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, this is a joint amendment with the Gulf, concerning yellowtail snapper, and that's actually going to be kind of a combined yellowtail and mutton snapper amendment. Those stock assessments are going through their review processes at this point, and I think those were very recently completed, and so the council will be getting more information on yellowtail and mutton snapper in June, and kind of work on that amendment is going to pick up following that meeting.

Kind of a new one that was brought up has been this evaluation for the need of continued management for the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and I forgot to put that in Jessica's presentation, because it did come up at the last council meeting, but I'll address it here, and so the council is looking at the management unit for snapper grouper species, and there's the fifty-five species, and evaluating do all of those species need to continue to have conservation and management measures from the council, and does the management unit need to be that big?

Do we need to have that many species included in snapper grouper management, and, as you probably have experienced, there are several species that are caught with snapper grouper species

that are not in a federal management plan, and some of those have been brought to the table in previous times for consideration, but, at this point the council is kind of looking at does the management unit need to be reduced at all, and so they went through all of the species, on kind of a higher-end level, at the last council meeting, and kind of took everything off the table that absolutely this needs conservation and management, and there's no question, and we don't need to look any further into this.

Those species that are going to be evaluated a bit further are those listed here on the screen, and so you've got spadefish, bar jack, and I'm not going to read all the way through that, and several grunt species, but those are going to go through another level of evaluation, and NOAA has -- Within the Magnuson-Stevens Act, there are ten criteria that the council would have to go through, and, if a species meet these ten criteria, then it is not in need of conservation and management, and the council could then consider it as an ecosystem component species, or remove it from the management unit.

What it means, from kind of a regulatory standpoint, is that that species may not need an annual catch limit, or it may not need necessarily on-the-water limitations on possession or things of that nature and so we're going to be going through that process in a bit of a deeper fashion at the next council meeting in June, and you all will be updated in October, and they will likely potentially ask for some feedback on those that are being evaluated to the fullest extent, to get some idea from you all from what you're seeing on the water.

Then a couple of the other amendments, and you got updates on the recreational for-hire and the for-hire reporting in Jessica's update, and so that's kind of the big synopsis of what's going on within the entire management unit for snapper grouper, and I can pause and see if there are any questions that haven't been addressed in Jessica's update from the last couple council meetings, or anything that you see here that's been kind of hanging out in the background and is going to be picking up as we move forward.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks James. I see these as a more of a recreational species group, that really aren't targeted that much for table fare, other than local, and so, if these were pulled, would they be put into their -- Well I guess it's still up for grabs, but are they going to possibly be in their own group, or just will they be even watched?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So if they were -- It depends on what the council decides to do with them, if they're ecosystem component or if they're completely removed, and like there are species, like -- I'll throw sheepshead, and sheepshead is not in any federal management plan in the South Atlantic, and so that's one that, you know, might get encountered, to an extent, but we're not monitoring it, and we're not looking at it. It's going to be looked at more from a state level, and to those extent.

Something that is in the federal management plan that is an ecosystem component species would be something like bank sea bass, where it's not really highly, you know, targeted, and it's not necessarily actively monitored, or assessed, but we kind of are aware that it's part of the fishery, and so, if there were reports that came in that people are really going after bank sea bass now, then the council might be more able to take some type of action, but there's no like annual catch limit

on that species, or something of that sort, and so it would depend on which route the council takes on that, but it could go kind of either of those ways.

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and I see this as good and bad. I mean, I like the idea of less regulation, obviously, but, just for a species say like spadefish, they migrate. They're a little bit migratory, and they'll go offshore, and they'll come back inshore, and that family will hang out on one wreck all season, and so, theoretically, that whole -- Without any regulations, they could be wiped out and that -- That would really deter a fishery from an area, but that's kind of thinking out loud.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and, at this point, this is not any type of final decision, and it was the first cut, and so it was like, you know, you all just had a very large discussion about red snapper. Red snapper is not on the table for this, because it's something that is definitely, you know, of management concern, and so the first cut was take all those blatantly obvious ones that are, you know, assessed, that are actively regulated, that need these conservation measures, and need these management measures in place, and take those off the table, and, you know, those are staying, and the ones that remained are in this list.

Those will still have to go through that full ten-criteria evaluation, and if -- Those of you that have been on the panel for some time, we did this for I think a group of nine species, and several of them are within this list, maybe three or four years ago, and so we'll be going through that process again for each of these, but that's kind of where that process is. We've gone through the first wave, and now we're gathering the data to compare it to those ten criteria.

MR. CONSTANT: I do want to say I do totally agree with this, overall.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Tony, for the question, and thanks, Mike, for the explanation. We've got John Polston.

MR. POLSTON: Just a quick question. I was noticing on there all the different porgies listed. Is that -- Where it just says regular porgy, is that red porgy, because I don't see it listed anywhere, and I was just wondering.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Red porgy would not be able to be considered. That was one of the ones that we had to, you know, kind of take off the table automatically, because it's overfished. Any stock that we have assessed and is overfished is not eligible to be removed from the management unit.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Not seeing any other hands, Mike, go ahead. David.

MR. MOSS: Sorry. Before we go away from this, as I'm looking at this, and as I see effort consistently increasing, certainly in south Florida, and I'm assuming across-the-board, my advice would be that we need to probably keep an eye on almost all of these, because they're going to become more and more important as other species are more and more difficult to target and catch.

I know, by us, like certainly down in the Keys, queen snapper, and, I mean, everybody's catching queen snapper, it seems, anymore. Deep drop -- I shouldn't say everybody, but a lot of people, you know, and they're fairly easy to target, especially with electronics and boats and all that stuff, and everybody and their brother has an electric reel now. These species are becoming more and

more, for lack of a better term, necessary to a rec unit, if you will, as we see limits increase in a lot of other areas and species.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, David. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Real quick, and so, a year or two ago, a recommendation came out of this AP, before I was serving on it, to take a holistic look at the headboat fishery. Is that still -- I'm not sure if it's a question for Mike, and is that still on the schedule?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think some of that effort, and I'm kind of looking at Myra, and some of that effort might have been enveloped within the for-hire amendment, one of the for-hire amendments, but I'm not sure that that is necessarily in its own amendment category, and I think some of that is planned to be enveloped within the amendment that follows the management strategy evaluation, because that's what that was intended to do, was to take a holistic look at the Snapper Grouper fishery, and so the headboat -- You know, kind of a larger view look at the headboat, as part of that, and where it fits in within that process.

I think those are the two efforts where the council kind of said this kind of fits into these places, but, Myra, if you have any recollection of other things, then -- The council is getting another report on the headboat information in June. That will be the next discussion regarding the headboat-specific component of the fishery, and so, yes, you can tune into that one.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Thank you. I think that we will be revisiting some of these amendments that we've kind of brushed over right now. I just wanted to be sure that nobody else had any further questions before I hand it over to Julia Byrd with the citizen science update. It looks like it's all yours, Julia. Let's go ahead and take about six to 10 minutes.

MS. BYRD: Well, actually, it's back.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Never mind.

MS. BYRD: Good morning, everyone. Sorry about that. I am known to break computers a lot, and so thanks for bearing with us. So, for those of you I haven't had an opportunity to meet yet, my name is Julia Byrd, and I manage the council's citizen science program, and so I know there are some new folks on the committee, and so just a little bit about the program.

What we really try to do is work with fishermen and scientists to develop projects to fill some of the data gaps we have in the South Atlantic, and so we work closely with lots of council staff, but there are two of us on staff that are focused on citizen science, myself and then Meg Withers, who's over there in the corner, and so what we're going to do today is kind of update you guys on some of the projects we have underway, and then we'll be happy to take any questions you all have.

So, again, I'm going to update you on one kind of -- We've been working on kind of evaluating our program, and so we'll talk a little bit about that, and then we'll give you guys updates on a number of the other projects you see on the screen there, and so the first thing I'm going to talk a little bit about is program evaluation.

The South Atlantic Council is the only council that has a citizen science program, and one of the things we're really trying to make sure we're doing is that the program is doing what the council wants it to do, and so one way we try to do that is through evaluation, and so it's evaluating our individual projects, but also the program as a whole, and the program works with lots of different folks in the fisheries community throughout the South Atlantic, but they're kind of three groups that we work with the most, and it's fishermen, it's scientists, and it's managers.

One of the things we really wanted to learn more about was kind of how fishermen, scientists, and managers -- What their knowledge is about citizen science, what their confidence in, and what their trust is for the citizen science kind of process of collecting data that might be used in fisheries management.

The idea is, if we gather this information now, we could do it again in five years and ten years, and that can help us figure out how the program is doing, if people's kind of attitudes or perception about citizen science is changing over time, and so we were really lucky to work with a couple of researchers over the past couple of years on this. One of the main researchers we are working with is Rick Bonney. That's his picture on the screen, and so he is kind of a citizen science expert. He is one of the folks who's been leading kind of citizen science throughout the country, and even the world, and so he's been providing guidance to our program.

In order to gather this information from fishermen and scientists and managers, the first thing he did is he interviewed a very small group of fishermen, scientists, and managers, to figure out what sorts of questions we need to ask them in order to gather this information, and so he did those pilot interviews, and then what he did was an online survey of scientists and managers throughout the South Atlantic, asking them about kind of citizen science, how they feel about it being used in making management decisions, that sort of thing.

On the other side of things, we had another research team that was led by Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes out of Georgia Southern, and, to gather information from a much broader group of fishermen, she conducted interviews with fishermen across the South Atlantic, and so we had limited -- They had limited funding to do this work, and so, for the interviews, and with talking with fishermen, she really focused on trying to reach out and talk to snapper grouper and mackerel fishermen, and so I'm not sure if any of you guys around the table were contacted by this team, but if you were, and you talked to them, thank you very much.

I wanted to mention it, just in case any of you guys participated, and then, also, there are links in this document, if you're interested in checking out kind of results from this work, but one thing I'll say that was really valuable for this research is we learned more from scientists and managers of what their concerns are with using citizen science data for decision-making.

We learned more of their thoughts on kind of the trust issues there are between fishermen and scientists and managers, and, on the fishermen side of the table, we learned a lot about what would make them want to participate in a citizen science project, what wouldn't make them want to participate in a citizen science project, and I think one of the most valuable things we learned is, through these interviews, we learned more about the types of projects fishermen may be interested in participating in.

We also learned, from scientists and managers, what data gaps they felt citizen science data would be most appropriate for, and so we can look at the overlap there to try to figure out the types of projects we want our program to pursue, and so that's just a little bit of information. We learned a ton from this work, and so, if you're interested in learning more, you can check out the reports, or just chat me up at one of the breaks.

Next, I wanted to give you information and update you on our FISHstory project, and so this is a project where we're using old historic fishing photos to learn more about kind of the historic fisheries in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, early 1980s, and even early 1990s, and so when there weren't a lot of catch monitoring programs in place for the for-hire sector, and so I know you guys have been updated on this project a lot, but I just wanted to give you kind of what's been happening in the past six or seven months, since you last met.

We've been continuing to work to grow our FISHstory archive, and so you guys know, when we did our pilot project, we just had photos from Daytona Beach, and we've been working to gather photos from throughout the region. I wanted to give a quick shout out, and Captain Bobby actually brought me some photos this morning, and Haley helped connect me with Jackie Foreman at Down the Hatch restaurant, and I was able to scan a bunch of photos from the kind of 1980s with her last week, and so now we have over 2,300 photos.

Many folks around this table have contributed them, and so I just can't thank you enough. We have photos. Now it's provided by kind of sixteen photo providers now, and I've gotten a few new people providing photos over the past couple of weeks, and so we're really excited about that, and, when we look at photos, if you look at the percentage of photos we have by decade, you can see most are from the 1960s, and then followed by the kind of 1970s, 1950s and early 1980s, and, if you look at the photos, we have photos representing trips from every month of the year, but the most photos are from April through August, which likely kind of mimics the effort in the fleet.

So, in our region, we have a lot of, or a number, of stock assessments that begin prior to the 1970s, which are when catch monitoring programs were in place, and so it's really kind of these photos can provide some quantifiable information about what was caught and the size of fish that were caught back in that historic time period.

I know you guys have seen this slide 800 times, but we're always looking for new photos, and I know we have some new faces around the table, and so photos that are really helpful for this kind of FISHstory analysis is we need to have photos taken at the end of the trip, where the harvested catch is displayed with the angler, and we need to have a year for that photo. Ballpark year is okay. We want to know the state that photo was taken in, and then information on the photo provider, just so we can share what's happening with their photos and share information about the project with them.

Then what makes a photo even better is if fish are hanging on a leaderboard, and we can estimate the size of the fish, and then having more specific date information can help us look at kind of seasonal analyses, and then we love to have more specific information on kind of the vessel and the captain and the city and the dock that the boat was tied up, just to learn more about kind of the fishery from that historic time period.

Once we get these photos archived, to analyze them, we put them online, in a website called Zooniverse, and we basically have a project where we train people to help us count and identify fish in these photos, and so we relaunched the project, after we gathered all these new photos, in July of last year, and so we have more than one volunteer looking at each photo, and so I'm excited to say that now we're almost -- We're 96% complete on having volunteers help us analyze these photos.

The next step in this is we have multiple volunteers analyze each photo, and so, when there's volunteer disagreement, we have a team of fish ID experts, a mix of fishermen and scientists, who help us confirm what's in a photo, and so I know, at the last meeting, some of you guys volunteered to serve on the validation team, and so you'll be hearing from me soon, to help us kind of verify what's in some of these photos.

Then the last thing I wanted to mention about FISHstory is we're really focused right now on estimating kind of the size of the king mackerel and the red snapper that are in these photos, and so, with all of our newly-archived photos, we've almost measured all the king mackerel in them. We have about fifty photos left. We've measured all of the red snapper in these photos, and are putting together length composition information that will be provided for consideration at the upcoming SEDAR stock assessment.

We're really excited to be working with folks at NC State, helping us with kind of the analyses of these data, and then there's a king mackerel stock assessment that is in 2026, and we'll be providing lengths from the project for consideration in that assessment as well.

Then the last project I wanted to update you guys on is our SAFMC Release project, and so this is the project where we're working with fishermen to gather information on released shallow-water grouper and red snapper, using a free app called SciFish, and so, to give you an update on what's happening with that project, participants are still recording information in the SciFish app. You can see the eleven species on the screen that they're gathering information on.

Our team has been doing a lot of outreach, really closely in particular with our best fishing practices initiative, and so we've gone to fishing expos recently, done seminars at fishing clubs, and really tried to kind of spread the word and increase kind of participation in the project, and a shoutout to Meg, who has done a lot more of this research -- I mean a lot more of this outreach, and has been on the road a lot more than I have.

Also, each year, we put together an annual data summary, that we share with our participants, and so our 2024 annual data summary was shared with our participants last month. We give them a few weeks to look at it before it's posted online, but now it's available, and so the next couple of slides will be updating you on kind of the information gathered through the project in 2024, and then the last thing I wanted to update you guys on was a cool new partnership we're doing with Sea Grant this year.

For the data summary, it contains a ton of information just kind of summarizing the submissions we have over the year, and so we look at things like release submissions by state and sector, the species that are submitted, length compositions for some of our key species. We look at things like release treatment by depth, shark depredation, that sort of thing, and, again another shoutout,

and I say “we”, but Meg is the one who has done all of this hard work, and actually has done the data summary, and so a shoutout to her.

I'm going to highlight a few things. You can barely see it here, but there's a link on the bottom of the screen, and so, if you want to check out the full data summary, you can click that link, and it will take you to where it lives on our website, and so, for 2024, when you look at where our Release submissions came from, the most submissions came from South Carolina, followed by Florida, and then North Carolina and Georgia, and, if you look at what sector the submissions came from, the large majority are from the private rec sector, and so over 80 percent of submissions were from the private rec sector, followed by the charter sector.

If you look at what species were submitted, the large majority is red snapper, and so 64 percent of the releases logged were red snapper, followed by gag, red grouper, graysby, and scamp, and then, if you look at kind of the hook type that's used, that were logged through the app, almost -- Just under 77 percent of the hook type logged in the app were non-offset circle hooks, which is great. Those have less of a chance of snagging a fish in a lethal area, and, if we look at where folks logged where their fish were kind of hooked, the location, almost 93 percent were hooked in the jaw.

Then one of the last kind of data slides I wanted to show you is one of the things we're really interested in learning more about is -- I know you guys are all familiar with barotrauma. When you pull up fish deep from depth, they have kind of barotrauma, can get barotrauma, or a pressure-related injury, and so their swim bladder will blow up with air, and, if you release them without treating them, a lot of times they'll float on the surface, and it lowers their chance of survival, and so we're trying to understand better when people are using venting tools or descending devices when releasing kind of their fish.

We're excited to see -- You can see this plot here, that, as the depth increases, people are more likely to kind of treat the fish, whether it's venting or descending the fish, and so barotrauma is more likely to occur in deeper depth, and so we're excited to see this sort of information.

Then the last couple of Release things I wanted to highlight is so, each year in our program, for the project, we have a participant recognition program, where we kind of celebrate the achievements of the people who are participating in Release, and so, each year, there are a set number of milestones, and, when folks meet those milestones, they get recognized.

We're really grateful, and excited, to be partnering with Sea Grant on our participant recognition program. They have adopted some of our milestones, so they can send out thank you packets to folks, once they reach milestones, and so these are just some of the milestones. We do largest and smallest of species that are logged within the app. These are just a highlight of a couple of the species where our participants reached the smallest and largest milestones, and you may recognize some of the names.

Then we have an around the reef milestone, and that's when people log all of the different species within the Release project, and so Jake Harmon is leading the charge on that. He has logged information on four different species, and then we have a Release champion each year, and that's the person who has logged the most submissions within the app, and this year it was a private rec fisherman from Jacksonville, Florida, Mark McWaters.

Then the last thing I wanted to share about Release is something that's hot off the press, and so this isn't in your briefing book, but we can share kind of the updated presentation with you guys, and so we work really closely with Sea Grant on our Release project, and thanks to the brainchild of Greyson Webb, who is our Sea Grant reef fish fellow, who is over there, and she came up with a great idea to do a Sea Grant Release Rodeo, and so they're trying to get best fishing practices gear into fishermen's hands, and the Release project wants to encourage more people to kind of log their information in the project, but we also want them to log entries that can be used for validation, and so, if someone logs an entry with a photo of their fish before it's released, that can help us verify the species.

If they log a picture where the fish is on a ruler, or another item of known measure, like a soda can or something like that, that helps us validate the length of the fish, and so we're really trying to encourage more people to kind of log entries with photos, where we can validate some of the data, and so Greyson came up with this great idea to do a Sea Grant Rodeo.

We shared this information with our Release participants on Monday, and so this is hot off the press. You all are one of the first groups hearing about it, and so the way the rodeo works is from -- It starts on May 1, and it will end July 31. For every entry logged with a photo, you get a Sea Grant prize raffle ticket, and so you can get up to four entries per month. However, if your entries include a photo with the fish on a ruler, where we can validate length, you can double your entry, and so you can get up to eight entries per month, and then, at the end of each month, Sea Grant will draw two names to be given prizes from their raffle.

Then, at the end of the rodeo, and so at the end of July, there will be kind of a grand prize drawing, and so Sea Grant will put anyone who has gotten raffle tickets into a hat and pull out a grand prize winner, and so we're really excited to do this, and hopefully really excited for our participants to kind of earn some of the kind of Sea Grant kind of gear prizes, and so really excited to share this with you guys. I know some of you guys are Release participants. If you're not, and you want to be, just either see me or Meg later today, or tomorrow, and we can get you all set up.

Then the last thing I wanted to mention, and I think I meant -- This was included in the briefing book the last go-round, but I had to Zoom through our presentation, and so I didn't mention it, and so I just wanted to let you guys know we have a new online tool called our Citizen Science Project Idea Portal.

I know you guys, being on the water a lot more than we are, may have some great ideas for citizen science projects, or you may see something on the water where we don't have data collected on it, and so we want to hear from you. If you have ideas for citizen science projects, there's kind of a link on our web page.

It's an online form. It'll take you less than ten minutes to kind of share information on your project idea, but we really want to make sure the projects we're doing are ones that you guys are interested in and that you guys think are important, and so, if you have ideas, you can always reach out to me or Meg, but there's now -- There's an online way for you to share your ideas with us too, and the way those ideas will be used is we have citizen science research priorities.

Those kind of take all of the different data needs, down to some tangible ideas that would work well with a citizen science approach, that are important to our fishermen and our scientists and our

managers, and so these ideas will help us update those research priorities, which drive the types of projects we're going to try to support and develop, and so that's a little bit about what the citizen science program has been up to over the past kind of six to eight months.

I'm happy to take any questions, but I also wanted to give a few kind of shoutouts around the table. We really appreciate all the support you guys have given to our program and, our outreach initiatives, and I know, earlier this year, Randy McKinley did presentations with like a ton, 500 or something, students in Wake County, and so he reached out, and we were able to provide him with some best fishing practices and citizen science kind of materials that he could share with the students, and in turn their parents, and so thank you for doing that.

Cameron has reached out to us, and we're kind of working on doing a Release seminar with some of his captains in the upcoming -- I guess it's next week, and then a shoutout to Haley too. There was a fishing expo in Daytona. We went down and had a booth. Haley had a booth, but then she also did a seminar, and, in her seminar, she talked about kind of intro to fisheries management, and how things worked, and so having you guys do kind of outreach in your communities is awesome, and, you know, if there's anything that we can do to help support that, just let us know, because we're -- We love when you all do that, and we're happy to support however we can, and so I just wanted to thank you guys for kind of the outreach that you've done over the past couple of months, and, with that, I would be happy to take any questions.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you so much, Julia. I think we had Richard Gomez.

MR. GOMEZ: That was a great presentation, Julia. I'm sorry I missed that webinar, and so Haley, myself, and Greyson were the MREP meeting recently, and I would -- I tell you what. When I walked in, there was a book, about this fat, sitting on the table, and I said there's no way we're going to get through all of that, but four days of heavy pounding, including, you know, some field trips, and we sure --

We certainly learned quite a bit during that meeting, and I would suggest to everybody that, given the opportunity, you should take the time and participate in an MREP meeting during your career, and as soon as you can, because we definitely learned quite a bit about -- Quite a bit of the science that goes into fisheries management, and, man, we were pumped full of graphs, and equations, which brings me to the point I want to make.

You know, one graph that we never see, and that could help in maybe getting more accurate reporting, would be a graph that shows what happens with reporting too many fish, and what happens when reporting too little fish, and what happens to your fishery, you know, with poor entries, and poor data, and so, you know, we always talk about trying to get fishermen more involved in the Lower Keys and I'm sure everywhere.

I mean, you know, the fishermen report, but, nine times out of ten, the reporting is inaccurate, because they really don't care. They don't see the upside or the consequences of bad reporting, and so, if they could be shown graphs that would depict what would happen to their fishery with inaccurate reporting, you know, that might be something that they could realize and get more involved in, for their own protection.

Then, with that rodeo, good job, Greyson. You know, we've talked about this on more than one occasion. You know, giving incentives to fishermen is important, and I think that rodeo is a very good step in that direction. That's it for me.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you for those comments, Richie. Anybody else have any questions, or comments? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Thank you for the presentation, Julia, and your work in this, Julia and Meg, and, just to follow up on Richie's comment, and probably a question more for you, Julia, but is there a way to make these data perhaps more powerful for the upcoming red snapper SEDAR, by incorporating potential reporting biases in citizen science data?

For example, is an angler more likely to report the disposition of a red snapper release if the animal lives, as opposed to dies, or if it's not bleeding, or is jaw hooked, compared to gut hooked, and so forth and so on, and so my concern here is, in collecting these citizen science data, that we might mistakenly assume that these conditions are reflective of the fishery, where indeed there might be some biases in reporting that might not make these reflective of what's really going on in the water.

MS. BYRD: Yes, and so, I guess, Paul, that's a concern that we've heard brought up a number of times, and so what we're trying to do for the upcoming red snapper stock assessment is we're kind of summarizing our data and then comparing it to other data sources that are available.

It's a little bit apples to oranges, and so there's kind of headboat at-sea observer data, from kind of North Carolina through Georgia, and then Florida FWC has headboat and charter boat observer data, and so we're comparing what we're seeing with some of what they're seeing, just to see what differences there may be, that sort of thing, and then there was a project that the council did, and, gosh, I can't remember the years.

I think it ended in 2020, but it was MyFishCount was another app that was kind of testing the app for use if recreational reporting became a thing, and so it was kind of a citizen science project too, and so we're looking kind of at what we got, with what they got too, and so we're trying to compare the data we have to other datasets that are available, to try to better understand some of that information.

It's a little challenging, because, again, it's a little bit comparing apples and oranges, but trying to think about that, and then also trying to think about better understanding who the people are that are logging information into our program and how they fit into the broader -- What that looks like compared to the broader demographic, and so I don't know that that answers your question, you know, with a lot of detail, but those are the things we're trying to do right now, and, if you have other thoughts of ways to do that, we would certainly be all ears.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Good stuff. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman, and just more so of an observation. We did wrap up this kind of first expo event that was attended by the citizen science team, and, just to share some feedback, it was phenomenal. I think there was close to 2,000 people in attendance. Almost 250 of those went through the citizen science booth, and, you know, that collaborative effort between the seminar, and that boots-on-the-ground initiative was huge.

It was so well received. I can't account for any type of negativity that came out of it. Even the people in the audience that came up, and approached us later, and said, wow, I had no idea that's a swim bladder. I thought that was the fish's stomach, and I've never even heard of the venting tool. I didn't even know I had to have a descending device, and so outreach and education, outreach education. I cannot say it enough. I know that you guys are super creative, with the very little to no funding that is received, but this boots-on-the-ground effort is not only so important, but it's working, and so keep on. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Excellent. Thank you, Haley. Not seeing any other hands, thank you so much, Julia, for that marvelous presentation, and I think we're going to go ahead and take a quick break here. Let's be back and seated by 10:45.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Let's move on to Number 5 on the agenda. Mike is going to go retrieve some hallway members and then proceed with golden tilefish. It's all yours, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you. I'll get the presentation pulled up. All right, and so we're going to be talking through golden tilefish, and the main management action, if you will, that we'll be talking about is Abbreviated Framework 4, and that's primarily looking at adjusting the catch levels for golden tilefish.

SEDAR 89 was the most recent stock assessment for golden tilefish, and, if you look in the file that was posted online, there are links to both the stock assessment report and the fishery overview. I am going to take a brief break from the presentation to go into one of the portions of the fishery overview, just to give a bit of explanation on what that stock assessment said.

The overall status conclusion was not overfished, and not overfishing, but there were a couple points to note along with that status. So, first of all, the recent fishing mortality rate, and so that is how quickly fish are being removed from the population due to fishing activity, that is almost equal to the rate that would produce maximum sustainable yield, okay, and that is the line between overfishing and not overfishing, and so if you are -- If you have a rate that is higher than that line, then you would be overfishing the population. If you are below that line, or at that line, then you are not overfishing the population, and you'll notice -- I'll bring up a figure that shows this.

The recent years, we're fishing right at that line, which on one hand, from a Magnuson-Stevens management perspective, that is the goal, and that is you want to catch maximum sustainable yield, or get as close to it, as much as possible, but there also is that acknowledgement that, you know, you're also close to the edge, and you're getting right at the edge, and you're getting right up to that threshold, and so there is that recognition on both sides.

We do see that the spawning stock biomass, and so the biomass of the population, is just below the spawning stock biomass that would produce maximum sustainable yield, and I'll go through a couple of figures, now just to kind of illustrate the situation that we're looking at, because that gives some context to the catch numbers that come out of the projections in this, and so I'm pulling up the fishery overview.

If you were to click that link, then it would take you to this page that you see right here. You would click over to graphs, and you can see the same graphs that I'm pulling up right now. First of all, we have our fishing mortality rate over time, and this is our line right here, that FMSY line, and you can see that, for quite some time, there was fishing that was occurring below that line, and, within the last four years of assessment, three out of those four years were just above that line, okay, and the way that they take the current fishing mortality rate is they take an average of the last three years.

If you take an average of these three data points, then you're right at, slightly below, but right at that line, and so that's one of the things that I pointed out in the presentation. The other point is looking at the biomass over time, and so there was -- Depending on how you think about it, if you think about it in the context of a maximum sustainable yield reference type of level, then there would be kind of, quote-unquote, surplus population to fish on, and that's what's been the case for a couple of decades at this point, and now we're getting to the point where we're right at that maximum sustainable yield, and we've seen a slight dip below.

This is not a situation where the stock is overfished and needs to go into a rebuilding plan. The line for that is down here, this solid line. That's the minimum stock size threshold. We're not approaching that, but we're just below the biomass that would produce maximum sustainable yield, and so, with that being the primary management goal, is to get to the biomass that can produce maximum sustainable yield, there does need to be some action taken to get the population back up, so it's producing that.

We're not entering into looking at a rebuilding plan, but you will notice, when we get to the catch levels, that the catch levels that have come out of the stock assessment are lower than recent years, and that is to get the population back up to that maximum sustainable yield biomass.

They increase over time. As the population continues to increase, the catch increases, and this is something to kind of keep into perspective, the long-term and the short-term view of fisheries. I know, a lot of times, it gets kind of thought of in this annual catch limit type of context, but, if you think about it in terms of a lot of you are business owners, and, you know, you look at it on an annual basis, but you also look at probably a five-year or ten-year basis as well, and you have things that happen along the way, where one year your expenses might exceed your income from that business, but you can still achieve your income goals on a long-term scale as long as that is not sustained and that's not the regular occurrence.

You might be able to sustain, you know, a year that has terrible weather, or a year -- You know, we had a pandemic a few years ago. You might be able to sustain a dip in your business for a year, or a couple years, and still achieve your long-term business goals, but, when you experience those types of years, you make decisions, as, you know, a business owner of, okay, maybe we're buying two-dollar index cards instead of four-dollar index cards, and you make those changes, so that you can get back on track to what your overall goals are.

That's kind of the situation that golden tilefish is in right now. It's not sell the business, get rid of the whole thing, and rebuild it all. It's get the population -- Get the biomass back on track, so we can get that maximum sustainable yield goal that we have in fisheries management, and so I'm going to come back to the presentation at this point. I'll pull that back up.

Okay, and so these are kind of the numbers that everybody looks for coming out of the stock assessment, the overfishing limit and the acceptable biological catch recommendations. You'll see these numbers, and, the ones shown at the top of this graph, this is what has come out of the stock assessment. These catch levels have been recommended to the council by the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and so the ABC values would be those that are shown here, and, just for some context, the current ABC that -- The ABCs that are on the books, those were put in through Amendment 52.

You can see those at this bottom level, and so, by comparison, for 2025, the proposed ABC would be 407,000 pounds, versus 458,000 pounds. That's the level of difference that we're talking about, and, as you can see, as you move through this time series, the ABC goes up. That is projecting that the cut has been taken, the population is rebuilding, you know, back to the place where it can produce maximum sustainable yield, or is, I guess, building back up.

"Rebuilding" is an official term, and so I probably shouldn't have used that one, but it's the population is growing back to where it can produce maximum sustainable yield, and that's what you see here, and, as the population grows to that point, the catch can grow, and so those are the catch levels that are coming out of this stock assessment.

The council, in their discussions, they've previously talked about several potential management changes, and some of those based on your comments that were provided here in AP meetings previously. The council decided that the catch levels would be revised more immediately, based on the most recent stock assessment information, and that is where the abbreviated framework comes in.

Abbreviated frameworks are only used when the only management change that's going into place is a catch level. That's the only time, and it would be changing a catch level in this case, where there's no change in stock status, and so other changes, including changing the recreational season start date, that was one that the council is kind of interested in looking a little bit more into. That is going to be addressed through another amendment.

Right now, we're kind of still looking at it from a logistical standpoint within staff, and we're going to talk with the council about it a bit more, on whether it fits more with the black sea bass amendment that is being developed right now or whether it fits more with the blueline tilefish amendment that is expected to start up later on this year, and so we'll continue having conversations on where that fits best, but that is something else that they have discussed, is changing the start date for the golden tilefish recreational season, so that it lines up a bit better with like the blueline tilefish and the snowy grouper season start date, so that those deepwater species can be fished for all on the same trip and not have part of the year where you can catch golden tilefish, but you can't catch these other deepwater species.

An abbreviated framework amendment, it's not a process that has come up a whole lot. I've seen -- I think this is the fourth one, as it is Abbreviated Framework 4, and those four have happened all within the last fifteen years, and so it's not an extremely widely-used process, but, when we have the situation where it can be used, it is the council's fastest way to adjust catch levels. There is one action that is included in this, and that is changing the catch levels, and the only alternative -- You have your no action alternative, which would be the current catch levels, and then you have

the recommended catch levels coming out of what the SSC has recommended, and so there's not this long list of alternatives.

It's one or the other, and there are no changes to the allocation or the ACL specification processes. All of the sector allocations would still be calculated based on the total ACL change in the exact same way, same percentages. In the case of the golden tilefish commercial fishery, the same gear allocations would be going for the hook-and-line and the longline components, and so all of that would still be calculated in the exact same way.

When this process is used, scoping is not a required step, and the public hearing -- The public comment and the public hearing meeting coincides with the council meeting when that amendment is being considered for approval, and so the public comment period would start two weeks ahead of the June council meeting, and the public hearing meeting would be the Wednesday of the council meeting, when they take public comment on a regular basis, and the council would then, after that public comment, be able to consider the amendment for approval.

So, like I said, there would be one action with these two alternatives. This just kind of puts the numbers to the alternatives for your consideration, or for your comment. One thing to note for the recreational ACL is we have a situation here where we have a total annual catch limit that is in pounds gutted weight, and we have a recreational annual catch limit that is in numbers of fish.

The current kind of on-the-books annual catch limit used an average weight to get that converted recreational value from the previous stock assessment. It was the most current stock assessment at that time. We, obviously, now have a new stock assessment, and so we need to have discussions about updating the recreational average weight that would be used in that conversion.

I've looked at it either way, and it's about six pounds. It's approximately six pounds. It's fractions of a pound that are the difference, but we do need to have that, in order to get the actual numbers to fill in that part of the table. We will have that for the council meeting, and that will be available within the public comment period. We just don't have that today because we're this soon after the council meeting, and we need to get the planning team that develops the amendment together to talk about how that conversion is going to happen, but those are some numbers to put to what is being done in this amendment.

Then, clarifying the timing here, so the council initiated this amendment in December, and March is when they directed us to use the abbreviated framework process. June would be the next step in the process. The public hearing would occur the Wednesday of that meeting, and so, if you want to comment, please note the comment period ahead of the council meeting, as well as that public hearing, and then, if the council approves the amendment, then the Fisheries Service would conduct its rulemaking throughout the remainder of 2025, and the regulations would be expected to go into place for 2026, and, with that, I will take any questions you all have on golden tilefish.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. Thank you, Mike, and so I guess I'm going to get it started here, because I can't help but wonder where the alternative action comes from. Where is it generated? Are we using this massive computer system in the MSE, this program? Are we plugging in these new datasets with these catch levels, and are we actually getting suggestions from a company that we are looking to use for fisheries management, or is this traditional alternative style?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so I'm pretty sure golden tilefish is assessed through the Beaufort Assessment Model. That is kind of the standard stock assessment model that's used in this region, and that has been used for golden tilefish for several iterations of assessments, just with the most recent data through -- I think, 2022 was the terminal year of that one, 2022 or 2023, but, yes, it's the standard stock assessment model, and what happens is that they put in assumptions about catch rates, you know, based on what has been caught in these most recent years.

This is what the catch rate would look like, or this is what the harvest would look like, and the population would look like if this catch rate continues for three more years, and they put in different sets of catch rates, and so they might put in the catch rate that would produce maximum sustainable yield, and then the catch rate that is a little bit some percentage below maximum sustainable yield, and then the catch rate that they've observed over the last three years, and those are all included in the stock assessment report. What ends up with the projections is a catch rate that gets you back to, in the long-term perspective, harvesting at a maximum sustainable yield rate.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Which is all great. I guess what my real question is, it's would it be worth asking MSE, you know, what their suggestion would be, given this, and plugging it into this specific species in the computer program that we're looking at to help manage this fishery? You know, like what would MSE do?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So the MSE that's being conducted for the snapper grouper management unit right now in the South Atlantic is really recreationally geared, and one of the primary objectives there is to look at reducing discards, and being able to reduce the recreational discards, and so, in that context, especially given that golden tilefish is a heavily commercial fishery, it's not really set up to address that question of how to maximize golden tilefish catch, and, really, in the context of what has been used for MSE, there could be a different application, a different developed MSE type of model that could be used for golden tilefish, but it wouldn't have kind of the interspecies nature that we have for like the recreational snapper grouper one that's being developed right now.

One of the things that that is supposed to take into account is the multispecies nature of the recreational snapper grouper fishery, and, as far as I understand, golden tilefish -- Kind of the prosecution of that fishery is not heavily multispecies. Like, when people are fishing for golden tilefish, they're able to kind of catch what they target a lot more than when people are out recreational fishing for snapper grouper and they catch a wider variety of species on a given trip.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So, basically, what I'm hearing is it's kind of out of the realm of what MSE has been brought to the table to do. David had a question.

MR. MOSS: I have a couple of questions. Number one, I think -- Well, not I think, but I know you're right that traditionally this has been a heavily-skewed commercial fishery. That has shifted significantly, I think, over the last ten or so years, with the advent of, again, just accessibility. You know, I know, down by us, it's a very accessible fishery now, and so that's one thing to look at, as far as I guess allotment, if you will.

The second sort of question that I have, and I'll pose to the group is further north. A six-pound average seems pretty -- Pretty low end, for down by us anyway. I mean, a six-pound golden tile is not a very big fish for us. That would definitely be on the lower end of what I would say an

average size fish would be. I'm not sure where that came from. If that if most of the data is coming from commercial, and perhaps that that's where that comes from, and I don't know, but --

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess noting that would be six-pound gutted weight. It would be different than, you know, your whole weight, and that also is -- That's coming from like -- I think that we can look and see what are the different averages, but that's what is coming out of that information, and, with respect to golden tilefish, you're also going to catch kind of that wide size range as well, because you don't have a size limit on those, on that species, and so you may see some skewness in what your average ends up being.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm going to acknowledge John, but just, you know, something I can't help but think, you know, when we're talking about average size, is this is probably mathematics derived from commercial landings, at least I would think, and, you know, a lot of the time, when you're harvesting, you know, you're harvesting that that schoolie, if you will, you know, that size fish, and they're normally just a little bit smaller, and maybe the private rec guys, you know, are fishing isolated spots, that might have some larger fish, you know, in general, you know, and maybe not as a rule, but in general, and that just would be my thought process on why it's a six-pound average. John Polston.

MR. POLSTON: To what you were saying on the size of the six-pound, I mean, we do, you know, quite a bit of golden tile, and not as much as we have in the years past, but I have seen more smaller fish, in the last probably two to three years, than I ever have seen, or we used to ever catch, and, when Ben was on the council, or whatever, you know, I said why don't we raise our numbers up, and he said you guys aren't producing enough smaller fish, because you don't have any -- So you don't have any recruitment coming.

My statement, I guess, is not necessarily a question, but we are seeing smaller fish now, and a lot more than we ever saw. We're still catching large and jumbo fish, and mediums, but never before, hardly, when you would have a quota being a 4,000-pound catch, would you have, you know, a hundred pounds of small golden tile, which we would grade under four pounds is a small fish, and you wouldn't have a hundred pounds, you know.

Normally, our guys would always fish the deeper water, because you catch larger fish normally in the deeper water, but, with that being said also, I've got guys this year fishing out to 600 or 700 feet, and we're catching small fish, right along with the jumbos and the large and stuff, and we're not producing, this year, in my opinion, like we have been, but I think there's a lot of reasoning for that too, because weather being one.

We haven't been able to get out that much, and the moon phase of every time we can get out seems to be a full moon and stuff, and so, anyhow, but the sizing-wise, which is what you were making the comment about, I have seen a lot more smaller fish, and medium fish, than I have in years past, and we've been, you know, doing it for twenty-five or thirty years.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, John. Anybody else? Robert.

MR. FREEMAN: My experience with the golden tiles was catching maybe one-pound fish, when we were fishing for triggerfish, and it kind of goes against what we had thought the depth that these fish would be found in, but they're just incidental catch, but they were not very large, and it wouldn't be a tremendous number of them, but we would catch them when we were fishing deepwater triggerfish.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Robert. I guess I would also like to, you know, look around to some of the commercial guys in the room and, you know, kind of looking at what this alternative means, you know, and what are what are your thoughts on that specifically, the guys that harvest these fish? David.

MR. MOSS: Obviously I'm not that commercial demographic, but one of the things, or a couple of the things, that I'll say on the rec sector is, number one, you are correct that it's a more -- I guess you could say dedicated fishery, at least by us. When you're fishing for goldens, it's in different areas than you would blueline and snowy, and so you're going to get less of the incidental.

Typically, the incidental catch that you'll get with goldens are rosies, which aren't managed, I don't believe, and the other thing to note is it seems that, every year, rec golden is getting closed quicker and quicker, and I think it was only like a two-month season or something like that this year, which, again, speaks to there's just consistently a lot more effort going on with them, and so keep an eye on it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you David. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: I just wanted to add that this year -- I do agree with John, and our average fish has been about, I don't know, a five to eight-pound average, maybe I would say, with a good amount of little fish and jumbos mixed in. The golden tile longline fishery is a directed fishery, and, when you are fishing in the mud, there's zero dead discards, zero bycatch, and it's a healthy and clean green fishery.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Vincent. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and I'll second that, with the comments about the size, and we've been seeing that off the Carolinas as well, in 600 to 800 feet of water, that sort of mix of small, medium, and large all mixed in there, and the season -- As John said, you know, our season was not stellar by any means, but we attribute that mostly to weather, and not being able to get out there on the right phases.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Cameron. Any other questions, or comments? David.

MR. MOSS: Sorry, and not to monopolize the mic, but I forgot the second part of what I was going to say, which -- I know that we're not at this discussion, but I actually don't know how much I agree with aligning the seasons with the other deepwater species, because it's more of a directed fishery. You're not going to get the bycatch of -- Typically anyway, by us, again, and speaking about south Florida, and you're not going to get the bycatch of the bluelines and the snowies with it, and the nice thing about having it different is at least something else is open to go out, and particularly with shallow-water grouper close through May, and some of the other closures and whatnot. You know, it's nice to be able to still go out there and get something deep-dropping.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, David. Andy.

MR. FISH: I would like to see it aligned with other fisheries, like May 1st, because like the snowy doesn't open until May 1 for recreational, and then you've got guys tile fishing, that do interact, in my area, with yellowedge and snowy grouper, and so I would like to see them have a better chance for no bycatch, meaning all the fisheries of the species aligning.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It's understandable. So, Mike, I guess I would ask what are our actions here? What does the council want from us, specifically?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Going back here, this is the action, and these are the alternatives that are going to be in Abbreviated Framework 4, and, like I showed in the timeline, this is going to be going for final approval in June, and so this would be the opportunity for the advisory panel, if you have any comments on this change that should be considered when the council makes their decision in June. This would be the time to have that discussion.

As far as the recreational season item, like I said, that's going to get addressed in another amendment, and so there will be other opportunities for you all to have that discussion, and provide a recommendation on that item, but, for today, if you have any recommendations for, or against, or reasonings why one way or the other -- For comments related to this action that's shown on the screen, for Abbreviated Framework 4, then this would be the time to hear those.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Great, and I would -- I guess I would assume that the council is preferring Alternative 2, rather than no action here, and, just to kind of get us off the tightrope that we've been walking with maximum sustainable yield and allowable catch, and I think that's the whole situation we're trying to kind of get some distance in between, and so comments? Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Just as far as taking that cautionary approach you just alluded to, James, to walk away a little bit from maximum sustainable yield, Mike, can you go back to those two timeline graphs that plotted a rate of fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass over time?

Again, my comment kind of dovetails in with what James just said, that, if you look at -- I presume this is a mean, or median, rate of fishing mortality per year over time, and spawning stock biomass I think on the lower graph that you're bringing into view, Mike, and so we're taking -- I mean we're assuming that there's a pretty high level, or, if these are mean rates, a very high level of precision around these estimates, if there's any slop in these estimates, any uncertainty, and we're talking about a long-lived, slow-growing, late-to-mature species like golden tiles, and we don't want to get into the same assessment and management mess that we find ourselves in with other long-lived, slow-growing species, and so, again, that's just something for you all to consider moving forward and making a comment at the June council meeting.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you Paul. John.

MR. POLSTON: Well, obviously, I have a big dog in the hunt in this, but my theory here, or thought, is we have been slowly growing this thing over the years, and we've been beat down for -- God knows, and I think it was 64 percent of our quota we got taken away when we had a million-pound quota, and it took away 64 percent.

They said they were going to take 36 percent, and they took 64 percent, but, anyways, we've slowly grown it since then, and so I think there's been plenty of precaution taken, and slowly grow the quota, and so I don't know why we would not go with no action, because it's not that huge of a difference, but, once again, we're putting more chains on us if they go with being more conservative again. I mean, it's growing -- The quota is growing slowly enough as it is, and then, finally, if we're not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring, why more change being put on this again? I don't really get it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So just a couple of notes regarding, I guess, the question and comment, and so, first of all, the council is bound to the SSC's recommendation, in the sense that they cannot exceed an ABC recommendation from the SSC. Another note that I would want to point out, and I can -- You can kind of see it from the slide, and I'm just going to bring the slide, the PowerPoint presentation, over, but you will also be able to recall it from Amendment 52.

You'll see that like the 2025 ABC was 458,000, and the 2026 would have been going down to 466,000, and that trend would have continued down. That 52 had a downward-sliding acceptable biological catch. The reason why it had a downward-sliding acceptable biological catch is because, at the time of that, the biomass was at this level, and it was bringing the biomass back to this target level of the biomass that produces maximum sustainable yield.

This is the this is the long-term target. This is where the stock is going to be its most productive for regularly producing a yield for the fishery that is going to happen on a recurring basis, and so this is the target. We had some years where it was above that target, and those catch levels were coming down, down, down, because they were getting the population back to that maximized productivity level.

Now we're at that maximized productivity level, and we've slid a little bit below it, and what's happening is now the projections are bringing us so that now you're going to be increasing in your catch levels, because your biomass is going to be increasing from what happens here, and, in reality, a biomass at MSY -- It is a dynamic value.

We take an average, so that we have a target, that we actually have a numerical target that we can shoot for, just like, again, kind of using the business analogy. You know, you want to make a certain level of profit, but that's going to be a dynamic value. You cannot plan on all of the different weather events that are going to happen, and you can't plan on all the different things that are happening in, you know, different aspects of the economic environment throughout the year, and so you need to be able to take into account that sometimes you're going to dip below, and you need to do things to get back to your target, but you still have that same overall target, unless something completely shifts, and unless there's some catastrophic failure that happens, and then you have to change your model, which is the fishery analogy is a rebuilding plan.

That's not what this is. We're right here, and we're at our target, and we're coming back into alignment with our target. The years previous to now, the biomass was above, and so, if we kept on the same track, and continued that projection past 2026, which you increase your uncertainty the further you project out, but, if they were to continue that projection for another ten years, then

you would have seen a decline, a further decline, in that projection, in that catch projection, until you got to this SSB MSY level, and then it would have leveled out, but that's what is happening here. That's what the result of the assessment is, and that's also why you see an increase in the catch levels over the next three years that are projected.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Mike, and, John, something that I would kind of -- That kind of parallels this with yellowtail snapper with this species is that it's kind of in the same situation. We may not be walking the same tightrope, you know, with the landings versus maximum sustainable yield, but we still are dealing with that unknown universe of angler, and what it is exactly that they're producing, and so I think that that's a big question-mark, you know, when it comes to what's actually coming out of the water.

You know, from a commercial standpoint, like I kind of feel like no action is probably smart, you know, but, from a management standpoint, you know, something has got to give, because there's still this giant question-mark, in this ever-expanding user group, that, you know, that they are taking fish, and we do need to be careful, I mean, and it's just -- It's just what it is, and like maybe that -- Maybe that has some bearing on, you know, on where you sit, but, you know, more fish are going away from another sector than what we can really count via, you know, logbooks and whatnot. Cameron, or did you want to answer, John?

MR. POLSTON: No, and I was just going to say -- I agree with everything you said, other than -- I mean, the other point I was -- There's always the conservation numbers put into the maximum sustainable yields as well. They do not give you a hundred percent, and they already have conservation in there, and so, if there was a little bit of leeway, it's not going to make -- It's not going to be the end of the world, because there's already conservation put in, and so all I'm getting at is, you know, let's not get to the point where we're going to have conservation -- To watch the conservation to watch the conservation, and that's what I'm -- You know, I agree you need conservation, but, at the same time, you've got to have production too.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Good stuff, John. Thanks. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and, I mean, the council is looking for a recommendation, and I'll stick with John on this one. You know, the no action, with the current rate of take, and especially since that species is a -- For us in the Carolinas, it's much deeper and further out, which is exceedingly, exceedingly weather-dependent.

I mean, what I've seen in the last few years, it's just getting rougher and harder and tougher to get out there, and for these guys to do their job, and we do it mostly in the winter, which is even more challenging, and so, I mean, the limitations that Mother Nature throws in the mix -- Going forward, you say, you know, it's not supposed to be calculated, but it's just a reality, because that's pretty much all you hear, is climate change is changing the weather patterns. It's getting rougher, and everything is changing, and so I would say leave it where it is for right now and then reassess as time goes on.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I don't see any other hands up. Is that something that we need to make a motion on, that --

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No, and I don't need a formal motion. I think the discussion is here, and we can give a description of the discussion that was had at -- When you give your report at the June meeting.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay, and so I guess we will be moving on into the gag fisheries performance report, and that's Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so, for some new faces in the room, I'm Allie Iberle. You will hear and see me on some snapper grouper stuff, and so I just wanted to introduce myself to anybody I haven't met, and so, before we jump into the fishery performance report, these are meant to be kind of for you guys to provide us feedback on these fisheries, and that can really help inform future management, and so I kind of just wanted to give some context on the FPRs before we get started.

The other thing I wanted to do is -- Hopefully this will load for me, and, I guess, to back up one step Attachment 6a, I believe, in your briefing book is the full list of questions that I'm going to go through today. I'm going to go through them in slides, so we can kind of break them up and we're not looking at kind of a book report of questions, but linked in that document is this kind of Shiny app that really houses all of these fishery performance reports.

When you're in this page, you can toggle down and find the species that you want to look at, and so I just selected gag, and in here right now is the previous time that you guys went through a performance report for this species, and that was September of 2020. In that attachment that has all of those questions, I kind of summarize the 2020 report for you. I'm not going to read through those for each section, but they're available for you, or you can reference the full report here.

Once we have compiled everything that we're going to go through today, then you'll see an updated report on this Shiny app, and, again, there's a full list of species, and so I encourage you to explore the Shiny app and go look at some of the feedback that the AP has provided in the past.

What I'm going to do now is pull up these slides, and so we'll just kind of jump right in, and what I'll be doing is -- Let me get myself set up here. So I will be recording your feedback on kind of the separate screen over here, and I'll be asking questions as we go, and then we'll kind of clean it up, because I'm going to be typing fast and furious. With that, I'm going to dive right in.

Again, we're talking about gag here, and so starting off really high level, and have there been any substantial changes in the gag fisheries since 2019, and so that 2019 date is going to be the terminal year of the most recent assessment, which was SEDAR 71, and then, if you are noticing any substantial changes, if you could kind of describe the timing, location, and what you think caused the change.

Then I will note, as far as kind of the assessment schedules go, gag is kind of tentatively scheduled to be assessed starting in 2026, but, last time I checked, that's still kind of preliminary, and not set in stone, and so, with that, I'll turn it over to you guys.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right, Allie. Thank you very much. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I'll just jump right in and say the use of Spot-Lock, and those types of technologies in the recreational fishery, are changing, likely changing, recreational catchability. I

don't know if there's any studies that have quantified that, but that would be my number-one observed change for the gag fishery off the coast of North Carolina.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: How so specifically? Just like what are you -- With the Spot-Lock?

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Well, this, again, is just my perception, and I know if anybody has quantified this, James, but the ability of a recreational angler, and potentially a novice angler, to hold position on a reef without any -- You know, without any prior knowledge of a reef, and just getting numbers off of the internet and then hovering.

I will say, if you're interested, there's a professor at the university of Carlton at Ottawa, Canada, a guy named Steve Cook, that has done a heck of a lot on discard mortality of all types of species, freshwater and saltwater, and he just came up with a paper expressing concerns about these types of technologies and how they're changing the catchability in the recreational sector in a variety of fisheries, and I would be happy to share that with you. It's free on the internet.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you for the expansion on that, Paul. That's exactly what I wanted. Jack.

MR. COX: You know, Paul took the words right out of my mouth on that. I made a living on gag fishing off of Morehead City back in -- I started back in the early 1980s, and you would hate to know what I saw then and what it looks like today, and it's pretty sad, but, I mean, that would be the number-one thing that you could do to help rebuild this fishery, is what Paul just said.

Those Spot-Locks, every place that I go to now, just about, has two or three boats sitting on it, and that's what they're doing. They're gag fishing, and, you know, I mean, I made a living, and it was nothing to go catch 500 or 600 pounds of gags in a day, and now the guys -- It's just too much. I mean, we don't even know how many of those people are out there and what they're doing.

You know, from being a commercial guy, and being under the radar, and having to count my fish the way I do, and how do we count the -- How do we count that technology that is doing what it's doing the fishery, and how do we count the fishermen, or the fish, that's doing it, and, I mean, there's no answer here for that, and that's the problem.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Jack. I saw a lot of hands. Go ahead, Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and I wanted to add to what Jack said. It's not just recreational, and it's commercial too, a lot of inexperienced commercial guys. I mean, with that Spot-Lock, you can do something -- Like our inshore ledges, and they run north-south, and most of the time the wind is coming at that. I don't how good you are commercial, how much experience, and you can't fight the wind and -- I mean, you can't line up and do it, but, with the Spot-Lock, you can, and it has definitely changed it, and not just for recreational, but it's commercial too, and so add that to it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Randy. I've got Haley. Did you have your hand up?

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. I'm not familiar with what Spot-Lock is. On our charter headboat, we have an anchor, and that's our 1980s approach. When we talk about overall fishery changes, I guess my first question is what is the current status of the stock? Is it overfished, and

is it undergoing overfishing? That would be the first question, and then, just from on-the-water observations, you know, two or three years ago, when we changed the vessel limits for gag and black grouper, it hurt our operation substantially.

Two gags per boat, you know, with no separate consideration for the headboat, and that's two fish for fifty people onboard. You know, I know that's something that the AP has talked about, vessel limits perhaps in proportion to number of anglers, as opposed to a vessel limit, when we talk about things like that, but, just out of curiosity, I looked back on our vessel fish data reports, and, you know, the shortened season from the past couple years has been May 1 through June 15.

I know, this year, it's extended an additional ten or eleven days, to June 26, and we don't catch them during that time. We caught and harvested I think six gag grouper from May 1 to June 14, and so I don't -- I'm not sure how that's reflected in the data, and then you move to June and July, and, you know, I'm not sure when their spawning season is, and I'm going to quote Dr. Clay Porch.

Is it better to catch a fish before they spawn, while they're spawning, or after they're spawning, and so just that shift in management measures, when it comes to vessel limits and seasons, has drastically negatively impacted our business. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, South Carolina. So, for the Spot-Lock, yes, it makes it so much easier for anybody. Well, anybody who has a smaller vessel. Unfortunately, I mean, to put that into a forty-five or fifty footer that's a -- It's a major -- I mean, you're talking major dollars to be able to have a forty-five or fifty footer sit in one spot.

So, you know, I used to value my captain with who was the best guy to anchor, and to be able to hit the right spot, and, you know, it's still that way in that in that size vessel, and so the Spot-Lock is definitely an advantage of the smaller, especially unmonitored, unlicensed, but not in the fishery universe of the recreational angler.

Now, from what I've seen on certain sites, that I've been diving for twenty or thirty years, is I built a site in 1999, about ten miles off the coastline -- In 1999, and it had some material down there already, and it really had very few grays or gags on it at all. I mean, very few. Now it's twenty-five years later, and I'm not a scientist by any means. I'm just a rum-dumb business guy who goes fishing and scuba diving.

So, in that twenty-five years, the numbers of grays has increased dramatically, and I'm not talking -- All sizes, small ones to the ten, fifteen, twenty-pound -- Keeper-size grays now inhabit that site, and I see some of the same stuff on some ledges, natural ledges, in that area, too. I was out this fall, and it was just -- I mean, when I say loaded down, it was loaded down with gray, at ten miles out, like fifteen or twenty gray, on a small ledge that I've done many times and never seen them.

Now, you know, whether they're moving in closer, or whether it's, you know, the age of the artificial reef site, I don't know, but all I know is that I've seen more in the shallower than I've ever seen in the past, of thirty-five years of diving out there. When I say gray, I'm referencing gag.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Cameron. I've got Chris Kimrey, then Andy, then Chris Conklin,

MR. KIMREY: So I just wanted to follow-up some on this whole technology thing. You know, since I've been on the AP, we've spent a lot of time addressing technology, and how it affects fishing, and I think, you know, a lot of you guys that have been here with me, or even prior to me, you know, we all know that's an issue.

I mean, there's a lot of people in the room calling out Spot-Lock. Obviously, Spot-Lock has revolutionized fishing for anybody that uses it. I'm not -- You know, just like Jack said, I grew up on the coast of North Carolina in the 1980s, commercial bottom fishing with my father. You know, when we started bottom fishing, you didn't even have to have a permit. We did a lot of drift fishing, and we did a lot of anchor, and we did a lot of pot fishing, and, you know, back then, you could pot fish certain -- Inside state waters, you can do a lot of stuff different than you could now.

Commercial fishing has evolved, and, you know, technology has evolved. You know, everybody knows about social media. We all use social media, or a lot of us do, business guys like me, you know, for the for-hire industry. I don't love social media, but I need to use it to keep up. You know what I mean, and so I use social media. There's lots of negativities that come along with that, but, you know, on the commercial side, there's things in the commercial world that have also evolve that affect the fishery, that have made things easier, you know what I mean?

Like, in our area, and not so much Jack, but some of the other guys, and, instead of running the old snapper grouper boats, they've got these go-fast center consoles, you know what I mean, and they can -- They've revolutionized the snapper grouper industry with that, doing day trips instead of how to do three-day trips. You know, when there's the right weather, they can make that ride that used to be six hours in an hour-and-a-half, or two hours, and so, taking all that stuff into consideration, I think where we need to end up --

I don't just mean as the panel, and I mean as fishermen, from every sector, and we have to realize that, as we evolve, and fishing evolves, and technology evolves, whether it's, you know, trolling motors, or really nice electronics, or if it's the chips you can buy, and, I mean, there's -- You know, there's little chips you can buy, and plug in your machine, and, if you can figure out how to use it, you know where everything is at instantly, and it could be your first day as a fisherman.

You know, back in the day, they guarded that stuff under lock and key, but, as we move forward, we need to realize that there's more and more people, and there's more and more fishermen, and there's more and more pressure outside of fishing, and we really need to figure out a way to take into account all these things, but you can't single out one entity.

You can't say, oh, if you get rid of Spot-Lock trolling motors, everything is going to be better. It's just not the case. You know what I mean? They're not going anywhere, and we all know why, because a lot of people -- You know, I do a little commercial fishing, and I make my living for-hire fishing but. Yes, I've got a Spot-Lock trolling motor in my center console.

I just spend a bunch of money on the latest and greatest one. I'm fifty-something years old, and I've dragged anchors and poly balls and chains around grouper fishing my whole life, and I'm not going to do it anymore. I'm going to hit the button, you know what I mean, and so we need to --

We need to keep in mind, moving forward, that's going to happen, and there's so much stuff driven in the industry, and really big money. You know, some of this stuff just isn't going to go away, and so we've got to figure out how to work around it, you know.

You know, one of the things, and I'll end with this, so I don't get on this long, you know, rant, but one of the things we need to do -- For NOAA South Atlantic, as an AP, as individuals, we need to figure out a way to connect. You know, a lot of people sitting in this room, we get what's happening, to some extent, but, you know, when you go back home, you could spend days trying to explain it to people, and they don't get it, and then, you know, we've got all these outreach programs, and all this stuff, and I think we need to figure out a way to connect the general public, through the AP, with the use of social media.

You know, the South Atlantic shares stuff, and I follow them, and they don't have a ton of followers, because there's so many people that don't like management, but, the people in this room, we're the connection. If we -- If we had a means to have a verified post, from somebody at the South Atlantic, that they could forward to us to use our social media, it puts a gap. They're more likely, the general public, to read and/or share something that we have, versus the South Atlantic, because most of them aren't mad at us.

I mean, let's just tell it like it is, and if we could get more involvement, and raise the education level and the understanding of all this stuff, from descending devices, why this happens, why that happens, and you could do a lot of that with a really quick post, but you have to get it to them. There's just so many people that want nothing to do with anything that says NOAS or South Atlantic management.

You know, there's -- If they do look at it all, it's going to be is derogatory comments, and we all know, and we see it. That's one of the things we need to do, you know, in addition to keeping technology in mind.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chris. That's a great perspective. Andy Fish.

MR. FISH: Thank you. I would say, up until last year, in my region, from Canaveral north, that it was -- I was very disappointed in gags and where they had been. Last year, in May, it was probably the best grouper, gag grouper, that we've seen in ten years, and, this year, it sounds like it's even better. I have no idea how, but it seems to be, and the only thing I could equate it to, and what I've said, is that the red snapper are actually saving the gags, by -- They're so aggressive that you can't catch the gags through the red snapper. That's one of -- I'm just saying that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Andy. Chris.

MR. CONKLIN: One of the big changes I've noticed, not only since 2019, or, you know, the traditional fishermen on the commercial side that, you know, pioneered and worked the fishery, and removed these animals over several decades, have pretty much died out, or aren't healthy enough to work on the ocean anymore, and so a lot of the heavy hitters, that removed these animals, are not there taking the fish anymore, and so it's leaving a lot more of these large, long-lived animals out there to spawn/

I'm sure, if you look at like commercial landings, even without the -- Not taking the trip limits and the stock assessment into the equation in the past year, that you would steadily see commercial landings go down over the past several years. I can tell you that I haven't moved nearly the number of gag grouper that we used to, and I'm talking like a 90 percent cut at my dock, and so I think it's been good.

The past couple years I've been fishing -- I mean, I don't mean good, and I mean good for the fish. I've, you know, seen a lot more gags, and a lot more small fish, and catching them as well, undersized, and several different year classes moving through, but I would say that NOAA Fisheries has done an excellent job of putting the -- Making it so a snapper grouper guy -- It's not appealing to be a snapper grouper fisherman anymore.

You can't make a solid living doing it, and a crewman certainly can't, unless you're like an owner-operator, and, you know, you don't have to -- The weather is good, and nothing breaks, and you can probably do a pretty good job at it, but, other than that, you can just consider us out of business. I mean, maybe about four months a year you can make a living, but it's not it's not a fulltime job anymore.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chris. I think that's the exact insights we've been -- You know, that we're looking for here. I've got Tony. Did you have some more?

MR. CONKLIN: Yes, and just one more thing, and I'm not like making a motion or anything like that, but, just for a heads-up we have commercial, charter, and for-hire permit sectors that are accountable. You could certainly make a rule to allocate, you know, certain technological gears, used for only those people that carry those permit, if that's something the council wanted to do.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chris. I've got Tony, then John, then Jack. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you, James. I agree so much with what Chris was saying about giving some -- Getting it out on social media and let these people know about things, but something else that has changed the last six years too is descending devices have become mandatory. Yet, at the Daytona show, how many -- Tons of people just do not realize it, and so I know a lot of us are using them, a lot of the private sector, and most all the charter-for-hire is, but still the rec sector is not doing it, because they just don't know about it, and so, to go along with a great new reg, we need to get the education out there somehow to these people to do it, to use it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Tony. John.

MR. POLSTON: So I touched on this a little bit earlier, but, off the Georgia coast, being in the water, videoing and diving, I'm seeing probably ten-times the amount of grouper now that I've seen ten years ago. I feel like the red snapper had a large effect on the grouper, for a long time, especially the young grouper, by eating them, but the grouper seem to, off the Georgia coast, have adapted, and we're seeing grouper -- We're just seeing them in different places.

It's like they've moved, and they've learned, and they've learned how to how to not compete with those snapper, and stay away from them and survive, and so I'm seeing tremendously more grouper, and then the fishery dates -- For us, May and June, we don't have a very good gag fishery

at all. Our gag fishery really is mid-July, up until about November, for us to catch good fish, and that's, you know, when they're more aggressive, and that's when we catch them.

We don't -- We actually have a pretty poor hook-and-line fishery, as far as what you're able to target during that time of the year. They're just not -- They're just not feeding. They're there. I can go down and shoot them, but they're not aggressively eating, and I think that's because we have so much bait in the water during that time of the year, and you're just kind of wasting your time.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's great input, John, and I really think that the guys that are that are below water, with their eyes on actual fish -- You know, what they what they bring to the table here is invaluable, and like it's really something that -- You know, the above-water guys, you know, we have a vision of what's down there, but we don't see it. Jack.

MR. COX: I'll talk about something here that's not very popular amongst a lot of people, but I fished an area off of Morehead City, and it's the Knuckle area, back in the early 1980s and 1990s, and I knew it was a special place, for the currents and so forth that came through there, and I did a lot of commercial diving in that area.

You know, that is an area that would hold these big groupers in April and May, and into the first couple weeks of June, and these gags would be on the average of fifteen, sixteen, seventeen-pound fish on these rocks, and it wasn't very much discovered by the recreational crowd, but participating in my life in hunting and fishing and, you know, wildlife and big game, at some point, we've got to figure out a way to enhance our fisheries, and, you know, a small marine protected area, where fish can thrive and be left alone to populate in an area like I'm talking about, and I'm not saying a big area. I'm saying you could take a small MAP area. To me, it makes a lot of sense.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jack. I think I had Cameron next.

MR. SEBASTIAN: So I'll just -- So we -- I sit on a board, and we created MPAs. Has there ever been studies, and information, gathered from those MPAs that were created I would say probably like fifteen years ago?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: To follow-up and answer your question, I mean, the snowy MPA wreck, you know, off of Wilmington -- It has truly enhanced that fishery, and, you know, it's been studied, and it's done a really good thing, and what it was intended to do. We did some SMZ work. When I was on the council, we put some SMZs in place for the warsaw and the kitty mitchell, and we were hoping we would get a little bit of benefit out of red grouper on that as well, and so our sunset clause is taking effect now, because it's been ten years since those SMZ sites were put in place, and so I'm participating in a study, coming up here next month, to evaluate that ten-year closure, and so maybe I can get back to the next meeting and give you some results.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Excellent, Jack. David.

MR. MOSS: Yes, and what Jack said. We're actually looking at three of those SMZs right now, and I did one trip last year, and I'm going to do another one in a couple of weeks, to an area off of Key West, and Jack participated in the one up here.

To go back to the outreach comments that have been made, and I don't disagree with what everybody said, but the unfortunate truth is, and to splash a little cold water on everybody's face, is it's very difficult to engage the unengaged, right, and so the vast majority of recreational anglers are people that, at best, at most, go out once a month, and they don't necessarily think about fishing, you know, 365 days a year.

They think about it that one weekend a month that they can get out, if they're lucky, and, you know, they've got kids, and they've got lives, and they've got all these other things, and so the unfortunate truth is that they're not constantly looking for all the latest and greatest release techniques. If anything, they'll YouTube a video on how to, you know, properly, you know, tie a Bimini, or something like that, but that's kind of about it.

I know it's not what everybody wants to hear, but I'm out there, and I'm trying to do it, from an outreach perspective, and that's the truth. I was at that Daytona show. As Haley said, there was a lot of people that kind of know what a descending device is, and, of course, they don't call it the right thing, and that's okay, and they're interested, when you can engage them, but how do you bring people to the table? If I had the magic wand, I would wave it, and it's difficult, and the council is -- I know council staff are doing their best, but the fact of the matter is that most people don't have the time, or the inclination, to want to hear all this stuff, and so how do we continue to engage them? I don't know.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Noted and that's good. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to note, along the lines of the MPA and SMZ research, you all will be hearing a presentation on some of the research that has gone on in spawning SMZs, and that will come tomorrow afternoon, so that will -- There will be some information on that in this meeting.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's great. Thank you, Mike. Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: Just an update, for the record, on the charter-for-hire in the Lower Keys. We continue to not see much gag grouper on the south side. It's kind of a rarity, even when we're targeting grouper, which isn't too often. It's still a Gulf of Mexico fishery, and it's too far for the charter boats to get to.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: As a as a representative of the Keys, I would like to just go ahead and echo what Richie is saying, and seeing. We just don't -- We don't have much of a gag fishery, and we never really did. You know, I don't think we could ever go out and target a gag grouper, you know, on the south side in federal waters, and so, you know, I would be kind of curious though to see if we do see, you know, some levels come back, you know, since we're hearing some positive information coming from a few different areas. Go ahead, Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: Yes, and so a lot of what Chris said 100 percent hits home for me. We're kind of -- 300 pounds of gag is not working for multiday boats. 2019 is the year that I finished my

Carolina boat, and got to Carolina, and it took me a couple years to figure it out. I mean, we still got our fish, but it was taking three or four days. Once I figured it out, a thousand pounds of gag every day, and not a problem.

I'm not doing anything different, other than diving, of course, but the fish are there. We could dive a rock the size of this room, four or five trips in a row, and all the fish you need, and so I don't see we're hurting the gag fishery. I never have, and I would like to see something a little bit more for multiday boats, because 300 pounds ain't working for us, even as an owner-operator.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jeff. Before I -- Before we kind of keep on going here, we do have other questions, and, you know, other points in this presentation, if we can kind of get moving. Cameron, real quick.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian. Since 2019, I've definitely seen -- My captains have noted a big increase in the juvenile gags in those shallower waters. Like it used to be relatively rare, you know, that you would see them, but now it's almost every day we're catching some of the small juvenile gags.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Cameron. Back to you, Allie. Jack. Sorry.

MR. COX: Just one last thing. The enforcement, federal and state, was a lot more prevalent when I was fishing pretty hard back in the 1990s and into 2000, the early 2000s, but, where I live, and I commercial dive as well, and I still do some diving, I don't see what you're seeing, you know, and so I'm talking my backyard, and your backyard may be different. I'm in the Morehead City area, and I don't see nothing of those fish on those rocks like you're saying.

We have a lot more recreational effort, I think, than probably where you're working, but, anyway, I just want to say that's not -- I just wanted to say the enforcement I think that -- You know, when you're talking about this descending devices and things that we've done to try to help with these fisheries, if you don't have enforcement, it's not going to work, and that's a big problem.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jack. Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Before I move on to the slide, I did -- So, Haley, you were asking about the rebuilding plan. So gag is overfishing, experiencing overfishing. It's currently under a ten-year rebuilding plan, and the end year for that rebuilding plan is 2032, and so I wanted to answer that question. Then, Jeff, I apologize, and what state were you coming out of?

MR. MARINKO: I fish all the states. I was out of South Carolina for years, until the fish house closed, and I'm in North Carolina now, and we do go up to Morehead, and I saw a lot of gags in Morehead this year.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so the questions -- Thank you so much for all of that feedback. Some of these questions, the feedback that you guys have provided has already touched a little bit on these, and so we can breeze over some of them, but I'm just going to go through kind of this next section, which deals more with fishing behavior and catch levels.

This first chunk of questions underneath this topic are when and where are the fish available, and has this changed, and I know you guys were talking a little bit about kind of the May and June fishery and how it might be a little bit better later, in the end of summer, and has the size of fish you're catching changed, and, if so, if you could describe that trend.

Has there been effort shifts to and from gag, and so please describe any -- Including the timeframes, and are you shifting away from the species or towards, and then has there been considerable changes in fishing techniques and gears? I think we've kind of really touched on this one, and so we don't need to spend too too much time on that, because I've gotten a lot of great feedback, but, with that, I'll turn it over to you guys.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Allie. I think Vince had a comment.

MR. BONURA: I was just going to add to James' and Richie's comments, but, actually, it kind of goes in this one too, and so, down in like the Broward County area, which is a hair north of Monroe County and the Keys, the past couple years, a few of the boats I purchased fish from have been catching more and more gags early in the year, in May, and then, further into June, it transitions more into the blacks, and so that's been -- Historically it's normally black grouper down that way, and there's been more and more gags in Palm Beach and Broward County lately.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Vince. David.

MR. MOSS: One of the things that I've seen, and it's not necessarily directly related to gags, but, down in our neck of the woods too, is there's been a little bit of an effort shift away from bottom fishing in general, because of frustrations with -- I know, further north, frustrations with red snapper, and that is not an issue necessarily down by us, but, by us, the issues is with sharks, that people are just tired of basically donating everything that they get, and so there's quite a few people that have just flat out stopped bottom fishing down by -- Recreationally, they've just stopped bottom fishing, and they're either -- They'll target pelagics, or they'll go deep-drop.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, David. I think that's, you know, a really valid point, and I think that's the responsible thing to do, you know, given the climate of where we're at and, you know, the overfishing of a lot of different species. I've got Jeff, and then Randy.

MR. MARINKO: I'm just going to try to answer the question. In my fishery, we definitely have moved away from the gag biomass, because now we need to make money and target other things, and so we're staying on hogfish and triggerfish and things like that, and so we're not diving as deep, and we're definitely not trying to go look at thirty or forty head of gags, that we can't touch, and so we've definitely shifted our fishery.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Jeff. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and I'll just second what a lot of people were saying, that we are seeing a lot more small fish, inshore and offshore. There really is no more -- Like Chris said, there's no more really grouper fishermen anymore. I mean, it's a bycatch, rod-and-reel. Triggers and beeliners I guess is what we're after.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Randy. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, in the charter headboat, in the Carolinas, or at least where we are, we've been fishing the same way for forever. It's just a chicken rig, a weight and two hooks, swinging, dragging, and, you know, in respect to the groupers, like I said, in the last probably five or six years, the amount of small groupers, like Randy said, has greatly increased to -- You know, you're catching them almost on a daily basis, on multiple vessels.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Cameron. Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Sorry, and I'm getting myself situated here. Okay. Thank you so much for that feedback, and so the next -- If I can advance. There we go. The next set of questions is still dealing with fishing behavior and catch levels. Have you noticed an increase in shore-based landings of gags? I know we've kind of talked a lot about, you know, seeing more smaller inshore gags, and then how much fishing for gag typically occurs during the day, versus at night, and has this changed? Then do you actively avoid fishing for gag in certain areas, to avoid catching undersized fish or highly-regulated fish or to lessen bait loss?

Then, in that kind of vein, and you guys have talked a little bit about that shifting effort, but how feasible is it to avoid gag, and I know you guys have kind of noted that, in general, the snapper grouper fishery is a little bit more of a bycatch, and so maybe that one you've answered, but I will turn it over.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right, and so any other points of notation? Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Allie. Thank you, Chairman, and so I'll just kind of go through and answer what I can. Out of the scope of northeast Florida, Ponce Inlet, we have not seen an increase in shore-based landings of gag. For our operation, we do not sail at night, and so that kind of answers that, and, for our operation in particular, we do actively avoid you know, spots, and rocks, that we know that the gag -- That hold gag grouper.

You know, when you look at the fish behavior itself, these fish prefer a very specific habitat of those ledges. They're king of the reef, in a sense, in where we are, and so, now that the season has been consolidated into forty-five or fifty-five days, we want to kind of try to save that for the time where we do have that opportunity to harvest it, and, yes, is feasible to avoid gag, from our operation, our anchor, and not Spot-Lock, but that goes back to the conversation of, you know, technology, but I think that, with the technology, it is easier for people to target it, and that's what I've got. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: I would like to say, like last couple of months, we've had a lot of boats black bass fishing, and they've encountered a lot more gags than normal, and I think it's, I mean, because that early closure last year. There's a lot of gags out there, but you just use simply a lighter hook, so it straightens, and you don't want to bring up the gag anyway, and so that's pretty easy to avoid them, by using a lot lighter hook, and it just straightens the hook.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's good stuff, Randy. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and so, in our area, my charter headboat guys, they'll hold off on bombing down whole minnows, and stuff like that, until the season is really open, and so we're just literally strictly squid and some cut bait until then, but then, when the season is open, they'll try to bring more onboard, because that's what -- You know, that's what really gets the customers excited, is seeing some grouper and stuff coming up.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, and, to just kind of piggyback on what Cameron Sebastian said, yes, certainly there is a diet that these fish probably prefer when you are fishing, and on hook-and-line, and they're not going to eat squid. They do prefer, you know, things like the threadfin herring and the sardines and the chunk bait, the live bait, and so maybe that's something to consider as well, is bait selection when fishing hook-and-line and targeting gag.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Haley. It looks like it's back to you, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. That brings us to this is -- The is the last section in fishing behavior and catch levels, and this is kind of thinking on a sector level, and so thinking both for the commercial sector and the recreational sector, and, you know, we've had a lot of discussions on digging into the, you know, private recreational versus for-hire, and so maybe it would be good to kind of parse those two apart as well, but how often are gag discarded?

What are the reasons you're discarding? Do you encounter gag as a bycatch when fishing for other species? If so, what species are being targeted on these trips, and then do you think that discard mortality is a significant factor for this species? Has it changed, and, if so, please describe, and then, if you can, give a timeframe.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: The first hand I saw was Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, you know, just going down the list, I mean, when my guys are targeting -- They're just going bottom fishing, and, a lot of times, you know, pre-May, we're just throwing down tons of squid, and we're still we're still catching them, and it's just the way it goes.

When they're encountering them, and they're fishing for everything else, and the mortality rate, I would say, has definitely gotten much, much better with the advent of descending devices and things of that nature, and, specifically where we are in the Carolinas, you know, the most we're encountering are probably between the sixty and the 110-foot range, and I would say the percentage that go back alive is very high, I mean really high, and the reason they're getting thrown back is simply they're either -- One, they're either too short, or the seasons aren't opened up for them, but the survival rate is much higher than I believe the forecast is for gags going back, dead discard versus live discard.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Cameron. I'm not seeing anybody -- Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: I just want to add something. We do see a few more very small gags when we're inshore on a windy day, fishing Hawk Channel, like for sharks and things like that, and so a few more than ever, before but still kind of rare, and very juvenile fish. We're also seeing a lot more

sawfish. A lot more a lot more people fishing those rocks in the Hawk Channel, that run up and down the Keys, are catching sawfish, and not a lot, but more than zero that we used to catch.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I find that interesting after that event we had a couple summers ago with the spinning sawfish. Thanks, Richie. Back to you, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so the next section deals with the social and economic influences for this fishery, and so the first couple of questions, and this one is targeted mostly towards the commercial, and so how has price and demand for gag changed? Is there an increased demand for a specific size of gag, and then, among the species you target, how important are gag to your overall business, and this can be for charter or commercial, or charter-for-hire and commercial, and I should have specified. Then what communities are dependent on the gag fishery?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Allie, and I would just like to say that domestic grouper is gold. You know, it will sell for high marks, and I don't think any commercial fishermen that produce grouper are in the dark about that, and, yes, it's -- I mean, it's important to every commercial fisherman who harvests it. It's a very, very important part of their business profile. I did see a few hands. Go ahead, Randy, and then I've got Paul and Cameron.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and I agree. It is it is extremely important, and I've sort of made my stand that I'm not carrying the imported grouper and snapper that's coming up from Miami. I've got a pretty high-end clientele, and they're willing to pay for it, and so, with the complete collapse of the red grouper, the gag is extremely, extremely important, and it was terrible that it was shut down in June last year, and, I mean, for retail in the Carolinas.

I mean, you've got May, June, July, and August, and it's terrible that we can't offer grouper and American reds during all four of those months. Hopefully that's going to change next year, but it is, and the price that I'm having to pay to get them has gone up, what I'm paying the boats, but it's worth it, because, I mean, on the retail end, I can make it up, and so it doesn't matter, but we've just got to be able to have them.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Randy. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I don't know if this is a good opportunity to bring this up, and Haley brought this up earlier in the morning, in a previous discussion that we had, about the two fish. Just as a testament to the social and economic influence of the species, I've heard concerns in Morehead City, from the headboat operators, or owner-operators up in Morehead City, that that seems to significantly impact their operations when they can only harvest two fish in a trip, regardless of how many head are in those boats, and so that's something that I hope the council bears in mind moving forward, as far as whether that allocation is -- I don't want to use the word "fair", but that's equitable compared to the rest of the recreational fishery. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Paul. You know, I think this is something that that we've continually brought to the council, and, you know, it -- At some point, we're going to have to have some action on that. I've got Cameron, and then Jack.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so the grays and the gags are critical for the charter headboat industry in our area. You know, the recreational paper person guy who can afford,

whatever, seventy-nine to two-hundred bucks a person, you know, they want to at least be able to have the opportunity to catch and retain something. The dream, right, and I sell the dream really, really, really well, you know?

I mean, when summer comes around, hey, half-days are really good, fun trips. You're not going to keep anything, but you and your family can go out and have a blast, and catch some fish, and that's just reality of it, and so, you know, if we lose -- You know, for the hardcore guys who still like to go out and bring fish back, when we have to say that gags are shut down, and you might catch a scamp or a red, you know, it's really -- It really hurts a lot, and, when you're talking a boat that can hold more guys, you know, then the word starts to circulate that they can only keep two grays per boat, and, you know, that just takes some guys, and they just get pissed, and they're like, the hell with it, and I'm not going fishing anymore.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Cameron. Jack. Allie, go ahead.

MS. IBERLE: A question on what you were saying, and so you were saying it was crucial for clients to be able to catch and retain. Is it as important to -- I'm trying to think of how to phrase this correctly. Are you advertising and just being able to catch them, and are people wanting to take trips just to be able to catch them for the experience, and not retain them, or is retaining them as important as being able to catch them for the experience? Does that make sense?

MR. SEBASTIAN: Sure. Clear as mud, and so it's two different types of clientele. One is a tourist, and they don't really care. They just want to go do something with their kids, or the grandkids, and so it makes not as much difference. Then there's what we would say was a true fisherman, and they want to be able to have the ability, or, as Randy and I have put it many times, the illusion of being able to go out and catch and bring back fish of a certain type, and, when that is taken totally off the table, then that's a tough rub on them, and they can't -- They just don't want to do it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack.

MR. COX: I was just going to say, when I first started gag fishing, and I've still got trip tickets showing that we were getting two-and-a-quarter a pound, and those fish now are between eight and nine bucks, and so, for us bandit boats to stay at-sea for two or three days, you know, that's 2,400 bucks on your limit of gags, at 300 pounds, and, you know, it helps.

I mean, it's -- It's just amazing to me that people will continue to buy fish, as expensive as they are, but they are, and some of the things that the dealers are doing in our area that take a little pressure off the gags is they're substituting gags and -- Not saying that they're calling a sheephead a grouper, but they're using -- You know, we're catching we're catching a lot of sheephead now, and learning how to fish for them, and so it's taking a little pressure, because people are learning that that fish has a pretty similar texture and taste to the grouper.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Jack. Jeff.

MR. MARINKO: I just wanted to say, for my business, I've always said gags were 70 percent of our business, basically just like Tony on the CJR was. When we caught our gags, we went home, you know, providing there was more good weather. That's when we went home, and, this year, it

was about 50 percent. I finally did the math on it, when I did my taxes, and we were about 50 percent under what we should have done this year without gags. I did a couple trips in Florida on lobsters, and so now I'm probably a little bit lower than that, but it's brutal.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley, did you have your hand up, and then Cameron again.

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, and it's back to us. Thank you, Chairman. The importance of the gag grouper, obviously, like Cameron said, it is extremely important, and, Allie, to answer the question that you asked him in regard to maybe the fisher's motives, I think that speaks volumes to, you know, the diverse crowd that the headboats service, and so we do have these tourists, these first-time people, fishing, and then we do have these regulars, the true fishermen, and so I don't think that it's fair to separate them.

I think it needs to be looked at as more of a holistic approach, as we're servicing, you know, such a diverse crowd, and I think it's also important that, you know, hey, because you're a true fisherman, that doesn't -- It kind of stinks, and they've got -- They're better at fishing, and so they're most likely going to land your two fish before, you know, someone who is fishing for their first time, and then, hey, that third fish comes over the rail, and I have a six-year-old standing there crying when I tell him that his twenty-pound fish has to be thrown back, and what does that do for business?

Do you think that that parent is going to book another trip with us? Absolutely not. They have not only ruined that experience for fishing, and taken that customer away from us, but it has probably soured that that child's experience, or that angler's experience. I just -- It will be the hell that I die on, but two fish, for a boat of fifty people, is not fair. It is not equitable, and I would strongly encourage the AP, or the council, to, you know, take a look at that. It makes sense. You have the numbers, and how do you extrapolate two fish per six anglers? It's there, and then just a -- I know managed under the gag and black complex, and we have never once landed, or harvested, a black grouper, in the fifty-plus years we've been in business, aboard our headboat. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and I'll agree with what Haley just said. For specifically the headboat trips, it is -- You know, it is very detrimental to have a strict limit like that, and the reality is, you know, just as you've seen the bandit boats decline, and fish houses decline and all that, you know, our dock spaces are declining.

If you're not in a good spot, you can be out of business, but, once those headboats go out of business, and I believe we talked about it at length the last go-around, and, once they go out of business, then you just pretty much created a, you know, gentrification of the ocean. The only guys -- The only people who can go out are going to be the guys who own their own boats, because, you know, we cater to blue collar, and, you know, lower-income individuals.

Now, switching to the commercial hat on, and so, in our area, we've seen a huge decline of bandit guys going out, just because there are no more docks. I mean, the docks are too valuable to be used as something else, and so it's just -- In our area especially, that North Carolina-South Carolina border range, it has really diminished, and I think our last fish house in our area went under about

two or three years ago, and I don't know if Chris can answer this, if they have any fish houses down in Murrells Inlet, or are they all gone as well?

MR. CONKLIN: I mean, there's a couple of people that hold dealer permits that think they can make a living doing it, but you can't, and so, no, there's no waterfront -- I mean, there's one guy leasing a dock, because the guy who owned the dock obviously saw the writing on the wall, and realized he was losing too much money to do it, and so he tricked somebody else into renting it from him, but, no, there's nothing in Georgetown, and nothing in Murrells Inlet. The boats I have left are fishing out of McClellanville, or we're bringing them in on a trailer to our store.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, guys. I've got Chris, and then Richie. I just wanted to add that we are running a little long here, and we're cutting into your lunchtime, and my lunchtime.

MR. KIMREY: And I'm hungry. I just wanted to follow up on the headboat thing. I mean, some of you know we spent -- We spent a good amount of time trying to come up with an idea, when they when they first did the two fish per boat, and that included headboats, and, you know, I don't even want to go down that rabbit hole, or beat on that horse, but I am curious what happened to all that. We presented it, or sent it to the council, and whatever happened? I haven't heard much about it since.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just to reiterate what we said this morning, it's on the workplan currently. It's not in -- The way we sort of do the council workplan is we have like sort of a top section of things that have to get done, because we're under statutory deadlines, and so if we have fisheries where we've gotten back stock assessments and we're under a timeframe that we legally have to take action.

MR. KIMREY: So, yes, and I understand that, but what does that mean in in the real world? Does that mean that, when grouper opens this year, it's still going to be two?

MS. MARHEFKA: Correct. Yes, and we haven't even started --

MR. KIMREY: So it's been a whole year.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes.

MR. KIMREY: So what's the process, and here we go down this rabbit hole, and sorry, but what is the process? I mean, do you have to do a whole new amendment, I mean, to change that? So that's why it's so time consuming.

MS. MARHEFKA: It's not just that it's a whole new amendment, and please feel free to correct me if -- It's we have to go through the process that's known as sector separation, if you're going to do that, and so what --

MR. KIMREY: So that's really what it's going to take.

MS. MARHEFKA: It is, and it's -- That's a huge lift, and not saying it's not worthwhile, and I'm not saying that that's not something the council --

MR. KIMREY: I just -- You know, for whatever reason, and was I asleep when you all had this conversation? I've been here all day.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just at the beginning of when Mike was going through sort of the overview of what the council has talked about recently, and I believe that came up, but it has to be an amendment, and that amendment would have to include pulling apart the --

MR. KIMREY: There's just no other way to do it, and we knew that was a possibility, but I didn't know that you all actually had those wheels turning.

MS. MARHEFKA: It's on -- Like I said, it's on the list, and it's -- It, unfortunately, gets bumped, and this is what happens all the time. The same thing for the commercial two-for-one, which we talked about for a long time. As you know, what will happen is then we'll get an update to a stock assessment, and then we're under a legal timeframe that we have to get that done, but it is absolutely on there, and then it will just be a matter of figuring out the spot that it works into and whether or not the entire council is saying, yes, this is something that we want to get into, but it isn't -- It's not being ignored. You all are not being ignored, it's on there.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and that -- I think that's kind of the answer. You know, we've got several headboats in Morehead, and I think that's the answer they're looking for, is is it being ignored, and is it ever going to change, and so -- One thing, real quick, you know, when it comes to releasing fish -- You know, like Haley said, you've got this child that catches this twenty-pound fish, and it's going to ruin your trip, and there are some kids that it's going to destroy their day, but there's also plenty of kids that it won't.

That's a learning opportunity for that kid, you know what I mean, and explain to him that, hey, real briefly, maybe next time you can keep that fish, but, right now, you can't, and, you know, I go through that on my boat. Some of them are like kill them all, and then others are like -- They love letting them go, and I just wanted to throw that in there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chris. Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: Real quick, because I'm hungry too, and, man, it sounds like these headboats along the coastline are really struggling just to -- Just to kind of stay in business, when you have to release most of your catch. Luckily, for us in the in the Keys, there's no shortage of varieties of fish to catch, and so we don't have that situation, but it just sounds like it's a real struggle for some of you people to talk people into going fishing, if they know they're not going to bring anything home, and it's ridiculous.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Richie. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Just to follow-up with what Richie said, I kind of feel like I'm at an advantage here, because I'm just a fly on the wall, when I go out my observation trips of local Morehead City headboats, is that the owner-operators, the captains of those headboats, have to immediately caveat away the experience.

Like, after May 1, they have to say that I just want to let you know that we're limited to two groupers, two gags per trip, and so the first two anglers that catch legal gags that -- After that, no

one would permitted to -- You know, to ice their fish, and so that does put a -- You know, I think that has a large bearing on the potential economic impact of that two per trip for headboats, when, you know, immediately the captain needs to explain away the experience, before fishing has even started.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Just real quick, in response to that, we do. It's just the same thing as telling a private recreational person you have to use a descending device, because it's the law. Just because you're telling them that, it doesn't change how they feel.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. I'm not seeing any other hands, and I think that we are going to -
- We have some more of this presentation, that we'll probably pick up first thing in the morning, I think.

MS. IBERLE: Yes.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: We're going to go ahead and break for lunch. Mike, what are you thinking on a return time?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: We can do the hour-and-a-half, like we had scheduled, and so that will just push the return time back to -- We're at, what, 12:25, and so 1:55.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. We're breaking for lunch. Return at 1:55.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Welcome back from a nice lunchbreak here, and we're going to continue with Item 7, Lines of Communication Run-Through, and I'm going to turn it over to Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: Thanks, Chair, and so I think I know most of you, but, for those who don't know me, my name is Christina. I'm the fisheries social scientist with the council, and, while I primarily work on mackerel, every once in a while I get the distinct pleasure of getting to come present to the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, and today I'm going to be talking to you about the council's new stakeholder engagement initiative called Lines of Communication.

If you were on the AP last fall, or last spring, and I can't remember which, we gave you guys a whole presentation on sort of the background, and why the council is doing this new engagement effort, but, just to briefly summarize again, public input, as you guys know as advisory panel members, is a really critical part of the fishery management process, and the council felt like they needed more opportunities to really engage with fishermen and encourage new individuals to continue to participate in the management process in the way you all have been, and they wanted to really harness the power of informal conversations.

I'm sure you guys have been to public hearings before, and we heard from council members and fishery stakeholders alike that one of the things they found really valuable were some of just those informal one-on-one conversations that they were able to have at in-person events, and so Lines

of Communication is going to be an in-person series of meetings, that's going to become a regular part of the council's engagement efforts, and these are something we'll do every single year.

They're meant to be more informal and discussion-driven. Oftentimes, the council is coming to you with, you know, a management proposal, and that won't be the case with these meetings. It will be much more forward-looking and an opportunity for fishery stakeholders to talk to their council members, and an opportunity for council members to share information with fishery stakeholders in their communities.

We went over the goals and objectives at the last AP meeting, but, just to sort of refresh, again, the purpose of this is to really build relationships with stakeholders by allowing for those two-way communications, and not the get up and say your three-minute public comment and sit back down, but really fostering a discussion between council members and fishery participants.

Again, this provides an opportunity for that open dialogue and mutual learning, so that council members who are representing you at the table can learn what's going on, and what's important in your fisheries, and then council members also have an opportunity to share information.

The hope is that this will help increase knowledge of the fishery management process, so we can encourage more and more fishery stakeholders to participate in council initiatives, things like advisory panels, public comment, the citizen science projects that Julia was talking about this morning, providing a new mechanism for stakeholders to bring their concerns forward directly to council members.

Like I said, council members are meant to represent you guys and your communities at the table, and so it's key that there's a mechanism for you all to bring concerns forward directly to council members, and then, again, finally there are always sort of major salient management issues, and this would be an opportunity for council members to share information with stakeholders, especially stakeholders that might not be able to make one of the traditional council meetings for public comment, and we will actually be in communities closer to these stakeholders, for them to have access to these meetings.

What's the council going to do with all of the information that they'll learn at these meetings? The first is they'll use it to identify topics that haven't been on their radar. Next, they'll use it to set the council's workload priorities. If you guys have ever been to a council meeting, you've seen that brightly colored spreadsheet that we pull up, and that has a long list of tasks for the council to be working on. Oftentimes, there's too many tasks to tackle at every meeting, and so the council has to prioritize what they're working on, and they would want these meetings to drive how they're choosing to prioritize what they are and aren't working on at a given time.

Then, finally, while these meetings are meant to be proactive and forward-looking, it's inevitable that discussions are going to happen around current management actions, and so they would use that information to drive the decisions they're making on current management actions as well.

The important thing to remember, and, if you came to the mackerel port meetings, you saw this slide, is that this is not public comment. Lines is really designed to have a discussion, and so there will be no management measures on the table for comment. This will all be about having a

discussion, with council members especially, as well as staff that will be there assisting, and so here is the agenda that we're going to walk through today.

The timing here is a little bit off, because we had a later lunch, but I want to sort of note a couple of things before we really get started. First, we're going to walk through, and this is meant to be sort of a trial run for staff. This is us testing out the way we've designed this meeting, and so you're going to have an opportunity to comment on issues in the fishery. You can talk about snapper grouper, mackerel cobia, spiny lobster, shrimp and this is one of the times when we're going to sort of open it up, and you can talk about whatever fishery is important to you, but keep in mind that the information you provide during this -- This is just a trial run, and that information is not going to the council.

The only information that will go to the council at this point is your feedback on how these sessions went, because we're testing the structure, and this is meant for staff to see what changes we need to make in this process before we sort of take it live at the end of the year. If there's something that comes up during this that you feel like, wow, that's really important for the council to hear, please bring it up under Other Business on the agenda, to make sure that it gets recorded for the council.

The last thing is that this is sort of meant to be an in-person thing, and so apologies to those online when we're running through the actual activities, and we won't be using the microphones, but, when we come back to provide feedback on those activities, we'll be back online, and you'll be able to hear the AP's feedback on those, and so, with that, I will pause just very briefly, to see if there are any questions about what we're going to be having you guys do today before we start the first activity.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Christina. I have a question. Who is going to sit as council members, and are we going to just be, you know, members of the public? I mean, is it like a double proxy situation?

MS. WIEGAND: So you guys will be members of the public. It will be staff that is running through the activities with you, but, when it's an actual Lines meeting, it will be council members that are sort of front-facing and running through the activities with the public. Right now, staff is doing it because we're trying to work out all of the issues and kinks that might be in the process we have set up, and that's why we're doing it with you all, to get feedback.

The other thing I want to note, related to that, is that we have a tight timeline, and we want to hold to that timeline, so that we can see, you know, okay, we did twenty-five minutes for the first activity, and that was too much time, or not enough time, so that, when we get to that end time, I will sort of stop and interrupt you, and we'll stop and move to the feedback session, and that's not to, you know, cut off conversation. That's because we need to keep to the strict timeline, to see if we need to make changes to it, and we'll be asking you guys for feedback, and was this too long, or was this too short et cetera.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Any other questions about the procedures here? I don't think so.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Well, with that, we're going to have you guys all get up from lunch and sort of congregate in this general area around this sticky wall, and Myra, Julia, and Nick are going to lead you through our first activity.

(Whereupon, the AP participated in the Lines of Communication run-through activity, and the activity was not transcribed.)

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Thank you, guys, for participating in that activity, and so now we're sort of going to take a pause on our Lines activity and try to get some feedback from you guys on how you felt using the sticky wall went, and, to provide some context, we put that activity at the very start of the meeting for sort of two purposes, to provide people an opportunity to just sort of get their thoughts out and up somewhere where they could be seen by council members.

Again, you saw, you know Myra, Julia, and Nick running that activity. At an actual Lines meeting, it would be council members working through all of that with you guys, and so, like I said, one of the reasons is to allow people to get, you know, what they came to talk about out at the start of the meeting, and that also lets us know what people are really interested in at this meeting, so we can incorporate that into some of the other activities that we're going to do.

We have, you know, some questions for you, and, again, Myra, Julia, and Nick, feel free to come up and ask additional questions you may have, but, first, I want to get your initial thoughts on how you felt that activity went. Do you think fishermen in your community would be willing to sort of actively participate in it the way you guys did, and do you think it's a good activity to sort of break the ice and start the meeting with?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'll go ahead and get started on this, and then I'll move to Tony. I think, initially, it's going to be as positive as that was. You're going to get everybody that's very hopeful that their voices are being heard, and that they have a place to where they don't have to be nervous and get in front of a crowd and give an official public comment.

My fear is that, once some time passes, and some of these things don't come to fruition, that it could end up being a worse scenario than we're already in. It's like now we know that we were heard, and we know that our concerns have been vocalized. They wrote them down, and they took them to heart, and now the changes that we see as what we need in our industry aren't happening, and it could be a further trust breakdown, and so reality doesn't ever get met, you know, and it just ends up being a pipe dream. That's what my takeaway kind of is, and I would certainly be willing to try it, but I would also caution against something like that. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, James. You know, I kind of see it a little bit the same way. Number one, I think it went pretty well, and the ideas came a lot quicker and more -- From all directions than I expected, and I think, in the public forum, it would be a good exercise, but I think, if you had the average anglers there, it would be nice to have a good smattering of charter-for-hire, so you would have that educated voice to bring out. Number one, it would kind of more direct things into an educated voice, versus getting just some hotheads out there blowing steam. You're going to have that, but, without the -- Without a little bit of a control factor, you don't want it to get out of line.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Tony, would you -- Instead of just having council members answer the questions, and you say you would want --

MR. CONSTANT: No, and if you had a -- Let's say we had it in every small city where you typically do these things, and you're going to have twenty anglers, or ten anglers, and it would be nice to have five to ten charters, too.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I don't think that they would be excluded from coming though.

MR. CONSTANT: No, and I think you need to ask, is my point, to make sure you get some guys that know what they're speaking about.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Got it. Got it. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and, this whole process that we just mocked up here in the last forty-five minutes or so, I would be concerned, in a real-world setting, about rates of participation. I think you're going to need to try to coerce folks, or use a carrot-and-stick approach to get fishery stakeholders to some type of venue like this, and you're going to have to draw more out of them, because you're reaching this pool of AP members, and we're full of ideas, and I don't know if that's reflective of the fishing community at large, kind of maybe a little bit following up with what Tony just said.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I've got Chris, and then Richie.

MR. KIMREY: So, I mean, yes, and, I mean, I think the exercise went well. I mean, it kind of reminded me sort of the mackerel port meetings, you know, that kind of -- That format, which we had a good turnout for, but, like Paul said, and I'm using the mackerel port meeting as a reference because, in our area, we had a really good turnout for the mackerel port meetings, but it's because a lot of the people, the stakeholders, thought that it wasn't an outreach, and they thought that there was getting ready to be a new regulation on king and Spanish mackerel, and so they showed up ready to fight.

They didn't realize it wasn't going to be that kind of meeting, but that leads us to our next point, and it's something I mentioned earlier, maybe out of place, when we were talking about social media and all that, and none of this stuff matters until you figure out how to bridge the gap, and you can get attendance for these events, and I've seen it over and over again with things you're doing.

The staff does a great job putting an event together, and presenting it, but, if nobody is there to see it, it doesn't matter, and so there -- We have to figure out some way to bridge that gap, and, from my perspective, in my area, and I'm sure that these guys that are from Morehead will vouch for me, there's only a small percentage of the people in our area that put the effort into understanding fisheries management, and the rest of them don't.

It takes a lot of effort, not to, you know, become an AP member and show up to meetings and do it all, but it takes a lot of effort just to read all the emails, the text messages, anything that's coming up, and it takes effort. Most people don't want to put the effort into it, and so there's two things that make them show up. You either have to threaten them with something or quite the opposite.

Like Paul said, the carrot and the stick, and you have to lure them in with something, and, until we figure out how to bridge the gap, it's not going to matter. I mean, I know that sounds ugly, but it's the truth. It's been happening over and over and over. I mean, I've been to a lot of these meetings, and I don't think anybody -- Other than the one they thought that someone was going to be taken away, it's been very poor attendance.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate the input, Chris. I did have Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: Yes, and it's all about getting them to show up, for sure, but some of the people that would show up would be a little hostile, as you probably would know, and so you would probably end up being the scapegoat for a little bit until you could -- Until you could make them feel good.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Richie. Christina, did you want to say something?

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and I just sort of want to address some of what Chris and Richie are talking about, and I couldn't agree more. In order for these meetings to be successful, we need to get people in the door, and I think there's sort of an understanding, with staff and council members, that building relationships, and building trust, takes an extended period of time, and it takes consistent interaction over time.

That's one of the reasons we're organizing these meetings, and the hope is that, while they may start small, they will continue to grow in size over time. At the end of -- Sort of after we go through all three of the activities, I am going to talk briefly about outreach, and I would love to get more ideas from you guys on how we can work to get people in the door, be it, you know a carrot and stick approach or some other way.

I know, for the mackerel port meetings, people came because they thought regulations were imminent, and now the council is talking about moving forward with regulations, but -- Then, in terms of, you know, people coming and being a little hostile, I guess I won't speak for all staff, but I will speak for myself, and we want people to show up, and we understand that there are frustrations, and that's fine, and we would rather have people show up and have conversations with council members about those frustrations, so that we start to sort of move forward and build those relationships, and so it's better to have people show up.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I've got Haley, and then John.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. Haley Stephens, and so I think initially -- I know that this was our first activity, but, you know, having a greeter at the door, like someone who -- Like a Miss Kim, or someone who is greeting you at the door and setting that expectation and welcoming you, is going to be really important for that very first impression, because people are -- You know, some people are going to show up kind of with their guard up, and so having that initial contact is going to be really important.

I don't love the what's going well question. I feel like it is very loaded. I felt uncomfortable answering it, and maybe like some type of quick icebreaker, before you get into the sticky note,

and I know that someone had mentioned, in the mackerel meeting, a word cloud, you know, to kind of put all the fishermen on the same page.

It's voluntary, and you can participate if you want to. What that is is you like scan a QR code, and you type in what issue is most important to you, and the more response of the same responses you get, the larger that word gets on the screen, and so that's kind of a way to connect fishermen, because I would hope that you have, you know, stakeholders from all different sectors, and kind of try to connect that quick icebreaker, and then move to the sticky wall, just to get the juices flowing.

When we talk about participation, I'm really excited to work through this, but I am going to say the elephant in the room. Realistically, if some of the things that are being proposed in our management world do actually go into effect, this will not work. You will be wasting your time in Florida if you try to do this, if certain things come out.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. I've got John, then Paul, then Paul.

MR. POLSTON: Okay. Well, we're talking about both, right? You're talking about the general angler, and you're also talking about stakeholders, right, and I heard both mentioned.

MS. WIEGAND: So this would be an event that is open to the public, and so commercial fishermen, private recreational fishermen, charter-for-hire. Any member of the public that feels sort of invested in the fisheries that the South Atlantic Council manages would be welcome to come and participate.

MR. POLSTON: Okay. Well, with that being said, the reason I asked that is because, if you're wanting to hear from the stakeholders, that's going to be -- In my opinion, that's going to be way different than hearing from your general Joe fisherman, and, if you did do it, instead of doing it just wide open, I would set it up separately.

I would have a stakeholders meeting, and then just your general, because it's going to go way differently, as far as what people's ideas -- What they have as far as commercial and recreational or commercial and for-hire. All that is going to be different than the guy that goes out every weekend, and I understand anybody can speak up, but you're going to have fifty people in the room that, if you put it on the board, and that's another suggestion. If you put it on the board, the sticky board, what are we going to do about the sharks, and what are we going to do about the red snapper, that's what three-quarters of those people are going to be there for, those two subjects, and those two subjects a lot, and that's just my opinion.

MS. WIEGAND: Just to clarify. when you say "stakeholders", do you mean specifically permitted fishermen? Okay. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, John. Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I'm going to push back a little bit about that what's going well segment. I think that's -- For that part of the exercise, Christina, that's absolutely essential, because I think we, as a group of folks that are vested in the reef fishery, need to be reminded of the success stories, and like sitting around with you all, and I'm going to be driving home at some point later in the

week, and I could put my head down and be like everything's in the toilet, and we've got to remind ourselves that, twenty years ago, none of us could find a red snapper, and here we are on the cusp of a great rebuilding.

Now, whether we want to rebuild for that much longer, before we can whack some more fish, can be debated, but we're -- That's a huge success, and we should all pat ourselves on the back, and so I think reminding -- The stakeholders need to be reminded of the successes that we've had in the fishery, else they get forgotten very easily, and then it becomes real doom-and-gloom.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: They'll be reminded as soon as they can start harvesting. Paul.

MR. NELSON: I remember, back in 2010, when the snapper fishery got closed, we filled rooms up. Hundreds of people showed up, and they all spoke, but they never got the answers they wanted to hear, and they still haven't got the answers they wanted to hear, and so there's a lot of frustration with the public, recreationally private for-hire, commercial, and it's all -- There's a lot of frustration with -- They're seeing out on the water different than everything -- What everybody else is telling them, and so it's hard to get people to come to these meetings when they know they're going to get the same answer that they got last time, that the science says, the science says, the science says, instead of having a solution, like a carrot out ahead of them, saying, all right, in 2027, we're going to let you guys start catching a few red snapper, and then you would have a little bit more participation, but I know, in Florida, there's a lot of frustration, and that's another reason why people don't come to the meetings, is because they know they're not going to be heard.

They know that nothing is going to get done, and it's going to get pushed down the road again, and, yes, we've had a great success for the red snapper, but they're not getting any rewards from the success.

They're getting a one-day fishery, maybe, or sometimes two days, and it just depends, and maybe this year none, and who knows what is going to happen, but that's why the public don't show up to the meetings, is because there's so much frustration with the council, or whoever, and maybe it's not with the council personally, but, whenever somebody comes to the meeting, there's really no solutions to any of the problems they have. Sharks is another reason. Open the sharks up, and let them start harvesting a few of them. If they start seeing some results, you may get some more people participating.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Paul. I've got Andy, and then Matt.

MR. FISH: I just wanted to touch base on Mr. Paul, I believe, and I believe it -- I have a hard time when I hear it's a success story of rebuilding the red snapper, when it was really fifteen years of abstinence, and it really wasn't a management. It was just a complete cutoff of all the fishermen, and I don't know why that triggered me, but I just wanted to say it, but I do appreciate everything you come up with, but it's not a rebuilding. It's just a, no, you can't have this, and now look what we've done, and we haven't done anything but not be allowed to go fishing.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Matt.

MR. MATTHEWS: Right, and, not to not to beat a dead horse on that topic, but I think, when we talk about what we can do to make that process most effective with stakeholders, which are the

good old boys that, if we do convince them to show up, how are we going to get those good old boys to participate, and I think opening them up and asking them to pat you on the back at the outset is probably not the best way to do it, you know, and it's -- But I also agree with you that that there is some value in making sure that people appreciate that there's their success in working to rebuild a fishery, and sometimes that requires us to take our lumps in the process, but to tell us what we're doing right is not the way to open that conversation.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's a good point, Matt. I've got John, and then David, and then, Nick, I think I see you. Do you want to hop in here right now?

MR. POLSTON: So, again, to follow his words, not to beat a dead horse, but when he made the comment -- I guess our science guy down there was telling us what a great job we've done rebuilding, and then you made the comment of, well, they'll appreciate it when they to keep some fish, and I felt like, one, that was really asinine, and, two, to say that shows a real disconnect with what this has done to the people who make their living in this fishery.

It has been detrimental to so many people, and caused bankruptcies, and loss of livelihood, and people have to completely change course on their entire life. Yes, we needed to do something when the red snapper were getting really low, but here we are fifteen years later, and not only are the red snapper in huge abundance, but, like I've said three times today, they're eating all the other species, and causing more problems, and so you have helped a problem, but you've also caused a lot of problems, and not to address that is just ignorant, to me.

Nobody wants to address the problems that have been caused by this fishery except the fishermen. Everybody, everybody, that I talked to when I said that I was joining this council told me I was wasting my time, when I was joining this panel. It's a waste of time, and they'll let you pretend that you say -- That you've got something to say, but, when it comes down to it, nobody really cares, and that's the way the fishermen feel, and that's what everybody that makes their living in this industry feels, and the people that have spent the billions of dollars economically that support this fishery -- They all feel the same way, and they all see it, and everybody sees it, except the people that make the decisions.

It's more like having an illusion of a voice, is the way everybody feels about it, and nobody feels like our voices are taken seriously, and nobody feels like the public opinion voices are taken seriously, and, until some real changes happen, nobody is ever going to take it seriously. It's always going to be that. You're always going to have the people that actually see it, and deal with it, versus the people that sit behind a computer and make decisions.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: John, be that as it may, we have an agenda to stick to, and we all have decisions to make about what's important in our own lives, and about the lives of the other people that we have -- That we are charged to represent here, and, you know, sometimes making light of something covers a little bit of pain, and we've all felt the pain, and we all continue to feel the pain, and so, you know, with all due respect to you and the time that you've given to come here, and I appreciate the words that you that you say, and we get it. It's not pretend. We all get it, but this is -- This is the platform we have to use the voice that we have. David Moss.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. David Moss. A couple of things I think you should think about is, number one, remember that it's going to be very regionally-specific, even -- I mean, I use Florida

as the example, right, and so, if you're talking like Canaveral to Jacksonville, the issue that you're going to hear about, of course, is going to be the red snapper issue, and I think you guys learned that like, if you come down to West Palm Beach for instance, and want to do a talk on bottom fishing, you'll probably have nobody show up, because that's just not the fishery that we have.

Twenty miles south of that, it's a little bit of a different story. Twenty miles south of that, another different story. Just in Florida alone, it's so regionally-specific of what we target, and how we target it, and please consider that, A, and, B, and we've said it a couple times, to get people to show up to these meetings, you've got to have either a carrot or a stick, and so you've got to either have an incentive to get them there that's positive or an incentive to get them there that you're going to take something away, is the unfortunate truth.

The other thing I would recommend is, rather than trying to get the fishing populace as a whole, and I'm speaking recreationally-specific, to attend these, and to understand what's going on, is get the people that those anglers listen to show up, and so, as much as I hate this word, but get influencers. Get TV show hosts, and magazines, things like that where the anglers go to that can help spread the word and say, hey, these are the good guys, and this is what's going on, and so on and so forth, and this is how to get engaged, and let them, to use a bad fish pun, cast the net, rather than you guys, or us guys, try to be those messengers and reach everybody, because it's just not going to happen, and, to be frank, they're probably not going to listen.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate your perspective, David. I think we're running like way off schedule.

MS. WIEGAND: Thanks, guys, and so we are getting a little off schedule, and so I want to move us to our next activity. After we get through all of the activities, we can come back, at the end, and continue this conversation. The next activity we're going to go into is what we've been calling our sort of topical discussion, the thought being we would pick a specific topic to discuss at every Lines meeting we hold, at least for one segment of it, and they would change year-to-year, but, for each year's worth of Lines, one topic, and we would break people up into small groups, to have small group discussions about that topic.

If you came to a mackerel port meeting, this is something that will look very similar to you. It's what we did at those meetings, and so, while this group is a little big, because the room so small, we're not going to break you in the smaller groups, and we're just going to have one group discussion together, and we will move off-mic for this and then come back to the mics when we get to the feedback session.

(Whereupon, the AP participated in the Lines of Communication run-through activity, and the activity was not transcribed.)

MS. WIEGAND: We'll feedback on the topical discussion, what we're calling the topical discussion session, and so, to provide some context, one of the reasons we wanted to have a more discussion-oriented section is, one, we always feel like it's helpful to break people into smaller groups. Two, we wanted to have a discussion with attendees that's a bit more focused than the original sticky wall session, but would still allow us to sort of draw from the input we got there, and feed it into the discussion, and so, for the meetings that will be held at the end of this year and

the beginning of next year, trip satisfaction was the topic that was selected for the more focused discussion.

One of the reasons for that was because we're trying to have a topic that will be of value, or of importance, to commercial, recreational, and for-hire fishermen and fishermen that fish for dolphin wahoo, snapper grouper, king mackerel, spiny lobster, shrimp. You know, we're inviting a wide variety of people to attend these meetings, and so we want to make sure that the topic is something that everyone can speak to.

Trip satisfaction also has the benefit of really talking about trade-offs, which is something that comes up time and time again in council discussions, and so knowing how fishery participants feel about these different tradeoffs can be really beneficial information for the council, and so my questions for you are sort of, you know, generally, how did you feel about that session? Did you feel like trip satisfaction was an okay topic? Do you like the idea of being in a smaller group, to have a more focused discussion, and did you feel like that would be productive, and so I have some other questions, but, at this point, I'll just go ahead and turn it over to you guys, to get your perspective.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I mean, initially, my knee-jerk reaction is why do you care about our feelings if you're not going to listen to what we say? I mean, like we all get emotional about this, and like this is this is meaningful, you know, and, when it comes -- When it comes right down to it, it's like don't ask me how I feel about something, and do something to make me feel better, you know, and that's been tough. It's been really, really tough, and so I really don't care if I get asked about my feelings.

MR. CONKLIN: Like, in fisheries management, there are no tradeoffs. It's a one-way street. You know, I keep thinking in my head about like gag grouper reduced down to 300 pounds, and, on the commercial side, we don't have the -- You know we're not meeting our other ACLs. If there was tradeoffs, then why didn't we look ahead and say, well, we can go catch 2,000 pounds of vermillion, or something like that, to, you know, make up, or tradeoff, for the economic hardship, but that most certainly has never been the case, and it never will be. It's like, if you believe in God, at least you get like satisfaction. You know, you can talk to him, and, you know, be filled with joy and stuff like that, but not with fisheries management.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate that, Chris. Looking around, I don't see any other hands.

MS. WIEGAND: So I'm hearing that trip satisfaction is maybe not a topic that you guys feel is -- I'm trying to think of how I want to word this. I guess then I will pose a question to you. If the council was interested in understanding what aspects -- Understanding that hard choices have to be made sometimes, and I'm certainly not going to sugarcoat that, but is there a better way to have a discussion with fishery participants on what is the key thing to preserve for a fishery? Is there a better way to have that conversation than the way we structured it here?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I've got Jeff, and then John.

MR. MARINKO: I think what -- Chris and I have the same views, as maybe more of a business plan for us. If you take something away, we need something to replace it, to keep ourselves going.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. John.

MR. POLSTON: Well, as far as the people -- Going to just recreational, which is I guess where a lot of the pushback is coming on the red snapper closure or whatever, the two different things that are being presented, maybe if there was a -- If both sides were presented as far as, okay, if we do not do this, being whichever one you want to say first, then this is what is going to happen, and, in our opinion, this is better than that, and a little more explanation to the people about exactly what they're facing, versus what they do not really know, other than what they're on the street and talking to their friends.

MS. WIEGAND: Okay, and so the topic is a little too obtuse, almost, and you need more concrete, real-life examples of what we're talking about.

MR. POLSTON: Not necessarily myself, but your general public. If they -- I believe one part says closing off snapper off for a certain amount of time, and you're going to get X amount of fishing days, versus if NOAA puts into effect and closes everything down, and then you're going to get zero fishing days. In other words, one versus the other. I mean, here's your -- Here's your alternatives.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: John, in response to that, you know, just kind of knowing how things work and stuff, I think that the confidence in the science, that would tell us what an outcome would be, is low. You know, say if -- You know, if we don't if we don't harvest less gag grouper, from now until, you know, 2030, we're not going to have a fishery. I mean, you know, I don't know who is really believe that, you know, given the confidence level in the science, in the best available science we have, just from a perception standpoint.

You know, all of us, we sit around this room, and we question, you know, the methods of stock assessments, and we question it, you know, and so, I mean, yes, I think it's -- I think it's a great point, and a great idea, but, you know, you have to get people to buy into where the -- You know, where the this or that is coming from, you know, the root of it.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, well, but the point was just basically with the red snapper, which is one of the biggest issues there is right now, and either one thing is going to happen, or the other is going to happen, and that's the reality of it. It's not -- It's not if or maybe, but one or the other is going to happen, and, if people knew that, then there might be a little less flack about one versus the other, is all -- That was what I was getting at.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. Matt.

MR. MATTHEWS: I think -- I think you hit the nail on the head when you said that it needs to be less obtuse. You know, I think, at this point, a lot of people see this as we're doing this because, if we don't, bad things are going to happen to the fishery, and just trust us, you know, and it's -- So there's -- I think there's two sides to that.

One is you can't just say trust us, because bad things will happen to the fishery, and you actually have to provide more specific information, but then, also, it's the carrot side of it as well, and there's got to be -- There's got to be -- I think a lot of this is probably PTSD from red snapper maybe, but, when you tell us you're going to shut down a fishery, or you're going to heavily regulate a fishery,

we've got to have some sort of a light at the end of the tunnel, if we're going to trust you on it, because just trust us, and then, fifteen years later, we get to fish two days a year, and the wind blows both days, I think that's the problem that a lot of people are having, is trust in what's coming, and, you know what information is being given these days.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Matt.

MS. WIEGAND: So I'm curious, and so a lot of what you guys are talking about are very specific regulations, and one of the hopes for this was that it could be more forward-looking, and so keeping that in mind, that our goal with this was not to -- Especially given that we're likely to have fishermen from a variety of fisheries attend, the hope was not to talk about something specific, as specific as red snapper being a specific topic, or gag grouper being a specific topic, or king mackerel being a specific topic, but to try to incorporate everyone and get more of a sense of where fishermen would like to see their fishery move in the future.

Within that context, and maybe the feedback is that type of structure is likely to be ineffective, and that's important feedback for us to hear too, but, considering that forward-looking aspect as being one of the goals of this, is there a topic that you think fishermen would find valuable to discuss with council members in smaller groups, or do you think it has to be that specific, in order to drive any sort of attendance?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Matt, go ahead.

MR. MATTHEWS: I think, if we're going to be general about it, then the most effective topic to address is going to be how the fisheries management process works, because the people that I've talked to, who really understand what we're dealing with, you know, on a day-to-day basis, are the ones who've been to MREP, and got an education on how this process works, and I just don't know how you do that in a short period of time, and it's not a -- It's not a simple concept.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I guess -- Tony, you can go next, but I guess my kind of question would be is are you ready for that? Are you ready for a large group of people, with a large number of priorities, to sit down in a room and just go -- I mean, like that seems very challenging, to me, where you -- When you could move around, you know, our region and see on -- You know, see different smaller groups that way, and get their more, you know, focused problems addressed in the areas, rather than getting a larger group to just spitball, and that's what I would kind of be concerned about. Randy. I mean, Tony. Sorry.

MR. CONSTANT: In our area, I don't think you're going to get a group of fishermen together just to chat with you. You're going to have to have a carrot, and, you know, I mean, not necessarily give them anything, but at least a direction. I think it is going to be a struggle to get them there and just have a general conversation. I don't think they'll show.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Just talking about small groups, breaking down into small groups, I'm assuming that you would have somebody lead each small group discussion, or, otherwise, there's no way it would work.

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and the plan would be to have -- Depending on the number of people who would show up to this meeting, either one small group, two, or three, and each group would have a council member leading the discussion, with council staff available at each group to help facilitate.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack.

MR. COX: I don't think you're going to get much commercial turnout. I just don't see it happening. I know the guys, and, you know, I mean, unless you're going to take something from them, and they're upset about it, they -- You know, they need some fish, and they don't have no fish, and I just don't see much coming out of it from the commercial guys. to be honest with you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jack. Anybody else? David.

MR. MOSS: Yes, and, not to paint doom-and-gloom, but I think the turnout is going to be your biggest issue. Even by us, you know, if you -- I shouldn't laugh, but, even if you dangled the red snapper issue in front of people, you're not going to get anybody showing up, because it's just not an issue to us, right, and, going back to one of the things that you were asking about with trip satisfaction, it's so difficult to quantify it.

I think it's even difficult for the users to quantify. One of my best friends runs a party boat in Islamorada, and he says, all the time, he would much rather have a good afternoon session, rather than a good morning session, and it's an all-day boat, but he would much rather catch nothing in the morning, and then have them fire up at, you know, one or two in the afternoon, because everybody remembers that, and they go home and think that it's a great trip.

They could have caught the same amount of fish at 9:30, in the morning, and then nothing in the afternoon, but, if they finish crappy, that's how they're going to remember the trip, whereas, if they finish strong, and the morning started off crappy, they remember a good trip, and so it's so difficult to quantify trip satisfaction, in that respect, and I think -- I always take that as a good lesson, and I always say that, you know, even when I'm fishing with family and stuff. If they don't bite in the morning, that's okay, and let's get them in the afternoon, because it's more fun anyway.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I would like to acknowledge a Scott.

MR. BUFF: I just would like to say that the perception of most people that is in this fishery is that they're always tired of giving, and never getting anything back, and I think that's your biggest problem. Number one, they don't believe in the process, or the science that's put into the process, and you're just not going to have a whole lot of -- Just like Jack said with the commercial side, they're just tired of giving, and never getting anything back.

Just like the red snapper, and, where we're at, from fifty to a hundred foot of water, you can't get away from them, and, in my opinion, those fish have eaten a lot of the younger fish, and the eggs and the stuff, from the other fish, and so it's basically took over the fishery from fifty to a hundred foot of water.

Our guys don't catch them a lot, because our guys don't fish in less than a hundred foot of water, for the most part, and so I was just going back to what Jack said. You know, the perception of

every person that's in this fishery is they're tired of giving and never getting anything back. Thanks.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Scott. Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Well, thank you, guys, for that feedback. That's super valuable, and it will help us sort of maybe consider how we would like to reframe this session, and so we're going to take a little break, and then move into our third session, but I want to explain our third session before I let you guys take a quick ten-minute break, and so this next session is going to be a little bit longer, and it's going to be much more informal.

Again, one of the hopes of this is to try to find an environment where fishery participants are able to have these relaxed informal conversations with fishermen, or with council members, and so what we're going to do is we've got three different stations set up around the room. Over in that corner, I'm going to have Nick and Greyson. In that corner, we have the exploring management and getting involved table. That table is going to provide information on the fisheries management process, and how fishery participants can get involved, the way you all have gotten involved.

Over in that corner, by Kerry and Amy, you'll see the sign up there of, when they're not a keeper, how do released fish affect your fishery, and this will be talking about how releases affect science and management, as well as how they affect your fishery, and I'm sure that's something that will resonate to Snapper Grouper AP members.

Then, over in the back over there, by Allie and Chip, there is how to get more involved in fisheries science, and this is where you're going to want to go if you want to talk about citizen science, and what we're really going to be asking of the AP members today is to talk to people that will be stationed at those different stations about that topic, what you think we as council members and staff should be presenting and providing to people who attend these meetings, and what information you think they're going to want to provide to us, so we can be as prepared as possible. So go ahead take a ten-minute break, get a drink, get a snack, and then, for the next forty minutes, you guys are able to just sort of move between those different stations as you would like to have discussion.

(Whereupon, the AP participated in the Lines of Communication run-through activity, and the activity was not transcribed.)

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Thank you, guys, for participating in that sort of informal session. I am sure that everyone that was staffing each of the individual booths got some great information on how to share these different topics with the public, and so, before we wrap-up, I just want to talk about sort of a few more things.

First, post-meeting logistics, and so what will actually happen after a Lines meeting, and there's sort of two separate steps. First, immediately following, we'll send out thank you emails to anyone who attended, with a bullet-point list of some of the things that we learned, and then provide them information on upcoming council meetings and other opportunities for participation, AP recruitment, public comment, citizen science projects, et cetera.

Then, at the next council meeting, at the start of the meeting, council members that were at each of the Lines meetings will present their biggest takeaways, and the things that they learned from the effort, and that will be at the start of the meeting, to sort of set the tone for the remainder of the council meeting.

Additionally, more detailed information will be presented before each relevant committee, or topic, and so say we were at a meeting in the Florida Keys, and spiny lobster was a major topic that was talked about consistently throughout the meeting.

When the Spiny Lobster Committee meets, we would go into detail on what was learned at the Lines meeting before that committee begins discussing their agenda, and then, finally, staff will prepare sort of a summary report that will be provided in the briefing book as well as on the website.

We've talked a lot about how challenging it's likely going to be to get stakeholders into the room for these meetings, and so here are a couple of the things that staff is planning on doing to help encourage, or at least let people know that these meetings are happening, the first being the council website. We always have information on our outreach activities on the council website. The website will have background on why the council is conducting these meetings, the objectives, dates and locations, and all the summaries from the past meetings.

We will also send information out through our normal council platforms, flyers that we'll email to all of the tackle shops we work with to display. When staff is out in communities conducting outreach events, we will have flyers for them. We will also provide that information to all of our state partners, as well as the Atlantic States Commission will send out news releases. There will be feature articles, information included in the *South Atlantic Bite* that Kim does, and then, of course, all of our social media posts and stories.

In addition to all of that, we are really going to be relying on members of the community to help spread the word on these meetings. Like Dave was mentioning, it's key to have influencers, community leaders, whatever term you want to use, sharing this information, and so we will be relying heavily on our advisory panel members, you all, to help attend these meetings, share information about these meetings with members of your community, and not just this AP, but the Mackerel Cobia AP, the Dolphin Wahoo AP, all of our advisory panels.

We'll be relying on people that participate in the citizen science Release program, working with -
- If any of you attended the Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program, we'll be working with people that have completed that program. We're going to be reaching out to industry groups, be that CCA, CFA, ASA, and so on and so forth. Any industry group that's willing to share information on this event, we will happily provide information to them.

Saving Seafood, or any other mailing lists or media outlets that we're in contact with, including those that have already published information on our behalf in the past, specifically on our citizen science and best fishing practices programs, and so we're really trying to leverage the community of fishing, to help spread word on these meetings.

Here are the next steps. Like I said, we did this exact same practice run with the Mackerel Cobia AP yesterday, with you guys today, and we'll also be doing it with the Dolphin Wahoo AP in a

few weeks. We're working on sort of general meeting logistics, locations for the 2025 and 2026 meetings, and getting our website and outreach materials ready as soon as possible, so we can really hit the ground running with outreach.

We'll be finalizing the meeting structure, based on input we got from this AP, as well as all of the other APs, and then we'll be getting ready to hold meetings. The plan is to hold meetings in Georgia in November and then North Carolina in February. We're only able to do sort of two states at a given juncture, and so, this year, we're doing Georgia and North Carolina. The following year, we will do South Carolina and Florida.

With that, I just wanted to say thank you. I know this took up a whole afternoon of an advisory panel meeting, and you guys have a lot of important things to discuss, and so we as staff appreciate you taking the time to run through this with us, so that we can learn from your expertise on what might work, or might not work, and sort of have the best possible structure for Lines by the time we actually get to doing it with members of the public, and so, with that, if there's any other feedback you would like to provide about Lines, or about sort of the informal tabling session that you all just did, we are all ears.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Well, thank you very much Christina. That was a great presentation, and some great interactions, and I think it was a great trial run, to kind of see how that was going to play out. Hopefully there was some information that you were able to gather and learn from for the future approach. Does anybody have any further comments, questions, or concerns about what's going on? David.

MR. MOSS: Sorry, and a quick question, and you may have hit this, but I didn't catch it. How many -- In each state, I guess, how many meetings are you planning on doing?

MS. WIEGAND: So it depends on the state. We're going to work with council members from that state, as well as AP representatives from an individual state, to determine which communities need to be -- Where having a meeting of this type would be most valuable, and so some states may need more meetings, and some states may need fewer, depending. The max we can really do is four, and so a meeting Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night is sort of the max we can do, and so, for states like Florida, that usually means we're going somewhere in northern Florida, a couple in central Florida, and one in southern Florida, and so it depends on the state, and we would be working with members from that state to try to identify the best locations.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Christina. I know all the hard work that you and your team have put into standing this up and I think that it has a lot of potential, and so thank you guys so much for your hard work. If I can offer a little bit of constructive feedback.

MS. WIEGAND: Absolutely.

MS. STEPHENS: Something to keep in mind will be, you know, just from a logistics standpoint and your venue, the noise. I'm relatively young, and I had a difficult time hearing, and so, you know, are you smiling and nodding to be polite, or are you actually taking something away, and can you actually even hear, and something else I would be curious about, maybe kind of an indirect

question, or comment, towards the council members, is how do you guys feel about something like this?

You know, in real time, we're talking about, you know, issues that have been brought forth that, unfortunately, just aren't able to get addressed, given the current workload, and so, if we're opening up this open forum, with the goal to engage stakeholders and have their voices heard, is that just going to keep piling stuff on, and is it realistic to add another additional huge workload to an already very, very full schedule, and very, very full plate, and, if the answer is no, you know, could that potentially backfire and lead to more distrust in the process?

MS. WIEGAND: I will certainly let council members speak to how they're feeling about this process, but I think one of the things that I'm really taking out of this is going to be the importance of setting expectations on what can come out of this type of meeting, and what can't, and acknowledging exactly what you said, that the council has a huge workload of things to get through, and stuff has to be prioritized, and that's one of the things I know council members have really encouraged staff to make sure they can get out of this, is help from the public on how this huge list of issues should be prioritized.

They are certainly going to have to grapple with the priority of Hatteras, North Carolina might not be the priority of Key Largo, Florida, and so I don't want to sugarcoat how challenging it's going to be, and I do think that's something we will need to be upfront with, to make sure that these don't backfire.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so we were talking about it over here. I think that both the things are true. I think it's true that you're going to have these meetings, and I think that people are going to come with really high hopes, and really high expectations, and then, six months from now, they're going to be like, well, I brought my thing, and it was I want the South Atlantic Council to send wahoo to the moon, and they didn't do it, you know, whatever the thing is, and then they're going to be like, see, I should have never come to this meeting, and now I'm just even more ticked off with the process.

There might be something that is some piece of something that we could take, that could either go into an existing amendment that's underway, and it could be tacked on to something else, but I agree that, some brand-new thing out of nowhere, it's going to be hard to fit into the schedule, and I don't know really, you know, how to resolve these two differences.

One thing is that, once you start moving the more specific action through the council, and so don't think about just we're asking everybody to come in and just give us some ideas, but, once you start moving a more specific thing through the council, and you're asking for comment then, kind of like you all have been talking about, people know either I really like this, or I really hate this, and I want to come forward and talk about it, and so, I mean, that's one positive thing, because something is already moving, and it's already underway, and people feel more committed to either supporting it or disliking it, and so it's it is challenging.

I also want to bring up something that you said, you know, earlier in the process, Haley, and like, depending on what is on the table for the council at the time, like red snapper closures off of Florida, then you don't want to go to Florida like all of 2025, or maybe even the beginning of 2026, because people are just going to be so mad about that, and they can't have a conversation really

that is beneficial to the council, that's beneficial to the process. It's like you've got to get away from those things to have a productive conversation with people. I think that we're sitting over here saying we can see some benefit, but we can also see these negative interactions coming out of it in the long-term too, and we think both could be true.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Jessica.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you so much, and, yes, that insight is spot-on. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I had Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, when we first started this over here, you know, there are a ton of ideas that were coming out, and is there a way that you can, in your format, ask the council, sort of like they ask us, hey, you know, you want to spitball the ideas, which is great, but then they already have some things that they're working on that the public might need to know, and what they're working on -- What's most important to the shareholders, and the members, of the public for what they already have on their desk, and so is there -- You know, instead of this spitball everything, have a two-tier approach of, hey, this is what we've got on our plates, and what's most important to you, and, hey, what would you like to see, or what are your ideas, and this is the way it works.

MS. WIEGAND: So we have sort of that -- It's interesting to hear that. We've talked back and forth about different ways to do this exact activity, and so I would be curious. We ultimately, having discussions internally, went with this, but the other sort of two ideas that were on the table for discussion were doing something like this, but having specific categories pre-made, and so things that are already on the council's workplan, things that are not yet on the council's workplan, things that are sort of outside of the council's purview, like sharks for example. Then, as people were throwing up ideas, categorizing them that way.

The other idea was to also just have sort of the workplan, the council's workplan, listed in some sort of way that's more digestible than what we call sort of the spreadsheet of doom at council meetings, to list it and have people put stickies next to what they thought was most important, so that, by the end of the meeting, you could see, in Hatteras, North Carolina, sending wahoo to the moon is the most important issue to them, and so is either of those -- Do any of those sort of resonate as maybe something you feel like would be more productive, or more focused, for attendees?

MR. SEBASTIAN: So I think if you -- Yes, and I think, if you narrow it down somewhat, and give a little more guidance, that might -- That might get to something that can be done, and people can see where things are moving, or how things are happening, and like the amberjack, more catch and less size limit, and that was a good -- That was that was successful, and so, you know, they can see how things are working, and be more involved, if you give some kind of guidance, and, once again, I'm just a rum-dumb scuba diver and fisherman, and I don't know shit about this thing, but it might it might help being focused, and sometimes you have to put out there, hey, how important --

How important is a closure to you, or how important is it to see that, hey, we can keep some American red snapper, or whatever, you know, and then, that way, you can get feedback from the

public on what's really most important to them and what the council has in front of them that they're working on currently, in some form or fashion.

MS. WIEGAND: Do you think there's -- So when I talk about, you know, that the workplan, which has its joking nickname because it's got, you know, thirty things on it, and it's complicated, because it says something like, you know, Snapper Grouper Amendment 95, and that has, you know, ten actions in it, and do you think there's a way to simplify, or present that information, that's going to resonate with people that might not -- You know, I don't work on snapper grouper stuff every day, the way Mike does, and so sometimes I have to go look up what Snapper Grouper Amendment 95 is, and do you have suggestions on how we could present all of that information in a succinct way, because I do think what you're saying is valuable, having something for fishermen to say this is most important and this is the least important issue to be addressed right now.

MR. SEBASTIAN: So, again, I'll defer to I'm a rum-dumb fisherman and diver kind of guy, and so that's not for me to come up with. Somebody who is smarter than me can come up with easier terms, terminologies, to make it -- You know, to make it more receptive to the average person to be able to participate in it and get a focus on it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that. I've got David, and then you, John.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. A couple of things. Number one, I think that this is a great next step towards community engagement, and, similar to what Jessica was saying, you know, I think being calculated on when, where, and why you're speaking is going to be integral to this, and you're going to have to be prepared, and it's easy for me to say, because I'm not one of the council members who is going to be sort of a meat shield for fielding this stuff, but, you know, you're going to have to be prepared, but, at some point, take off the band-aid and further the community engagement. I mean, it's just going to have to happen, and, otherwise, it's just constantly kicking the can down the road, and it's never going to -- You know, you've got to start it somewhere, and that's number one.

The other thing that I would say, and this is kind of just somewhat of what Cameron was saying, is I think that this could be a great two-way street to inform, but also listen. You know, there's a saying that you don't know what you don't know, right, and so you don't know what's going to resonate in a community until you're there asking the questions, and you can go there expecting to talk about XYZ, whatever the case may be, but then the community engagement that you get is, well, no, we don't care at all about that, and we really are focused on these other issues that that are tantamount to us in our locale.

I think that, again, this could be a great both informative session and listening session as well, if structured the right way, I kind of like the fact that you can, and excuse the language, but throw a bunch of crap against the wall and see what's going to stick, because, again, when you show up to an area, even in South Florida -- If you go to West Palm, the issues there are going to be different than what's in Fort Lauderdale, and it's going to be different than what they're going to talk about in Miami, and that's, you know, thirty miles of Florida, and forget about up north and the Keys and everything.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, David. John.

MR. POLSTON: What my question is it, and, once again, I don't know if this is the correct way of asking it, but would it be easier for -- Let's say we're the AP, and, normally, every time we have meetings, we have questions up on the board of what the council questions they have of us, and they expect us to answer them the best way we can, and so would it -- Why not the council come to you guys, and let you know what they're looking for from the people, instead of trying to figure out what the people want, and what are they actually looking for, and what kind of input are they looking for from the people, and then you take that to your meetings and say, okay, we want to know your input on this.

That way, you're actually accomplishing something, because the council is looking for something. Otherwise, they wouldn't have you guys doing this stuff, and so why not find out what it is they want, like they do with us, and let the people answer to the best they can, and you know -- Then you don't have to have all this, as far as what can we do to get them to give us input, and they can give you the input on the questions that you ask them.

MS. WIEGAND: I will say that is how some of these topics were decided, and so we worked with council members, and so the first round you saw that we're doing is Georgia and North Carolina, and so we worked with council members from there, to say what would you like us to have for that topical discussion where we talked about trip satisfaction, as well as these topics around the room, and so how those were decided was based on what council members felt they wanted input on and wanted to provide input on for the public meeting.

Then the sticky wall here was designed to be a bit more of an interactive activity, and to get back to that prioritization of the workplan, with the heavy workload the council has, wanting -- The council wants input from members that attended this meeting on what their priorities are, what members of the public feel the council should be prioritizing, in terms of what they're working on, given the large amount of stuff that they have to work on.

MR. POLSTON: Thank you. I don't know, and it just seems like there's a lot there, because we all know what all the council is doing, and they've definitely got a full plate, and all the stuff that they're trying to do, and, obviously, the stock assessments aren't being done as fast as they would like to get them done, and they've got to prior to prioritize what they're trying to do with a stock assessment, which ones they want to do next or whatever, and now asking for more input, and, I mean, it just seems like trying to stuff fifty pounds of potatoes in a twenty-pound sack, but whatever. I mean, I don't know.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, John. Something that is kind of becoming a little bit more apparent to me is that the entire body of fishermen is almost like a child, and the child wants to do something, and forgive me for just making a complete analogy here, but this is kind of my formulation of things.

So the child wants to do something, and the child goes to his father and pitches, Dad, you know, I want to do this, that, and the other thing, you know, and, you know, Dad is a little bit more lenient, you know, and maybe wants to please a little bit more, and he says, you know, I'll think about it. The kid pitches it to his grandmother and grandfather, you know, and he's kind of got everybody onboard with like, hey, this is this is what I want, you know, and I'm gaining some traction, and then it goes to mom, and I feel like mom is overseeing the council even, and mom says, you know,

you might have fun if we can accomplish this, and really give you what you want, but we can't do that for you, because it was never done that way before, and I can't make any promises to you that I can't keep, and that we just have to try and find another way to ask the question, so maybe we can get approval.

I think the council feels a lot of what we feel in this room, and I feel like they share in a different type of frustration than then what we're feeling, and the governing body for them has their hands tied as well, and so, a lot of the times, we may not be even barking up the correct chain of command, and, to actually get things done, you kind of have to go outside of this, of these the rails of these proceedings here, and this is just becoming more and more clear to me as we sit in these rooms, and, you know, we have pretty well-thought-out arguments on a lot of different things.

There's a lot of supporting evidence, and yet we just don't -- We aren't dealing with the people that have the power to make the difference, and so what do we do? Really. I mean we are operating in the guidelines that are that are best suited for our range of knowledge, and we have a lot of good input, but what is it that we're really going to do? I think, by incorporating all of this, and asking the public what they want, I think it's really good things, but we just got to remember that, a lot of times, the answer is just going to be, no, we can't do it. Jack.

MR. COX: Where something could be beneficial is where fishermen could come along and, if they can -- If they could come together and say we see issues in the fishery, and we think this is some things we hate to see happen, that we can -- That we can maybe work on before we have a problem, like gags or red grouper or things that have happened in the fishery that we're paying a dear price on, and it takes forever to fix these problems, to me, this makes a whole lot more sense for fishermen to work with science to say --

Like, right now, personally I feel like we have an amberjack problem, but everybody feels like amberjacks is good to go. Well, you wait ten years from now and you see if I wasn't right. You remember this conversation, and it may not even be that long, but, when you see issues coming before you as fishermen, what can we do to mitigate that, before we get into a dire situation like red snapper, where it's a complete disaster. To me that's where something like this could work, and let's try to fix a problem before we get into the problem.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Certainly. Thanks, Jack. Matt.

MR. MATTHEWS: I think that ties right back into the need to come up some way to help people understand how that process works, because, you know, people don't understand just how much the council's hands are tied on certain things, and I think the recreational guys would probably be a whole lot more willing to pay for a permit, and report their catch, and would probably be -- That may eliminate some of that bias that you're concerned about, if they understand the benefits of doing that, and why we have to work within this framework that we've been provided by statute.

Again, and I think I already said it once today, and I might say it again tomorrow, but that's a big task, because MREP is a long program, and I don't know how you can truncate that, but I think you get more benefit out of feedback from the fishermen, and you get better participation from them if they understand that they can yell at the council members, and they can be mad at them all they want, but they're constrained by what the stock assessment says. I don't know how you do that, but --

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Matt, and, in the past, there have been independent, you know, researching -- You know, science studies, and stuff like that, from different sources, that have helped, you know, in catch levels. I think John, you know, has participated in, you know, in that with wreckfish, and, you know, maybe we have to pull some funds together and make something like that happen, you know, and it has to go item-by-item, species-by-species, and get everybody onboard with the best available science, and maybe that's -- Maybe that's where it has to change, is what is actually, you know, going to be best, and so, I mean, still, you know, we don't have scientists banging down our door wanting to do this stuff for free, you know, and it's going to be expensive, if that's -- You know, if that's what we choose to do. Did you want to add to that? No? Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman, and, just to add to the Lines conversation, and to piggyback on what you were saying about the kid, the family, I totally get that. Maybe a high-level overview, some type of graphic, to explain to participants that, hey, in zero to three, this is state waters, and three to twenty, or 200, is council, regional, and, you know, just so that they know that, hey, this is how it works, and this is how it's managed, because a lot of people don't even know that start.

MS. WIEGAND: I'm glad to hear you say that, because Allie Iberle behind you -- You can see her smiling, and she's working on exactly that graphic.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Just to dovetail what Haley said, I think it would be really helpful, and I think Myra pointed this out, right when we started the session in the afternoon, of pointing out, in these Lines of Communication sessions that you're going to have, of what is beyond the council's control, and what they do not manage, and so, very quickly, Myra reminded us that they don't control habitat or water quality, and they don't manage that, but habitat, estuarine habitat, affects some of our critters, such as gags, and we were rely on good estuarine water quality and seagrasses to produce gags for us, and so I think it would be really helpful, Christina, when you move forward in these meetings, that you remind the public of what you don't have control over.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's a good point, Paul. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Real quick, just to add to that, if we're talking about take-home materials, and I'm not sure if he's online, but I'm going to quote it, and you can shout it out if you know, but a good fisherman doesn't have to know all the answers. He just has nowhere to find them, or her, and so maybe some take-home materials, with approval, or permission, from, you know, those different agencies, or commissions, who do handle things like HMS, or that do handle water quality, and so, hey, we can't answer that for you necessarily, but this is where you can find that, if you're interested.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Haley. You know I can't help but also come -- Circling back to one of the things you mentioned earlier about a word cloud, you know, with a QR code, you know, and maybe all of these topics -- You know, when you get right down to it, all of the things on the agenda for like the council, you know, maybe -- Facebook posts and, you know, maybe like a comment, and, I mean, I know there are comment sections, but have a have a useful tool that can

take all of those comments and just pull it all together and pick the most talked about topics, and the words associated with those topics, and really get a pulse on what the people are feeling through that dataset. I mean, that's something possible, too. Anybody else? All right. Christina, you're finished, I guess?

MS. WIEGAND: That was all I had for you today.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: When I was on the council, and talking to fishermen and stuff, one of the biggest frustrations is -- I know there's no way to fix this, but I've just got to say it, is that it takes so long, the council process, to get things done and to move along. My god, we don't live long enough to get some of these things done. We talked about some of the stuff that we did back when we first started doing port meetings, and, I mean, that's been twelve years ago, and we still can't get them done, and fishermen are frustrated with that. I mean, there's no telling how many fishermen have died since we started this process.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Indeed. Mike, I guess I would kind of be looking to you. Are we able to finish today with what we wanted to start with tomorrow, or is that not a possibility?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: (Dr. Schmidtke's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. I guess that adjourns our meeting for today, everybody. I would like to encourage everybody to kind of continue the conversation, and maybe get to know each other a little better personally, what our stories are, and maybe hang out by the bar and drink, or don't drink, whatever, but, you know, let's figure each other out. We've got some new members here, that most of us really haven't gotten to meet and interact with too much, and I think that would be a good time to do that, and evening like tonight. Thank you, everybody, and you're dismissed for the day.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on April 2, 2025.)

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APRIL 3, 2025

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 N. Charleston, South Carolina, on Thursday, April 3, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman James Paskiewicz.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Good morning, everybody, and welcome to day two of two of our Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting. We're going to jump right back into where we kind of left off yesterday morning and invite Allie and Chip back to resume the gag grouper fisheries performance report.

MS. IBERLE: Yes, and so, before I launch back into the questions, I'm going to turn it over to Chip. I neglected to completely review that tool with you guys, and so I'm going to let Chip take over, because I think he'll probably do a better job than I.

DR. COLLIER: All right, and so, if you go to the tab, or the link, that's provided in -- Was it 6 for this one?

MS. IBERLE: Yes, and it's 6a.

DR. COLLIER: 6a, and there's a link for the previous fishery performance report, and then, if you look up top here, it's got three different tabs that you can go to, and just click on this tab that says "Snapper Grouper AP". This is where we provide the data for the ongoing advisory panel where we're trying to get information regarding a species.

What we like to do is provide some background information on the species. We start off with a page that's looking at the life history, and so we provide the age as well as the length of those fish at age, and these are just estimated length at age plots, based on the recent SEDAR assessments, and so let's take gag grouper here.

You can see, at age-four, it's about twenty-seven or twenty-eight inches, and then, if you go to up to age-eight, they're getting up to thirty-six or thirty-seven inches, and so growing pretty big in a fairly short amount of time, and then a lot of things that fishermen are interested in is the length-weight relationship, and so looking at how many pounds a twenty-inch fish weighs, and it's less than five pounds. Then you go out here, and, as they grow, you start to get some of this more rapid growth.

Then another piece of information that a lot of folks like is the maturity of the fish, and so you can look at twenty-five inches, and it's very low maturity, but, as you get up to thirty-five inches, you're getting closer to 100 percent female maturity of gag.

Going on to some of the other information that you all might find interesting, we do have indices of abundance that were used in the stock assessment, and I know these two -- It's because it's different timelines here, and it may be a little bit difficult to see if these two are comparing to each other, and so you can actually limit the timeline to 2012, when both of them had started, and you can see the pattern in the headboat data, and so looking at the catch per unit for anglers on headboats, and then catch per unit for the video survey, the fishery-independent video survey. The two correlate fairly well, where you're looking at the decline from 2012 to 2016, and then staying at a fairly low level.

Yearly landings, we'll start off -- We can look at commercial to start off with. Don't worry about the scale here. I generally just do a whatever numbers come out, and I know it's hard to read over there, and it's around 40,000 pounds is what we're looking at, and you can see declining commercial landings. You can see which state has the landings over time, and then we also have the number of releases. This number here is the number of releases from the last stock assessment. We don't have it for the entire time series. I haven't updated with the more recent values yet.

You can click over and look at recreational data, if that's what interests you. We have the same time series. You can look at which state is catching the most, and then you can look at the number of recreational releases as well. If you want to know what month the fish are being caught, as expected, very low catches in January through April, and then a big spike when the season opens, and that makes sense, and then it decreases in the fall and begins to increase again towards the winter, and that's going to be the same for commercial.

Revenue, right now, we just have it for commercial, where we're looking at the ex-vessel value and then the price per pound for gag. These are adjusted to 2023 values, and so, as you're looking back in time, it is a comparable value to look over. Like I said, there's no values for recreational, but we do have economic impacts for the recreational sector, and I'm looking at the last five years. These typically follow the pounds landed fairly well, and so, if you're seeing changes in pounds landed, or trips landing gag, that's going to follow this almost identical, and we have that for commercial as well, if that interests you.

That is just background data that we provide you all. I know sometimes it's difficult, when you get to a meeting like this, to know everything that's going on with the fish, and so, if you have questions, or if you want additional information in these tools that will help your discussions, please let me know, and we can add it in there. It's not a big deal. If you're curious, you know, what do we have for past information, we have the data for all the species that we've done in the past.

You can click on the data for past reports, and, if you want to look at other species, such as king mackerel, they're in there as well, and so we don't just focus on snapper grouper when we're doing the data for past reports, and, as Allie mentioned, we do have all other species, all the fishery performance reports that have been done. You can see there was one in 2017 for black sea bass, and one for 2022, and so we just identify them by year if the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel has done it more than once, and so, with that, any questions for me, or I'll just turn it right over to Allie. Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: I was an observer with the SEDAR 71, when the results were coming up, and, in 2014, we knew that gags were in bad shape, and overfishing was occurring, and why have we waited twelve years to get on this and get so far behind the eight-ball? That's a bad question, I'm sure, but we knew we had problems, so many years ago with this fishery, and then it seems like -- Why didn't we start working on it and rectify some of these problems until we got so far down the way here? I know that's a bad question to ask you, and it puts you on the spot, but --

DR. COLLIER: I'll put you right back on the spot. You were on the council.

MR. COX: Yes, and let's do it. I was sitting beside Anna, too, and so we were going back and forth. We had a lot of discussion about, you know, what we thought we should do commercially, and recreational, to try to curb some of the problems before we got so far into it, but, no, and, I mean, you know, it's just like I was fresh on the council then too, and so I didn't say a whole lot, you know, looking at this, but, now that I know a little bit more about it, that's why I ask the question now, because we were having problems, and we knew so many years --

That's the frustration with the process, you know, and everybody has to take these cuts, and, you know, it's just -- It's kind of like what I was talking about yesterday with the Lines of

Communication with science, if we could do things before we got like this, when we knew we were having problems, and not wait so long, and now everybody is getting punished, and a lot of the commercial guys are losing their jobs, you know, because they need at least 500 pounds of gags to make a trip. Anyway, that's just my two-cents' worth out of it.

DR. COLLIER: I'll give you a more -- Not as sarcastic of an answer, and so if you're looking -- I mean, one of the challenges that has come up with ACL-based management is, when you're not reaching the ACLs, that's deemed a good thing, but, if you're not reaching the ACL, that's a bad thing, when it comes down to it.

It means the fish aren't out there, and the fishermen aren't catching it, and so, if you're getting to 50 percent of the ACL, and it used to be caught every year, that should be one of the biggest red flags out there. That's indicating that the resource isn't there, because it's not likely that the fishermen have stopped going, or have forgotten how to catch that fish, and so -- That's around 2012 is when, you know, people stopped reaching the ACL for gag grouper, I think, and I would have to go to it, and so, yes, it is a big concern.

AP MEMBER: Just one real quick comment. I agree with everything you just said, except for the part that if you're not always catching ACL that it means the fish aren't there anymore. These last two or three years we've had has been some of the worst weather I've ever seen ever before, and that's a definite big factor in being able to catch fish, is weather, is being able to get out there after them, and so, I mean, yes, I get the point about not catching them, but sometimes it may take you longer to catch them. Sure, and, if they're not there, they're not there, but I'm just saying weather is a big factor, and it has been the last two or three years.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Chip, I would agree, you know, with you on that general statement, you know, but some of the other things, the other factors that are in play here, like working waterfront going away and commercial pressure, has really decreased because of that. A lot of trips have not been made, and people are out of business and all that, you know, and so it's a combination of a lot of different things, why ACLs aren't being met, at least in the commercial sector. Chris.

MR. KIMREY: There's something that we talk about as fishermen a lot, but you know, there's these natural cycles that nobody truly understands until they happen, or have passed, and we had that scenario this past year for our grouper season. I mean, you can ask Jack, or any of these other guys from that area, and, you know, we had our little short forty-five-day window. The fall prior to, when it was closed down, we had a really good showing of gags in some of that area that Jack talked about the other day, and other places, I mean, but we couldn't fish for them, and so we tried to stay away from them.

Well, just a matter of a few months later, six months later, when they finally give us our few days to fish, and all winter long we had this huge cold slag of water sitting off our coast and you had to run slam to the edge of the shelf to catch a grouper, whereas, typically I can ride twelve or fifteen, and not thirty-five, and, during the course of that forty-five days, the grouper fishing was really poor, and then grouper season was closed, and then the grouper started showing up, and we couldn't fish for them, and that's going to reflect in these numbers right here, and it's going to make it look like that abundance is low, when it's not.

It wasn't necessarily because of the weather during the season, and it was because of what happened before, where those fish had staged up, and where most of us try to access those fish was outside of that boundary. Most of the charters I do are going to be inside of twenty-five miles. Most times, I'm not going to ride further to catch two groupers for a boatload of anglers. You know what I mean? That's going to show up in these numbers in a couple of years, I guarantee you, because there was way less fish caught the month of May last year off our coast than typical.

That had nothing -- In my opinion, it had nothing to do with abundance, because we saw so many months before that, and, during the time we were allowed to catch them, we weren't able to catch them, and it's going to show up and make it look like that abundance is even lower, when I don't necessarily know that's the case.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Chris. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: One of the things also that really heavily impacted is the collapse of the red grouper, because that was the bread and butter for our fleets. I mean, you would go out there and catch three, four, five boxes of red grouper, and you wouldn't have to stop inshore to try to catch a few gags, and, with that gone, that put a lot more pressure on them.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Randy. Jack.

MR. COX: We've definitely seen a size change over the last twenty years. I mean, what used to be an average-sized grouper was twelve or fourteen pounds, and now it's an eight or ten-pound fish, and you don't see the abundance of those big fish that we used to see a lot. Very rarely do you catch an eighteen to twenty-five-pound gag in that shallow water that we used to fish in, but the rebuilding schedule is nine to eleven years, as we stand, right, on this?

MS. IBERLE: It's a ten-year rebuilding plan ending in 2032.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So that was a ten-year plan ending in 2032.

MR. COX: So what percent increase are we looking at per year when the rebuilding started? Do you know, on commercial?

DR. COLLIER: Allie has all this stuff memorized, I think.

MR. COX: I mean, there was a percentage every year that we got increased.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and so it's going to increase for a couple of years, and then it's going to level out, because of the projections, but I'll let Allie speak to that.

MS. IBERLE: So the catch levels right now, and I'm looking at the sectors separated out, and so, this year, you're at a-hundred-and-seventy-and-change-thousand for the commercial sector, and right about the same for the rec sector, and so those are going to increase each year until 2032, and so that last year of the rebuilding plan, where they're going to stay stable at four-hundred-and-seventy-one-thousand-and-change for the commercial, and four-hundred-and-seventy-six-thousand-and change for the recreational, and so they'll stay there until modified in 2032.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Looking around the room, I don't see any more hands. Andy, go ahead.

MR. FISH: Is there a plan to increase the trip limit as the poundage goes up, so we can meet the limit? Is that part of the rebuilding process?

MS. IBERLE: So the trip limit was reduced in Amendment 53, but it's just staying at -- I believe it's -- Sorry, and let me look here, but 300 pounds, but that's not -- They didn't build in, in that action, to have the trip limit step up. That's something that the council, I guess, could do, but it's not part of the rebuilding plan.

MR. COX: (Mr. Cox's comment is not audible on the recording.)

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and they would potentially stay the same, but remember, we have a stock assessment coming up in 2026, and so values will be coming out of that in 2027, and management can change in response, if the population is showing the dramatic increase that was projected in the stock assessment.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so where we left off yesterday, as far as the questions that we have for the rest of the fishery performance report, and we were still in the social and economic influences section, and so, again, some of this we talked about, but feel free to touch on anything again.

We're still recording everything, and we'll organize it later, and so, launching right back in, have changes in infrastructure, docks, marinas, fish houses affected fishing opportunities for gag, and you guys have talked about that kind of in general. Obviously, it's applicable for gag, but feel free to touch on it again. Then how have fishermen and communities adapted to changes in the gag fishery?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Andy, go ahead.

MR. FISH: I know, as far as infrastructure, my place in North Carolina is up for sale, my fish house. When that gets sold to the eighty-year-old-pissed-off man that owns the place, I don't know what I'm going to do. I mean, as far as fishermen and the communities and adapting to changes in the gag fishery, it's -- With it being such a short season, we're having to go -- We're seeing a lot more boats, or I'm seeing a lot more boats in my area, when -- As soon as gag was closed, there was -- I saw six spearfishing boats in the same five-mile swath of where the hogfish and scamps are more predominant, and that's one of the things I noticed.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Andy. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: It's they shifted to triggers and beeliners, and so grouper is more of a bycatch right now.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Allie and Chip, for all this information. I, you know, feel like this is a little bit of a loaded question, because it kind of just sings to the tune of what we've been saying in the big picture thing all week with the snapper grouper fishery. Yes,

there is a continued decrease in working waterfront access, and I don't think that fishermen are adapting. I think that they're just -- They can't do it. They're leaving, and they're not -- They don't have that fishery.

As far as the seasons go, I kind of touched on it yesterday, because we utilize VESL, and we have -- You know, we can go back and look on our reports. It's not easy to do, and you can do it day by day, but, again, from May 1 through June 15, we harvested -- The most out of a five-year time in that forty-five days was eight gags, and then you look at what it used to -- What the longer season used to be, and, just out of curiosity, from June 15 through the end of the summer, you see many more landings, you know, thirty or forty in that timeframe, and so I know that it's unique to each region. That is what we're seeing out the scope of northeast Florida for the charter-headboat.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. I've got Chris Conklin and then Scott online.

MR. CONKLIN: So we've had a huge loss of working waterfront. I don't know that that's affected the fishing opportunities for gag grouper. The management measures have affected the opportunity, and I don't want to say -- Like we haven't been able to adapt. I've had to sell like my bigger trip boats that go out and, you know, would land, you know, larger quantities of gag.

My smaller boats, I mean, they're able to make shorter trips and easily get they can easily usually get the 300 pounds, I guess. We didn't have very long to look at that last year, and then, as far as like on the dealer side, or as far as a wholesaler, I've been having to buy a lot more fish out of the Gulf of America and from Mexico. I've been having to sell a lot of imports to, you know, keep feeding my family, which sucks.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chris. Scott.

MR. BUFF: I guess I just want to reiterate what Chris just said. He basically said what I said, and I'm putting my place up for sale as well, and I don't have the answer, but this industry is just -- I call it a dying breed, and a lot of these bigger boats are having to go to smaller boats, which, you know, the fish we've got is what we've got. Nobody can sit here and argue that there isn't a problem with what we're doing, but I've been in this business since 1998, and this is the worst year that we have had that I can remember. Not only with the weather, but the fishing just in general, but I don't know what we're going to do for the future.

It's like Chris said, and, I mean, we're buying fish all the time from the Gulf, you know, just to keep the doors open in the retail market, and we've even contemplated just shutting the doors, and just closing it up, and I literally have three boats sitting at the dock that we don't have captains for, because there's no younger people that are going to get into this, because there's no future in it.

The younger people that are getting into it are running center consoles, and making short trips, but, here again, I don't know what the fix is. We all got here together, and I guess we'll have to figure out how to get out of it together, but, at the end of the day, our industry is dying, and I don't know how to fix it. I'm just -- I'm kind of like Chris said. I'm just -- I'm tired of fighting and struggling and taking money out of savings every year just to keep the doors open.

Also, too, Kerry helped me a few years back, and we were able to buy her property, and there's -- When you go to try to buy these properties, to keep them for what they are, and, of course, the

business models don't make sense, and so you're not going to get money from the bank, but there's no programs to help with that.

I think that's one big thing that the South Atlantic is missing, and I don't know how we get it, but you see all the time, for the stuff on the Pacific side, and Boston, all up in there, there's programs for the waterfront, and there's no sort of programs. Even when I bought my building, we were paying 8 percent interest on a half-a-million-dollar loan, because that's the only place we could get the money.

You know, fortunately, we paid that loan off, but, at the end of the day, none of this makes sense anymore, and I don't -- Other than dealing with imports, and it's kind of like Chris said, and our retail market is awesome, but the rest of it is just terrible, and I don't know how you fix it, and so, anyway, I know that probably wasn't the right place to put that, but I just think it's something that we need to work on, or all of our waterfront's going to be gone, because why do you want to have a building on the waterway that's worth \$500,000 or \$700,000 or \$800,000, and you can't even pay your bills, and you can sell it to Jimmy Joe, and he can put some condos there, and you go home and sit on the couch, and so, anyway, that's what I got. Thanks.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Scott. I appreciate your insights. I did want to give the floor back to Chris.

MR. CONKLIN: Just for the record, you know, working waterfront fish houses, the only way they make a living, or did make a living, was on volume, pounds of product coming across the dock, and, as I mentioned yesterday, you know, these troops are getting cut, cut, cut, cut and so, you know, years ago, I've operated on, you know, fifty-cents a pound was like a packing fee, and then I had to go to a dollar, and now I'm, you know, in excess of that, and there's still not enough pounds coming across.

I used to pack, you know, 25,000 or 30,000 pounds a week, and now I may pack that in one year, and, if you close up -- If all these places close, you know, that's not enough. I mean, I don't know if it's like this facade that everyone thinks that all the boats can just move on down, you know, a hundred miles down the road to the next fish house, and they'll all get the volume, because it's just not worth somebody traveling to do all that.

I mean, there's just no money in it. Like Scott said, the business model is gone. It makes zero sense. Working waterfront is a thing of the past, and the places I've been able to be in in the past few years have been a privilege, and, you know, fishermen -- They don't really behave very well, and we've lost several of those privileges on top of that, and so fish houses and docks used to be a safe haven for the radical dudes, but not anymore.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Chris. I wanted to you before Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so Little River had a fish house as far back as I can remember, and it went out of business like three or four years ago, and so what we saw then was they had seven vessels that they operated out of there, and, when they went out of business, then we saw an increase of fish that we were catching, because all seven of those boats were gone now, and they would, of course, fish closer and stuff like that.

Now, since that time has gone on, and the grouper limit now is like -- For the grays, we're having to go -- Where we used to go run a Gulf Stream trip thirty-five to forty-five miles out, and be productive, and do well, since the limit, now we're going fifty or fifty-five miles, and so then, that way, we're getting into more scamps.

We're trying to get away from the grays, because we have more opportunity to catch some scamp out in the deeper water, and so it's added, you know, whatever, like 25 percent more fuel cost to every trip we run out with the Gulf Stream, basically, but that's what we have to do, because, if our customers -- If we say, hey, you can only keep two, on a boat of a hundred or whatever, then they'll just stop coming, and we've seen a big drop recently in the gag fishery.

May 1, that first month of May, was like every Gulf Stream trip sold out, and that was seed money for our season. I mean, we had to get that cash, because we just spent \$400,000 or \$500,000 in repairs in the last months before that, and so that was the seed money to get caught up, to get through the season, and so the business model is -- We've seen that drop like 25 or 35 percent in the last four years, as far as the Gulf Stream guys going out in May and that big influx of cash. What we really need to sustain operations is not what it used to be.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks for the input, Cameron. Anybody else? Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. Yes, and I just want to echo what Cameron Sebastian said, and, also, the difficulties with the shortened season. It is moving towards that model of a derby-style fishery, which, as many of us know, is very challenging and difficult, and we kind of touched on it yesterday.

You know, these fish do live in an isolated habitat, right? They love to be up under the ledge, and there's only so many ledges and places that they live, and so, come May 1, with this new derby-style sort of season, it's really difficult, without something like Spot-Lock, and we use the anchor on the headboat, to go out and compete with, you know, not only all these newly-entered six pack for-hire boats, but also the general recreational.

As we've seen the effort in the universe increase in the private charter, private rec, it's very difficult to compete with, and so maybe, you know, we can look at different season start dates for different sectors. Maybe you need to have the first step of separating those sectors. I think that spreading it out would ultimately benefit the fishery, and benefit the fishermen, because it's not fair to the commercial to go out and have to compete with charter boats. It's not fair for headboats to go out and compete with the private rec, and so I think that spreading it out would maybe alleviate some of the pressure and try to make do with what little that we're working with.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. I think it's back to you, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and, before I move on to the season closure, and I did want to note that the last action for gag didn't modify the season, and so what happened there was the ACL was reduced, and, when that action was implemented, it was implemented within the open season, and so everyone was fishing on that higher ACL, and then the action was put in place mid-season.

We were asking questions as far as the accountability measures go, and, since that action was implemented mid-season, would that be triggering the accountability measure, and we were

ultimately told yes, and so the shortened seasons are a result of the accountability measure, and so, if the ACL isn't met, then we could go back to that full May through December accountability measure, and I wrote that down, so I could make sure I said it correctly.

The rec accountability measure, there is an in-season closure, and then the post-season closure is only reliant on the rec sector meeting the recreational ACL. When that happens, then the season is reduced, and then, for the commercial, it's slightly different.

They also have an in-season closure, and then, the post-season AM, there is three triggers. The total ACL has to be reached, the commercial ACL needs to be reached, and the stock needs to be overfished. If all three of those triggers are met, then the ACL is reduced, and so a little bit different than the commercial sector, and there could be the opportunity for that season length to increase as we kind of -- I don't want to say adjust to the new ACL, but as fishing, and I guess I don't have a better word for it, but adjusts to that new ACL.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Allie, and I totally understand all of that. Given the slow-moving process that we're working with, if we talk about it now, maybe it will make a difference in ten years.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so that brings us to fitting management measures, and so this is a really broad question. I know we've talked about management measures kind of throughout this entire process, but are there new management measures that the council should consider? Are there existing management measures, anything that you can think of that should be changed, and then are the current allocations appropriate for each sector?

I wanted to touch on the allocations a little bit, because these -- The council kind of pioneered a new allocation technique with gag. We were originally calling it the share-the-pain-share-the-gain, but it kind of shifted to the split reduction method, and so what that did was it took that initial reduction, to get from where we were to that reduced number, and it reduced each sector proportional to what that sector had been landing, and the council looked a three-year time period and a five-year time period.

They ultimately went with the five-year, and so they reduced each sector proportional to what they had been catching, and then, each year, we talked about -- With Jack, we talked about how that ACL was stepping up. Each year that that ACL increased, that total increase, and so say it was an 80,000-pound increase from 2025 to 2026, and that would just be cut in half and equally spread between the sectors, and so each sector would get a 40,000, and I'm just making up arbitrary numbers at this point, but like a 40,000-pound increase on their sector ACL.

What that kind of did -- We usually think of allocations as a percentage. What that did was it changed the percentage slightly each year. Instead of setting the percentage, you were kind of more allocating on a poundage increase, and then the percentage would fall out of that.

The way that it worked with gag was that it shifted a couple years, and so, in 2025, it's a 49 commercial and 51 recreational split, and then, by 2027, it will be 50-50, and it will stay 50-50. That's just how the numbers worked out, but I wanted to kind of reiterate that allocation method, since it was a little more complicated than just kind of setting a percentage based on landings, like the council has typically been doing, and so with that, I'll turn it over to you guys.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Allie. I'm looking around the room for hands, comments, questions. Andy, go ahead.

MR. FISH: As far as the management measures, kind of like -- When you say 50-50, and you talk about commercial and recreational, is it true that, on the red snapper, and I have to say I apologize, but that the commercial red snapper quota got reduced this last year to give the recreational another additional day of fishing? Was quota taken away from the commercial to give the recreational days? I'm just curious, and, if you're asking for this 50-50, or it's going to this 50-50 quota, and is that something that actually happened, and I apologize.

MS. IBERLE: No, and you're good. So, for gag specifically, before Amendment 53, I believe that the sector allocations were really close to 50-50. It was like -- I think it might've been 49-51, and so they were already really close to -- So, in thinking about that total ACL, right, your whole pie, it was splitting it pretty evenly between the commercial and the recreational sector.

Then, when we implemented this new allocation method, it kind of -- It fluctuated a little bit, based on each sector's landings, but it didn't drastically change, and it kind of evened out at the -- It will even out at the end of the rebuilding plan. As far as red snapper goes, I might need to look to -- Perfect. Here comes Chip, because he'll speak better on that.

DR. COLLIER: I'm not aware of them taking landings, or ACL, away from the commercial sector in order to get an extra day for the recreational sector, for this upcoming year or last year.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So, when we're talking about this, I can't help but think, if we're setting a precedent moving forward for other species, yes, gag grouper is nearly 50-50, as it stands, and, when things get extrapolated out, the reallocation was not something that we discussed or voted on. You know, if we go into a species that isn't exactly 50-50, and we have to take these reduction measures, because it happened with gag grouper, is this something that's just going to be the norm, and we don't have a say in how this gets reallocated between the sectors?

MS. IBERLE: As far as the council adjusting allocation, so, when the council received the catch levels for the most recent stock assessment, gag was still -- The rec landings were still being tracked in CHTS units, and so that new ABC recommendation switched over to incorporate the MRIP-FES numbers, and so, when they implemented that catch level, they needed to revisit allocations, to make sure that the allocations incorporated those new FES numbers.

I will say, if the council does decide to modify the allocations in the future, that will be brought to you as part of, you know, when we review the whole amendment, and I encourage the AP to provide feedback on that, as far as the methods of allocating go. I'm sure the council -- I can't speak for the council, but I'm sure that they would appreciate your feedback on how that breakdown goes, and I know they've used kind of different methods, you know, in the past, based on each sector's landings, but any suggestions I'm sure would be welcome.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Allie. Jack, I think I saw your hand.

MR. COX: Yes, and, you know, I want to go back to the ACL we were talking about on the commercial side a minute before. It seems like it would make a lot of sense, because we fish some

deep water, if we had a step-down as we get closer to the end of our ACL. When we have a 300-pound trip limit, and we're fishing forty or fifty fathoms, and we interact with some of these animals, bycatch is important to keep, and so, if we have a 300-pound trip limit, and we backed it off, at say 20 percent of our ACL left, down to a hundred or so, to me, it would make a lot of sense to stretch it out, speaking in reference to the commercial guys, and a lot of the retail shops could - A little bit of fish goes a long way, and so, you know, that's what it takes to make our fishery work now, if we have a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and, to me, it would make a whole lot of sense with the commercial sector, and it's something that I think the council should maybe reconsider, to keep some of our guys in business.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Jack. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: I'm going to second what he said, and I keep saying it all the time. I think we should always have a bycatch allowance on fish, year-round, just big fish like that that you're going to catch from time to time.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Randy, and I can't -- As I was looking at the charts for sexual maturity in gag grouper, you know, that kind of thirty-five and thirty-six-inch range for female maturity is 90, or 90-plus, percent, or somewhere in that range, and I can't help but thinking about what Stephen said about slot limit has worked really well for the redfish, and I don't know how feasible it would be to apply something like that to this species, you know, with release mortality and all of that, but, I mean, looking at those charts, you know, there seems to be some scientific evidence there that those larger females should probably live. Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: On the commercial, how much ACL -- When you have to project so far out, when you have these high trip limits, and you're trying to project out when the season is going to end, and how much ACL on the commercial for gag was left on the table last year? Do you know?

MS. IBERLE: So the landings are still preliminary, but, in 2024, they got to 99.4 percent, and it was closed on June 30. Did you want me to go back a couple of years too?

MR. COX: What would that equvalate to in pounds?

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

MR. COX: Okay. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Any other questions or comments on management measures? I don't see any. John.

MR. POLSTON: James, what were you talking about when you were talking about a slot limit on the gags? Were you saying to allow the larger fish to go, or they have to be a certain size to keep? Which way were you going with that?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I was thinking that over a thirty-six-inch fish probably should be let go, and the minimum size limit can probably stay the same, just, you know, based on the sexual maturity of the females, you know, being so high at that size range.

MR. POLSTON: The reason I asked is because, when we did that, the opposite with the red snapper, to me, I think that was probably one of the best things the council actually ever did. When they raised the size limit to the twenty-inch, my commercial guys, they fussed and bitched for years, you know, and they're never going to get that size, but, once they did, I mean, they were there with a vengeance, the snappers were, and I think that's what got us where we're at with how many snapper we've got, even though the science says different, and we see, you know, there's plenty of snapper out there, and so would it be better to let the smaller ones go, and, you know, take the bigger ones, as far as reproduction is concerned, and I don't know the science on it, but just a question.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Well, I mean, in my experience with yellowtail snapper, it's the same thing. When they implemented the twelve-inch size limit on that species, it was a wonderful thing, you know, and so I think it's -- You know, when you look at other species that have slot limits, it seems to work for them as well, you know, and we've already made that move to let the small ones live. You know what I mean? I just can't help but, you know, looking at the chart, and looking at other species that have success stories, you know, making that assumption that it might be something worth looking at. That's all.

MS. IBERLE: I just want to confirm, for my notes, and so, when you were thinking about a slot, that slot would be from twenty-four, which is the current minimum, to thirty-six, and so thirty-six would be that cap that you're --

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, and that's what it looked like, based on the chart I was looking at, yes.

MS. IBERLE: Then, John, if you were thinking about like a maximum size, you would be kind of thinking thirty-six inches? I just want to confirm what you were thinking.

MR. POLSTON: No, and I wasn't really debating the size as much as the difference between letting smaller fish go for maturity and reproduction, versus, you know, letting the bigger ones go, whichever way it would work out the best. I just know it worked out good with the snapper, when they did the twenty-inch thing, and I saw the results of that, but that's two different species of fish, and so I don't really know.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: You know, when it comes right down to it, it kind of would be really difficult to do. I mean, you know, looking around the room, I see different harvest methods. You know, hook-and-line, you may be able to have, you know, some success releasing that fish, but how could somebody under the water, that's going to spear that fish, know that it's thirty-six-and-a-half-inches, you know, and that fish is going to die anyway, because it's shot, and so, I mean, you know, it would be kind of tough to impose a slot limit on that. I've been seeing some hands. I've got, I think, Andy, then Randy, then Paul, or then Tony, then Paul. Sorry.

MR. FISH: I would just be worried that -- I think, in general, the biggest fish are caught in the deeper waters, and I would be -- Obviously, hook-and-line, those fish are going to have a less percentage chance of making it, and that's my input on that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Certainly. Thanks. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and, you know, I was thinking along those lines too, James, and I didn't say anything. I like the way you're thinking. I think that it would be worth putting that in front of some scientists, to see about barotrauma on the bigger -- But, like Andrew is saying, the deeper you go, the bigger your fish, but, you know, this scenario would not work for red snapper, because they're not a good, releasable fish, but grouper are. Grouper are pretty tough, and they might be able to be released, and, you know, if you had a twenty-four to thirty-six-inch slot, that's doable, and you might have to make a provision for a spearfisherman for a half fish, and I don't know if you could or not, but those are things that have to get worked through.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. Paul, and then Chip, or do you want to go first, Chip? Go ahead, Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: It's probably conversation for another day, and this is pretty extensive, as far as gag biology, but, if I'm not mistaken, these fish are protogynous hermaphrodites, and so they're transitioning from female to male at larger sizes, and so just something to consider. You know, if we're protecting those slot size fish, what's the percentage of male versus females as you step up towards that thirty-six-inch, and so it's something to consider, but a pretty big topic.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: No, and that's an excellent point. Go ahead, Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Just to build on what Paul said there, you know, the bigger fish are the males, and then, at lower population sizes, it seems like there's a very low proportion male, and so maybe a lost limit is a good thing, but, like Tony said, you know, barotrauma does get worse as these fish get to deeper water. The black bellies are generally in deeper water.

There is a relationship that was developed on some research that Jack McGovern did, back in either the late 1990s or early 2000s, indicating that there is definitely a pretty significant increase in gag mortality with depth, and, if you look at the difference between release mortality for gag grouper included in the stock assessment, one of the reasons that's cited is that depth difference between a recreational fishery and a commercial fishery. The recreational fishery has a 25 percent discard mortality that's associated with it, whereas the commercial is up at 40 percent, and that's based on the depth of the fisheries.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks for the input, Chip. I've got Jeff and then Jack.

MR. MARINKO: Yes, and I just wanted to say that's very area specific with the size fish. I mean, we have twenty -- I don't measure fish when they're big, bigger, and you know it's thirty inches, or forty inches, and we don't measure them, and so I can't say what thirty-six looks like, but I can tell you that we've shot many twenty-pound black bellies, mature fish, in North Carolina, whereas it might be a fifty-pound fish in north Florida to be a black belly, and so it does change, and I guess that's just what I wanted to say.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jeff, do you got those fish?

MR. MARINKO: Yes, we've got them.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: How many of those big ones are males?

MR. MARINKO: I don't know.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. It was worth a shot.

AP MEMBER: The black belly is the male.

MR. MARINKO: Most of them.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. I don't have a lot of experience with the gags, and so Jack.

MR. COX: Anyway, back to what Chip was saying about the study that was done in the 1990s on these fish, and the mortality and so forth, I mean, a lot of that was -- That information -- We weren't using the barotrauma tools and the venting, and, you know, that was kind of back in the day, when we would take a knife and stick it in his stomach that was sticking out is his mouth, and release the fish, and we didn't really know exactly how to do it until we started getting those tools, you know, and knowing where to vent a fish and those things, and so it would be interesting to see what that data would look like now if we used that equipment.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's a great point, Jack. I don't see any more hands up, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right. This is the last section, and so we just want to touch on environmental, ecological, and habitat, and so, again, we've talked -- We've covered some of this in discussion, as we've kind of gone through this, but do you perceive that the abundance of gag has changed over the past ten years, and then when and where are the fish available? Has this changed? For instance, has there been any shift in catch annually, seasonally, inshore, offshore, north, or south, and I know you guys have touched on this a little bit, but, if you have anything else, I would be happy to jot it down.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm not seeing any hands.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Okay. Has the size of fish that you typically encounter changed, and then, if so, could you please describe that trend? Have you noticed any unique effects of environmental conditions on gags, and then, if so, please describe. What are your observations on the timing and length of spawning in your area?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Andy, has turbidity in the water been an issue for diving to harvest gags?

MR. FISH: In Cape Canaveral, our water quality has drastically changed in the last ten to twelve years.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So that's an environmental?

MR. FISH: I would say absolutely. We don't know what it is. A lot of theories that it's the Lake Okeechobee discharge, and we could point it at several things. A lot of guys say it's the cruise ships. I think Lake Okeechobee is the big one.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Thank you. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Randy McKinley. Yes, and the environmental definitely. Where we're at, the south end of our island is not on septic. I mean, it's on septic, and it's not on sewer, and let me tell you what. Every square inch of that beach is being built, and then, across the waterway, all the houses coming. There used to be, twenty or thirty years ago, there was a little sound pier that actually advertised grouper fishing off their pier, because just massive numbers of little gag grouper come in, and they catch them recreationally.

You know, with regulations, they have to throw them all back, but you don't see quite as many of those juveniles, and so the environmental impact probably is way more than any fisherman has ever done to it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I hear you on the septic situation, and, you know, the Keys are a fairly fragile environmental ecosystem, and I had a very respected peer of mine, and he's an older gentleman, kind of point out to me that, you know, some of the decline that we have been seeing in the yellowtail snapper, mangrove snapper, you know, kind of coincided when we went to central sewage, and he kind of pointed out that these fish are pretty nasty, and they will eat just about anything, and not that raw sewage was leaking into the water, but I'm sure, you know, some sort of nutrients were there, were present.

Listen, and I'm not trying to say that this is any type of science. It's just an observation, but, you know, who knows what type of impact the septic systems have, you know, in relation to, you know, the way the fish behave nearshore, and, really, you know, going to central sewage system, I mean, it makes total sense, but who knows? We've got Jack, then Cameron, and Tony.

MR. COX: The bay that I live on is about three miles from the inlet, and I've been there for thirty years, and the amount of construction and septic systems has increased exponentially, and I used to set my pinfish traps around where I live, to catch bait to go gag fishing, and I would catch those little baby gags in the pinfish traps. Especially in the fall of the year, I would catch sometimes five or six of them in my trap, but our local government does nothing to help us enhance our water quality, and I have just watched, year over year, how nasty it's gotten, and the dolphins used to swim in there every morning, and every afternoon, and I haven't seen them in ten or twelve years.

I guess what I'm saying is, you know, is a lot of things we talk about, the inshore water quality has a huge effect on these fish, and the local governments, I don't think -- You know, all these coastal communities rely on this ocean, and this water, and it seems like one of the last things that they take pride in is keeping -- You know, keeping an eye on the water quality, and things that we can do to make it better, but it really does affect what we're trying to do and talk about here.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jack. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and we see that, when they do beach renourishment -- I mean, you're talking millions of pounds of sand being pumped up on the beach. You know, that just stirs up sediment from the depths, and what we see is, you know, gag, or our fishing in general, will decline after that, because, after each storm, that fine sediment gets lifted up off the bottom, and it creates this muck layer that's five to ten feet off the bottom, and it's literally like you're diving into a cloud.

You know, then that will settle back down, but it's still on the top, and so it's this cycle that will occur after renourishment that our inshore waters get really, really tough to fish in once they do the renourishment. Now, it's a catch-22. Without the beaches, we've got no tourists, and then we've got no business, and so there's really nothing, but it's just an observation that I've definitely seen in the North Carolina-South Carolina borderline.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Cameron. Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks, James. In South Carolina, especially in the southern part from Charleston to Beaufort, we -- When it comes to building, there's a stormwater permit, and they're very well protected, especially in Beaufort County, and I say this because I've fished the Keys a good bit, and I just see such a neglect in the Florida Keys.

In Beaufort County, when a builder goes to get a permit to build a new house, he also has to get a stormwater permit, which he has to protect his property from stormwater, and it has to be inspected by the county prior to getting a building permit, and so he cannot start even cutting a tree until he's already got stormwater contained, and that's also randomly inspected throughout the process until he gets the CO.

If that was applied throughout the Southeast, that would go so far, especially in the Keys. When I fish the Keys, I do it like most guys, and we rent out the VRBO and take the boat down to the dock and fish, and I'm watching the neighbors, and there's just junk in the water, and it's just remarkable.

On another subject to size, in the South Carolina region, we have -- You know, first off, our water quality from runoff is a long way from the grouper hole. We're typically fifty miles out, but I consistently see it just covered with snapper. We have changed methods a few times over the years, but by far the best way to catch a big grouper, a big gag, is live bait, with a lot of leader, and similar to your mutton.

It still is, but, years ago, I could jig them up with a flat jig and catch a ten or fifteen-pound grouper, and I agree with Jack, and I think the average size has probably dropped to eight or ten pounds overall, but still -- We still catch twenty or twenty-five-pound grouper on a regular basis, if you can get through the snapper.

I have gone through a fifty-count live well and caught maybe one grouper and forty-five snapper. I remember one trip, and I actually timed it. With a live bait, I was never down more than forty-two seconds without getting a bite, but that was a grouper number. That wasn't a snapper hole, in the past, and so we're just so overwhelmed with predators in what was our gag hole.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Tony, that's something that you're echoing, and I think Jeff had mentioned that -- Maybe it wasn't Jeff, but some of these groupers have just moved away from the areas that snapper are, you know, have been predominantly on, you know.

MR. CONSTANT: If we park on that number, we may catch that grouper first, or maybe second, but then the snapper sees that live bait, and they swarm on it, kind of like bees.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Got it. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Haley Stephens. I just kind of want to echo what everyone has been saying, and Cameron also touched on what I was going to say, the impacts of beach renourishment, especially as of late. I think, you know, in a big picture, that's having a huge impact on our fishery, and I'll give you a great example off of northeast Florida, in Flagler County.

They did the beach renourishment, the dredge, recently, and, you know, come to find out, they were dredging not necessarily on an area that had an artificial reef, or a reef that you think is a structure, but they were actually dredging on top of the live bottom spawning grounds off of Flagler County, and it was something that was managed by the county, and, when we brought it to their attention, they said, well, where were you during the public comment, and so I think that that sort of thing has an impact on the fishery, and it needs to definitely be held accountable. We as fishermen are held accountable, and so I think that needs to definitely have a scope on it. Then I don't want to say it, but I'm going to say it, is sharks.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Just a quick reminder for everybody. When you are called upon to speak, just to turn your microphone on and kind of speak clearly into the microphone so we can record your information. Any other comments, or questions? Go ahead, Scott.

MR. BUFF: Thank you. I would just like to say that we fish a lot in Louisiana, and you would have to think that the Mississippi River is way worse than what we've got here, and I know this is two completely different things, but I just wanted to point it out. You know, the fishery down there is unbelievable compared to what it is here, and I do agree.

I've said for years that the water -- Like where we're at, coming out of the Cape Fear, with all these plants and all the pig farms and chicken houses and all that stuff running into the water, it's got to do something to the fishing, because, if you notice, it's like the radius of fish keeps going further and further and further away, and so, you know, I do agree with the water, and I just can't understand.

You would think that the Mississippi River would be the most contaminated, because of how far it flows, and how big it is, and, if you've ever flown over that in an airplane, where it comes out, it's mind boggling what it looks like, compared to the ocean water where it meets with the tide, and, here again, I don't know what that means. I'm just making a point, and, also with what Haley said about the sharks, the sharks here are horrendous, and so I don't know, and probably, if I had to guess, 20 percent of our catch is eaten by sharks before it ever even gets to the boat, and so, at some point in time, somebody is going to have to address that, but, anyway, that's what I had for the water.

Just like the stormwater stuff, that stuff changes all the time. I build houses actually for a living, and so I deal with stormwater a lot, and our stormwater infrastructure has changed tremendously in the last five years, but, if you look at the weather, with all the flooding and stuff that we have, all the stormwater and all the stuff, I mean, the yards, the fertilizers, all of that stuff is going straight into the ocean at some point in time, and so, anyway, that's what I had. I just thought it might be helpful. Thanks.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate your input, Scott. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Yes, and, just to kind of reiterate what everyone has been saying, we have all of these different issues that we're identifying. Is there a way to incorporate that into some type of management, where, you know, instead of working it from the bottom up, you know, maybe like a -- Instead of a food chain, a food web, or an ecosystem-based web, where we're saying, hey, the environment is affecting this, which in turn is affecting this, and just kind of being able to look at it from a big picture and, you know, consider management measures with all of these different things on a collaborative scale?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I would like to acknowledge Chip Collier.

DR. COLLIER: We do have an ecosystem model that is looking at a variety of species, including the groupers and snappers, and so we do have that style of information. We haven't asked the questions on stormwater and different things, or tried to use it to set up bag limits, or catch limits, but it's used to answer questions, and it's going to be presented at the next SSC meeting in April, and then hopefully we're going to have another seminar series on it, and so I'll let you all know when that seminar series is going to be developed.

Describing the ecosystem model, it's mainly going to be looking at black sea bass and climate-driven effects of black sea bass, and where that species is going, but we can answer other questions for it. We're working on a grant that hopefully will be able to continue that project, and expand it, and we can look at some of these questions that you're bringing up, Haley.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Chip. Allie, I think we're back to you.

MS. IBERLE: Sounds good. I believe this is my last slide, and so just a couple more questions. What are you seeing in terms of recruitment, the small fish, and I feel like we've kind of covered this one pretty well. Have you observed changes in catch depth or apparent bottom type fish are on? I feel like you guys have hit on this one a little bit, but, again, please feel free to add anything to these. Have sea conditions changed, either monthly or seasonally, affecting fishable days, and then have you noticed any changes in the species caught with gag over the years, seasonally? I'll turn it back over.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I know we've heard a lot of discussion on some of these things, but, if anybody has any new information they would like to note here, now is the time. I don't see any hands, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and then, just lastly, is there anything else that you really want to kind of -- Any feedback you want to provide in this report, or anything that you want the council to know about your gag fishery before I hand it back over to Mike?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: Yes, and I would be interested in a little more information about would there be any benefit in a slot to help rebuild this fishery, you know, kind of to what Paul was talking about, and at what point do these fish -- Would there be a benefit in keeping some of these large males in the water, to help rebuild things and get things moving a little faster that we are?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that. Jack. Go ahead, Chris.

MR. CONKLIN: I just wanted to say that, on the commercial side, I don't really think that would work, because we've already taken a 70 percent hit on our opportunity to be able to harvest the fish, and that's just taking the trip limit from 1,000 pounds to 300.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, and it's going to be really tough to hit the ACL if you have to discard more fish. I totally get that. Looking around the room, and does anybody else have any last comment? I think that's it. Go ahead, Allie.

MS. IBERLE: So, in thinking about that slot limit, maybe wanting to explore that for the rec sector only, and then I would look to Haley, and is that something -- I know we've talked a lot about like the sector separation, and any thoughts on that slot for the for-hire industry, just any -- Brainstorming anything?

MS. STEPHENS: I guess -- Haley Stephens, and I guess it just depends. There's a lot of things to consider. I think, from an angler satisfaction point, it would be really difficult to -- You know, as Paul alluded to yesterday, hey, we're setting this expectation that grouper season is open, and it is not only a derby-style season now, but it's derby-style aboard your vessel. We can only keep two, and then an angler lands one, and you're like, oops, sorry, wrong one, and you're off by an inch. I think that would be really difficult to explain.

We don't see -- Where we're fishing, you know, on our headboats, it's shallow-water grouper, and so we don't encounter, you know, these larger coal bellies, black bellies, that we're talking about, and so, you know, I guess it's just a lot of different considerations to think about, but I would advise against a slot limit aboard a headboat. If you're going to catch two, catch your two and be done with it, or change it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. Thank you for that awesome presentation, Allie. I actually have Cameron. Go ahead.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so, along the slot limit -- This is just for survivability, you know, where we are, our geographical area, we're usually not fishing over like 110 feet or so, and so I would say the survival rate for the gags is relatively high. The 25 percent that was spit out somewhere earlier, I don't see how that's even close to being realistic, but so it could be done if the science proves that it's worthwhile for a certain size fish to go back in, to add to more recruitment for the species.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Cameron. All right. Thank you so much, Allie. Chip, go ahead.

DR. COLLIER: Sorry, and I just have a question for the group. Do these bigger gags move around more than the smaller fish? I'm just curious on what you all think the behavior of these -- If they move more or less, or whatever your insights might be, and I think that would be helpful as well.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: I mean, we catch these black bellies on the break in about forty fathoms. Forty to forty-five fathoms is kind of the magic number, and they just swim up and down the break, and

we have places we can go that we know that they usually live, but anywhere up in that range is where we find them commercial fishing out of Morehead.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jack. Jeff, go ahead.

MR. MARINKO: I would say they're all in the biomass, right, and so, if the males and the females want to be together, they all travel the same pattern, and that's been my observation.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate it.

MR. MARINKO: I did want to say one thing about the slot limit thing. I'm not really wanting to vote for any more regulation, or make things any more complicated for us. However, if it meant we got more fish, I would have no problem figuring out what a thirty-eight-inch fish looked like and make sure we didn't shoot those. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate that. Jeff, I would like to ask -- You know, because with yellowtail snapper, we see -- I tend to see the migrating biomass be predominantly male, in a very, you know, specific size range. You know, we're talking about like a twelve to sixteen-inch fish, and they migrate in large numbers, and it seems, to me, like a lot of the larger females are kind of held up in certain bottom structures, and these large migrating biomass is a predominantly male fish, you know, and they come in, and they do whatever they do, and do you see anything like that with gags?

MR. MARINKO: No, and, I mean, I feel like they're all going to be together. A lot of times, you don't get the big ones, diving now, and I'm specifically talking about spearfishing, but just splash in on a rock, and say it's a nice, clear day, and you see the bigger, older, smarter fish peel away from the rock, and the little ones just turn around and look up at you. You know, that's been my experience, but they're all there, but, yes, you might come up with a string of three or four of the smaller ones, and be like, man, there were some big ones down there, but they all peeled off.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Great input. Thank you. Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: I just want to ask a question to you, because I did some commercial diving when I was a lot younger, and most of my diving was done at fifty to sixty-five feet of water. What depth do you do most of your commercial diving in?

MR. MARINKO: When we're fishing for gags, 100 percent on the break, and so 140 to 200.

MR. COX: Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Now you know.

MR. COX: You know, he and I yesterday, we were talking about we saw a difference in where we see fish. Today, you know, I'm not seeing them in the shallow water, but you're seeing them in the deeper water, which is good to hear, because a lot of our fishermen are seeing a lot more fish in the deeper water, too.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, and that's kind of the comment of now you know. Cameron, go ahead.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Just on the grouper, so I don't dive the 140 to the 200 anymore, and I'm in the shallower water. Like the eighty to the 130, it's the same thing, that, when you're going down, the big boys know what the deal is, and they're like that's not good, and they'll slide off into -- They will slide off into the sand, 100 percent, and they survive because from spearfishing because they learn, you know, and that's just the way it works, but I do see a lot of the smaller juvenile gags in some of those shallower areas that I never used to ever see, like in pretty large numbers.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All great input. All right, and I think we're probably wrapping this up here. Mike, did we want to move into the black sea bass, or are we going to do the risk rating on the gag?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: The risk rating on gag.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Good morning. For those of you who I have not met yet, I'm Judd Curtis, fisheries scientist at the council staff, or at the fishery management council, and I'm going to go through the stock risk ratings for you. We did this in October, if you all recall, with a few species.

For the new members though, I wanted to do a quick little intro to the new catch control rule, ABC catch control rule, and, as a refresher for you all as well, just real briefly, and so recall, from the presentation in October, and just what we've talked about so far, we have an overfishing limit, or an OFL, and then we have acceptable biological catch, or an ABC, right, and so the ABC is recommended by the SSC after a stock assessment has concluded, and it forms a basis for that federal fisheries management. You then have ACLs that come out of the ABCs that is part of the management purview.

What we really want to focus on here, that the stock risk rating is related to, is this what we call P* approach, or this scientific uncertainty and management risk buffer, and that's basically the difference between your OFL and your ABC values, and that's dependent on the stock assessment uncertainties, management risk tolerances, and a host of other criteria that you're going to cover today with the stock risk ratings.

In the new ABC control rule, the council developed this table that basically sets up the default P* value that is derived from both the combination of that stock risk rating and then the stock biomass that is the output from the most recent stock assessment, and so you have, on the left side, a stock risk rating of either low, medium, or high, and then, across the columns, a high, moderate, or low biomass, and, within that matrix, then you just figure out -- If you have a medium stock risk rating and a medium biomass, then you have a default P* value of 40 percent, right in the middle, and that's the starting point for deriving that P* and that uncertainty.

What is the stock risk rating based on? We have several different classifications of biological, human dimensions, and environmental parameters, and you can see some of them right there. I'll won't go into the details on them here. We'll do that in the stock risk rating spreadsheet, but that's basically a summary of what we've developed so far in the new control rule, and it's still somewhat a work in progress, as it evolves, and maybe more categories can be added, based on

recommendations from you guys and other APs, the SSC, and the SEP as well, to get a better idea of what that risk rating should look like.

The steps for this process, before the assessment, you see the SSCs and the various APs will recommend those risk levels for attributes that contribute to the stock risk rating. The council will then review the recommendations from both the SSC and AP, and the SEP, I should add, at the next meeting, and then, after the assessment is concluded, that P star will be derived using the estimate from the stock risk rating, as well as the relative biomass coming out of the assessment.

That dictates what projection analyses are run for -- Your P* at 50 percent is basically your default value for the overfishing limit. That is consistent across all assessments, and the P* value defined by this combination of the stock risk rating and the biomass forms the ABC recommendation, and so we're right here at this point, and so I'll stop here for any questions on the overall process, while I switch gears into the spreadsheet.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Looking around the room, you guys are up. I think we are becoming somewhat more familiar with this process, even though it's still a little convoluted, but we're going to absolutely do our best throughout it. I'm not seeing any hands.

DR. CURTIS: All right, and so this is Attachment 6b in your briefing book, and we'll start with gag, and the way this works is so, on the left, in Column A, you have the various attributes broken down by section. We'll start with biological attributes. Columns B through D, you have the risk of overexploitation ranges, and so the score will fall within one of those ranges, based on the criteria in the notes and the input from the AP.

You see the notes, in the fifth column right there, and that's based on information that we pulled from a variety of sources, and I'll go into those as we move down the line, and then a default score that we populated in that first box, based on those notes and the default information that we received, and you will compile an AP score, whether you agree with the default score or if you want to deviate from the default score, and then we'll add some notes there on your rationale for doing so. All make sense? All right. I'll try to make this as least tedious as possible, but it is kind of a tedious process.

The biological attributes are taken directly from the latest stock assessment, and so the two parameters we have here are the estimated natural mortality, and this is based typically on the maximum age of fish in the fishery, or in the population, excuse me, and so, from the latest assessment, or the last two assessments, you see a natural mortality, or M, of 0.15 and between 0.14 and 0.16, and so, if you look over at the criteria, that is less than 0.2, and so it would get a one, or a high risk of overexploitation.

The next biological parameter is the age of maturity, and again taken from the latest stock assessment, SEDAR 71. It had a female age of maturity around 4.6 years, and the previous assessment had an estimate for size and age of transition, which is just a supplementary information here, and it doesn't have anything to do with the risk rating, and so 4.6 is over four years, and so that would also get a one, a high risk of overexploitation. Any other questions on the biological parameters?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Stephen.

MR. RANNEY: When was the last stock assessment that you keep referring to?

DR. CURTIS: 2021. Sorry, and it's up there, and it's a little bit hard to see. It was SEDAR 71, and it was completed in 2021.

MR. RANNEY: I'm old, and I can't see it, and so we're basing everything from the data collected in 2021?

DR. CURTIS: Correct, and that's really -- Really, it's data a little bit older than that, because the terminal year of the assessment would have been probably a year or two years prior to that, when they stopped collecting the data to go into the assessment, and so we have a new assessment, right, coming up in 2026, and that will probably then have a terminal year of either 2024 or 2025.

MR. RANNEY: Who determines when and why there is needed an assessment?

DR. CURTIS: So the council determines, through the SEDAR Steering Committee, what species they would like to see added to the stock assessment schedule, and, through a negotiation process, they determine which -- The order and what capacity of the center is and how soon they can provide an assessment.

MR. RANNEY: So the council, as a group, decides it's time for another assessment?

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and so there's, obviously, capacity considerations within the center on how frequently they conduct the stock assessments, and what type of assessment they can do, and so council does decide which species they want to see, how frequently that assessment is done, but it is, you know, subject to the capacity of the center and the stock assessment analyst.

MR. RANNEY: I'm asking because it just seems, to me, there's a lot of decisions based on the stock assessment, and now you're saying that the stock assessment for six years ago, and we might not have another one until another two or three years?

DR. CURTIS: That's correct.

MR. RANNEY: I'm more of a right now kind of a guy, you know, and what's going on right now, or even just last year, to be able to make a good decision, make an educated judgment. Anyway, thank you, and I appreciate the answer.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and that's -- The unfortunate truth is it takes quite a bit of time, and there's a lag between how long it takes to collect and process all these data to run the models and create those projections that you're seeing out of the stock assessment output. There's been talk, you know, on trying to adopt maybe less complex models, in the interest of providing more timely management advice, but you lose some of the transparency and the complexity in doing so, and so there's a tradeoff between, you know, the complexity of the model and the level of uncertainty and the throughput.

MR. RANNEY: Because that's the other thing I see a lot, is estimates and now we're estimating from data collected six or seven years ago. It still seems, to me, that -- Like all these guys are

saying, this is basing our life on these decisions from data that's old, and then it's just on an estimate, you know, and we heard a thing about release mortality of 25 and 40 percent.

That was from a long time ago too, and that didn't seem like it -- That data didn't seem like it stood up. You know, once again, that was from however long ago, and, by now, we have better release controls, and we have better education of the angler, as far as how to release something so there's not so much morbidity, and so I don't know. I just -- I realize it's government, and it's going to take a long time to get the wheels to turn, but there's a lot at stake, and not just your job, but our jobs, and it just seems like we need to have more current data.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so I just wanted to address -- You'll see, as we move into other attributes, when we get into things that are monitored in more of a real-time fashion, like landings are monitored on a year-to-year fashion, and there we have the more recent data that's available. What's considered here in the biological attributes, a natural mortality rate and an age at maturity, those things are not typically things that are changing on a year-to-year fashion.

Like think about, you know, the age for humans, when humans typically mature, and it's somewhere in that, you know, teenage range, and that has stayed pretty well in its time for quite some time, several generations over, and so that's kind of what's considered in these biological attributes, but, as you move down, some of the things that do change on more of a year-to-year basis, like your landings, like your discard numbers, things of that nature, there are more recent years for those types of attributes.

MR. RANNEY: So, the data from the landings, is that from the fish reports that we turn in? When you say landings, where does that come from?

DR. CURTIS: Landings are either taken from the ACL monitoring page, and that is reported on those basis, and some of the information is coming from the stock assessment still, and some others is coming from the MRIP query datasets.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, gentlemen. I guess, looking at this, it would be maybe time to decide if one is fitting in both columns, if anybody has any basis for changing that one, and maybe some discussion on that is where we're at now. Go ahead, Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: So, kind of just speaking to Stephen's point that he just made about contemporary information, but inherent biological characteristics that might not change from one generation to the next, I'll just ask the council staff of the urgency here, if we could kick this can down the road, because there's an NC State University PhD student that's trying to directly estimate natural mortality rates of gag right now for his PhD project, and I think that information will be coming out in about a year, and so that's some new information.

We can maybe put in a number right now for the AP score, for this first row of data that Judd has up on the screen, but I just want to let you all know there's going to be some updated information about directly estimating natural mortality rates of gag in our region probably coming out next year, if I had to guess at it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Paul. Did you have any input on the scores, or they should stay the same for now?

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I mean, I would vote for them to stay the same, but, again, I mean, I don't -- I don't know natural mortality rates of gag, and that's why we're undertaking the study. I'm not part of the study, but I'm just telling you it's in the hopper, and so we might have some new information before the assessment is formally conducted.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Good to know.

DR. CURTIS: I was going to say we can go through and put a default AP score now, if you wish, and then, as more information does become available, and this assessment isn't starting until 2026, and we can revisit it with new information provided by studies such as the one that Paul has described.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Andy.

MR. FISH: Just to be clear, we're not calling shark depredation hook-and-line natural mortality, and that's -- Okay.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Glad we got clarification there. Jack.

MR. COX: I think one would be a good place to start, and leave it there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Looking around the room, it's looking like one for both. Are we satisfied here? I think we're going to go ahead and take a short break, maybe ten minutes, and let's get back and seated and ready to go later than 10:40.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Let's make our way back to our seats, please. I would just like to remind everybody that we're still working on some leftover stuff from yesterday. We do have the rest of our agenda to get to, and so let's buckle down and kind of hammer our way through this. I'm going to turn it back over to Judd.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you, Chair. So we've agreed on the biological attributes, the default scores, agreeing with the default scores of one. I'm going to move down into the human dimension scores as well. Again, just to repeat the three categories of risk of overexploitation are the same, one, two, and three, high, medium, and low, respectively.

The first attribute was the ability to regulate the fishery. This is information taken directly from the ACL monitoring webpage, and you see the various criteria, depending on how frequently the ACL is exceeded, and the extent to which it's exceeded, if it's more than 15 percent, and so, for gag, based on the ACL monitoring webpage, that total ACL was exceeded by greater than 15 percent in 2023 and 2024.

You'll notice an asterisk by 2023. That was when the implementation of the new ACL occurred midseason and switched from the MRIP-CHTS units to the MRIP-FES units, and so a bit of an anomaly that might have affected that category there in that particular year.

Commercial ACL was exceeded by greater than 15 percent in 2023, again potentially because of that note, and the recreational ACL was exceeded by 15 percent, greater than 15 percent, in 2023 and 2024, and so, based on those criteria, it would be a high risk of overexploitation and a default one score. Any comments?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Looking around the room, I don't see any.

DR. CURTIS: Okay.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm sorry. Haley Stephens, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Haley Stephens, and I apologize in advance, but, before we dive in, I just want to make sure that our group is comfortable and understands what we're doing. We do have brand-new members to the AP, and, you know, this is very important. It does directly affect the ABC, and I just want to make sure that everyone understands what we're doing, and, if we don't understand, you know, maybe go from there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: If anybody would like any clarification on this risk rating system, we could probably try and do that real quick. If not -- Andy, go ahead.

MR. FISH: Yes, and what exactly does the term "overexploitation" -- What do we mean by that?

DR. CURTIS: The risk of overfishing or overfished.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I don't see any other hands up. Go ahead, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. The next category would be the potential for discard losses. I did this a couple of ways with the recent MRIP data for the recreational discards, and it was not making any sense, and so I went back to the assessment, and so this is a little bit more legacy data, if you will, instead of contemporary information, but the recreational discards from the assessment, using that discard mortality rate of the 25 percent, as you commented on already before, a portion of the dead discards to the total removals, and so that would be your dead discards estimates over your dead discards plus your landings, was equal to 21 percent. For the commercial discards from that assessment, a discard mortality rate of 40 percent.

Keep in mind that's just the rate, and that's not, you know, the number of rules, necessarily. The proportion for the commercial dead discards to total removals was 2.51 percent, and so, summing that up totally, it was 12.52 percent, making it less than the 15 percent threshold, to make it a low risk of overexploitation. Any comment?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It seems pretty straightforward to me. I don't see any hands.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving into some economic criteria, the annual commercial value, it's broken up into two sections. The top is the total annual revenue in the high, medium and low

categories, and the average annual revenue calculated from the years 2019 to 2023 was equal to 12.5 percent, on average, making it a high risk of overexploitation, a number one. It's greater than the 10 percent total annual revenue threshold.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So, looking at this, because it adds such a grand economic value, and it's highly sought after, and that pressure alone would leave it at a one, correct?

DR. CURTIS: Correct.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I don't see any other hands for comment.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and then the other part of that criteria is based on total trip revenue, on average, and average total trip revenue was calculated to be 28.4 percent for the years 2019 to 2023, falling in that middle risk of overexploitation range.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So, to me, that would look like, because we went from 1,000 pounds to 300, the number kind of fell of what it meant for each individual trip, and, I mean, is that kind of how I'm seeing that? It looks reasonable to me. I don't see any other hands.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving on to recreational desirability, so this is calculated using the Primary 1 and Primary 2 information coming from APAIS survey, and so it looks at what percent of trips were targeting this particular species, and so gag in this case, and I broke that up into two categories here. There's an average percent of all trips taken from 2019 to 2024, equal to 0.7 percent, or an average percent of all just snapper grouper trips, not including gray snapper, which accounts for an overwhelming amount of trips, and that was equal to 3.9 percent, and so that's mostly just for reference, but the criteria is for the total trips, of all trips, and so that would be 0.7 percent, and so less than 1 percent of trips report targeting this species, falling under the three, the low risk, category.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Looking around the room, I don't see any hands.

DR. CURTIS: All right, and the last human dimensions category is social concerns, and this was done a little bit differently than we have in the past, because the database that we typically use is unavailable now, and so our social scientist worked with some of the data she did have, and based a lot of information on the fishery performance reports from the past, and also then we'll -- The recommendations coming from this meeting, the AP and their recommendations, will be passed along to the council.

For the community reliance, social concerns, there was two communities that were heavily reliant on commercial or recreational fishing, Sneads Ferry and Nags Head, North Carolina, and less than seven communities rely on the species, and so it makes it a three, a low risk of overexploitation. Any comments?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It's looking like it's going to stay at three.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and the last category is this environmental attributes, and this category is not a requirement in the overall matrix scoring, but it is an optional right now. We've put some notes down in there, under the other environmental variables. If it's determined that this species does

experience -- You know, if there's some concerns that need to be scored in the environmental attributes, then the scoring will be part of the overall calculation of the matrix. If there is no score included into this, then it is omitted and just reliant on the biological parameters and the human dimensions parameters.

We have been hearing a bit, and that's what the notes represent, on the reliance on inshore seagrass beds at those juvenile life stages, and is any degradations of these habitats affecting recruitment, and we've heard that there have been pulses in juvenile recruitment, two or three years ago, that are starting to show up in the fishery now, and so all those kind of comments are welcome here, as well as what you provided to the fishery performance report, and we can also pull from the fishery performance report, if you think it's been captured there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I think that some of the discussion that we've had, you know, about nearshore water quality, you know, may be of note here, but I'm not sure if it's appropriate. You know, just what our coastal development has -- You know, what impact that's had on the recruitment of this species, and possibly what predation from red snapper might look like as well. I've heard that a few times, from a few different individuals, that they eat everything in sight, and so maybe, when these gags are a little smaller, maybe they're at risk, but, other than that, I really haven't heard a whole lot. Jack.

MR. COX: There's one thing that we always hear a public comment, and at this panel as well, is the sharks. You know, we have no idea what the sharks are doing to these species. They've definitely got to be taking a toll on it. They're at the top of the food chain.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jack. Of course, and that's always a hot topic. I think back to you, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, that is all the -- Well, actually, before we move on, would you recommend adding a default score into the environmental attributes, based on all this information, at least as a recommendation to the council, and they ultimately have a final decision whether it gets incorporated or not, but, if you feel strongly that there are -- That there have been environmental changes in those attributes that you specified, then you could suggest adding a one into that AP score. In this particular category, it's either zero or one. It's all or none, and so you either have no effects in the environmental attributes or you have high effects.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: I mean, I wouldn't be afraid to say, on the ecosystem importance, I would score it as a one, because of the water quality, and we all agree it's in terrible shape.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I just second what Jack said. I mean, we're in some of the fastest-growing counties in the entire country, and we have these questions about potential recruitment declines of some of these cornerstone species, like gag, and it could be due to low water quality, and poor water quality definitely affects seagrass meadows, and so I'm with Jack on this.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So this will overall average the score to be a little bit closer to one, a little bit higher risk, in this section. If anybody has any direct argument that this -- That we shouldn't put a score forward, I think now is your time. Otherwise, we're going to leave it at one. Go ahead, Andy.

MR. FISH: I think it's kind of tough to put a score on something we can't change or do anything about.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So I have an advocate for leaving it to where it falls out, and that we don't have any impact on the overall rating through this score. David Moss.

MR. MOSS: I don't disagree, to a point, but it still has an effect on the overall stock, and so we need to take this into account when they're doing any kind of evaluation of OFL or anything else, and so while -- You know, I'm sure we're not going to raise money to buy up waterfront to turn it back, and it does affect the stock, which is going to affect ABC and OFL and all that other stuff.

MR. FISH: So to use it against this, us, okay, we have 10,000 septic tanks in Florida, and now they're just going to point the finger at septic tanks, or -- I mean, if we can't change it, and I understand it's all a problem, but, if we can't do anything about it on our level --

MR. MOSS: Because we still have to take this into account. You still have to take all that into account, you know, like the loss of seagrass beds, and not only, as a for instance, does that affect like the juvenile fish, but it's also the forage fish, and they eat offshore, right, and so all that stuff is going to affect whether or not those fish are there, and all that stuff, and the availability to us as anglers, whether it's commercial or recreational or whatever, to harvest them.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I've got Randy, and then Tony.

MR. MCKINLEY: Is my understanding right that this whole thing comes together, and it's a risk value, and that's just a percentage that's going to be taken off of the commercial ACL? Is that what this is?

DR. CURTIS: Not quite, and so this is a step before the split at the ACL. This would be when you have your ABC recommendation coming down from SSC, and then you -- Before that, you have an overfishing limit that comes out of the stock assessment. This is essentially representing one of the components that goes into recommending that buffer between the overfishing limit and the ABC, and then the ABC then is converted to an ACL, and typically that is held at the ABC level, and so, in some regards, you could think of it as the difference between the overfishing limit and the ACLs, if there is no difference between -- If the council decides not to put a difference, or a buffer, between the ABC and the ACL. Does that make sense?

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you, James. On Andy's point, I agree with you. It's nothing we can do, but, at the same time, I think that, if the council, and hopefully NOAA, recognizes that the AP

is recognizing the amount of water quality decline, that they will then, in turn, head towards local governments and start affecting more water runoff procedures and safeguards.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I did hear something in the room, you know, about this species being in trouble many years ago, and we kind of knew where this was going, you know, and so, I mean, I think it's really up to us to kind of make sure that the risk rating associated with this species aligns with how at risk it really is, you know, and so I would -- I would be an advocate for the one being in there, just to kind of -- You know, just to kind of enrich the at-risk profile, I guess.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and I kind of peeked ahead for the aggregate scores, and, if anybody had any heartburn about putting a one or zero into the ecosystem, it doesn't make any difference on the overall final risk score. It's going to end up being high either way, and so it sounds like, from the AP discussion, that's probably an appropriate score for this species.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. We appreciate it, Judd. I think that we're going to move right into black sea bass now.

DR. CURTIS: All right, and you're stuck with me for a little bit longer. We're going to roll right into black sea bass, with the same exercise. So, again, starting back at the top with biological attributes, based on the last two assessments, we had natural mortality estimates of 0.375 and 0.38, in that medium category, and so a two, and the age at maturity fell to less than two years, based on information that was dug out of the assessment and the various working papers, and so that gave it a risk of overexploitation of low, less than two years, and so a low. Any comments or recommended changes to these two parameters?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm not sure that anybody in the room is qualified to make any real difference here, but it looks like two and three is what it's probably going to be.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving down to the human attributes, human dimension attributes, and so the ability to regulate the fishery, and, again, this is looking at the ACL monitoring page, total ACLs. Commercial ACLs and recreational ACLs were never exceeded in any of the years 2020 through 2024. They're all consistently around 30 percent of the ACL, and so this has kept consistently below the total ACL, making it a low risk of overexploitation.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So I heard, and I think it was Chip earlier, that said that we're having some discussion about overall it's viewed that not -- That hitting your ACL is a good thing, and that not hitting it is problematic. I'm pretty sure, if we look around the room, we know that black sea bass -- They're at risk here, and at a high risk, and so we might want to make an adjustment here. Go ahead, Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and there's other factors that get into more of that side of things. This one is looking at the ability to prevent overages, if they were to be occurring, and so don't worry about that ACL part here. It's developed to account for that later.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, sir. Comments around the room with the black sea bass, guys? Jack.

MR. COX: I think three is appropriate, being that we haven't met the ACL.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving on to the next category, and this is what Chip was alluding to here, the potential for discard losses, and this is looking at, you know, like dead discards as a proportion of the total removals. This I did calculate using MRIP data, looking at the proportion of dead discards to total removals, and you can see that's, for the recreational sector, about 74 percent. It's kind of small, but 74 percent, and, for the commercial discards, we did not have that data available, but, from the previous assessment, commercial discards represent around 3.89 percent, but, obviously, swamped out by the recreational discard levels, and so that 74 percent is much higher than that 40 percent threshold, making it a one risk of overexploitation, or a high risk of overexploitation, and so I'll stop there for any comment.

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

DR. CURTIS: That 74 percent comes from a calculation from the MRIP query over the last five years, 2020 through 2024, data, and it's taking the proportion of dead discards, which is the B2 estimates coming out of the MRIP queries, your released fish, and multiply that by the discard mortality rate coming out of the assessment, which was 13.7 percent for the rec sector, and then comparing that to total removals, which is that value of dead discards plus your harvest and your reported harvest, your As and B1s.

MR. KIMREY: All right, and so slow it down, so everybody can understand. I'm not the only one that didn't understand all that, and so 13.1 percent is from MRIP? That is what the dead discards are?

DR. CURTIS: 13.7 is the discard mortality rate coming out of the assessment.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Got it.

DR. CURTIS: That's this value here.

MR. KIMREY: Right.

DR. CURTIS: Sorry, and maybe just ignore this for right now.

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

DR. CURTIS: Correct. 13 percent, or 13.7 percent, of the fish released die.

AP MEMBER: I think what we're having the trouble with is the jump from 13 percent to 74 percent.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and I mean I -- So 13.7 percent of the MRIP surveys is the estimated release mortality for recreational anglers, true or false?

DR. CURTIS: Correct.

MR. KIMREY: Okay. Next, and so, the part that you highlighted in red, you're saying to omit that, and let's not pay attention to that?

DR. CURTIS: That's a different calculation. That would be the proportion to the total catch, and not to the total removals.

MR. KIMREY: Okay, and so let's move down to the next line, proportion of dead discards. Okay, and that's where the 74.3 percent is, and so slowly explain where that number comes from, slowly.

DR. CURTIS: All right, and so you have the number of dead discards, right, calculated from the discard mortality rate and the number of released fish.

MR. KIMREY: Got it.

DR. CURTIS: That number, plus the number landed, which is A, plus your level of reported harvest, which is a B1 from the MRIP surveys, and all those summed together is essentially your denominator, and the dead discard number is your numerator, and so you take that dead discards divided by the total removals.

MR. KIMREY: So 74.3 is -- What does that number represent?

DR. CURTIS: The number of dead discards to the total removals. So you can think of it as more or less almost 75 percent, and so every three fish, out of four, that are removed from the fishery result in a dead discard. I

AP MEMBER: think I may be able to hold that down a little better, Chris. What he's saying is there is 74.3 percent more fish being released and dying than there are being kept.

MR. KIMREY: Right. That's what I thought. I just wanted to make sure I didn't miss something. Okay.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I've got David Moss. I'm sorry. So we have clarity, Mike, go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Close, but I would describe it a little bit differently. So, in the sense of all of the fish that die, either from being landed by the recreational fishery or from by being caught, and discarded, and then they die from that catch-and-release process from the recreational fishery, and so, of all the fish that are estimated to die from the recreational fishery, 74 percent of those are dying from being caught and released, okay, and so that's what that number is representing.

It's a high proportion, and that's something that is -- You know, if you look at kind of the trends that result from -- There's been a maintained high level of fish that are caught and released for black sea bass, especially in the in the closer-to-shore waters, but there's been a big decline in the landings over time, and the landings have gotten to a low level, and so they're contributing much less to the total removals than what the discards are at this point.

MR. KIMREY: Right, and I'm not even saying I disagree with that. I just wanted to make sure, and I did. I just wanted to make sure that I understood that, and I'm not saying that I disagree with that number at all, but I just wanted to -- I mean, it seemed a little drastic.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Sometimes it's good to know what you're eating. I've got John, and then Chris.

MR. KIMREY: For us, where we're at, we still have really good bass fishing. I understand that Florida might not, but, where we're at -- I mean, you ask these guys, and we've got really good bass fishing, and so that's another thing, but we also noted that there's a huge amount of discards on black sea bass in people that aren't even targeting black sea bass. We have piles of them in our inshore waters, literally inshore, that are probably figured into that number from people that aren't bass fishing, and so I get it.

MR. POLSTON: My question is to Chris, or whoever wants to answer from the Carolinas apparently, and we don't catch sea bass, obviously, in Florida anymore, to speak of, and so we can't speak on that fact, but does that number sound right, as robust as your fishery still is in black sea bass? 74 percent are dying, but yet still you have that many sea bass?

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and there's so much crossover with recreational anglers. You have people that are fishing nearshore reefs, that are not even targeting sea bass. They might be targeting gray trout, or just general purpose fishing, the guys fishing inside, and like, for our area, in our river channel and all that. They might be fishing for sea mullets, whiting, whatever you want to call them, and they might be fishing for gray trout.

They might be sheepshead fishing, or black drum fishing, any of that stuff in our inland waters, and even up and down our coast, on our nearshore reefs, on our jetties, dock fishing. You know, we do a lot of dock fishing from boats, and all that stuff. You have a really high interaction rate with undersized and juvenile sea bass, and it's alarming, because the number of recreational anglers in our area that are -- We call it high-low. You know, high-low rigs two hooks, with two hooks, and they're j-hooks, and they're using cut bait.

The number of interactions in our area with undersized and juvenile sea bass is very high, and it's alarming, because the number of anglers has increased so much in recent years, and, you know, the advent of the trolling motor has made it easy for anybody to dock fish. It used to be, if you dock fished, you had to know the owner to tie up to the dock, where you had to be really good and clever with an anchor set up on it, but, with the trolling motor, there's so much more dock fishing, in every one of those things.

Areas where we're speckled trout fishing in inland waters, we're running into sea bass, and even in the Neuse River, which is twenty miles from the nearest ocean, off the Pamlico Sound, and there's times I'm fishing for redfish, and we're having interactions with sea bass. I mean, they're -- You know, all that is caught by the MRIP surveys, or not all of it, but any MREP survey that's done could catch it, and let me rephrase that.

MR. POLSTON: I understand the interaction and all that stuff, but that's not the question. Does the number seem correct, that that many fish are dying?

MR. KIMREY: Absolutely.

MR. POLSTON: Because the same thing happened with the red snapper, the dead discards and stuff, and that those numbers were nowhere near correct.

MR. KIMREY: Absolutely. When you're using a size six hook, long shank, with cut bait, and you catch a six-inch sea bass, it's literally in his stomach, three out of four times. Absolutely those fish are dying, and you have so many anglers. They're just aggravated. I mean, I see it all the time, and they've got two sea bass on a hook, and they're beating them on the water, just to try to get clear of them. I mean, it happens, all day long, every day of the week, and so, yes, I'm not saying I disagree with that number at all.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I have several, and I have Tony, then Haley, then Randy.

MR. SCOTT: The sea bass, I don't agree with that mortality number. I run a party boat in Hatteras, and we do a lot of sea bass fishing. Our half-days are predominantly sea bass fishing. I can go back to the same spot, all summer long, and catch small sea bass, and we release them. It's more doing something, but there's no way I can pound a spot with fifty people, and I carry 6,000 or 7,000 people out of Hatteras Inlet a year.

There's no way I can go back to the same spot over and over, on these half-days, and catch sea bass every day and have the small ones. We do catch some keepers mixed in, but it just -- If I was pounding that spot that hard, you would see a reduction in the numbers, if they were going back dead, and I'm not seeing it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Judd is going to go ahead and respond to that.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and so keep in mind that that discard mortality rate is across all modes of fishing, including the shore mode that was just described, offshore, and attributed to hook-induced mortality, temperature, in addition to like the barotrauma stresses and use of descending devices, and so all those combined together represent that 13.7 percent mortality.

I agree with you, and like offshore, shallow-water black sea bass releases are going to do pretty well, if they're caught in the lip, you know, but if they're deep hooked, as was described, that's all contributing to that discard mortality rate.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Based on what I see in South Carolina, I disagree with that number as well, but something I would like to ask is, first off, is there a way for us to disagree with this? I mean, because, ultimately, we're looking for a number.

DR. CURTIS: Yes. Absolutely. If you disagree with the number, and want to provide comment, and cite evidence that, you know, you think that number is incorrect, that will get passed on to the council.

MR. CONSTANT: I was just curious on that part, but, on Chris's point, are those numbers in the study? I mean, being that he's talking a lot of inshore, and not saying that any of that doesn't exist, but all your studies are in federal waters, correct?

AP MEMBER: Not the MRIP survey.

MR. CONSTANT: Okay, and so they're inshore?

DR. CURTIS: Correct. Yes, and those numbers, where you're looking at the total removals, includes the shore mode, the inland mode, the less than three miles offshore, and the greater than three miles offshore, and so it's all your inland, your state, and your federal waters combined.

MR. KIMREY: I would -- You know, just like the gentleman at the end of the table, and I'm sorry I can't see your name there, and I don't know you well, but, in my operation, I have an extremely low release mortality on sea bass. If you're on my boat, it's almost impossible for you to kill a sea bass, unless he is really deep hooked, and we have a really good release on our boat, just like he probably does, but he's also got a partyboat, with trained mates, and he's circle hooking. Unfortunately, there's a thousand boats for every one of our boats that don't have the same either skill or circle hooks or the desire to care. I mean, I'm telling you, and I see a lot of it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: We're going to move on to Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Haley Stephens. A quick question for our science team, and I know that a lot of this is being taken from the MRIP surveys. Is any of the SRHS data incorporated into this, or is it strictly MRIP, or is it kind of indirectly from the SEDAR? Is there any of the headboat survey data incorporated into this? Thank you.

DR. CURTIS: This data was taken directly from the MRIP query. Chip may know better if that incorporates the headboat survey or not.

DR. COLLIER: It does not include that, but we can definitely include it next time. We have estimates of discards from the headboat survey, and so they could be added in as well.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chip, and I just mentioned that for clarification, because, as we move around the table, and I don't want to spend too much time on it, but we see a lot of different fishing methods, a lot of different fishing motivations, and a lot of different levels of professionalism throughout different sectors, and so just something to keep in mind as we work through the rest of the day in different topics. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: Okay. The whole black bass thing is -- We can see it's headed toward a trainwreck, just like the American red, and it just seems like -- I know there's been talk of it, but, if they would hurry up and reduce the size limit, that would help considerably with this discard issue, and, as far as not catching them, you know, further south, I've always strongly felt that this whole body of fish moves up and down, and I know there is studies being done on that, but these bass, I think, are pushing up. They're going further north. They're not as far south as they used to be, but, when you combine those two things together, and the discards, it's going to be a trainwreck. They're going to take it away, and the black bass is so valuable for our inshore charters and stuff. I just wanted to throw that out there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Randy. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. I think there's still some confusion, and people are freaking out about the 74.3 percent number, and I think I understand it, and I'm not the smartest guy in the room, but it's

a 13.1 percent discard mortality rate, and so, if you catch 100 fish, and release 100 fish, thirteen of them die, okay, and let's make it easy numbers.

If you take 100 fish that are dead, 74 percent of those are dead because of discard mortality, and so that means 26 percent you actually took home and ate, or whatever, and so it's not that 74 percent of everything that you catch dies. 13 percent of what you catch and release dies, but 74 percent of everything that is dead is dead because of discard mortality.

DR. CURTIS: That's correct, yes, and so you think of it in overall percentages, right, and three out of every four is dead because of catch-and-release, and you're discarding -- You take home, in the box, one of every four.

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

DR. CURTIS: Correct, yes.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I guess we're moving forward.

DR. CURTS: Okay. Thank you for the comments. Those will get passed along to the council when they review these as well. Moving on to the next criteria, commercial value, the average annual revenue between 2019 and 2023 was estimated at 2.8 percent, and the total trip revenue for the same year span was 11.3 percent, both falling under that medium risk category, and so it merits a two. Any comments or disagreements?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Randy, go ahead.

MR. MCKINLEY: I would just say that most of our commercial guys don't even fish for black bass, when they're really there in January and February, because mid-Atlantic keeps getting more quota, and the price, with these big trawl boats coming in, deflates the price so bad that we're just not -- We're not even fishing for them, and so the landings are going to be lower, because we can't afford to fish for them, and so there's evidently a large amount -- Or a large amount up there that they keep catching.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Randy, are you familiar with how the next region up manages black sea bass, and is that something that, you know, we should be looking at?

MR. MCKINLEY: Their efficiency is better. I know that those trawl boats can have a 10,000-pound bycatch, the flounder trawl boats.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I just mean how they're regulating that fishery.

MR. MCKINLEY: I have no idea.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. I was just curious. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Something that's really interesting, that's actually being in the works in the Mid-Atlantic region, is sector separation, for four different species, and I believe

it's scup, bluefish, one other one, as well as black sea bass, and so that's for-hire sector separation work that's going on now in the Mid-Atlantic.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley, and so it looks like the two is going to stay.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving on to the recreational desirability, and so, looking in the notes, the average percent of all the trips from 2019 to 2024 that was targeting black sea bass is 2.2 percent, and that's either it's your primary target or your secondary target, from the APAIS survey data, and that falls between the 1 and 5 percent range, meaning it's a two, a medium risk of overexploitation. The lower value is just the average percent, including only snapper grouper trips, but not gray snapper.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Looking around the room, I don't see any hands up. I do now. Chris, go ahead.

MR. MILITELLO: In South Florida, I don't think anyone targets them. They're just not there, from I would say Fort Pierce south, at least, and maybe zero.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: So, regionally speaking, I think it probably still will stay at two.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and the last category is the social concerns. The information gathered stated that four communities were highly reliant on commercial and/or recreational fishing. This is less than seven communities highly reliant on the species, putting it into a low risk of overexploitation, a number three. Any comments or disagreements?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Looking like a three.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and, moving into the environmental attributes categories as well, we have the ecosystem importance, climate change, and other environmental variables. We made a note here, and that's been already stated around the table too, and is there a potential range shift going on, and there seems to be some evidence that that might be occurring.

We've seen, with the trap-video surveys, the lowest levels of recruitment in the time series for the South Atlantic, while the Mid-Atlantic biomass has steadily been increasing, and is the highest in their time series, and so, again, we didn't put any default score into this, but I wanted to leave it up to the AP whether they wanted to recommend adding an environmental score to this stock or not.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and definitely just parroting what other folks have said, and it appears that we're experiencing, or likely experiencing, some type of range shift. I think that might be reflected in the survey data that MARMAP and SERFS are collecting, and so I would put a one for the default score.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Any discussion on this being a one? Any opposition? Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: I'm just saying I agree with Paul on that one. That's a good place.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you for that.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you, and, again, now combining all those scores together, you have a final risk score of high for black sea bass. Any heartburn with that decision and how we got there?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Given the parameters that we're operating under, we have successfully gone over the risk assessment.

DR. CURTIS: Thank you, Chair. That's all for now. See you next time.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right, and so we're going to be moving on. Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so we're going to be moving into discussion about Snapper Grouper Amendment 56. You can refer to Attachment 9 in your briefing book. I'll kind of be talking through this document, and we'll have some points for discussion. I do want to preface this and let you know this is probably going to be a bit more of an update than it is a full discussion, just because of where we are in the amendment development.

This is not the last time you will see this. You will see this again, most assuredly, in October, and possibly another time after that, depending on the timeline of the amendment development, and so there will be a couple of points of discussion today, but a lot of it is just going to kind of be updating you on the work that has been done and the work that still needs to be done regarding this amendment.

The last stock assessment for black sea bass was completed in 2023. That was SEDAR 76, and that indicated that black sea bass stock has had substantial declines. It was not declared overfished, because, at the time, the federal agency, NOAA Fisheries, they wanted the council to consider changing the reference point, which is basically the line that is used to determine whether a stock is or is not overfished, and it very likely is overfished, but, in order to make that official determination, then NOAA Fisheries would want the proxy that was being used for maximum sustainable yield to be updated to the value that was recommended by the stock assessment team.

They're going to have to make the rule that sets the line, and then they can evaluate against that line, whether it is or is not overfished, but it very likely would be declared overfished after that change is made, and so that's one of the actions in this amendment. We're, you know, addressing several things, and we'll get to the actions in a little bit, but that's a little bit of the background on how this amendment came to be in its form right now.

Since the completion of that stock assessment, there has been a lot of back and forth between the council and the SSC and the Science Center regarding the catch projections and the assumptions that are going into the catch projections, and so, every time that we project catch forward, looking at, you know, levels for the future, there have to be assumptions about how much fishing is going to be going on under this scenario, and what are the conditions that we are assuming are going to happen next year, the following year, and the following year, and what is the most likely to be the case, and how would the stock respond, and so there's been quite a bit of back and forth.

As you can tell from a completion time for that assessment of 2023, and we are now in 2025, the time that has elapsed between that, that became problematic, because the assessment was getting a bit old, and so the Science Center has very recently completed an update of that stock assessment, with data through -- I'm looking at, Chip, and is that 2023 or 2024 that they included in their update that will go to the SSC in April? Do you know? I know it's at least through 2023, and it might include 2024, but I'm not positive, and we can check on that, but more recent data were included in that update.

DR. COLLIER: 2023.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: 2023? Okay, and that was the most recent year that we had available, and so data through 2023. That information, that updated stock assessment, is going to go to the SSC at their meeting later on in April, and so later on this month.

Given what we have seen from the Southeast Reef Fish Survey, which is one of the main indices, and given what we've seen in the landings, I would not expect any significant change in the stock status from what it said in the previous assessment. We haven't seen, you know, big increases in black sea bass. Nothing has really been reported along those lines, and so it very likely will be a very similar status, but it will include more recent years of data in that in that update.

Once that has been reviewed by the SSC, then the SSC would be scheduled to make catch level recommendations. You'll notice one of the actions, when we get to it, is for catch level recommendations to be changed. That action is going to include whatever the SSC comes out with in April, and so a lot of this work has kind of been front loaded, and then, with the back and forth that happened between the council, SSC, and Science Center, we had kind of taken some steps in the development, but then we had to pause to wait for the analyses to kind of come into place.

There's a lot of background that is that is there, but I wanted to kind of give that synopsis and that timeline, for you to have context as you move through, and that description of that ABC-setting process is included in these couple of paragraphs. Again, the SSC will see this in April. The council will see it at their next meeting in June of this year.

The objectives for this meeting for you all are to take a look at the draft actions, and, if you have any additional recommendations on the range of alternatives that are being considered, and so not necessarily picking one. We don't have alternatives listed out for each action.

Right now, the direction that we have from the council is kind of the bookends of, you know, for example, a size limit, and consider a size limit between this size and this size, and then we would develop ranges, and we would develop alternatives that go between that range, and so I'll give some description of the direction that the IPT, which is the interdisciplinary planning team, and that's essentially -- That's the group of people that write the amendment, that do the actual, you know, writing and developing of the alternatives, the analysis of the alternatives.

Our direction, at this point, is included here in these actions, and, if there's any additional recommendation that you would want the council to consider outside of the range that they've already given direction for, then you can make those recommendations here.

You have provided recommendations that really, for several of these actions, kind of motivated the action to be included, as well as some of the alternatives that are included in the council's current level of direction, and you can refer to some of the comments that were made in March of 2024 and October of 2024. Those meeting reports are linked in this document, just to kind of see how we came up with this list of actions. A lot of them were recommended by the advisory panel.

I'm going to skip over the first two actions, in the sense of reducing catch levels, because we don't have the SSC recommendation yet. As I said, that's going to come later, in April. You will get a chance to see that when that is made available, and we will probably be bringing that to you in the October meeting, and so you will have a chance to comment on that. It just won't be at this meeting, because we don't have the information to present to you just yet.

Similarly, revising the status determination criteria, there are some factors included with that that are associated with the stock assessment update, and so the SSC is going to talk about the status determination criteria, the SPR proxies, and there's going to be some discussion along those lines at their meeting in April as well, and so, again, that's going to be another action that it will come to you, and just not at this meeting. It will come back in in October, when we're a bit further along developing the event.

The next few items, and I do kind of want to, I guess, put some context to recommendations on these actions.

I wouldn't necessarily -- If your recommendation is solely dependent on the level of harvest that will be allowed, the annual catch limit, then you might want to wait on providing your recommendation until a later part in the development, when you can see that annual catch limit, that level that's going to be made available to you, likely in October of this year.

Some of these actions you've been recommending even before you, you know, knew a stock status, or annual catch limit, or anything like that, and so, some of these actions, you may think this is just flat out the best thing for the fishery at this point, and, if and if that is the case, then you can go ahead and, you know, provide your comments and recommendations along those actions, on those lines, and so I just wanted to make that distinction, because you may want to have ACL play into your considerations for some of them. Some of them you may just think this is the direction that the council really should go.

Changing the fishing year start date. What this means is the fishing year right now for the commercial fishery begins on January 1. For the recreational, it starts on April 1. That is when your ACL, your annual catch limit, resets. It goes back to zero, and that's when they start counting against the annual catch limit, when the recreational season would be determined, and that's actually the accountability measure right now.

There's been no limitation on season, just because the harvest rate of black sea bass recreationally has been very low, and so there's been no, you know, kind of no set beginning and end season. It's just been the entire year, but the accountability measure that's on the books right now is actually that the Fisheries Service is supposed to set the season, based on the harvest rates of previous years.

When do you want that number to start open, and commercial, if commercial begins and it ends when the ACL is projected to be met, which, again, it hasn't been the case for recent years, but, normally, when you change a fishing year start date, sometimes the motivation is to make sure you include the, you know, quote, unquote, the most critical times for fishing, so that, if a closure does happen, it's happening towards the end of the season, when there is a less significant time period of the year for fishing.

It can be helpful to have a January 1 start date for some fisheries, or you might be considering a different time of year. I think one of the items that the council was looking at, given that black sea bass are in a pretty poor state, and there likely will be a rebuilding plan on the horizon, was to potentially align the start dates for both of the sectors, and so setting them to occur at the same time.

Their direction, at this point, was to include an alternative for a January 1 start date for both sectors, and they did also request analysis of kind of interactive effects of the fishing year start date with any size or bag limit changes. We'll develop those once we get the annual catch limit numbers, and so I'll pause right here and see if there's any discussion, or recommendation, or potential additional alternatives, that you all would like to recommend that the council consider at this point.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm seeing a few hands up. I saw Randy first, and then Jack.

MR. MCKINLEY: I wouldn't want to change that at all, especially the recreational with April, if we know where they're going to get hammered. January, February, and March, there's not a lot of people fishing, but they need to be able to fish. I mean, I would hate to say it, but even move it to May, possibly, if it's going to be that bad, so they can get the summertime fishing. Commercial, we need it to start January 1. I mean, the only time we catch them, the big ones, is in January and February, and a little bit of March, and so I wouldn't want to change that, for our region anyway.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Randy. Jack.

MR. COX: Yes, and I agree with Randy. Would you move the slide back a little bit, to where the MSY is going to SPR 40 percent, if we went from 30 percent to 40 percent on this, and explain to me a little bit how we got to 40 percent, just because the council is talking a lot about this SPR, and proxies, and so forth, and maybe give us just a little introduction of what's going on with this.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. This is one of those very technical things, and so I'm going to try to go slow, and I'm ultimately going to be pointing you to another presentation that's given by somebody that works more directly with this than I do, and so what we're looking at here is, when a stock assessment is kind of measuring the status of a stock, okay, it's measuring whether the biomass is able to produce the maximum sustainable yield.

That is kind of our benchmark that we manage our fisheries based on, is can the biomass produce the maximum sustainable yield. Sometimes we have the information. Ideally, we have the information to be able to estimate maximum sustainable yield directly. Sometimes we don't have that information, and what we would use is the information that we do have to estimate a proxy for maximum sustainable yield. The common proxies that have been used in this region are based on spawning potential ratios, and so, basically, you look at how the fish grow, and how many fish there are of different ages within the population, and, from that, you are able to estimate what an

unfished population -- If there were no additional fishing mortality that was going on, because you estimate your natural mortality rate, your fishing mortality rate, and you are able to kind of take off the fishing mortality rate and see, in an unfished population, how productive would it be, and then you compare that to the productivity that you are observing in your population now, when it is fished.

So, with that comparison, you're able to set kind of a metric for maximum sustainable yield, and you're shooting for a target that is say 30 percent of the productivity, the reproductive productivity, that an unfished stock would have, or 40 percent. What we've been using for this stock has been 30 percent of the reproductive productivity of an unfished stock, and what has been recommended, for several stocks within our region, has been 40 percent, and that's been based off of several pieces of scientific literature, but there's also a lot of discussion that's going along with those numbers, which is where I will point you to another presentation that is coming up in June.

The council got a presentation on the different SPR values, and maximum sustainable yield proxies, and they got one in March from the Fisheries Science Center, and we also have assessments in our region that are conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and they asked for Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to give a presentation on kind of their take on how they've used these types of proxies, and, also, especially to do it in a way that is, I guess, a bit more common language, not as technical, and so they're working to develop that right now.

That's something that will come to the council in their June meeting, June 2025 meeting, and so I kind of gave as much as I can of an introduction to that, but I would definitely point you to tune in to the June of 2025 meeting, where there will be probably a much better presentation of that type of information.

MR. COX: Thank you. The work that goes into arriving to that number comes out of that last assessment, to get to where we are with bass, and so there's work that has been done offshore to gather data, fisheries data, independent data, that brings us to these numbers, and am I right? What is the lag time for when that information was gathered to when we land to starting to do the SPR proxies?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just making sure I understand the question, the lag time between the data collection and the -- I guess the use of that data to develop an SPR-based proxy?

MR. COX: Correct. That's my question.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. So, for SEDAR 76, for this stock assessment, I believe the terminal year was 2021, and so that would have been -- The data collection year would have been 2021, and they would have developed that proxy based on those data through 2021 within that process that finished in 2023, and so the time that they did the estimation would have been kind of through 2022, finishing in 2023, but, yes, at this point, the last year of data would be 2021.

I will note that, with the update that has been completed, once that update is presented later on this month, that will be data through 2023. I will also note that maximum sustainable yield is generally -- If you think back to kind of our discussion of golden tilefish yesterday, where I showed that maximum, that BMSY value, on a long term, that's not really supposed -- That's not really a number that's expected to change. That's expected to be a number that's pretty inherent to the

population, based on the environment that it's existing in, the biology of the species, and so, on the long-term, that's supposed to be a pretty static number.

There is some variation that goes on over time, and especially if you have a changing environment, and then you want to keep on estimating it, so that you can update it as your environment changes, but that is a number that is expected to be pretty -- It's expected to be a long-term. It's not expected to vary, you know, heavily on a year-to-year basis.

Now, what is kind of the level of discussion right now among the council is what is the best proxy for MSY, and is it -- You know, what makes 40 percent any better than 30 percent, or any better than 37 percent, or 34 percent, and that's what that presentation I think in June is going to give a little bit more information on, is how do you distinguish between these different levels of proxies.

MR. COX: Because, at the end of the day, what matters to most to us, if we don't get these numbers right, is it equates to catch that we're allowed to have.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and, I mean, this is what sets the line of is the stock overfished, or not, and this is also what sets the line of in -- You know, in perfect state. If the stock is not overfished, if the stock is doing the best that it can, what is, you know, the most amount of harvest that you would be able to get out of this stock, and so, yes, it does -- It does have some pretty big implications on the way that management is carried out.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack, just kind of to go along with what, you know, what we've seen in the past, and I think this is with yellowtail snapper, when we had some discrepancy in the ACL being set too low, it was discovered that the SPR that was being used for that species was derived from mutton snapper, instead of yellowtail, and there was a major discrepancy there that ended up being changed because of this number, and so it does directly correlate with what's going to be on the table to be harvested. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman, and so is the current stock status of black sea bass overfished?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Not officially, because the agency has requested a change of the proxy that was being used, that was being used to evaluate whether it is overfished or not, and so the agency is waiting until the rule goes in to change the proxy, and then there would be the overfished declaration.

That doesn't mean that the council can't act to be more conservative of black sea bass at this time. They can change the catch levels, and, if the SSC recommends different catch levels, they are still required to do that.

What that means, from a regulatory standpoint, is, if NMFS declares an overfished status, like officially overfished status, then the council would have two years. It would be on the clock, and it has two years to develop and put in place a rebuilding plan, and that would change what would go into an amendment, or anything like that, and so, right now, we don't have a rebuilding plan within this document, because the council is awaiting, you know, kind of that status change on an official basis, but the council is still, as you can look through the actions, looking at different ways

to change how black sea bass fishing is prosecuted in the region, so that there can be a bit more conservation, recognizing that black sea bass are not in a very good state right now.

MS. STEPHENS: Just to clarify, so it's my understanding, and please correct me if I'm wrong, but a stock can be overfished, and not necessarily through fishing efforts directly, but through other considerations, and then the term "overfishing" is a direct reflection of fishing efforts, of F , and is that correct, and so, basically, what I'm getting at is it's not necessarily that the bass are being overfished, or we're harvesting more, and it's just that they've moved, and so would that be a consideration for overfished, given the terminology?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: In the official terminology, overfished is going -- Like even if fishing is not necessarily the cause, it's still called overfished under Magnuson. It's still called overfished, and, in the case of black sea bass, black sea bass would be considered overfished, but not experiencing overfishing. That means the mortality associated with fishing -- The mortality coming from fishing is not too high. It's that the population has dropped substantially, and very likely there are other factors that are in play here that are affecting black sea bass and their productivity.

When you have that combination of status, yes, there is the recognition that fishing may not necessarily be the cause, but there also needs to be an effort to rebuild the stock, to get the stock back to the place where it's required to be legally or to evaluate what the level of productivity of the stock can be moving forward.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: John, go ahead.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and I've just got a quick question for you, and I'm not trying to beat a dead horse on the data stuff, but it seems like, on every species that we do, we're working with anywhere from four to seven-year-old data. Why is it that the data is not being received fast enough, or is it that it's taking that long to do the updates and assessments and stuff? Where is this major timeframe, and why is there a major timeframe on using data that's that old, without trying to, you know, confuse things.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, in most of the -- I'm going to speak on, I guess, the catch data, because that is monitored on a year-to-year basis. A lot of like the life history, the growth data, that's done through specific studies. Somebody gets a grant, and they conduct a study that lasts two or three years, and then that project is done, and we use those, you know, kind of interspersed types of studies in stock assessments, but it's not the year-to-year monitoring that we have for like catch information. That is monitored on a year-to-year basis. We also have surveys that are a year-to-year basis.

What normally happens is you conduct your sampling of the fishery, your data collection efforts, your collection of logbooks throughout the course of the year. You might -- You know, you finish that in December, and you have that information that has come in.

People are probably still submitting some information a little bit late, and so you're still collecting information probably through January or February, and then you have to go through a quality control process to examine all that information, and so a lot of times -- Say, for commercial data, we get the previous year in the middle or so of the next year, okay, and so we might get commercial data for 2024 in July or so of 2025, and so you have to get the data in place.

Then, when you get to a stock assessment process, you also need to collect all these different sources of data, put them in, and plug them into a model, and so that model is huge. It has a bunch of different inputs, inputs from the commercial fishery about the size of the fish, you know, how many are caught on a given -- On, you know, various trips throughout the year, different regions, and you also have that from the recreational side as well, and so you have all these data inputs that are going into this model.

You have the discussions that go along with these data of this -- You know, this data point looks weird, and it seems like an outlier, and what was going on in the fishery at that time that could explain what's going on here, and do we need to adjust it, and so you have meetings along those lines, and stock assessments themselves take anywhere from -- The fastest track that I've seen is along the lines of, you know, maybe nine months or so, to a year-and-a-half or two years, depending on how complicated your data inputs are, and so, when you kind of have that cutoff of, okay, we're using data through 2024, then you conduct your stock assessment meetings, figure out how best to model the population over the course of the next couple of years.

You might finish your stock assessment at the end of 2026, or the beginning of 2027, but your data ends in 2024, and so those are the processes that go into, you know, why there's that lag time in between, and, typically, those assessments will use kind of assumptions about the interim of, okay, they've averaged, you know, over the last three years of data, and they've averaged this much harvest, and so we're going to guess that they're averaging that much harvest moving into these interim years, and then project the model from it.

That kind of gives some context of why there is a lag, because they do have to go through that QA and QC process, and there are modeling discussions that have to happen to account for any anomalies that happened in the data.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, sir, and I appreciate that, and I really wasn't talking about like the -- I kind of figured in the two years, or you can call it three years, but there's a lot of things that we, and the councils, are being asked to assess, on way older than two to three-year-old data. I mean, I get that, you know, it takes time, but, when you're talking about four, five, six, seven-year-old data for different species, it's -- I guess we just can't get to it as fast we need to, or whatever the case may be.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and sometimes it could be a subject of, you know, whether you have people in place to have those discussions, and you got to prioritize your time. Sometimes, in the case of what led to the need for an update for this assessment, it's the set of assumptions that was used, you know, kind of coming out of the stock assessment, and the council -- The council, they -- The council thought that the way that the fishery would be prosecuted moving forward was different than the way that the Science Center had necessarily viewed the fishery being prosecuted moving forward.

Then you have to have those discussions back and forth to understand, okay, what is the most realistic situation of how this fishery is going to act coming out of this assessment, and, if you have to have back and forth, you know, these are all happening in public meetings, and so you have to have that time to set up your public meeting. You have to have that back and forth within the public meeting, and, yes, that that take time.

That is why this assessment needs to be updated before the council can take further action on it, which, I mean, in this case now we're in 2025, and they're looking at an assessment that goes through 2023, and so it's not the extreme time lag of 2021 that it would have been.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: I know that was a lot, but thank you for explaining that, because it's become -- You know, it's going to be important, moving forward, that we learn along with the council, as they move into other species and doing this same kind of work, and, you know, if we see something that we don't feel like is just right, maybe we can give some guidance to the council from this table, because we do have a lot of expertise here.

I was just going to ask James, on that mutton and yellowtail, and how did that -- How did that information -- Well, who found that there was a problem there in that assessment, and how did that information get compiled with yellowtail with mutton?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm pretty sure that there were some demands for them to go over it with a sharper pencil, and they found -- They found the mistake. I'm not -- I'm not sure if that's exact or not, but I think they took a closer look at things. They had so many people saying that this isn't right that they took another look at it, and they found the one number that pushed everything the wrong way for that species. Go ahead, Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and this is jumping back to the original start date thing, and so I'll agree with Randy that -- You know, I believe that, if I'm not mistaken, the April start date came about back when black sea bass got slashed, and everybody, especially charter and headboat, was like, hey, you know, if we get we lose time in July and August, then we're really -- I mean, we're going to be out of business.

So, you know, I would say we need to leave the start date alone, and leave it in April, in case we have to have cutbacks, or, you know, as we've talked about numerous times, and was sort of very, very prevalent in the previous discussion, there's this humongous difference between charter-headboat guys and recreational guys and the amount of dead discards, et cetera, et cetera, and so, you know, until the point where charter-headboat can get cut out for that section, which we've beat to death, you know, we're going to be in a very precarious, precarious place, going forward, with a possibility of looking at reductions of black sea bass being caught on a year-round basis.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Cameron. Go ahead, Andy.

MR. FISH: I don't know if I missed it, but when is the spawning season for black sea bass, and hopefully it would not open during that.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: If I remember right, black sea bass are winter spawners, and so I don't know exactly the months. I might look at some of the biologists that are over on my left side, if they would know more off the top of their head, but it would be wintertime. They're not summer spawners.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Mike. I'm going to go ahead and speak and then acknowledge Randy, and so all of this is meaningful, clearly. Something that I was hearing, and it kind of goes back to the 30 to 40 percent, is it almost sounds like does this panel want to advise the council to really kind of look and see if this species is overfished, and, if we're going to get to that overfished categorization, do we need a rebuilding plan, and, if we do, we shouldn't kick the can down the road any further.

We should initialize that as soon as possible, and is that where we're at with this species? It's not in my wheelhouse, but this is kind of what I'm hearing here, and we don't have projections on proper ACLs, because we're incomplete, and, if we make all of these adjustments to the way that the data is compiled, and regurgitated, are we going to achieve, if you will, the categorization of overfished? Then we can move forward from there, of what's going to -- You know, what we need to do then. Am I on base or off base?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, with what the council is looking at here, I think there's recognition from the council that black sea bass is not in good shape right now, and very likely that is going to result in lowered catch levels for black sea bass. The difference between lowering the catch levels without a rebuilding plan, versus lowering the catch levels with a rebuilding plan, is that the rebuilding plan places a specific amount of time on your ability to rebuild, and so, presumably, if you fish, you know, below the rate that would cause overfishing, if you are not overfishing a population, that that population should rebuild over time, back to its biomass of maximum sustainable yield.

Now, in a rebuilding plan, you are put on a time clock. It's not simply fish below the overfishing rate. It is fish below the overfishing rate to the extent that this stock rebuilds within ten years, or however long the rebuilding time clock is, and so what's being -- What will come about as the catch levels are proposed is lower catch levels are being proposed, and other measures are being proposed within this action that can reduce harvest of black sea bass, and that's not to say that fishing is the cause of these things, and necessarily that lowering the fishing levels for black sea bass is going to get it to some historical level, because there are other factors that are in play here, but that at least puts it in a position that, if the conditions become right for black sea bass to rebound, that it can rebound.

That's kind of what the difference would be, is are you on a specific -- Are you on a long-term time clock, or are you on a specific time clock, or are you putting in practices to lower harvest, so that you're not necessarily on a time clock, but you're still putting yourself in a position where you're taking less out of the population, so it has a higher probability of improving in the future.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Mike. I think that's exactly what I was looking for, the kind of the distinction between the two. I have Randy, and then Jack.

MR. MCKINLEY: I just wanted to comment on the spawning. I mean, the bass, the last thirty days, have been full of eggs, and it looks like they're just -- They're spawning now, and they should be pretty much complete, and so the timeframe would be right to open it, you know, in April, I think.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Randy. Jack.

MR. COX: Any time I feel like a species is in trouble, the first thing we need to do is to look at that spawning of that species, and do the best we can to protect it, with whatever months those are, but, I mean, I -- You know, when we look at this SPR proxy, North Carolina -- I feel like 40 percent is mighty strong, you know, for -- I don't think our bass fishery --

You know, it has definitely declined, but it may not be to the point that is in Florida, where those fish have migrated out of there, and so, when they looked at this SPR, did they look it state-by-state, or is the whole region -- Like do they collect data from North Carolina all the way down to Florida, how do they -- Do you know what I mean? I'm now asking you how do they collect the data, and how is -- Is it by state or throughout the whole range?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So I know that they would evaluate that proxy, and it's for the entire stock, and so it would be using information from the entire range. It wouldn't be on a state-by-state basis. I would recommend, just so that we can get through the information that's being presented to you at this meeting, and this will come back to you at a future meeting, that the SPR discussion might need to be tabled until October, when we can bring catch levels, the alternatives that are being considered, and, after you all have had the opportunity to listen to that June presentation, and you can have a little bit more information to go into that discussion.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Sounds good, Mike. Chris.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and so that was sort of a question I had, since Jack mentioned -- I know that, last year, with the chevron traps, you all went north of Hatteras, to the Virginia line, and part of that was to get DNA off the bass, right? Wasn't that kind of the primary objective? But you did do it? Did collect any DNA off the bass between Hatteras and Virginia Beach, or the Virginia line?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Wally Bublely is coming to the mic.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and so that was -- That wasn't the primary reason we were doing it, but we used that as a means of getting it, as well as we also took -- We also got samples from other surveys in the Mid-Atlantic, and the New England area as well, and so, next week, there's -- A shoutout to the seminar series talking about black sea bass, and so we'll give some preliminary information about that.

MR. KIMREY: Is that DNA data?

DR. BUBLEY: We'll have the locations of DNA. Right now, they're currently sequencing the DNA, and so it's not -- We don't have the final results of it yet, but we have all of the fin clip samples.

MR. KIMREY: Right, because it's my understanding that the line that was set at Cape Hatteras, between us and the Mid-Atlantic, was set -- That was DNA from twenty-something years ago, and wasn't it nearly twenty years ago, that line, or thirty years? A long, long, long time ago.

So, you know, it's really important to us in North Carolina, because our state is already split between two stocks, you know, and, if they are shifting, you know, we want to -- If they're shifting north, I mean, I would like to see that line come down, and not go up, you know, for us, because

we -- We still have good bass fishing where we're at, you know, and so that's why I was -- I don't know if everybody was aware of that, that's not familiar with the bass fishery, but it's kind of a big deal to us.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chris. I guess we're going to start moving on down the page here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so I have a few comments there on the fishing year start date, most of them kind of along the lines of leave the separate start dates as they are. The next action is to reopen the nearshore seasonal closed areas to black sea bass pots that are equipped with on-demand gear, and so on-demand gear is a fairly newer technology that's been developed, and it was developed so that pots that are in the water do not have vertical lines that are remaining in the water, that could potentially be entangled with whales as they pass through on their migration routes.

That was kind of the original reason for the seasonal closure that occurs for black sea bass pots in nearshore waters from November 1 through April 30, and so what's being proposed here is, now that there is this technology that takes those vertical lines out of the water, but allows the pot fishing to occur within that area, that that area could be reopened to pots that are equipped with appropriate gear.

The council's direction, at this point, is to either keep the seasonal closure as it is or completely remove the seasonal closure, and that should -- I'm going to emphasize this, because it came up in the meeting last week. You would remove the seasonal closure for pots equipped with on-demand gear, and so you still couldn't fish the traditional roped pots, but, those that are equipped with on-demand gear, that do not have a line sitting in the water, would then be able to access that area during the season when it would be close to the roped pots, and so they said either keep it or remove it for that gear, and that's kind of where they've directed, thus far, on that, and so any comments, or recommendations, for that action?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I see several hands. I'm thinking Paul, then Cameron, then Jack.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and so this is fairly new gear. For those of you folks on the AP that aren't familiar with it, this is really slick gear. It's been demonstrated in a variety of fisheries now. This on-demand gear, it's -- I think Jack can speak this really well, probably, and I don't think it's as efficient, of course, as the rope gear, but this ropeless technology has been demonstrated across the country now, across this country and in multiple other countries, for previously roped gears, and I think this is a great idea for the council to consider to open this back up.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Paul. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: I'll take the exact opposite stance. I could care less what kind of gear it is, but we've had -- You know, the black sea bass in our area, you know, it's been a huge deal to not have trappers trapping right off the beach, and so I guess, you know, I would ask the council to look at the totality of what we're facing, charter, headboat, recreational, versus I believe forty or fifty permit holders, that hold half of the entire black sea bass allocation, and so, you know, what's the best -- What's the best option there, for forty or fifty people to be able to fish inshore or with

the rest of the entire population being able to keep a good fishery, that we've had for the last ten years?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I think Paul wants to rebut that.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I appreciate that comment, Cameron. I think the closures is not sector -- One sector versus the other here, if I'm understanding your comment right, and I might not be, but I think this closure was put in to protect right whales, or potentially protect right whales, from those types of interactions, and so I think the council is considering taking this action to reopen the wintertime trap fishery, because they feel like the traps are now mitigating -- With this ropeless technology, mitigating the impacts to whales, compared to how it might have been with the rope gear, and so that's the perspective I'm coming at it with.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Cameron, and I'm just going to let this wrap up.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and I understand. I understand the rope gear. I'm just saying that, you know, we're -- Charter-headboat is going to be in an exceedingly, exceedingly tough spot, since it -- Definitely we're not getting a whole lot of traction with our own sector allocation or anything, and so to allow the trapping to come all the way into the inshore could have an exceedingly negative impact, if trappers in our area want to invest in the ropeless gear.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: Yes, and I agree with some of the comments Paul made. This is pretty cool stuff, you know, to mitigate the right whale issue, but what does that -- Paul, do you know, or does anybody know, what the cost of that is per trap now?

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I don't, Jack. There's a couple different technologies. It's pretty high, but the loss rate, based on what Chops Cowdrey has been doing out of Sneads Ferry, that loss rate of that gear is pretty low, and so it's a high initial investment. I can't remember, trap by trap, what it is. It's substantial to start with, but then, you know, if you're not losing gear, and those guys aren't losing gear in the test fisheries, then, you know, your cost is initial, and it stabilizes after that. That's my understanding of it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I've got Tony, and then Randy.

MR. CONSTANT: Yes, and I agree. Those traps are very good, technology-wise. They're a good, solid investment for the commercial sector, but I have to agree with Cameron. I just don't see us bringing that back open, when we're having to deal with keeping the fishery open and putting another regulation on all the commercial harvest.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Randy. Thank you, Tony.

MR. MCKINLEY: I'm just -- In defense of Chops, and I like him. He's sold me fish before, but I think -- Not going against Cameron, but there's not forty or fifty. I mean, I don't know if we have a number of the active pot fishing boats. I'm thinking it's just a handful.

AP MEMBER: I think there's thirty-three now.

MR. MCKINLEY: There might be thirty-three, but, active, there's not even that. I mean, it's a very, very small number.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and, to jump in there, the number of guys that know how to use this gear, and are trained to use this gear, is even less than the thirty-two that Randy is bringing up. It's a very small number.

MR. MCKINLEY: Yes, and I will say it's -- I mean, it's less than a dozen that are doing it. I mean, he would be the only one really off our coast doing it. I don't know about South Carolina. I didn't think there was any active ones off South Carolina.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Chris, go ahead.

MR. CONKLIN: Yes, and so, I mean, the -- Giving up that area for the whales to swim through, and that that was the reason for the closure of that area for black sea bass pot fishermen, in case one of the 400 whales, you know, got hooked up on a vertical pot line. The fishermen that are left in the fishery have worked very hard to try to try to mitigate that possibility, and they've demonstrated, through, you know, years of research and development, and they've proven that the gear works.

The only reason why the area was closed was because of the whales, and now they've proven they're not going to tangle up with whales, and so it was the council's intent to reopen it, if that was ever a possibility, and I don't support going back on the original, you know, intent of the -- I mean, why the hell would you even go develop all this stuff if you can't use it and people are going to fight using it, you know, and you're talking like not many guys anyways, and I think it might have been 330 lines, if everybody was fishing at the same damn time.

Another thing is, I mean, you can't catch fish that aren't there, and I was having some other thoughts about black sea bass, and I wanted to -- At lunch, I was going to ask about why not, you know, make like another council be in charge of it, since they've all swam, you know, somewhere else, and sorry, but we're wasting a lot of time on fish that we don't even have anymore, and so there could be a better use of our resources to give it up.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Chris. All right. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Thank you for those comments. We'll include those in the kind of the running log that we have of your comments, and, later on in the process, you'll have an opportunity to discuss alternatives, one against the other, as well.

The next action that's included in this item, you've seen it before in Regulatory Amendment 35. This is something that is looking to reduce dead discards for the recreational sector, and that was something that they did specify, and so I want to make sure it's clear that it was spelled out for the recreational sector.

This is likely to be developed similar to that action, where there would be a prohibition on multi-hook rigs, and that would be written kind of along with the regulations that we already have for hooks. Circle hooks are required within north of 35, I think it was, and so there would also be, along those same lines, that it would be a single hook, as opposed to a multi-hook rig, for the recreational sector.

Again, this is aimed at reducing the dead discards, which are a big component of the removals for black sea bass, and so this would either be to continue to allow multi-hook rigs, or to not allow them, and that's kind of the range of alternatives that's been directed at this point, and so any comments on what should be considered along these lines?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Paul.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I'm struggling to see the utility of this suggestion here to prohibit multi-hook rigs, especially if you're using circle hooks, because, if you're catching two bass at the same time, and they're both circle hooks, they're probably going to both be jaw hooked, and so I'm struggling -- If circle hooks are already required, I'm struggling to see the savings of using a single hook, compared to a multi-hook rig, and I could be missing something.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So there's not a huge amount of literature on this, but there have been a couple of studies that have been conducted, one of them being through Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and, depending on the species, the difference in catch, the difference in overall catch, for single versus double sometimes ranged around 15 percent.

Again, it varied species-by-species, and depending on who was using the gear, but there could be some reduction within the amount of overall catch, or the rate of the catch that's happening, and so, if it slows down the rate of catch, then you're able to -- The thought is, if you slow down the rate of the catch, you're able to fill the day without having as many fish that are caught and thrown back, and so, overall, your number of discards would be lower than it would otherwise.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Paul, and then I'm going to go to John.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: I think I kind of heard two different things there. We're slowing down the rate of catch, which I totally get, Mike, but I also thought this was -- This alternative was being developed to reduce the discard mortality rate, which is different than the rate of catch, and my contention is that this might not address that discard mortality rate, as opposed to the rate of catch of black sea bass.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No, and it's not meant to reduce the discard mortality rate as much as it is to reduce the number of dead discards, the total number of dead discards. That's what it's meant to reduce, and so you reduce the number of fish that are being caught, or how quickly fish are being caught, and, therefore, fewer fish have to be caught and discarded, and then, you know, you take that 13 percent of those that would die from that process.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: John, go ahead.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and I think -- We keep talking about the dead discards and stuff, and that's from the recreational fishermen and stuff, but I was just having a thought, and I asked Jack what he thought, because I don't know much about sea bass, because we don't do much of it, but would it be a consideration, possibly, to just do away with size limit on recreational black sea bass fishing?

That would do away with all dead discards, and leave it in commercial, if they're not having that big of a problem with dead discards, and, that way, you could do away with a lot of the big numbers that you're talking about as far as having to throw them away, because you keep saying the small ones -- If they're gut hooking them, or they're doing whatever, but if -- Once they did kill it, if they could keep it, and they were allowed X amount of fish or whatever, then you would eliminate a lot of the discards. I don't know if that's something that could be looked at.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Mike, go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So I guess a couple of notes, some for black sea bass, but some, you know, for the larger snapper grouper fishery, and so this would be for the recreational sector of the snapper grouper fishery, and so this is one of those actions that would stretch beyond black sea bass, and dead discards are a problem for several snapper grouper species, and so this wouldn't only be affecting them, but, specific to black sea bass, they're also -- I wonder if there would be the appeal to the recreational fishermen to even keep a six-inch black sea bass, if there were no size limit. I think there probably still would be a level of discards, or fish that people are not necessarily bringing home, just because black sea bass are being caught, you know, within this fishery at very small sizes, that may not have the utility to be used for many recreational fishermen.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that. Matt, go ahead.

MR. MATTHEWS: I'm good.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Great.

MR. NELSON: Paul Nelson, Ponce Inlet. Law enforcement is going to be impossible to enforce this anyway. I mean, people in the recreational fishery are going to do what they want to do. I understand that that's what we're trying to do, but we're really wasting a lot of time on two-hook rigs, in my opinion, because I know that we're going to have recreational fishermen, and commercial fishermen, that -- I know it's allowed in the commercial fishery, but recreational fishermen are going to use double rigs. If they feel that the commercial fisherman can use them, they're going to say, well, why can't we use them? There's going to be some conflict with that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Paul. We've got Cameron, and then Haley.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Just going back to the no size limit thing, if I recall correctly, when sea bass got shut down years ago, the whole reason to keep the size limit up was just to keep the season going, because the worst thing possible for a charter-headboat is if a season closes down, and then we're pretty much out of business, and there's nothing to go for, if we can't at least give the illusion that you can go out and catch a keeper black sea bass.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It's a healthy illusion. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. Just to reiterate what some folks have been saying around the table, out of Ponce Inlet, I think it is like the 28-degree line, where circle hooks are already required for fishing in snapper groupers, and so we've been utilizing circle hooks for years now. Folks get on the boat, and they've never seen a circle hook before, and they're like my hook is bent, and something is wrong, and give me a new hook. We say, no, no, no, and it's better for the fish. Trust us. So that's news to me, that other folks are still using non-circle hooks.

Either way, we've definitely seen a reduction in discards, particularly for many of our sought after snapper grouper species. They're very rarely got hooked. They're hooked in the jaw, and, you know, you can adjust your equipment to mitigate discards. We've seen it. It's been proven in the science.

Then, to piggyback on what Paul said, how on earth would you enforce this? It's enforceable aboard our headboat, because we have onboard observers, and we have dock intercepts, and we have this huge level of accountability to do the right thing. You do the right thing, because it's the right thing to do. Yes, headboats have to, and I think it would be impossible to enforce on a general recreational level.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Mike, go ahead, and then I've got a couple more.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, just noting some of the discussion that happened during Regulatory Amendment 35 that, you know, kind of pops its head up as this action gets brought up again, a lot of the law enforcement discussion -- Like, yes, there was concern about law enforcement being able to enforce this, but there was also the recognition from the council that the council already has regulations on something like hooks, and so, theoretically, if somebody wanted to break the rules, and not use a circle hook, they could do that.

Not legally, of course, but they could go ahead and try to do that, and, you know, there may be concerns about whether people that are doing that are being caught by law enforcement, and this is a regulation that's at the same level as that, and a lot of the discussion that happened, even at the AP, was noted that -- You know, I guess it was noted that, yes, there are bad actors in the fishery, that are going to break the rules, but those bad actors are going to break rules no matter what the rules are, and the intent was to make the rule for the majority of the fishermen, that are trying to do the right thing, and are trying to follow the rules, and, if most of the fishermen are doing that, then they would be adhering to this, and then there could be some benefit from this type of action going into place, and so that's just reiterating some of the discussion that the council had, that the advisory panel had, that came around in the last round when this was discussed.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right, Mike. Thanks. I've got Tony, and then Cameron.

MR. CONSTANT: Thanks. A lot of the questions are getting redundant, and I see, in the rec sector, we need more enforcement on the j-hook versus the circle hook. Like what Chris was saying earlier, you see somebody with a long-shank j-hook with a sea bass on the end of it, and I see more people not using that j-hook out there than a double hook, and a double rig with circle hooks -- I don't believe I agree with Paul. I think that they're going to -- I see them hooked in the

jaw. I don't see any gut hooked, as long as we're using straight inline circles, and I think that's more of an issue than a multi-hook rig.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so I would say that, you know, my view would be, you know, if it's going to -- On the council's view, if a single-hook rig is going to cut down the mortality, and increase what we're taking, then let it roll, and it will be what it will be. The people will follow the rules if they want to, and enforcement is going to do what they want to, but, as long as the council is looking at it, hey, you're doing your best, and it is reducing the discard rate, then I would think that's the whole purpose of it. Reducing the overall number, right.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, and it's -- I mean, it's the number, but, I mean, we all can do the math on it, and so it's not the rate, but it's the number. All right, and so we're going to go ahead and pause for lunch. It is, what, 12:25 now. The same thing as yesterday? 1:55?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: We probably need to come back a little earlier than that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: 1:45.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Welcome back, everybody. I hope everybody had a good, nourishing lunch, and let's get back on track here and jump right back in and finish construction on this thing.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right so, getting back into Amendment 56, there was a bit of a computer hiccup during the break, and so the notes are not showing on the screen that I took, but I am going to go back to the recording and grab the notes that I had listed from the previous section, and I'll do that ahead of developing the report, and you all can let me know, when you see the report, if there's any issues, but I'll make sure to grab those notes, so that information can be included, but it is recorded. We both have an audio and a visual recording of the presentation, and so that's all there.

All right, and so, coming back into Amendment 56, we're talking about black sea bass, and the next item that the council is looking at within this amendment is considering a revision of the recreational bag limit. The current bag limit is seven fish per person, and mostly what's talked about has been reducing the recreational bag limit, given there is expected to be a harvest reduction for black sea bass.

The council did ask for an alternative exploring a larger bag limit to be included, at least for comparative purposes in analyses, and so we are going to include an eight-fish bag limit, just so that, when the different analyses are run, they can see what it would look like for an increase, versus a decrease, but I think what we were initially thinking for a range within this recreational bag limit was somewhere between three and seven, but we would look to the advisory panel, if you have any recommendations on what the range -- I guess it would be three to eight, including that increase, but we would look to the advisory panel for any recommendations on what you think should be included for consideration in that range of bag limits.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I saw Randy, and then Cameron.

MR. MCKINLEY: I know Cameron is going to say the same thing, but we don't know what the allowable catch is going to be, and so it's just got to be whatever keeps it open the longest, and whatever that figure might be.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate that, Randy. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and Randy was exactly correct, and so, you know, when we went to seven, I was like that's a high number, and so as long as we keep the season open as long as possible for charter-headboat, whether that's four or whatever, and just throwing a number out there, and, I mean, that's the most valuable thing for charter-headboat, is we've got to at least have the season open, or else it's just death.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: What if, proportionately, whatever the ACL, the suggested ACL, becomes, you kind of make it proportionate to the seven that it is now, and so, if it was 100,000 pounds, and you're allowed seven, if they drop to 50,000 pounds, you're allowed three-and-a-half? I mean, just -- Just like -- Just an idea. Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, just to follow-up to your comment, Cameron, I guess, what should the low end of the range be? Like what is the -- If you go any lower than this, then there's no business even catching black sea bass?

MR. SEBASTIAN: You know, I mean, the reality is it goes back to the illusion, of, as long as you can say you can go out and catch them, we'll have people, but, when you say you cannot catch them, because they're off limits, then you have no people, and so, I mean, for me, three or four, literally, you know, whatever it takes to make the season as long as possible, because, when it goes to you can't catch any, then we're just done.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Thanks. Go ahead, Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: Thank you, James. That question is a very good question, Mike. When snapper first closed, I was -- We were talking about this the other night, and I remember five charter captains just singing the blues that they were going to go out of business, because red snapper was going to close, and this was fifteen years ago.

Now, along the lines, when you ask how much to keep things alive, it's really, really close, and I know he testified to that, but, if we take that sea bass down to three, or four, or five, and we already can't do red snapper, and we're going to take gags to who knows, and it's getting to the point where, you know, the charter-for-hire, period, whether it's charter boats or headboats or whatever they are, is not making it, and then we've already seen it with the working waterfront, because, if you can't afford to pay the rent, then that disappears too, and so we're really getting close on all the species.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Tony. Mike, go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thanks. and I'm just mostly asking for the purpose of, I guess, what the IPT needs to analyze within that range, because, you know, in general principle, the fewer fish you

catch per person, the longest season is going to be, up to the point where, you know, the longest season is open the full year, you know, or as long as the ACL, you know, allows persistence of that.

So I guess I'm wondering how far should we analyze? Should we analyze down to three? Should we analyze down to one, or should we analyze down to the point of as long as possible of an open season, with allowing, you know, ability to catch at least one fish per person?

MR. CONSTANT: I would agree that as long as possible to stay open.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I kind of think, proportionally speaking, you know, depending on what the ACL is, you know, compared to what it is now, and I mean, that would --

MR. CONSTANT: I agree with you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: The season would stay open the same amount of time. We're having some technical difficulties, and so bear with us.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Allie, how does that sound? Is that any louder?

MS. IBERLE: Yes, and I can hear fine.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. Hopefully that works a bit better for people. If you can't hear the sound, then drop another comment as we move through our discussion, but I think, related to where we are here, we've got comments. Anything else for the bag limit, or can we move down?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It's looking like move down.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Not seeing any hands, we'll move to the recreational size limit, and so what's been talked about thus far is considering a change to the recreational size limit, reducing it from the current thirteen inches down as low as eleven inches, and so we would probably have alternatives of eleven, twelve, thirteen. Eleven inches would match the commercial minimum size limit. Are there any comments or any recommended other ranges that the council should consider for that action?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: I would love to see you go to eleven. I think it should. I mean, you've got, you know, people that just don't have bigger boats, and the inshore is hard to catch that thirteen-inch fish, and eleven inches would at least help, and it would definitely help with the discard situation.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Randy. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: I'll disagree with Randy on this one. So, you know, once again, so our whole deal is, hey, if it stays at thirteen, and we go to four fish, and we're able to fish year-round, then that's all really we can ask for, and so anything -- You know, my fear would be, if you drop it

down, and then you do hit your limit, and then the season is shut down, and then it's over with, and then it's all for naught anyway.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I would dare to ask the question though of if -- If everything kind of changes with the way the ACL is calculated around dead discards, if less fish are getting discarded. I mean, that has to be taken into account at some point, I think. If you're having less interactions with fish, and you are -- You know, before you have your bag limit. Mike, go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and this is one of the places -- This discussion, as well as the bag limit discussion, where the council looked for some preliminary analyses, and I'm not sure if you tuned into -- I think it was the December meeting, and they talked about it a little bit in March as well, but they looked at the number of discards, and also the number of retained fish angler, or per trip, something of that sort, and the way that it works out for black sea bass, just with the number of fish that are caught and discarded, caught and released, especially in the inshore waters, that are undersized, the vast majority of trips that catch black sea bass harvest zero of them.

The vast majority that are catching them are not landing any of them, and so what that tells you is, as far as the size limit reduction, in order to affect the overall catch, the number of fish that are being brought into the boat and then, you know, released, there would also need to be a change in the bag, because, if you're able to eat more of those fish, then you're going to be increasing your retention, but you're also still going to be throwing back a lot of a lot of fish, if there's continued effort to try to reach a high possession limit, because they're just not catching enough of those fish that they're able to land them, and so it can increase it, increase retention some, but not to the point where people are limiting out and then they're moving on to other forms of fishing.

That's what the data have indicated at this point, and so it's likely going to need to be some combination of size limit and -- If the size limit is going to change, it will probably need to be in combination with some level of bag limit change as well, and we will have those as we develop the amendment. We're going to analyze different combinations of size and bag limit, and so you'll be able to see the season projections associated with all of those.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Cameron, did you still want to say something? Okay. All right, Mike. It looks like we can move down again.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. The next discuss item is a seasonal retention closure that would match the shallow-water grouper closure, and so black sea bass would be closed from January through April. The council also talked about inclusion of alternatives that don't include this entire timeframe, or sub-portions, but, along the same lines of seasonal retention closure, this would just be for catching and keeping of black sea bass. I listed there the other snapper grouper species that are close to recreational harvest during January through April, and so those are shown on the screen.

The council did also ask for inclusion of some analysis looking at historical time periods when the recreational sector hit their ACL, and closures went into place after hitting their ACL, seeing if that had any effect on the number of discards that occurred in those years, and that would have been like the early 2010s, and so it would have been a much different fishery at the time, but we will take a look at that information and see what we can glean from it, and so, at this point, we're trying to figure out what alternatives should be included there.

Right now, there is -- The no action would be that there would not be a seasonal retention closure. One of the alternatives that they've requested has been January through April, but they did ask for inclusion of some different alternatives that may not be that entire group of four months, and so I'll turn it back over to the AP to see if there's any recommendation on other alternatives that should be considered under this action.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Randy.

MR. MCKINLEY: I would hate for the charter boats to be -- You know, the inshore charters to be shut down in April and May. It's bad enough going all the way through April, and I know Chris would agree with that too, but anyway, but it's more important to be open longer.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Tony.

MR. CONSTANT: I'm not a fan of closures at all, but I happen to agree with this one, and especially since Randy was mentioning that he was seeing these things spawn out in April. January through April, there's not a lot of fishing going on, but, if it was closed for the spawning, it sure may help the stock, and we're already not bottom fishing for grouper, and I'm kind of a fan of going ahead and doing that four-month closure, to see if it picks the stock up. It may be a painless thing that would be worth it. Whether we'll get it back or not, if it does work, is another thing to see.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Tony. I've got Chris, and then Cameron.

MR. KIMREY: Yes, and, I mean, I see the point the guys are making with the closure over here, Tony and everybody, and, I mean, I'm a big fan of no action on this one, and it's partly because of where I'm at and what I do. You know, one of the few things in the nearshore ocean we fish for, charter fishing and/or our recreational guys, is sea bass, January, February, March, and April, especially March and April.

I mean, I've ran, just in the past few weeks, several trips, and sea bass were our primary target, and we caught them, and caught them good. I did several last month, and I'm not the only one, you know, and there's plenty of us that do it. There's literally nothing left. If you take sea bass from us, what the hell are we going to fish for? I mean, I can't be any more blunt than that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Yes, and I'll second that. Yes, I would say definitely no action, and the reason is there's just nothing else out there at all. You know, I mean, for the inshore, if you take away sea bass -- I mean, we do a pretty good business. Like Chris said, we do a good business, and, I mean, not like slammed, but we have trips going on, and that's -- I mean, that's putting money in our captains' pockets, and our mates' pockets, and, you know, they're getting able to pay their bills again from, you know, two or three months of not having much going on, and so it's a big financial deal to the charter-headboat if we have nothing to fish for four months, and that's basically what this would equate to.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Cameron. I've got Paul, and then Haley.

DR. RUDERSHAUSEN: Yes, and I'll just third what Cameron and Chris said, that, especially this winter, and we had a legitimate winter off the coast of North Carolina, on the headboat that I hop on on a regular basis out of Morehead City. That bottom water is really cold a long way out in the middle of the winter, and their bread and butter this past winter was definitely black sea bass, and so, without that, they're struggling in the winter, without a bass fishery.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Paul. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: I would like to fourth what everyone has been saying. You know, out of our scope, Ponce Inlet, we don't see much bass anymore, but even the headboat to the north, in the Jacksonville-Mayport area, the water does stay a lot colder, and they do catch those fish, and they do rely on those, and so, when we talk about a timeframe of January through April, you know, in Florida, and up and down the east coast, that's spring break, right, and that's a busy time, and, when the weather allows, you have to go.

It's not necessarily to make a profit, but it's to, you know, crawl your way back out of the wintertime hole and make your dockage, and make your rent, and pay your people, and so I would strongly be in favor of no action on a January through April closure, based on the fact that that we need it. You know, you can only squeeze so much before there's just nothing left.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Haley. Looking around the room, I don't see any more comments on this section.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and then the final action that's included right here is not black sea bass oriented. I noted, yesterday, when we talked about golden tilefish, that the council is interested in revising the recreational season start date for that species, and we are trying to find the best place to put that, the best amendment to put that in, whether it belongs here in this black sea bass amendment or in the blueline tilefish amendment that we'll start later this year, after that assessment is completed.

I think, for the sake of the time schedule today, as well as the fact that we don't know if this is going to stay here or is going to be shifted over to another amendment, I think we can hold off on this, on discussing this action today, because it will come back to you, either in this amendment or in another form, but I did want to make you aware that that's one of the discussions that the council has had, is that they are thinking of revising that recreational season start date and potentially aligning it with other deepwater species that start on May 1.

If it's okay with you, Chair, and with the panel, then we can pause on that, and hold off on that, until October, and then we can bring it back to you when we have a bit of a clearer idea of where that's going to -- Where that's going to fit, moving forward.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm not seeing any -- David, go ahead.

MR. MOSS: That's fine, and we could pause the discussion. The one thing I will say, and we don't have to necessarily take notes on this, is it's only like a two-ish-month season as it is, starting in I believe January, right, and I think that's when it opens, which is theoretically the more difficult time to get out, and it's getting more and more accessible, obviously, as I've stated before, and so,

if we move this to May, when it's easier to get out, I mean, we're -- It's going to be closed like that, and people are already angry, down by me, because of how short it is.

Similar to what other people have said about, you know, having something open kind of throughout the year, at least you can go and get something deep dropping, kind of at the beginning of the year, when other things are closed, and, if we move this to May, I mean, a couple week season, and like, you know, people are really going to be angry, and so just keep that in mind. I mean, we can table this until October, and it's fine, but --

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, David. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: When is the other deepwater species open for the recreational?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So blueline and snowy open on May 1. If I could -- I would probably have to bring back like the deepwater complex, and other pieces of the FMU that are in deeper water, but those are typically the two main deepwater species that have been discussed, and those are May 1.

MR. BONURA: All right. Thank you. Just, in my opinion, and I'm not a recreational fisherman, per se, but I would say why not have all deepwater species aligned with one another?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Vincent. David, go ahead.

MR. MOSS: Just to add one other thing too is to remember, and I understand that this is a very localized problem, if you will, but I think some of these, if not all of them, are open in state waters still, which believe it or not are accessible, and like you can catch these in state waters down by me. Not necessarily goldens, but bluelines and snowies, for sure.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I mean, just to kind of think about what Vincent was saying, I mean, maybe a split season, and I don't know, and like you can access all the deepwater species and have the ACL cut in half. That way, at two different times of the year, you would have access to these fish, and it's just a thought. Back to you, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and so that is all we had for the actions. I do want to note, and I probably should have said this a little bit earlier, although it has come up, and so I've said it in different parts interspersed, but, yes, black sea bass is one of the species that has a pretty strong component of that stock that exists not in federal waters, and so any of the regulations that the council would be changing would only apply in federal waters, and the council would do its best to work with the states, but the states are not necessarily obligated to match whatever the council does.

That does make it a bit more difficult to improve a stock that spans that entire frame, because the council is responsible for improving the status and the management of the entire stock, and so the stock extends into areas where the council can't necessarily -- Or does not have jurisdiction to necessarily put in the same regulations, and so that is something that -- Just to kind of tuck into the back of your mind, as we move forward with these discussions, that that can make things a bit more complicated than the typical format for some of our other species.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Mike. I've got a question from Matt.

MR. MATTHEWS: I just have one more comment before we wrap it up here. Somebody mentioned, a minute ago, about timing that season so that we -- That less recreational anglers get to access it, because it's in rougher time of the year, and I think there's a handful of issues that I see with that.

One is you're excluding a class people from the fishery, because those people that can't afford the bigger boats to get out further, to weather the rougher seas, aren't going to be able to fish, and the other is, if we're looking at regulating the whole South Atlantic, it's going push the effort south, because, the less you have to run out -- You know, the closer you catch them to shore, and, I mean, say we're catching blues in state waters. Well, up here, you've got to go a lot further, and so it's going to -- It's going to force a lot of that catch down south and targeted in one specific area, and so I just wanted to make sure I commented on that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Matt. Back to you.

MS. BROUWER: Thanks, AP. We really appreciate the conversation about black sea bass around the table. Mike, could you scroll back up? I just want to make sure we're all kind of talking the same language here, and you can make sure I'm hearing you correctly, and so the overall support is for whatever combines, from a most likely recreational, and we're going to talk specifically the recreational for-hire fishery, but an overall support of whatever combines for a max season, bag limit and size limit, and take into consideration your fishing year, and so, if we start April 1, and that photo is gone in December, it's going to be closed until April 1, and so that season could be affected too, and it's just something for you guys to think about. It's not just bag limit and size limit, but it's also going to be that season and how that plays into when that ACL might be reached, and so just thanks for thinking about that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you so much. Any questions, or comments, with that information, that little nugget? This is your opportunity to kind of get ahead of this and, you know, steer the council on what they should be thinking, that we're thinking. I don't see any hands. Thank you very much. Mike, I think we're back to you.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so we're through all of the actions, and I just want to give you a brief overview of the timing that we're looking at right now for this amendment. June is when the council will see the catch recommendations from the SSC, as well as some initial actions and alternatives, and possibly some level of preliminary analysis, but we won't have a draft amendment for them, because we need to have those catch recommendations included when we send them the draft amendment, and so, with the timeline that we're working with right now, they would receive a draft amendment in September.

That's when they would potentially consider this amendment for public hearing approval, public hearings being conducted in the fall, and then, ultimately, having council approval tentatively scheduled for March of 2026, and so effective regulations possibly late 2026, or early 2027, and that's what we would be looking at for the timeframe for this amendment, but I would strongly suggest, those who are invested in this fishery, to stay tuned, and tune into the SSC meeting that's

coming up in April, and tune in, if possible, next week to the seminar series. That will be Tuesday afternoon.

If you if you can't make the seminar series, then we do record all of our seminar series meetings, and so those are posted online. If you don't know how to access those, then shoot me an email, and I'll point you -- I'll give you the link, and you check those out. You can look at that seminar series or any of the other sessions that we've had going in the past.

Then I suggest tuning into the June council meeting, to listen to the black sea bass discussion there, because there are a lot of developments that are going to happen in between now and your October meeting for this amendment, and so, that way, you can kind of stay in the know of what's happening for this amendment, and that is all I have for black sea bass, and I guess I can answer any questions on the timing before we move off.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Cameron, go ahead.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so you said you're going to run multiple different scenarios on how things could be affected by hooks, by numbers, by timin, things of that nature?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Not me personally, but our IPT, yes but, yes, and so we've developed, in the past, kind of the decision tools that we've used in different amendments, and we will probably need one for this amendment, where you can plug in your bag limit, and you plug in your, you know, season start date, and you plug in your -- What's the other one? The size limit, and you can see, from the combination of those things, this is the projected season length, and you can toggle between those options, to see, you know, does one of them not really affect the season length a whole lot, or does one affect it very significantly, and the council -- You all will see that at a future meeting, and the council will be able to see that for their decision-making process.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Well, yes, and that would run -- That would be exceedingly important information when we're talking about an April date versus a January date, because, at the end of the day, it all comes down to how long can the season last, and, if you've got to roll the dice, do you roll the dice to be shut down starting in July, or do you roll the dice and you're shut down January, February, March, and April?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All things to consider. Looking around the -- Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman, and really quick, before we move off of this, Mike, was the SRHS data incorporated, or considered, when making this amendment, or was that MRIP?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes.

MS. STEPHENS: It is? Okay, and just something that I want to touch on, for those who probably don't receive an SRHS annual report, our latest one here on the black sea bass, for all the regions, the average length is right at 13.8, or 13.9, for a five and ten-year average.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Haley. It looks like this puts black sea bass to bed, and I think we'll be directly moving on to Item 10, the for-hire reporting amendment, and I would like to bring John Hadley and Myra Brouwer up.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so this is Attachment 10 in your briefing book, but the attachment itself is a little bit different than what I want to show here. John Hadley and I are leads on this amendment, and so we put together a PowerPoint to walk the AP through, and so you can refer to the document. This presentation is in the additional materials section of the website.

This is an amendment that would make changes to for-hire reporting, and so it would affect charter and headboat vessels, and I'll give you first a little bit of background of how this all got started. Most of you know the SEFHIER program was put in place through implementation of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment. That was back in 2018-ish.

The actual program, which implemented the electronic reporting, and then put in a frequency and all the requirements, went into effect in 2021, and this affects Snapper Grouper, CMP, and so the mackerels, and Dolphin Wahoo for those vessels that have federal permits in those fisheries.

Throughout, I guess, once the program was implemented, and a couple of years after that, the council was getting periodic reporting, briefings from the SEFHIER program, to kind of check how things were going. In 2023, I believe it was in December, the council received an update presentation where they were told that overall compliance for the South Atlantic with the reporting requirements was really low.

These are the figures that the council heard, 83 percent of the permitted vessels reporting at least one time in 2023, and so that was an overall number. This is not to say that -- You know, the compliance also has to be looked at relative to the accuracy of the information, the timing, and so there were many other factors that were contributing to this overall low compliance, and so 37.4 of the vessels were assessed to be meeting all the reporting requirements.

In 2024, the council started thinking about an amendment. They went through a lengthy process, where they received presentations from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, and they received a presentation from Amy Dukes about how the for-hire reporting in the State of South Carolina was working, and so they just got a bunch of information.

At the same time, the Gulf Council is also having to go through revisiting the reporting requirements for their program, which was actually set aside in February of 2023, after a court order, and so they're having to redo the whole thing, and, also, the Highly Migratory Species Division of NMFS is also looking at electronic reporting, and so we have a situation where there's, you know, permitted vessels in those three fisheries that could be having different reporting requirements, depending on the permits that they have.

We're trying to make sure that, as much as we can, there is consistency in those reporting requirements for all those various programs and permits and that the reporting burden is minimized for the permit holders. Another thing I'll say is, in 2024, the council. When they were told the overall compliance with these reporting requirements was really low, they said, okay, well, what level of compliance is necessary to make sure that the data can be used in management and to make sure that we are -- You know, that the program is functioning like it's supposed to.

The Regional Office and the Science Center sent a letter to the council with various -- I can't see my notes, but the letter basically said, you know, initially, we knew that there needed to be three

years of side-by-side comparison, right, and so when, you know, for-hire captains started reporting in 2021, they were aware that there were going to have to be at least three years of side-by-side comparisons, to make sure that the data were usable in management.

According to the agency, the data are not able to be used in management right now, as they are, because we are lacking a validation component, right, and so the compliance is low, and we don't have validation, and so this letter basically said, okay, these are the things that need to be improved in order for this program that you've put together to be successful, to do what it was supposed to be doing in the first place, and so, basically, we are trying to improve compliance, collect the data that can be directly used in management, and then also trying to minimize reporting burden for you guys.

This all got started, like I said, from March through December 2024. We gathered information from the council. In January and February of this year, we brought together the For-Hire Reporting Advisory Panel, which is a temporary advisory panel that's been put together specifically to advise the council on this amendment, right, and there's a couple of you, I believe, and I know Haley and Chris are on that AP.

They discussed some potential changes. We also brought together the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel, and I walked them through everything that I want to walk you guys through, and the council got input from those two APs in March, and they approved for scoping, and so we're getting ready to hold scoping for this amendment, which will be done online.

We're not going to do a live webinar. We're going to make a document, make a presentation, put that on the website, and have an extended comment period to get input from the council. They're going to also -- We are convening the three APs for the three FMPs, right, and so Dolphin Wahoo is coming up at the end of this month. Mackerel Cobia met earlier this week, and we'll bring all that input to the council, and then we're going to work on the amendment, if they choose to continue moving forward, and we are going to be bringing it to them for potential approval for public hearings at the end of this year, and so that's kind of where we are.

I should say the Gulf Council is about a year ahead of us, because they started this process before we did, and so they are looking to approve their amendment in June of this year, and so this is a list of the possible actions that we could be looking at.

We're going to talk about do we need to modify the reporting frequency and the timing of when the reports are submitted? Do we want to talk about hail-in and hail-out, or, you know, some kind of trip notification? We're going to talk about approved landing locations, and I'll explain to you guys what that means. The validation survey is something that the region and the science center said was needed, and then talk about whether any modifications are needed to the current way that economic data are gathered for charter vessels, and then also talk about whether the did-not-fish reports are working and whether any changes should be done.

So, for the reporting frequency and timing, so there's two components, right, and, right now, the federally-permitted charter and headboat vessels for those three fisheries have to report all the fish that are harvested and discarded from each trip and submit that weekly. Potentially, we could change -- Look at modifying the frequency of reporting, and so how often you report, as well as

the timing of that report submission, and so that would be the deadline for when the report needs to be sent in.

This table shows you what's currently in place, on that top row, and this is -- It includes the SEFHIER for the South Atlantic, the headboat survey, and so, currently, it's a weekly reporting. The Gulf of Mexico, the Gulf, SEFHIER are in the process of revamping now, and so we don't know where they're going to end up, but they are proposing -- They're looking at potentially requiring a report prior to offloading the catch, also within thirty minutes of the completion of each trip, or each trip daily, and so once at the end of the day.

In the Greater Atlantic Region, they have what's called vessel trip reports, and those are generally required forty-eight hours after they enter -- After the vessel enters port. For recreational tilefish, it's a little bit shorter, and that's every twenty-four hours.

There are no proposed changes in that region, and like I said, HMS is also looking at potentially changing. Right now you can do an electronic report, and you can report by telephone, and there's also catch cards that you can submit. They are looking to changing that and putting it -- Putting electronic reporting every twenty-four hours after the end of the trip, and so, as you can see, trying to make these things all fit together and be consistent is a little bit challenging, and so here's what we're talking about, and this is where you guys get to tell me what you think.

The reporting frequency, those are the two options, and there's potentially other frequencies, other ideas, that may want to be considered, like once at the end of the day, report after each trip, or some other frequency.

For the timing, and, here, we are trying to kind of match what these other programs have, so that there can be, you know, kind of a comparison, and hopefully the same range of alternatives is being analyzed, and so should that be within twenty-four hours at the end of each trip, within forty-eight hours at the end of each trip, and these numbers are, you know, kind of bookends that the council has talked about, and they said let's go to scoping with this range of options for timing. Within one hour of offloading catch, within thirty minutes of offloading catch, sometime prior to offloading, or some other kind of timing and so I will pause here and see what you guys have to say about this.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay, Myra. Thank you, and so let's see what we're working with here. I saw Matt's hand go up first, and then Haley.

MR. MATTHEWS: This is just a question, but can you go into a little bit more about why this -- What makes this data unusable in the management, and is it just the validation, or the lack of validation, or is there more to it than that?

MS. BROUWER: It is mainly the validation, and so, you know, the data are being collected, and have been, you know, since 2021, but there's currently no way to really validate those data for accuracy. There's also inconsistencies.

At some point, it was mentioned that, you know, did-not-fish reports are sometimes being submitted when, you know, a permit needs to be renewed, because the vessel has been out of compliance for some time, and, rather than trying to figure out, you know, what all those reports

would have been, there's a did-not-fish report that gets submitted, and so there's several different issues that are preventing the information from being used directly in management, and that's what that letter that I mentioned, which you can see what it says, and it's linked within the document. Basically, it said this is what needs to happen for this program to be successful, successfully integrated, into the decision-making process.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks for that explanation. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Haley Stephens. Thank you, Myra, for not only this report, but everything, all of the work that you've done on this so far, and so I know there's a lot of commercial and recreational folks around the table, and so, just for the sake of a little bit of insight, the way it is currently, headboats participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, which is a different reporting platform, under software called VESL. The State of South Carolina also utilizes VESL for their data reporting.

Everybody else falls under this program called SEFHIER, and I want to make this difference really, really clear, because the headboat survey is the longest-standing source of fisheries-dependent data that we have, since 1972, and so we are already completely regulated separately on the reporting requirements, and, as we move through this document, the way that the headboat survey is set up through VESL already checks all of the boxes that are being proposed in the SEFHIER improvement plan.

With that being said, the purpose and need, to my understanding of the SEFHIER improvement is to be able to potentially move away from MRIP data that, you know, maybe folks aren't so happy about, and to be able to maybe consider some of that data on the science side of things, but you can't, because compliance is so low.

Headboat data is already used in SEDAR. It's already validated, and we already have, and I'm referring to this report in 2023 from NOAA Fisheries, a 100 percent compliance rate, and so I would strongly advise against changing anything on the headboat side of things, because it does work, and, if anything, use it as an example of something that we could potentially work towards to bringing our other charter boats up to speed.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Haley. Is there a penalty for non-compliance at this point? Is the permit renewal contingent upon it?

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

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay, and so there is. Go ahead, Stephen.

MR. RANNEY: Thank you, James. Haley, do you have data as far as compliance with the people using VESL in South Carolina?

MS. STEPHEN: I'm not from South Carolina. I'm from Florida. You can probably look to the young lady behind you, but I will say, you know, as someone who has utilized VESL for, you know, almost a decade now, it is very user-friendly, and so Ms. Councilwoman Amy can touch more on it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Amy, yes, go ahead. Thank you.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, guys. Yes, and so thank you, Haley. I appreciate that, and thank you, Steve, and I also appreciate that. The presentation that Myra actually alluded to, when she was doing her presentation to you, was given back in March of 2024 to the council, and, on average, South Carolina, for our federally-managed -- So we have both state and federally-managed species that have a mandatory reporting requirement in South Carolina. The state-only is trip-level monthly. Of course, if they're a SEFHIER federally-permitted vessel, they are trip-level weekly.

If you focus just on the trip level weekly, we have about a 90 percent weekly compliance rate, and so that means 90 percent of the federally-for-hire-permitted boats in South Carolina are compliant each and every week. It does vary from time to time, and there are times where it does dip down. I've seen it as low as about 79, but typically that's just one week, and they typically rebound pretty quickly. A lot of times, it's in the summertime, when you all are really busy, but, overall, if you look at, we're at 88 to 89 percent, almost 90 percent, compliance rate every week, but I do have a pretty extensive outreach group as well.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's great. I have Richie, and then Chris.

MR. GOMEZ: Okay, Myra. As much as I don't like to say this, you know, the charter boats in the Lower Keys are going to probably have to be force fed a little more, and that would mean that, you know, if they were reporting every twenty-four hours, you're going to get at more accurate reporting, and, when you give them the option, when it's time to renew the license, to fill out a bunch of no-fish kind of slips, they're going to do it, and so, you know, we never agreed with this, but here it is, and we have to deal with it, and, if we're going to deal with it, we need to start dealing with it a little more honestly, and, to do that, they're going to have to be put to task a little more often.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: The Conch Republic is pretty special. Steve, I'll come back to you, unless it was a -- Was it a direct -- Okay, and so I'm going to go ahead and go to Chris, and then right back to Steve here.

MR. MILITELLO: I just had a quick question, and how do you know that 88 to 90 percent are -- Where do you get that number from?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Amy, you're up.

MS. DUKES: So that is actually a state regulation in South Carolina. If you are running for-hire trips out of the state, you're required to have a license. That's been in effect since 1993, and we've been requiring trip-level reporting requirements since then. As SEFHIER was coming out, we changed the South Carolina platform to meet the federal requirements, so that the South Carolina for-hire captains didn't have to use a secondary data collection platform to report for their SEFHIER and then the South Carolina platform.

We merged them, and so one trip ticket meets the state requirement as well as the SEFHIER requirements, and then we track compliance on those vessels as well, and so the electronic data is pushed into an internal compliance database, and we are monitoring their compliance as real-time. Does that make sense?

MR. MILITELLO: I mean, it makes sense, but I don't -- I guess I don't understand. I mean, they're complying, and how do you know they're complying? Because they're reporting?

MS. DUKES: They are compliant from a reporting standpoint.

MR. MILITELLO: So you know when they're going out?

MS. DUKES: I didn't say that the trips were being validated. I said that the reporting is at 90 percent, and so what is being reported to us is at 90 percent. That could be inclusive of both positive trips and did-not-fish reports. South Carolina has no validation program.

MR. MILITELLO: Okay. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Steve, go ahead.

MR. RANNEY: Thank you. I am glad to hear that they have incorporated, because it has made my life a lot easier, because I do have all those permits, and I keep up with all those things. I still get letters in the mail. I still get phone calls. I still get -- I consider it being harassed, but --

MS. DUKES: You're welcome.

MR. RANNEY: I'm doing my job, and it's just like why is it so difficult to look and he turned in his report. My problem is that I hear this word "validation", and there's no validation that my log that I presented is accurate, and so wait a second, and you're saying -- I mean, I'm a fisherman, and sure I tell stories, but I'm not lying on my report. That is being turned into the government, and I kind of have a fear of them, and so I'm going to be truthful when I turn in a report, but then I hear, well, we can't validate that, because no scientist has looked at it, and nobody -- Somebody hasn't got the right certification to validate, or they haven't -- Now, I've been compliant ever since I started getting my permits, and, like she said, I've been doing it over twenty years.

I've not had a problem, but my question is could we not get some system, like VESL, and Chris just said it, and it is so user-friendly. I'm IT challenged, and I can use it, okay, because you push this button, and it just pops right up, and, okay, I'll take that day, and it pops right up, and this time. I mean, it's not like I have to do a bunch of typing. It's very friendly, and so, to be able to incorporate that to the other states, that maybe the Keys would be much happier to use, if it was an easier system.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Myra, go ahead and address that.

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and so we're not talking about changing any of those platforms, right? I mean, VESL will continue to exist and be available for for-hire captains to use. The other one that is available in our region is called eTRIPS. That one, from what I understand, and from listening to the AP's conversations, is not as user-friendly, but, currently, those are the only two platforms that you can use.

The way it works is NOAA puts out technical specifications, is what they call them, and, basically, it's just like saying, okay, you know, whoever wants to produce a product that has all these different features, then NOAA will certify it for use, and that's what VESL did.

I believe it's Bluefin who produced this app, and they went through the technical specifications, and they made an app that met all the requirements for SEFHIER as well as, you know, South Carolina, and so that is not changing. What we're talking about is changing the frequency. to try to make it -- To try to get that compliance from different areas, right. to make sure that people are fulfilling the reporting requirement, but that alone is not going to tell us whether the information is correct.

That's where the validation portion comes in, and so that's why there's, you know, all those possible actions that I showed, because they are targeting different components to improve the whole thing, and, as Haley said, you know, the reason that -- So we started calling this amendment the SEFHIER improvement amendment, and then we soon realized that, if the council chooses to change certain things, that is also going to affect the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, and there's some overlap in the for-hire, the way that a for-hire vessel is defined, I guess.

Some for-hire vessels, some headboats, are, you know -- They, obviously, carry more than -- A whole bunch of people, and they need to have the inspection by Coast Guard, but there are also smaller vessels that are considered to be a part -- Or that get elected to be a part of that survey as well that are, you know, smaller vessels, and so there's a bit of an overlap of what a headboat is, and it can change, but the numbers, obviously, are a lot different, and so there's about, I don't know, sixty-some headboats, I think, in the whole region, or maybe less, allegedly, and there's probably -- I mean, we don't really know, because of this issue with the permits information that the agency has been having, and we talked about it earlier.

So, as of 2021, I think, which is the last time we were able to access those data, there were around I want to say about fifteen-hundred-plus charter permits, or maybe more, and maybe I'm making that up. I'll have to go look, but it's a substantially different number, and so the kinds of outreach that the agency can do is going to be a lot harder than, for example, what Amy and her team can do. There's a lot of very direct outreach that takes place to get at the compliance for a program like what South Carolina has, and so we're talking, you know, a lot bigger and, you know, a much more, you know, expanded outreach, like Richie was saying, and that's going to be really important.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Myra. I saw a bunch of hands go up at once. I have Haley, Richie, John, and Matt. If I need to add you, or take you off the list, let me know, but, Haley, you're up.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Myra, thank you so much for pointing out some of those points. Getting back to the document, so, with the headboat survey, we report once a week. It's due by the Tuesday, and that works, and so, you know, I would be interested to hear from some of the six-pack charter captains, and how they feel about that, but once a week works for us for reporting frequency, and I guess that kind of goes to timing.

When you talk about a headboat, you know, you've got fifty people. Some of these options about timing is unrealistic for us, and I know that it's unrealistic for some of the other smaller boats, but

could you imagine standing there at the dock with fifty paying customers, being out in the sun all day, waiting to collect their fish, and you, as a captain, are like hold on one second, and let me plug in my information. That's drastically going to decrease your angler satisfaction, and your customer service, and then timing as well, as we look at some of these.

Some of these boats are running multiple trips, and so it's kind of unrealistic to say, and maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. Like I said, I would like to hear from what other folks have to say, but, for us, the once a week works, and I think the biggest factor on that is the accountability and the enforcement. Our fleet does not have a choice. We have to report, and we do have dock agents, and intercepts after almost every trip, in addition to onboard observers, and so there is someone watching out. Accountability and enforcement, I think those are two other issues that are bigger topics.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: Okay, and I mentioned this in the first meeting, and I think it's probably a good time to mention it again, but, you know, when I speak to the captains of the Lower Keys, and the boat owners, I mean, I have to say that there's little to no accuracy in reporting, and one way to get the charter boat industry possibly doing more of the right thing is to single them out, to try and get a meeting, and give them a reason to show up, and then, you know, come up with the graphs that show what happens with that reporting, and maybe they would be more apt to say, well, you know what, and I'm really hurting myself, because they don't have no real clue that they're hurting themselves or they're helping themselves.

They just figure the best thing to do is to not tell the truth, or make it up, just on general principle, because they don't want to be a part of it, and so getting them interested in doing the right thing might benefit, and, if there was something shown, you know, what bad reporting does to their industry, you might get somewhere with them, but then they've got to show up. You've got to give them a reason to be there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Richie. John.

MR. POLSTON: I was just thinking about the -- This has kind of got like something to do with what Richie was saying, but, at the same time, is there be a way of maybe putting some teeth into the non-reporting, and like the commercial. You know, if you don't report, you don't get your permits renewed, and then -- But then you actually have to have a way to track whether they're reporting or not.

Now, you're talking about validation, and I don't see how you're ever going to get that, but you could possibly -- There may already be something out there that each person that does charter-for-hire has to have something. With us, it's a VMS, and, on the VMS, you have to hail-out, and you have to hail-in, and that gives law enforcement the opportunity to be there, if they want to be, whenever you hit the dock, which scares the people, whoever is on there, if they're doing anything wrong.

I mean, it just gives you a way of kind of keeping up with people and making them realize, as you said, that, you know, if they're not reporting correct, or whatnot, but, somehow, I think you need

to put some teeth into it, because, otherwise, they don't care. I mean, if there's nothing -- If there's nothing there to scare them, if you will, and I don't know, but just a thought.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Richie, you got a direct comment on what John is saying.

MR. GOMEZ: Yes, and it's -- Myra, you may correct me on this, but I think there's more than one boat owner in Key West that's been fined already, and, also, I believe -- I know of one for sure, but, also, they just wait until it's time to re-up the permits, and then they put a bunch of no-fish days, and make up other shit, and they get their permits, and so --

MR. POLSTON: Correct, but that's back to what I said. You can eliminate that if you had something comparable to a VMS, where they have to hail-out and hail-in. You would eliminate that, because, every time they do that, that means they're making a trip, and so you have validation of when they went fishing.

You may not have validation of what they caught, but you have validation if they went fishing or not, and, if that's reported on there, and they report they didn't fish twenty days out of the month, but you have them hailing-in and out twenty-five, hey, no, this doesn't match up, and you're not getting your permit this time, because you lied to us. That's what I mean by putting some teeth into it, and so then people start following the rules better. When you hit them in the pocket, it seems to make people pay attention.

MR. GOMEZ: Yes, and I don't like it, but I agree with what you're saying.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm going to give the floor back to Myra here real quick for some clarification.

MS. BROUWER: So thank you for those comments, and, John, I think we're going to get to some of the other actions, which I think are going to get exactly at what you were talking about, but the one also thing to keep in mind is the compliance in the SEFHIER in the Gulf was higher, because that -- They have a limited-entry program for their for-hire fleet, right, and so there is more teeth, as you said, John, to that, right?

If you lose your permit, it's a big deal, whereas, if you have an open-access system, like we do on the Atlantic, people can do the thing where they just submit a bunch of DNF reports and then simply just -- Or just get a different permit. I think it costs \$25, and so that's a problem, but putting in a limited-entry system is not -- It can't really be done. The council couldn't justify doing that just to improve compliance, and this is something that was explained to the council by NOAA General Counsel.

You know, you can't just say, oh, well, we'll just make it limited entry, so that our compliance increases. It's not the way it works. A limited-access privilege program needs to be put in place with the intent of achieving optimum yield from those fisheries, and so I just wanted to make sure, because that's a very important piece of all this, right, is the open-access nature of our fisheries on this side.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Matt, go ahead.

MR. MATTHEWS: I just have one comment on that. My other question, and I'm going to read the letter before I interject again, because I finally found it, but, along those lines, without limiting entry, couldn't you -- I mean, for a for-hire vessel, if they don't fish a certain number of days a year, then they don't get to renew their license for the next year, and so, you know, if you've got a for-hire vessel permit, and you're reporting five days a year fishing, then you really probably don't need a for-hire vessel permit. If you're reporting five days a year just to get out of doing -- Filling out your reports completely, then you lose your permit for the next year, and you can try again the following year. Just a thought.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Matt, and I did want to say -- I wanted to add something, like kind of to what John was suggesting. Some of the auto insurance providers, they issue like a drive safe and save, you know, where you have a little transponder that, you know, tracks everything you do. It monitors your speed, and, you know, if you're a hard braker, you know, stuff like that, but, if we could incorporate that into an app, and they have this on the boat, it kind of would eliminate the hail-in and hail-out. You know, their reporting would just have to align with what is the data that's gathered from the module. Just a thought. Steve.

MR. RANNEY: Thank you, James. I disagree with Matt wholeheartedly. What happens when your boat is on the hill for repair? So now you're going to pull my permit because I was fixing my boat, and now I can't get my money back, and I've got to go fight that all too, and to pull a permit for inactivity -- That's not how you get compliance. I thought we were trying to get compliance.

If we're going to get compliance, we have to do more like John said. We have to get some teeth into it, and I don't understand this whole limited and unlimited, and you're right that they could just get another name and get a permit in, you know, another entity, but, if we're trying to change compliance, pulling a permit because you didn't use it, or you didn't fish, I don't think that's the answer.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate the input, Steve. I saw Haley's hand go up.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, guys. Really good discussion. I just, you know, kind of am curious, because I do sit on the SEFHIER improvement AP, if anyone has any specific input on reporting frequency, or timing, and how that would directly or indirectly affect your operation, while we're on this slide.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I just know, as a commercial wholesale dealer that once a week works for me as well, I tend to do it on Sunday. You know, it is a little bit burdensome to try and do it every single day. I mean, I'm not required to, but I can only imagine, when you're in the grind of a hard season, and you're just trying to get after it, day in and day out, you know, it's -- It's a little bit, you know, overwhelming. Steve, go ahead.

MR. RANNEY: You asked about a six-pack and how they -- Were you asking how they report, or if we care about the frequency, and is that what your question was?

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, and so I was just addressing the topics on the screen and looking for input on do you like doing yours once a week, and how would once a day affect you, or the timing?

MR. RANNEY: Once a week is great. You know, I keep a log, so I know what I caught Tuesday, and I can tell you Friday, Saturday, Sunday, because I keep a log, because I want to know next year, when I go out on -- What is today? April 3? Anyway, so next year, when I go out on April 3, I can see, oh look, I caught, you know, a black sea bass there, and I caught a red drum, or I caught this or that, and so it helps me with, you know, my fishing for that day, and so I have accurate data, and so, yes, once a week is great.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that. Matt, go ahead.

MR. MATTHEWS: I think it was Steve that commented, and I just wanted to clarify where that thought came from. I know, in previous conversations, we've had some of the recreational for-hire guys saying that the guys who charter three to five days a year are hurting them significantly, and I don't remember what context that conversation came up in, but that's kind of what led me down that road, is I remember folks complaining that the, you know, fly-by-night kind of charter guys were hurting their business.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Jack.

MR. COX: Yes, and I was going to say that I would never support ever taking somebody's permit because of inactivity, and I'll just tell you that I've had some health issues over the last couple of years, and a lot of doctor's visits, and I just didn't feel well. I didn't feel like being on the ocean, and you never know. As people are getting older, they're going to have these challenges, and maybe they'll want to go back and work on the water, and do whatever they do, and so I would never, ever pull a permit because there's inactivity on it. I think there's a lot of reasons why, but that's a good one.

You know, we do, commercially, it at the end of the week. I would sit down, and I would do mine on Sunday as well, and do my reporting, and I think once a week would be good for these guys, and, you know, we have a lot to lose, you know, and our permits are expensive, and they're worth a lot of money, and that is one reason that I -- You know, you have to have something worth losing to stay in compliance with something, sometimes. If you have a for-hire permit, and you're not in compliance, then I don't think you -- If you're not doing your job, and what's being asked of you, you should not be able to renew your permit.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Jack, and, just along those lines, you know, I'm going to add that I've held charter permits for every one that I could in the region, and I'm 100 percent commercial. I've never run a charter in my entire life, but I've seen the way fisheries management works, and someday this may be limited access, and someday I may not want to do the same volume of work that I do as a commercial fisherman, and I might want to --

I'm not saying that what you do as charter captains is easy, but, you know, going fishing, and being customer service, and kind of taking a little bit lighter duty, might be appealing to me at some point, and I would hate to have the permits that I paid for for ten-plus years, or maybe longer than that, just be taken because I'm not using them. I have a couple more people on the list. I've got Richie, then David.

MR. GOMEZ: James, just in reference to that last comment, I mean, I would say, in the charter boat industry -- You know, when I was fishing regularly, I dealt with a lot more pressure to keep

those people happy. You know, when you're commercial fishing, certainly you need to make that buck, but, if you're not producing, you only have yourself to deal with, and then you have to do better the next day, but the person that's out on a fishing charter -- You know, the tourists, they don't want to hear that excuse at the end of the day, but, anyway, Matt, I mean, you know, we have a big problem in the Keys, especially with fly-by-nighters in backyards, but many of them don't even have permits anyway, and so there's really no way to deal with them as of right now.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Richie.

MR. MATTHEWS: I thought it might have been you that mentioned that, and so thanks for speaking up.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. I'm not opposed to John's idea of a hail-in and hail-out. I think you would have a lot easier time getting that through with people than certainly any kind of VMS or anything like that with the charter industry, but, if you have some sort of hail-in and hail-out system, and then you have like a trip ticket to go along with that trip, and then, like he was saying, if law enforcement decided to randomly stop, or whatever, you have something to reference, and so on and so forth.

Then, as far as the non-fishing, I completely agree with Jack. You know, if you're holed up for any number of reasons, whether your boat's in the yard, or you're sick or whatever, but then why not have -- You know, every week, you're submitting your did-not-fish reports, and you can legitimize that, and have your reasoning, but then, you know, if you're constantly submitting these did-not-fish reports, and, all of a sudden, the law shows up, and you've got a crew offloading, then you have something to answer to, but, as everybody said as well, unless we put some serious heat behind this, you know, it's that old carrot or stick.

There's not many more carrots to offer them, and so it's going to have to be a stick. Unless you have some pretty serious ramifications for being out of compliance -- You know, right now, you can just change your business name and get a new permit, if they hold the permit against you, and so, unless you professionalize the fleet, and make it more difficult to do that, it's probably not going to go anywhere.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate the input. Go ahead, Chris.

MR. KIMREY: So, yes, and, I mean, I agree with part of what I heard, once I got back. I had a phone call, and sorry, but, you know, as far as carrot and stick, there's plenty of us legitimate fulltime operators that the carrot for us would be, if we went limited entry, we might not mind that hail-out, if it was a limited-entry program. I know that's something different, and I've talked with some of the council members about why we can't do that now, and we can't do it in conjunction with this, and so I got all that, but there's some things to consider with what James was saying.

You know, he's had these permits for X number of years, and if they did, you know, transition into that, and just -- People that had permits, that were submitting DNFs all the time, and there's other reasons, and I can give you a prime example of why some people may have a long list of DNFs, like myself up until this year.

For a number of years, I've been running two boats. One of them was an inshore boat, and one of them was a twin-engine boat I used in the ocean, and I have federal permits on the big boat, but not the little boat, and so on the days in the State of North Carolina, when I was running my smaller single-engine boat -- A lot of days I fish in the ocean, but I'm inside of three miles, and so I never put federal permits on it, and I fish inshore.

There's no reporting requirement there, and so, you know -- I'll just make these numbers up. Let's say, for 2023, I might only fish thirty days in the ocean, outside of three miles, on my twin-engine boat, and so I reported those days. I might have fished 150 days on that other boat. If you look at the federal reporting system, it looks like I only fished thirty days, and I really fished 186, and so there's things to consider. You know, like what James was saying, don't just yank permits because they're not showing, you know, reporting history, because sometimes there's very valid reasons why.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Go ahead, Myra. Unless we have any other comments directly pertaining to what is on the screen right now, or in front of you, I think we're just going to keep on moving.

MS. BROUWER: Okay, and so I do want to get through all these actions, to make sure that we get your feedback to the council, and so what I heard is that the AP would prefer that the reporting frequency stay the way it is. What about the timing? Is there any desire, or is it feasible, to have reporting due prior to offloading, at any time, and are any of those things realistic?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I see a lot of heads shaking no, and Haley, and then Chris again.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. No, and not for the headboats.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Chris.

MR. KIMREY: So I know there's a push, from a certain few that are huge proponents of the reporting prior to offloading or within one hour of offloading, and I'm not going to sit here and pretend I don't see the benefits of that, and it's definitely the potential to validate this data. It would be one step closer to that, but it's a huge imposition for a lot of people.

If you're going on the same trip every day, at the same place, doing the same thing, you could definitely get that routine down, but there's a lot of operators that run from different locations, different marinas, off the trailer, you know, on center console boats, that it's really going to be a huge imposition, and I'm sorry. Even though I do see the benefit to it, I have to speak for the masses in my area, and it's hard enough to get them to do the right thing now. Please don't make it any more difficult than it has to be. Figure out a way to use a little bit of stick, but not a really big stick. That's a pretty big stick for a lot of our guys.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. I think we have everything we have to offer. Myra, go for it.

MS. BROUWER: All right. Thanks, guys. I'm taking notes over here, and I know I'm not putting them up on the screen, but I am taking notes. Okay, and so we'll move on. Here's what some of you were already talking about, this hail-in and hail-out, and so, right now, there are no trip notification requirements. In the Gulf's amendment, they are considering requiring trip

notification, either for activities where the vessel is involved in fishing, and so for-hire fishing, obviously, when the vessel is being used to obtain bait for said activity, if the vessel is being used for private recreational fishing or commercial fishing, and then there would be another potential alternative to require a hail-in and hail-out when the vessel is being used for other activities that involve paying passengers, such as sunset cruises or dolphin watching cruises.

As I've said, we're trying to keep the range of alternatives kind of similar to what they're considering in the Gulf, because it is one system, right, and the SEFHIER program is kind of -- It has a South Atlantic component, and it has a Gulf component, and so, because there are vessels that have permits for both regions, and vessels that have permits for the Greater Atlantic Region as well, we're trying to make sure that the burden is diminished, and so this is what we have for the trip notification, and so let me know your thoughts.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Matt, go ahead.

MR. MATTHEWS: I have a question, and I also want to officially retract my previous suggestion that we pull permits for inactivity. I have been disproven, but for -- I'm purely private recreational, and so the hail-in and hail-out, and I don't -- If somebody could explain how that would work for a for-hire vessel, and is it a VHF hail-in and hail-out, or how does it work?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Well, I mean, I know how it works currently, but, in this application, I would think a central data collection base, a phone number, and you text it, and there's no twenty-four-hour requirement, because maybe you get booked overnight. You text it, and I've got a trip tomorrow, and I'll be on the water. You know, I mean, like -- I feel like that's the only way that it would work.

I mean, I'm working with the observer program now, and, you know, I contact the person on the list, and I've been given the liberty to just kind of keep them informed on when my boat is fishing, via text message, and I think that could morph into something, you know, a little bit more concrete, and that may validate, you know, a hail-in and hail-out requirement. I think something as simple as that is probably going to help streamline this process, but, you know, otherwise, you know, you would have to, you know, basically call in and, you know, say you were leaving the dock. I mean, that's not something that I have to do, but it's a little bit more official. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Am I allowed to share thoughts from our previous AP discussions?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: For sure.

MS. STEPHENS: Okay, and so I thought this was a really good topic, and, once we began to explain to our SEFHIER group about kind of a -- What is the word I'm looking for? Give a little, and take a little, and I don't know.

Compromise. A compromise. I thought this was really interesting, because, at first, the group seemed to be very against hail-in and hail-out, and then, going through some of the other proposed actions and alternatives, they kind of -- The discussion came back around and said, hey, you know what, maybe I could entertain the idea of a hail-in and hail-out if that meant that my data would

potentially be, you know, considered for validation, but, again, it's got to be very, very simple. It needs to be as simple as turn a button off or turn a button on.

I think, you know, you can do that as you're leaving the dock. I think that a timing requirement, kind of like to what James was saying, you know, something -- If it's a twenty-four-hour notification, or a three-hour notification, prior to leaving the dock, it would not work, you know, for a number of reasons. We're waking up at five o'clock to go to the dock, and that means I have to set my alarm at 2:00 a.m. and hail-out, and I'm up with a baby, and so it doesn't matter. I could do that, but maybe not for other people.

MR. KIMREY: A lot of days, we don't even know if we're leaving the dock until six o'clock in the morning.

MS. STEPHENS: Right.

MR. KIMREY: I mean, that's the last conversation you have before bed, is, hey, text me at 5:30, before I leave the house, and I'll let you know if we're going today. You don't know until the next morning.

MS. STEPHENS: I will say that, for the FWC EFP survey, they do require a hail-in and hail-out, and so some of the anglers got some experience with that. It does require a twenty-four-hour notice, just for that particular project, but, if we're talking about for the for-hire fleet on a regular basis, it could be a compromise on track to validation, but it would need to be very, very simple, and with no time constraint.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Haley. Go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, and someone please correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe some of the -- I don't want to use the word "failure", but some of the challenges that they're facing in the Gulf was from VMS, and so some of the settlements and lawsuits or whatever was centered around VMS, and so I would definitely advise staying away from VMS, to try to prevent problems that we've learned from neighbors.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: Cameron Sebastian, and so I 1,000 percent agree with no VMS, period, on the vessels. AIS is tough enough on the vessels sixty-five or greater. What James said, I mean, you know, as long as the system would be developed, and, I mean, you just have a computer somewhere, and it's AI generated, or whatever runs your numbers when you text you're heading out, and when you text you're heading back in, and then program really is almost self-sufficient. You can print reports and send them to whoever they need to be sent to.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I think, around the table here, we've gotten so accustomed to this being such a hard process, and so slow, that, you know, we don't really think about the things that we use every single day that makes our efficiency in everyday life possible. You know, we have to start incorporating some of this stuff in fisheries management. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you, James. That's exactly it. I mean, you can have an app, with your vessel information already on there, and you literally click a button as you're headed out, and you click a button within -- You know, except for down south. Most of you guys are running way the hell offshore to go fishing anyway, and so you can certainly click a button within an hour of getting to the dock, and it should be a fairly easy process.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Steve.

MR. RANNEY: Okay, and I'm going to show my ignorance. What are you talking about with VMS?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Vessel monitoring system, and basically an onboard -- Maybe like an EPIRB tracking device, you know, that's always on.

MR. RANNEY: But not AIS? VMS?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Correct.

MR. RANNEY: Okay.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Anybody else? All right, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so what I heard is that a trip notification -- I just want to make sure, but a trip notification requirement, as long as it's very, very easy, and painless, and you would not be against having to have.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Correct, for for-hire fishing activities. I don't think that Cameron wants to hail-in and hail-out every time he does a sunset cruise for dolphin watching, and that doesn't -- Yes, and just for fishing efforts.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Cameron.

MR. SEBASTIAN: I mean, really, whatever makes it easy and makes the system work, and I don't really care. My captains will do what they need to get the job done.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Chris.

MR. KIMREY: So, yes, and, I mean, I think you should hail-in and hail-out for things that you're required to have the permit for. I can do all the sunset cruises, dolphin watching, private recreational fishing, and I won't without those permits, and so don't tell me I have to tell you when I'm going. That upsets me, like bigtime, especially when the boat I'm on is in my name, but, yes, for anything that's related to the permit, I don't have a problem with it. Things outside of that, I've got a problem with it, straight up.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: As well you should. I think we're back to you, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so the next action is landing locations, and before -- So I wanted to give you a little bit of background on this, because I think this caused a little bit of entanglement in the conversation with the for-hire reporting AP, and so the landing locations would be a new requirement, right? Currently, there is no landing locations,, and, basically, it's just information that would supply law enforcement, or a port agent, with the exact location of where that vessel is going to be offloading catch and passengers.

So it does -- This is one of the components of this validation thing that we've been talking about, and so, the way they're approved, participants simply just submit a new landing location, if one doesn't already exist. Let's say that where Tony fishes in Beaufort has already been input in that database, and so then you don't need to -- You just say I'm going out of this location, and that's it.

If there are new landing locations, potentially even private residences, you would have to call and enter a name for that location, contact information, and then the SEFHIER staff would make sure that that location is in fact a location that's on the water, and it takes like one or two days to actually get it approved, and so it's not like you have to land at already selected locations, right, and this is where I think there was a little bit of confusion, and Haley is nodding her head.

The council is considering, based on the recommendations from the agency, including landing locations as a requirement of the for-hire reporting program, and so here there would just be, you know, one alternative to the no action, and then that would be just -- You know, there would be some criteria, and we did talk about this with the law enforcement guys, and they didn't have a problem with it.

We said, well, would it be hard for you guys, and, you know, for example, for vessels that are permitted in the dolphin wahoo fishery, which goes all the way up to Maine. and they said no, because, you know, there's databases that allow us to tell where all these locations are, and so it wouldn't be a problem for them, and so that's what that's about, and so let me know what you think about landing locations.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Before we address this specifically, I think we -- I would like to acknowledge Scott, who is online, and he may have had a comment about our previously-discussed item. Go ahead, Scott. If you would, go ahead and unmute yourself on your end. We are not picking you up. All right, and maybe we'll come back to Scott in a moment. I saw David's hand. Anybody else? Then Randy. Go ahead, David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you. Yes, and I think that this is kind of a no-brainer, to have -- You know, you can even have a couple of pre-approved locations in here, if you're going to run it from an app or whatever. I mean, you know, if Amazon can figure out that I can deliver packages to seventeen different locations, and have them all memorized, I don't see why an app can't, and it's going to help with the teeth that we've all been asking for, if law enforcement can then show up, if they want to, and validate what it is that you're doing.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, David. Randy, go ahead.

MR. MCKINLEY: I noticed, on the one before, the hailing-in and out, it mentioned commercial, possibly, and this one doesn't, and so this is just for-hire?

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and this is being

So this is just for hiring. Yes, this is being considered just for the for-hire fleet.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: David, you were supporting that possible change, right? Okay. I like it. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, and, again, I think this speaks to the difference between a charter boat and a headboat. If our headboat isn't coming back to the dock that we left out of, something is seriously wrong. With that being said, I think that maybe a public stakeholder perspective of landing location sounds a lot scarier than it actually is.

The process, as it has been explained to me, and in my understanding, is it is very simple, and, just from the scope of Ponce Inlet, there is only one boat ramp that you can launch your charter boat from. You know, there's restrictions on other ramps around town, that you can't participate in commercial fishing activities, whether it be commercial fishing or charter-for-hire. You cannot operate out of those, and so I think it's already kind of that way naturally, that folks are leaving from one particular location, and that gives surveyors, or dock interceptors, a chance to maybe sample some more boats at the same landing location, and I had one other thing, but I forgot, and so I'm sure I'll think of it. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate it, Haley. Go ahead, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so next up is requiring participation in a validation and estimation survey, and so this is something that, again, has been -- The council has been told we need to have validation, and what is validation? Basically, it's just -- This is the definition that I found in the dictionary, and it's the action of checking or proving the validity or accuracy of something, right, and so this is just to make sure the data are valid and they can be used in management.

A survey would be something that it's administered by the agency, and so the council doesn't need to have alternatives for how the survey would be designed, or conducted, and simply it would be like, if you're going to participate in the for-hire fishery, then you need to agree to potentially being selected to participate in a validation survey, and it would probably be a one-time thing. It's not something that would be a recurring activity, and there would be, you know, a subset of permitted vessels that are sampled and asked to participate in the survey, and so does the AP have any comments on that?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley, and then we'll go to Richie.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. We're intercepted at the dock at every trip that our port agent is available for, and it's several times a week. Not only are they taking weight samples and length samples, but they're collecting otoliths. Again, the headboats survey is the single longest-running fisheries-dependent source of data. It benefits our fishery, and it provides, you know, that bridge between what we're seeing on the water and the science, and I don't see why anyone would be against participating in the survey.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley, and, Richie, I'm going to acknowledge you in just a second. Along the lines of what you're talking about right now, when I was speaking with the observer program recently, I offered up my location, as kind of an open door, to come and have access to these fish on a regular basis, and, you know, maybe not in lieu of having an observer on the boat, but I fish by myself a lot, and it makes me very uncomfortable to try and have another human being on the boat with me, that I don't necessarily know or trust, and I really -- It makes me super uncomfortable, and I've made that abundantly clear, and somehow I keep getting randomly selected.

That's not the point, but the point is I've offered up my location, to come and give access to all of this data, and I'll tell you where I caught them, and I'll tell you, you know, what the conditions were, the sea temperature, whatever it is that they want to know, and the response was, well, I don't know if we can get somebody out there, and it's like I'm volunteering you all of the stuff that you need to validate a lot of the things that you want to know, and you won't come and get it. It's frustrating. Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: My question would be how would that survey work, because I know I haven't had to answer the phone in a long time, but occasionally we would get that phone call from someone asking us questions about what we did between this date and that date, and, you know, a lot of times, I would be busy, and some of the information I gave wasn't accurate, although I tried to remember, but, you know, I owned a few boats, and so I couldn't always remember, and, by getting that phone call in the middle of doing ten other things, it was definitely less accurate, and so I don't know how that would work to validate the survey.

MS. BROUWER: So I don't think I -- I mean, I don't have any of the details. We haven't really gotten to that part, but I think it would be, like I said, a tool that would be designed to get an accurate -- A representative sample of the fleet and then check that the data that those vessels submitted is valid, and so there would be a way to connect, you know, to data that were already submitted for that vessel and to check for accuracy.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Richie. Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Something else I wanted to talk about is, you know, our uncertainty in the fisheries world right now, and so I believe, in the Gulf, they did lose their headboat port agents, and, if that were to be the case here on the South Atlantic, you know, could something like required participation in the validation survey kind of help replace, in a way, or supplement, if there were to be a change in our fisheries dockside intercepts, and we're just trying to -- It's really, really rare, guys, that we have the opportunity to be proactive in making amendments like this, and so I just want to think long-term, big-picture.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Matt.

MR. MATTHEWS: I think Richie touched on it, but I'll reiterate. It seems hard, to me -- It's hard to believe, to me, that a survey would provide anything that's any more accurate than the initial reporting, because you're increasing the length of time between the event and asking the fisherman to recall the event, and so, if he said he released six red snapper, and kept two, six months ago on his initial report, the chances of a six-month-old recollection being any more accurate -- It seems

slim to me. It just seems like that would be a waste of time, but I don't know what else you could do to validate the data either, other than the things that have already been mentioned.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Matt. Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Yes, and, if this is something that the council does choose to move forward with, I would stress that the survey is being conducted with that for-hire captain and not their passengers.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Noted. John.

MR. POLSTON: Just a quick response to what you were saying. I would think there somehow would be something like for us to say, every time you make a trip, you've got to do a VTR report of how many -- In their case, maybe it would just be how many fish you have, because we've got to report how many pounds, what was the method of catch, yada, yada, yada, but, if they had something comparable to that, and not too involved, but something comparable to that per day and per trip, what you call that day, you could go back, a month later when they call you on that, and say this is exactly what I had, because you have it in your book.

MR. MATTHEWS: But you would have to have a paper record of what you caught on each day, right?

MR. POLSTON: Well, that's what I was saying. I don't know if that exists already in your things or not, or maybe it could be added to, you know, or just required of, you know, whatever it may be, but just -- Like you're right, and, a month from now, you're not going to remember what you caught today, but, if it had to be written down daily, you know, what you had, I'm just saying then you could come back to it. Even if you said it on your phone, here's what I caught today, you know, and you can come back at any time then and recall it, is what I'm saying.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate the input, John. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: S I'm wondering if, and, Myra, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but my impression of this validation survey, or required participation in the validation survey, would be the ability -- You would no longer be allowed to deny a sampler from sampling your catch at the dock, and so, within the recreational survey right now, for many states, it's optional, right, and it's not a legal requirement to submit to a survey at the dock.

What this would do is, if you're in the survey, you would be -- However they want to implement the survey, you cannot say no to it, and so, if you constantly said no, then law enforcement could come in and say you must say yes, and, if I'm wrong on that, let me know, but that's how I interpret it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chip. Matt.

MR. MATTHEWS: So we're not talking about a phone call six months down the line that says, on July 18 --

MR. KIMREY: It's more of a real-time, that day sort of scenario, but you -- Like, with MRIP surveys, you, you can walk away and say go away. If you, you know, submitted to the validation, for hire, you would not be able to refuse, like you can right now. That's what Chip was trying to say.

MR. MATTHEWS: Gotcha. That makes a lot more sense than calling six months later and asking them to validate what they reported.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, guys. Myra, go ahead.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so the next action, and we are getting close to the end, and so please bear with me. This action would be to revise the way that economic data are collected, and so, right now, for-hire vessels are required to provide information on the charter fee, fuel usage, and the fuel price for each of their trips, and that's for all the vessels that have the federal permits for the three fisheries.

What this would do would be, instead of making it a census, or instead of it all being a census, so that everybody has to do it, it would select a sample of the fleet to do that, okay, and so the intent is to make it easier, so that, you know, people would be -- I guess, you know, they would be more motivated to report this information.

This was something that was pretty contentious when this was put in place in 2021, and, from what I recollect, it was just very burdensome for vessels that -- In the Mid-Atlantic region that had Southeast permits, and they were not happy at all about having to supply this information, and so this action mainly intends to make it, you know, kind of a narrower frame, and the information would stay the same, and so I'll turn it back to you guys.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I know, economic reporting from the commercial sector, I don't feel like it's anybody's business, and I know that expense varies from operation to operation. Some people produce their own ice. Some people have, you know, fuel stored on their own property, and it's a little bit complicated to break it out as an expense, and I'm not saying it's the same, you know, but, if you're in business, and you are filing your taxes, and you're able to pay your bills, I think that you have been a successful business person, and, you know, clearly this would help ease the burden on some people. I just don't like the economic data requirement at all, personally. John, go ahead.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and I had this conversation with -- The same thing you just said with us commercially, and I said, well, why is it your business what my boat is making, or what my captains are making, and we had to fill out exactly how much money the trip was worth and everything like that, and so, to me, you're getting into our personal lives, and why do you need to know the information? Well, he said, we could care less what you guys make, and it's got nothing to do with that.

I did understand a little better when he explained himself saying that what we're trying to do is put a number on what each fishery is worth, the golden tile fishery, the charter boat fishery, private, for-hire, whatever it may be, and the government wants a number on what that represents, so they can put a dollar figure to it, the way the guy explained it to me, and, when he explained it like that -- Because on the bottom, as you know, commercially, we would just put trip not figured yet, no,

and now that they won't accept that. They won't accept it as a completed trip now, and he said that you have to put all that information in before they'll accept it as a completed trip.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: If I could respond directly to that, and then I'm going to turn the floor back over to Myra. I get that, but it also feels like the knowledge of that information could be used for a very specific purpose if we were looked at to be eliminated. If the dollar amount got small enough, to where the socioeconomic impact of snapper grouper fishermen became so small if we were eliminated, that the overall dollar amount is meaningless to government, but, when you take a case-by-case basis, and somebody has built their entire life around commercial fishing, and the possibility of that could get taken off the table because, as a group, we're insignificant, I don't particularly like the idea of that. Myra, go ahead.

MS. BROUWER: I guess I was going to say something along the lines of, yes, we need to know the value of these fisheries, and obtaining this information is important for that. It's important for us to do the analyses that we have to do to figure out the impact of regulations, for example, and it's also utilized for disaster relief, and so, when there needs to be -- You know, there's a hurricane, and you need to get assistance, the economists utilize that information for that purpose as well.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That is correct, but, in every disaster relief program that I've been a part of, I have to show trip tickets. I have to validate the income that I have lost historically, and it doesn't matter, because nobody is going to write a check for me, based on my economic reporting through my VTR paperwork.

They're going to issue it to me based on previous landings in comparable years, and comparable date structures, that are, you know, relatable to what the loss was for any particular storm, and believe me, and I've filed a lot of these, and I know how to comply with those requirements. I'm not saying it's, you know, a no, because no, and it's, to get this funding, you have to prove that you're working and that you have a loss already. Any other hands? Steve, go ahead.

MR. RANNEY: Thank you, James. I'm the same way. I don't like government intrusion in my life, and that's what it feels like. However, once again, with the VESL program, that's already set up for you to fill it out. Now, it says, you know, how much did I pay for fuel? I put the same number down every single time, because fuel does this. Sometimes it could go up, and it was \$5.39, and the next week it's \$7.24, and, no, I just put the same. I put down \$7 every time, but it's already right there. That's why I really encourage the council to look at trying to encourage other places to use VESL.

I mean, Amy said we've had a high compliance, and that's because it is so simple, and so that's my only thing on that. You know, that information is there. I didn't like doing it the first time. I said it's none of your damn business, but I still filled it out, and I don't -- It's not really that big a deal. You know, they can find out by calling my -- Because I work out of a marina, and so they can find out how much I get, how much fuel I buy. They can go find that out, and so, for me to give it to them, I'm complying.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. I think a much better way to do this would be to just ask for our federal income tax returns. Seriously. Personally, I would, because I go -- I pay for an accountant to do my taxes. I know what I made. I know what was -- You know, I mean, here. Have it. Whose hand did I see? Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. To add to what Steve said, in VESL, I mean, we're already reporting on the number of paying passengers, the number of paying crew, how much fuel we use, the fuel price, what depths we fish, the lat, the long, what was kept, what was released, what was vented, what was descended, and I know that economic information is going to -- Volunteering economic information is going to look a lot different to a lot of different people, and I completely understand that.

I think, you know, just from a big picture, the charter business is a very valuable business, and my fear for the charter fleet is that, if you're not contributing some of this economic data, that it doesn't create -- It doesn't paint that picture of how valuable it truly is. Now, on the flip side of that, you can simply not put a number on the value of what my boat and what my business and what my passengers mean to me. It is simply invaluable, and so, when you look at economic data, it's a very big picture, and some things you just simply can't calculate.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you. I've got Tony, and then Jack.

MR. CONSTANT: Real quick, I would think that a Schedule S off your tax reform would be plenty for them. That tells you your gross and your deductions. They don't need to know the itemization of each one, but it would give you the total overall of the fishery.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Steve, go ahead.

MR. RANNEY: Thank you, James. We're having people having a hard time telling us what fish they caught, and now we're going to ask for their income tax?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I was more being sarcastic.

MR. RANNEY: I know you were, but, all of a sudden, we're down that rabbit trail.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: We didn't get the luxury of these big conversations about what we wanted and didn't want in the commercial industry. They said here it is, and do it, and that was it. End of discussion.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Point taken. Tony, go ahead.

MR. CONSTANT: I would just make a quick comment that I hope we put this much effort into recreational reporting data.

UNIDENTIFIED: We're getting to that next.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. I think we're going to go back to you, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you. Okay, and this is the last potential change, and so we've talked about the did-not-fish reports, and so, currently, they are already required if a charter or headboat isn't going to be participating in for-hire fishing. They can submit these, and they can be submitted up to thirty days in advance, and so do we even need to change this?

I recall, with the For-Hire Reporting AP, some of those members did see the value, and were, you know, using them, the did-not-fish reports, as intended, but then there's the issue that we've already talked about with this kind of reporting being -- Getting in the way of accurate information being submitted, and so do we need to change anything about did-not-fish reports?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. It's my opinion that the DNFs, as they stand now, are completely fine. You know, just from my personal experience and to touch on some experiences that others around the table have shared, you know, whether it's health issues, whether it's family issues, whatever you have going on in your life, that that DNF is really a useful tool, and really important when used in the correct way, and a great example is, this winter, I thought I was never going to make it out of the boat yard.

We were going through a repower process, and you know, six weeks turned into four-and-a-half months, and that DNF was really important, because we had so many other things going on with our business, with our family, with the children, with these motors. DNF was a very useful tool. If there's any way that -- The thirty days, and you have to do it weekly, and so you have to still go in once a week and do it, but for up to thirty days.

If there is any type of improvement, or something that could be added on, something very easy, maybe a comment section. Maybe you can say, hey -- You know, without getting into a lot of detail, but boat yard, health issue, vacation, whatever it is, and then kind of create a record to look back on, if it's ever needed.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. Myra, go ahead.

MS. BROUWER: I forgot, and I should have shown this before I turn it back to you, and so this is what is currently in place and what is being proposed, and so, as you can see for the Gulf program, they are potentially looking at a similar requirement to what we currently have in the South Atlantic, and so monthly. Actually, no, it's not, and so ours is weekly, up to thirty days in advance. They're looking at having just a monthly requirement.

In the Greater Atlantic Region, it is not required, and so this is where there's definitely going to be potentially some inconsistency with vessels that have Southeast permits but are fishing for dolphin off of, I don't know, Maryland, and then the HMS Division is proposing also a monthly did-not-fish report, and without a limit to how far in advance you can submit that, and so just so that you can see the range of what's out there.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. I'm looking around the room. Go ahead, Haley.

MS. STEPHENS: I really appreciate you guys listening to my public comment session here, but something else to note is, early in the presentation, you know, we kind of joked that there's sixty-two alleged headboats, and the reason I alluded to that is because there are headboats in the Gulf that do hold charter-headboat South Atlantic permits, you know, with different motivations.

You know, I've been told I have this South Atlantic permit, and I never intend to fish in the South Atlantic but, if something were to ever change in the future, I could potentially capitalize and cash in on this, and so maybe that check-box of your comment. If, you know, your DNR is for an entire year, maybe it is some of those issues we talked about of health, family, vacation, et cetera, or maybe you have to say my boat is in the Gulf, and that's where I fish. That's where my marine is.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: To kind of speak to that with my particular circumstance of why I hold permits that I don't use, if -- You know, if I did need to switch gears and go from commercial to charter, and, in the future, if those permits were, you know, were valuable, and, you know, maybe there should be some stipulation that, if you didn't use them, it's not available on the open market, but, if you're going to personally use it, go for it, you know, something like that, because I don't have it for future potential gain, and I'm not trying to sell something that I had never used to somebody. I'm just, you know, just in case I need it type situation, and in a section like that, you know, or some provisions that way, might be useful. All right. Myra, back to you.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, and so I have nothing more to bring to you on this amendment except to just say we are going to be collecting scoping comments from the public, and so this is going to be on the website, and there will be a form where you all and, you know, anybody who wants to can submit comments to the council, and so thank you very much for that discussion. That was very useful.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Great. Myra, thank you. I know that we are running a little bit long here. Mike, should we take a quick break, or should we just kind of get started, or keep going?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Let's take a quick break and come back at 3:55.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. We're shooting for a 3:55 return.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. It is 3:56. Now let's settle back in so we can get to it. I'm going to give the floor to Chip, and we're going to go over the South Atlantic Spawning Special Management Zone Research, Attachment 11 in your books, and let's go.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you. This presentation is a joint effort. Lewis Naisbett-Jones, as well as several other folks, have contributed to information on this, and so I'm just the presenter of it, but there's several folks at The Nature Conservancy that have worked together to put a grant together to collect some of this research.

There's several fishermen that contributed their time to go out and collect data, and there's folks at LGL Consulting that have helped to collect some of this data and analyze it. South Carolina DNR has done a lot of the histological work, and so it's a very large team effort, and some of the folks in the room here have contributed to this effort over time, and so I just want to give you an update on the spawning special management zones and what we're trying to do with evaluation for it.

First off, let's talk about what the spawning special management zones are. There's five of them along the coast, from North Carolina to Key West. They're mapped over there on the right. You can see that they're fairly small, starting most northward with South Cape Lookout. That's a 5.1-square-mile area. That's the largest of all five, and going all the way down to Warsaw Hole, which is 3.6 square miles.

Three of these are out on the break, in fairly deep water, and then there's two that are the Area 51 and Area 53. We're not looking for aliens. Those are actually artificial reefs that were put out there by South Carolina DNR. When they did it, they had an intention of creating kind of secret spots, or not necessarily secret spots, but spots that weren't noticed for fishermen, and the idea was, you know, these were going to be protected areas.

When this idea of spawning special management zones came up, they included their artificial -- A couple of their artificial reefs in there that were protected, or not announced, and so those have been included in the spawning special management zones.

Why these areas have been selected is these are areas that it's either there's been observed target species spawning in the area, or they're suspected of spawning in the area. You know, it's very difficult to determine exactly where fish are spawning. A lot of this was developed through public comment when the amendment, Amendment 36, which was completed back in 2016. When that was put together, a lot of comments were gathered, and these were some of the areas that were identified as potential spots for spawning.

The reason that we're bringing this back to you all now is they have a sunset in July of 2027, and so, if the council doesn't vote to keep these areas there, they will go away. They've been in place since July of 2017, and so we'll -- Let me go into a little bit more information on exactly what they're trying to do.

Within these spawning special management zones, what we're looking for is either direct evidence of spawning, basically confirm what people have said has been occurring, or indirect evidence of spawning, and so direct evidence can be a couple different things that are going on. One is something like this video that I have here, where it's a video of mutton snapper. A diver is in the water, and they're seeing a group of fish swirling around. Shortly here, you're going to see them start going up in the water column. When they go up in that water column, you'll see them release eggs and sperm, and so that's direct evidence of spawning.

That is the holy grail. It rarely occurs. You've got to have the perfect situation here, right? The fish are -- A diver has got to be in the water at the right time, and they've got to be facing the right way. It's the right time of day. It's everything coming together to get that image. It rarely happens. With mutton snapper, we knew where they spawned, based on what fishermen had said where they go fishing, and so it was a little bit easier than some of these fish, something like a gag grouper.

I don't know if we know of any spots like this. There are suspected spots, definitely, and we don't know when they spawn. We don't know where they spawn, and so we'll rely on other information, such as looking at the size of the gonads, whether or not they're roed up. I heard you guys talking about some of that for black sea bass earlier today, and so that's some more direct evidence that a fish is in spawning condition and that it's likely to occur.

Some of these conditions they've determined that, based on some of the histological, that the fish is likely to spawn within twenty-four hours, and so it's probably not going to move all that far in that last twenty-four hours. They're probably at that spot.

Some of this indirect evidence of spawning, one may be a coloration change, and what I have here is in -- This is in Devil's Hole. It's a video collected by NOAA Fisheries, and you're going to see a scamp, what's called a tiger pattern scamp, come into the video. If this red snapper ever gets out of the way, you'll see it. There it is right there. That is actually a scamp. It's not a parrotfish, and so it's a scamp that has a very odd coloration. Let's see if I can pause it when it gets close.

This has been suspected, and there it is right there. You'll see it's normal black. It's got a very white face, but, if you were to catch that fish, it would change back to the normal coloration of a scamp, and so that is thought to be indicative of spawning. There's definitely some questions on whether or not that does indicate spawning. It could just be saying what is this big thing in the water with me, and it's freaking me out, and so it could be that as well, but this could be an indication of spawning.

Another thing that we've seen in Devil's Hole is, if you look down here, this is another video that was collected. All these black fish down there, those are all scamp, and you can see them all over the place, and so this seems like a beginning of an aggregation, a potential spawning aggregation, for scamp, but we're not positive if there's aggregation that occurs, and then you'll also notice the sandbar shark that goes swimming through the group as well, and so those are two indications of potential indirect evidence of spawning, just so you know what we're looking for as the samplers go out into these different areas.

There's been some recent and proposed work, and so in Georgetown Hole, and that was the hole I was just showing the videos for, there are two completed surveys that have been done by TNC, and so those were completed in April 2023 and April 2024, and the reason that month was selected was it's suspected of potential spawning for scamp, and so you saw direct evidence of potential spawning for -- Or indirect evidence of spawning in that area, and that's why we went there at that time, trying to figure out when scamp are spawning, and is this actually a good location for scamp, and Devil's Hole is one area that we thought scamp would be.

There's other species that are likely to occur in the area, and have been caught in the area, such as warsaw grouper, but you have to go there at the right time. Warsaw Grouper potentially spawn a little bit later in the season, and so they might not be ready to spawn at that time.

So, moving further south to Warsaw Hole, this is another location where sampling has been conducted, and there's going to be another sampling event in this spring, or actually next week, and so we'll -- Then the last location is South Cape Lookout. There's one planned visit to South Cape Lookout, and then there's potential other sampling events that will occur.

Going into the areas where sampling has occurred, and so, looking at the 2023 and 2024 sampling events, you can see all the different locations. You can see how -- Just the interesting depth profile in this area. One of the thoughts is, these kind of elbows out in the water, that helps to create eddies in the streams, and those eddies are used to deposit eggs further inshore, and that's what the fish are using in order to get their eggs and larvae to be entrained into the local areas.

A couple other things that you'll notice is this one hole, and that's why it's called Georgetown Hole, is there's this hole there, and then the drop-offs over on these two sides, and so direct evidence of spawning, and we have a scamp pictured on the left, a gag in the middle, and a red snapper on the right, and, in 2023, in the sampling that they observed, or they collected seven female scamp, and, in 2024, they collected fifteen female scamp, and, for each of those, there was 100 percent of those scamp that were observed in spawning condition in April, and then, in 2024, 93 percent were observed in spawning condition in April.

Another thing that's pretty interesting about these different locations, or this location, was the mean age of scamp in the area. 9.5 is a fairly old scamp, when we're looking at some of these, and so it is potentially an indication, another indication, that this is a spawning area, because the older individuals are going to the location.

Moving over to gag grouper, none were collected in April 2023, but they did observe eight in 2024, and seven of those eight were in spawning condition, and then, moving over to the other fish, we have red snapper. Eight females were caught in 2023, and four were in spawning condition, and nine fish in April 2024, three of which were in spawning condition. Usually red snapper begin spawning a little bit later in the year than the groupers. They're usually a summer spawner fish, but you are seeing some evidence of them beginning to spawn in April as well.

Moving on down to Warsaw Hole, this area too has a hole right here. It's extremely deep, and an extremely sharp drop-off. On the western side, it's a more shallow drop-off than on the eastern side, and you can see all the sampling locations that occurred in 2024. Next week, there's going to be a sampling event in the same area. They are targeting times for warsaw spawning, but they would also like to do some future trips, to get something like greater amberjack.

You guys know that the closure for greater amberjack is a little bit later in the year, or potential spawning would be later in the year, and so that's what they're going to be -- Sorry. Spawning for greater amberjack is in April. Warsaw grouper is later in the year. I got those backwards.

When they went down there, and this is the second trip that have caught two warsaw grouper on the trip, and both of them had either early developing or potential developing warsaw grouper in it, and, if you notice this individual right there, that is David Moss. He was out there collecting information on the trip, and so he can catch fish.

This could be considered some of the direct evidence of spawning in the area. It's been -- When we're looking at the location of where these warsaw grouper were caught, the previous sampling event occurred in 2018. This sampling event occurred in 2024, and the warsaw grouper that were caught in the area were caught about seventy-five feet from the locations, and so it seems like that is a good location to catch warsaw grouper, potentially in spawning condition.

South Cape Lookout, there is going to be a sampling event going on later this year. Jack Cox is going to be leading that up. This area is mostly hard mud, or sediment, and it's a gentle shelf break. It's a little bit different than many of the areas. One of the ideas for this area was to protect red grouper spawning habitat, and so this is an image of the actual South Cape Lookout, and you can see a scamp right over there, and so you just get the idea of the roughness of this area. We don't have video of -- Or I didn't include video of the Warsaw Hole.

There's some decent-sized scamp in this, and you can see some -- I think there were some lionfish that were present as well, and so, looking at some direct evidence of spawning, species that have been observed, one is scamp. They observed some gonads that were in spawning condition, and then I have a picture here of a rock hind that has a potential spawning condition, and then other species, that were caught on previous sampling events, were red grouper and red snapper and vermillion snapper. Those were all in development stages, but they were not in spawning condition.

A little bit more details about the next steps, and so that is the data that's being collected. The next steps are we need to do an evaluation of the area. We have this group called the System Management Plan Workgroup. They are going to be working on an evaluation for these areas, and they'll present their findings to the council, and their recommendations to advisory panels as well. Those recommendations will be coming to you all in April of 2026.

The system management plan, they're going to be looking at additional information. One piece of information is going to be these new data collections that are occurring in the natural areas, and, when I'm talking about the natural areas, those three areas that I've shown you. We're also going to be looking at larval dispersal models. There's been some work with larval dispersal that's shown the overall benefit, or potential benefit, of these areas.

We would like to get some law enforcement and compliance for the areas. How well are they working? Are fishermen abiding by the regulations to avoid the areas to protect these spawning fish? You know, it's very important to allow these fish a chance to spawn before they're removed, and so we've identified certain areas. The council kept them small, to have as minimal impact as possible, and hopefully compliance is high, given that the size is fairly small.

Then we also -- There's some data collection efforts that have been going on in artificial reef areas, and we would like to get a presentation on that. In the upcoming months, the System Management Plan Working Group is finalizing the evaluation form, and then they'll use that form in order to evaluate the areas. You know, it's hard to develop an evaluation form until you know what you're trying to evaluate, and so that's what they're working on right now. Then, like I said, this will be coming to you all in April of 2026.

This is my final slide. This is another image of the Devil's Hole area. There's been a few submersible dives done out here, with an ROV dive off the -- I believe it was the Pisces. It's just really good footage, but, with that, I will take any questions. It's a fairly long video, and so you all can be entertained by the great white that swims by and then gets chased by a bunch of amberjack. It's good to know where your enemy is, right? You can follow them. You don't want him following you.

AP MEMBER: How deep is that?

DR. COLLIER: I believe that's -- Chris, you probably know the depth of this hole better than I do, right? It's what, 180 or 200 feet?

MR. CONKLIN: It's all over the place. It depends on where you are there, but you can see a pretty good amount of light in that one, and so I imagine it's up on the shallower side.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Chip. This was an awesome presentation. It's really cool. I like how the videos were added to give us, you know, a real feel for what's going on down there. I would caution against conversation here. If we have legitimate questions, we would love to have them. You know, we are a little bit short on time. Looking around the room here, I don't see any questions, Chip. Jack, go ahead.

MR. COX: When will this information go back to the council and they will start to break it out and figure out what's working, and what's not, and what's the timing like on that?

DR. COLLIER: So I'm still working on the timing for it. You know, this can be done in a fairly quick process. It is -- I'm trying to remember the name of it. It's a frame-workable option, and is that correct, and so it can be done in a fairly short process. We would like to get it to -- The amendment can start whenever, but we would like to have the evaluations further along than they are right now, and so it could start as early as maybe September, or December, of 2025 and then begin taking scoping comments, if that's required, in order to make sure we have everything completed by the end of 2026.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Excellent. Thank you. Any other questions? All right. I think we have you also for Item 12.

DR. COLLIER: All right, and so I have struggled on how to present this to the Snapper Grouper Advisory Committee. There are so many things that we need in order to manage this fishery well, and so the research and monitoring prioritization. We are in the process of revamping it, and, because of all of the information that we needed for the snapper grouper fishery, I've struggled on how to revamp it, but it is going to be revised.

What I would like to get from you all is what you think is needed in order to manage your fishery better. One thing I've heard, specifically at this meeting, is we need to update release mortality numbers, ever since the change of the descending device regulation. I think that is very good reason for updating those numbers. That's a very big change in it. You know, also, some of these numbers were developed before circle hooks were required. That too is going to change release mortality for some of these fish, and so I hear that as a very important research recommendation.

There were other things that were brought up at this meeting that I think need to be included. I'm trying to think through what they were, but, if you all have any ideas on what you believe is needed in order to manage your fishery better, please let me know. We can get it added in. Just know it's not going to look like this in the future. It is going to be a much different looking document, hopefully something that's readable. This is painful, and I will admit that readily.

We have it broken out by species. A lot of it is what is needed for stock assessment. Some of it gets into some of the technical details. One thing I think that would be extremely useful, and I don't know if you all agree, but knowing where some of the juvenile snapper groupers are, and I think that would be beneficial, ways to see them, or catch them, and figure different ways, different techniques, to get a juvenile index abundance for these species. That will help with projections, to know exactly what direction these species are going. Is there -- Do you all have any ideas on what we should include in research and monitoring?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: That's a big ask. Looking around the room, I think we're chewing on it. Jack.

MR. COX: When it comes to the gags, to look -- Maybe do some research, kind of like we're doing the SMZ sites, in some of these shallower places that we think might be spawning grounds, to identify, you know, some of these spots that might be important to protect in the way that we're doing it with warsaw and the kitties.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, Jack. Andy Fish.

MR. FISH: I feel like we're kind of already protecting them in the spawning season. Why do we need special, more special, spawning zones that are -- It sounds like they're closed, or are they only closed in spawning seasons, or are they closed -- I don't think we need to close more, but just close during the spawning season.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Well, we did kind of move away from the spawning when we hopped into the overall monitoring plan. You're good, but anybody else? Haley, go ahead.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman. Yes, and I agree, Chip. The discard mortality percentages as a priority, for sure, and then, also, as I'm scanning through the document really quick, I guess it's the social and economic priorities. I appreciate that the develop a socioeconomic profile impact model for the South Atlantic headboat component is highlighted, and so I appreciate that being prioritized.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Haley. I guess, for me, you know, and this is kind of like a broken record, but the speed in which we get through these items, and the way that they're brought up, I think that focus needs to be on efficiency and how quickly we can compile the data from stock assessments, and how quickly we can use that in management, and really shorten the amount of time that it takes to run through amendments. You know, that should be part of the plan, is to make this more streamlined. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and I think Steve and John both brought this up, but the frequency of assessments probably needs to increase a bit. Looking at information that's five to seven years old, and making management decisions on that, is a little bit challenging. I think, if you all agree to make more frequent assessments, and maybe they're not going to be as in-depth as some of the ones that we're currently getting, but we need something on a more regular basis, to avoid dramatic changes in the fishery. At that point, it's horrible, and, quite often, it's almost impossible to respond.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, and I think we've all felt that at one point or another. All right. Not seeing any more hands, thank you, Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you all, and if you --

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Chip, go ahead and finish up here.

DR. COLLIER: If you all have any additional ideas, please don't hesitate to email me. I will definitely try to incorporate everything that we can into this. I think it's very important that we get

the feedback from the stakeholders, as much as possible, to figure out what you all think is most important in managing your fishery. If there's glaring holes in it, you know, please let us know. Talk to any staff, in order to get things started.

Going from research to something that's usable for management takes a long time, and, if you don't tell us until it's very bad, it's usually a longer time, and so tell us early when you're seeing something. That will help us to incorporate it into this research and monitoring plan and hopefully get it into management a little bit quicker.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you so much, Chip. We'll move right along into Item 13, the SEDAR update with Emily Ott.

MS. OTT: Well, I hate to interrupt that conversation, but, for those of you I have not met, I'm Emily Ott. I'm the SEDAR coordinator with the South Atlantic. This will all be South Atlantic-specific SEDAR updates, and I recognize I'm one of the final barriers between this meeting ending and you going home, and so I'll keep it brief.

One of the main things I wanted to show you all was the new project grid that came out of the most recent SEDAR Steering Committee meeting this past February, and so, before going into all of this, just I wanted to throw out that all of this is dependent upon the resources and staffing we currently have, and I just wanted to put that out there, but I wanted to show you all a visual side-by-side of the current SEDAR project schedule. This is just the snapshot of the South Atlantic assessments, and so, if you want to see all of the SEDAR cooperator assessments that are coming up in the next few years, you can look on the SEDAR website and see that entire spreadsheet, but, again, so this is just the South Atlantic.

The one on the left-hand side is what's currently on the website, and then on the right-hand side is the project schedule that came out of the steering committee meeting. I know it's a pretty colorful graphic, and so to quick orient you with all the different colors, the green slots represent the stock assessments that the steering committee has approved, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center has already scheduled those assessments. The orange means the steering committee has approved the assessments to be conducted. However, it's pending the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to schedule that stock assessment.

The blue are our hopes and dreams, and so, like Judd was saying earlier, cooperators come to the steering committee meeting, and they negotiate which stock assessments they would like to see in the future, and so those are just future requests that are not confirmed, in the blue, and then the pink -- Those pink slots are unique to the updated project grid, and these are stock assessments which will be updates, and they will be completely conducted within the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, to hopefully produce some updated management advice on those stocks that need it.

I wanted to point out, with this side-by-side visual, some main changes going from the old project grid to the new one, the first one being the SEDAR 95 Atlantic migratory cobia assessment. That assessment was paused last fall, due to staffing, and, as you can see, it's no longer on the project grid for the South Atlantic side. However, the Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission will be doing a cobia assessment in 2026, and so they kind of took that one over.

The red grouper assessment got pushed down from 2026 to 2027, and then the black sea bass update, which we all were talking about earlier, was in 2025, and, again, that's that Southeast Fisheries Science Center update.

Then, just briefly, some general updates regarding SEDAR, and so one of the most recently completed assessments, which was already talked about, is the SEDAR 92 Atlantic blueline tilefish stock assessment. That stock assessment will go to the SSC for review in a week-and-a-half, and, if you would like to read a very long document, that stock assessment report is on the SEDAR website.

A stock assessment that is underway is the SEDAR 90 South Atlantic red snapper, a very popular fish. That data workshop is only a few weeks away, and so it's open to the public, and so, if you're local, I encourage you to attend. It's here in Charleston, at the Town and Country Hotel, and, if you're not local, there is a webinar registration, and so you can listen in as well.

Then, if you would like to stay informed with any particular SEDAR assessment, please let me know, and I can add you to an email distribution list, so you'll get notifications and reminders for any project schedule with the SEDAR stock assessment, and you'll get those webinar registration links, know when all the workshops are going to be held, but, if you don't want to get a million emails from me, we keep the SEDAR website very current, and so you can also just go on the SEDAR website and see all of those upcoming events on the upcoming events tab, and you'll also get all the webinar registration links and the workshop location.

The last thing, and so, coming soon, the SEDAR Steering Committee is working on the SEDAR process graphic, to create a visual for the general timeline components of stock assessment, which, in my opinion, is very helpful to have a visual representation of that, and then I'm open to any other infographic ideas, whether you want to talk about it now or you can send me an email, whether that's how to use the SEDAR website, and we have a lot of resources on the website, the different stock assessment models, the different inputs and outputs of those expected models, and then maybe how to get involved with SEDAR.

I know, yesterday, there was a lot of conversation with how to get the information that we discuss at these AP meetings back to your communities, and so maybe infographics would be an avenue for that and that's all I have.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Emily. Well done. I appreciate the brief presentation. Do we have any questions or comments for Emily? All right.

MS. OTT: If you think of one, my email is in the bottom left.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Very good. Once again, thank you so much. It was a great presentation. All right. Moving right along at this point, Item 14, we're looking at Other Business. I'm going to turn it over to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so, first of all, one other business item is the council has put together a Wreckfish Advisory Panel, and that advisory panel is comprised of shareholders for the wreckfish fishery, but one of the seats on the advisory panel is for a Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel representative, and so I am looking to the panel for a volunteer who would like to serve as

the snapper grouper representative to the Wreckfish Advisory Panel. It cannot be a wreckfish shareholder. I know we have a couple of shareholders here. You already have a seat, and so it would be somebody just representing the general Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel.

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

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I don't know, and, Myra, has the Wreckfish AP convened at this point? Not yet? Okay, and so I'm not sure necessarily if they're going to be convening in-person or webinar primarily. I think that that's -- This is a new advisory panel, and so it's kind of yet to be determined, once we get all the people in order.

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

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay. John noted that previous meetings of the wreckfish shareholders have been in Florida, in Daytona or the Keys.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I didn't want to interrupt any of the discussions, but I do want to let everyone know that in the -- We have a project going on right now, a management strategy evaluation for the wreckfish fishery, and so we're envisioning that this Wreckfish AP would be utilized in development of that management strategy evaluation, or a data-limited approach.

What the goal is, it's one of our goals is to update that stock assessment that's getting fairly old, that the industry had paid for years ago, and we want to make sure that that information is updated, and so we hope to bounce some ideas off the shareholders, get them engaged in the process, to see what they would like out of the fishery.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Chip. I think that we have a volunteer for the open seat on the panel, Vincent Bonura.

MR. BONURA: Yes, I'll volunteer for that one. I don't own any shares or anything, but I'll volunteer for it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that. Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and then one other item is I just wanted to point out -- There's been some discussion, throughout these couple of days, about the council's workplan and the prioritization of the council's work, and so I just wanted to point you all to where on the website you can find the workplan that gets developed at each council meeting.

When you go to any of the council meeting workbook, or briefing books, and so, right now, I'm going to go to the March 2025 council meeting, and, if you scroll down into the Friday session, and sorry for the visual of the scrolling, but, if you scroll down into the Friday session, it's always one of the last things that the council works on, because they kind of go through all their different processes during the week, and then they identify that, well, this needs to be higher up, or lower down, on the workplan, and so this is the visual of what it looks like.

I'm not going to go through it all, but you can see the list of the projects here, and, if you want more information on how to go through that, see how the council evaluates -- These blocks are blocks of time within a council meeting, but, if you want to look through that file, and you want more information on it, just follow-up with me via email, and I can get you some more information on what's in that workplan, but I did want to point it out to you, so that, if you are interested, you can see the list of what the council is working on at a various time, and that's all I have.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Excellent, and that's great. That's a lot. That's the spreadsheet of doom?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: That is the spreadsheet of doom, yes.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Looking around the room, any other business? Andy, go ahead.

MR. FISH: I would like to make a motion. **With all the concerns and talk of efficiencies in our fishery, I would like to make a motion to allow multiday boats to possess multiday limits, especially with the smaller red snapper and grouper limits on us now.**

MR. PASKIEWICZ: We'll give Mike a minute to capture that sentiment.

MR. POLSTON: A quick question, while he's writing, and is that going to be for everything, like king mackerel, or just in certain species?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Let's go ahead and wait for a second, and then we'll have some discussion, and, Andy, if you wanted to specify in your motion, as Mike is capturing it, and maybe our discussion could be streamlined some, if there's something else that you want to include there.

MR. FISH: I mean, that's a start. I mean, I'm open to everything. Most of these multiday boats are in the northern region, and like, north right now, the limit for king mackerel is --North of Daytona is the line for 3,500 pounds, and, actually, it just went back down to the Brevard-Volusia County line, and it's 3,500 pounds. I don't think we need more than 3,500 pounds of kingfish, but I'm up for discussion. I'm kind of lost right now.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Well, we have a motion. Do we have a second? Jeff has seconded this motion. Some discussion? John, go ahead.

MR. POLSTON: Yes, and my question was, you know, is it just going to be in the grouper snapper, or is it also going to be across the board? For example, like I just said king mackerel, and not necessarily king mackerel, but, for example, cobia, and a guy is out commercial fishing for three to five days, and he gets into a school of cobia, and, you know, he's out -- Is he going to be allowed five days' worth of cobia, or is he just going to still be on an unloading limit and stuff? That's something we have to address now, if we're going to push for it, is what I was getting at, and maybe not right this second, but --

MR. FISH: Maybe if I could describe the scenario that goes on now. When red snapper opens, it's a derby fishery. There are people that go just to go catch seventy-five pounds of red snapper. They go out, and they come in. Me and my peers don't feel that this is a proper use of the resource.

There's people that go king fishing, that have kingfish permits and bottom fish permits. Those guys troll out and catch their king, and they go to the red snapper spot, and catch the kingfish they can, and then come back. They have to go in and out every day. If they could -- Because they don't want to miss out on their seventy-five pounds of red snapper.

Now, if they could go out and actually go king fishing, and actually catch their red snapper, and do a full day's work, anchor up, get back up and do it in the morning, all out in the fishing grounds, and that's where I'm getting at. There's a lot of people that want to go tile fishing, that want to go to the real tilefish grounds, but it's ninety miles away. If they could go do a huge trip like that, catch king mackerel along the way, catch red snapper along the way, catch multiday -- Really use the efficiency, for the guys with the bigger boats, that pioneered the fishery, that are now getting pushed out, because of working waterfront, because of tiny limits, and people are working single outboard boats, and trailering around. That's the picture I'm trying to paint.

MR. POLSTON: Understood, and I'm behind you 100 percent, because I have all slow boats, but what I was getting at is you still need -- Somebody is going to have to specify, and is it going to be across the board or just for certain species? That's what I was trying to say.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Well, the thing is, if we set a precedent here, you know, it may follow for other species. I did have Richie, and then David, and then other people.

MR. GOMEZ: Yes, and I don't see why you would have to burn extra fuel coming home every day. I mean, you're out on a three or four-day trip, and I don't even know why you would have to have done this in the first place, but this sure is a wrong that needs to be corrected.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks Richie. David.

MR. MOSS: Thank you, and we spoke about this briefly. I don't have any problems with this, but then there's going to need to be some sort of verification that you are indeed out there for multiple days, and so whether it's a hail-in and hail-out, or whatever, but, you know, you're going to need to, I would think, attach to this some sort of verification process or -- I know we love the word "validation", and so I'll use that one, but validation of you being out there for more than a day, rather than just catching, you know, 150 pounds in a day.

MR. FISH: Even the guys, as much as everybody hates the vessel monitoring system, which is a big invasion of privacy, a lot of the guys, and not all, would be onboard with the VMS, the headache of all that, the invasion of the privacy, if they could have that way to prove multiple days that they're offshore, to actually catch multiple catches of trip limits.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Do you want to include that in your motion?

MR. FISH: Yes, and a way to accomplish this by any means.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Something that maybe would help is if we can ask a council staff member if -- You know, in a motion like this, is this something that we can get the wheels rolling on, and get it pushed through, if we have the support necessary? I mean, I would hate for something like this to get put on the spreadsheet of doom and always be at the bottom of it. Mike, go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: This item, I mean, it's right in line with what the Commercial Subcommittee has been talking about. One of the two main goals that they identified that they wanted to address with the commercial fishery was to improve trip efficiencies, and this is something that can be brought and incorporated into that effort. That's an already ongoing effort, and that's something that ultimately is expected to lead to an amendment, and we can bring that to them in their next meeting, and they can, you know, make a decision about incorporating it into that process.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Great. I have Chris Conklin.

MR. CONKLIN: There's like a thousand different ways you could do something like this. This screams gag grouper, red snapper, and red porgy to me. I probably wouldn't -- Maybe not even red porgy, but I probably wouldn't touch, you know, snowy grouper or anything like that with like real low ACLs, or even lower than the low gag grouper, and at least in red snapper, but you could -- If there was a way that you could do this and validate, you know, when you leave the dock, and when you get back, or how many days you're out, and even, to make it more appealing to management or whatever, you could say, if you're on a multiday trip, you can't have more than two limits, or, you know, if you're on a --

So it doesn't matter how many days you're out. If you're out five days, you can't come in with five limits. You can come in with two though, or one-and-a-half, or something like that, and anything would be better than nothing. We're just trying to find a way forward. You know, I've thought about stuff like this before, and I really appreciate you bringing it up, Andy, and I think there's probably a lot of support for anything we could get at this point. Is it going to make me go buy more big boats and get back into the fishery? Hell no, but damn right it would help.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'm going to turn it over to Kerry before we get to some of the other AP members.

MS. MARHEFKA: I've got an ugly old slow boat I'll sell you. No, but I think, because we're going to be talking about this in June, and I don't want to interrupt your conversation, and we're running out of time, but it would be really helpful to the extent you can flesh out this conversation. We're curious about the people -- Are you all in support of this, or, if you're not, understanding that this could lead to shorter seasons, because the ACL will get caught up quicker. Can you all have a discussion around that, so that, when we meet in June, we know people's feelings on that and the tradeoffs you're willing to make for this to happen, and that will just help us when we talk about it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I'd be curious, and is the verbiage daily limit, or is it trip limit, in the way -
- It's trip? Okay.

AP MEMBER: One day trip limit.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It's a trip limit though.

AP MEMBER: A daily trip limit.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: A daily trip limit. It's opening up a can of worms. I did have Randy, then Vincent, then Jack.

MR. MCKINLEY: I would be all supportive of it, because there's not many big boats left, and multiday boats, but I would -- I don't know how you would do it, but I would just hate to see some of these new outboards that have got into it, that they just go out there in the afternoon, and spend the night, and then they say they get the thing, and so somehow -- I would love it for Andrew, but not some of these newer outboards and stuff, and so I don't know how you would fix that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate the input. Vincent.

MR. BONURA: I was just going to add that I've got a Gulf of Mexico permit on the boat, and, even when I'm fishing in the Atlantic, I have a VMS on the boat. I have to check in and check out, even golden tile fishing here in the Atlantic, and then would your thing here include golden tile fish, Andy? This motion, would it include golden tile?

MR. FISH: There's a lot of fishing grounds not being fished, because of the distances, and it would also take less pressure off of the close ranges. Like, in the Ponce area, there's a fleet of twelve or fourteen summertime kingfish boats that have a grouper snapper permits, and they're all -- Especially if it goes to 150 pounds of red snapper a day, hopefully, and fingers crossed, they're going to be having to go farther and farther to get to better productive grounds, and, if the guys could go on three and four-day trips, the pressure on the local community fish would be a lot lessened, and they could spread out the devastation of the heavy biters.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Jack.

MR. COX: Yes, and I would love to see something like this work. I've got a big slow boat as well, and it can go a long ways offshore. It takes me four hours sometimes to get where I want to go, or three hours, trying to conserve fuel and so forth, but, man, we talked about this for hours and hours and hours, and I don't think the council would even touch none of this right now, the way we're looking at it, and it would take a long time, a couple hours, to try to flesh this out, what we want to do, and I totally support the idea.

It's just I'm afraid it would shorten our seasons, you know, if we weren't real careful the way we tried to do this, because some people may say why not just increase the trip limit then, and, of course, that would shorten your season as well, but it's the right thinking to try to keep some of the boats working, that do the multiday trips, but, man, this like in the game, and today in our meeting, and maybe we could bring this back in our next meeting or something, but, you know, keep thinking along this, but it's going to --

Man, I'll tell you, and, you know, permit stacking would be something probably easier for them to recognize, or something, and I don't know. It's the right idea, but I just don't -- It's the right idea, but it's so complex, and I don't -- I would be so careful in the way we went about this, because it could really mess our seasons up.

MR. FISH: Well, it's like the fishery is getting pushed it to small boats, and it's getting pushed. Are they are they placing a 300-pound limit on grouper, and is it based on the average boat is twenty-five feet long, and thirty knots? Is that why we got that, or, I mean, I know we want to

prolong the season, and I know we want to be able to catch fish too, but I'm not asking for a ten-day trip, for 3,000 pounds of gag grouper. I mean, we just need a little bit more than what we have on a big boat.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: It smells like ITQ to me. I've got Haley, and then John.

MS. STEPHENS: Thank you. Haley Stephens. Yes, and I've got a big boat, that's real slow, and can I get some more fish too? No, and I'm just joking, but, man, if these fishermen and women are willing to go spend days at-sea to scrape the bottom of what's left, we absolutely should support them in whatever capacity that we can, and so I would really look to our commercial stakeholders and follow your lead there with my support. Maybe some verbiage about a twenty-four-hour period, as opposed to daily, or trip, and I might be able to support some clarification on your time at-sea.

MR. FISH: For the record. I have a big, fast, pretty boat.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Maybe even a historical component for -- You know, and just like it -- I do understand, and kind of agree with Jack, and like this is -- There's a lot here, and, again, I'm in support of the idea. I love it. It makes perfect sense to me, but, you know, it is heavy lifting.

MR. FISH: Right now, on the federal lobster tailing permit that is issued, you have to -- When you sign it, you are proving that you do multiday trips. I'm sorry, and that's a state, but you're proving -- Or you're signing that you routinely do multiple-day trips, and that's why you need this permit. It's not like you can give a john boat permit a tailing permit. It's the same kind of thing.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Correct. Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: I mean, I would say we can put this to bed by putting the vote out there right now, and it's not like we're going to get all this shit approved, or talked out, in the next hour, or two hours, but we could certainly bring it up in the next agenda, but at least get an approval of this, so so it does move forward.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: John, did I did I address you? Okay. You're up.

MR. POLSTON: Just real quick, Jack brought something up that I know they've already done in the Gulf with the king mackerel net boats. They've slowed down their fishery, to where they want to get more money for their fish, and they started catching less fish, and there's other boats that have taken -- They own multiple permits, and they're stacking their permits, which is like what Jack mentioned, and has that even been ever brought up in the South Atlantic?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I saw Andy and Mike at the same time. Do you guys want to fight to see who goes first?

MR. FISH: I am involved in the Gulf reef -- Or the Gulf kingfish fishery. Last year, there was talk that the gillnet fishery was going to try to reduce the amount that they caught, so they could have better quality fish, and they ended up not catching their limit, based on -- I don't know what that's based on, but they caught it this year, and they had -- Three boats had 90,000 pounds in one

day, and so, I mean, there's a fine line between not catching what you want to catch, because you're trying to dial down, and then catching them all.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: The kingfish story is not a model right now. The net fish, it's really kind of ugly actually.

MR. POLSTON: No, no, and I agree. My point is I believe it's already been done. I was just asking, and has that been even ever thought about in the Atlantic, or whatever, because, if you have two permits, if you've got two boats, or if you have three, and, if you choose that you want one to be golden tile fishing, and you want one to be wreck fishing, and you have a different permit, if both those boats, like you said, could catch the most you can per boat, if you put two permits onto one boat, you're not producing any more fish off the quota than if you're fishing two boats. I'm just saying it would make it more efficient, and I was wondering if that had been discussed at all in the South Atlantic.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Mike, go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and permit stacking is one of the items that was brought up to the Commercial Subcommittee, and so, as they're going through their discussions about potential ways to increase efficiency, that's something that will be in the conversations for them as well.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I think what you're kind of talking about is like stacking and then unstacking, and so you have three permits, three boats, and one could catch all three limits for one species, and one could catch all three limits for another species, and one could catch all three limits for the other species, and nothing really changes, but, yes, I mean, that's an efficiency situation. I don't know how we can make it work, but yes.

So, I guess, based on Richie's suggestion, we can take a vote on this and see if it's something we want to move forward with. Looking around the room, let's see all in favor. Andy, were you comfortable with the way that this is written?

MR. FISH: Yes.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. I guess I should go ahead and read the motion and make sure that we've captured the sentiment all the way. The motion is recommend the council allow multiday commercial trips to possess multiple days' worth of snapper grouper commercial trip limits and it's -- This is red snapper specific?

MR. FISH: I mean, I guess it should be for species that we think are viable, and not experiencing overfishing, I guess, or -- You know.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: We need some guidance here, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So if you -- If you take it as-is, what the council would then do with it is they would do what they are legally able to do with this type of motion, and so, if they're unable to do something like with an overfished stock, or something of that sort, then they would refine it as they go through their management process, and so, if the, you know, overall intent is captured in this recommendation, then I think the council members -- They've heard the discussion

surrounding this, and we'll provide them with the context, along with this recommendation, and they can then take it to, you know, further steps, and, as they develop an amendment, they would also be coming back to you all for further recommendations, and so this could get the ball rolling in that direction, if that's your intent here.

MR. FISH: Yes, sir. That's my intent.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Then I think discussion has passed on this, since we've already initiated a vote. Do we need an exact hand count on the yes, or can we just ask for all opposed?

MR. COX: I would amend your motion a little bit and put some species-specific in it, just to narrow it down, because, the way it reads now, it's just way too broad, for too many species that are in trouble, and so I would put the ones that are -- I would change that motion and wordsmith enough to try to achieve a specific goal, whether it be -- You know, whatever species.

MR. FISH: Well, my one of my big concerns was a lot of the tilefish guys want to go out too, but I'm good with leaving it as-is, and, if the powers that be want to -- I mean, I appreciate exactly what you're saying, like porgy, you know, and everything, but, whatever we can do to get it discussed at a higher level, I'm good with it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay, and so the motion, as read, I'm going to ask for anybody opposed to it. We have one opposition, and do I need to ask for abstain? David.

MR. MOSS: The heartburn I have, and similar to what Jack said, is I do think that you need to be more specific with species, because it's going to include the whole complex, and there is, you know, quite a few out there that are having some issues, that they're not going to want to pursue this, and so, for me, and, again, I'll about this for very specific species, in certain scenarios, like you were saying with red snapper turning into a derby, and this is a free-for-all the second it opens, and it's -- You know, it's not viable to you, and it's not -- It can be dangerous, all that stuff, and so, if you want to do it for, you know, one or two selected species, to throw them in there, three or whatever, but, to leave it open to all fifty-five I think would probably not be the best way to go. I'm more supportive of it if you dial it down.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: **Again, we have had discussion, and I think that the intent of this panel is to have this move to the next step and let the council determine if they want to streamline it, and prioritize it, and put it back in front of us eventually as an amendment, and, as far as I'm concerned, this motion has passed.**

MR. FISH: (Mr. Fish's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MR. PASKIEWICZ: You're welcome. Okay. Thank you for your motion, and any other Other Business? Vincent.

MR. BONURA: Yes, and I just wanted to put on the record again that we're still working on a white paper for catch shares in the golden tile longline fishery.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Sounds good. Noted. Okay. If we have no other hands up, we would be moving into public comment. Looking around the room, I don't know if there's anybody present

that has a public comment. Do we have anybody online? Dewey you are recognized to give your comment.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Okay. Can you hear me?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, sir.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: Dewey Hemilright, commercial vessel owner up in the northeastern part of North Carolina. The last couple days, I've appreciated listening to everybody's comments, and especially explaining their fisheries. As we all know, particular to the commercial snapper grouper fishery, the outlook doesn't look real good, with docks going away and different things happening.

If there was some way, and the subcommittee, Commercial Subcommittee, has talked about this - When you look at the SERO quota monitoring page over the last four or five years on commercial, you only see about three or four different species where the ACL is caught, and maybe four, something like that, and there's a lot of them that you see where only 60 percent is caught, or maybe 65 percent, and so if there was some way, into the future, that, when an ACL is not going to be caught, or a trigger put in to allow the Regional Administrator to change the trip limits and give anybody and everybody that's left in the commercial snapper grouper fishery a chance to harvest the ACL.

This past year, I believe, looking at it, there was 9,000 pounds of snowy grouper left on the table, and that could have been forty-five trip limits. You look at the other things, vermilion, and I believe amberjack, and a few others, where the ACLs aren't getting caught, and so the folks that are left should be able to -- Given every opportunity to harvest the ACL that's given to them by management, and that's about all I had to say, and I thank you all for you all taking your time to tell the stories and how the fisheries work up and down the coast, and everybody around the table, and you all have a safe travels. Thank you.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: We very much appreciate that comment. Go ahead Jack.

MR. COX: This is going to be a little crazy, but I've got something that I've been thinking about for a while, and it's way out there, but it's a big threat to this industry and everybody in this room, is the microplastics in this ocean, and, you know, there's an article came out today that says that cola, Pepsi cola, are some of the biggest contributors to the pollution of plastic in the ocean, and it's wreaking havoc on everything that we're harvesting, and it's a big deal.

As I dive and fish, I see more and more of this stuff every year, and not that we can do a lot about it, because this problem is a lot bigger, but to ask the councils, and not just to South Atlantic, but all the councils in our country to put pressure on these companies that are producing all this plastic, and tell them what it's doing to our industry, because it's going to get worse. That's my public comment, but it's something that we see more and more of when we're diving and fishing.

I'm sure everybody here is -- You know, the consumer is not going to be happy reading these articles about what -- These fish are eating these plastics, don't eat more fish, and it would be nice for all the councils in this country to put pressure and ask these companies, you know, what -- How do they feel about it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Appreciate that, Jack. Go ahead, Richie.

MR. GOMEZ: Just for Dewey, I mean, I'm sure you've probably been to council meetings, but just know that, you know, we're just an AP, and we can give advice, but really you've got to get a small group together and show up at the council meetings if you want to make a difference like that.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Since we've covered Other Business and public comment, this meeting is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 3, 2025.)

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Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
May 19, 2025

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

First	Last	Suffix	Position	Affiliation	Seat	Expertise
James	Paskiewicz	✓	Chair		Commercial	
Chris	Kimrey	✓	Vice Chair		Charter	
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	Web			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	
Haley	Stephens	✓			For-Hire	
Todd	Kellison	✓			NOAA	

needs name tag
new
nametag

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Tom Roller, Vice Chair
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Kerry Marhefka
LT Tom Pease
Staff contact: Myra Brouwer

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Andy Strelcheck
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Nally
Busley

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

	First	Last	Suffix	Position	Affiliation	Seat	Expertise
✓	James	Paskiewicz		Chair		Commercial	
✓	Chris	Kimrey		Vice Chair		Charter	
✓	Vincent	Bonura				Commercial	
✓	Jon	Braun				Commercial/Charter	
X	Gettys	Brannon	III			NGO	
web	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	
✓	Haley	Stephens				For-Hire	
X	Todd	Kellison				NOAA	

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Wally - Bubley

April 2025 Snapper Grouper

Attendee Report: AP Meeting

Report Generated:

04/04/2025 09:07 AM EDT

Webinar ID

736-229-227

Actual Start Date/Time

04/02/2025 08:08 AM EDT

Staff Details

Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

Last Name

Bates

Bobnar

Brouwer

Bunting

Cheshire

Conklin

DeVictor

Finch

Foss

Golden

Guyas

Hadley

Helies

Hemilright

Huber

Iberle

Ivec

Iverson

Karpowski

Klasnick

Leone

Lynch

MCCLAIR

Mallory

McGill

Mehta

Murphey

Neer

Newman

First Name

Sydney

Ashley

Myra

Matthew

Rob

Chris

Rick

Margaret

Kristin

Zoe

Martha

John

Frank

Dewey

Jeanette

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01Kelly

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GENINE

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Maria

Nikhil

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Thomas

Oliver
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Stephens
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militello
moss
o
scott
walsh

Ashley
Emily
Chloe
Haley
McLean
Tracey
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Haley
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jon
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chip
tim
chris
david
o
haley
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April 2025 Snapper Grouper

Attendee Report: AP Meeting

Report Generated:

04/04/2025 09:08 AM EDT

Webinar ID

736-229-227

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04/03/2025 08:10 AM EDT

Staff Details

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Yes

Interest Rating

Not applicable for staff

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Cheshire
Conklin
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Guyas
Hadley
Hemilright
Iberle
Ivec
Iverson
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Lee
Lynch
MCCLAIR
Masi
McGill
Mehta
Merrell
Moore

First Name

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Alan
James
Gib
Myra
Matthew
Julia
Rob
Chris
Margaret
Kristin
Chip
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Martha
John
Dewey
Allie
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Julia
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Nikhil
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Mudrak	Peter
Murphey	Trish
Naisbett-Jones	Lewis
Newman	Thomas
Oliver	Ashley
Shervanick	Kara
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Spanik	Kevin
Spurgin	Kali
Stancil	Mackenzie
Starling	Savannah
Stein	Madison
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Thomas	Suz
Vara	Mary
Waldo	Jennifer
Wiegand	Christina
Withers	Meg
braun	jon
buff	scott
collier	chip
griner	tim
moss	david
o	o
scott	haley
walsh	jason