

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE

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

December 4-5, 2024

Snapper Gouper Committee

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Ashley Oliver
Dr. Mike Shmidtke
Rachael Silvas
Nicholas Smillie
Suzanna Thomas
Greyson Webb
Christina Wiegand
Meg Withers

Attendees and Invited Participants

Monica Smit-Brunello
Dr. Marcel Reichert
Sonny Gwin
Dr. John Walter
John Sanchez
Martha Guyas
Shepard Grimes
Dewey Hemilright

Rick DeVactor
Kathy Knowlton
Rob Cheshire
Joe Grist
Anna Beckwith
Haley Stevens
Kristin Foss
James Paskiewicz

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

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

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going here in the Snapper Grouper Committee. Once again, we're a committee-of-the-whole in Snapper Grouper. The first order of business is Approval of the Agenda. Any changes, or modifications, to the agenda? The only one that I know about is I believe that -- At the back of the room can you guys -- It's hard to hear up here. Thank you.

All right, so the only change in the agenda, that I know about right now, is Andy going to give us an update on the secretarial amendment, under the Status of Amendments. Are there any other changes, or modifications, to the agenda, or Other Business that we know of at this time? All right. Any objection to approval of the agenda? All right. Seeing none, we'll consider it approved.

The next order of business is the Approval of the Minutes. Any changes, or modifications, to the minutes from the September meeting? All right. Seeing none, the minutes are approved, and so, next up, we're going to go to Status of Amendments Under Review. I believe we're going to go to Rick first and then to Andy.

MR. DEVICTOR: That's right. I'll go through three amendments that the council has approved at recent meetings. Snapper Grouper Amendment 48, and that's wreckfish, and, of course, that modernizes the wreckfish ITQ program. It moves from a paper coupon-based program to electronic reporting. That document was approved by the council at their June meeting, and so we're waiting on receiving that.

The next one is Regulatory Amendment 36, and this was updating the gag and black grouper vessel limits and stowage of on-demand gear. You approved that one at your last meeting, and we're waiting on that one, and, finally, it's Amendment 55, and so this one had to do with scamp and yellowmouth. It establishes the new complex, status determination criteria, rebuilding plan, et cetera, and you took final action at your last meeting, and we're waiting on that one, and so I think we're going to be getting these pretty soon, at least a couple of them, and we'll work on rulemaking, once we get those. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Rick. Any questions on those amendments? All right. Seeing none, I'm going to pass it over to Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Madam Chair, and so I'm going to give you an update on the progress we've been making with the secretarial amendment and give you an idea of the timeline, and kind of where things stand. First, I want to just kind of acknowledge some, you know, frustration, and anxiety, amongst the fishing community and talk a little bit about how we got here, for those that are new around the table.

It's certainly an unenviable position for the Fisheries Service to be in. Secretarial amendments are rare, and it's much preferable that we have amendments that jointly get developed through the fishery management council process, and so we continue to see you as an essential partner to this process, moving forward, and we see a number of opportunities ahead for how we can improve

and reshape our fisheries management in the South Atlantic, including things like we've discussed this week with MSEs, the South Atlantic Research program, et cetera.

Like many of you, I'm sure you've been receiving some angry phone calls, some nervous phone calls, some anxious phone calls, and I had one person call me recently and say, am I going to be able to go fishing this summer, right, and it's a frustrating conversation to have, but I can say, yes, they're going to be able to go fishing this summer, and we hope to provide some additional opportunities to go fishing.

I also wanted to just kind of lean in and say I've seen a number of news articles, and opinion pieces, sharing information about what is being proposed, or at least what's thought to be proposed. To date, the Fisheries Service has been very clear in not sharing information, and so those are all speculative, and I look forward, today, to, obviously, share a little bit more detail. I won't be able to, obviously, provide full details, because we're still working on this amendment, right, and we're building the plane as we fly it, so to speak.

For those new council members around the table, as a reminder, in July of 2021, and so a long time ago, we notified the council of its obligation to end overfishing. That was based on the SEDAR 73 assessment, which included the stock was recovering, but it remained overfished and undergoing overfishing. Too many fish were being caught and discarded dead.

We wrestled, around this table, for the better part of three years, and we weren't able to come to any decision, and so the overfishing is being driven largely by dead discards from the recreational sector, both during the directed recreational fishing season, but also the closed season, and then after, you know, much discussion, there was approval of Regulatory Amendment 35, that was later rescinded, and so no action has been taken to-date.

In the interim, the Fisheries Service was sued three times, and, in August of 2024, we had a district court approve a settlement agreement between NOAA Fisheries and the plaintiffs for one of those lawsuits, which requires the agency to submit a final rule by June 6, 2025, implementing a secretary amendment, or, if the council chose to take action, we could implement that council action in the Federal Register to end overfishing.

That's kind of the background, and so where are we at now, where are we heading? In October, we did a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement, in association with the secretarial amendment, and requested public comment on the scope of issues and options to be considered in that environmental impact statement. That notice of intent indicated our intent to evaluate a range of alternatives for setting and managing catch for South Atlantic red snapper, to end overfishing, and so support rebuilding objectives.

To no surprise, we received over 1,300 comments, and we're currently reviewing those comments for consideration in developing the environmental impact statement and amendment, and so all the comments received can be seen online, at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov), if you're interested in taking a look at them.

My team, and I want to just give a huge shoutout to my team, is rapidly preparing this amendment for public dissemination in the near future. We have an all-hands-on-deck right now, between our economists, biologists, the Science Center. Everyone that can contribute to this amendment is

working on it, including our attorneys, and so thank you to them for all their hard work that's going into this.

At the last meeting you asked me, well, what science is this going to be based on, and so the results of the amendment are going to be based on an updated stock assessment. The terminal year of the SEDAR 73 assessment was 2019, and so, in order to ensure the best scientific information available is used for decision-making, we have updated that assessment to include data through 2023. That is going to allow us to, obviously, evaluate the rebuilding progress that's being made, as well as any changes in fishing mortality since 2019, to inform actions in the secretarial amendment.

With that, everyone's question to me is, well, what's included in the amendment. I guess I can first say I think we can all agree that the short recreational seasons, and the low commercial quotas, are not working. It's been a point of frustration for all of us, for many years, and we can also agree that red snapper are far more abundant, and larger, than they used to be, consistent with both our science and angler observations. However, our success in recovering this stock, and this is important I think to hear, has resulted in limited harvest opportunities, because of the large amount of discarded fish.

We're successfully rebuilding this fishery, because the bulk of our mortality is being controlled by low landings and -- Excuse me. The bulk of our mortality is coming from high discards, and not the landings, right, and so we have struggled, obviously, to meet our statutory obligations, going forward, to end overfishing and minimize bycatch, and bycatch mortality, the extent practicable.

Further delaying action to address the challenge not only violates the law, but it will result in the same frustrations in 2025 that have plagued the fishery for a number of years, and so our intent, and I've been very clear about this, is to explore strategies that increase fishing opportunities, by reducing those dead discards, and so that's what we're working on right now, and, although I can't get into the details of all of the actions and alternatives, what I can tell you is the secretarial amendment currently considers eight actions.

We are evaluating the proxy for determining whether overfishing is occurring, and that's based on the fact that there's been this recent persistent above-average recruitment of young fish to the fishery, and so we're going to take a look at that proxy. We are also evaluating the commercial and recreational annual catch limits, and are going to set those at a level to ensure that overfishing is prevented or, excuse me, ended, and prevented, but we are looking at increases in those catch limits.

The increases are dependent on the level of discard reductions that may be achieved. To achieve the reductions in discards, we're also looking at a variety of temporal and depth-based discard reduction areas, or time periods. The management alternatives essentially are considering the tradeoffs to evaluate between the scope and scale of those management actions, to reduce discards and the resulting increases in red snapper fishing opportunities and landings.

What I hope you'll see, when the secretarial amendment emerges, is the kind of minimum levels that we need to take to end and prevent overfishing, but what opportunities may exist to actually enhance fishing opportunities, if we can bring discards down, and so the amendment will look strongly at those tradeoffs, going forward.

Other options that we're considering is looking at increases in commercial trip limits, to improve both economic efficiency, but also reduce discards in the commercial sector. We are evaluating changes to the fishing year, and changes to the start of both the commercial and recreational fishing seasons, including how the recreational season is structured, and so, right now, it's three-day weekends. We are looking at other season structures.

What I also can say is we are not proposing any changes to the commercial or recreational allocation, and we are not proposing implementation of size limits or any sort of limited-access system, and then, lastly, because we also recognize that it's important that the council continues to move forward with the exempted fishing permit projects, and some of the innovation that's happening now, we are promoting the continuation of that great collaborative work, by looking at options to establish an annual experimental studies program that would be built into the amendment process.

That's the suite of options that we are considering. I can't get into greater detail, at this point, because those are still being written, and developed, but, you know, it hopefully gives you a flavor, and feel, for everything that's being considered, and then I'll end by saying kind of what's next, and happy to take questions, and so we intend to publish a notice of availability for the environmental impact statement, and the amendment and the proposed rule, in the very near future.

I don't have a definitive timeframe for that. There's a lot of factors that play into how quickly we can publish that, but I'm hoping soon, within the coming months. We'll request public comments at that time, for up to sixty days, and, if we do that, we'll remain on track to meet the deadline for issuing a final rule, consistent with the litigation.

We would then, at the same time, essentially share the amendment with you, and for your consideration and comment, and then we would anticipate that public comment period would overlap with the council's March meeting, and I'm happy to get with, obviously, John, and Myra, to determine if that will work, and the structure of it, as, you know, time allows.

Then we are targeting, right now, holding in-person public hearings in February of 2025. We have been scoping locations for those, but have not locked down any specific dates, and so, with that, I know we have public testimony later. I know you have a number of questions. I certainly would welcome those questions, your input on the plan, as well as public input on the plan and process, at this meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Andy. Let's raise our hand with questions. I can try to start, and so I had two questions. One, can you tell me a little bit about, if you can share, more about this updated assessment, or interim analysis, that you conducted, and then I would also like to hear about the option to establish an annual studies program. That sounds like EFPs, or something, and so those are the two things that I would like to hear about, if you can share anything on those.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, you know, typically, when an update assessment is done, it's done in conjunction with the SEDAR process. We view this situation as an exceptional circumstance, and, given the data was fairly dated, I felt it was important, obviously, to update the time series, for most of the data streams in the assessment, through 2023, and so that's what we've done.

You know, I think the report, right now, is in draft form, and I don't know how soon we'll be able to share it, and post it, but we do want to make that publicly available going forward. I will say that the information in the assessment indicates continued recovery, consistent with the rebuilding plan, but that overfishing has continued to occur.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. What about the studies that you that you said you would run?

MR STRELCHECK: So the action to look at an annual studies program is designed to kind of set up the process, in terms of how that would work, and not necessarily the funding stream for it, and it would give an opportunity then for people to apply to conduct annual experimental projects, with a certain amount of quota that would be made available for those projects to proceed forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Okay. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: I think I heard this, and I just want to make sure. Did you say there would be some kind of depth restrictions, fishing restrictions, and did you say something about depth?

MR. STRELCHECK: I said we're considering either time or depth-based discard reduction areas, right, and so trying to, obviously, reduce discards, but, in reducing discards, that provides, obviously, more opportunities for red snapper landings, and days fished, and higher quota levels, and so that will be considered, but we haven't chosen or preferred at this point. We don't have a specific recommendation, in terms of how we would be going.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Did you happen to say something about a discard reduction area, and can you explain -- Does that go hand-in-hand with what Judy was asking about?

MR. STRELCHECK: (Mr. Strelcheck's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Andy. Just so you're required to end overfishing, with this amendment, so how are -- You know, you're going to enact the amendment, and then you're going to -- The results of the amendment are going to be based on an updated stock assessment, what, a year after this is in place, or how are you going to know that it's going to end overfishing? Is it through an MSE, maybe, because you already have some of that information.

MR. STRELCHECK: So we're basing our amendment on the updated assessment. In terms of actually whether it was successful in ending the overfishing, that's based on future analyses, but the assessment will tell us what the catch levels need to be specified at, how much discards can be allowed for those specific catch levels, and so it is looking at, obviously, the tradeoff of how high, or low, we have to set the catch limits, relative to the amount of discards that's occurring in the fishery, and we'll be able to then evaluate progress made toward ending overfishing based on future stock assessments, as well as other metrics, like indices of abundance.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks for that update, Andy. We appreciate the limited transparency that you were able to provide. Can you talk a little bit more about the data

that was used in the update assessment, and specifically if it included fishery-independent data from the SERFS project?

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't recall all the data that went into the updated assessment. We did integrate fishery-independent data, you know, through 2023. I don't recall all the time series. There is, obviously, updates to the landings data that occurred. We would have to kind of check on that, and get back to you, in terms of the details, but certainly, once that report is released, we'll be able to share that, you know, more information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. More questions? Judy.

MS. HELMEY: So the deadline you said was June 6, 2025, where you had to come up with the plan?

MR. STRELCHECK: That's when we have to submit the final regulations to the Federal Register for publication. As I mentioned, the public process, the opportunity to be able to provide input and comment on this, we hope will happen early next year, and so we would, at that time, you know share the secretarial amendment, the proposed rule, the environmental impact statement, and hold those public hearings. We're also required, by the Magnuson Act, to consult with the council, and so that's why I mentioned then, at March, we would, you know, bring this in more detail for council discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL Thank you. I'm sorry if you already stated this, but so the Science Center has already run an updated red snapper assessment, it sounds, and so when would that -- When will you release that SAR, so to speak, to us, the public?

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't know for certain. We're checking on kind of how close to final it is, when it could be distributed, if it would be distributed at the same time as the secretarial amendment would be provided, but we, obviously, are intent on being fully transparent, in terms of the data and information that we're using for the amendment, and we want to distribute that as soon as we can.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions for Andy? All right. I don't see any additional hands. I really appreciate everything that you could share with us today. All right. Continuing to move through the agenda, next up on the agenda is our Snapper Grouper AP report, from James Paskiewicz, that is on items that are not covered on our agenda, and I believe he's joining us virtually, and so I'm going to turn it over to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: James, I'll pass it to you, and you can go ahead and tell me when to move on to the next slide.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate it, Mike, and good morning, council members, and staff, and any guests that may be in the room or online. Can everybody hear me okay?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, we can.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Very good. So just a quick rundown of some of the highlights, and concerns, and conversations that we had in the October AP meeting. We did go ahead and complete the fishery performance report on both red snapper and yellowtail snapper. I think that we that we did get a lot of really good input from, you know, across all sectors on both of these species. We had a lot of -- You know, a lot of quality conversation back and forth on both of those. I mean, I guess, right now, if we had any questions on those performance reports, now might be a good time, before I kind of jump into some of the other business.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, James. I had a question on that, on the yellowtail, and so I missed that portion of the meeting, when you all had that discussion, and I haven't been able to check it out online, and can you talk a little bit about what the AP said about yellowtail snapper and if they were thinking that management changes are needed on yellowtail?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: For the for the most part, the overall consensus is that this fishery is performing well, I think, all the way from the furthest points in Key West all the way up to some of the areas that David Moss and his people up there frequent for yellowtails. The general theme is that these fish are still readily available, and readily targeted, and seeing, you know, fairly good size range fish, you know, and, beyond that, you know, we did we did go over a lot of the methods used to catch yellowtail, where they're mainly hooked in the water column, what depths of water are mainly, you know, that these fish are targeted.

With that information, we did we touch on the mortality rate of released fish, and we feel that most of these fish are released unharmed, if they're if they're not retained, due to, you know, being too small, and so, I mean, I think that there's a lot of positives that we that we pulled from the information that we got from everybody on the panel.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Any other questions on the fishery performance reports? All right. I don't see any additional hands. I'll pass it back to you, James.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Very good. Thank you. Some of the other things that are really ranking highly, and I hear this echoed all over the place, is that ,you know, anglers are having continued struggles with shark depredation. Maybe this has been done in the past, or maybe it's time to do again, but the panel would like to recommend that the council consider a letter to the Highly Migratory Species, to help address this issue, you know, and, beyond that, there was there was some discussion about just the overall image of the shark fishery, how it just -- It isn't looked on as something that's necessary.

A lot of, you know, the people that can participate in the shark fishery, the general public looks at them like they're doing a disservice to Mother Nature, and I feel that I'm not alone when I say that we have a bit of an imbalance, when it comes to all of the species that are that are swimming about in the ocean, and this apex predator is really wreaking havoc, you know, not just for recreational and commercial fishermen, but on different fish species in general.

Aside from that, I did want to say that some of the golden tilefish longline endorsement holders -- They're considering a proposal for a catch share program. I did speak to a few individuals that are involved in that fishery, and it sounds like it's something that they want to move forward with.

We also noted some concerns with the recreational data uncertainty and effects on commercial quotas. I'm definitely one of those people in this in this situation, you know, as far as just the accountability of the commercial sector. You know, we've done our part, throughout the years, to be on top and really give the best information that we have, as far as what we catch and what we do, and the big question-mark that looms over the recreational sector is still very heavy, and so, you know there were some concerns there.

Also, there was some desire for an income requirement with continued open entry for the for-hire component of the fishery, rather than limited entry, and, Mike, I know you did say that you would move the slides. I hope you're just following with me, because I'm on my phone and computer at the same time, and so hopefully you're moving along with me.

Some of the some of the people I spoke to have generational concerns, when it comes to the entry into the fishery. Let's just say you have, you know, a father that had become, you know, a father, you know, at a relatively young age, and he's a charter fisherman, and historically he's been a charter fisherman, and, as his family grows, his son, or daughter, may may want to enter into the fishery, but it's not a takeover situation. It's a, you know, I need to get my own license, my own boat, and there's some fear that, generationally, there's going to be a limit to what, you know, our future generations can step into if there's a -- You know, if there's a cap put on the total number of permits.

They feel that that the cost to enter may be too high, in the future, and they did express some desire for an income requirement, and so, if you've been working in the industry, you know, as a teenager coming up, working as a mate, you will show income that would be qualifying for a new permit.

Also, headboat representatives -- Still, they reiterated their opposition for federal bottom closures. You know, the opportunity to get out there, and go catch a fish, remains super high, and it's very paramount for, you know, for this for this particular user group, and just keeping them in business, without having, you know, major closures is something that that is resounding, you know, note that's been that's been coming up pretty much every panel meeting. On any of those notes, do we have any questions?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, you do. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Hi, James. Actually, I don't have a question for you. I was there, and remember things as you do, and I was also approached by the golden tile -- A golden tile longline endorsement holder, telling me of their intention to come to this body to request the possibility of forming an ITQ, and is that the one we're using right now, the ITQ? I have all of those acronyms in my head.

I advised that probably, you know, to be prepared, and I think it's a long process, and the thing that I'm concerned about is that we haven't gone through the modern version of this process. I mean, we haven't done anything with those in regards since -- 2006 was when we talked about them for the entire industry, and then, before that, was recognition that Magnuson has been reauthorized, and there's all these new rules and all that.

So, in anticipation of them continuing, or at some point coming forward to us officially, I think it might be important for us to get a tiny little briefing, if you will, on what that -- I know there's a

vote, and I don't know if the vote is just those endorsement holders, or is it the entire fishery, and I think it's pretty complicated, and so maybe just some highlights, from counsel, at our next meeting, so that, if they if they do formally come to us, whatever that looks like, we will have an understanding of what that entails.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that sounds good, and so, just to try to restate that, it would be a briefing on what are the requirements for the council to establish that, and how the vote works. Even though it's a subset of the snapper grouper fishery, does the entire snapper grouper fishery vote on it, and all that. Okay. I've got that down. Charlie and then Anna.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was pinged about that, several months ago, by one of the endorsement holders, and there's been some consolidation of permits, between a few individuals, and my suggestion to them was, if they really wanted to do that, to bring something to the table on how they would split shares up, and how they would do it, and don't expect the council to do it. They needed to get a bulk of their fishermen to say this is an outline of what we would like to do, but they would have to do that, at a bare minimum, to come to council.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: Thank you, Madam chair. I'm curious, during the discussions within the AP about shark deprivation, if the perception, from the AP, is that it's really a population issue, or is there some discussion that shark behavior is changing, and the may be cueing into fishing behavior, boat motor noise, that sort of thing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: James, did you happen to hear that question from Anna?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Can I get her just repeat? I was trying to modify my microphone situation. Can you just repeat that last little bit? I'm sorry.

MS. BECKWITH: Sure. I was just curious if the AP had thoughts on if the shark deprivation issue was really a population component problem or if the behavior of the different shark species is changing, maybe cueing into chumming, to the motor noise, to sort of general fisheries, you know, fishing behavior.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Well, I mean, I think that we may not give sharks enough credit for how intelligent they are, you know, and, as far as chumming the waters, you know, I mean, at least for the fishery that I participate mainly in, the yellowtail snapper, you know that chumming the water is something that we've done for decades on end, and, you know, the sharks -- They don't seem to be behaving any differently in the chumming areas.

Now, if you wanted to talk about different, you know, situations that may lead to feeding sharks for entertainment, you know, that may open a door to some very serious danger for participants, you know, if they're looking to have encounters with sharks, and maybe getting in the water and feeding them, stuff like that. I think that, you know, a lot of the shark behavior that we see now is very personal. I think that that interactions with fishermen, you know, with sharks coming right up to the boat, chasing -- You know, chasing, or capturing, you know, some of some of these species we target.

You know, we have a lot of up-close interactions with sharks, and maybe there's -- You know maybe sharks are just getting more and more used to interactions with humans. That I don't know, but -- Again, just speaking of the intelligence factor of sharks, you know, a lot of a lot of these animals, they are congregating where fishing pressure -- It happens on the regular, and so that would be any of your, you know, your reef structures your -- You know, some of your deeper water, the hardbottom areas, or a wreck or, you know, other situations like that.

I think that we're seeing just maybe more of an imbalance, than a change, in in the shark interactions. Maybe there's just more sharks than we've had in a very long time. I hope that answers your question a little bit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, James. You've got more questions. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thanks for the report, James. I had a question on -- I believe you conducted, at the AP, a risk tolerance spreadsheet, for the AP members, where they rated, on a scale, you know, risk to -- For different reasons, to the importance of the fishery, to the individual, and onward, but I attended the SSC meeting, and that particular spreadsheet was used by the SSC to increase, you know, risk in managing a fishery. I didn't know if the AP knew how important what they were doing was, but it was definitely brought forward, and how that was perceived by the rest of the AP. Thanks.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thank you, Jimmy, and I think that, in our last panel meeting, we were getting accustomed to how that risk evaluation -- To how that works, and how that's weighted, and I think, by the time we did move through that with a couple different species, I think we had a really good understanding of the importance of that, and, moving forward, I think that, you know, that that's only going to get better, that, as we evaluate these things on a little bit different level than we than we have in the past, we're going to see how important that is, and how and how that rollout really looks.

MR. HULL: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Sure.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to note that the risk ratings, from both the AP and the SSC, will be presented tomorrow. They're on the agenda for this meeting, and so you'll see the scores, and the comments, that were provided by the AP tomorrow.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Mike. Any other questions for James about the items that were in this PowerPoint, or other items that they might have discussed that aren't on the agenda?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I think I actually have maybe a question for the council. You know, in regard to the golden tilefish wanting the, you know, their own allotment, or ITQ, or I forget how they exactly worded that, but is that something that can even be done? You know, is there a framework that supports that already, and would that be -- Or would that be completely reinventing the wheel? I know it's been a long time since any of that's done been done, and it's never been done in the South Atlantic, and so maybe somebody can kind of answer that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I can start, and then staff can fill in. It actually has been done in the South Atlantic. Wreckfish has an ITQ, and that's actually the oldest one in the nation, and so there is a framework, and a mechanism, to do that that. It exists now.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Yes, and I did completely forget about that one, but so it is a possibility.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'll just add that wreckfish is being moved into an electronic system, and it's largely aligned with what we've done with the Gulf, and so, to the extent that there's alignment with any new ITQ systems being developed, right, it is something that can be done, and built, and used, you know, with our Fisheries Service ITQ system already.

I did want to comment about, you know, the industry coming to the table and having to decide on allocations. I do agree that that is beneficial, right, but the most important part would be if the industry wants to pursue, the commercial longliners, then we first want to hear that from the industry members, beyond just the AP discussions, and a council decision then can be made as to whether or not we want to proceed with development of an amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I just wanted to reiterate to James, and I don't know if you were following before, but what is different than when we did wreckfish is -- I believe, the last time Magnuson was reauthorized, there were all sorts of provisions put in there, that weren't there before, for how an ITQ could be developed, including this voting system, that I don't understand, and probably some other provisions, and so it's not that we're reinventing the wheel. It's just that we haven't done this sort of program, or even discussed it, since that has been in place.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I appreciate that, and so, I mean, something else to consider, throughout this whole process -- Can you guys hear me any better now, or is this worse?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, this is good.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Okay. Since the council has so much on its plate already, with trying to, you know, just keep -- Really keep fishing open, you know, and is this something that the council is going to be, you know, willing to take on at this point, just so we kind of understand that, in the back of our head, you know, if they're going to give it any priority, and are you guys able to answer that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, what I would say is the council has a subcommittee that's looking at a number of commercial fisheries issues, and so I think that there we're intending that some type of action, or amendment, you know, would be coming out of that. I agree with Andy that maybe the people in the fishery could, I don't know, but send a letter to the council, or come to the meeting and tell us what they're intending to request, or what they want, but, yes, I think that there is a mechanism. It's hard to know, until we know, like Kerry said, all the details that are now required in the reauthorization, and to learn a little bit more about that part as well, and it's hard to know if

the council can fit it into the workplan right now, or wants to do it, but I do think that there is a mechanism that's already underway to have this discussion. Tim.

MR. GRINER: James, I was going to kind of say the same thing. You know, I don't see the council picking this up on their own. I mean, it's not a high priority. It's a fishery that already works the way it is. It's a small fishery. It's 300 000 pounds of fish, that are among a small amount of people, and it's executed very well right now, and it's not broken, and it's nothing -- We've got other issues to deal with.

As Jessica said, there -- We think there's a mechanism there that, if you want to bring it to the table, it can -- You need to bring it to the table formally, and then it can be addressed, but it's not something we're going to -- That I see us picking up on our own, for sure, you know, and it's going to take a whole lot of thought, from the guys that are in it right now, because there's -- It's going to be a whole lot more complicated than you think, and trying to do -- Trying to do this with a fishery that's only 300 000 pounds is going to be -- It's going to be problematic, at best, especially when you have a fishery that has two components to it, and so you're trying to spread --

You're trying to split out a fishery that has a hook-and-line component, and a longline component, and give special privileges to the guys that are using a gear, and so, you know, there's a lot of thought to be into this, but, if they are going to bring it to the table, they're more than welcome to. I just -- You know, I'm just cautioning you on that, but, to answer your question, no, I don't think it's something that we're going to do on our own.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Very good.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to kind of frame the context with which this comment was given. It was more of a, at least how I interpreted it, it was more of a heads-up, more of these are conversations that are going on, something that may come along down the line, but I think that community, that group of fishermen, is still having the conversations, and, when they're ready to put something forward, they will do.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Mike, my recollection is pretty much the same on that, and so I don't think there's any further discussion that we need to have on that at this time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Mike. Thanks, James. John.

DR. WALTER: I'll just note that I think there was a paper presented to the SSC on a comparison of the ITQ in the Gulf with the system in the South Atlantic, and so I think that might be something to reference, in terms of if the interested parties on the AP want to kind of add some quantitative analysis behind their requests, if they want to follow-up on that, and so it's not something that hasn't already seen some area of study from some of our economists. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and the AP has seen it, and the SSC has seen it, and this body has seen that. Everyone has seen it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions for James? All right. Thank you, James. Thanks for that report. I think you're going to be maybe hanging with us for part of the day today, and so we'll be coming back to you, as we dive into some of these discussions.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right. Sounds good. Did you guys want me to go over any of the highlights on the black sea bass, or is somebody else going to take that over?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: We'll have you do that. I guess, if the chair is ready for us to go into black sea bass, then you're first up to go anyway.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, let's do it.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: All right, so we did have a good, lengthy, and healthy discussion on black sea bass, and, really, before I go ahead and read some of these bullet points, you know, I did want to kind of acknowledge that a lot of our discussion was based on, you know, the possibility of this species kind of spreading out, maybe moving out of the waters that we normally associate with them, and so that was a big question-mark.

Beyond that, you know, recreational effort was unlikely to decrease under a retention closure, because black sea bass are mixed in with other reef-associated bottom species, and so little effect in specific targeting, or avoiding. There was some opposition against a closure, a January to April retention closure, because there are very few other species in nearshore areas off North Carolina during that time of the year.

There were some fears that reducing the recreational size limit, without reducing the bag limit, could be detrimental, if it leads to season closures, and so there -- You know, if there was more retention, the ACL may be hit quicker, and that would -- You know, that would kind of shorten the season there.

Moving on to -- There was a proposed consideration of a twelve-inch size limit for both sectors. A little bit larger fish is commercially valuable, and there's not as many large black sea bass off Florida, and so that may lead to increased discarding there. I think, you know, Jimmy might be able to kind of answer in that area. He's probably one of the furthest points in north that have those encounters, and, for interactions with smaller, or undersized, black sea bass off North Carolina, you know, just like with yellowtail, the shallow-water survival is higher than deep, but circle hooks are not required for use in shallow water, so gut-hooking by j-hooks hurts survival, and so that's, you know, maybe one of the ways we could eliminate some of those dead discards.

Proper gear and releasing techniques, that maximize survival, could help the survival of inshore juveniles, and I think we had some discussion there based on just a broader scope of information to your general population of anglers, you know, kind of especially a lot of shore-based anglers. Maybe they're not having the information readily available, at boat ramps, or piers, stuff like that, to help -- You know, to help them release fish unharmed. I think that was a lot of a lot of our discussion there, was a little bit a little bit more education, and maybe some signs posted, or some QR codes, stuff like that. Any questions on the black sea bass?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike has a question.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Not a question, but just a clarification I noticed in the way that I had typed out some of that information. Shallow-water, in that last bullet regarding North Carolina, I'm referring to state waters. State waters are the shallow water that's being spoken of where circle hooks are not required, and j-hooks are used, and that can affect the survival, and so I wanted to make sure that that was clarified.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, Mike.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions on the slides from the AP? All right. I don't see any hands, James. Thank you for that update. All right. Now we're going to go to the SSC recommendation, and I think Marcel is going to give us that.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you for that. During the SSC meeting, Judd Curtis provided an update for the SSC, relative to the discussions you all had on in September, and also provided a brief summary to the SSC about black sea bass, where we are, and how we got there, and so the SSC was asked to review projections, new projections.

Based on the discussions you all had in September, there was no rebuilding, discussion on rebuilding, necessary at in our meeting, and, as a quick reminder, we were asked to provide an ABC for 2026, and 2026 is because that's the fifth year after the terminal year of the assessment, and the SSC typically provides only five years of projections after the terminal year, because of the increasing uncertainty in projections going forward.

They were based on an SPR 40 percent, and that was based on earlier discussions at the SSC, and, also, we had an overview, at our most recent meeting, of P^* of 30 percent, and that was based on our old ABC control rule and recent recruitment, and that was based on the earlier discussions at the SSC, and also based on recommendations from a working group.

The SSC reviewed and discussed the updated projections, and we received a presentation from Dr. Matt Vincent, and we appreciated his work on the projections, and, during the discussions -- We reviewed them, and we had discussions, and, during these these discussions, Dr. Erik Williams, our Science Center liaison, recommended that we should not use the projections for management recommendations, and that was based on a number of considerations.

The projection assumptions were no longer valid. For instance, the projections included four interim years, and with the propagation of bias since the terminal year, and, as I mentioned earlier, the further you go into projections, the more uncertain those projections are. The available data show the fishery-independent index, and you've seen that presented by Tracey, and I believe it was Monday, but the index value continued to go down, in recent years, while the projected index value was going up

Also, the MRIP removals, that included the discards, are higher than the realized values, and the stock is at a historically low value, and the potential ABC that would come out of the current projections would increase catch, relative to recent realized catch, even with this low abundance.

When we -- That put the SSC in a bit of a quandary, and so we postponed further discussion until later in the meeting, so the members could think about potential solutions, and a path forward, and

then, when we resume the discussions, the SSC was informed that there was no immediate urgency to provide a catch level recommendation, and, with no immediate urgency meant that October meeting. However, the council does need that ABC for 2026, and it was discussed potentially for 2027 also, that you guys need that recommendation soon to move forward with the amendment.

After considerable discussion, the SSC came up with five potential options. The first one was to disagree with the Science Center's liaison recommendation and provide an ABC recommendation based on the projections, and the SSC decided not to recommend Option 1, at this point, based on the concerns that I mentioned earlier.

There were five other options, and basically all agree with the liaison's recommendation to not provide an ABC recommendation at that meeting, but recommend alternatives, and so alternatives -- Alternative 2 was not to provide an ABC recommendation and not recommend a path forward until the SSC had additional information and guidance. Option 3 was to deviate from the -- Remember this was the old ABC control rule. After some discussion, we concluded that that would likely result in an ORCS-like approach, and Option Number 4 was to recommend an interim analysis based on the available index data.

For all of these options, we thought that the approach probably would take considerable time for discussion, and the outcome would be uncertain, and that meant that we weren't sure whether the outcome of the discussion at the meeting would result in an ABC recommendation to the council.

For all of these three options, but in particular for Option Number 2, it was uncertain what additional information would be needed for us to make the recommendations to the council. For the Option 3, the likely ORCS, or ORCS-like approach, many current SSC members were not involved in developing the old ABC control rule, and they were likely not familiar with the ORCS approach, and the SSC hasn't applied the ORCS approach in quite a while, and so we felt that that would need some -- Again, some considerable discussion to refresh the SSC members to that approach, and, in terms of the interim analysis, we discussed the interim analysis earlier this meeting.

It has not been used by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's SSC for ABC recommendations. However, as was mentioned, it has been used in the Gulf of Mexico, and so there may be some guidance from that process, that we potentially could use, but, ultimately, the SSC decided not to recommend Options 2 to 4 at this time, and so that left us with Option Number 5, and that was to propose additional model and projection runs using all new available data, all updated data, and the SSC recommended this option at this time.

Again, after considerable discussion, we felt that that would address the projection concerns. It would -- It was expected that it would provide information that the SSC could use directly to recommend an ABC to the council for 2026, and maybe even allow for an extension of the projection timeframe, possibly to 2028 or 2029, and it also may allow us a simultaneous start of working on rebuilding scenarios.

However, getting the data as soon as possible is critical, and Dr. Wally Buble, from South Carolina DNR, mentioned that, in terms of the data, the SERFS trap index data is available through

at least 2023, and that includes the index, the length comps, and the age comps, and he said possibly through 2024. Before I get too ahead of myself, let's see if I missed any of the -- Okay.

At the meeting, Dr. Williams indicated that this approach was doable, and feasible in a reasonable timeframe, given the high priority, but the specific timeframe was not provided, and that timeframe was kind of an important issue for the SSC, because this option may necessitate an extra SSC meeting, and the SSC's workload for the spring, or until the April meeting, is pretty full already, and so, the sooner we know whether that's needed, the better it is for us to potentially schedule an additional meeting.

Chip reminded us that the council had requested an ABC by sector, and bycatch projected by sector, and so that is something that should need to be taken into account, and the SSC also mentioned that, given the likely delay until management can address the rebuilding, the council may want to protect whatever available spawners are in population right now, to increase the chance of better recruitment, and delaying action may actually delay rebuilding, or the rebuilding success.

Then something that wasn't extensively discussed at the SSC meeting, but I wanted to mention that here, as I said before, we used the old ABC control rule to set the P*, and I just wanted to throw this out, that, if we get an updated assessment, and projections, whether the council would like to use the new ABC control rule, and, if that's the case, then we should be looking at scoring the risk tolerance sooner rather than later, and I believe that's -- Yes, that concludes my SSC report from our last meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. Thank you, Marcel. Let's go ahead and take questions for him. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have a question, but I attended the meeting, and all the presentation comes out of the SSC report, and I just wanted to publicly thank the SSC for the thoroughness of the report, in this context, and I think it's very thorough, and explained in more detail than we typically see, and that's very, very helpful in this context, and so thank you.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Shep.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, and then Charlie.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. Marcel, could you go back one slide, to those bullet points, the slide just before this one?

DR. REICHERT: This one?

MR. HULL: Yes, sir, and so that third bullet point -- I take that one really to heart, that here we are, and, basically, we're under status quo management that we have now, which means, you know, the stock off of my coast is in really bad shape, but I can still go out there and prosecute the fishery and so -- But we need to do something. If there's any spawning population left there, I need to -- It needs to be protected, and so, I mean, there's an urgency that we have to try to do something to stop me from going and doing that. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't know what to say. Charlie, and then and then Tim.

MR. PHILLIPS: Marcel, have -- I was there, and I really enjoyed being at the meeting, but I don't remember any conversation of how the red snapper secretarial amendment, and the actions thereof, might affect black sea bass discard issues, and things like that, and so how are you going to weigh those in with our options on rebuilding and whatnot?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and the SSC did not discuss that, and the SSC did not discuss the secretarial amendment at all, and so it's very difficult for me to comment on that, unless we have some background there, but we did not -- That did not come up. I know that's probably not a -- But we didn't discuss that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Marcel. While you've got that slide up there, I just wanted to take the opportunity to reiterate Bullet Point 2. We did ask for that, and we didn't get it, but that is super important, and so let's make sure that that is something that that we do get. Like I said, we've asked for it, and there's a reason, and it's very important. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Tim. Andy, and then Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you. Just in response to Tim there, so we've talked about that, and the Science Center, you know, provided a response to it, and the SSC talked about it, and so you have that information, in a general sense.

The answer was that you cannot have -- Or that the discards in the recreational sector exceed their allocation percentage applied to the ABC, right, and so, in order to do that, you're going to take away -- You know, to give the recreational sector an ACL that would encompass all of its discards, it's necessarily going to reduce the allocation percentage that goes to the commercial sector, because there are not enough fish, right, and that was the answer to that question. I mean, you don't have numbers, because they can't produce the numbers. You would have to change the allocation, to increase the allocation, in order for them to have enough just to cover the discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim, to that?

MR. GRINER: Well, to that, that's not exactly how I see it. You know, that's the whole reason we want to see these numbers. You need to see the numbers laid out to determine -- To see that, visually to see that. You know, it's very important that you are able to see that, and just -- As I remember, right, the discards, on the recreational side, exceeded the recreational's a lot, or the recreational ABC, but it would not have affected the commercial, and so I'm not sure. You know, without seeing the numbers, and, again, without actually looking at numbers, I don't think that's -- You know, I don't think that's accurate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike had his hand raised, and then we'll go back to Shep, and then Andy.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to note, relative to this discussion, that the allocation percentages that have been developed at this point are developed specifically based on landings, and that's the

-- Having the combination of landings and discards would likely have affected those discussions and the percentages that they fell out on.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I think the question, Tim, that you -- The answer that you want is what allocation percentage would we need in order for the recreational sector to receive enough allocation to cover its discard, right? I mean, I think that's what you're really looking for, because you can't get a number, you know, separate ABCs, with enough catch for the recreational sector, based on the current allocation. You know, I know you don't -- You disagree with the way I'm characterizing it, but I'm all but absolutely certain that was the response to it, because I followed-up and asked about this, but I think, again, the question, or the answer that you want, is what change in allocation would it take for enough allocation to go to the recreational sector to cover the discards that are occurring. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I guess, until I see all that, then you're already having a de facto reallocation, because you're taking these -- You're taking these discards away from the commercial sector to begin with, by not splitting it out, and so you're already doing a de facto reallocation to the recreational sector. You're just not showing us what that -- Exactly what it is and how it got there, and I think it's important to see that. We're taking we're taking recreational -- We're taking discards, and we're making the commercial sector pay for recreational discards. That is that is in fact a reallocation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Tim. I have Andy, and then Anna.

MR. STRELCHECK: A question for Marcel, and a comment. If you go back one more slide, or, actually, another one, and so I think it was Option 4, or 3, and that's -- Option 4. So, if you could talk a little bit more about the interim analysis. My concern is updating the assessment. It's going to take time, you know, and we're kind of in pursuit of perfection.

We know that the assessment outcomes are very much in alignment with the trend in the black sea bass index of abundance that's coming from SERFS, and other surveys, and so I guess I'm surprised that that wouldn't be a viable avenue, and so I would like to understand a little bit more about the SSC's rationale not to pursue an interim analysis.

DR. REICHERT: I think it's important to say that, during the meeting, the SSC didn't recommend it at this time, but that was assuming that Option 5 was doable in a reasonable timeframe, because it would -- It would provide a lot more options, in terms of the ability of the SSC to provide a direct ABC. It may extend the projection horizon, and so it had a lot more a lot more positives, a lot more advantages, to go that route, but, obviously, if that's -- If that timeframe is too long for the council, then we obviously need to look at other options, and then perhaps an interim analysis may be available, or maybe doable.

In the past -- I looked at our notes from our October 2023 SSC meeting, where we discussed the vermilion snapper interim analysis, and I think, at that meeting, we mentioned that black sea bass may be a good candidate for that, and so that would be possibly a viable option, if Option 5 is not

doable. The SSC did discuss the fact that we have not applied that, and so, even if we get the analysis, then I think we should have -- We likely would have considerable discussion about how then then to apply that, in terms of an ABC recommendation, and I think that's -- To my recollection, that's kind of a summary of the discussion we had.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Marcel, and so, as follow-up and I guess a comment, and I missed the SEDAR Committee discussion this morning, right, but we continue to get bogged down in kind of the complexity of assessments, trying to, obviously, go to simpler approaches, and I feel like we're still taking a more complex, lengthier approach here. I still see some opportunity for an interim analysis.

Regardless though of where we proceed, I just wanted to advise the council, right, that the ABC is set at the current level. We don't have ABC advice. We could come in and set catch limit advice lower than that, right now, and, you know, put in some regulations to be proactive with regard to management. You know, put in the Jimmy Hull prohibition, whatever we need to do, but the reality is, you know, we can continue to, you know, move the science down the road for some time, and then react to it, or we could go ahead and be a little bit more proactive, which is my preference, even if it's not going to take us all the way, and then, at whatever point we actually have that science, we can move forward with, obviously, that science and take additional steps.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: Thank you. Just sort of a question back to Tim's point. Does receiving catch projections by sector necessitate that the allocations by sector contain landings and discards, or can you still base those allocations by sector on landings alone, and still get some information on sort of the bycatch and discards? Does that make sense?

DR. COLLIER: One of the issues with this stock is I think over 80 percent of the dead removals are associated with dead discards, and the ACL, or the allocations, right now are 51/49, somewhere around there, I think, and so, given the high level of dead discards coming from the recreational fishery, just using landings-only allocations do not allow you to look -- To separate among the two different sectors, because one is already exceeding what their allocation would be. Does that make -- Is that way you were getting at, Anna?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, and it sounds like the Science Center could easily run a UM and update us on management advice, using the index, the SERFS index, which, in particular, in my opinion, tracks this real state of the fishery at this time, also using all the fisheries-independent, and landings, and, if we could get some discard information, and they could easily give us some type of information quickly, or at least that's what it sounds like to me. I don't know if that's true.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I like what Jimmy and Andy are saying there. You know, I really think this is the perfect time to use that interim analysis, and this is the perfect -- This is the perfect species to do it with, you know, and that that index is right there in front of us, ready to be used, it seems like to me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I may need to get clarification from the Science Center, if I'm misinterpreting this, but what I understand is that the -- Basically, what is proposed in Number 5 there, that is the interim analysis, plus additional information, and it's updating the landings, it's updating the discards, and it's also updating the index through 2023, and so it's doing all of those things.

It is, in essence, a form of interim analysis that is incorporating a little bit more information than might be used if it were strictly only, you know, basing it off of some proxy relative to the fishery-independent index, and so the idea that of interim information is being used in this Number 5, and it's just a little bit more than what you would normally expect out of a strict interim, and we're going to base it off of one fishery-independent index.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: This is a question for John, or Andy, and Erik had, said at the meeting, that it was -- You know, they could do it. You would have to -- It really kind of sound like we can do it, but I need to check and see if we will be able to do it, and so do we know that answer yet? I mean, are they going to be able to do it?

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

DR. WALTER: I think, I mean, Erik indicated that it was feasible, and he would know best, and so we have the SERFS index through 2023, and so the main engine behind what the trends in the stock assessment would see would be that SERFS index.

I think there might be a few things we might be missing, but, essentially, it would be updating the stock assessment model with the index, with other available data, particularly the landings data, and maybe the age comp, if it's available, but it would be much improved over a simple projection, which just makes assumptions for those, and it would allow us to bring it up to a more current time period. While I have the floor, I guess the one, and it does seem like that's doable, in a couple of probably months, and so maybe for the next SSC meeting to review.

The timeframe, and I guess we'll get to the timeframe for the action, but one of the concerns here is, and I want to ask the SSC chair, in your Bullet 3, when you said the council could consider other things, did the SSC actually go into what those might be, and was there some -- I think, in the one of the slides, it said that, given the situation -- Because it's going to take some time for the full rulemaking, and then also to review these additional model runs, but I don't know which slide it is.

DR. REICHERT: Was it Bullet 3 or Option 3?

DR. WALTER: No, and it was -- Not options, it was in your last -- I think your last slide. Given the delay in management, the council may want to protect available spawners, and did the SSC come up with any recommendation there on how that could be achieved?

DR. REICHERT: No, and I don't recall discussing any methods, or ways, for the council to do that. I think it was more a cautionary remark, in terms of, you know, a delay in management would potentially make rebuilding more complicated.

DR. WALTER: Okay, and so I'm just -- I'm wondering maybe if there is something to be gained, and gleaned, from the existing stock assessment that might inform that, and I don't -- I think we don't want to let perfection be the enemy of the good, and necessary. If this stock is in really poor shape, and we're going to continue to fish it at our current levels, absent some intervention, that would certainly set us on a much harder rebuilding path, and potentially damage the spawning stock biomass, and so I guess I would ask if there's something we could still pull from, and are there -- Is there some information about maybe a reduction in catch that might be helpful, but it sounds like the SSC didn't explore that.

DR. REICHERT: No, we didn't. We didn't talk about that in in specifics.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? All right. I think we're going to break for lunch. I'm going to turn it back to our chair, so she can tell us when to come back.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Let's just plan on coming back at 1:30. I don't think -- Everybody can eat a little less than an hour-and-a-half, and so, if we can just come on and get back at 1:30, that would be great.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going here, and so, even though we were in the middle of black sea bass, we'll be picking that up at another point, because we need to jump into the MSE, because the folks from Blue Matter have a time-limited time with which they could speak to us, and so, on the snapper grouper MSE, first, we're going to hear the AP comments on that, from James, and then we'll go into the SSC comments, and then we will hear from Blue Matter, and so, James, are you ready to go?

MR. PASKIEWICZ: I hope everybody had a had a good lunch, and I guess, just kind of jumping right into what the AP thoughts were on the snapper grouper MSE, and so I guess, right from the jump here, some of the things that we noted, on some of the topics and stocks, it was snapper grouper species may never return to historical levels under current environmental conditions.

Especially, you know, down here in the Keys, we're very concerned about these things, that fishing may not be driving the declines, and species -- As species decline, or move out of the area, new species may increase, or move into the area, and so access to available species is -- It's always necessary. Along with the best fishing practices, you know, to continue to increase awareness, and practice for proper releasing techniques is needed to reduce mortality, and those are just -- You know, those are very important issues.

Moving on. some of the AP members noted that the model runs presented in this meeting seem to indicate the need for a reduction in recreational effort to rebuild the topic stock. Potential strategies to help are a one to two-month closure during the spawning seasons, small, inshore MPAs focused on the enhancing survival juvenile fish, and stocking for some species.

You know, when we talk about stuff like this, I always see hands go up about, you know, possible depredation from other snappers, you know, kind of eating, or, you know, impeding recruitment of other species, and the red snapper kind of always tend to be brought up about that, and so that's something that, you know, we can kind of continue to look at.

Also, headboat representatives stated their opposition to bottom closures. I think that, for that particular user group, just having access is most important, and we've heard that time and time again from some of the AP members that represent that that user group. If a bottom closure is necessary, a niche to be carved out for the headboat component, to allow persistence of this part of the fishery, and so, you know, we want to keep what's left of that sector viable.

Moving on to the final one, bottom closures could result in business closures, and further loss of working waterfront and coastal fishing areas, and I think that, you know, some of those fears are, once those businesses are gone, they're gone forever, and a certain part of the user group, the general public, can get on the water relatively affordably, and there are no alternatives left for them, and so that's a that's a big concern.

The AP reiterated the prominence of red snapper throughout the region, commenting that they are now being caught closer to shore than ever, even from the shore in Florida, and sometimes even - - Members also commented on the lack of the on-the-water enforcement of fishing and boating regulations of these fishermen operating as for-hire or commercial professionals without the required permits and certifications.

You know, this is something that I've talked to at length with law enforcement in Florida, and the kind of knee-jerk answer that I always get is, well, the rules are there because most people follow them, and, although that is a fair statement, there just isn't a whole lot of fear for people who are breaking the law, you know, and so that sentiment is -- It carries a lot of weight, in my opinion. That's kind of a broad overview of our take as the advisory panel on the on the MSE. Any questions?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, James. Any questions on the AP discussion on the MSE? I don't see any hands. Thank you, James, and, with that, we will go to -- Now we'll go to the slides on the SSC response, and Marcel can cover those.

MR. PASKIEWICZ: Thanks, everybody.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, James.

DR. MARCEL: Thank you. The SSC received a presentation on the management strategy evaluation of the three species, red snapper, black sea bass, and gag. First off, the SSC commended the analytical team for the tremendous amount of work they did on the MSE study, and we, as an SSC, reviewed and provided recommendations to the team, and we felt that earlier recommendations and comments were addressed and included in the results.

We also felt that the operating model based on -- It was based on approved stock assessments, and, of course, had certain uncertainties in there that, obviously, were also included in the MSE. We felt that some of the base model results may be a little optimistic, in some cases. We talked a little bit about that earlier for black sea bass. The operating models used the long-term average

recruitment, and, for instance, in sea bass, the more recent recruitment was -- The SSC felt was more appropriate to use, but that wasn't included in the current models. However, we feel that it's a very valuable tool to develop management.

We commented, earlier, on regional and depth strata that were selected, after previous model reviews, and the changes they made we felt definitely improved the spatial structure of the MSE. We felt that the fisheries were represented properly, but we talked a little bit about the fact that management regulations in state waters may differ from those in federal waters, and that may have an impact on some of the outcomes of the management strategy evaluation.

The model addressed uncertainties that we requested earlier, in earlier reviews. However, we suggested to perhaps further explore the issue I mentioned earlier, the recent recruitment versus long-term average recruitment, and some of the changes in effort, transient recreational and license and vessel registration, and the catchability, the increase in catch efficiency with the changes in gear and technology improvements.

We felt that the management options were appropriately included in the projections. There were a large number of projection scenarios that were explored and presented. We also discussed that perhaps both dynamic management options and dynamic responses could be considered for possible -- The dynamic management options and dynamic responses could be considered for possible -- The dynamic options, for instance, dynamic reference points, and the dynamic responses, and one example is the changes in effort offshore, and then also perhaps consider changes to the levels of compliance in the various management options.

In terms of the results, the SSC felt that the model is appropriate as a basis for developing management recommendations. However, we discussed that the relative nature of comparisons may serve as an excellent framework in comparing management strategies, but we also noticed that it may be most useful in identifying management options that are not -- That will not work, so that those can be avoided, and we also discussed that it is difficult to make quantitative predictions, for instance looking at probability of rebuilding.

We were asked for the strategies that could meet goals for reducing discards and rebuilding. Based on the analyses, neither gag nor black sea bass would rebuild, under any of the explored management scenarios, and also -- That was discussed earlier, at our earlier meetings, that general recreational fishery relative effort reduction scenarios may have the highest probability of meeting rebuilding targets.

In terms of the best bang for the buck for red snapper, it would be moving effort offshore. However, on the other hand, for gag, it would be moving effort inshore, and so that may create some complications, in terms of management.

We were asked to look at, you know, what would be good to for future management strategy evaluation explorations. As I mentioned earlier, state regulations may be different from federal regulations, and so that may be something that could be explored. Effort reduction, and sector caps, and then, something I also mentioned before, the recalculation of reference points, for instance, looking at dynamic reference points, and then, also, looking at potential responses of the recreational fleet to management actions, especially of inshore-offshore shifts and seasonal lengths, if they're considered, to see the responses of the recreational fishing fleet.

Then it would be good to look at compliance rates and measure of angler satisfaction, and then something we mentioned in the previous review is that it would be good to see if additional species, and species interactions, could be included in the management strategy evaluation, especially looking at population dynamics. I believe that's my last slide. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you Marcel. Are there any questions for Marcel? I don't see any hands. Thank you. All right. I'm going to turn it over to Chip.

DR. COLLIER: So, while Adrian comes up, and is getting ready to give his presentation, I wanted to give a little bit of background on the MSE, the MSE process, and maybe as we move forward. One of the things you're going to see here is a pretty depressing presentation, as Marcel had alluded to.

You know, in some cases, some of these stocks don't rebound, or rebuild, if things don't change, and so just look at this and remember yesterday, when John Walter gave a presentation, that MSEs are meant to be iterative, and there is that circle that goes through, and I feel like what we've done here, in this first contract that we had with Blue Matter Science, is develop the process, in order to really go through that first circle, and I think we need to do the second iteration, to really narrow down what the potential management options might best support what the council sees for this fishery, and potentially reaching back out to some of the advisory panels, to make sure, you know, what is being envisioned could work for them. We just need some guidance on the direction to go.

Some of you have been around for this entire process, that I think it started around June 2021, and so we had originally contracted, back in January 2022, I think, or December of 2022, in order to get you guys a management strategy evaluation by June of this past year, 2024. Unfortunately, we didn't get it to you at that point. One of the reasons for that is because we added another species in there, and we probably should have listened to John Walter's original caution that developing these management strategy evaluations are going to take a lot of time, and it has taken a lot of time to develop this, and develop the way it is.

We haven't got to the really narrowed-down management options that are probably best, because as you're talking about different things, you know, it's -- We're at broad strokes here, and we need to get down to the fine details for the management strategy evaluation, but I think, as you're looking through this, and really take to point what Marcel had pointed out, that MSEs are very good at pointing out what don't seem to work, and there's a couple options that don't seem to be working all that well, and I think that comes out in this presentation that you're going to see.

Then, after the presentation, and there's some discussion, it would be good to hear from the council exactly what you would like to see going forward for this as well, how we can refine it, if you're thinking about more spatial measures, or you want more information on how the fishery is going to behave, and that's going to influence how we put out the next request for proposals.

We're going to put that out shortly after this council meeting, in hopes that we can get somebody else working on this MSE, to really -- Or continue this MSE the way it's going, in order to integrate what you all think is most important to inform the next steps.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, Chip, just to clarify, so, today, we're asking questions about the work that's already been done, but we're also making suggestions for the next steps here, what else we would like to see analyzed, including thinking about the list that Marcel just showed us from the SSC, and so it's fine to say, hey, we want more, and we have additional questions, and that's fine for today's discussion.

DR. COLLIER: Yes. We have -- Through the red snapper spend plan money, we do have some funds to continue work on an MSE, and that's our -- That would be our goal, is to hopefully integrate what you all recommend here into the next iteration.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Chip. All right, Adrian. I'm going to turn it over to you.

DR. HORDYK: Great. Thanks. Chair, and thanks, Chip, for the introduction, and thank you, council, for this opportunity to present again to you, this time with an update of the MSE that we've been working on for the last year-and-a-half or so.

I'm just going to start with a little bit of brief background. The overall objective for this project is to develop a framework for comparing the expected performance of different management approaches for the snapper grouper fishery. The approach that we've used is called managing strategy evaluation, MSE. We talked a lot about this at our first meeting of this project.

MSE is essentially closed-loop simulation testing. This is where we model a population, a fishery, an entire fishery system, in an operating model, the green box, and we generate data, simulate data, from that fishery, apply different management procedures, or harvest strategy, management strategy, essentially some rule of converting data into a management action. We implement that management action back in the fishery and then repeat for another time step, to project the population forward in time, closed-loop simulation testing. At our first meeting, we came in-person and presented to you, and we spent a bit of time talking about this MSE.

The two key pieces of information, the most important pieces of information, in an MSE are the operating model, and this is the knowledge and the uncertainty in the fishery system, essentially a characterization of how the fishery system works, and, in the red box there, the management procedures, or the harvest strategies, are what are the potential management options that we can test, and evaluate, using this framework.

A really important part of MSE is stakeholder consultation. We had, throughout the life of this project, several meetings with stakeholders, with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and the SSC, as we just heard. There was also a couple of public scoping meetings. The idea of these stakeholder consultations is to get that information, to gather the information for those two boxes, the knowledge and uncertainty of the fishery system in the operating model, and also the types of management approaches, and what are the feasible management approaches that could be used for this fishery.

We had an MSE technical team, and that was made up of scientists from the council and from elsewhere, and that met fairly regularly to do the development, the technical development, of this MSE work.

Okay. Over to the methods. We built operating models for three stocks. Like Chip mentioned, we started with the red snapper and the gag, and then, earlier this year, we added a third species, the black sea bass.

These plots here show the spawning biomass relative to the rebuilding target for each of these stocks. These plots are coming from the MSE framework, from the operating model. These operating models are based directly on the assessments, the most recent assessments, for each stock, and so what the operating model is doing here is just simply recreating the fishery dynamics that are in those assessments.

What we call our base case operating model is the fishery dynamics as they were estimated, as they are predicted, from the stock assessments, and so we reproduce those assessments exactly in the MSE framework, and then we project them forward under different management scenarios. As you can see here, for all three stocks, the current state is well below their rebuilding target, and so the focus of this analysis has been on identifying management approaches that are designed to rebuild the fisheries, to try and rebuild the stocks by their rebuilding target year, which is -- I'll talk about that a little more in a second, but that's the vertical dashed grey line there you can see.

The stock assessments didn't have a spatial component, but, in the MSE, we wanted to evaluate some spatial options, and so we superimposed a spatial structure on top of the operating models. We had three geographic regions, that you can see there in the colors, and two depth zones, the nearshore, which is defined as less than 100 foot, and offshore, which is between 100 and 300 feet.

For management approaches, management approaches essentially define the fishery behavior in the projection period as we project the model forward. For this analysis, we started with what we call status quo. This is where we -- It's a constant effort approach, where we fix the fishing mortality, the overall fishing mortality, or the fishing mortality for each fleet, at the geometric mean for the last three years, and so we call this status quo. This essentially means we're projecting the model forward assuming that the fishing effort, or the fishing mortality, for each of these stocks -- That it stays at its current sort of average current level.

As you can see there in the green lines, and the gray line, for each stock, is the fishing mortality relative to the maximum fishing mortality threshold, and so you can see, for each one of those, in recent years, it's about twice the threshold. For our status quo, we assumed what if everything stayed exactly the same, and fishing effort stayed frozen at this level projected forward, and then we added a bunch of different management approaches on top of that status quo scenario.

The first, or the second, approach here is full retention, and so this is where there's no discarding, and so it has status quo, where the fishing effort is frozen at the current level, but there's a policy brought in where there's no discarding. All fish that are caught are retained, and so that essentially is looking at what happens if there's no season, no retention season, or a limited retention season, for any of the stocks, and no discarding, no background discarding, for any other reason.

The third one was to look at minimum legal length, and so, here, fish below the minimum legal length are discarded. It's twenty-four inches for the red snapper and the gag and twelve inches for the sea bass. You note that some of these stocks already have these size limits in place, and so, for those stocks, there isn't a lot of change with this sort of approach of adding the minimum legal length. The only difference is, in this scenario, it assumes that this minimum legal length is

implemented perfectly, and so there's -- Every fish below the size limit is discarded and subject to discard mortality.

Then we looked at two different options for spatial management, nearshore, where all fishing effort was shifted to the nearshore region, and essentially no fishing effort in deeper than 100 foot, and an offshore, where it's the opposite. All fishing effort was shifted to the offshore region, and so those twelve combinations -- We looked at all the combinations of these approaches, and so status quo, and then status quo with a full retention, status quo with a minimum legal length, and so on, all the way to the last one, status quo with full retention, a minimum legal length, and effort shifted to the offshore, and so there's twelve different management approaches that we looked at here.

Then, also, we looked at, or we were asked to look at, a series of reductions, reductions in the general recreational fleet, effort for the general recreational fleet, and so we looked at -- We had eleven different options for that, starting at -- So one is 100 percent effort remained, the recreational effort stays the same, and then we looked at what happens if it was reduced by 5 percent, 15, 25, and so on, all the way to the effort was reduced down to 5 percent of its current level, and so, in total, there was twelve management combinations, eleven levels of recreational effort, and that resulted in 132 different management scenarios.

So, as Chip mentioned earlier, the idea here was to look at these broad management scenarios, to quantify these key tradeoffs to identify the management directions with the best performance, or to identify management options that have bad performance, or don't perform well, that we can eliminate, and so the idea here wasn't necessarily to propose these as actual management options that could, and would, be implemented directly into the fishery, but it's really to try and understand the shape of the different management option, to identify which direction has the most promise, in terms of rebuilding the stocks, and not having too much of a negative impact on yields and other things.

In terms of summarizing the results, the first thing we looked at was the probability of rebuilding the stocks by the target year, and so that was the priority, to look at the probability of rebuilding. For red snapper, the target year was 2044, and, for gag, it was 2032. For black sea bass, which I believe is not under a rebuilding plan currently, but there has been some evidence suggesting that it could rebuild by 2032, I believe, and so we used that in this analysis.

The important thing here is that, when you look at the probability of rebuilding, it -- That value is going to depend on the target year, and so, if you had a different year, for any of these stocks, the probability of rebuilding will be different, and so, for any of the results you see here, we look at the probability of the biomass reaching the rebuilding target by these years here.

The second thing we're going to show you, in plot, is the median spawning biomass relative to the rebuilding target, and so a value of one means that there's a median biomass is at the rebuilding target, or, essentially, a 50 percent probability of rebuilding.

Then I had two metrics looking at yield. One is the relative short-term yield, the median landings in the first five years, and the second is the relative long-term yield. Excuse me. I'm just going to need to be excused for a second, while I have a coughing fit. I'm very sorry about that. I hope it doesn't happen again. I've been plagued by a cough from a cold a few weeks ago.

There was two ways of summarizing the yield. One is the short-term yield, the yield in the first five years, and the second the long-term yield, or we call it long-term yield, the expected landings in the second five years, 2030 to 2034, and the last way of summarizing the results is look at the fraction discarded, the total -- The fraction of the total removals that are dead discards. All right. This is the results.

This plot shows the results for all 132 management scenarios, and so I'm not going to go into these in detail. There's lots of information here. You see each panel there is the stock, the red snapper, the gag, and the black sea bass. On the Y-axis is the twelve different management options, and on the X-axis is the relative reduction in effort for the general recreational fleet. Then the colors show that the probability of rebuilding, with red showing the low probability of rebuilding, and increasingly, going from white to blue, as the probability increases.

If you just look at the top row there, that's the status quo scenario. You can see there, under -- For the red snapper, if we focus on that, the probability of rebuilding doesn't approach 50 percent until the general recreational efforts reduced down to 35 percent of the current level, and so, as Chip gave you a bit of a warning before, there's quite a lot of red on this plot, but there are a few areas where it's, you know, white and blue, where there is an increased probability of rebuilding, and I'm going to focus on those scenarios, and these results.

I'm going to focus on just these three scenarios, the status quo, which I just mentioned, and I'll look into that in a bit more detail, and then two -- The two management options that had the highest probability of rebuilding the red snapper, to reducing the effort for the recreational fleet, and also looking at where the effort is move towards offshore region, with a full retention policy, and so this plot here shows, on the top, the spawning biomass relative to the rebuilding target for each of the stocks. The green there is the projections, and the grey is the historical. It came from the operating model, with the shading showing the 25th and 75th percentiles, and the solid green line there is the medium, the 50 percent probability.

As I mentioned earlier, the vertical grey dashed lines are the rebuilding target at the year, or, sorry, the target year, and then, in those grey tables on the top, it shows you the probability of rebuilding, the stock reaching the rebuilding target, moving above the minimum stock a spawning stock threshold in the tables.

You can see, for red snapper and gag grouper, under status quo, the stock is either predicted to decline or stay relatively flat, well below the target, the rebuilding target, and, for black sea bass, the model predicts, and this is largely to do with the recruitment that was mentioned earlier, the stock to under status quo scenario to increase. It has a 15 percent probability, or a fairly low probability, of rebuilding, but you can see that's also because, in that year 2032, it continues to increase after that.

This is what I mentioned earlier, that the probability will change as time goes on, but you can see, even towards the end of the projection period, the 50 percent, you know, the median line there, is well below the target level, but it has quite a different dynamic than the other two stocks.

On the bottom panel, it shows the landings, in the solid line, and the discards, in the dashed line, and these more or less follow the biomass. This is a constant effort scenario, and so, when the biomass is declining, the landings are declining, for the red snapper. For gag, or, sorry, in the red

snapper, the discards, in the dashed line there, is more or less staying the same, the same magnitude.

For the gag, the landings are increasing slightly, but just following the trend in the biomass, and then, for the black sea bass, you can see both the landings and discards are following a similar pattern to the biomass. The stock is getting larger, and the landings and discards are following.

This plot shows the scenario where the recreational effort was reduced down to 35 percent. On the top panel, I've included the black dashed line, and that was the median from the status quo, so you can see the difference in the performance, a difference in response to the biomass, and so you can see this leads to a significant increase in the probability of rebuilding for red snapper. The median line is now pretty close to the rebuilding target.

For gag, and for black sea bass, you do see a response, but it's not as much as for the red snapper, and there's still -- There's an increase in probability of rebuilding, but it's still lower than -- It's well below 50 percent. Then, in the bottom panel you can see there, you get, in the short-term, a reduction in landings, because the effort has been reduced, and so you get a dip in landings, but, over time, those landings are increasing back up again, as the stock rebuilds to higher levels.

Probably the thing, in terms of the landings, that's most different between this and the previous slide, which I'll just jump back to briefly, is this is the status quo scenario. If I jump forward, the big thing is the reduction in discards. With the reduction in effort of the recreational fleet, there's quite a big impact on the discards, the level of discards, for the red snapper and the black sea bass.

For black sea bass, previously, the discards were -- Again, if I jump back, you can see they're higher than the landings, and the red snapper also significantly higher than landings. Under the scenario where the recreational effort is reduced, the red snapper landings are -- Sorry, the discards are similar, just a little bit higher than the landings, and, for the black sea bass, you get -- The discards are actually less than the landings, and so that's probably the biggest impact there, in terms of the landings is a reduction in dead discards.

Then the final scenario I'm going to look at is the full retention policy, where effort is moved to offshore. Here, you've got a similar response for the biomass. It's about around 50 percent, or 45 percent, probability of rebuilding for red snapper, and an increase for both gag and black sea bass, compared to the previous scenario, and so, here, recreational effort has stayed the same, but the difference is there's a full retention policy, and so all the fish that are caught are kept, and effort is being moved to the offshore region.

In terms of yield, you see the same thing. You get a slight dip initially, as there's a reduction in effort, or, sorry, in the landings, as the effort is moved offshore, but, overall, it's a large increase in landings, because all the fish that were previously caught, and discarded, are now retained, and you can see the discards go down to zero, and so it didn't have much impact on gag grouper, where there wasn't -- Discards weren't much of an issue, but, for red snapper, and for black sea bass, under this policy, there's no discards, and so everything that's caught contributes to the landings.

Another way of looking at these results is through tradeoff plots, and so I'm just going to kind of walk you through one of these now, and then show you all these results we just talked about in the tradeoff plot. On the left-hand side there, we see three different tradeoff plots. They all have the

same X-axis, the spawning biomass relative to rebuilding, and so that green point -- Even though the label is in different locations, the green point, on the X-axis, is in the same place. If you look on that plot on the top-right, what that green point represents is the median line, that solid green line, where it intersects with the vertical dashed grey line.

You can see it's around 0.25, or something there, at the end of the -- That time series plot is predicting that the median biomass is around 25 percent or so of the target, and then, if you look at the tradeoff plot, on the left, that's where that point is.

For the other plots, and the top one shows the relative short-term yield, and so this is the short-term yield relative to the average historical, to the most recent, and so you can see it's around one. What that's predicting is that, under this status quo scenario, the landings, in the short-term, will be pretty similar to what they were in the last three historical years.

You can see that, in that plot on the bottom side, where the landings in the first few years are pretty similar to the average for the last three years, and then the long-term yield is slightly below one, and you can see, in that plot, that the yields -- The landings are decreasing, and the plot on the bottom shows a fraction discarded, and so, here, about 75 percent or so of the total removals from this stock are dead discards. That's an average over the entire projection period. That's more or less the same as the past, although you can see, in the historical, there's a lot more variability.

That's what these trade-off plots show. They're just a single point to show how a response, in terms of biomass -- What the tradeoff is in terms of rebuilding, versus short-term and long-term yield, and how much of the stock gets discarded, dead discarded.

This plot shows now those tradeoffs on the -- For all three stocks, and for the three management options we looked at, the status quo, the status quo that was reduced with -- The general recreational fleet was reduced to 35 percent of its current effort, SQ35, and then the full retention offshore policy, in the FROS, and so the plot on the left, the red snapper -- What we just saw was this the green point, the status quo, and now I've added on to that the other two management options.

For the top and middle rows, better performance is the top-right, so you've got higher biomass, and higher yields, and anything that's further to the top and right performs better than things that are either further to the left or further down. You've got higher yields, and higher biomass, is ideal, and the plot on the bottom is the Y-axis is reversed, because it's the fraction discarded, and so, ideally, you want to have higher biomass, higher yields and low discards.

You can see, if we look at -- There's a bit of a tradeoff here across options within a species, and also across species. For both, we just look at the row on the top, the full retention policy, and effort moved to the offshore has the median biomass pretty close to the rebuilding target, and it has a significant increase in short-term yield, and the long-term yield, about two-and-a-half to three times for the red snapper, and something similar, a lower magnitude, but something similar for the gag grouper. The point furthest to the top and right, for each of these plots, is the full retention offshore.

We get a little bit of a different -- A tradeoff in performance there for the black sea bass, and you see that same policy results in a reduction, a slight reduction, and not that dramatic, but a slight

reduction in landings for the black sea bass, the short-term and long-term landings, compared to any other options. In the plot down at the bottom, you can see that, particularly for red snapper, the full retention policy, with effort moved to the offshore, has a similar biomass outcome to if it was just a reduction in effort from the recreational fleet, but the big difference is, of course, in a full retention policy, there's no discards, whereas the reducing the effort from the recreational fleet does reduce discards, but they still -- It's still about 60 percent or so of the total removals are dead discards, and so there's a lot of information in this plot, and I can come back to it in the discussion, if you wish, but I'll move on now.

We did -- So far, the results are presented for our base case operating model. We did a bunch of sensitivity tests, and we built alternative operating models, alternative hypotheses of the fishery dynamics, and evaluated how these management options perform under those conditions.

The first two were we looked at sensitivity tests for the natural mortality rate. These are directly based on the sensitivity tests done in the assessment. The third one looked at there's been some hypotheses that the removals of the recreational fleet have been overestimated, perhaps by up to 40 percent, and so the idea of this test is to see, well, what if that was true, and we're not saying it's true or not, but, if it was true, what are the consequences, and so, in Sensitivity Test Number 3, we reduced the removals by 40 percent for the recreational fleet, and we reran the assessment model, built the operating model, and did the same analysis.

The fourth one looked at an effort creep, and so what happens if you kept the -- Nominally kept the effort the same, but there was an increase in catchability, for example better technology, or the actual effective effort of the fishery was increasing by 2 percent per year, and then the last one looked at recruitment trends and what happens if recruitment -- Going forward, the recruitment deviations weren't -- They didn't recover back to the sort of long-term average, but stayed in the more recent pattern, where we've had some stocks having more negative recruitment, and others having more positive recruitment.

I'm only going to look at the Number 3, the reduced recreational removals, in this analysis, but, obviously, we have results for all of these. Before I do that, I'll just say, in general, we found the same tradeoffs, and so, if you look at those tradeoff plots that we just showed earlier, we essentially got the same result for all these tests, and that's the first thing we're looking at. If you've got quite a change in relative performance of management scenarios, for these robustness tests, then that would tell you that these uncertainties really matter, in terms of which managed options are better than others.

What we had in those tradeoff plots is the actual quantitative values do change, but the general tradeoffs are the same. The fishing full retention policy, moving to offshore, had the same pattern, where it was better, with respect to yields and biomass, than other outcomes, and so that tells us that those options still give -- Qualitatively still sort of lead to better outcomes under these uncertainty scenarios, but I'm just going to quickly look at the some of the results from that third scenario, the third sensitivity test.

This plot here shows, on the left-hand column, the base case the spawning biomass for the base case, and so we just looked at this. This is basically directly from the assessment, and I've got those reference points in the in the dotted and dashed blue lines, and then, on the right-hand side, we have the same plot, the same general plot, and this is the historical biomass from the assessment

model, but, under this scenario, where the recreational removals of catches and discards were reduced by 40 percent.

The thing that you can see here is the trend looks pretty similar, but what's clear is, on the plot on the right, is the magnitude of the stock is reduced. Those lines are all further down. If you see the first point, around 1950 for the red snapper, and a bit later for the other stocks, that's generally the assessment assumed to be the unfished level, and, if you compare them across the -- Between the left and right panels, you can see that the model, where it was run, where there was a reduction in in -- The catches and discards from the recreational fleet were reduced, and it resulted in an estimate of a stock of a smaller size, and so, while the stock size went down, you can see also that the reference point lines go down. They shift by the same amount.

What this means is -- We'll do this next slide, and we're showing the same results, but now everything is relative to the rebuilding target, and so everything is relative to one. Because both the magnitude of the stock went down, and the reference points go down, when you compare them, the stock status, or the stock relative to these reference points, you essentially get the same result.

You essentially get the same result, where the stocks are more or less the same place, relative to the rebuilding target, as they were under the base case assumption, and so what this means is, in this projection, when we do this forward, the absolute biomass is at a lower level under this scenario, but all of our results, that I just showed you, were comparing the probability of rebuilding and so on. Because it's in the same place relative to rebuilding target and the other reference points, the results are essentially the same, and so this particular sensitivity test -- It didn't have any consequence, any consequence on the results of the MSE. You still come to the same conclusion.

All right. I've got a couple of conclusion slides. The status quo scenario, where basically effort stays the same as it has been, for red snapper and gag, there's a low probability of rebuilding, and a general decline, or pretty stable landings. For black sea bass, we can see there's an increased probability of rebuilding, and increased biomass and landings, although it doesn't quite reach the rebuilding target by 2032, under the constant effort scenario.

When we looked at what happens if the recreational effort was reduced by a significant amount, this results in a reduction in fishing mortality, especially for red snapper and for the black sea bass, and so, consequently, it has an increased probability of rebuilding and reduction in discards. Of course, if you have a reduction in effort of the recreational fleet, the landings for that fleet are also going to decline.

The third scenario is where effort was moved to the offshore. This reduces the fishing mortality on the young and immature fish, which can lead to -- Which leads to an increase in spawning output. Essentially, protecting immature fish means they can contribute to the spawning population. They spawn at least once, and then that can result in an increasing recruitment, compared to what you would get without that, and then adding a full retention policy onto that means that you can increase landings, and reduce dead discards, and it came at only a marginal cost to the rebuilding, and so, in this way, you can still rebuild and address the issue, perhaps, of dead discards.

There's essentially two handles. In terms of trying to rebuild the stocks, there's two handles that can be pulled. One is a general reduction in fish mortality. If you want the stocks to go on a

different trajectory than they have, it requires a reduction in mortality, and the second is to increase the spawning output, to protect that spawning population to increase, or keep stable the recruitment, and so, essentially, these results that we've looked at do these two things, either a general reduction in effort, to reduce fish mortality overall, or moving the fishing effort away from young and immature fish and allow them to spawn once.

Like I mentioned earlier, these are fairly -- These management options we looked at are fairly broad, fairly coarse, the idea of being able to try to identify which approaches are most promising, and we can -- In terms of actual management options that could be implemented in the fishery, these results indicate that the focus should be on these two things. One is just a general reduction in fishing mortality, and the second is, one way or another, trying to look at ways of increasing the spawning output or reducing fish -- For example, by reducing fishing mortality on young fish.

All right, and so, for next steps, we heard, just now, some reports about from the SSC and for the AP, and do you want to incorporate that feedback into the analysis, where we can, and finalize this analysis, and submit a report to the council. We intend to do that next month. Essentially, these results that I've showed you here, in a lot more detail. We've also, as a technical team, been drafting up a scientific manuscript for publication, and we would like to submit that, to get published, hopefully early next year as well.

Just a couple of kind of general recommendations for future directions. One is to identify specific implementable management strategies. We've looked at fairly sort of general ones, what happens if fishing effort is moved offshore, or nearshore, or what happens if effort is reduced by this amount, and so on, but those are -- Those sorts of management approaches may be -- They're not really implementable. We can -- You know, a recommendation for next steps would be just to identify very specific management decisions, and then this is what we want to do, in terms of management, and that -- We can model very specific management actions that can be implemented then, and these might require some thought about some specific details of the management, for example allocation between sectors.

So, in this scenario, where we reduced effort for the recreational fleet, you see the landings of the recreational fleet went down, right, and the effort goes down, and the landings go down, but what we've done is we've just kept the commercial effort the same, and so nothing changed with that.

When -- I know this there's allocation between the sectors, commercial and recreational sectors, in many of these fisheries, and so a question would be if, for example, there was a reduction in landings for a recreational fleet, would the recreational -- Sorry, but would the commercial landings be reduced by an equivalent amount, to keep those allocations the same, or not, and, right now, we haven't done that, but that may be something that the council, the managers, would decide to do, or not, but these are the sorts of very specific questions that we would need to think about if we want to try and model an actual management strategy that could be implemented in the fishery, and so all the questions about what do we actually need to think about to be able to implement this.

Some of those specific management options may require sort of specific research on certain areas, and so, for example, one thing we haven't looked at was aggregate bag limits. You might have a boat limit on all snapper species, for example. We can -- To do that, we need to be able to model what the predicted probability of releasing the fish are, given the catch rates by species, and so this is something an actual management option, like an aggregate bag limit of X fish. If we want to

examine that in the MSE, we would need to be able to build a model to predict how the catch rates -- What the probability of fishers catching and releasing fish are.

For example, if we want to look at management options with seasonal closures, or spatial closures, very specific ones, we need to build a model to be able to predict how the fleet behaves in response to changes in season length. We haven't really looked at that in a lot of detail here. We did a bit of work on that earlier in the project, but we realized that's something that's going to need quite a specific model. If we want to increase, or change, the season length, how will the fishing fleet respond to that? What would they do? That requires empirical data, so we can build a model to be able to predict something that matches what's likely to happen in reality.

Then the last thing to think about is some sort of key uncertainties, and so I just mentioned the fleet dynamics, how the fleets respond to changes in regulations. It's really important, if we want to try and use these predictions about what's happening.

If there's an interest in looking at spatial management options, we need to think perhaps more about the actual spatial distribution of the stocks, because that's really important. The results based on spatial management options really depend a lot on what the knowledge, and the uncertainty, in the spatial distribution of these species are, and then we talked a little earlier, and, in the SSC, we talked a lot about this, is, when we do these projections going forward, we need to make assumptions. We need to have some idea about what the recruitment patterns will be like in the future.

The current model assumes that the recruitment will return, on average, to the average historical recruitment. If it doesn't, if things stay the same as they have in the recent years, and we've had these quite dramatic deviations from the average, what would that mean? Would that mean a regime shift that systems now are very different than it was in the past?

If it does, do the reference points need to be adjusted? These are all sort of fairly complex questions, but they can have a big impact, because, if we really do believe there's a regime shift, and we change those reference points, then all those calculations I showed you earlier will change, because they're all relative to those reference points. There's just some sort of uncertainties we need to potentially think about in more detail to be able to get specific results.

My final slide is just to say that the technical details of all this are available on a homepage, and there's a link there on the bottom. This has been developed in R, based on the OpenMSE framework. It's all reproducible code, and so, on this website, there's links to the code to build the operating models and so on, and a description of the methodology. Everything I've shown you here can be reproduced by the code that's in that document, and, if you have any interest in doing this, and run into any problems, by all means, contact me, and I can help you out with that, and that brings me to my last slide, and so thanks for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Super cool stuff. Questions? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you Madam Chair. Thank you Adrian. It was very informative, and interesting. My first question would be, if you could go to page 20, the slide on page 20 of your presentation, and so, on that full retention offshore, that is without any reduction in effort, and that's just full retention offshore, with the same status quo effort that we have without a reduction?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, that's right.

MR. HULL: I have a couple more, Madam Chair, if possible.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead. Go ahead.

MR. HULL: You have the spatial component, which is east inshore and offshore, and was there any consideration of north and south?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and we have those areas in the model, but we haven't examined -- The answer is no. So far, we only looked at the spatial options nearshore and offshore, because you can imagine there's lots of different combinations that you could do. You could have nearshore in certain regions, and so that could be explored in a lot more detail, but it hasn't been done so far.

MR. HULL: One more, please, and so if -- It sounds like you've excluded headboats, charter boats, and commercial fleets from the spatial closures, and -- No?

DR. HORDYK: No. The spatial closure, at the moment, applies to everything.

MR. HULL: All fleets?

DR. HORDYK: Yes.

MR. HULL: Okay, and so that answers that question. Okay. All right. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you. I have a question, and I guess it kind of backs up before all this. What would happen, in your opinion, to the red snapper stock status if we were to use the assessment and have it begin at a start year that's more realistic than the 1950s, something like the mid-1980s, when we started to get good data, or better data, and it has improved since then, because it seems, to me, while philosophically pleasing to go back to a time like the 1950s, when there was very little fishing pressure, it's kind of unrealistic to try to hold modern fisheries to that kind of unrealistic standard.

DR. HORDYK: That's a good question, and I don't know like a lot about the assessments of these stocks, and so I'm not the right person to sort of comment on those. I guess, in general, the idea of these assessments is to try and start them at a point where you believe the stocks were unfished, or at a relatively unfished state, and so that's the idea, and so, even if there isn't a lot of data back then, if you've got some index data points to show like what the stock was in its unfished level, before fishing really started in its intensity, it can help scale the whole population.

If you start the assessment in a period where fishing has already started, it will certainly -- Like you say, it will change the relative status of the stock, and so the idea is to try and find it at a state where the average level the stock was before fishing started. It can be really difficult, because, often, like you say, there's very few data from back then, but I can't really comment on what's the best approach for the actual stock assessment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We have more questions. Robert, online, has a question.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Hi, everyone. The comment I have is speaking about going back to a time when there was less fishing pressure, and I also wonder how you model changes in habitat, and, you know, specifically for us down in the Keys, loss of corals, and loss of habitat. It also throws, in my mind, a significant change in conditions there that are part of some of this data, and was that taken into consideration?

DR. HORDYK: I missed some of that, but I think the point you're getting at is things have changed in the system, or you believe things have changed in the system, and I think that's a fair point. That needs to be considered in these sorts of analyses, because it's true, and like we heard from the previous comment, and this one, that this whole thing is going to be based around the assessments, which is comparing things to the unfished level, and the reference points are calculated from that.

If there have been changes in the system, in the terms of like there's less spawning habitat and so on, or habitat for nursery habitat and so on, then it may be the case. I'm not saying it is, but it may be the case that things have changed in the system, in which case it may be that the previous -- The reference points based on historical data may they look irrelevant.

That's a big question, and it's an important one, but it's a big question, and it can have consequences, because you can have fisheries where things have changed so much that it can't recover back to the previous state. If that's the case, it's essentially the same as a regime shift, and it's a different system than it was, and, if that's what's believed to happen, then it may be an argument to change those reference points to something that accounts for the recent changes in the system. Again, I'm not the right person to know if that has happened or not, but I would agree that that's an important area for research.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I had a couple of questions, and so it sounds like recreational was treated as just one unit, and so it included private boats, charter boats, and headboats, and all of those were included?

DR. HORDYK: I haven't -- No, and so the answer is no. We separated out -- We had three fleets, commercial, the recreational headboats, and what we call general recreational, and so the private boats, and so the results I've shown here have been aggregate, but, for those effort reductions, it was only for the private boats.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Looking at the stock assessments, there's different ways that the -- Or the way that they typically aggregate the recreational is in two different components. There's the headboat component, and then there is the general rec, which includes charter boat and private recreational, and so it's a little odd on how it's done, but it's done because it's based on the data collection system. One is through the Southeast Headboat Survey, and the other is done through MRIP.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, when he says commercial, he really means for-hire?

DR. COLLIER: No, and commercial is commercial. So there's a commercial fleet that's included in this, right, and we didn't exclude commercial harvest. That is still going on in the background.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm so confused, because I thought that commercial wasn't going to be included, but I'm --

DR. COLLIER: Well, let me clarify that. So management measures for commercial weren't being included in this. What we were thinking, and what we were doing, is management measures for the recreational, and assuming that the commercial would be some allocation of the overall catch, and so we're not necessarily addressing issues within the commercial fishery, but removals from the commercial fishery are being included in the total removals.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and then one more question, at this point, and then I'll go to somebody else, and so, when we say -- When we talk about moving effort offshore, do we really mean that people fish to a certain point and then stop bottom fishing? Is that -- It's just a little unclear, to me, what it means when we say, you know, move effort offshore beyond 100 feet. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, certainly. In this model, because of the spatial structure, we have those six areas, the three geographic regions and the two depth regions, and so that's the resolution of the model, and so, in the model, what we looked at is what happened if they stopped fishing in the nearshore and moved it to the offshore.

In reality -- That's the resolution of the model. That's all we could kind of look at. In reality, things are, obviously, more complex than that, but, essentially, what we're trying to -- What we looked at here is what if that was happening based on our understanding of the distribution of the stocks, and so a lot of it -- I haven't gone into the detail here, but it shows that the young fish are all -- They'll recruit in the nearshore regions, and so, for now, the model is basically assuming that there's no fishing to occur in the nearshore region. If something like this was going to be investigated in more detail, I would recommend building a finer-scale -- A spatial model that matches what you would do for management.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, just to follow-up on that, go along that train of thought, it's just perplexing to me, because I feel like we've always been told that having more older fish, that we presume are in deeper water, in the population is more important to considering the stock to be rebuilt than these inshore juvenile fish species, and because the older -- The big old fat female spawners are the ones that are contributing a disproportionate amount to the population, and so, to see the flip side of it, with this modeling, I don't know, and it just brings up a lot more questions for me, and is it suggesting that our assumptions all along, that protecting these older female fish, is wrong, or that juvenile fish were way more important than what we thought they were? It's just -- It's counterintuitive to what we've always talked about here around this table, and at the Gulf Council as well. Go ahead.

DR. HORDYK: I can make a few comments on that. Particularly for the red snapper, what the assessment -- The results of the assessment show, or predict, that the discards -- As you know, the recreational discards are really high, right, the most significant fish mortality on the red snapper, and the assessment predicts that the selectivity pattern, for the recreational discards, is focused really on youngish fish, and so there's like a -- Quite a big sort of peak in selectivity for those

young fish, and so what this is saying is, by moving the effort away from there, it's going to -- The model is saying that that's not going to occur, because those young fish are caught nearshore. The reason isn't so much about protecting the young fish, but reducing mortality on them allows them to grow to be older fish, and to contribute to the mature, -- To the spawning population.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see lots of hands going up. Kerry, Andy, Jimmy, Charlie.

MS. MARHEFKA: I have two questions. One is relating to the point you just made. Is it difficult to model, especially these three species, where red snapper are not protogynous, and gag is, and does that change sort of how you think about it, and then my second question goes back to the point before, and so I'll wait.

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and so it's a good -- So, at the moment, these models are basically stock assessments, and the stock assessment models don't have any sex structure in them, and so we've tried -- We've built the same dynamics, but I think that's an important one, especially for these onshore/offshore sort of distribution, because they change sex, and so that would be something that I would try to kind of caution.

I think, in general, these results show that reducing mortality on immature fish will result, or is expected to result, in increased biomass. How that goes about, sort of how you would do that, is a different question, but I think, particularly for the gag, where they change sex, it could be something that could be quite important, and it hasn't been investigated in detail here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Relating to the point before, and I don't want to belabor it, but I want to make sure I understand. I understand that the commercial catch is included, and is part of what you're running throughout. What I'm not clear on is, when you're talking about sort of moving all the catch inshore, or offshore, or whatever, is that including the commercial catch too, or just the recreational catch?

DR. HORDYK: So, right now, with the exception of that general reduction in effort, everything else applies to all the fleets right now and so, again, the reason we've done it this way is because you can imagine there's so many different dimensions that we can look at, and so we just tried to look at this overall, to see what's the most promising, but these will be the sorts of things I was getting at in those final slides, is to see what exactly would -- What we actually would propose, and then we can test that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Lots of questions here, and so, kind of along that same line, how do you treat full retention then for the commercial sector, as well as the recreational sector, in the modeling?

DR. HORDYK: So, in the model, at the moment, the full retention is just -- What it is, it's, with the exception of if -- Every fish that's caught in the commercial and recreational, it actually just removes the retention curve. Everything that's caught is kept. The only difference is, if you impose like a size limit or something on top of it, then things that were below the size limit are discarded

but all we did in the model -- Like the biggest thing is, obviously, the recreational, and it just assumed that at the retention curve -- That everything was retained, and so it just turned it off, and everything that was caught and killed was kept.

MR. STRELCHECK: You're, obviously, summarizing results at a, you know, much grosser scale. You have, obviously, finer-level detail, and so does the model show, for example, over time, with full retention offshore, that we're kind of depleting the stock down in the offshore waters, but at the benefit of increasing the stocks in inshore waters?

DR. HORDYK: Yeah, and it can do. All that information is there. One of the challenges we've got is we've got three stocks, and then, if you start looking at that age structure, and spatial structure, it's like -- It's a lot to look at, and so the information is there. We've got age structure by stock, by area, by fleet, and the fleet dynamics by fleet, and so it's all there, but I haven't presented any of that, and so, if there's questions about that sort of thing, like what would happen in this scenario, then I can produce those results.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I had some of the same thoughts as Jessica mentioned, and maybe less concerned about red snapper, or even sea bass, based on their life history, but a stock like gag, where we rely on the male population, and the ontogenetic shift from inshore to offshore, and those spawning aggregations that form, and I could see that being detrimental to a species like gag, whereas red snapper, or black sea bass, might benefit from such a management approach, and so I'm not as convinced that the benefits to gag would be there, based on the modeling, as presented, but we would want to understand the details of that better.

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and I would agree that, for stocks like gag, the sex structure could be really important for things like this, and so that hasn't been examined, and one of the challenges is, because we build these operating models based on the stock assessment models, and we don't have the sex structure in there, although I guess we do have the age structure, and so we could probably do it for gag, but we haven't investigated that in detail, and I would agree with you that that should be -- If that was something that would be considered, like spatial management, that should be looked at in more detail.

MR. STRELCHECK: Okay, and then last question. You mentioned kind of the open source code, and so you're kind of closing out this portion of the effort. There's, you know, more work to come. The ability to -- For example, earlier today, I mentioned that we're updating the red snapper stock assessment, right, and so that will have four more years of data, and so including something like that, or, if we wanted to look at a different boundary than 100 feet, or, as Jimmy suggested, some of the north-south differences, right, and all of those -- Are those things that can be flexibly input, and modified, within the model, now that it's kind of built?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, they can be. We've built a function essentially to import the BAM models. One of the complexities has been that they can have -- Different assessments can have different structure, like fleet structure, or they start at different times, and so on and so there's a bit of -- If you're adding new stocks, it can be a bit complex, to make sure everything lines up, but, basically, if there's a new red snapper assessment, we should be able to just run that same function, import it, and you have the new operating model updated, or, if not, it might just require some tweaking, but, basically, that's the idea, is to make it reproducible like that.

The same with the spatial structure, and that gets imposed afterwards, and so we import that, and then we add that on. What we just need for that is a spatial distribution of the stocks by whatever areas, and so we've got those six areas. If we just -- If we change those spatial definitions, we just need to build a model, or get results that -- What we have -- What's basically -- What we get is the operating model, and the distribution by area, and put those two things together, and so it can all be updated.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip, and then we'll go back to our list.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, just to build on what Adrian is talking about, in April of this year, we're going to get a presentation to the SSC on the Ecopath with Ecosim with an Ecospace module, and so we're going to have greater details on how the fishery operates. It includes both recreational and commercial depth components, and so that probably would have a lot of information in it to potentially inform this model, and that those potentially could talk to each other, and that could be a request that the council considers, moving forward, for the next steps.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Chip. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. A question, and so we're trying to find a way, and get some results with management strategies to reduce recreational effort, and so this MSE has given us some results that show, if we spatially close inshore of 100 feet to recreational snapper grouper bottom fishing, that we see improvements, and the stocks rebuild, and maybe end overfishing, but that's -- So are you really reducing -- Have you shown how much effort you are reducing by that inshore closure, and maybe it's in the details, or are we just protecting recruitment, and that's making the difference? Are you really -- Can you show how much effort you're reducing by that closure inshore?

DR. HORDYK: I think so one of the things that's really important to answer that sort of question about how the spatial management can impact the rebuilding is what the fleet dynamics are. What we've done right now is we just closed off the fishing. We've got this spatial distribution of the fishing fleet, based on the catch by age, right, and so showing like, for example, that most of --

The assessment has that most of the discards are young fish, and the spatial distribution says that they're mostly inshore, and so that's saying that most of the discards recreational fleet are going on inshore, in the model, right, and so, when we move that to offshore, essentially all those fish that were getting -- Young fish that were getting killed before are no longer being killed, but what we haven't included in the model is a spatial fleet dynamics model and what would happen if we really did this, and, again, the 100-foot thing is because that's the spatial structure of the model that could be changed, but would -- Would really all the effort be moved offshore, or would there be an increase in effort, or would there be a change in effort, and would they move to different species?

All that sort of fleet dynamics stuff could really impact those results, and it hasn't been captured in there right now, and so, to answer your question, the result for the red snapper, in this model, is because there's -- All those discards that are in the model that are focused on these young, small fish are just gone.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and that's kind of along the track I was thinking. I mean, if we -- What's our risk that, if we close inshore, we're not just transferring so much effort offshore that pretty much kills everything, or will they really just stop? You know, I know we're going to protect those fish, but are we going to put so much pressure on the offshore fish that we haven't helped ourselves, and so is there a risk factor built in there, or is there a confidence interval built in, and so we think it's in this range, and then, again, I guess, obviously, when things come to council, then we can say, yes, we really believe that is, or we might feel a little stronger, and then we can adjust, you know, our management approaches accordingly.

DR. HORDYK: Like I kind of mentioned, that's -- I agree that's important, and it's something that you would want to sort of explore those uncertainties in a lot more detail, if this is something that was seriously being proposed for management, because -- Because like, right now, like I said, we basically, if we -- In this model, we assume everything stays the same as it is, unless we've got like we need an alternative, and we need to be able to describe the alternative, and so you're right.

Like I think any of these changes, to any of these fisheries, the management actions, would result in something, different behavior on the water, and so we need to be able to try and characterize what that could look like, and that's kind of a discrete piece of work in itself, is how would the fishery respond to any of these management actions? We don't have that right now, and so, rather than just making something up, we've just assumed that nothing changes, which is probably not right.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: So I have two questions. First, when we're moving the effort offshore, it's not just for bottom fishing. If you sort of close, would you -- Is this considering closure to even like trolling and pelagic fishing? That's my first question.

DR. HORDYK: No, and this is just assuming closure for these stocks, to bottom fishing, yes.

MS. BECKWITH: I guess my second thought is it's pretty clear, especially with what we know about the biology of gag grouper, versus red snapper and black sea bass, that there isn't going to be a one-size-fits-all sort of answer that kind of covers all these species. This is a presentation, and it shows us that that's unlikely to be the case, and so there's not going to be one easy fix for all of these, and so I can't imagine what's going to work for red snapper is going to work for gag, which gives me a little heartburn, when we start talking about big area closures, because, you know, that's -- One, it won't be well received, obviously, but, also, I don't know that it's going to be a full fix across all species, and, if it's complicated for just three, then we have to take into consideration all of the other species that we're managing, and so thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Anna. Other questions? John Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thanks, Adrian, and I think this has been a really great presentation, and great work, because this is not an easy modeling challenge here, and I think you're getting some really good feedback here from the council. I just wanted to add a couple of things that are probably useful to maybe also get from the council.

One are the management objectives, what you want here, are those the things that you want reported out on, and I would offer up -- There's probably some things that people often want, that we might not be seeing here, like fishing days, or something like that, days on the water opportunity, which I think is -- We hear is something that's really desired, and so, if certain management action -- Remember that we're going to rank these, and, eventually, they will be Option 1, 2, or 3.

If you pick the one that has higher yield and higher opportunity, well, that's great, and so maybe try to develop an operational management objective based on like days of fishing, if possible. There might be others, and so start thinking about what are the things that would help you make a decision about which one is better than the other.

Then, on the operating model structure, which remember this is trying to get advisement from the council on are these operating models structured right, and I'm hearing a strong desire to explore regime change in this, and I think that that's getting to John's point about the starting time, and it's what we've been talking about almost with every stock assessment we do, is has there been a regime change, and is recruitment now at some new either higher or lower level?

That's probably something that's good to put in, and it might not materially affect the ranking, or the performance, of the different MPs, but what it might do is alleviate the concern that we are predicated solely on the stock assessments, and what we want to be able to do is say that the best ranking managed procedure actually is independent of some of the assumptions that are in the stock assessment.

That's the value of this. We're not beholden to the assumptions in the assessment, and so probably putting in some regime change, either in the future, and then maybe it might be helpful to alleviate that concern, because we're certainly talking about that with black sea bass, is have they left the region.

Then these options -- While these are only really two options explored from the status quo, there's a whole lot of other ranges here, and I think we don't want to get hung up on that, just because there was two presented, that that's the only ones, and I think that's where the real feedback and iteration from this council is going to be critical, is saying try this one out, because this might be implementable. You'll get that feedback on how it performs, and then, oh, wait, could we change this a little bit, but right now is the time to get that feedback on the operational management objectives, so that we are coding up and getting the ones that people want reported out, the operating model structure, so it's able to test the management options, and those are really the two keys now.

Obviously, it would be good to say things that might be might actually be going into place. Maybe we should call that the status quo, and make sure that we're -- All we have to do is beat the status quo, and it shouldn't be too hard to beat the status quo, particularly on something like opportunity, right, and get more than one day of fishing, and that would be beating the status quo. Anyway, great work, and I think this is a good conversation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, John, and you're getting into the kind of what else we would want to look at, which we're going to transition to that in just a minute, but we still have more hands up. We have Jimmy next, and then Tim.

MR. HULL: I was going to more of what we want to look at, and so I can wait.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let's go to Tim, and then we'll come back to what do we want to look at. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, and thank you for the presentation, and I think this kind of leads me into what we want to look at next, but I just want to make sure that I've got my arms around how the MSE -- How this evaluation starts from the beginning, and I'm understanding it's a direct input from BAM, and so the data is directly imported, and so if -- None of these evaluations are running scenario evaluations of an I changing input models from BAM, and these are changing scenarios of management decisions, and not data points, and not what was in BAM, and is that correct?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and so they all use the BAM model, and so the only deviation we have from that are listed here. They change some of the parameters of the data that went into the BAM model, and rerun it, but the essential structure of the assessment model hasn't changed at all, and so, no, that hasn't been -- That wasn't something that was explored. It was based on the assessments or deviations from that, the data or the assumptions in that assessment, but the same model was run to create the operating models.

MR. GRINER: Great. Okay. So, with MSE aside, if that particular BAM model run was deemed unusual by the SSC, when they reviewed it, does that -- That would then necessarily translate to anything that was run from the MSE -- Any MSE run from that BAM model would therefore no longer be usable, no matter what different inputs, no matter what different scenarios you looked at, because they would all be based on that initial BAM?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and I think the answer is a little complicate, because it depends on what you're trying to measure from this. If we're trying to get results that predict like the probability of the stock recovering by this year, something very specific, it's not -- It's a prediction, right, and an MSE can be -- It's challenging, because, like you say, the prediction depends entirely on what the assumptions are, and one of them is the model that went into it, and so what you often do -- Like you say, there's alternative models. If there was uncertainty between them -- I think if you had a model that said that's wrong, flat-out wrong, you wouldn't use it.

If there was in uncertainty competing models, and there was this assessment model and this assessment model, with a completely different structure, or whatever, and there was an arguments, or disagreements, between which was the appropriate, that's what MSE is actually designed to do, and so then you can find your actual quantitative predictions, and like the probability of rebuilding by certain years will be different between them, but if you can --

Like John was saying earlier, if you can find a management approach that, under both those scenarios, gets you the sort of the best option, the best candidate, then you can say, look, we don't -- We can't really predict the future, right, and let's not pretend we can, but we have some confidence that, even give this uncertainty in these two different assessment models, or whatever, this approach is still the most likely to be better than anything else, and so that's something we can have confidence in the management approach, even though we can't really predict quantitatively exactly what the expected outcomes are. Does that make sense?

MR. GRINER: Yes, but you would need to -- You would need another model to compare that to, from the assessment side.

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and we need some way -- We need some way of characterizing the fishery, and so we've done this sort of thing in really data-poor fisheries, where we have very little information, but, of course, then you can imagine an operating model is your -- It's a hypothesis, a description of the fishery dynamics. The less certain you are about that, the more uncertainty is in that operating model. If you have a really uncertain, data-poor fishery, you can say like the historical fishery, rather than being what we saw here as a clear line, would be like a big mess of lines, because the fishery could be in a great state, or it could be in a terrible state, all this uncertainty. You can still do the same approach, but, the more uncertainty you have in the historical dynamics, the more uncertainty you're going to have in your predictions.

MR. GRINER: Just one more. So is your evaluation able to handle inputs, new inputs, that would have gone into the BAM? For instance, you know, if you wanted to -- Could you change that mortality, that F , where you kept it constant, and could you change that into an outcome? Could you change discards? Could you change any other data points that were in that BAM model, and see what it affects?

DR. HORDYK: Yes. The answer is yes, and you can change anything. We have the control over all aspects of it. The challenge is like what specific -- Like what exactly do you want to change? If somebody can propose like a specific scenario, and so that was kind of this one, this third one, where I think it was at the AP meeting that it came up as a fairly important issue. There was some arguments that the recreational effort, or, sorry, removals were too high, or whatever. This sort of thing, it doesn't really matter whether it's right or wrong, and it's about if people really believe something, and so, like you were describing, if someone says this is a better model, or better data, or better parameters, yes, that can be rerun and incorporated in the same way.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I was going to point out this exact same run is, you know, the inputs that go into BAM -- There can be sensitivity tests that are applied to it, to make sure that what was used in BAM is -- The management measures that are coming out are robust to those inputs to BAM, and so, like you said, there was very little changes in the overall stock status for changing the recreational removals.

Another thing that could be looked at is differing time periods for recent recruitment. In this model right now, our recent recruitment is the last ten years. If you looked at black sea bass over the past ten years, it has not been on a positive trajectory, and so what happens if you do -- If you use average recruitment over those past ten years, it's a very different picture than maybe what was used for the projections, and so we might need to consider what would be a good recruitment scenario to use for these different species going forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions? Amy, did you have your hand up?

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Chip, for talking about that change in sort of that short-term to long-term recruitment. Can those recruitment scenarios be altered by the species as well, so you can

run a different sort of scenario for each of those species, and you don't have to have a standard one, correct? Okay.

DR. HORDYK: Yes, that's right. We can control any aspect of it, and so we can control recruitment, growth, mortality, anything you like, and so, again, what we kind of need is a proposal, like a scenario, like look at this, because particularly the recruitment one is difficult.

You can see, in those plots, that -- Like Chip was saying, like this one, or any of them, the black sea bass is rebounding so quickly because it's where -- The model is assuming that, on average, it kind of returns back to the -- I haven't shown it, but we ran that scenario where the recruitment in the future was just based on the most recent ten years, and, like Chip said, it's very different. The black sea bass is just flat, or declining, and like it's completely different, and so it matters what those scenarios are, but the challenge is coming up with those scenarios in a defensible way, or, you know, there's lots of different alternatives you can come up with, but, if there's something to be investigated, you describe what you want to look at, and we can model it, for sure.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Do you have anything else, Amy? Okay. Do we want to kind of transition into kind of the next steps? So maybe, and, Chip, I don't know how you want to capture this for us. We could either start with the list that the SSC had for next steps, or we could start with the list that Adrian had, but do you, you know, want to put some of these on the screen? Thank you, Adrian.

All right. What we have typed up here, for future iterations, was grabbing everything that was in Adrian's presentation, as well as grabbing the items from the SSC presentation, and so this captures a number of the things that we were talking about, but I want to make sure we capture other things, and so one example is what John Sanchez brought up about the start year, and so I'm not sure where to capture that, Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I think that would go under a key uncertainty. That could be tested as a sensitivity.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

DR. COLLIER: Adrian, if I'm wrong, just speak up, and he had mentioned that that would be related to reference points as well.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're capturing that. What else is missing here? Jimmy, you said that you had some ideas. What's on your list?

MR. HULL: Yes, ma'am. Well, you captured them on the aggregate bag limit, but one thing that I heard earlier was days at sea. That's something that is used, and has been effective. Maybe some type of days at sea analysis of weekends or --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We got that one. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Jimmy, are you meaning like the length of a season?

MR. HULL: No, and I mean -- So, just for an example, most private recreational anglers I know, they fish on the weekend, right, and not during the week, and so, if they were just fishing on the

weekends. and they weren't -- Their effort was reduced to just weekends, what do you get? You know, you're not assuming all those -- All that effort during the remainder of the weekdays, and what does that result in, and so you're reducing the effort by doing that. Most of them fish on the weekends anyway, as far as the general recreational. Something like that, just any type -- I'm thinking of any other type of option other than a spatial closure to throw at this and see what we get.

MR. GRINER: Yes, me too, and, when you said it, it started making me think. You know, one of the things that I think was interesting, that we found that we see in the Gulf, is, the longer they open -- The longer the season is open, the less days people actually fish. It gets spread out, and so there is no rush to fish, and those weekends that were jam-packed with people are no longer jam-packed with people, and so I think it would be very interesting to see what happened if you just opened the -- If you opened it at, you know, whatever bag limit, one per person, but open it for ninety days, May, June, and July. Just open it, and let it open. What would happen to the discards? What would happen to the landings, and what would be -- When would people fish, and how would that spread out through that time? Is that what this can do?

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and so I think that's super interesting, and that's sort of like different mechanisms to change the actual fishing effort. We can -- That can be modelled. The challenge is like how do we model that? How do we -- We need to know, and like we need to predict how that's going to happen, what's going to happen, and so the modeling isn't the problem. It's trying to specify the model that's the challenge.

So, to do that, ideally, you need some sort of empirical data, like an experiment where you try that, and, like you said, there's data from -- Maybe there's data from the Gulf, and I don't know, or maybe from elsewhere, but to build that model that predicts that, because, otherwise, we just -- We don't know. Like if we if we increase the season length by X number of days, or whatever, the result is going to depend entirely on what the fleet does in the model, and we need to be able to characterize that, one way or another, and so that needs to come from empirical data, some sort of research.

MR. GRINER: Right. CPUE.

DR. HORDYK: CPUE, or, essentially, what we need is data points where you've got like, on the X-axis, the number of days fishing, and then like the fishing effort, like you're saying, so you can see. So then, in the model, we can say, okay, if it's gone from here to here, this is what the fleet is going to respond. Without that, we can't characterize the model to say what happens if you went fishing when the season was thirty days, rather than five days, or whatever. We can't characterize how the fleet is going to respond, because we don't have the data to be able to realistically say that.

MR. GRINER: Chip, do we have, do we have data to do something like that? Can the data be teased out from what we have?

DR. COLLIER: Probably not, and so we do have an ongoing situation assessment, that Kai Lorenzen at the University of Florida is doing, in order to gather some of this information. There's also a paper by Tara Topping that looked at this non-linearity response that you were talking about, and I believe it was for red snapper, where they were looking at the season length differences over for the Gulf red snapper in Texas.

It was definitely a non-linear response, with -- You know, as you get fewer and fewer days, it is a much steeper response. More people are going to be going on those days when they're more limited, but I don't know if there would be -- If people would be comfortable with borrowing that model for the South Atlantic, but it could be a starting point, and it could be a robustness test.

MR. GRINER: I really think that's the utility in this thing, is being able to do things like that. I mean, because at the end of the day, those are real-life results right there. That's what is really and truly happening, and it could make a big difference on how we manage this fishery.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so good points. I've got a number of hands. I have John Sanchez, John Walter, Kerry, and Andy.

MR. SANCHEZ: I'm going to pass. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. John Walter.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think John and I were going to touch upon the same thing, and so the Gulf -- There's work by Sean Powers that looked at, I'll say, effort decompression, based on the seasons getting longer, right, and so we do have some empirical data. We may be able to tease apart, at least with the specialized survey that FWC has run now for almost a decade, but I think the longest season we ever had was probably about nine days, under that survey, versus the one this year, and that's heavily dependent on weather conditions as well, and so you have to make sure you're addressing that confounding factor.

While I have the mic, I guess the other thing that I was going to mention, and, you know, we talk about these scenarios, in terms of changes in effort, and don't know a lot about effort shifting, but there's also some pretty substantial economic consequences that I could see with some of these decisions, and tradeoffs, right, and so for-hire trips, right, and will headboats be profitable if they make offshore trips? Will they get enough customers that can afford to make those offshore trips, right, and so is there a way of also incorporating kind of the economics of this into the modeling?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip is capturing that. I guess I would also come back to the discussion that we had earlier about the life history of some of these species, and so we got into maybe closing the offshore area wouldn't help gag as much as maybe it helps red snapper. Is that -- Do you think that that's captured under one of these, Chip, or do we need to try to capture that?

DR. COLLIER: I don't think it's covered under one of these. Maybe it could be added as additional species, species interactions, and then life history variants.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Next up, Kerry.

MR. MARHEFKA: I'm struggling a little bit. I'm mostly -- I want us to be very cautious. I'm a little concerned we're running -- This conversation has the potential to run into some of the same issues we had yesterday with the dolphin MSE, in that, right now, there are several management things that are actually coming down the pipe, right, the secretarial amendment, and we're working on the commercial subgroup, and that's -- The latter is what made me think of it.

Like, for the commercial industry, we're working on throwing out all these ideas, and trying to figure out what's best for that sector. I want to be really clear about, so that there is no confusion to the public, or to us, that this is sort of a thought exercise, more than a here are things right now we're considering, because it makes me hold back on things I want to throw in there, because we are actually considering some other things right now. I'm not quite sure how to square that. You know, I hear days at sea, and that's something we've never talked about before. I certainly am not dismissing that as an answer at all. I'm just -- How do we make sure it's clear that it's part of an exercise for this, versus where we've actually really talked about going at this time? It just makes me a little nervous.

DR. COLLIER: I would say if you're not considering going there -- I mean, management is key in this. It's a scenario that you are thinking about moving forward with, and so, if you're not thinking about managing days at sea, we don't need to explore that as a management objective.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, sure, but I just -- But I don't know that. Maybe that is the answer. Maybe, you know, it gets plugged into the model. I'm not saying it's -- That you're like, oh, that's the thing, you know, and so I don't want to throw anything out, but I just want us to be, at least verbally on the record, conscious about how we frame what we're putting in there, so that it's clear, so that we can be really creative in the things we ask for, which I think is the utility of this tool, and gets me excited about this tool, and so I don't want to stifle anything. I can't say whether or not days at sea is a thing, but I want -- That's what I'm having trouble with.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Adrian.

DR. HORDYK: Yes, and I agree. I think it's important to communicate that with management strategy evaluation, because it really is a what-if analysis, and, with that, anything can go, right, any ideas, and so what if this was true, and what if we did this? Then how would that perform, or compare? If this was true, we did that, you know, and so I think you're right that you need to communicate that in a way of just any ideas are valuable, in terms of -- That's why I tried to kind of caution it with the things we looked at here. It's just this broad scope of like what if we did these fairly extreme things, just to better identify what doesn't work, what's more promising. Then, like John said earlier, it's kind of an iterative process. We can narrow things down, to be able to find something that's actually recommended.

MS. MARHEFKA: Sorry. Last thing. I guess then should though we be cautious, and it's obviously time consuming, and I suspect can then be a somewhat expensive process, and so do we want -- I think maybe what Chip is getting at is then do we need to be careful that we're really only choosing realistic things, and less from your perspective, but more from how do we responsibly manage this process, time and fiscally?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip, did you want to respond?

DR. COLLIER: Well, and Adrian can respond to that too, because he would know how much it is to model some of these things. I mean, just -- You know, it's simple to put in there, but, you know, just response to aggregate bag limit, that is a very difficult challenge, when we only have three species in here, but an aggregate bag limit is likely to include many more species than just

those three, and understanding how the fleet dynamics will change based on that is -- You know, it's a challenging question, and figuring out how to do it.

I know Adrian has worked on many of these MSEs, and I believe he worked on some fisheries like the rockfish fishery, which has similar dynamics to our snapper grouper fishery, and so he might be able to speak to it a little bit more.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Adrian.

DR. HORDYK: Well, I mean, one thing is it's certainly -- If not the most, certainly one of the most, complex fisheries that we've worked on. Like, as you know, it's complicated. It's not just the number of different sort of sectors that are involved, the number of species, and such a large geographic region and all that, and so it's complicated, and so --

I think, to me, I've always -- In many MSEs processes that I've been involved in, things can kind of drag on, because it's so -- The scope is so wide, and so I would recommend trying to focus it, to explore -- The comment earlier was about don't worry about exploring things that you may, and you explore -- Is this an idea worth exploring further or not? You can certainly have a sort of a broader scope, but try to keep it focused on what's the main management question, or what are we trying to answer, and then get as quickly as you can to that point.

Another point, while I've got the mic, is I wanted to kind of -- To something that Andy said earlier about, and also Tim was talking about this effort compression and so on, and something that may be worth considering, for the council, is sort of this adaptive management approach, because like some of these things we don't have the data for, and we don't know what's going to happen if we do certain things.

We may have some models that can predict it, but one idea is to sort of use this sort of modelling to try and find something that's promising, and then do some sort of experimental management, and so, with that, you've got to set up a data collection protocol, so you can gather the information that you need, and they can see is the fishery responding, is the fisheries fleet responding the way that we predicted, or in the right direction, or things getting worse, and it's sort of an adaptive management approach, rather than do lots and lots of modeling to try and find the answer and then implement that, because that can take a long, long time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: So, when we went through the visioning process, we got some great feedback from different component fisheries, and I remember recreational folks liked the idea of an aggregate bag limit, but what they were sort of asking for, at the time, was to give us one number of fish that we can keep sort of regardless of if it's, you know, five black sea bass, five gag, whatever. When that sort of came back around the table for discussion, that was, obviously, very difficult to do, because of the other constraints that we had on these particular species.

I wonder if there's something else that was discussed in the visioning, you know, that might -- That we might would be able to go back and reflect on and pull into this that would have already had some sort of built-in support by the community, but I would have to go back and kind of review the visioning document.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we're in the process of reviewing the visioning document on the commercial stuff that was in there, and so it's a good point. I guess I would make a suggestion that -- I mean, we have a lot of ideas up here, and maybe we think about this and discuss this again when we get to Full Council. Like is this the right list? Do we want to take things off the list, based on whether or not we think we would do them, et cetera, and that would give us a little more time to think about it. Does that sound good? Chip will email you this list, so that you can have it and think about it.

Why don't we go ahead and take a break? You know, we're going to get ready for public comment here in a few minutes, but let's go ahead and take a break, and we're done with the MSE stuff for the committee. Thanks, everybody.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're going to come back to the table and we're going to do the Commercial Subcommittee, and then we're going to go into public comment, and so we're going to try to do the commercial subcommittee before we start public comment, and so we're jumping around in the agenda, and so if folks could come on back to the table.

We're going to try to do one more quick thing before we go into public comment, because we need to start public comment at 4:00, and not early, and so, with that being said, I'm going to turn it over to Mike to talk a little bit about our new subcommittee and our recent virtual meeting.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you, Jessica. The Snapper Grouper Commercial Subcommittee met on November 5th of 2024. We met between the last two council meetings, and they reviewed some of the commercial issues that were brought up during the visioning conducted for 2016 through 2020, and so there's a long list of topics that have kind of been put out.

The council kind of developed this long list of topics for them to review, and they talked about several of these in some length of detail. I'm going to scroll down past those, so you can review those parts of the report, because the ultimate conclusion that was reached by the subcommittee was that prioritization of those topics was a bit premature, just for the amount of information that they had and the timing of this meeting, and so they put together an information request of staff, and we're going to be working on trying to pull all those different pieces together, in between now and the next time the subcommittee meets.

The subcommittee requested that their next meeting should be in-person, and before the March 2025 council meeting, so that -- We'll try to pull together as much of the information as we can within that timeframe, so that they can review that and try to develop a bit more of a prioritized list and talk about the concerns that this subcommittee will be addressing for the commercial sector.

That's kind of a very broad overview of what happened at the subcommittee meeting. If you have specific questions about what's in the report, or some of the discussions that were had, then we can address those, but kind of the big takeaway was staff is working on gathering more information, and the subcommittee wants to meet in-person for their next meeting, and they want that meeting

to be in between now and the March council meeting. So, with that, I'll turn it back to you Madam Chair.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you Mike. Are there any questions, or comments, about the subcommittee? So the -- Once again, the intention is to have this subcommittee meet before the next council meeting, including if that is at the very beginning of the next council meeting, or the day before. Any questions, or comments? I don't see any hands. All right. So now -- Since that concluded relatively quickly, now we're going to dive into having Nick test the mics for the people that are online for public comment.

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

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DECEMBER 5, 2024

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Lumina Holiday Inn, Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, on Thursday, December 5, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going this morning. We're still in the Snapper Grouper Committee, and, first up, we're going to go into Amendment 46, because one of our folks giving us an AP report can only do that this morning, and so, first up under Amendment 46, is the Private Angler AP report, and I'm going to turn it over to John Hadley, and then he's going to be turning it over to Martha Guyas, who is the chair of the AP, but I'm going to turn it to John.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you. So, as mentioned, we'll start off with the AP report this morning, and then the idea is to jump into the decision document afterwards, and so, before I hand it over to Martha, I just wanted to thank the AP for their input, and, also, just to get everyone kind of coordinated on what the AP reviewed, they were focused on the education requirement, and the related actions and alternatives with that, and then also the potential exemption to the federal permit requirement for states that would intend to, or have, their own permitting and education requirement, equivalent requirement, in place, and so that was sort of the general crux of the discussion, and, without further ado, I will hand it over to Martha.

MS. GUYAS: Thanks, John. Can you all hear me?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. Perfect.

MS. GUYAS: Okay. So John mentioned that we met in early November. We do have a chair and vice chair now. That's why I'm giving you this report. Trip Aukeman is the vice chair, and, as John mentioned, we focused on the last three actions in our discussion at this meeting. If you all recall, we met back in May and discussed the earlier actions, at that meeting, and so, if you want

to refresh your memory about that discussion, check out the report in the June 2024 council briefing book.

So we had a really good discussion about an education requirement potentially to go along with the permit. Pretty much everybody felt that an education requirement would need to be required before the permit is issued, and so that would correspond with Alternative 2 under Action 3, and we had a lot of discussion about what that education requirement should look like, in terms of how long the training should be, how frequently it should be taken.

I think we kind of landed around, you know, the more substantial education requirement, and so, in words, how long the class is, the more likely some anglers would be deterred from participating in the snapper grouper fishery, and so, if it's very burdensome, you may have people that opt out and do not get the permit. There's a lot of people that are first-time anglers, or they're not regular anglers, and maybe they're just a guest on someone's boat, and they're going to go fishing as a private angler, and so, you know, this may be difficult for them to achieve.

It wasn't unanimous, but we did talk about a vessel-based permit makes more sense, in that sense, as opposed to an angler based, but there's tradeoffs there, right, and so, you know, if you want individual anglers to be competent in, you know, learning the education things that you're trying to convey to them, then, you know, in that case, an angler permit makes sense.

We did discuss how -- Or one of the questions really was how the council would handle licensing exemptions and lifetime license holders, and so, for example, I'll use myself as an example. I have a lifetime license in Florida, and so, if this permit is somehow tied to that license, would there be a requirement for me to do this annually, or semi-annually, or whatever time interval that you all discussed? I can say, for the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, it's separate, and so, even though I have a lifetime license, I still have to do Florida State Reef Fish Survey annually. Anyway, that was a question and just something that we flagged as something that the council would need to discuss.

This is going back to the discussion about how often the requirement should be completed. There are mixed feelings about this. We did talk about, you know, if you have a more substantial initial course, perhaps that could be followed-up with a refresher periodically, as either materials are updated, to make sure that they have the -- That they're aware of the latest information, whether it's regulations or best fishing practices or what have you.

We did discuss, with Action 4, Alternative 5, that communicating that permit holders need to re-complete that education requirement, you know, as it is updated, could be challenging, rather than doing it as at a regular interval, and so we did feel like having it on a regular interval, and so, in other words, like the education requirement, or certificate, expires with the permit, and that would make more sense, because we felt like communication about when that education component is updated, and would be required to be taken again, would be a challenge.

Then we did make -- One recommendation we had for the council was to work with the state agencies and communicate with them about one-time education requirements, like boating and hunter safety courses, and some AP members felt like that could potentially be a model for how this works. There were even -- You know, some members felt like even a, you know, multi-hour course, you know, could be something that could work here. That was not a unanimous thought,

but these are the tradeoffs that we were talking about, like doing a long course one time, versus a shorter course multiple times, and so we really dug into this subject, and I know there were a few council members that were able to listen, and thank you for being able to do that.

Kind of digging more into that, in terms of how long the education module should take, you know, our recommendation really depended on how this is structured, whether it's a one-time-only deal or if it's taken multiple times. We felt like, if it was a one-time-only requirement, it could be a longer course.

We did have a range of alternatives here. You know, some of us felt like it really needs to be short and sweet and to the point, but we did have discussions also about a more substantial, potentially multi-hour course, and then I already -- I think I already mentioned this, but, if it's a multiple-time course, perhaps the initial course is more substantial, and then the refresher is truly a refresher and just provides updates, and, again, keeping those to, you know, a max of fifteen minutes or so.

Then we also talked about, you know, the length of the course may vary with the permit type. If you're doing a more vessel-based permit, it may be reasonable to have a longer time education requirement with that, kind of thinking along the lines of boater safety where, you know, as the captain of the vessel, you know, you've had to take time to educate yourself on, you know, how to maneuver the boat, and, in this case, how to practice best fishing practices. Then, for an angler-based permit, for convenience of anglers that may or may not -- Or may be jumping into the fishery, you know, just for to fish for one time a year, and not necessarily having the mastery, a shorter course may be more appropriate in that case.

In terms of what should be in the education requirement, we did feel like best fishing practices and barotrauma mitigation should be the priority. I mean, that's -- We kind of felt like that was the whole point of this. The point of the permit was to reduce release mortality, and that really should be the focus.

We discussed, a little bit, the Outreach and Communication AP's recommendations, and concurred with those, largely. Again, they also felt like streamlining it to best fishing practices and descending devices was the way to go. We felt like helping anglers that are taking the course understand why they are taking it is important. That hopefully goes without saying, but, you know, you never know.

Then we discussed a couple of other models out there that the council could consider as they're putting this together, such as the Highly Migratory Species angling permit. Florida has -- They have a shark endorsement, also. Florida has a shore-based shark fishing permit, and the purpose of that is education. We talked a little bit about the Florida red snapper EFP education that they are doing, and then, also the Return 'Em Right program, which isn't associated with a formal permit, but is certainly, we thought, a successful education program aimed towards anglers.

Just a couple other things, and then we'll be wrapping up here shortly. We felt like outreach is going to be very important, given a lot of the trust issues that you all talked about earlier in the week, and we talked about at our first meeting, and so, you know, we thought it would be beneficial to have certainly South Atlantic staff, and other staff, perhaps agency staff, but also ambassadors, perhaps, from the industry to demonstrate the education module.

One idea that we had was to have an online course that presumably would be accessed by most anglers, but also give people that attend in-person education seminars the opportunity to earn their education requirement from doing that, and so I think Julia talked about some of those partnerships that council staff have had, where they're working to teach best fishing practices at fishing seminars in-person, you know, demonstrating how to use the equipment, and giving people an interactive chance to learn about that. That would be -- I mean, that's even better than doing an online course, we felt like, and could help, you know, build relationships and rebuild trust within the fishing community and the council.

We also felt like, really, the council needs to make a final decision on vessel-based, versus angler-based, before we could really, you know, flesh out really what this looks like. That seems to be the first step, and so, you know, based on how that's structured, the rest of the permit details would fall in line based on that.

Then it was not on our list of things to talk about, necessarily, but, you know, most AP members, and this came up multiple times during our meeting, felt like some kind of angler reporting should be associated with the permit. There was a lot of discussion, and confusion, about what is the purpose of the permit, as it is right now, as a standalone item, and it felt like there were a lot of different ways that reporting could be done, but that that definitely should be explored, and, again, feeling like a standalone permit was probably not so useful, but coupling that with some kind of reporting, or data collection, you know, would have much more utility.

On Action 5, the exemption from a federal permit, AP members, most AP members, felt like the states were probably better equipped to administer a permit, given that most anglers are already working with the states to get their fishing licenses, and other permits, and so there's already a process there that anglers are familiar with, and the infrastructure is already there. We also discussed a little bit the trust of anglers in state agencies. I think you all saw some of that in the report-out from the Citizen Science Committee earlier this week as well.

We did feel like avoiding dual federal and state permits should be a priority dual permitting, having anglers have to get both a federal permit and a state permit, like in the case of Florida, with their State Reef Fish Survey, would be confusing, and probably would compromise existing efforts and then whatever efforts come out of this federal permit to improve recreational data.

Then we also discussed, if there is an exemption, we would like to see reciprocity between the states on the permit and the education requirement. In other words, if an angler gets a Florida permit, rather than the federal permit, or a state permit in another state -- You know, if that Florida angler goes to South Carolina, it would be nice if that Florida permit was recognized there, given that they had gone through the education requirement and are doing all the things they need to do to have that permit. That's it. I'm happy to take questions, if there are any at this point. If not, thanks for your time, and sorry to have to do this online, but I had to dash to another meeting this morning.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Martha. Great presentation. It looks like you guys did a lot of work. Are there questions for Martha? This is going to be our only opportunity to ask her questions, because she's had to hop off. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: Hi, Martha. Thanks for the presentation. I appreciate it. Do you have -- Your group, do they want vessel, or are they leaning towards an angler-based permit? Did they say what they would like preferred?

MS. GUYAS: I don't think we came to consensus, but I would say that the group was leaning more towards vessel. You know, we kind of talked -- We talked about a lot of the tradeoffs, mostly in our first meeting, if I'm remembering, but some of it did come up in this one as well.

Let's see. I'm looking at the old notes, from our past meeting, just to see if we did. So, yes, it looks like we were -- Looking at our notes from our May meeting, we circled around vessels, and here's some of the things that came out of that that we talked about. I mentioned, earlier in the presentation, angler-based may be a deterrent for some people. If they're an infrequent fisherman, they may just, you know, give up by that regulatory burden.

Then I think members of the panel felt like vessel owners are just, in general, going to be more experienced with fishing. They're going to be more experienced with fish ID. You know, there's an added responsibility that comes with being in charge of operating a vessel, and so those were reasons why the council may want to go to a vessel-based permit.

Then, you know, there's pros and cons, I think, from a data collection standpoint. I know there was the other AP that talked about some of those things. There are reasons why you want to do it vessel. There's reasons why you'd want to do it angler.

We did -- I'm looking at our notes from our May meeting. If there's not a reporting requirement, we felt like vessel-based makes more sense there, but, if anglers are supposed to be reporting what they caught, you know, it may be -- There may be reasons why you would want individual anglers to report their individual catch that way, and, in that sense, you would want an angler-based permit. A couple of the things that we discussed were enforceability might be a little easier with vessel-based, easier to check on the water and at the ramp, and then that's all I got, Judy, unless you have more questions.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you very much.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Other questions for Martha? Sonny.

MR. GWIN: Thank you. Was there any talk about cost associated with getting a permit?

MS. GUYAS: I think, in our first meeting, we asked about cost, but we really didn't -- We haven't really dug into that, Sonny, in terms of making a recommendation or anything like that. Is that what you mean?

MR. GWIN: Yes, that's correct.

MS. GUYAS: Okay. That was mostly a question that we had, I think.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for bringing that up, Sonny. I was curious. I guess I'm under the impression that the cost is kind of capped. It can't be more than the actual cost to administer putting the permit forth, right? Does that change whether the states implement this or whether it's a federal permit? Would each state have a different fee?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't know that that's a Martha question.

MS. GUYAS: I hope it's not, because I don't know the answer.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So we could dive into that, you know, when we get into the amendment. I don't know that we're going to have a ton of answers on it, but -- More questions on the AP's discussion? Okay. I see heads nodding no. All right. Thank you, Martha. Thanks for doing this via webinar.

MS. GUYAS: Thank you. I hope you all have a good meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Now, John is going to dive into the document.

MR. HADLEY: All right, and so, following along the decision document that was provided for Amendment 46, and, also, before I go any further, I did want to thank Martha for being available to present today. She was recently elected chair, and so it was kind of short notice, and so I appreciate being able to work it into the council's agenda, that was already set, after the AP meeting, but thank you.

Moving over to the decision document, the idea is to have a quick rundown of Amendment 46, and then there are sort of a few items, certainly some housekeeping items, on some of the actions and alternatives in the latter half of the amendment, and the idea here, you know, in general, is to get the momentum going on this amendment. It's been -- Really, the last time the council has had a chance to dive into this in detail was the March meeting, March 2024 meeting, and so it's been a while, and so, you know, there's a little bit of momentum that we need to get going again, and so the idea is to go over the contents of the amendment and get your feedback on how you would like to move forward.

You did have the discussion, in June, where you did review the AP feedback, but you didn't have a chance to go into the decision document, and the details of the action, and so, really, a lot of the actions in here are similar to what has been developed since June. As a little bit of a reminder, there's been several APs, and AP meetings, that have provided feedback on this amendment. There are links to each one of those various reports in the background information, on the first page, and you can see all the various meetings there.

Then, looking over -- You know, generally speaking, the overarching view of this amendment, there's five general actions, and so there's -- The first two actions focus on the permit, specifically developing the permit, and so you establish the permit, and the permit type, and then you specify what species are covered by the permit.

The next two actions focus on what was just reviewed regarding the education requirement, and so establishing the education requirement, and specifying how often that requirement would need to be satisfied, and the last action looks at establishing an exemption to the federal permit

requirement if there is essentially an equivalent permit, or license, as well as education requirement, put in place by states, and so we'll get into the details of each one of those actions as we move further down the document.

As I mentioned, the objectives for this meeting really are to get the momentum going on this amendment, gather your feedback on the actions and alternatives, and then, also, there was an item, and Martha mentioned it, regarding providing feedback on potential exemptions to permit and education requirements. That was an item that was brought up by the Private Angler Advisory Panel as well as your technical AP, and so your Permitting and Reporting AP suggested that council discuss that part of the permitting provision.

Looking at general amendment timing, and then I'll pause for any questions, but, you know, generally speaking, as I mentioned, the last time this was reviewed in detail was March 2024. We're kind of getting the ball rolling again on this amendment, and so we're really looking towards -- Building towards approval for public hearings sometime in the first half of next year, and so whether that would be either at the March meeting or the June meeting, and it's certainly at the council's discretion, but that's kind of the next step in this. We're sort of in the middle part of that amendment development process, moving towards approval for public hearings, and so, before I get into the purpose and need and actions, are there any questions, generally speaking, on the amendment?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'm thinking long-term. You know, we've got -- For instance, we've got charter boat permits for snapper grouper, and we've got charter boat permits for mackerels, and we've got charter -- You know, we've got different charter boats, and are we looking, or thinking, or have we even thought about, are we going to, you know, require permits for other fisheries at some point in time, so that, when we're collecting data, we know the suite of what's going on, instead of, you know, compartmentalizing things, and so I'm just kind of thinking on the long-term, you know. So, if we build an education, you know, segment, are we going to build an education segment that might be valid for any and all future permits, or just -- I'm just kind of thinking long-term.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So let me ask you a question. Do you mean that there would just be a kind of a generic private angler permit to fish for any council-managed species, and so meaning like coastal migratory pelagic and snapper grouper, and is that what you're saying? I'm just kind of confused about what you're asking.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, I'm asking the question of what do we really need, in the long-term, as far as, you know, data, who is doing what, who is catching what, and long-term. I know snapper grouper are the hot species right now, and kings are in good shape, and so on and so forth, but I'm just thinking further down the road, so, when we build the mousetrap, it fits for where we're going down the road. Does that kind of make sense?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I'm just thinking about how you would expand this. Maybe other committee members have other ideas, because some of the things that I was thinking are so it's -- I'm just also going to put it back to the committee. Do we need to consider reporting? That keeps coming up, and there's no reporting in here.

If we are going to consider reporting, then I think that we need to consider the species that are in the fishery management unit, and start a process to examine those, because I don't think that anglers can report on fifty-five species, and so we talked about this earlier in the week, and we've already encountered some issues with this with Florida's exempted fishing permit, and so you've got multiple ideas, and questions, on the table, and so Trish, and then Kerry.

MS. MURPHEY: So, Charlie, this is my thought on what you're getting at. To me, right now, this is focusing on snapper grouper, and it's been a long discussion, and it's taken a lot of time. This would be what I would suggest, is maybe go ahead and get through this snapper grouper one, get it on the books, get it working, and then we can consider expanding this to the other species, and to the other FMPs. I mean, that's a suggestion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, I agree. You know, we probably want to eat the elephant one bite at a time, but I just kind of want to think the larger picture, and I agree that, if we don't have at least some - - That there will be -- You may be randomly picked for, you know, some reporting, and that should be a bare minimum in here, that you could be randomly picked for reporting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, it sounds like you see where we're at, and there was a time, at the very beginning, where I was hoping so too. Like, if we're going to do it, let's do it, but then, once we really get into the meat of it, and found out how complicated it was going to be, it made sense to sort of -- What we've always heard on the Snapper Grouper AP, I think you and I, since the 1990s, is, you know, at least for the deepwater snapper grouper species, right, and I'm not saying that's where we're going, but I think that there's a lot of public buy-in, very good buy-in, for doing it in this fishery. It seems like the place to start.

Back to Jessica's point, it does sound like reporting is back in play. I'm personally -- Not having to be anyone who deals with the data and the complexities of that, I'm very much onboard with bringing that back in, because, for me, that's -- If we're going to do it, let's do it right, and what's the point of doing it, if we're not doing that, and I'm also in complete agreement that that means we really need to be thoughtful, and pick our species, and we are -- 100 percent, I know we cannot do fifty-five species, and so I'm supportive of figuring out how to add reporting and define which species we're doing this for, and it seems like we need to do it now, don't we?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so I would say yes to all of those things, but we've got more hands going up. Andy, and then Tim.

MR. STRELCHECK: Just to comment about the reporting requirement, kind of like what Amy did the other day with SEFHIER, I think we need to have this discussion, you know, now, because at least the original vision, the way I was understanding it, was this was going to be a way of improving our effort estimation, right, and you define the universe of snapper grouper anglers, and then you're able to survey those anglers, at some finer scale than what we're doing with the permitting data, and then ultimately get better estimates of effort for our snapper grouper complex.

If we're going to integrate reporting requirements to this, which I know, obviously, we just heard a presentation from the AP, you know, about possibly doing that, that, to me then requires, you know, much more information from the statisticians, and others, in terms of how we're going to use that data, and how is it going to be collected, and it won't be a census, right, and so can we integrate the data that we're collecting through any sort of reporting, and what would that look like to bolster our sample sizes, right, and so I'm fine with having that discussion, but I think we're going to then need to bring back in some experts, and others, to really figure out the mechanism of how we would that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. Yes, and, along those lines, I mean, I kind of see the permit is for all snapper grouper species, but then I don't think we really want to drill down to the reporting aspect of it just being a few species, or would you go back and say, you know, only the species that we're reporting on require the permit?

I would rather see it with just all snapper grouper species, and then the reporting -- Maybe just make it so simple that it's not tied to the species, but it's such simple reporting as you report on did you fish this year, and how many times, and, I mean, again, like Andy said, I thought the idea of the reporting was to kind of drill down and help that effort survey, and so, if you could use this as a way to identify the universe, and then drill down a little bit further into what part of this universe is really active, you know, the old rule of 10 percent of the people are out there catching 80 percent of the fish, and, well, it would be good to find that 10 percent of recreational fishermen that are really out there doing it.

That would give you a much better handle on, you know, what effort really is, but those were my thoughts, that, you know, I don't see -- I don't really see -- I see it's getting bogged down if you try to tie this reporting to something complicated on a species basis.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anna. Thank you. Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: Thank you. I always -- I agree with Andy. I always envisioned this permit as sort of a standalone permit that would be useful in kind of tuning-in how many folks were actually targeting snapper grouper species, and helping scale that, the MRIP information more appropriately, but, in terms of the reporting, we have such excellent examples in the hunting community.

When you renew your hunting license, you get asked a quick series of questions that says, did you hunt this year, and then, if you hit yes, then the next question pops up, you know, of what -- How many times did you hunt, and what did you -- Did you hunt for this, and, you know, and they're binned answers, where you could easily, you know, use that model to create, you know, the deepwater species, you know, the different subcomplexes, and get a feel, in a very broad sense, of what the effort is, and so this does not have to be, obviously, a census reporting, but, if we use the examples from all of our hunting permits, there are ample opportunity to mirror some of that effort, and people are sort of accustomed to that, and it's not, it's not a difficult process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that comment, Anna. That was a very good point, and it's important to point out that in our hunting community, you know, a lot of how people report is kind of tiered down, right, and what I mean by that is, you know, we look at our big-game species, and it's pretty acceptable for the hunting community to want to report all of those, and what I think Anna' is referring to, particularly, is to migratory birds, where you get these individual surveys every year of how many times did you hunt, you know, and which one of these did you harvest.

Now, what we have been dealing with, in North Carolina, is we're going to have required reporting for a lot of our inshore species, and one of the comments we heard from the angling community, and we got a lot of them, and what really stuck out to me were people saying like this seems burdensome, because these fish are stuff I catch all the time. Now, something we've heard from stakeholders in the snapper grouper fishery, particularly with the rare-event species, is they seem to treat them more like big-game species, because they're not something that happens all the time. They're not something that you target all the time. Some of these things, like the deepwater complex, I personally believe there's a lot more buy-in, when it comes to reporting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Other thoughts? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, Andy, I appreciate your comments, and I agree with you that this is an opportunity for us to flesh this out, because when you say the word "reporting", it has so many different spiderwebs that it could go down, and I think we need to sort of drill down what it is that the council's first-step attempts are, and I tend to agree that that survey approach of identifying these anglers is a great first step towards perhaps a larger scale, more directed reporting, perhaps mandatory, perhaps at some species level, but, until we really dive down into it, and we start to learn what these fishermen are really doing, I'm afraid that we -- If we start to create something from the get-go, it may not work.

We've had lessons learned in the Mid-Atlantic. We heard presentations about how we've started this reporting, mandatory, and it's not quite working. We did a survey, and we figured out the questions we were answering, or asking, weren't being understood, and so could this be an opportunity for us to really go out, identify the audience, like the intent of this original amendment was to be, which is to identify the universe, and to enhance the ability to collect recreational catch and effort data.

Just putting a permit in play will help identify the audience, and it will enhance that ability. So then we can then survey those individuals, to figure out how we could build a robust reporting mechanism down the road, but a survey is reporting. If you think about it, it's still reporting, and so, when we talk about reporting, we have to make sure we're defining what we mean by it, too.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Joe.

MR. GRIST: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to follow-up on that. I agree, and one thing I'm thinking about, from the Virginia north perspective, is just the outreach that we're going to need to do with our group, that we do have fishermen in this fishery, Norfolk Canyon and north. I came before this council, over twelve years ago, to talk about that, and it was a developing fishery then, that no one was recognizing.

As I'm watching, and listening to all this, I'm like -- I'm a little curious. You know, we just did port meetings on mackerel, and I think the council learned a lot of things about the mackerel fishery in our region that wasn't known. The same thing is about to happen here, and the outreach part in our area, our region, is going to be really key for you all to know how much is going on north of North Carolina, a lot more than I think a lot of people realize.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Joe. That was actually something I wrote in my notes, and was wanting to ask on, and maybe for future clarification, which is what sort of grouper snapper species are being caught north of North Carolina, and in what numbers, right, and I was always under the impression that -- If we look at mackerel, right, we know that that's more commonplace, you know, up further up and down the east coast, but, given fish in our jurisdiction, I was just curious if we could look at like how big of an impact this is going to be from, you know, from Virginia north.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. So let me try to ask more questions, to try to focus our discussion a little bit, and so, before we dive into the purpose and need, I think we need to answer this question about are we going to add back in reporting, or surveying, or those types of things, because that is not in the document now, and it's not in the purpose and need statement, because we had decided before that we're going to break this into two components.

So what are our thoughts? Are we bringing -- I know we have new faces around the table here, that weren't here when we had some of these discussions before, and so I'm trying to -- You know, just it is what it is, that we need to rehash some of these things. Thoughts? Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So I'm kind of struggling, because I feel like we we're zooming-in and zooming-out with the situation, right, because, in certain situations, if we just go with the permit, we're following a similar path to what Florida did, right, with the SRFS part of it, as far as identifying the universe of people, bringing it down so that your focus is on just those folks who are offshore fishing, but the catch is still coming from APAI, and so you're still dealing with rare-encountered species. Even though there's fewer people --

MS. MCCAWLEY: We do have reporting on State reef Fish Survey, and a dockside validation component.

DR. BELCHER: So it's not dependent on the catch coming through the APAIS survey, or is it, the catch part of it, and so I guess my understanding is the SRFS permit is to get an idea of how many people are participating in the offshore grouper, with the specifics of your fifteen species, or thirteen species, whatever the number is, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would have to go back, but maybe Andy is going to answer questions.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so you're correct, in terms of the permit for identifying the universe of effort. My understanding of SRFS is -- They use a combination of MRIP APAIS sites for sampling, as well as, I guess, enhanced, or weighted, sites for offshore fishing effort, to target areas where you were likely to encounter more reef fish, right, and so they've essentially bolstered the APAIS sites to be more inclusive of sites that are going to capture the offshore fishing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so it also looks like our staff are saying basically yes to what Andy said, but we do our own sampling, and we supplement the State Reef Fish Survey with APAIS.

DR. BELCHER: So I think, for me, that's the hard part, is, without the catch, it kind of makes it that you've got a permit, and so we're just getting at -- For me, it's putting basically a reverse bifocal on the lens, right, and we're really good at what we know nearshore, but we've got to get a different level of resolution to get the offshore, and so the catch, I still feel, has got to be part of that equation. The reporting, to me, probably should be part of that.

I did want to digress a little and go back to what Tim was asking about cost. There's a problem if the states do it, because we cannot raise our licenses without going to the legislation, and different states have different ways of doing that, and so, in certain states, you may be able to charge them. In other states, we're not going to be allowed to charge them for it.

In conversations we've had with our licensing unit, if it was done at a federal level, and similar, again, and I know we keep using the analogy, but we've kind of been trying to weed apart on a duck stamp approach. It is easier for the state to take and add a checkoff for a snapper grouper stamp, coming from the feds, because the system is already set up to accept the money and transfer the money.

The question is what the money does once it goes back to the feds, but to put that added on there, and then to put the fee on it, it is not doing anything that goes against what our legislation is saying, because it is not a state permit. It is a federal permit, and so the feds can add that on, and people can choose to engage in it if they want to or not, but, for the state itself to take it up and carry it, every one of us is going to be dealing with it differently.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so maybe we can just pause and try to answer Tim's question. So, in Florida, we have the State Reef Fish Survey. It is free. It's an add-on to your license. Martha kind of got into this a little bit. If you're a lifetime license holder, or a five-year license holder, you are required to declare yourself as a State Reef Fish angler annually, and so we are getting people to update that universe, if you will, annually. You're also agreeing to be surveyed and all these other things.

This has been through the legislature. We have dedicated money for this, but we do not charge people a fee to get it. However, if they go online, in the licensing system, and add it to their license, depending on what else is in their cart, you might have a handling fee for the items in there, but there is not -- It is a no-cost add-on to your license in Florida, but I'm going to go to the other states, to see if they can respond to the fee component.

Just one more thing. Like Carolyn, we would have to go to the legislature to charge a fee. This is all done through our licensing system, and this has already been through Florida's legislature, and they instead wanted to just give the agency the money to implement the program, as opposed to charging each angler an additional fee. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So how it works in North Carolina, if we wanted to do a permit, we would have to do a rule change, which takes about a couple of years, and, as far as charging, we can charge a specific amount, and I cannot remember what the max is, but our policy has been keep it free, but we do have the opportunity to charge, but it would have to go through a rule change.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and, from South Carolina's perspective, if we were to do an add-on endorsement to any of our saltwater licenses, it would require going through the General Assembly, and the General Assembly could decide to have it be free, as an endorsement, as it does in Florida, or it could provide a fee associated with it, but it would be up to our General Assembly to do that, and it would take action through that way.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish, did you want to add on?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and I was just talking -- I just did permits, but, if we had to do an endorsement, we would also have to go to our legislature to get that change.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: The question I have is so the only state that has an endorsement, or reef fish survey, is Florida, the only one at this time. Okay. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. More thoughts? Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: So, just focusing on the purpose and need, I have two thoughts. You know, when we talk about identifying the universe of private anglers, or vessels targeting, I think, in terms of the reporting piece, if you had the same series of questions about what you targeted, and caught, in sort of an easy binned option at time of renewal, that would actually fall within the purpose and need.

My second thought is, in terms of the free portion of the permit, I don't think that, if you add an endorsement, and have it be free, that you are actually going to achieve your purpose and need of identifying the universe of people that actually target, because it is so easy, if it's free, to just check off the endorsement, and so I think, if we go the route of endorsements, or checking it, or just adding on, we are not going to be achieving the purpose and need of actually identifying the people that we're targeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. I had sort of a process question, and so, without changing the purpose and the need statement now, if a permit were to be issued by the service, since those individuals are going through the process to buy it, providing their contact information, is that the checkbox for them to be automatically included in a survey?

I know, if you buy a license in the state, then I can take that information, and I survey you, without, you know, any sort of notification, and so, if the idea would be to survey, could that be done with the way that the purpose and need statement is written now? As we're identifying the universe, would that then be able to take that information, and survey them, or does that specific language need to be included in this, and so it's a process question.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think that sounds like a NOAA question. So, in other words, do we have to indicate that our intent is to survey people, or have some type of reporting in some way, or, once the universe is identified, we can just start contacting these people, telling them what to do, and survey them, and so can someone speak to that? Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Well, if you're going to require people to respond to the survey -- If it's a voluntary survey, then it's much like MRIP is now. You don't have any -- That's not a regulatory program. It's a voluntary survey. The Paperwork Reduction Act would still apply, and so you would have to go through that process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: You know, I'm sure we're all frustrated, because we have been there, done that. I mean, we're just --- We've gone over this so many times, but I will add that we have, to me, a new piece of information that is changing my thinking, and that is the request from the advisory, that advisory panel. We've had this request many, many times from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, and now the Private Reporting AP, which is made up of some people who really know what they're talking about, have requested it, and that does make me want to backtrack.

Then I go to the point that Dewey, and many other people, made on the record, or, I mean, at public hearing last night, that, at some point, we have to stop and do the hard thing, and it is hard. I know it's going to take a long time to go through legislatures, if that's how we do it. I understand that, if we do it federally, there's budgeting issues, but maybe this is the first hard thing we take up, and I'm very nervous. This has been asked for for so long that, if we don't do it well, then it's going to be a detriment, and so I just wanted to say that's why my mind has come around to an annoying level of let's look at this thing we've already looked at 900 million times.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so that's helpful. I think those were good comments, but I guess -- So the reason why you're suggesting re-looking at it is because of wanting to add the reporting requirement. Can you elaborate a little bit more?

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I think the two new things that are in my mind are hearing from the recreational reporting AP that they want it, and then also this concept that we've been talking about, outside of this topic, of reducing the FMU, and sort of changing how we look at all of that in general, which then makes it easier to narrow down our species, and so those are the two new pieces of information that I have that are making me go, well, maybe it is time to slam the brakes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So I guess -- So I have been thinking, as we've gone through this, that we were, you know, to coin Charlie's phrase, eating the elephant one piece at a time. In my mind, I had figured, as we went through this, we would get the permit first. Then that establishes our universe, and then, once we've established our universe, we can go from there and either develop a survey, have reporting, have mandatory reporting and all that, but I just -- To me, in this particular amendment, it just seemed, to me, we really need to just establish the permit, so we can establish the universe, and then we can start collecting the needed data based off that universe.

Our need says to improve the quality of effort and catch data, and so it doesn't say to have an amendment to -- I mean, have a permit just to have a permit and educate people, and so, anyway, that was kind of in my -- That was sort of how I have pictured how this would go, since we started it, was just get the permit, and then the next amendment would be survey, species, manage whatever. You know, anyway, and so just throwing that idea out as far as, you know, how do we get there, and it's going to just -- It's going to be a long, hard effort, but, to me, we've made the first step at working at just getting this permit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just a couple things to add to that, and we've got more hands up. Just a word of caution, from a state that already has a permit in place, and then the AP said it too, that you really need to begin with the end in mind, and so, even if you're just going to use this amendment to set it up, but the next amendment is going to do the reporting, like Kerry saying, you've got to do it right, or it could be a flop, and so it really is important to begin with that end in mind, if the end is to ultimately do reporting. Just putting that out there. Carolyn, and then Tom.

DR. BELCHER: I think the thing that's difficult too, Kerry, is that the states are getting a lot of pressure right now from outside groups that are very earnest for us to get better data collection, and the things are tied together. We're trying to figure out what's right, and we're kind of in the -- In the conversations we've had, states like Georgia, and I'm speaking for South Carolina, and Amy can correct me, we're kind of stuck between the bookends of what poor North Carolina is dealing with, with make a mandatory reporting program, and it's not their brainchild, versus an ongoing successful survey approach, and how we can all get similar things going, but yet we've got folks that are willing to go to lobby, and a lot of them are already off the blocks.

They're not waiting for us to make a decision, and it's making it very difficult for us to be able to take that pause, because it's like states need to be doing this, and it's like it's not a state issue. I mean, we're involved in it, but it is not a state-water issue, and, with some of that, that's where we're struggling, is how do I ask for money, in a potential environment where people are like we want less government, and why are we doing the federal job, and they're not our fish. You know, that there is that potential, and I'm not telling you that's the language that's there, but these are some of the potentials that we're dealing with, and how to figure out the best way to work it.

We're willing to work in concert, and we're going to collaborate, cooperate, whatever is necessary, but a one-size-fits-all is going to be harder for the states, because we all have different mechanisms, different legislators, different needs, all of the different focuses, where, if it's federal coming in, it's a little bit more unified, because the fed is thinking from a regional standpoint, with our input, but it's a regional design, and so I think that's kind of where I get pushed in two different directions, because we'll have conversations from our local CCA that they fully support what the council is trying to do, but they want it done today. They don't want to wait on the federal process. They want the states to do it, because they think the states can do it faster, and do it better, and so that's my two-cents on that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I've got a number of hands up. I have Tom, then Charlie, then Andy.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Chair. I just want to agree with Trish, and I think you made a really important point, that this is a multi-step process, and I think that that's how we have to handle this, to get it right. I'm certainly in support of having reporting, particularly for rare-event species down

the line. The question is just how we do it, and I would remind the council here that some of our previous debate was looking at the education component and how we were going to phase that in over a number of years.

Do we start it now, or do we start it next year, or do we start it five years, and so I think that we need to be, you know, realistic about that, and I think that we just really need to set this up, and we can talk about some of these. We can certainly build in that idea that we're going to be doing this in the near future, but I think that we just need to be very realistic about how we get this going forward, as we start it off the ground.

I also want to go back to one of Anna's comments regarding how we define the universe, right, and I am skeptical that, if we have a free permit, we're not necessarily going to do that adequately. People like free permits, but, when you have to spend five or ten dollars, you start to think a little bit differently about it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, to Tom's point, if it's a free permit, people are going to check the box, and you don't know if they went fishing or not, and so we -- I like Anna's idea about, you know, just a really short question box of did you fish, and we can get those questions maybe from Andy's team, so he can give us questions that actually will help him and his team, you know, figure out what's what, and make it really simple, and so, yes, I would -- I would be inclined to go down that path, but, if you've got a free permit, everybody is going to check the box.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Andy, and then Amy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So we heard last night, during public testimony, the United States probably has the best recreational survey programs in the world, and you can see how complicated this is, and challenging it is. I guess a few comments, right, and so I appreciated the comments made by some of the state directors about pressure from recreational organizations.

There's certainly this huge distrust with federal surveys, wanting to go to state surveys, and states can either do it better, or faster, and, you know, we've learned a lot from the Gulf model, and, you know, there's a lot of lessons learned, and having four states and the South Atlantic potentially go down four different routes is certainly not a route I would recommend you take.

With that said, you know, I like where the conversation is going. I think sometimes we're in pursuit of perfection, but I also am concerned like, if we don't do this well, right, and we fail, we're going to kind of be struggling through the same challenges we're dealing with now with the SEFHIER program.

A few thoughts I'm having here is, you know, can we work on building the amendment in a way that's kind of add-ons, right, and so it's not necessarily like we're going to require additional permitting now, right, and so you could say we're going to just require this for snapper grouper, but, at a later date, we could add on dolphin wahoo, coastal pelagics, right, and the mechanism of how we could go about doing that, but it's kind of setting us up so that we don't necessarily have

to come back to this, two or three or five years from now, and work on it again. We've kind of built in a mechanism up front for expansion.

The same would be for reporting, right, and so I appreciated Amy's comments. Reporting means a lot of things to a lot of different people, and I think, in this instance, we know that at least the initial intent of reporting was being surveyed for the effort portion of the recreational estimates, but what I'm hearing from, obviously, constituents is we want to actually provide landings data, and catch information, and that might be able to be built into a program, but I'm not sure we're going to be able to do that quickly, and do it now, and whether or not that's going to be worth spending the next two or three years trying to build in, versus trying to kind of stand something up and indicate that maybe reporting would be required in the future, as part of the permitting requirements, and we would work toward that at a later date.

I guess think about this as maybe some building blocks. I really like the kind of as a steppingstone, you know, one bite of the elephant at this point, but maybe there's some ways that we can also head off having to do a lot of additional work down the road, by creating some of the building blocks now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. I have Amy, and then Kerry.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Andy, you eloquently said a lot of what I was going to say, and so I appreciate that, and I think this phase-in approach is really what we need to do. We've been tossing this idea around, at this table, for two years, and, although I appreciate this idea of maybe we should pump the brakes, and we should think about reporting, I'm not one to be thinking that way. I'm thinking that we need to take some action.

We are hearing, from all of these APs, the old AP, the Snapper Grouper APs that have been around for a while and the new APs that we've now created, and we've asked for these subject matter experts to provide information on what they think we should be doing with 46, and I think we should listen to them. I think we should be moving forward with let's first identify this universe. Let's get a permit in play.

It sounds like we have overwhelming support to do a vessel-based survey. We have overwhelming support to do an education component. We have overwhelming support to think about lowering the number of species that are here, and let's get down to the species that really matters, and there's an overwhelming support for an exemption, and that exemption right now would be for the state of Florida, but it might not be for the state of Florida forever.

There could be an opportunity for South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina, in the future, to have some sort of state program that matches Florida, but we're not there yet, and, because we're not there yet, and we don't have this permit, it's not doing our state any good right now, and so I would be supportive of moving forward with 46 in a building block approach. If we could build in a mechanism to have next steps, great, but I don't want to pump the brakes on this. I want to hit the accelerator on this, and I think, when we start talking about reporting, and those definitions of reporting, specifically mandatory reporting, it takes a ton of money.

It takes a ton of people, and it's constant, the outreach and education, the following up on those compliances, and those are huge stumbling blocks that we're going to have to really think about

how we're going to get over them, because, as we've seen in SEFHIER, in some areas, the compliance isn't quite there, but, when you have boots on the ground, and you have the people, and the conversations, your compliance rates go up, and, if we're going to do that in the recreational world, we're going to need to make sure we have the infrastructure, the people and the money, to be able to support it. We're not there yet, and so let's do what we can do now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thanks, Amy. Then I'm going to go to Kerry, and then I'm going to go back to the purpose and need.

MS. MARHEFKA: That's what I was going to do. That was going to be my suggestion for a path forward, and I would like to say that this is one of the things I love about this process, you know, is you're able to hear from everyone, and, you know, out of respect for the state people, who have jobs that I can't imagine what are like, and sort of those hurdles, I can absolutely see where you're coming from, and so my suggestion for forward movement would be that we adapt the purpose and need to be clear that, at some point in the future, or, ideally, we would like to build towards reporting, and then know more about the mechanism Andy was talking about, and that Amy just mentioned about, you know, can we build something in here that is setting us up for reporting in the future, and is that necessary, but I have personally come around, based on discussions at the table, to know this isn't the time to put full reporting in, because you all have jobs that are very hard, and I don't want to make them harder for you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so I was talking to staff there. I don't know that we should sit here and wordsmith the purpose and need, but maybe we add some concepts here that's direction to staff, so they can go back in and make sure it's in there, and so I guess I would -- Once again, maybe this is a question for NOAA.

If we're thinking that it sounds like people are wanting to charge a fee, does something about that need to be in the purpose and need, or does it not matter, and it gets worked out later, and I'm just trying to figure out if we need to adapt the purpose and need so that fee is somehow in there. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm agnostic on this topic, but I just did want to point out that, while it may be easy just to tick the box the first time you get it, you do have to do the education component. There is a level of investment. It's a time investment, and not a money investment, and so, if you're not at all interested in offshore fishing, the chances of you actually doing -- Ticking the education component box, which is mandatory, might be a high enough buy-in, but I don't have a -- I don't care what is decided.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't think putting the cost of a permit in there needs to be in the purpose and need, right, and I think it'll be in the broader document. We'll have to acknowledge that requiring a permit would come with an administrative cost to the agency, and we would build that into the analysis. I did like the suggestion of maybe expanding, or further emphasizing, the intent of surveying people for collecting effort, and/or catch data, right, and so we would have to figure out how to wordsmith that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and John is capturing that now. Anything else that we need to make sure is captured by staff in the purpose and need statement? All right. I don't see any additional hands. I'm going to pass it back to John to move through the amendment.

MR. HADLEY: So, yes, and we'll take this as direction to staff. We'll pose it back to the IPT and, you know, come up -- We'll wordsmith it during an IPT meeting and come back to you with edits at the next meeting. You know, right now, it sounds like adapting the purpose and need to include planning for potential reporting and expansion to other FMPs in the future, and kind of, you know, emphasizing the potential, and leave it as a gray area, and then further emphasize the intent to survey permit holders to enhance data collection.

If there are any other items, you know, we can certainly pose that to the IPT. We can also -- You know, this will be included in your Snapper Grouper Committee report, and so, if anything comes up, you know, throughout the rest of the meeting, we can certainly come back to that and add that as direction to the IPT.

So, moving along to the actions in the amendment, the first action, and I'll just provide a brief overview. You know, this is the action that essentially establishes the permit and specifies whether it's going to be a vessel-based permit, which would be Alternative 2, or an angler-based permit, which is your current preferred alternative, Alternative 3.

I'm not going to go over all of the AP comments, and, you know, there's some summary versions of that. The full reports are linked at the very beginning, but, generally speaking, your Permitting and Reporting AP, and so your technical ad hoc AP, continued to recommend that a vessel-based permit would be a superior choice to an angler-based permit, from a technical perspective, logistical perspective, and survey design. They felt that the net benefits to any subsequent improvements in the private recreational catch and effort estimates from a vessel-based permit are likely going to be greater than an angler-based permit, and so that was their sort of standing recommendation.

You've also -- You had a -- We discussed kind of the private, the Snapper Grouper Angler AP recommendation. They had a discussion sort of on the tradeoffs of an angler-based versus a vessel-based permit. I think the leaning, as Martha mentioned, was towards a vessel-based permit, amongst that AP, but they did have a discussion of the tradeoffs between the two.

The Snapper Grouper AP was sort of split on, you know, which way they were leaning, as far as a vessel-based versus an angler-based permit. However, they did -- They did pass a motion to include reporting in the amendment. You can see the motion right there, and then the Law Enforcement AP noted that a vessel-based permit would be easier to enforce. However, there are some issues with -- There could be some issues on when the permit holder was not onboard the vessel, such as during say a vessel rental or a delivery operation.

So, just posing it back, there's nothing -- There's no real action that needs to be taken on at this meeting, but just considering the AP input and just making sure that you're comfortable with your preferred alternative, which is Alternative 3, which would be an angler-based permit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I've heard a lot of discussion about vessel-based. Do we want to have a discussion on this? So, I will just add, from Florida's perspective, ours is angler-based, and

also add that one of things that the EFP is testing is what it would be like for the permit to be vessel-based, and have an education requirement, and have a reporting requirement, and let me just say that, with the fifty-five species, that is extremely challenging. You are asking a private vessel captain to do a lot, and be responsible for a lot. Florida's legislature did not approve a vessel-based permit. They wanted an angler-based permit, and so I just want to put some things out there about some other additional information. Gary, and then Amy.

MR. BORLAND: I think, due to the lack of the reporting requirement, that it has to be angler-based. In my opinion, I think without -- If it's vessel-based, you try to report how many people, or anglers, were on your vessel, and, without the reporting requirement, I think that's -- I think you have to throw the vessel-based out, although I am for the vessel-based permit, but you need the reporting requirement.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Sorry, Gary, and so we've been hearing that a vessel-based permit is the preferred from a lot of our APs, and I hear you, Jessica, and I have sympathy for you, Jessica, because what you guys have got going on in Florida is great, but I think the other actions, later in this amendment, will be able to adjust and adapt for you to continue down that path you're on, and that idea, and concept, is what I would like to think could happen in the future, if Georgia, South Carolina, or North Carolina were to do something at the state level.

From a logistical standpoint, and from a -- From kind of what the agency would have to do, they're already issuing vessel permits, and so the magnitude of permits coming in would be less for the service at the vessel. It would hopefully be in line with what the permit system is looking like. I'm not even sure what the permit system would have to change, to go from angler to -- To an angler-based, and I don't know.

That might be a service question, but I just think having that consistency amongst commercial, for-hire, and now perhaps a recreational component, would be helpful, and, if we are looking at this as a building block, and eventually will perhaps have reporting, then we would have every single angler be reporting, and I'm wondering if that might be more of a difficult task for us to do, from an education and outreach component, than it would be to build upon a vessel permit, and the Paper Reduction Act and I are going to have -- I've got to learn more about that. Sorry.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Gary, then Anna, then Tom.

MR. BORLAND: Like I stated, I'm for a vessel permit. My struggle with the vessel, without reporting, is not understanding what the universe looks like, right, and you go from a boat to, you know, six people, and you multiply that out, extrapolate that out, and we're not going to understand the full universe without understanding who -- How many people are actually fishing on that vessel.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anna, and then Tom.

MS. BECKWITH: Thanks. I think the choice between an individual and a vessel permit is really going to end up hinging on what the eventual reporting requirement is going to be. If you are going to require sort of a significant reporting requirement, then it will more likely be successful

at the vessel level, where one person is responsible for reporting-out what that boat caught that day, and that would be in line with what the charter situation is.

If the goal is to identify the universe, similar to a hunting license, and the reporting requirement would be at renewal, as we previously discussed, then I think that strategy could work at an individual basis, but, if you sort of don't walk into this knowing what your reporting requirement is potentially going to be, it might make it more difficult to choose, you know, the most successful path.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I have Tom, and then Andy.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you. I'm going to start off with a quick question for Florida. Is the Florida Reef Fish Survey required for shore-based anglers?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No. It's only people going offshore in a vessel.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Thank you. I go back and forth on this issue, angler versus vessel. I can see the points of each, but I keep -- The more I think about it, and the more we discuss, I keep going back towards vessel. I think that that's going to get us a better idea of what our fleet is, but, realistically, the answer to this question is partly bureaucratic.

It's also partly -- What I mean by that is what's the easiest way to administrate it, but I also come back to what is going to get us the best data we have, right, and so, regardless of which one it is, that's which one I'm going to prefer, but given -- Listening to the AP, looking at some of our other permits, like the HMS permit, which does have reporting associated with it, it keeps pushing me back towards vessel as our ultimate option.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, then Trish.

MR. STRELCHECK: We're still early in the process, right, and I know we're debating kind of where the preferred should be. I'm not sure we have consensus on how to move it from where we're at to a different preferred. I guess a question for Jessica, first. My recollection of the State Reef Fish Survey is it's an angler permit, but then, when you actually do the mail survey, you target permit holders with vessels, or you just send it out to anyone that has a State Reef Fish Survey? Okay, and I thought you had refined that, because of the response rates were better based on people with boats.

My main concern, obviously, with switching from an angler-based to a vessel permit is alignment with the State of Florida at that point, right, and so, you know, we don't want to have duplication of permitting. We have no idea if, you know, Florida would be willing to adapt to a different permit system and go vessel-based. Florida represents a large portion of our snapper grouper harvest, right, and so I just -- That's in the back of my mind right now, in terms of maintaining a vessel permit, just because there would be that broader alignment with the state that already has a State Reef Fish Survey.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have Trish, and then Jimmy.

MS. MURPHEY: So this one I keep going back and forth on too, but I think I keep coming back to we're trying to establish the universe, and so it's the universe of anglers, and not the universe of vessels. I went back to check how our mandatory reporting is set up.

We don't have a permit or anything for that mandatory reporting, but, if you're fishing, you've got a license, and you have to report individually, and so we're actually going to be doing angler-based reporting in our mandatory, and so I'm -- This was also a question, because I was just looking at some of the other comments that a permit on anglers may be tough for those coming out of town. Well, that's most -- That's a lot of your folks that come out of town to go fishing, and so how do you guys handle it? Is it a big deal? I was wondering what -- Is there a burden?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I mean, it's on the licensing system, and so it's one of -- Like, when you're on the licensing system, and you're going through the items, it's asking you if you intend to go offshore to fish for reef fish. Reef fish is defined as, and then you're listing out the species, but we also have it -- It's in our regulations booklet, and it's in every press release that's about a federal waters fishery that's opening or closing, and anything, and it's reminding people that they have to have this, and so we do this -- We do the outreach on who needs it in multiple ways, I guess, and so we're also -- We're doing it point-of-sale licenses, which would get the out-of-town people. We're also doing it in press releases. It's in the regulations booklet, and it's on the website, when people go search for the regs, all of those things.

MS. MURPHEY: Thanks, and that makes sense, because I was actually thinking we actually have a ten-day license for folks that come from out of town, and that would be the way that we could handle an angler-based, and so, anyway, I think I'm still leaning -- I know it's probably simpler with vessel, but I just -- the bottom line is we're trying -- If we're trying to get to a universe of anglers, it should be angler based.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, then Judy, then Amy, and then I'm going to try to wrap-up on this action, if possible.

MR. HULL: Thank you, ma'am. I'm taking all this in, and I agree with a lot of what was said. I believe the private angler lines up with Florida, and we should go that way for the universe, but then, when we talk about reporting, we should look to the vessel, somehow massage this to where we go to the vessel owner.

You would have to go to the registration of the vessel, people that own vessels, and try to get the reporting that way, from the captain of the boat, because, if you went vessel, you're never going to know how many people, anglers, were on the vessel. You're not going to get the universe, and so you need --- The universe is the most important thing to get first, and somehow we'll figure out the reporting, whether we require it from anglers or vessels down the road. That's the thought I have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Judy, then Amy.

MS. HELMEY: I believe we need to go angler-based, because that's the only way we're going to come up with a number of people that are using, and so I'm saying angler based.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Judy. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm trying to think about this from a data perspective as well, and so I think about when we have samplers on the docks doing the APAIS MRIP survey right now, and listening to anglers communicate, sort of argue, over which fish is theirs, and this is my fish, and, no, that's my fish, and it's like, oh my gosh, and so, most of the time, when we're in the middle of a recreational APAIS survey anyways, the APAIS survey is like group catch, because most anglers can't determine which fish is theirs, and they're arguing over the same fish.

I worry that, if we can't do it in front of them, if we start thinking about anglers being represented, and then anglers perhaps reporting, are we going to get fish counted again and again and again by anglers, and so I worry a little bit about this. I think about APAIS components, and knowing that the vessel idea is already a part of it. To me, it adds an additional frame for that stratification, and -- I don't know.

If you don't own a boat, or you don't have a friend with the boat, you typically can't access these fish, and so it kind of takes it back to, if you don't have access to the fish, then at the vessel level - I don't know, and I do worry about the oversubscription side of the house.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so a couple things, just to try to wrap up this discussion. So, yes, it seems like we're still debating, but it seems like most people are leaning towards anglers, and so, unless there's a motion to change the preferred, I think it's okay for now. I mean, we've still got multiple meetings to go on this document. I would also say that, if you're looking for the universe, anglers, you know, you should do it at the angler level, if you're trying to count how many people are going out to go do this.

Anglers, this works in Florida. We don't have some of the issues that Amy is describing when we are sampling people, and we have a way, a mechanism, to account for the perception of oversubscription, and so with the freeness of it. All right and so I'm going to move on from this and ask John to go to the next action, to try to move us along.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you. So the next action specifies which species would fall under the permit. There's currently a suite of different species, groups of species, I guess. Your current Preferred Alternative 2, the permit would cover all species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit. Alternative 3 would mirror the species covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, and Alternative 4 would focus on deepwater species. You know, as I mentioned, Alternative 2 is your current preferred.

You're looking at -- You know, looking at the number of species, which has been a discussion, you know, of the council this week so far. The Alternative 2 would cover fifty-five species, Alternative 3 would be thirteen species, and Alternative 4 would be ten species.

How that exactly plays out, you can see Table 1, and this includes all fifty-five species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit. If there's an X next to them under FLSRFS, and that's the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, those are the species that are currently covered by the State of Florida. If there's an X next to them, the deepwater species, those are the species that are covered, or that would be considered deepwater, and, if there's no mark next to them, they fall under neither one, but, of course, they are in the unit.

You know, we can bring this table up in a future discussion. I know that there's a discussion on maybe narrowing this down a little bit, and so the way -- You know, one thing I did want to point out, the way that these alternatives are worded, you know, they're not necessarily -- If the grouping changes, I would think that the permit coverage would change along with that, and so, if you narrow down the species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, then that permit would apply to that more narrow grouping of species. The same thing with the State of Florida. If they changed their species, then that would, you know, kind of convey to the permit as well.

You know, I'm not going to go over the AP recommendations, but, generally speaking, you know, the various APs that have reviewed this have noted that it's sort of -- It's difficult for anglers, or vessel owners, permit holders -- It would be difficult for permit holders to distinguish which species fall within the permit or fall out of the permit, and so they recommended the whole snapper grouper fishery management unit.

However, it has been noted that, you know, remembering all fifty-five species is a fairly large ask, but, you know, generally, you know, if the APs had to choose one, the general recommendation from the Snapper Grouper AP, Private Angler AP, your technical Permitting and Reporting AP, and Law Enforcement AP was geared towards all snapper groupers within the unit.

One thing that was noted by the IPT, in this discussion, was that, you know, there are some species -- If you're not covering the entire unit, and, for example, if you focused on the species that are within the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, they work well for the State of Florida, but there are some of those more northern species, such as black sea bass, that don't necessarily fall under that current list, and so that was something that the IPT noted, but, again, no action needed.

You can consider confirming your preferred alternative. I know there's a larger species discussion that goes along with this, but you will also have several -- You know, you will have other chances to review this action, as it moves towards public hearings and finalizing the amendment, but any comments on Action 2 at this time?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Lots of hands are going up, and so I wanted to start with what I brought up earlier in the week, so that you guys can comment on this as well. While I kind of lean towards, if we're going to do a federal permit, it should be all the species in the unit, but there are too many species in the unit, and Florida's exempted fishing permit has shown us that, in these arguments with fishermen about what's in there, and so I can't make a motion.

I'm the chair, but I would like to start a discussion where we please go back and look at the species that are in the snapper grouper fishery management unit and maybe start, as soon as the next meeting, looking at this, and having a discussion, as a committee, about do we have the right species in there, and should some of them be moved to ecosystem component, et cetera?

The EFP has really shined a light on how challenging it is for people to realize what is in the unit, and, if you're in Florida, the snapper grouper complex and the reef fish complex in the Gulf are totally different. This is just a huge challenge, but so I want to put that out there for people to talk about, as I have hands going up. So I have Trish, then Kerry, then Carolyn, then Andy.

MS. MURPHEY: So, yes, after listening to what Jessica had to say the other day with the EFP, and the discussion of what do you mean grunts are in this, you know, and it's just -- I kind of -- I

would be interested in looking at reducing that complex, but, in the meantime, after discussing key species the other day, do we want to -- Don't shoot. You guys just don't shoot me. Don't shoot me, but do we want to -- We originally had an alternative that said the ones that were assessed, and so do we want to maybe revisit or -- Either revisit the assessed species or add, once we get our key species discussion done, add that as an alternative, and so don't shoot me on that one.

Then really don't shoot me on this one, because I'm just going to throw it out there, because I'm an idea person. Is there any way, or would it be like totally crazy complicated, to have like a list, a regional list? I don't know how complicated it would be. You know, Florida has got their list, and so maybe North Carolina could have a list, or there's -- You know, North Carolina and South Carolina may have a similar, or South Carolina and Georgia may have a similar list.

Anyway, just throwing that idea out, and I don't know how that would complicate things, and, from a data perspective, I totally have no idea how that would complicate things, and, even as a database infrastructure, I have no idea how much it would complicate things, but I thought I would try to throw that out there as well.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me try to respond with some ideas on both of those, real quick, and so I think both of those are doable, but I'm wondering if we go -- It seems like what you're talking about -- Two things. One would be to add an alternative here for something that would say something like key stocks, but maybe we figure out what the added alternative is after we have this discussion of what's in the fishery management unit, but, yes, I like the thought process of where you're going on anything that we have an interim analysis on, or a full assessment, or -- You know, some -- An alternative that would do that.

I'm also wondering if your other idea maybe could be accomplished in the way it's surveyed, and so not on the frontend, on whether it's required or not, and maybe it's on, once the surveys come out, and certain states are focusing on certain species to -- You know, as the priority to get the data, and so then you wouldn't have to change it here. You would be fixing it on the other, and so just some thoughts on that. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I wasn't -- This isn't part of my original comment, but my only concern with that is we're in an era of climate change, and we're supposed to be thinking about the future, and the fish that are important to Florida now may not be later, and all of that, and so I probably would not be super supportive of that idea.

As I've mentioned before, I'm 100 percent supportive of narrowing down this fishery management unit. What I'm trying to figure out, and would look to staff, for is sort of -- That's probably, I'm assuming, going to have to be its own amendment, because there's going to have to be, I would think, pretty good rationale for dropping things.

Like I don't think we can do it within 46, in which case 46 is already starting. Whatever this is would be semi coming behind it. I'm sure there's a way we can make it clear in 46 that it -- That, if we say all species, it means all -- Like the new definition, or whatever, and I'm sure we could do that, but I suspect that has to be a new FMU.

Then the last thing I want to say is I'm just -- I think Trish's point about key stocks is really important, because, while you guys are out -- Florida was out ahead of the pack, and I think that,

in a lot of ways, we don't want to disrupt that. You should be -- Your reward for being out ahead of the pack is that we somewhat have to follow what you all do, but I would note that there are key stocks, like snowy grouper and red porgy, that you all don't have on there, and so that would make it really hard, and so I think my question then is what mechanism do we all envision, and I am ready to get started on this. What do you guys think that looks like?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and so I think this was brought up the other day. What would have to happen is you have to go through -- I think there's like nine or ten criteria to see if a particular species is in need of conservation and management at the federal level, and it includes looking at landings in state waters, versus federal waters, and there's a whole bunch of criteria, and so, yes, it would be helpful, if you guys want to get started on this to give us like maybe a handful of species, where we can get started on that, compiling the information. Then I think, yes, it would probably have to be its own amendment, or it would need to be an action within a plan amendment, I believe.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, yes, and I can come back to you. Like I'm wondering if we make a motion, or direction to staff, to get that started in another vehicle, and maybe, even if we don't have the species right now, maybe by Full Council, we could figure out the species. So, Kerry, did you want to say something, and then I'll go back to my list.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I just think -- I'm happy to make the motion. I just -- For a lot of reasons, I would like to keep it separate from 46. I think it's its own creature. I think it comes with other things we probably haven't thought through, and so, when it's the appropriate time, I will make the motion, and I agree with your path forward. By Full Council, maybe we give them somewhere to go.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MS. BROUWER: So one more thing that Chip just reminded me. One of the criteria, I believe, is whether the state wants to take over management for that species, and so it would be helpful if the state representatives, you know, provided rationale and provided something, at some point, to say, you know, they would be prepared to take over management for that species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Since I've been on this council, we've removed species from the fishery management unit, in the past, and we had a nice handoff that, as soon as the council passed it, the FWC extended regulations in federal waters, and the council kind of reviewed what the state regulations were that were going to be extended, and so just putting that out there. I'm going back to my list. Carolyn, and then Andy.

DR. BELCHER: I'm pretty much piggybacking off of both Trish and Kerry, with the suggestions going forward. I do think it would be beneficial to at least have an alternative in there that talks about the key stocks, because, at a minimum, I think all four states should be focused on the key stocks. Otherwise, what's a key stock, and so that kind of at least gives us a different number to start with, but --

MS. MCCAWLEY: So it sounds like, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like you're saying we need an alternative that -- We could put "key stocks" in quotes, because we don't really know what that means yet, but --

DR. BELCHER: To that point, I think it's more the same idea of how we've done the preferreds. It's pretty generic. Like, by saying any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, if that's -- If it dynamically changes, you're not like being so prescriptive in it that now you're like constantly -- As opposed to saying it covers fifty-five species. Well, that's not going to be helpful, and so, that idea, it can be dynamic. It may be ten species, and it may be fifteen species, as the council sees that they might need to add key species on the list in the future, or take species off the list, and I'm just thinking more to say that, because we're still in that mode where we haven't defined them yet.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree. I share those concerns, but maybe it's something that the IPT could think about, and so, instead of a motion, maybe it's just direction there. All right. Back to my list. Andy is next.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I guess both of my points have been covered, and so I was going to make a similar suggestion to what Carolyn did. I like the idea of kind of keeping it flexible, but that can be challenging, because then you're, you know, setting up a permit, and you have to be very explicit, in terms of what that permit is required for, but there are certainly species on the State Reef Fish Survey for Florida that should also be added to our list, and then there's ones that aren't on that permit.

In terms of the species in need of conservation and management, you know, I don't want the council staff, and my staff, to have to go through the entire fifty-five species list, right, but there are things already in the guidelines that indicate that you wouldn't consider stocks that are already undergoing overfishing, or are overfished, as species that wouldn't be in need of conservation and management. I know Kerry was going to make a motion. I'll certainly support a motion, or I can make a motion now to do that.

Direct council staff to begin a review of the snapper grouper complex to determine what species are in need of federal conservation and management, and change "complex" to "FMU", fishery management unit. If I get a second, I can, obviously, explain my intent there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's seconded by Kerry. Back to you, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I think it's better to just keep this generic. I know that staff would want some specific direction on species to concentrate on. I guess what I would recommend is that let's look at the obvious ones, that we know are in need of conservation and management, and then maybe some that we don't manage regularly, or don't, you know, have a lot of management, and see if those would qualify as species we would remove from the list, but it is a little bit of a cumbersome process, because there's at least ten National Standard factors that you have to go through.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Sounds good, and so under discussion. Any more discussion on this motion that's on the board? Shep. All right. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I just want to make it clear that this is, for me, considered outside of Amendment 46.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that's how I'm interpreting this discussion, is that, even though the motion is not worded that way, but this would occur in a separate -- We'll call it a vehicle, separate vehicle, than Amendment 46. Any more questions, comments, discussion on this motion? All right. **Is there any objection to this motion?** All right. **The motion carries.**

With that, I don't know that we need to spend time right now on the rest of this action. We've had a lot of good discussion. We also gave direction to staff to think of another alternative that would go in here that would be more reflective of the key-stock-like discussion, and so I think we're good with this action, and we can move on.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you. The next two actions are going to shift gears and focus on the education component.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Hang on. We forgot to go back to Shep. Sorry.

MR. GRIMES: I apologize, and I was answering another question. I just wanted to comment, or remind you, I guess, and you'll see this as you move through the document, but your decision for the preferred alternative for Action 2 is going to affect the exemption that you have in Action 5. I don't remember the discussion for why, but I thought the technical AP mentioned that it was important that the exemption -- If you're going to have the exemption, that the species be the same, and I'm just noting that because, generally, it seems we've been coming at this expecting that Florida would be exempt from this, following Florida's lead on the permitting program, and this will be inconsistent with what Florida does, and that's one of the things you'll see in Action 5. I'm just noting that. I wanted to point it to you now. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we'll try to circle back to that discussion.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you. So the next couple actions that we'll talk about will cover the education requirement, and you heard some feedback, from the Private Angler AP that recently discussed this, at their other meeting, and some of your other APs have discussed this as well, and we'll get some summary feedback on that.

Action 3 is the action that establishes the education component and the education requirement, and, really, there are two major alternatives here. One would establish the education component and requirement before, and the education component would be required before or for initial issuance of a federal recreational permit, and, you know, this is a suggested minor wording change. I'll come back at the very end to get the committee's feedback on that, but that was something that the IPT and the technical AP identified that -- They thought it read a little bit better and clarified that the education component would need to be required for -- It would need to be satisfied for the private recreational permit to be issued.

Alternative 3 looks at a sort of delayed implementation, and so, in this situation, the permit requirement would go in place, and then the education component could be delayed, and implemented at a later date, and there's two subalternatives here. One is Subalternative 3a, which would be before initial reissuance of a permit, and so the idea is that you could kind of get your

initial private recreational permit, but before that is -- Once that expires, and then you need to renew it again, you would need to satisfy the education requirement.

Then Subalternative 3b is sort of when the issuing authority stated that the education requirement would be implemented, and so the idea here, with 3b, is, if the educational materials aren't available, but the permit is ready to go, the permit requirement could be put in place, and then, when the education materials are ready to go, and go live, so to speak, then that issuing authority would say, okay, the education requirement is now in place, and so that's sort of to allow a little bit of flexibility in timing.

You can kind of think of it, generally speaking, as Alternative 2 is the educational requirement goes into place right away, and it's, you know, lockstep with the private recreational permit. Alternative 3 would have some sort of delayed implementation, where the permit requirement would go into place first, and then the educational requirement would come into play after that.

Looking at some -- I just wanted to go over a few things from the technical, from the AP's perspective. The Private Angler AP felt that the education requirement needs to be -- To go into place before initial issuance of the permit. You heard some of the other details from their discussion. I won't go over that again.

The Outreach and Communications AP also felt that the education component should be required before initial issuance of a permit. It should be available online, and as did the Snapper Grouper AP. Generally speaking, there's a lot of AP support for this education requirement. The Snapper Grouper AP provided support for establishing the education requirement as soon as -- To start working on it as soon as possible, and as did the Law Enforcement AP. They similarly recommended that the education requirement go into place right away, rather than face delayed implementation.

Really, looking for the AP input on the various -- Looking for consideration of the AP input, and the IPT, as noted, had that suggested wording change. That was something that sort of tripped up the technical AP as well, and we just want to make sure that the -- We don't necessarily need a motion, but make sure that the committee is okay with that change, and any other discussion on this action. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, John. So, just to recap, all the APs are very excited about the education component. I don't know that we have to pick a preferred today. We've had a lot of discussion already about the education component, and how we think it's important, and it also factored into the is it vessel-based, or is it angler-based, and who is taking this, and so, if you have comments on this, and also make sure you're okay with that one change on Alternative 2 from the IPT, but further comments on this, or are we okay with the range of alternatives that we have right now? I see heads nodding that, yes, it seems like folks are okay. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, I'm supportive of the range of alternatives, and supportive of the change, and one thing I wanted to comment on, because Myra and John had asked us to weigh-in as, you know, the cost of outreach and education, and what we can do to support this, right, and, as you all well know, federal budgets have been flatlining for us, and, with inflationary costs, it's been a challenge, obviously, to fund even some of our kind of base work, at times, and so we don't have obvious resources to dedicate to directed outreach funding.

There are certainly temporary funds that can become available periodically within the agency, and so I wanted to note that, because programs like this, to me, are important. We have a lot of support for it. How we actually support and implement this is to be determined, and I think that will have to be kind of written into the amendment as it develops further.

You know, we have a great outreach team, and the South Atlantic Council has a great outreach team. I've mentioned to John about, you know, are there economies of scale there that can help us to build some of these outreach tools? We also have things like Return 'Em Right, which may or may not come to the South Atlantic, and so there's already outreach tools that are being developed, right, and how do those integrate, and so a lot of this depends on kind of what this looks like.

Then the last thing I'll note, and John Walter might want to weigh-in, is we have been receiving up to, I think, \$1.8 million annually to support red snapper work in the South Atlantic. We've talked with the congressional office that has helped to, you know, provide that funding, and provided spend plans in recent years, and so, depending on how quickly this moves forward, that could be a potential for at least an initial funding mechanism for some of the outreach and education tools, but we would have to have a lot of conversations, obviously, as to whether that would be a viable use of those funds. John, do you have anything else to add?

DR. WALTER: We've briefed this council on the spend plans for those monies, and the bulk of the money has gone to supporting the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program to count for red snapper, and so that's been the intent for that, but, presumably if that funding source continues, we will have that count, and we'll have a number of critical follow-on studies that are also being planned, but there may be an opportunity to motivate that for something that might be really supporting the reef fish fishery into the future, and I think that's where we want to just open that conversation about whether this council thinks that this permit would be something that they might want to see that fund go to. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and let's -- I see people getting up and leaving. Let's take a ten-minute break, and then we'll come back, and, if there's any more comments on this action, but we'll continue moving through the document. Thanks.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going. All right, and so we were on the action about education. I don't know that we need a ton of additional discussion on this. It's not like we're building an education course today. I think we might be good, unless someone has a burning need to talk about education more. Otherwise, we're going to move on to the next -- We only have a couple more actions in here, and we're behind. We're going to move on to the next action.

MR. HADLEY: All right. Thank you. We're going to move on down to Action 5, and this is the action that would establish an exemption to the federal permit and education requirement, provided that states implement their own permit and education requirements focused on the snapper grouper fishery.

You'll see several highlights in here. These are edits that were made, early guidance that was received at the March 2024 meeting, and, really, the idea here is that the committee clarified that they wanted the exemption to also cover the permit as well as the education requirements.

That's why you see a lot of highlighted words there, but, basically, those are focused on integrating the education requirement as well as the permit requirement, but, quickly, to go over the mechanics of this, Alternative 2 would establish the exemption to the federal snapper grouper permit and education requirements.

The National Marine Fisheries Service would be the one that certifies that a state and education component is equivalent to a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education component, provided that the state implements equivalent measures, at a minimum, and then there are subalternatives there that specify what would be entailed within that and what would be considered equivalent.

These really tie in -- As Shep alluded to earlier, you know, these tie into decisions that were made earlier in the document, and in other actions, and so, very quickly, I'll go over Subalternative 2a. The permit would be for the same entity, and so that kind of ties into Action 1. Subalternative 2b, the permit would cover the same snapper grouper species. That ties into your decision on Action 2. The permit will remain valid for the same amount of time, and that's not necessarily an action in this amendment, but the intent is that the permit would be an annual permit, and so the state would implement an equivalent annual permit on their end. Then subalternative 2d is the state permit would have the same education requirement as the federal permit, and so that relates to the decisions made in Actions 3 and 4.

So, really, this is the one that sort of ties all the other previous decisions together. I won't go over the AP recommendations. You did have feedback earlier on the Private Angler AP, but, generally speaking, the APs have been supportive of this. It was noted that there's support for, and this is kind of to just recap some of the earlier discussion, and the Outreach and Communications AP recommended this, and I know that the committee has discussed this, sort of developing a universal education module that the federal government, as well as state agencies, could use as a reference, so everybody sort of has the same curriculum, if you will, for that education requirement.

Really, looking for discussion on this action, I know that there was, you know, some discussion earlier in the meeting about what happens if the number of species don't necessarily line up with what's currently in the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, and so, you know, just as a starting point for discussion, perhaps you could task your IPT with adding a little bit more of flexible language in there, where that could be -- That essentially the Florida State Reef Fish Survey could be accommodated under this federal requirement, and so I'll turn it over to the committee for further discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: To get to that, and to what Shep was saying, maybe there's a way that there's a broader statement that exempts a state that has an existing program, and so maybe there's a way to do that. I think that we could get the IPT to do that, and then further discussion on this. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and you beat me to it. I was actually, you know, in reviewing all this, and thinking about Florida, and trying to stand in their shoes a little bit, you know, they've got a system

that already works. It works for them. It's MRIP-certified, right, and, I mean, so why make them fix something that ain't broke?

I was kind of wondering, and can we put a -- I don't know if it would to be already exempt Florida, or grandfather them in, and then, you know, if the other states decide to pick it up on their own, then we've -- You know, we can build off the federal system, because Florida has been doing this, doing this for quite a few years, and to kind of have to dump on Florida and say, well, you've got to change it to fit us, and I just think we should let them -- I think they either should be exempted now, or we can have a grandfather clause or something for them in this, in this amendment, and so that's my two-cents' worth, as far as trying to accommodate Florida and their already successful program.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that sounds good, and, while you're doing that, John is writing some information there for the IPT. Others? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Trish, I completely agree, and I love this dynamic approach, as it applies not only for stating on the record right now that Florida is perhaps exempt, based on all the parameters above, but I would like to take that on to down the road, if another state were to do something that -- That the determination of that exemption would lie -- Does it lie with this body?

Then, secondly, just another sort of thought for the IPT is, in the Alternative 2, it uses the word "equivalent", and I think that that is a better word choice, perhaps, to be carried through some of those subalternatives. The word "same" might get us into a vocabulary lesson, and I don't like vocabulary lessons, and so I think maybe using some similar language, like "equivalent" or "comparable", or something, and that may get us to have a little bit more flexibility as well. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Sounds good. We're taking notes on that. Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: So Martha discussed that the AP had had a question on how to handle lifetime licenses, and just sort of going back to the idea of the lifetime hunting licenses. When you have those, you still have to go in and get your -- You know, your tags for the year, and so, if the goal of the purpose of need is to identify the universe, I would just kind of throw out there that maybe the lifetime license folks still might need to go ahead and get this permit, similar to a lifetime hunting license, that you still sort of need to get your tag, but the end purpose is to continue to identify that universe.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's already in place in Florida. Anything else on this action? We've got a lot of direction here. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So this, I think, addresses some of the concerns I mentioned earlier in kind of thinking through how do we integrate this with Florida's program, and so I'm fine with including this for now. I think we really do need to then go back to my earlier comments, which is, you know, how would this relate to any permit system that's developed at the federal level, and is there challenges with having the State Reef Fish Survey operating a little bit differently than the federal permit system, based on this exemption, and so it would be more, I think, for the statisticians and

those that are using the data then to improve survey estimation, or ultimately reporting, and making sure we understand kind of those benefits and tradeoffs.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for that. Any other discussion on this action? Amy.

MS. DUKES: To that point, and I know it's not exactly under Action 5, but, if we're going to ask the Science -- Or the Office of Science and Technology to really look into that, and get some of the statisticians involved, I think it would also be applicable to get some better feedback on how the exemption would work if the preferred alternative were to stay to angler-based, as well as perhaps change to vessel, please.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John is going to take some notes on that. All right. Anything else on this action? All right. I think we might be done with Amendment 46 here. That was the final action in the document. Thank you, John. I think that now we're going to go back to black sea bass, and so give us a minute to do a switch-out up here, and then we're diving back -- We're going to go back to the top of the agenda, which was black sea bass.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so, coming back to black sea bass, you've heard the comments from the advisory panel, as well as the SSC yesterday, regarding their discussions on behavioral responses in the fishery and the catch projections for black sea bass, and now we're going to be discussing Amendment 56 and what you all would like to do with that amendment moving forward.

So a lot of this background information on the stock status has already been discussed within this meeting. Kind of coming into this meeting, out of the last one, you all had a discussion, in September, about the actions that would potentially be included in this amendment. One thing that was noted, at that time, was that you all decided that you do not want to include a time-specific rebuilding plan in this iteration, not until the status determination criteria have been updated.

The ABC numbers that were previously recommended by the SSC are still included here, but, given the SSC's advice from their October 2024 meeting, that note should be taken along with any consideration of those catch levels that are included there.

Our objectives, for the remainder of discussing black sea bass, are to consider any potential revisions to the plan for changing black sea bass management based on the SSC's recommendations, and then have some discussion about the timeline that would be involved with any black sea bass management changes coming out of this assessment and those recommendations.

The advisory panel comments are summarized within the document, as well as some reference to the SSC comments that were made yesterday, and so, moving us down into the actions portion of the document, you've seen all of these actions already, and so we don't need to necessarily dive into details of each one of these. Really, the big thing, the big discussion that needs to be had, is how do you want to deal with these actions, given the discussion that the SSC had and their kind of further actions regarding developing these enhanced projections for black sea bass and updating potential projected catch levels for this stock.

The discussion to be had here is do you all want things to continue to proceed with Amendment 56 in some limited capacity? Do you want to wait for this entire process until you get those catch levels from the SSC? Do you want to split things up, and have things running with some actions on one timeframe, and some actions on another timeframe, and so there may be some discussions about that timeline, but this is kind of the list of actions that you all have discussed and have included for consideration in this amendment to this point.

To inform that discussion on how you want these actions to be structured in amendment form, we do have the tentative timing included in this document, and so, as of right now, we have this discussion of the SSC comments and recommendations. You all have approved this document for scoping, but scoping has been delayed for the last couple of meetings, awaiting the additional catch recommendations, and so is that something that you all want to be carried out in between this meeting and the next one, or how would you all like that timing to be addressed?

That will be part of the discussion for today, and then you kind of have the SSC's recommended course of action, as far as developing this interim approach that updates the catch levels, updates the fishery-independent index, what was discussed yesterday.

In order for them to kind of proceed going about that, we do need kind of some direction from the council, the thumbs-up of that's what you want to do, or if you all want them to take some other course of action, and then advise on what that course of action would be. So a lot of pieces to this discussion, and I guess, Chair, do you want me to ask them one question at a time, or kind of have the discussion start going, and we see where we end with all of the pieces?

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's a great question. What does the committee think here, because it seems like we also already had a discussion that, you know, Jimmy could slay all these fish in their upcoming spawning season, and that maybe we need to put some management actions in this document, and so do we want to let Mike go through the whole document, or do we want to stop at each one of these decision points? Trish? Anybody? Okay. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, I guess one question would be how is it going to affect staff's workload if we try to split this up? To me, it seems simpler to just keep it together, but, if staff thinks it works better for them to split it up, then, you know, I'm totally willing to -- I don't know what the secretarial amendment is going to do to affect possible black sea bass discards, and I would kind of like that in the mix, you know, especially if we can get it -- Get that information in a couple of months, and then so we don't have to go back and revisit things like that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, go ahead.

MR. HULL: Yes, ma'am. I think that -- I mean, the problem is discards overall, and so what are some of the commonsense things that are in here that can reduce discards that we might want to implement even before we get all this other information that we need from the stock assessment projections and from the secretarial amendment? I mean, single-hook rigs, they can reduce discards. I mean, there's commonsense things in here that could help in the meantime, while we're -- Otherwise, we're sitting here with the status quo projections on catch that we have, and I don't know, and that's where I'm at.

I'm thinking, yes, maybe there is some things we can do, management-wise, that will help in the meantime, that really aren't going to change that much, even with the further information, just the idea of using a single hook instead of a multiple-hook rig. Obviously, you're reducing the chance for discards, and so that's my thought.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So, I guess, in my mind, you know, and those are good points, you know, to go ahead and maybe start doing some management stuff, and maybe that's -- We should, but I guess, in my mind, aren't we -- We're going to end up with two amendments anyway, because we're going to have to do a rebuilding, after we change the status determination criteria.

We're going to start into another amendment anyway, and so I think we're stuck with two, whether we do management in the frontend or the backend, and so I was actually thinking, but I'm open to adding, you know, any management measures to stop Jimmy from slaying fish, but I originally was thinking, you know, maybe we should just tackle the minimum requirements, at this point, and then move into -- During the rebuilding plan management, but I'm not -- I am open to trying to do some, like you said, commonsense stuff now, but that -- That was -- So it's really more about process. I think we're stuck with two anyway.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Hands are going up. I got Amy, and then Tim.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think I need a little bit more variables into my decision - making, and the first one I think comes from this idea of the update model from the Science Center, and, at the SSC, it was the intent that they would incorporate additional years' worth of data, where available, when available, from the terminal year, and it was stated, on the record, that, at least for the SERFS data, that is, at minimum, ready to go through 2023.

So, going back to my question, it would be how quickly could an update model be provided by the service, by the Science Center, if that data were to be incorporated? Some sort of timeline would be helpful in sort of making those next step decisions, in my mind.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Mike. Sorry. John.

DR. WALTER: I was not at the SSC meeting, but I think we did give an update that said we could do that probably for the next SSC meeting, and so that would be by April.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Then that would come to the council in June? Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I was going to make the same comment. What we were told,, at the SSC meeting is that we would have -- We would have the expectation that it would be available for the April SSC, and so it would come to the Council in June.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Amy.

MS. DUKES: So, to that point, the update model is already started, or are you looking for direction to start it?

DR. WALTER: Ideally, direction is always helpful because that helps us to prioritize. I'm not sure that we would embark upon it if the council is not going to use it.

MS. DUKES: Okay. To that point, I would like to direct the Science Center to go ahead and begin that process for the update model for the black sea bass, in preparation prior to the April SSC meeting, to get recommendations from the SSC to come back to this council table at our June meeting.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're capturing that. I have Tim, and then Trish.

MR. GRINER: Yes, I agree with that wholeheartedly. I was under the same impression as Amy, that, you know, that we were kind of waiting for the SSC to rerun this and then have it -- Or for the Science Center to rerun it, and get it back to the SSC for their April meeting, and then back to us immediately. I mean, we've got a situation here where we've got a problem with the assessment, and the SSC's review of it, and so, moving forward, I don't see how we can, really, until we have ferreted through that.

Given the fact that we're not catching the fish, the landings are dismal, the entire problem seems to be the discards, which is the part of the data that seems to be the most problematic, and so it seems like we're kind of in a point where, you know, you can't really -- We can't really make any decisions, and we can't really do anything about this stock right now, and, as far as, you know, a separate amendment, you know, based on changing an SDC, well, we haven't even -- We haven't gotten there yet either. You know, I mean, in my mind, I don't -- I'm not sold that that's a foregone conclusion either, and so that's a whole separate discussion, but as far as, you know, some kind of management decision right now, I think we're a little bit premature there. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. I have Trish, and then Andy.

MS. MURPHEY: So, I just want to stress to the service that it's imperative we have this done by April, and meet that deadline, so that we can move forward on this, because you obviously can kick in real quick on red snapper, and I think you can kick in real quick for black sea bass, but I just want to count that it's imperative we have it, because we cannot keep kicking things down the road, and so I just really want to stress that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm about ready to lose my patience here. Trish, you put us in a very extraordinary position for red snapper, and we did an assessment very quickly because of that. We are committing to, based on the conversations of SSC, to also help this council with sea bass, but we've spent the better part of a year now, I think, trying to discuss sea bass, and have gotten very little, you know, going forward.

Tim just mentioned we can't do much until we get the new science. I disagree with that. We're kicking the can down the road again, right, and we can't keep kicking the can down the road. You're expecting maybe a different outcome, and we know the trends in the projections, or the indices of abundance, are declining still. It's going to be a worse assessment for you, and so let's get to work. Let's start working through this amendment.

In the meantime, when we get the scientific advice, we'll plug it into the data and information, but what keeps happening, I see with this council, is we debate around the table for a long period of time, and then the assessment advice gets out-of-date, right, and so let's move. Let's start getting some things done, and for you to be critical of the service for doing the red snapper assessment quickly, and saying we're supposed to be doing all these quickly, let's look in the mirror and see what we're doing around this table first.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Go ahead.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm not critical of that. It just demonstrated that you guys can do things quickly, and so that's why I just want to say we need to get black sea bass done. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so I think we're hearing a couple different things. One idea is to move forward and to start putting some, I guess, management actions in there, so that the document is ready to go when the analysis comes, but you've also heard from folks to go ahead and start talking about these management actions. You heard Jimmy make a plea for this yesterday, and so, yes, and I guess I would say thoughts on what alternatives, I guess, should be in a document, if we're going to start that today, and/or management actions. I have Tim, John, and I'm sorry. Mike. Let's start with Mike, and then we'll go back to the list.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so I guess, if the will of the council is to kind of take the next step forward in development of this amendment, coming out of this meeting, that would be directing staff to conduct scoping in between now and the March meeting. We would be doing so without having the final catch levels, but we kind of know the status, and so we can at least convey that during scoping, and I know that that was something that, you know, maybe -- That would affect the scoping input on the other management measures, but, at this point, if the timing is the concern that seems to, you know, definitely be conveyed around the table, then that would be the next step. The next step would be for us to conduct that scoping with what we have available to us right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So just a couple more questions on that. So you're saying you would scope anything that we have a discussion about today, meaning, if we have a discussion on like some of the management changes coming out of the AP, and like I think that the AP maybe suggested single-hook rigs, and so, if we have discussions on that, then that would be scoped too, and so basically any discussion from today would be part of scoping, and I'm just not understanding.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So the actions that would be scoped, to this point, are what's included earlier in the document, and so we have our -- You know, our three more or less required actions. Any changes to allocation, that's not necessarily a defined action. That's you all need to have the discussion, at some point in this amendment process, of whether you're going to change allocations.

The changing of the catch levels, the revision of the status determination criteria, and then these several actions that have been proposed, thrown out, as potentially in this document, and so what we could do, in scoping, is kind of show these are the items that the council has put on the table so far, and convey to the public, if any of these are, you know, things you don't want, then this is the time to say, council, take this off the table, that type of thing, but also convey that there are some of these actions that will be legally necessary, or that have been requested, you know, in the

sense of the status determination criteria that have scientific recommendation behind them, that type of thing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So then it seems like there would be some utility in going through those, that other action list, if this is going to go to scoping, so that we could either narrow that down, change it, et cetera, so that it can be properly scoped, I guess.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I can go through that in a bit more detail again. You've seen these actions, but I can kind of introduce them, so that you all can have your discussion, if you would like me to do that now or wait till the other comments have been made.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and let me get through a couple more hands before we do that, and so I have Tim, and then John Walters.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Andy and Mike, for your comments. I'm going to backtrack on what I said a little bit, after hearing Andy and Mike here. I think there's a lot of utility now, and Jimmy's comments, also. There is stuff we can work on here, and so I think we need -- We definitely -- I think I was getting too focused on the first part of this amendment, but these other actions are definitely something that do not need to wait.

There's no -- With the other actions, we're just talking about orders of magnitude. We're not -- We know we have the problem, and so let's go ahead and start addressing that problem, and get it out for scoping, and get some feedback from that, and so, yes, I want to backtrack there and try to move forward and discuss some of these other actions. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Sounds good. John Walter.

DR. WALTER: I'll reiterate that a secretarial amendment is a rare and exceptional circumstance. The reason for updating the red snapper assessment is that that could be a very rare situation that ever occurs, and so that is not something that's going to happen routinely.

Now, however, I will say that there are ways that we can update, like a lot of assessments, which, if we move it somewhat out of the SEDAR process, and that allows the flexibility to speed some things up, and so we have shown that capacity, but we haven't heard the desire to move things out of SEDAR quite as strongly as I think we are promoting the need for that. If we hear that there is indeed a desire that that's going to reduce some of the transparency, and, unfortunately, that's true, but you get the quickness, and the rapidity, that seems to be sometimes now a management necessity.

Now, thanks for the request for doing that. We'll take that, and, if I could make a further request, that would help us clarify and streamline that, one thing that is still outstanding is the benchmark, and moving to the SSC-recommended benchmark of FSPR 40 would mean that we don't have to do two sets of projections, and that we don't have to have another back-and-forth. If that's something that could happen, that would speed things up on our part.

Two, the sets of projections that were requested, and I think there were ten of them, and they all had some slight tweaks on like size limits, et cetera, et cetera, discards, separation. All of that is kind of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic here, and I think that makes the projections really

complicated, and difficult to interpret, and so I would say could we simplify the projections to there's going to have to be major cuts to help try to recover the stock. I mean, I think every indicator indicates that, and so let's try to get those projections relatively simplified, so they're easy to understand.

My last point is, in terms of can the council take action, well, this council could set an ACL, an annual catch limit, below the current ABC on the books. That's within your purview. Andy already raised that as an option, and so, if the council wants to set something, absent a new ABC, that's within your purview. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm going to go to -- I see hands over here. I'm going to go to Mike first, and then Chip, depending on what Mike says, and then we'll go back to the hand list.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess I just wanted to note, in relation to the -- To John's request concerning like the number of projections. One of the reasons why the projections were getting tweaked in that way, with these different management measures, is because, regularly, at least in the short time that I've been here, but it seems pretty regularly that, when an amendment goes through, and there is a catch level change, for instance, and then there are also other management measures that are tied in along with that catch level change, it's a -- It's kind of a regular note, a caveat, that, when we go through Science Center review of that amendment, that this is -- That the catch level projections are not making the same assumptions as what's going into the amendment, because the amendment is changing some of the management measures, and so we were trying to, I guess, try to have those things tie together a little bit more.

That was the reason for coming up with these alternative scenarios where, if the council went with this management change, then they would -- Then this would be the projected scenarios, and so to have a bit more cohesion between the projections and the management changes that are being considered in the amendment, rather than having to add that caveat tacked on at the end, when it goes through Science Center review.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That might have confused me more. I'm going to go back to my hand list. Tim.

MR. GRINER: To John's point there, John, I absolutely want to see separate runs of 30 percent and 40 percent. That's very, very important to what we're doing here. You know, there's no magic math number to 30 percent and 40 percent, but we're talking about the difference between, you know, overfished and not overfished here, and so it's very important. You know, from seeing the two of them, we can get a feel for what 32.5 percent is, what 35 percent is, what 37.5 percent is. Those little tiny percentages here make a big difference in how this stock is treated, and so I think we definitely need to see that. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for that comment. I'm looking for any hands, or if we're ready to dive into some of these management measures. I see heads nodding yes, to dive into management measures. John.

DR. WALTER: I think we should definitely get to the management measures, but just, on that, the recommendation comes from the SSC for FSPR 40, based on the scientific justification. Looking at the results does not provide a scientific justification for the benchmark. Looking at the

results is letting the results drive the science, and that is not the way that should be done, and so, in that case, I would recommend that this body heed their SSC's recommendation, unless there is a strong scientific rationale for choosing a different benchmark. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm going to go to Tim, and then John Sanchez.

MR. GRINER: Well, I don't think that was the actual conclusion from the SSC. They did have discussion about that, but there was no absolute conclusion, from what I heard, that, you know, 40 percent was based in some brand-new scientific information. It was more of a discussion of 30 percent was left over from something from the 1990s.

It was more of a leftover, and maybe 40 is better, but I don't think there's any papers, from 2022, or 2021, or 2020, that said, you know, 40 is better for black sea bass, and so there was some overall discussion about it, and how, you know, it may -- You know, 40 percent may be better for the life history of a black sea bass, but we don't really know that for sure, and it was more that this 30 percent is just left over from, you know, picking a number some time ago, and so I really don't think that's the case at all, and that's why I think I'm adamant that we do 30 and 40. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree with you, Tim. John Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you. You've heard me before, in the Gulf, that there seems to be a movement, if you will, to go to 40 percent, and maybe even higher on some of the grouper species. I haven't seen that thrown out there yet, but apparently it's based on some science, but, by that same token, I don't think it's like a one-size-paint-everything-with-the-same-brush-fits-all, because we do have to consider life histories, the uncertainties associated with, you know, relationships between stock productivity, uncertainties, and indices of abundance, recruitment, how all these things relate.

Just to kind of go march forward on 40, and I'm not saying that 40 might not be appropriate for hermaphrodite species, like black sea bass, but I do think the council still has the authority to request some projection runs. We have that proxy authority, and I don't see a problem with asking, just for comparative purposes, even if it's more work to do runs at 30 and 40, and see, because, honest to God, we just had an experience, on the Gulf, where this very same phenomenon -- You know, it pushed you right up against that threshold, where going -- Using 40 percent, instead of 30, you became appropriate or not, and you became over -- Overfishing was occurring, and then that necessitates us, in this process, to do certain things.

Some of those certain things, you know, resulted in a significant reduction in quota, and so I think, given the potential severity for some of these decisions, go ahead and do the 30 percent, and 40, and then let the chips fall where they may, but that's kind of the motivation for that. There are some real significant economic consequences to some of those.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I agree with what John said, and what Tim said, and it is the council's decision. I'm going to go to Mike, and then I'm going to go to Andy.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So just noting, as far as -- As far as the projections that need to be run and presented the information for the council, from a -- From the NEPA perspective, as far as I

understand, because we have a no action alternative that would be in place, and there would be the consideration of the alternative, we do need the comparison of the one or the other.

I also, hearing -- You know, this conversation has been had by the council a few times, of 30 versus 40, and what's the rationale between the two, and there was a presentation made by the Science Center for the SSC, at one of their meetings, and it may be useful for the council to receive that presentation, as you all are going through your amendment process. I'm not saying necessarily to hold anything up for that, but at least that would help you all develop your rationale, as you make that decision between your reference points.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I like that suggestion, and so I just wanted to say that. In terms of the 30 versus 40 percent, given 30 percent SPR is on the books right now, I think it's appropriate that we would need to get those projections, in addition to the 40 percent projections.

In terms of some of the additional projections that ultimately may be needed, right, I think that's something that we're just going to need to work with the Science Center, and council staff, and what can they do within the time period allotted, and, you know, we can try to get as much done as we possibly can, but we also don't want to go down rabbit holes and provide a lot of projections and analyses that may never be needed, and so I don't know if there's a way also to look at the initial projection results that we've seen, and are there things that maybe no longer are going to be necessary for us to consider, because the expectations, and the outcomes, are going to be the same as -- You know, with just some new data updated through them, and so think about that, but I think there's ways we can help with the workload on the Science Center, while still accomplishing the council's objectives.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I was at the SSC meeting. The SPR discussion that I heard was the committee felt like, at the 30 percent SPR, it didn't represent the reality of the stock, as we look at it, from the indices and the recruitment that's coming, and that 40 percent would more show -- It would align up with, you know, the reality that we see with the stock, and so -- I'm fully supportive of running both 30 and 40 percent, to compare and see, but I see Marcel is raising his hand to probably correct me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Marcel, did you have something you wanted to add to this discussion?

DR. REICHERT: Yes. Thank you. It may help the council. On page 11 of the October SSC meeting report, the SSC recommended -- The SSC's recommendation is a minimum 40 percent SPR is an appropriate proxy, based on the information that was provided by the Science Center at our October meeting, and so there is a recommendation from the SSC on the books. I hope that that helps with your discussion. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. I still think we're at seeing a 30 percent and a 40 percent. Heads are nodding yes. Okay. Everybody is saying yes. So, with that good discussion, I'm going to pass it back to Mike, to talk about these other actions that we want to consider, and so, once again, these

would be things that we're actually willing to consider, that we think are going to make a difference here, and a reminder that we're trying to narrow down this list, change this list, so that it's as realistic as we can make it before these concepts go out to scoping, and so back to Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes. So, again, reminding that these actions I'm going through are kind of the other actions. We have the required action that there's going to be the change in the catch levels, and there would be the change to the status determination criteria. The sector allocation percentages, that's something that you all can decide when you would like to have that discussion. Again, this does not need to be an action in this amendment. It just needs to be a discussion that you all have and determine whether you are, or are not, considering allocation changes, per your allocation review trigger policy.

So, now, in the other actions portion, it's been brought up to potentially change the accountability measures. Specifically, what was brought up was changing the current recreational measure, in which the service sets the season each year, and changing it into some other form of accountability measure that would be considered, but, basically, taking -- Moving that from the service, so that they're not setting the season each year, because, right now, that is what is on the books.

The other considerations were to potentially change the fishing year start date. Right now, the two different sectors have different fishing year start dates. The commercial starts on January 1st, and the recreational starts on April 1st, and so any consideration of aligning those, or revising those, so that they're in a different time period, that was one thing that was brought up.

It's been brought up the potential reopening of the nearshore areas to on-demand black sea bass pots. You can see the current seasonal pot closures summarized in that bullet, and, with the rise of on-demand pots in experimental use, there's been consideration of reopening those nearshore areas.

Then the consideration of allocating the commercial ACL by gear. There are largely two gears that are used in the commercial fishery, pots and hook-and-line, and the AP noted this when they filled out the 2022 fishery performance report, that the idea of allocating by gear, similar to the way that hook-and-line and longline is allocated for golden tilefish, may merit some consideration.

Then there were a slew of recreational management measures that were discussed, many of them aimed at trying to improve catch efficiency and reduce discards for the recreational sector, and so some of these discard-reducing measures, one that was brought up a few times, was the single-hook rigs.

Another item that was brought up was potentially reducing the recreational bag limit or changing the recreational size limit. We've had a lot of discussion on how this would potentially increase retention, but there needs to be kind of some balance between the size limit and the bag limit, if you all are looking to affect the overall catch for black sea bass.

Then there was a discussion of a recreational seasonal retention closure. That's something that went to the AP in their last meeting. They were discussing how effort would potentially be affected by this type of closure, and they noted that they do not expect recreational effort to change very much as a result of a seasonal retention closure, but what's been discussed so far was closing retention, similar to the shallow-water grouper closure from January through April, and you can

see a list of species in the snapper grouper management unit that are closed during that time in that bullet beneath.

This is kind of the suite of actions that you all have put on the table, and not necessarily that all of them are going to make it into the amendment, but this is what's been talked about so far, and I guess the next point in this conversation would be what of these actions would you all like to present to the public in the scoping process to get public feedback on? Are there any that you all want to take off the table at this point, and not go out to scoping, or are there additional actions that you all want to put on the table to take out for scoping as well?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. A question, and so the one that the AP was talking about, that discard-reducing measure, such as single-hook rigs, the AP -- I'm trying to remember the discussion, and it wasn't just single-hook rigs for black sea bass. It was for the entire snapper grouper fishery, right, like what was in 35, and is that right? Okay. I see heads nodding yes.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Correct.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks for that. I just wanted to some clarification. I've seen some hands going up. Once again, we're trying to figure out what we want in here that's going to go to scoping that we would consider. Anna, I think you had your hand up.

MS. BECKWITH: Thanks. I have a question. On the setting the annual season, as we've been doing with the service, when we originally put this in place, we considered it adaptive management, where we could -- Every year, we could look back at the effort from the previous year, and then set it, and then, you know, if there was black sea bass left over, the service could reopen at the end of the season, potentially. Can you guys give me a quick history on why we're thinking about moving away from that? Was that a request from the service to move away from that, or was that council driven?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and it hasn't been constraining, and so we've had a year-round season now for quite some time, and, because of the substantial reductions in the quota that we're talking about, it could provide at least a little more predictability. My preference would be to, at this body, kind of set a start date for the season, and relook at the accountability measures based on that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Other thoughts? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Whatever we do, as far as management measures, I would strongly urge that they be enforceable. Like single hooks is just not enforceable. I can see it going to best management practices, and I would recommend that. I think we can -- Then we turn around and work on bag limits, and size limits, that are enforceable, but I would put something like that single-hook into best management. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: You know, Charlie, I keep going back and forth. That's a good point, but I keep going back and forth on that. You know, we've gotten to the point, with this enforcement problem,

that, you know, if we only did stuff that we could enforce, we wouldn't do anything, especially in the State of North Carolina, and so, you know, you're right that you might not ever can truly enforce a single-hook rig, but, by having it out there, and having it as a rule, the people that follow rules might follow the rule. If you don't have it out there, then they're not going to do it. They're not even going to think about doing it.

I do think that there's a lot to be said about having a rule that, even though you can't enforce it, peer pressure can enforce it. Outreach and education can enforce it, and, as a new group of fishermen come through fishing, and they've been exposed to these new ways of thinking, that it becomes second nature to them, and whether it's enforceable or not doesn't really matter to them, but, you know, enforcement -- Even on things like bag limits, you know, and they're enforceable, all right, if there's somebody there to enforce it, and if you get stopped, but other than that, they're unenforceable, too. There's nobody there to stop you.

So, yes, I do think that that's something to think about, but, at the same time, you know, as Andy said, it's something that we can do, and it's -- You know, it's kind of low-hanging fruit there, and so I would be, you know, all for moving forward with anything and everything we can to help in any way.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and it was what the AP had recommended. Charlie, and then back to Mike.

MR. PHILLIPS: I agree in a lot of what you say, but LE does not like unenforceable rules, for sure, and the problem that I see is the slippery slope. Then you get fishermen that decide that I don't like this rule, and so I'm not going to enforce -- I'm not going to follow this. Well, maybe I don't like that one either, and so they start picking what they want to do, and bag limits are enforceable.

They may not be enforced very often, but they are enforced, and, if you've got too many, you're looking at a fine, and so it's not so much that it's -- You can use peer pressure on best management, just as well as you can use it here, and so it's that slippery slope of those knowing that they don't have to follow it, even though that's the rule, and then what else do they want to follow, or not follow, and so that's my overarching thing, and so I would support best management still, and let peer pressure work from there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to note that a lot of discussions regarding enforceability of a single-hook rig requirement were had during development of Reg Amendment 35, and one of the points, kind of recurring points, that was made, within those discussions, was that the council already has hook requirements on the books. There's a circle hook requirement, and a requirement for a single-hook rig would probably fall in the same enforceability realm as the circle hook requirement that is already in place right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I just wanted to say I'm in support of the management measures for consideration for scoping. I did have a question, for at least the commercial representatives, and

so we have a couple of things related to the commercial fishery. One is allocation related, and the other is reopening for on-demand gear, but are there commercial management measures, anything that you would want considered to go out to scoping beyond those?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: That wasn't to Andy's question.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's okay.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. I guess I'm just throwing it out, because I'm kind of wondering about the reopening of the nearshore, because of the reproduction, and the timing of year of reproduction, and where spawning occurs, and is that risky, given what we're seeing with the fishery-independent survey? I'm just throwing it out to the group, that -- Is it something that we should talk about, from that standpoint, because putting it forward I think almost feels a little bit contrary to what the issues are in the fishery.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I've got hands going up. I have Jimmy, and then Tim.

MR. HULL: Carolyn, I'm sensitive to your statement. I mean, the current -- Off of Florida -- You know, in the northern states, there's still some production there, but, off of my state, there's none, and, you know, it's kind of counterintuitive to open that up for more -- For possibly more production, in an area where you could have a protected area for more recruitment to occur, and to rebuild the fishery, and so I'm kind of torn on that.

On the other hand, the on-demand gear, you know, we already have done a lot of development on it, and, you know, the only way I'm probably ever going to use it is if I can go into those areas that are off-limits to me, because, if I can still use vertical line pots beyond 100 feet, that's what I'm going to do, because it's just easier to work with, but, if we need more development of on-demand gear, I'm sure this council would be glad to do an exempted permit for more experimentation, where we can work with it, but --

So, that one, I don't know that it needs to continue to go out to scoping, because most people that I've heard from say, no, well, why would you want to open it up, in the state that the stock is in now, because it is very effective gear, but, as some of the other measures, to move on to single-hook rigs, I think I support that, by all means, and also reducing the size limit, recreationally, so that we have less discards, and that they can potentially -- Again, this is not off of Florida, because we're not catching bass there, but they're catching off North Carolina still, and so, I mean, let them catch their limit, and quit discarding animals, and be happy with the limit that they have.

You know, if we have -- When we get a new ACL number, down the road, or we do one -- You know, eventually we're looking at really low harvest here, to try to rebuild this stock, and so, you know, let's provide the opportunity to catch what you can, with less discards, and then stop fishing for them, stop retention, and so that's what I got to say. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. So that was -- I guess we'll call that two suggestions to remove Number 6. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. Well, I'm going to kind of go the opposite way here. You know, the entire reason that you have that area closed was for one reason, and one reason only, and that was for right whales. We heard public comment yesterday, from someone very interested in the right whales, that suggested opening up these areas to on-demand pots, and not only opening up this area for on-demand pots would help the situation with the right whales, but that it would also -- By opening up that, it would encourage, and almost dictate, that the same potters are going to not have two separate pieces of gear on their vessel, but they're going to start setting these pots in the areas that are outside of the closed area, so that, eventually, you're going to move to an all-demand pot-less fishery, inside and outside of that area.

The whole premise of having that closure was for right whales, and not anything else, and if that's why we closed it, and that's why we developed this on-demand gear, what was the purpose of developing the on-demand gear, if we weren't going to go back into the areas where we were concerned about vertical lines?

I'm all for moving back into that area. I'm all for eventually trying to shift the fishery into less vertical lines in the water overall. I think that only helps the fishery, and, as far as being an effective gear, they are effective gear, but they're not being effective -- They're not effective gear if the black sea bass aren't there, and so, right now, it's not a problem of the gear being very effective, but the problem is the fish aren't there, and so, you know, you can't catch fish that aren't there, as hard as you want to fish them on them, or no matter how good your gear is, but that was the whole premise for closing the area, and for developing these on-demand pots, was to get vertical lines out of the water for right whales. We've done that, and so we should open the area back up. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I've got two more hands up, but, so far, we have not narrowed down this list at all, and then also Andy had a question about were there any other commercial measures that we wanted to consider to take out to scoping. I have Charlie, Carolyn, and then back to Tim.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, and I'm like Tim. You know, we've spent a lot of time developing this gear, and my boats may use it outside of the closed area, and so we're going to -- I don't want to have to be swapping, you know, one way to the other, you know, accordingly, but -- And we don't have that many discards from pot gear. The small fish get out, and, if we don't have a lot of fish, we're not going to catch a lot of fish, and, if we lower the trip limits, then we're probably not going to use this gear very much, or at all, not to mention just, again, the larger picture.

If we can show this gear works as well as it's been working, then that's going to help. It's just going to make this gear much more -- I'm going to use the word "palatable" to other fisheries, and other regions, and we're on the cutting edge of it. I mean, we're first, pretty much, and so I don't want to stop the train just because black sea bass are in a really bad place right now, because, eventually, black sea bass are going to come back, and then we'll already have this, you know, in place. We can use it, and we just adjust our catch levels as needed. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR BELCHER: I'm not unsupportive of that with a healthy stock that's not dealing with recruitment problems. We're dealing with the fact that, at least according to the NOAA site, they spawn from January to July in nearshore coastal areas, and so opening that up during their predominant production time is putting that pressure on what few animals are there that are actually trying to put stock back into your fishery, and so that's where to me, the gear -- You're allowed to use the gear. I mean, that's the one thing that we're doing with the other amendment, is allowing that gear to be put into circulation, and so the gear has not going to be taken off the table at all. You have that ability to use it.

Then we know that there was, back in the early days when, you know, you guys were kind of in your dormancy period, and we were bringing you back, that there was a lot of concern just bringing you back, because of the vertical line was going to cause a problem, and so, you know, I just -- To me, I don't want to see us lose ground on that, and let you guys do what you want to do, because that's what you've done, is you've made a cleaner, you know, less impactful fishery for right whales, but let's get our stock back before we open that area, just because, without it, you're not going to have that production.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Back to Tim, and then Trish.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, and thank you for that comment, Carolyn, but we haven't determined that we have a recruitment problem, actually. We had six-million discards of undersized fish in both the estuary nearshore and offshore a year, six-million individual fish for the last five years. The problem is we can't figure out where those fish went, because we didn't catch them, and the mortality rate is only 15 percent, and so they didn't die when we threw them back. We didn't catch them when we threw them back.

It may be a regime shift, and not necessarily a recruitment problem, and so we've got to figure that out, but that's not set in stone that the reason that those fish that are in -- Or we're having, or seeing, problems with the fish is purely because of recruitment. That's the first thing. I don't think putting pots in there during that time is going to affect recruitment. I really don't, especially given the fact that, as Charlie alluded to, these pots are very effective at releasing small fish.

The second thing I wanted to just say was Action 7, and I think we could remove Action 7. I don't think, given the fact that neither sector is catching any fish, there's any real need to have any discussion about, you know, allocation between the two gear types. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I hear everything that you're saying, Tim, but it's still -- We have a fishery-independent survey that has been going down, down, down, down, down for fifteen years. We've also complained about the quality of the data nearshore, because of MRIP, which we're trying to get answers for, which is part of the way that we've gotten those discards, and so there's a lot of uncertainty to that that doesn't make me feel as optimistic about opening that area, because there's just enough unknowns.

We don't know that the discards are that high. They could be a lot lower, and this thing is still cascading down. Then what? It does start pointing back more towards the biology of it, and I think that's part of what I'm struggling with, is that I just don't want to see additional pressures on

this and that we end up not being able to recover it at all, and then we're giving something back to take it away again.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I don't think we need to keep discussing this. I appreciate the discussion that we've had, but, I mean, we're not making a final decision today. We're just figuring out what's being scoped, and so I appreciate it. It's been a good discussion, and I guess you have some ideas about how different people around the table feel about that particular action. It sounds like it is still going to go to scoping, and get some feedback on it, but I'm going to go to more hands, because I feel like we're just kind of at an impasse here, going back and forth on this one action, and so Trish, and then Amy.

MS. MURPHEY: Sorry to drag it out. My thoughts on it, I think -- Just thinking about the public comment we heard when we were going through the black sea bass pot thing, and I guess it was 36, and those closed areas are not closed to sea bass, black sea bass fishing, right? We've got hook-and-line fishing going on in those areas, and so it's not a sanctuary.

So, if we did open that up to pots, we're adding another whole user group to that area, and I know, just remembering the comments that we had from I think the charter boat, and the headboat folks, it was they didn't want -- They didn't even want it to be open to pot, because they've got a good spot there, and so, to my mind, just thinking about there's still pressure in those closed areas, and the status of the stock, and I would support removing that Number 6, but I don't mean to beat a dead horse.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, also, it sounds like another thing that some of you are saying is closing that, and going the opposite way, and not allowing pots in, but you're also suggesting that maybe hook-and-line shouldn't be fishing on the spawning stock in those months. That's also what I'm hearing, and so that -- I don't see that exact option up there, and so maybe you guys are also saying remove hook-and-line harvest in those nearshore spawning areas. Is that part of what you're saying?

MS. MURPHEY: No, that was not what I was saying. I was just saying we would end up -- There's already pressure in these areas, on a fish that's got a poor stock status, and just to add to that pressure, and that's all. I mean, it's up to the council, if they want to go that route. That was not my intent for that point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I've got Amy, and then Tim.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think we've elaborated enough on the commercial stuff, but I do think, at this point, since it's scoping, let's just push it and see kind of what information we do get back. I would just ask, from a clarification, almost a setting the stage, that, if we do start talking about ABCs, and potential looking at the ACLs, as they are now, just to ensure that, when we're presenting that data to the scoping audience, that all of the variables are set to either pounds, for both, or what have you, and then I guess the consideration of the FES versus the Coastal Household Telephone Survey. Just things for us to be thinking about when we're presenting this data to the public when we do our scoping.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So we wouldn't necessarily have poundages, or numbers, you know, one or the other way, because we won't have the catch levels. Like, assuming you all are intending for

scoping to happen after this meeting, the catch levels, the information that we can give, is catch levels are expected to be reduced significantly, but we don't have exact numbers from that, because we are getting updated projections right now, but I wouldn't put out numbers, or pounds, at that point, just because we don't have the information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MS. DUKES: Not necessarily the projected, or the future numbers, but I do think it is helpful to talk about why we want to have recreational management measure changes in this amendment, things like single-hook rigs, bag limit reductions, to help showcase the fact that we do have potentially a recruitment, and/or a moving stock, and that might get better engagement, from our scoping guys, to understand the reasons why we're asking for some of these management measure changes going downward, even though that the ACL is still way up there. We're not catching the fish that we are even allowed to catch, because they're not necessarily there. I think we have to sort of sell why we want to do these changes to management measures as well.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I have more people in the queue. Once again, we're trying to figure out what's going out scoping. I feel like we've had a lot of good discussion. We haven't removed anything. I think that's okay, but is this the full list that would be scoped? Can we think of other things? I don't know that we need to continue to debate every single one of these measures. I'm just putting it out there. I appreciate the discussion. Tim, and then Jimmy.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. You know, the discussion did bring something up that may be an action to add to this, or a recreational measure to add, and I think, if we're -- If our thought process, on the black sea bass in that inshore area, is that there is a problem, and then that's an area to solve, then, well, the problem is the recreational pressure on them. That's where all the discards are coming from, and so I think we ought to send out, for scoping, an action that would shut the area down for recreational, and for charter-for-hire as well, during that timeframe. Just shut the whole area down for all black sea bass fishing. There's where you're going to get your bank for your buck, right there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MR. GRINER: It's just scoping.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess just clarifying that, and would that be on a similar seasonal basis as the pot fishery? Is that what's being discussed, like the same area and the same timeframe?

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I think so, unless we wanted to look at it differently. You know, I would look for some input there, or if -- You know, as Carolyn alluded to, maybe it's -- You know, maybe it's tied to where you're saying the timing of the spawn, but, you know, there's difference between the timing of the spawn and the right whales, right, and so, I mean, I don't know, but, if that area is going to be closed for black sea bass pots, and let's keep in mind it's only thirty guys, you know, so they're not the ones that -- I mean that's not going to give you a lot of bank for your buck, if you're talking about we got recruitment issues, and so, you know, maybe it's just this spawning time. Maybe it's just the, you know, December through March, but I'm just throwing that out there as an action to add for scoping.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and what I heard was add a time period that would coincide with spawning season, whatever months that is. I have Jimmy, and then Tom.

MR. HULL: Thank you, and, to that point, so do we have included for scoping, the including the black sea bass in the shallow-water grouper closure? Is that still in the document to go out to scoping?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and that's this bottom one, a recreational seasonal retention closure, and, just noting all these closures that are being talked about, yes, there's the -- Like the big issue that's been talked about so far has been discards, but the closures, as I'm interpreting what you all are talking about, these would be retention closures for black sea bass, which your AP feedback indicates that effort wouldn't really be changed for snapper grouper, and so there may still be similar numbers of discards occurring for black sea bass.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Going back to Tim's comment, I'm okay with this being on there, because, I mean, we do have a discard issue, but I think we're going to need to look at some clarification, and I'm just going to bring up some of my previous comments to the council regarding the recreational discards in this fishery, and I want to reiterate the fact that I don't believe that they are people fishing for black sea bass. I don't believe that they are people trying to target black sea bass.

We have a lot of fishermen who are just fishing, in ports and jetties from the shore, nearshore, and they're not -- They're just dropping two bottom rigs, with garbage bait, and they're catching little black sea bass, and I don't believe that, you know, reducing -- You know, prohibiting retention is going to have an impact on discards. Maybe it will. I'm okay with discussing it, but I just want to reiterate that we need to get a better grasp on the nature of these discards, because I don't believe it's people who are actually engaging in the grouper snapper fishery. I believe that they are just people fishing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just along similar lines to what Tom noted, you all have received information, and I think it was two meetings ago. I think it was two meetings ago that you got information kind of on the breakdowns of those discards, and there is a significant amount of discards, small black sea bass that are discarded, in state waters, and any regulations that you all are talking about here would be for federal waters.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I think that's a good point that needs to come out at scoping as well, that, you know, that there are issues in nearshore waters, nearshore state waters, that are outside the purview of the council. I just want to bring that up. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Just that was what I was trying to say, and thank you, Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Mike is adding it. I think that we've had a good discussion on this. I think this is a good list of items. Have you got another one, Jimmy?

MR. HULL: Yes, and I just wanted to agree with Number 7 would be a good candidate to remove from scoping, for the reasons that Tim stated. You know, we're nowhere near catching these ACLs, either sector, and so you're kind of wasting your time with Number 7. Maybe take that one -- There's one you can take away.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right, and we had already said possibly remove that one, and so we've got one that we can remove. Yay, us. Otherwise, I feel like we've had a good discussion on this. I feel like we're in a good place, and so, after Mike finishes typing the last comment about nearshore waters, then maybe we can talk a little bit about the timing here, about when the council will see this again, and I believe the intention is to scope this before the March meeting, but, Mike, can you speak to this one more time?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so I think, with the direction to conduct scoping after this meeting, that would kind of put this amendment on the track that you see here, in which you all would see this next at the March meeting. You would see your scoping comments. We wouldn't have the catch levels yet, at that point, but you would be able to see the scoping comments, and possibly have some initial discussions, and give some direction on development of the non-catch level actions, letting the IPT know what you want in those actions, potential alternatives that they should be working on.

Then June would be a discussion that would bring in those catch levels, and there could be some further development. I would probably anticipate -- I'm not sure that we could have a draft amendment done for the June meeting, because you all would first be seeing the catch levels at that point, and possibly have the draft amendment come to you all to consider that for public hearing maybe in September, and so some slight deviation, but the short-term would look like this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Just a point. To Jimmy's point of we're not even getting close to the ACLs on hook-and-line or the pot fishery, but, when we do reduce the ACLs, we may have that issue, and so, again, I'm not sure I would take 7 out, especially since it's going to scoping, and then, if we want to take it out after scoping, fine, but we can't add it back in, I don't think, if we go to scoping. We can add it back in, if we scope without it? Okay. Just checking.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and are we all good here on black sea bass? All right. I appreciate the discussion. All right. We're going to go ahead and break for lunch, and we will come back at 1.30. 1.30. Thanks, everybody.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to continue back into Snapper Grouper. All right. We're going back into Snapper Grouper, and we are on the Assessment Review and Response Planning Discussions for Ongoing Assessments, and I believe that's Judd.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you, and so this is Agenda Topic 3 under Snapper Grouper, and there's a couple assessments that are upcoming that involve multiple jurisdictions, or councils, or shared jurisdiction with the South Atlantic and either the Mid-Atlantic Council, in the case of blueline tilefish, or the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, in the case of mutton snapper

and yellowtail snapper, and, because these are treated as a single stock, we need to come up with a joint review plan between the respective SSCs for each of these assessments, and so I just want to give a quick overview of a proposed plan to do that, and get your approval, if you think that's okay, and a chance to ask any questions. There's a little bit of a different mechanism on how they operate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: The webinar is on pause.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Sorry about that. We were paused. So, first up, Atlantic blueline tilefish, and so this is an Atlantic coast-wide stock assessment that's being done by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and, of course, it spans up into Mid-Atlantic jurisdiction regions, as well as the South Atlantic, and so a quick little background.

The last assessment was completed in 2017. It was SEDAR 50, and this included stock ID, data, assessment, and review components, workshop components, and, similarly as what will be done in this upcoming SEDAR 92 model, it was a combined two-model approach, where it had a necessity, because, north of Cape Hatteras, we had to implement a data-limited model, and then south of Cape Hatteras was a production model.

In either case, there was no age information to inform the assessment, and those two models are combined into coming up with an ABC, an OFL and ABC, that then is split between the Mid-Atlantic and the South Atlantic jurisdictions. As part of the SEDAR 92 process, they use the same models, just with updated recent data. There was a request to conduct a couple topical working groups, to look at various catch and landings north of Cape Hatteras, to see if there's any more information to inform that data-limited model north of Cape Hatteras, and any additional life history information that might have been available since the last assessment.

This is currently scheduled to be completed sometime in the spring of 2025, although there may be a little bit of a difference in arrival of the different models. We may receive the production model, south of Cape Hatteras, before the data-limited model, but that's still to be determined.

As far as the review goes for this assessment, as mentioned, it's a single stock spanning this jurisdictional boundary, which necessitates review by both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic SSCs. There's a fundamental procedural difference in how the SSCs operate, which creates a little bit of a complication here. The Mid-Atlantic SSC does not review stock assessments, similar to our South Atlantic does. They have a technical review panel approach, and, by the time it gets to the SSC, all the reviews are essentially completed, and the SSC just applies their ABC control rule and sets catch level recommendations.

In contrast, our South Atlantic SSC does in fact review stock assessments, and reviews the base model, makes potential recommended changes and improvements to that, and then, after they're happy with how the base model looks, they apply their control rule and set the catch level recommendations, through projections or other means.

Because of this, the thought was to form a sub-review panel of Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic SSC members, around three from each council, and this would operate similar to a SEDAR review panel format and include terms of reference associated with the review portion of this. The

logistics are still being hammered out, but the need for this is that this sub-group review here would provide information on the review of that north model, that data-limited model.

That would then come to the South Atlantic SSC, along with the production models south of Cape Hatteras, and the South Atlantic SSC would make ABC recommendations, based on both those models. The northernmost model would just go to the Mid-Atlantic, and they would figure out the catch level recommendations on their end from there.

We're in the process of developing this, or gathering members for this sub-group panel from both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic SSCs, and hopefully, in the spring, we will start to produce -
- We'll have the members finalized for that membership and have a terms of reference produced that's gone through the review of the sub-group to provide to the council for their review as well. I'll pause there for any questions on the approach for Atlantic blueline tilefish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions on that approach? All right. I don't see any hands.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving along to the other two stock assessments that are shared jurisdictionally, in this case with the Gulf of Mexico, and that's mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper. In this case, we have shared management documents as well, right, and there's a joint amendment process that needs to take shape after the assessments are completed.

Some history for each of these two previous stock assessments, or these upcoming ones, SEDAR 79 is the most recent southeastern U.S. mutton snapper assessment. The last one was SEDAR 15, with an update in 2015. The most recent one was just completed, and the review workshop was completed in September of 2024, and the final assessment report was submitted to cooperators on October 8th. For SEDAR 96, southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper, this did not go through all the different components, because there was already an assessment completed in 2020, and then an interim analysis to update the data streams conducted in 2020 in -- Completed in 2022.

As part of the next update to SEDAR 96, there was a recreational landings topical working group that looked at the incorporation of the Florida State Reef Fish Survey for private recreational estimates, and so that was vetted through this topical working group process. The same process was also conducted for the southeastern mutton snapper, although this was done through the data workshop phase. For yellowtail, the final assessment report should be submitted to cooperators by the end of this year, or early next year.

Logistics for the review, we're suggesting a joint South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico SSC review. South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico council staff have talked, and came up with this plan, because it's a single stock, spanning both these jurisdictions, that are mostly Florida-centric species.

Again, a subgroup approach was kind of the recommended approach that represents both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions. We hammered out some of the potential logistics for this, where the Gulf Council will host the meeting at their council office in Tampa, Florida. This is going to be done in concert with part of the Gulf of Mexico's SSC meeting, which is scheduled to be that last week of February, and so for -- The joint meeting would take shape and occupy the first couple days of that week, on February 25th and February 26th of 2025. While the Gulf will play host, each council will then coordinate their travel with various representatives from the SSCs.

That composition of a subgroup looks something like this, and so about ten to eleven SSC members from each of the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico councils, two council staff members, which are likely myself and Ryan Rindone, from the Gulf staff, and two council members, yet to be determined, which we may need to discuss. I think, talking with Jessica earlier, that overlaps -- That week is the same week as the Florida Commission meeting, and so we may need to get another representative from the South Atlantic Council to attend.

The Gulf of Mexico's SSC Chair, Mike Allen, had agreed to serve as the joint subgroup chair. He was a good fit, because he is from the University of Florida, familiar with these two species. He was also the chair of the review workshop for mutton snapper, and so he got to see the whole review process unfold.

Because the majority of the jurisdictional landings, or apportionment, is -- The apportionment is to the South Atlantic, that dictates that we would use the South Atlantic's ABC control rule. Given that we've already -- We've only just revised it, and gone through it one time with tilefish, we'll have to consider providing a lot of documentation for the briefing books that the Gulf of Mexico can be brought up to -- Brought up to speed with the implementation of our new control rule.

There's also some other options too, where it might be able to just consider a straight 75 percent buffer to account for adequate scientific uncertainty. In previous cases, there was some cases where the application of the ABC control rule did not really result in an adequate scientific buffer between OFL and ABCs, and so alternate means were necessary, and so that's something that the SSCs would have leeway to discuss.

Given that this is following under the South Atlantic's ABC control rule, it will operate under consensus. For those of you that don't know, the Gulf of Mexico SSC operates similar to their council, by making motions, and voting, where our SSC operates by a consensus approach, and so we would be operating by a consensus approach at the joint subgroup as well. This does not necessarily mean that it's a unanimous agreement, and minority reports can be drafted, but a consensus decision-making process would be what would be used.

One really important caveat, and this was -- We went back and forth on this a little bit, and, because of previous scenarios that might have happened, that were not so favorable with a subgroup approach, we determined that this subgroup body will represent the final decision-making authority of the respective SSCs, and so, once the review of these decisions has been done at the joint meeting, there will be no changes made to those back at the home -- Your home SSCs, essentially, and so an update on them can be provided, but no changes to those recommendations by the subgroup will be made, or considered.

One of the South Atlantic SSC members, and I just want to add this comment here, that he mentioned, you know, we needed to make sure that there's insured transparent recruitment of SSC members, to avoid this perception of any cherry-picking. In this case, any standing SSC member is welcome to volunteer. We called for volunteers at our meeting in October, and had nine members volunteer for it. The Gulf Council will do the same. If there's more than eleven from any particular council's SSC, then council chair and ED for that council will make the final selections, and, as stated down there, the procedure of the subgroup is being presented to you all right now, and then we'll present to the Gulf Council as well, or maybe it already has.

Just some action items here to approve the plan and process for the review of the mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper assessments and approve the list of participants, or SSC members, that will be participating in that subgroup review. I don't believe we need a formal motion or anything, but we'll leave it up to the chair.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Discussion on this procedure? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Madam Chair, I think this is outlined very well, and I think this is fine for us to move forward with, as presented.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions, or comments? All right.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and I'm going to pass this along to Myra now, who is going to talk a little bit about the potential management response, once the stock assessment review has been completed.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Judd. Now we have to talk about what this means in terms of amendments, right, and so this is what we are proposing. Since it is a single stock, and we need to come up with the apportionment between the South Atlantic and the Gulf, we would do that in one amendment, and that amendment would only include an action to establish the jurisdictional allocation for both species.

Recall that there's Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55 that has been sort of paused, since there needed to be an update to the yellowtail snapper amendment, and so we would pick that back up. The actions would be, like I said, just OFL, ABC, and jurisdictional allocation.

After that's done, then each council, with their respective apportionment of the ABC, would then establish the total ACL. For us, there would also be establishment of the sector allocations, and then any management or accountability measures the council is interested in considering, and the same thing for the Gulf.

For the previous amendment, the Gulf Council would be administrative lead, and that's simply because of timing, because you guys aren't going to get the recommendations from the joint SSCs until the very first week of March. The meeting will have just been the week before, and so there's not enough time for us to get started on an amendment, and so we figured the Gulf Council could be the lead, the administrative lead, for that amendment, and then, you know, hopefully the two will move kind of back-to-back. Ideally, that's what we would intend to do, and so that's what we're proposing, and, if you guys have any questions, or clarifications, I am happy to talk about it some more.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions, or concerns? All right. I don't see any hands.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you all for your input.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, Judd. All right. Next up is the Stock Risk Ratings for Golden Tilefish, Blueline Tilefish, Red Snapper, Mutton Snapper, and Yellowtail Snapper.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so, for the ABC control rule stock risk ratings, we've developed a decision document, and I will go through that, giving a summary of the different scoring attributes, and then we will pull up -- Instead of going through, in the Word document, the actual ratings for each specific species, we'll have a spreadsheet, so that the numbers can add up, and average out in real time, as you go through your scoring process.

When you passed the ABC control rule in 2024, when that was revised to the new control rule, you decided that final risk scores would be evaluated for South Atlantic snapper grouper species by the council, with input from the AP and the SSC, and, if you look at this table here, you can see how those risk ratings, those risk scores, come into play, and so the way that -- Just for nomenclature's sake, I'm going to try to stick to -- When I say "score", I'm referring to a number, the number that we use, a 1, 2, or 3, as we go through this process, whereas a rating would be the final result, the low, medium, or high risk rating, and I will stick to that as much as I can, but this is my first time doing this, and so please have patience.

When you look at the stock risk ratings, they interact with the biomass, the relative biomass, levels that come out of a stock assessment, and they produce a P* value. P*, if you will remember, is the accepted risk of overfishing, and so, for every fish that is taken out of a population, there is a risk that the population is experiencing overfishing, and, as you take more and more fish, that risk becomes higher and higher.

When you offset catch levels, you are accepting some level of risk of overfishing, and these percentages would say what your stated risk of overfishing -- How much risk you are willing to accept, how much of a probability that that stock is going to experience overfishing you are willing to accept for each of these levels.

Going into the attributes, there are three categories of attributes. You have your biological attributes, human dimension, and your environmental. I'll talk through each of these and kind of the default scoring criteria that are associated with those. You do have some level of discernment to deviate from your scoring criteria, but be conscious that you do need to also keep your record, and so, if you're going to deviate from your default standard scoring that you've reviewed throughout your ABC control rule process, then there would likely need to be some reasoning to go along with that.

First diving into the biological attributes, and, just as a reminder, I'm presenting these as a -- To remind you of what is in the ABC control rule, and not as much to go through a review, or trying to figure out changes to be made to these attributes. You've already reviewed this process, and approved it, and so I do want to make sure I point that out.

For the biological attributes, the first one that you will look at is estimated natural mortality. The natural mortality rate for a stock is associated with its productivity, and so, in circumstances of non-fishing species that have a high natural mortality rate, a lot of them would have died naturally anyway, and so we figure that there can be more fish taken out of that population, because they would naturally experience a high natural mortality rate, absent that, and, in order to persist, these species need to have characteristics like maturing quickly, growing quickly, reproducing at high volumes, and so, typically, your species that have a high natural mortality rate are going to be those that you can harvest at a relatively higher level, and so you're going to be at a low risk of overfishing a stock if it has a very high natural mortality rate.

You'll see the low risk right there is associated with natural mortality rates greater than 0.4, whereas your higher risk is going to be those that experience a very low natural mortality rate. These are going to tend to be your species that grow slowly, mature later in life, may not have as much annual productivity than others.

Next, moving into age at maturity, and so species that mature later in life are going to have a harder time recovering, should they become overfished. They're also going to have potentially lower productivity, on a year-to-year basis, and so, species that have a younger age of maturity, they'll mature faster, and they'll become productive into the stock at an earlier point in their life, and so your risk of overfishing is going to increase for species that have a later age at maturity, and so we evaluate this with the age at which 50 percent of the females are expected to be mature, and we'll present that information as we go through the individual species, but your high risk is an age at 50 percent maturity of greater than or equal to four years. If you're less than two years, then that species would be considered a low risk of overfishing.

Next, going into your human dimension attributes, first, we're looking at the ability to regulate the fishery, and so this has to do with whether the catch is able to be constrained to the total ACL. That's the limit that it's not supposed to be going over, on an annual basis, from a management perspective. High risk would be reflected by the total ACL being exceeded in three or more of the last five years. A low risk would be a stock for which the landings are consistently being kept below the total ACL.

Now, we did have the question come up that it should be kind of a red flag if the landings are being kept below the ACL, because then there may be fewer fish out there. That may be the case. It's just not evaluated in that specific piece of the criteria, because there also is the job of management to be able to constrain the catch, and so this is evaluating the management's ability to constrain the catch to a sustainable level.

There are other pieces of information that can be evaluated, and there's a whole stock assessment that goes into setting the catch that would indicate if the population is at a lower state, and so keep that in mind as you go through that.

Next is the potential for discard losses. Discard losses can create a lot of problems, as you all have experienced, because, in those situations, there's catch and release. There's not necessarily constraints on how many fish are going through that process, and so, if there is a high proportion of removals coming from dead discards, then that can create a higher risk of overfishing than species that experience a lower risk of their removals coming from dead discards, and you can see the associated percentages there.

Annual commercial value looks at how the commercial sector is going to value that fishery, is going to seek that specific stock, and it can also be thought of in another context, in the sense of could the commercial catches mask stock declines, and so, if the stock and the commercial catch per unit effort are, you know, kind of maintained, then, as the stock goes up, you see more commercial catches. As the stock goes down, you see fewer.

However, if a commercial fisherman highly values a species, and they have a lot of benefit from being able to go after that species, and they might spend an extra hour, or two, going after that

specific species, because they have the incentive of a high price per pound, or a lot of dependency of their business on that particular stock, and so that can create a higher risk of overfishing, because it may mask those population fluctuations in that information, and so you may see maintained high catches, even if the population is starting to go down.

We have two pieces of criteria that go into this. One is considering the percentage of total annual revenue, and the other is considering the percentage of average revenue on a per trip basis, and so there's the annual and the per trip basis for that attribute that are being considered, and I think we have one case in which they fall in two different categories, and that's a place where the council would kind of use some discernment to see which one of those ratings should this fall into, from that perspective.

Next, looking at your recreational desirability, our proxy, our metric for evaluating this, is using the number of trips that report targeting this species, and so, if there are a lot of trips that are recreational trips that are going after a particular species, then that can put it at a higher risk of experiencing overfishing than one that is not as highly sought after, and you see the associated percentages there.

Next, looking at social concerns, this one we had to deviate a little bit from the default criteria, and, if you have any questions, then I'm going to defer them to our social scientists on staff, because I don't completely know all of that analysis, but, basically, we do not have the definition of information to go all the way down to the community level.

We have it at the county level, and a given county may include several communities, and so we had to deviate a little bit from these thirteen and seven metrics, and what is presented here is, basically, if there was one or more county that had a medium to high, or a high dependency upon a given stock, then that got a bit more weight towards a higher risk of overfishing than if there were entire counties that mostly were not very dependent on a given stock, and then, finally, the environmental attributes.

Environmental attributes, and their role in overfishing, are very hard to categorize, and so these -- We have three different attributes that are included here, and, basically, if any of them pose a risk to the stock, then it's an on switch. It turns it on, and it puts it in high risk from an environmental perspective. If there is nothing that applies for that stock, from any of these three categories, then it is not included. It's not a part of the average. It's just an off.

The potential risk factors that are evaluated here would be ecosystem importance, and so this kind of evaluates the role that this stock would play in affecting other species around it. Is there a high dependency of other species on this species, in terms of ecosystem effects? Is it a keystone predator? Is it a primary prey type of species? Is it a habitat builder, that a lot of other species depend on? Things like that would put it as there's a higher risk that comes from potentially overfishing that stock.

Next, looking at climate change. Now, this one gets a little bit complicated, from the standpoint that climate change has different effects on different species. Not every stock is going to be negatively affected by climate change, and so we're really looking more towards is climate change negatively affecting the stock in our region, is it potentially causing disruptions to the productivity, disruptions to the recruitment, and this may not always be definitively proven.

This could be a potential that, you know, this species is susceptible to these climate change effects. Just due to the nature of changing climate ongoing, and the research associated with it, we may not see all of the definitive cases right now in front of us, but you all are still tasked with considering that as part of the management.

Then, finally, if there are any -- This is just kind of a coverall, but if there are any other environmental variables that are causing negative effects on a stock, or could cause negative effects on a stock, that we know about, and this would be things like recognize potential regime shifts, or conditions that are unfavorable to recruitment, recruitment failure due to some other, or some unknown environmental variable. If there's something that you all are noticing is, you know, causing disruptions to the stock's productivity, then that would be something that would potentially get flagged, from an environmental standpoint, as a risk variable.

So, at this point, I'll pause, and see if there are any clarifying questions concerning the attributes, and then, after that, I will pass it off to Judd and he will walk you through each of the individual species, so that you can see the recommendations from your SSC and the Snapper Grouper AP, and you can go through the scoring, and we'll come out with the risk ratings for these five species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Mike. Any questions? All right. I see heads nodding no.

DR. CURTIS: All right, and so thank you, Mike, for introducing all the different categories and the descriptions therein. So what you see now is kind of the default spreadsheet that we've been using to accumulate these different scores and then calculate what the ultimate risk level would be at the very end.

This is an iterative process where the -- Let me go just through each of these columns here, and so you have each of the biological and human dimensions attributes, et cetera, on the left, in Column A. You have the various categories of the risk of overexploitation, from high, medium, to low, and what the different criteria are for that level of exploitation.

The notes column then is populated from either notes from when the default and the preliminary scores were set, information coming from stock assessments, like you see in this case from natural mortality, which is from SEDAR 73 for red snapper, and then, also, comments from either the SSC or the advisory panel, when they reviewed these scores in their respective October meetings.

The default score is the preliminary score that was given when the ABC control rule was first being developed, and this was done by the SSC. The AP score then reflects the more recent AP input from the October meeting, as does the SSC score. In this case, the SSC scores have not changed from those default scores, which is not surprising, given that those preliminary scores were generated by the SSC to begin with, but the AP scores do differ somewhat, and so, ultimately, it's the council's decision on what the final score should be.

I'll go through this with you for each of these different species that we're doing now. We'll input the council score at the end, and then it will tally up the level of risk, at the very end, and then, because, as Mike mentioned, this is a dynamic scoring kind of setup, where the high, medium, and low levels of exploitation will shift, the ranges will shift, based on the most current information,

and so we'll input all the species scores that the council has determined, and then we'll see where those -- What the ultimate risk of overexploitation will be, and so any questions on the process?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so the AP score is recent. It's not -- It doesn't go back to the default score, meaning from the original discussion on this. It's from a recent AP meeting, right?

DR. CURTIS: That's correct. Yes, the default score was done in the development of the ABC control rules, and so it's several years old. Mike could probably clarify, but the AP score, and the SSC scores, were both recent from October meetings of this year.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: The default score may not line up with what was included like way back at the ABC control rule amendment. The default score is the score if you go strictly based on the default criteria that were set up, and so the way that like you look at high, medium, and low, and your default criteria are your -- For natural mortality rate, mature -- Or natural mortality is less than 0.2, and so, if that species had a 0.15 criteria, and that were updated between when this got passed and right now, then that would be reflected in the default scores, the scoring according to the default criteria.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? All right. Back to you, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so we'll just go down one line at a time, and so this first species that we're reviewing is red snapper. For the biological attributes, estimated natural mortality, SEDAR 73 indicated that the value was 0.11. These are age-dependent estimates, scaled to this value, and so the default score then was one. The AP score was two, and the SSC score was one. The AP commented that the red snapper are fast-growing, and long-lived, and so they may be less susceptible than most species to overfishing, which was their rationale for wanting to change that to a score of two from one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thoughts on that, because what we're trying to do here is put a number in that council score column. Thoughts on -- I mean, because the AP score is different, and they do make some points, but, yes, thoughts on that? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: They do make some points, but, in this sort of metric, I'm inclined to go with our scientific advisors. It feels like more of a scientific determination, to me, but that's just me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Yes, and I'm going to agree with Kerry, and then, also, just in looking at the stock assessment, when you look at the ranges of sensitivities, there wasn't any M values that would have exceeded 0.2.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I just wanted to make the point that I think, you know, ultimately, it is a council decision on the risk of overfishing, but some of these things are highly technical, scientific in nature, and this is certainly one of them, and so I think, you know, some degree of deference to the SSC is warranted throughout this stuff, but, in areas like this, I would say it's particularly high. I'm just adding that for your consideration.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so it sounds like we're going with a one. That's how I'm reading this. Okay. All right. Back to you for age at maturity.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Age at maturity is broken into those four categories, from less than two years for low, from two to four years for medium, and over four years for high. SEDAR 73, in 2021, estimated the greater than 50 percent maturity between one and two years, making it a low risk of overexploitation, and the SSC and AP were in agreement there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Everybody had a three. Are we good with three? All right. Heads nodding yes. Thumbs-up. I can't tell -- Maybe this is a lively discussion after lunch, and I can't tell.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving into human dimension attributes now, and I'll try to speed it up, and the first one will be the most painful, right, and then we kind of smooth it as we go through the other species. Ability to regulate the fishery, the default score one, AP score was two, medium, and the SSC score was a one. Over there, the criteria for two is the fishery is mostly kept below total ACL, exceeds the ACL one to two out of -- One or two out of five years, and does not exceed ACL by more than 15 percent.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Every time I see differences, I'm going to ask you guys some questions. What do we think about the AP score, versus the SSC score? What are we thinking here? Okay. Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I don't think we've done a great job at regulating. I mean, it's hard to constrain the harvest, which for me says our ability to regulate the fishery at this moment is a one, right, and that might be unpopular.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, let me ask Judd another question. Can you have like a half of a point? Have we done a 1.5, or does it have to be a whole number?

DR. CURTIS: I'm going to defer to Mike on that one, because I just asked Chip that same question.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I mean, the math will -- You know, the math will math. It will still average out. There's nothing that is, I guess, constraining you guys to these categories, but I do think that, once you start getting into decimals, it gets messier than what it was intended to be. It's intended to be a categorical thing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: This is awesome. I think it should be like 1.75, or 1.5, or maybe 1.325, and so thoughts? Trish, and then -- Wait. Let's go to Chip first, and then back over here to Trish.

DR. COLLIER: So I know there might be a desire to get to these half points, but, when we're looking at this thing in an overall score, it does end up scoring each of the different species relative to each other in the final product, and so, as you're trying to really get down -- It's going to be kind of difficult on how to do this, as you're getting into half points. I would recommend just make a decision, and go with it, because it's -- Getting that half point might not actually do you any good.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Trish, and then Tom, then Tim, then Jimmy.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to agree with Kerry. I would put a one, if it was up to me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you. I'm going to go with one. That's the definition, the ability to regulate the fishery. If we can't get a good grasp on discards, we don't have a good ability to regulate it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I would lean more toward a two. I mean, the first thing I read there is the fishery consistently exceeds its total ACL, in three out of five years, or total ACL by more than 15 percent. I don't think we could sit here and say that we meet that, and so I don't think -- I mean, I can't remember when the last time recreational exceeded the ACL. I don't think it's been recently, has it? Anyway, I would lean more toward the APs, to agree with the APs, a score of two.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, and then I'm going to go back to my list.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So it is tiny, at least from my view, and I'm sorry that we can't fit everything all onto the screen at once, but it's in there, as far as the years that the ACL has been exceeded. The total ACL was exceeded by more than 15 percent in 2018, 2019, and 2020, when looking at the time period from 2018 to 2022, I believe, or in 2021, and so, four out of five years, the total ACL was exceeded, in that 2018 to 2022 period.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thank you for that. Jimmy, and then Andy.

MR. HULL: Yes, ma'am. It's a one. We don't have the ability to regulate this fishery and not go over the ACL.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm not sure why we're spending so much time on this. The total ACL exceeded three or more times in five years is a one. We just read that it was exceeded four out of five years, and so it should be a one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Sorry. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Sorry, and I had to be out a minute. Well, 15 percent seems like a lot, but the number -- 15 percent of what number, which is a really small number, I think, and so it's not like we had an ACL of 200,000 pounds, or 500,000 pounds, when we were 15 percent out. I mean, we had a really low number to be 15 percent out, which, really, I don't think it's as bad as just looking at 15 percent might say.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I still think we're at one. Tim.

MR. GRINER: No, and I had a lunch moment there. I was black sea bassing over here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Got it. We're on red snapper. I'm just saying. I know that was a lively black sea bass. I'm going to go to Amy. Did you have your hand up? Okay. One. All right, one.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. I'm hearing one. I think, Jessica, you hit on a good strategy. Maybe it's just go down, and, the ones that are different, then we can really have some discussion on.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so then what we're going to do is, if we see differences, then we're going to stop and have a discussion. Otherwise, we're going to move quicker, and so, if you have a comment, or question, which Trish has a question, then let us know, and we'll go slower. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So maybe I'm reading this wrong, and I'm going with going if everything counts, but, at annual commercial value, shouldn't the default be a two, from what your description is, or am I just reading this wrong? Annual commercial value is between 10 and 40, which looks like that's a two, but that's all years. Anyway, maybe I'm wrong, but, when I was going through this, I thought maybe that should have been a two, but you guys --

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think Trish is right.

DR. CURTIS: Trish, I think you're right, based on the criteria outlined in the notes. That means both those criteria for being a two, not a three. Well, that can be then the council's recommendation, is to be a two, and we'll just leave the other ones untouched.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so is our recommendation a two? Okay. People are saying yes, and then, also, the one above it, potential for discard losses, it looks like that's a one. Okay.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving along, recreational desirability, we have one from both the AP and the SSC. Annual recreational targeted trips range from 5 to 36 percent of rec trips in the region, with an average of 19 percent. There's a one and one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think it's a one.

DR. CURTIS: I'm assuming the council will go one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes.

DR. CURTIS: Social concerns, estimated at the county level, most counties have a low reliance on this species. Both the SSC and AP were scores of three.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Are we good with that, the three? All right. Thumbs-up.

DR. CURTIS: That concludes the dimension scores. The environmental attributes are next. There was no default scores built into the environmental attributes for this, and the AP, and the SSC, did not assign any environmental attribute scores.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. It doesn't sound like we need to. You want to skip it? Okay.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so I'll just leave that blank, and so that essentially means, within the score sheet, that it does not account for any of the environmental attributes. Okay, and the next species is golden tilefish. SEDAR 66, going back up to the biological attributes, natural mortality estimated in SEDAR 66 was 0.1038, based on a max age of forty years, resulting in a high risk, and both the SSC and AP agreed, and so any dissent?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Once again, we're on golden tilefish now, and not black sea bass. Golden tilefish. All right. I don't see any dissent.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Age of maturity estimated -- The age at 50 percent maturity, from SEDAR 66, is at three years, falling into a medium category. Both the AP and SSC agreed, and so two.

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

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving down to the first category, and the human dimension attributes, we had a difference in opinion between the AP, or difference in the scores between the APs and the SSCs, a two or a three. In this case, the notes, the total ACL was exceeded by less than 15 percent in 2019. In 2020, it was less than 1 percent, and, in 2022, it was less than 1 percent. The commercial ACL was exceeded by less than 15 percent in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Then the recreational ACL was exceeded by greater than 15 percent in 2018 through 2021.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Is it a two? I think it's a two. I'm just putting that out there. Okay. I see heads nodding yes. Wait. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: No, I'm good with two. I just was wondering why the AP said three, because I don't see that comment. That's all.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, could you explain why the AP had a different number?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think it had to do with that being a heavily commercial fishery, and in the sense that, yes, from the recreational side, there could be very wide exceedances, due to potential MRIP estimation in some of those years, but, largely, the commercial fishery is pretty consistent at its 97 percent of that ACL, and so, even though there is a regular exceedance, it's very low. It's in that less than 15 percent range, and, in two of the three years where it gets exceeded, it's less than 1 percent of an exceedance, and so I think that's why the AP went with a lower risk factor than what the default or the SSC would indicate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Because it's a low-encountered recreational species, is what it sounds like.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, because it's low-encountered recreational species, and the sector that has the bulk of it, even if they have exceedance, it's normally because of that lag in time that happens between when they hit their quota and when the closure of the fishery occurs, and, like it's noted there, 2020 and 2022 were both less than 1 percent of exceedance.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That helps. Kerry, thoughts?

MS. MARHEFKA: I don't know. I am inclined to say two. We did hear, in public testimony yesterday, that there's an increasing targeting of these species in the recreational fishery, which

doesn't necessarily mean we're not able to regulate it, but, given the uncertainty in whether or not we're picking up that increase, I'm inclined to have it be a two.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Let me just look around the room. Chip, did you have your hand up? Okay.

DR. COLLIER: I will say, when we go through the fishery overview, you are going to see a couple years with very high recreational landings, almost equaling the commercial landings in the recent time period, and so that does tend to indicate that, in some years, it might be difficult to regulate this fishery.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to concur with Kerry.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and it sounds like -- I see people holding hands up. Hang on. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Well, I was originally going to say, if there was a moment to have a half point, this would be one of them, but, and I would still -- Like I'm on the fence, saying like 2.5 would be great, being that it's a small commercial fishery, but heavily regulated, but, given Chip's comment and this being -- Being that it's such a small ACL, and it's a rare-event species in MRIP, which makes it hard to manage, I would be inclined to go with two.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't know. I heard the half a point. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: I think, on the AP mindset, it was commercially -- I mean, when the fishery is open, it's highly monitored, and it's shut down, and, many times, it's been closed early, and then reopened, and so, I mean, there is accountability there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: For what it's worth, I would go with the three, because the PSEs on those couple of recreational years were really high, if memory serves.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thoughts here, or we could do that sneaky half point. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I'm fine with the three as well. I mean, it's a small recreational fishery. It's rare-event, and the --

MS. MCCAWLEY: The high PSEs on that, yes. Okay, and so we've got a couple of people suggesting three. Are we okay with three? Okay. No one liked 2.5, and so three. Okay. Do you want to hold up what number you want? Put your hand in the air with the number that you want. I think that the threes have it, except for I saw two 2.5s in there.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. So we're going with the three. Great discussion. Next up, we have the potential for discard losses. That was a three across the board, and so, unless there's dissent, I will put in a three here. Annual commercial values was a one, a high risk. Any objection? Recreational desirability was a three, low risk. Threes across the board. Any discussion?

Social concerns was a two across the board. Any discussion? Not so fast. So, in this case, we did have the AP recommend an environmental attribute be applied to the ecosystem importance, because of their habitat effects through burrowing behaviors.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thoughts on that? Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So I'm going to defer, again, to this SSC on that, for the fact that the folks who do know some about the biology of these animals would be offering those numbers up. I have very little experience with these fish, other than to know that they do burrow, but that's it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So your number is a zero, or N/A, a blank. Okay. Is everybody okay with the blank? All right. I see heads nodding yes.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. All right. That completes tilefish. Moving on, the next species -- That completes golden tilefish. The next species we have is blueline tilefish, and so the score is a one. Based on SEDAR 50, 0.13 was the estimated natural mortality, based on a meta-analysis growth parameter.

Okay. In this case, there is no age of maturity score, because age was not estimable in this assessment, and so that is left as a blank. Okay. Moving on to human dimensions, the ability to regulate the fishery, we have ones across the board, a high risk of overexploitation. Any discussion?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No hands.

DR. CURTIS: Potential for discard losses, SEDAR 50 characterized dead discards as 3 percent of total removals, making it a three. Annual commercial value, the average was 3.3 percent for total revenue for all years between 2018 and 2022. For annual revenue, and for trip revenue, 15 percent, putting it in a two category. Recreational desirability were threes across the board. Annual recreational targeted trips range from zero to 2 percent, an average of less than one. Three?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes.

DR. CURTIS: Social concerns were twos across the board. It was mentioned one community is medium, and two are medium-high, Dare North Carolina for commercial and Dare North Carolina for recreational, and then Monroe for Florida, Monroe, Florida, for recreational. Okay. In this case, for blueline, climate change was assigned a default score of one, and the AP, and the SSC concurred, during their review in October.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see heads nodding yes on a one on that. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I'm just curious. There's a comment about the burrowing behavior, but there's no score with that. I'm looking at -- Well, I'm looking -- I'm pretty sure I'm looking at what's on - - Well, maybe it's because I'm looking at what's actually off of the link on the page and not what's virtual, and so that might be part of that. I'm looking at the document.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Sorry. That looks like it was an errant copy over, in terms of the burrowing, and that would be referring to golden tilefish, but the climate change discussion was the one that was had relative to blueline tilefish. They seem to be seen further and further north than their historical range, moving up into the Mid-Atlantic area, and it seems to be like the strongest portion of the stock is kind of pushing up in that northern portion, and there's not as large of a portion of the stock that is further south.

DR. BELCHER: No worries. I just was -- Because I was working off the PDF, and that comment was there with no score.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So then I think we're good with one, right? Okay.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. A score of one for the environmental attribute climate change, and that completes blueline tilefish. Moving right along, muton snapper. Biological attributes, natural mortality was estimated at 0.11, based on a max age of forty years, placing it in the one, high risk of overexploitation. The AP and SSC concurred, and the age of maturity was estimated at -- 50 percent maturity at 3.7 years, placing it into the medium category. The AP did make a comment that size limit changes was a significant measure, and so a two. Any discussion? Okay.

Moving down to the ability to regulate the fishery, there are no overages from either sector from 2018 to 2022. The AP made a comment that they are not meeting the ACL in recent years. Closed areas where mutton are found in south Florida, placing it into a low category, a score of three, low risk of overexploitation.

Potential for discard losses, I won't read all that, but you can see the metrics there. The AP did make a comment that it's typically shallow-water releases, noting there are problems with shark depredation, but still placed it under a low risk of overexploitation, a three.

We have a different score for the annual commercial trip value. For total annual revenue, between 1 and 10 percent of total annual revenue for all years, 2018 to 2022, and the average of 1.8 percent, less than 10 percent of total trip revenue for all years, 2018 to 2022, averaging 6.7 percent for total trip revenue. The AP commented that it was more valuable in lower quantities, and maybe Mike can elaborate on that.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So that was -- I would have to look back and see the context with which that comment was made.

MS. MCCAWLEY: While Mike is looking for that, Trish has something on -- Is it the previous row? Can you go up a little bit?

MS. MURPHEY: Yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: For discard losses, and is that the question that you had, Trish?

MS. MURPHEY: So, on that, is that correct too, because it's one is dead discards at 40 percent, and it looks like both commercial and rec had greater than 40 percent discards, or removals, and so should that be a one? That was just another one I had flagged, and I may be reading it wrong.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So we may have gotten that one right around the same time that we got the SEDAR 79 stock assessment, and so that may have changed in between their scoring and this scoring, but there were different -- There was a big change in the dead discards that happened from that assessment, relative to the levels that were estimated from before then.

MS. MURPHEY: So my question is should -- Based off that information, it looks like it should be a one. Yes?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So, yes, there's some discrepancy between commercial and recreational, and so maybe it needs a two. Let me -- Who had their hand up? Tim, was it you?

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I'm getting confused here too, but what was the previous percent of dead discards, if it changed? I mean, greater than 40 percent, and I'm not real familiar with the mutton snapper commercial fishery. I don't even know the minimum size limit, but I can't imagine that the dead discards are greater than 40 percent.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right. Well, I think that they're higher -- Because that's higher than red snapper. I think that it had been higher maybe because of shark depredation, but -- Because, yes, the commercial -- It said 5 percent, and so I don't think that this is an issue, but that's just me. I mean, we could compromise at two, and go in between those two numbers. What are other people's thoughts here? Can we ask staff to look into this one more maybe? Okay.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. I'll keep that one as a placeholder, and we'll make a note to look that one over. Okay. Then back down to annual commercial value. We also had a little bit of a discrepancy, and Mike was going to tell us something about that.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I don't have anything additional on that. That was just a note that was recorded, and, without diving into AP minutes in the middle of a meeting, I'm not able to give a whole lot more context.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I don't have that specific AP, but I've just gotten a text that says it's the same price as grouper, if not more. They're -- The few you get are very desirable, and so I suspect that that's where they're coming from, and so I'm inclined to go with the three.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for checking on that. Are we good with that? Do we agree that recreational desirability is a one? Okay, and let's just back up to the row before on commercial value. Are you thinking it should be a two and not a three, Kerry?

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I think it's more valuable than would be shown in the numbers, and so that tells me it's a two.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Right. In this case, two would be more valuable, yes. Okay. We're going one and three on the last two, unless there's any discussion on those, and no environmental attributes were considered, or scored, in this case for a mutton snapper. Any other discussion on mutton snapper? We'll check out the one value for the discard losses and get back to you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: The discard losses, the three in the default category, that came from the SSC's original scoring, and so we forgot to put that to the default criteria when the assessment was completed this fall, and so we put the information there, but, according to the assessment information from the SEDAR 79 assessment that was completed, that would be a one, and one meaning it has a high number of discard losses.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: That was how I was reading it when I was reviewing this before the meeting. I would have put one there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I was just going to ask, and I presume the SSC has not reviewed it, and provided a risk rating, based on the new assessment, which you can almost guarantee will be the one, based on that score.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so, Kerry, should it -- One? So make it a one. Okay. Don't ask Kerry. What do -- Trish says one. Okay. Tim.

MR. GRINER: So this -- That came from SEDAR, and the SSC hasn't seen the SEDAR?

DR. CURTIS: Yes, correct. It's gone through the review workshop, but the SSCs have not seen that. They'll see the assessment, and set ABC recommendations, in February. Okay. Final decision, number one.

The last species is yellowtail snapper. Going back up to biological attributes, estimated natural mortality, and, again, this is SEDAR 64, and so this would be the old assessment, and not the most recent one that's coming out and being reviewed in February. The constant mortality at age of 0.16, making it a high risk, and that was the same between AP and SSC, as well as a risk of three, a low risk. 50 percent of females were sexually immature at 1.7. That was the same between the AP and the SSC, and so any discussion there?

Moving along, the ability to regulate fishery is at a three across the board, a low risk of overexploitation. Potential for discard losses was a three, a low. Annual commercial values was high, a one. Recreational desirability, one. Social concerns, we did have a discrepancy from the original. That was a two, and the AP recommended it was -- The communities are more reliant on the species than the default score, and the comment down here is, because of the high importance to south Florida communities, it should be a high risk.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We might have to agree with that, yes.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Going with one, and no environmental attributes were -- Excuse me. One was scored. For other environmental variables, infrastructure impacts on shallow-water fish, and they are dependent on coral habitat, and the AP recommended scoring this with a one, because of these reasons.

MS. MCCAWLEY: What do we think about that? I think I would go with the zero here. I don't know how coral dependent they are, but, yes, I think I would go with no score, would be my suggestion. Okay. I see heads nodding yes.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Great. Leaving it blank. That concludes the scoring process. We'll have to take a moment to just input all these into the master spreadsheet, and then recalculate all the things, and so, Chair, I'll leave it up to you if you want to do that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, so staff can put them in another part of the document, let's take a five-minute break.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, come on back to the table. Now we're going to report out on our final scores \, before we move into golden tilefish, and so I'm going to turn it to Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Thanks. So we summed up all the values that you all just went through, and added them to the All Species scores tab in the spreadsheet, and so, as Mike had said, and I mentioned before, this is a dynamic -- The percentiles are dynamic, where they change based on input of new scores, and so those percentiles will change.

You see -- I just summarized, right here, the new risk score, and the new risk rating, of the five species, which are highlighted in yellow, and blue line tilefish came out as 1.4, high, golden tilefish at 1.95, a high, mutton snapper at 1.75, high, red snapper at 1.8, high, and yellowtail snapper at 1.9, high, and so they all fall under the high risk rating.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions on that? Okay. I think we're concluding this portion of the agenda, and I think, next up, we're going to move into the golden tilefish stock assessment, where we're going to use the number. Okay. As we move into golden tilefish, the first presentation will be done by Erik Williams, and so we're getting that going right now.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Erik, I've gone ahead and unmuted you.

DR. COLLIER: Erik, this is Chip. Do you want to control the presentation, or do you want us to go through the slides for you?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, and why don't you go ahead and go through the slides.

DR. COLLIER: Go ahead when you're ready, Erik.

DR. WILLIAMS: All right, thanks. Thank you, everybody, and thank you to the chair for allowing me the opportunity to present. I am, obviously, not Matt Vincent. Matt was going to make this presentation, but had some issues. He was the lead analyst for this stock assessment, but I'm going to step in and go through this presentation, which hopefully will be brief. For those who don't know me, I am the Chief of the Atlantic Fisheries Branch for the Southeast Science Center.

SEDAR 89 is an operational assessment, and the assessment previous to this was SEDAR 66, which was completed in February of 2021 and had a terminal year of 2018. That assessment found that the stock was not overfished and not undergoing overfishing. For this stock assessment, we held a topical working group on January 24 and February 14. All the data was submitted on April 5th of this year, with working papers by April 19th, and then we turned around this assessment fairly quickly and had the report written by July 31.

I won't read these terms of reference in detail, but to note that this is an operational assessment, and it included some topical working groups. It actually included five topical working groups, and I'll go through sort of the conclusions from each of those in the next set of slides.

The first topical working group was to see if we could incorporate the SADL data, which is the South Atlantic Deep Water Longline Survey, a survey that was started up in 2020, I believe, and it was determined that we couldn't use it for this assessment, because it was a little premature. There wasn't enough data available, and the first year of this survey, which is common for many surveys, and the first year is always sort of a spin-up year, and had some issues, and might not be usable for sort of final analyses, and so we're hoping to get some more years under our belt of collecting survey data for this survey, and then hopefully this will be a very valuable piece of information in future assessments.

The second topical working group was addressing hermaphroditism, which has been brought up as to whether this species is a hermaphroditic species or not. Without getting into too many details, the grand conclusion is that there really isn't enough evidence yet, or ever, and not to say that there may not be more evidence, but the evidence right now is pointing to the fact that they are not hermaphrodites, and so we did not pursue anything there.

The Topical Working Group 3, the previous assessment from SEDAR 66 used gonad weight as the measure of spawning output, and we wanted to try to improve on that, by moving to fecundity as the spawning output measure, and we were able to do that, with some additional data, and so, that's one change to note from SEDAR 66, is that we changed the spawning output measure from gonad weight to fecundity.

Then Topical Working Groups 4 and 5 sort of were looking at connectivity and range shifts. There's very limited data on a lot of this, and so we struggled with sort of making any grand conclusions about genetic structure in the stock, or connectivity, and there is not much -- We're sort of actually in the middle of the total range of tilefish, and so there's not much to say about any range shift at this point, because there are tilefish that range all the way up to Nova Scotia, and all the way down as far south as you want to go in the South Atlantic.

A brief overview of the assessment model. We made all the changes that I just sort of went over from the topical working groups, the change to fecundity, and I guess the others really didn't amount to too many changes to the assessment model. We did incorporate an ageing error matrix, which was not done in the last assessment model, and, as I said, we changed the SSB metric, or spawning output metric, and, of course, we incorporated some more things into our Monte Carlo Bootstrap Ensemble uncertainty analysis. For this assessment, we used the years 1972 to 2022, and we were able to estimate steepness, which I'll talk a little bit more later about.

Getting right to the output, here's sort of some of the conclusions. What's shown here is the base run and median run of the output, and in the gray is the uncertainty range from our MCBE uncertainty analysis, and this is for spawning biomass, which, in this case, as I said, is fecundity, which is millions of eggs, and on the right is just biomass, and you can basically see the stock has sort of undulated a little over the last forty years, but it's generally not -- We're not seeing any big trends up or down, or alarming trends.

Fishing mortality outputs are shown here, and it does fluctuate. As we often see with fishing rates, they fluctuate quite a bit sometimes, but the end result for this one is, in 2022, the terminal year of this assessment, the stock was right at FMSY, which is an unusual result. I mean, it was dead on, out to the third decimal place, right at FMSY.

This one should be clear as mud. I don't know what happened here, but these were just showing the phase plots. They're available in the stock assessment, if folks want to look at them, but I'm going to talk about some of the numbers from this in the next slide, or not the next slide, but one of the next slides.

The next slide here is selectivity. One of the big changes we did have in this stock assessment is a change in selectivity starting in 2020, and there was an obvious shift to harvesting younger fish that started to occur in 2020. We heard this from the harvesters, that they were, in some cases, targeting these smaller fish, or at least they were showing up with more smaller fish, and so, as a result, we sort of -- We had to model that with a change in selectivity, and so there's important implications for this that I'll talk about later. The red line is showing the new selectivity that we're currently applying to both commercial gears, which is the commercial handline gear as well as the commercial longline gear.

Here's one of our standard sort of tables of output results from the assessment, showing both the estimated value from the base model, and so the column that says "estimate" is our base model output, and the "median" is the median estimate from the suite of MCBE runs.

We tend to go with the estimate values for management, and even for projections, but it's important to note how the estimate and the median from the uncertainty analysis differ sometimes, and, in this case, you can see that, if we highlight the fishing status, F over FMSY, you can see we're point on at FMSY with the base run, but, if you look at the median value, it actually is suggesting we're overfishing, and that's just because the distribution of the uncertainty is such, but it's an important note to understand that the uncertainty is suggesting that we might be overfishing, but the base run itself is not.

For the stock status, overfished status, which is spawning stock biomass over MSST, it actually is a little bit in the reverse direction, or not reverse, but it does, again, show that the median of the MCBE is showing a sort of slightly poorer stock status than the base run itself, but, overall, I would say these differences are not too much to be concerned about, but just to take note of, I guess is probably the best way to put it.

The end results are the stock is officially not overfished, and it is basically fully exploited, right at FMSY, and, again, here's sort of the notes of caution, is that we are very close to the threshold limits, for some of these, and that the MCBE output suggests that we actually are overfishing slightly.

This is a note here to discuss the importance of that dome-shaped selectivity. We switched to that in 2020, because that was showing up in the data, and, because we didn't know whether that is a temporary thing, or a permanent thing, our best assumption is to use that selectivity going forward, with both the projection analysis as well as the computation of the benchmark, and so, if that changes, then you have to worry that that's going to change both the benchmarks as well as the validity of the projections, but, for now, that seems to be the case, because that pattern has held from 2020 on, that there is definitely a shift to younger fish being harvested.

Here's the projection results. We used the P^* of 30 percent, and here's basically the output, and I'm sure the SSC will talk about these results as well, but these are the recommended landings, using that P^* of 30 percent, and this assumes management goes into place in 2025. I think that's it, and so I'll entertain any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that presentation. Are there any questions? I'm looking around the room here. I don't see any hands. Wait. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Hi, Erik. Thanks for the presentation. I was curious, and I guess it's Slide 9, the biomass trends, and the green versus blue line -- Is that median versus maximum likelihood estimates?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

MR. STRELCHECK: Okay, and I see, obviously there's a huge amount of uncertainty around the spawning stock biomass. I'm curious why that's so much larger than the biomass.

DR. WILLIAMS: It is because we're including all the uncertainty that goes into computing fecundity, and so that is quite large.

MR. STRELCHECK: Then, with fishing mortality, which is on the next slide, is that uncertainty driven by the fact of, you know, when tilefish recruit to the fishery at this point, or why is uncertainty increasing over time?

DR. WILLIAMS: That one I'm not exactly sure. You know, it's hard to discern what is happening with uncertainty trends in F . I mean, F does bounce around a lot, and some of that might be driven by -- Well, in other stock assessments, and not necessarily this one, some of that is driven by the uncertainty in the recreational landings and discards. In this case, it's kind of a small component, and so I don't know. I'm not exactly sure what would be driving that.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Hi, Erik. I'm not sure I'm going to ask this in a smart way, but bear with me. When you talked about the selectivity being slightly a thing that made you go -- You said that you looked at both gears as separate fleets. I think what I'm trying to figure out is in my mind, and Charlie, and Jimmy, and Tim, you guys tell me if I'm wrong, but there's been a greater emphasis on the hook-and-line fishery. I know we've fished a lot more for golden tile than we did before

2020, and we're catching them further inshore than the longliners or the SADL fleet would, and so could that be an explanation around your question about that?

DR. WILLIAMS: Well, possibly, and so, Kerry, if you look at this slide, the plot on the left is the handline, and you can see that, even before this shift in 2020, that they did catch smaller fish, relative to the longline, which is on the right, but both fisheries did show a shift to younger fish, as well as a decrease in the older fish, and so that's why we went to this dome-shaped selectivity, and we had three years of data to confirm that, and so it's a realized event, and it shows up in the data. The question we weren't sure is whether this is entirely driven by a change in fishing behavior, or if there is something going on with the stock dynamics, either a possible shift in the distribution of younger fish, or it could even be the beginnings of a big year class coming in, possibly.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thank you so much. That was helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? All right. I don't see any additional hands. Thank you, Erik.

DR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Next up, we're going to go to Marcel, who's going to talk to us about the SSC recommendations.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you. The SSC reviewed the golden tilefish stock assessment. Matt Vincent gave us a really thorough overview of the assessment, and the SSC concluded that it addressed the terms of reference, including all the sub-bullets, and we also concluded that it meets the BSIA guidance and practices.

As Erik mentioned, many model parameters were updated, and, again, as Erik explained, the appropriate changes in selectivity were made. We felt that there were very good fits to the landings, the indices, and the age comps, and a reasonably good fit to the length comps. We were asked about contributions to risk and uncertainty. The stock-recruit relationship was used to derive MSY, and, as Erik mentioned, there was no proxy needed. There was significant uncertainty in the steepness distribution, and, as I mentioned, the steepness was fixed in the previous assessment, and it was estimated in the current assessment.

The F_{init} parameter, or the F value, to initialize the model had a relatively high uncertainty. We also noted the selectivity, and, again, Erik talked about that, the difference between the domed selectivity and the flat-top selectivity. Matt showed us a selectivity run with a dome-shaped selectivity, and, of course, as expected, there were significant changes in stock size and SSB.

We also noted the lack of indices of abundance in recent years, and I think that's where the new survey would be very useful in the next assessment, and there were two things that we discussed in addition to that. One was the change in spawning input, the gonad weight to fecundity, as Erik explained. Matt presented a comparison of the two methods, and there were very little differences in stock status between those two different methods, and then the retrospective analyses showed a substantial bias in biomass in the terminal year, but that was explained by the introduction of that new selectivity block.

The SSC concluded that the stock size is reliable, and both the SSB and the F indicators are close to what is expected when you manage to MSY, and, as Erik mentioned, there were notable differences between the base model values and the medium MCBE values, and the phase plots, that were kind of mumbled in Erik's presentation, are here on the lower right-hand side, and, as Erik mentioned, the stock is not overfished and is fully exploited.

Relative to the reliable predictions of future conditions to support fishing level recommendations, yes. However, as with every projection, the projections get increasingly uncertain in the future, and then this is Table 4 of the SSC report. The SSC used the stock rating of high, pending the council's scoring, and the ABC recommendations are listed in this table.

As a reminder, again, as Erik mentioned, the SSC recommended an ABC for 2025 through 2027, and that's based on the projections of a maximum projection of five years and the terminal year of 2022, and I believe -- No, and there's one more slide.

In terms of additional monitoring, of course, the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey is important, to particularly abundance and fish size, and, relative to the research recommendations, it would be good to keep looking at the flat-top versus the dome-shaped selectivities. Size distribution between the survey and the fishery is important information, and it may be good to look at a potential age validation as stock structure, and the SSC is always asked about when the next assessment should be conducted, and we felt that the next assessment would be useful within five years.

What should be included in that assessment, of course, is, if available, the SADLS results, a possible stock ID workshop, and the SSC felt that that stock assessment could be reviewed by the SSC, and so we felt that maybe no CIE review would be necessary, and I believe that completes my report. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Marcel. Questions for Marcel? Okay. I see heads nodding no. All right. Thank you. All right. Next up is the fishery overview by Chip.

DR. COLLIER: All right. As usual, once you all get a stock assessment, we try to provide you with a fishery overview, just kind of a snippet of information that's available for the species, trying to combine a lot of information and have it available for you as you're beginning to develop your thoughts on how to create management measures, in order to deal with the outcome of the stock assessment.

If there's significant changes, maybe you have to look at trip limits, bag limits, size limits, seasons, other effort control measures that might be effective for this species. For the most part, we try to keep an updated history of management. Unfortunately, I did not get to that for this one. I was bogged down in other things, trying to get it ready for this, but we do have the newest fishery performance report. I believe that's -- The one from 2018 is in there, and so if you all would like to look at that for golden tilefish.

Then going into the graphs, Erik just went over these. This first one is just looking at the FMSY, and, once again, he said that it wasn't overfishing, and then, in this plot, you can see there's two

points that are at the overfishing line. The reason for that is we do a geometric mean of the last three years, in order to estimate overfishing.

Going down to spawning stock biomass, this is just a plot of the biomass relative to the MSY, as well as the minimum stock size threshold, the MSST. Continuing on down, and, if there's any of these pieces of information, you're more than welcome to look at it. I think a key piece for this stock assessment is looking at these indices of abundance. These can drive a lot of the stock assessments. Unfortunately, we do not have a recent index of abundance for this stock, and so a lot of the directionality that's coming from this is coming from the age structure that's likely taken from the commercial fishery.

One thing we try to do with these is try to put the projections in line with what has been going on historically in the fishery, and you can see, back in the 1980s, there was a tremendous amount of landings back here, and there's just been minor changes from SEDAR 66 to SEDAR 89. You can see a little bit of deviation in the most recent time period.

One thing I do want to highlight here is the change in the ABC, based on the recommendations of that high-risk category for the projections. The ABC will be dropping down, in 2025, to this value. In green, those are the current ABCs, and so it's going to be a slight reduction from the current ABC, but it still will likely be impactful to a small community of the longline fishermen. It's also going to impact the hook-and-line fishermen as well, and not to ignore them, but it is -- In looking at some of the fishery performance reports, and the outcomes of those, it's been highlighted that that longline fishery is highly reliant on this longline fishery for golden tilefish.

Looking at the allocations, and they didn't print out that well on this slide, but it's 97 percent for the commercial fishery and 3 percent for the recreational fishery. The commercial fishery generally bounces around one, or 100% of the ACL, and, as I mentioned earlier, the recreational fishery has some extreme events that pop up through the MRIP survey, and you can see those here, where it's not uncommon that it goes over 500 percent, and, in some instances, it's going 1500 percent over the ACL.

Here's a plot of landings, by sector. Once again, the commercial is the dominant part of this sector. The commercial is in gray, and then the recreational is in blue. Once again, those two years are really showing up in the recreational fishery, as spikes in the data. Here's monthly landings by sector, just so you can see where overall landings are coming from, and then which states -- Where all the landings are coming from. These are grouped in Florida to Georgia, and North Carolina and South Carolina, just to make sure we keep all the confidentiality issues addressed.

The commercial sector, we have the landings, once again. We also, here, are starting to focus on the monthly landings, and, in 2010, you can really see this truncation of the golden tilefish fishery just to the first four months of the year. It's usually closed in early March, but you can see this trend is, ever since 2010, it's rarely been open, at least for the longline fishery, past that March/April time block. Regional landings, once again, it's mostly a Florida fishery, with some landings coming in from Georgia and North Carolina.

Here's some length distributions that were analyzed through TIP. These aren't weighted to anything, and so it's not based on sector or anything like that. These are just raw length estimates, and you can see we had some -- A decent number of fish that were being measured in 2000, 2001,

and 2004, and you can see the size distribution. Unfortunately, I don't have the information on the most recent sizes. I'm sure it's in the database. I just was not able to pull them. They're there, and trust me. It's just I didn't have them.

Then, looking at how the fishery operates, this is a highly targeted fishery, as you can see here. These are the pounds per trip, and then the overall landings that are coming in that bin category. When you're looking at these, a fishery that is highly targeted on a certain species, you're going to see a lot of landings to the right, and that's not uncommon, but, when you look at number of trips, this is not uncommon either. Once again, you're seeing that this is a highly targeted fishery, but there are some smaller catches that do occur.

The recreational fishery, just pointing out here the extremes, and these are numbers of fish, so that the landings are comparable to the number of discards, but you see the number of discards are very minimal in this recreational fishery.

The timing of landings is pretty much all over the place. There seems to be some landings during the summer, but there's also some landings that will occur in January and February, but you'll see little blips throughout the time series. Most of the recreational fishery was coming from North Carolina and South Carolina in the early part of the time period, but since has shifted down to Florida, and I thought I had fixed this graph, but apparently it's not -- I haven't updated on the figure, but there are some length distributions for it. It's very difficult to read, because of the length, the size, of golden tilefish, and I'll get that updated in there.

The one thing I do want to point out, on the number of fish harvested in the recreational fishery, on charter boats and private recreational trips, is you'll see a few trips that were up to five fish, around 2005 and 2006, but then you'll see the impact of regulations coming in, where the bag limit is now one fish per person, and that's what you're seeing throughout the time series, in this last ten years.

Then the nerd in me always likes to show off the information on length and age, and you can see a ten-year-old fish is around thirty inches. These fish do have sexual dimorphic growth, and so this is just the average between the males and females. The length-weight relationship, and so, a thirty-inch fish, how much does that weigh? It's going to be around twelve pounds.

Looking at the maturity of these fish, twenty-inch fish is almost 100 percent mature, and then it assumes, by age, or by all these lengths, that the proportion female remains constant. I've got to check on that one a little bit more, and so that's the fishery description. Anytime you have any questions on that, you can dive into this webpage. It will be available to you. It will have updated information, fixing that length graph for the recreational, and then I'll check more on the proportions at size.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Questions for Chip on this? Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So I don't know a lot about tilefish, but, the very high years of rec, is that more an artifact of intercepts, and PSEs, or whatever, or do you think that's real?

DR. COLLIER: So I debated on the best way to display the data for the recreational fishery. For the most part, these PSEs exceed 50 percent, which means they're not necessarily good for

management, but that's also what the input to the stock assessment model was, and so I wanted to present it as it was put into the stock assessment model. I was considering smoothing it out, just to see how that would change things, but, when you're looking at a point of 1,500 percent, over pretty much the normal, I would think it's a pretty extreme example.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any more questions? All right. I don't see any additional hands. Thank you, Chip. I guess we need to have some committee discussion on considering initiation of an amendment. Don't get too excited about it now. All right. We're finding a place to put all of our ideas and capture them. All right. Thoughts? What's the pleasure of the committee here to react to this new assessment? Do we want to initiate an amendment to bring in these new catch recommendations? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Am I missing something? Didn't you say we have a new ABC recommendation, and so do we have to do it for that, and so we don't have a choice for that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's right.

MS. MARHEFKA: Okay. It was presented like we had some choice, and so you can see my confusion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So it sounds like you're suggesting that we should consider an amendment. All right. We need a motion to initiate an amendment, if someone would like to make a motion. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Madam Chair, I would like to make a motion that we start an amendment to work on our new assessment numbers and catch levels.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. The motion is going on the board there. All right. We have a motion on the board there. Motion by Charlie. Do we have a second? Second by Trish. Any discussion? Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Yes, and so, if you're looking at only adjusting catch levels, I think we can -- The IPT can look into doing this via abbreviated framework, and hopefully that will expedite things.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for that. I saw a hand. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, I do want to raise two things that would be worth considering on golden tilefish management. One is the accountability measure, and so, right now, if we have an overage, and especially if there's landings early in the year, then I have to set the season based on that and close, and so we had that two-month opening recently. I would really like to change that.

The second item is we occasionally will get phone calls from the longline industry. They will not hit the target, in terms of the, you know, allowable catch, and then they have quota remaining, and we can reopen them, but it's usually for a fairly short period of time. There's a huge cost for, obviously, them to go out and buy the longline spool, and so, rather than reopen because of a shortfall, is a way to kind of move that quota to the next season, or something, to make it more economically efficient for them.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and then, also, I'll just ask, and are we required to look at the allocation, because there was a stock assessment? Okay. Myra says yes, and so that goes on the list, too. No? No, we don't?

MS. BROUWER: I think you just looked at it in Amendment 52, if I'm not mistaken, and so I think we're good.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're good on that. All right, and so I've got hands going up. I have Amy, I have Tim, and I have Anna.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. I just want to make sure that I am correct that this will be the first time that we're going to push forward the new ABC control rule, correct?

DR. COLLIER: Yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tim, and then Anna.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. I guess I've got some questions about putting forth that new ABC control rule, because I think it's a little bit confusing. Is that part -- So that would be part of the accountability measure, but am I wrong in thinking that that had to be part of the stock assessment to begin with, that the ABC rule that we were considering that -- Did that have to be part of the stock assessment, the change in ABC control rule beforehand, because it seems like, when this came up on another species, I was told that, well, we couldn't do it now, because we didn't consider it in the SEDAR assessment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I see what you're asking. I didn't think it was dependent upon the assessment, but I'll look over here to staff. You're talking about things like phasing-in?

MR. GRINER: And carryover.

MS. MCCAWLEY: And carryover. All of those types of things. Okay, and I'm going to look --

MR. GRINER: I think that's what Andy's alluding to, right, Andy?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, I mean, it relates to that, and there are a lot of provisions that would limit whether we can or can't implement carryover. I'm not sure we have those restrictions for golden tilefish, but I'll look to staff if they think that it would apply or not.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, as far as Tim's question with, you know, how potentials for carryover or phase-in could be brought in, that would come with the SSC's recommendation, and so, if that's something, and it sounds like it is something that you all are interested in, then we can bring that question up with the SSC. I can take a look at the criteria, make sure that golden tilefish are hitting the checklist, and then we can bring the question up with the SSC, if they would add a recommendation for carryover or phase-in of these various measures, as the ABC control rule would allow.

MR. GRINER: Do we need a motion for that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're trying to capture it here on the screen, and so we're working on that. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: One of the provisions for allowing carryover is doing an analysis to make sure what you're doing for carryover isn't going to result in overfishing, and it's slightly different than the projection, and so what we can do is ask the Science Center to do an analysis to make sure, you know, if carryover is going to be allowed in this, that it's not going to result in overfishing, and so that can go on as you all are developing this amendment, and we can come back to you on the overall impact of what carryover could do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are you good, Tim? Okay. Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: My question was related to that carryover. I was trying to remember if we had any buffer between the ABC and the ACL for golden tilefish, because that would also impact the potential for carryover.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Mike can speak to this more, but one of the reasons that the council decided on this new ABC control rule was to better clarify the role of -- Or the differences between risk and the -- Or the SSC's uncertainty buffer and the council's risk buffer, and so that's why it was done that way, and, now, maybe it's still not all that clear, but there's definitely a risk that the council is looking at, and the uncertainty buffer is established through the P*.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any more questions or things that we want to see in there? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Would it be feasible to look at a different recreational season start date, other than January 1?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're adding it to the list. Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you. I'm just a little confused, and maybe -- Andy, I guess this question' is for you. I thought what you guys were concerned about was the kind of not time-certain reopening, and that it would be easier for fishermen, when there was a reopening for the longline sector, to be able to prepare for that, as opposed to the service saying, okay, now we're going to open for the next two weeks, and then those guys have to, you know, go and do all the preparations that need to be done to their vessels to go out, and so I think that's maybe different than what we were just talking about, this carryover of the ABC. I'm wondering if we're not maybe want to talk about a split season or some kind of within-a-year kind of measure that would allow for a predictable reopening of the longline sector, if there was still ACL left unharvested. Does that make sense?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and that's not quite the issue, and so the recent issue is, you know, anytime we're projecting the closure date, there's uncertainty around it, because, obviously, we're

using actual landings, but also expected landings. There's time lags, in terms of when we receive those reports.

Sometimes we overshoot that estimate, and close early, and then we leave, I'll say, 3 to 4 to 5 of quota on the table, and so the calls that I often get then is, okay, there's quota remaining, and we do want some predictability, in terms of when you're reopening, and we want to be able to then go out and buy our line for the spool to go fishing, but, because there's a big expense with buying that line, and oftentimes we have a very small amount of quota, and some of them are deciding just not to go fishing, because it's not worth the expense, right, and so my suggestion here is just taking that small percentage, if we leave some on the table, and bringing it into the next fishing year and allowing them to harvest it on that quota.

If we were perfect in estimating the quota every year, it wouldn't be an issue, and, if we left more on the table, you know, then they would make it more economically viable to be able to go out and buy that spool and harvest for a longer period of time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Does that help? Okay. Did I see other hands up? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Andy is absolutely right, especially if they're already fishing another fishery, and they don't want to buy the gear, they don't want to buy the wire, and it's just much more disruptive than the added on the following year, if it's possible.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything else here? All right. I don't see any additional hands.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just one clarification, and I guess I need to look to Myra, just to make sure that this is okay, this is in line with the allocation review trigger policy. If the council says, right now, they don't want to -- You know, they're making a decision, at this point, not to revisit reallocation, and then that kind of restarts the clock on the next review. Like does this -- Would that statement from the council today serve as their review of allocation, or do they need a more substantive discussion about it?

MS. BROUWER: I think I would lean towards a more substantive discussion, so we could capture it in a report, similar to what you all saw on Atlantic spadefish and the jacks complex.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that sounds good. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I don't remember that, but what was I going to say? So you want more justification for why we're not talking about it now, or more --

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're good. All right. I think we're good for today. We have a motion with some direction to staff here. **Any more discussion on this motion?** All right. Any objection to this motion? All right. **The motion carries.**

All right, and so now we're going to move into some items that are under Other Business. The first item under Other Business is the Return 'Em Right expansion, and I think that Christina is going to come talk to us about that.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Thank you. So, as you guys have heard a couple of times this week, there is a current proposal to expand the Return 'Em Right program, and so, in the interest of time, I'm going to give you a very, very brief overview of what that proposal includes, and so, as I'm sure most of you know, there's the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group, and this is a group that works to sort of approve projects that are aimed at restoring species that were affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

All of the money that funds that is what came from the original settlement with BP. It was close to \$8 billion, I believe. That group is tasked with restoring species throughout their life stages and geographic ranges, and so funds can be used outside of the Gulf of Mexico, which is sort of why this expansion can occur using oil spill money, and the public does have the opportunity to review and provide comment on all of the projects that are under review by that Open Ocean Implementation Group.

Their fourth restoration plan was released in October of 2024. I believe John Carmichael sent it to everyone, because it does include this Return 'Em Right program expansion, and so, in brief, that expansion is a fifteen-year, \$66.2 million proposal, and it would provide funds to not only continue their outreach, education, distribution of release gear work in the Gulf of Mexico, but it would also expand it to cover the entire Atlantic coast and the Caribbean regions, and it would also expand it to different species, and so that includes HMS, coastal migratory pelagics, and some inshore species, like flounder, drum, seatrout.

Then, in addition to the expansion of the outreach program that I know you all are very familiar with, there are a couple of research proposals, first looking at monitoring gear use and progress towards best fishing practices. This would be conducting studies on angler behavior and attitudes, improvement of data collection and reporting tools, specifically looking at things like web portals and mobile applications, as well as enhancing at-sea observer coverage. They would also look at doing work on addressing the efficacy of best release practices and estimating post-release mortality for priority species.

They do this through a series of workshops that would look to discuss the best way to validate the effectiveness of release methods, prioritize some of the things they're saying they're going to implement in this expansion, as well as exploring methods of estimating post-release mortality and how that may affect fisheries data and stock assessments.

Finally, they're looking at doing some studies to, again, validate the effectiveness of release practices and tools, specifically with the goal of improving the accuracy of mortality rate estimates and testing new technologies, and so that's a very, very brief overview of what's included in that proposal.

I'm happy to take questions, but there's not a lot of information that is available to us yet on the timing of all of this, and so that's something that would have to come in the future. The main thing that we're looking for today from you all is do you wish to submit comments on this proposed expansion, given that it will be occurring in the South Atlantic region, and, if you do want to submit comments, what you would like to include, and, in the interest of time, staff has drafted sort of a bullet-pointed list of things that you could consider. I guess the first question would be are you guys interested in submitting formal public comments on the proposed expansion?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would say yes, but I'm looking around the room. Yes, and it looks like people are nodding yes, that we want to submit comment. Okay. Can we have a motion? There's a draft motion there on the board. Okay. All right. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. **I make a motion to submit comments on the Return 'Em for the Species and Area Expansion Project proposed in the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Draft Restoration Plan 4.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It's moved by Amy. Is there a second? It's seconded by Charlie. Any discussion? **Any objection?** All right. **The motion carries.**

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so, like I said, staff brainstormed some of the things that you all could consider including in this comment letter, and so I'll run through them quickly, and we're sort of looking for a comment from you all on whether that list is appropriate, if there's anything else you'd like to include, not include, et cetera.

So, first, sort of just expressing general support for the expansion of the program into the Atlantic region and to those species managed by the council, since it wouldn't just be snapper grouper, but it also includes coastal pelagics, and so the mackerels and cobia. Then noting, and really emphasizing, the importance of coordinating with the South Atlantic Council's best fishing practices initiative.

Our staff, Ashley, Greyson, and, before Greyson, David, have done a ton of work building relationships with fishing communities in the South Atlantic region, and so making sure that Return 'Em Right efforts and the efforts of our staff are sort of working in coordination would be beneficial, especially noting sort of that there are regional differences between the South Atlantic and the Gulf, and, up until this point, outreach in the South Atlantic has been very sort of grassroots in nature. We've had our staff at tackle shops, and seminars, working directly with communities.

Also, expressing support for the work they plan to do to improve data collection and reporting tools, but really emphasizing the importance of using mobile applications and resources that are already available in the South Atlantic. Think of things like ACCSP's SciFish platform and SAFMC Release, and so considering those two, and we really suggest that Return 'Em Right coordinate with the council's Citizen Science Program on some of this work. Meg and Julia have done a ton of work to get those programs off the ground, and make them successful, and it'll be important for Return 'Em Right to utilize resources that are already available, so that they're supporting that standardized, streamlined data collection.

Then, next, sort of they're proposing a lot of research in this, looking at validating the effectiveness of release practices, and looking at discard mortality rates, and so we really feel like they need to take a regional approach to this.

Perceptions of best fishing practices and, you know, release mitigation gear can vary greatly between the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean. These are different fisheries, and so one area can't necessarily serve to be an example for the entirety of this very large Southeast region, and then, last, but certainly not least, in the event that the Return 'Em Right proposal is one of the projects funded, and it is currently one of their preferred projects to fund, that they provide the council with a presentation that would go over sort of the timelines for the different components

of the expansion, would provide a bit more detail on the expansion, specific to what would be occurring in the South Atlantic region and for South Atlantic Council-managed species, really focusing on opportunities for collaboration and participation from the council.

Then, finally, as, again, we sort of alluded to earlier in the week, given that they have an outreach and education program in place, how they might be able to assist with Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 and the education component included in that, and sort of we're tentatively thinking maybe June 2025 for that presentation, hoping that, you know, things have been approved and more details are available at that time, and so that's what staff has proposed for inclusion in this comment letter. Any thoughts are very welcome.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I thought it was very extensive, but I see hands. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I think it's very extensive. I think it's very good, and I'm supportive of everything you had in there, and I personally am okay if it's strongly worded. You know, sort of -- You know, I can see that the issue is you all have done such good work, and built such relationships, on a shoestring budget, and then someone like pops in, with their big old checkbook, and, on one hand, that could be a really good thing, if done right, but, on the other hand, it could really undermine the work you've done, and so I trust what you want to say, and I trust you all to word it however you want to, but I would support it being quite strong, if you would like it to be.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We have more hands. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and I agree with Kerry. I was wondering if might be good just to -- This is how I had read it, that it was Atlantic-coast-wide, so to also strongly suggest that they contact the states, and ASMFC, and the other Atlantic councils. I know, when I at least talked to our Mid-Atlantic Council rep, he had not heard about it, until I told him about it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Anything else? Amy is asking --

MS. DUKES: Christina, can you scroll up just a little bit to -- I know you're typing, and I'm sorry, but where you talk about the coordination with -- Emphasize coordinating. I would almost say that, you know, to be even a little bit more bold with emphasizing the importance of coordinating, and I'm almost like it's an opportunity to expand what you guys are currently doing with Return 'Em Right. I don't know if I'm putting words in anybody's mouth, or anything like that, and I don't want to do that, but I want to be even more so that we would support this, as long as it's an expansion of what's already going on, a better collaboration of already what's going on, and not just a coordination. Thank you. I trust you on your word choice though, but, yes, be stronger.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Anything else? I don't see any additional hands, but it does look like folks are reading. Are we good? Okay.

MS. WIEGAND: Thank you for letting us sneak that into Other Business, and we will draft a letter for the chair and vice chair to review before submitting it by the deadline.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Christina. I had another item for Other Business, and so I had seen a presentation, a few weeks ago, a month ago, and it all runs together, about the Mid-Atlantic's

recreational reform, and how they were using some modeling to bring in MRIP numbers and other things.

I'm wondering if we could get a presentation like that, from someone at the Mid-Atlantic, maybe at the next council meeting, to see how they're doing that. I think that that would help us out in thinking about recreational numbers. I don't know if John Carmichael wants to speak to this a little bit more. He saw the presentation, too.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think the process they called it was recreational reform. There's a lot of information about it on the Mid-Atlantic's website, and there was an amendment, and there was a lawsuit, and they're back to the amendment. The gist of it is, you know, they -- I think the example they looked at was black sea bass, that was presented. They get assessments like every two years. I think that was the interval.

Then, in between, they -- Instead of just using the straight up MRIP estimates, apparently there's a model that's done, by someone at the Northeast Center, to give a more sophisticated estimate projection of what the catch will be next year. Then they compare that to what the ACL is, and, from there, there's a potential percent change that can be made in the catch level that is just applied. Then that's just -- They use the actual fishing mortality rates to evaluate are you overfishing, or not, and that's essentially how it works.

In some ways, that's something that we used to do long ago, before we got off on ACLs and long windows between assessments, but it might be something that's worth looking at, in terms of how they do it. What I found most intriguing was not just using like last year's catch, or an average of the last three years to predict next year's catch, but a bit more sophisticated model.

I don't know what goes into that estimation process to predict the catch, but it does seem like it gets, you know, a different answer than if you just used some sort of averages, or just used last year's catch to predict next year's, and so I sort of see there's two parts of it. One part is, you know, what was the general process they did for reform, and how is it working out, and is there anything we can learn there that's helpful, and then, also, what is going on with this estimation of next year's catch, which that part, to me, is more of an SSC-type discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That's helpful. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I would be very interested in that, but, like John said, I kind of see it as a two-part. One from, you know, maybe our liaison, or somebody from the Mid-Atlantic to talk about how it's actually working on the boots on the ground for them, and then -- I don't know if that's somebody from the Northeast Science Center or who it is, but who is actually doing that modeling, to kind of clue us in on what exactly is being done, and, you know, what are the parameters, and how does that work.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I will just add, and I think I mentioned at a previous council meeting, about the Gulf of Mexico's recreational initiative as well, that's ongoing, and it, in part, relates to the harvest control rule work for the rec reform, and so they've had one working group meeting.

There's two more that are scheduled for between now and March of next year, and then the Gulf Council will get a report-out.

You know, one thing that's kind of going through my mind is we have a lot of things that are kind of coming to a head right now, with the MSE, with the secretarial action, you know, suggestion now kind of bringing these presentations forward, and so thinking about whether March would be the right timeframe, or if it would be good to kind of bring this all together in June, with the completion of the rec initiative, and so just, you know, a suggestion there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I was thinking that we would have to look at this in the timing and tasks motion, and the overall schedule of what's coming to the next couple of meetings, and I agree. Any other thoughts on this? All right. Any other Other Business to come before the Snapper Grouper Committee? Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: I just want to say thanks for making me feel at home. It really does feel like I came home again. See you guys next time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for joining us. Anything else for the Snapper Grouper Committee? All right. That concludes the business of the Snapper Grouper Committee, and I'm going to pass it back to our chair.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 5, 2024.)

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
January 23, 2025

Snapper Grouper
Wed 12/4

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SAFMC Dec. 2024 Council Meeting

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

Report Generated:

12/09/2024 09:41 AM EST

Webinar ID

887-478-187

Actual Start Date/Time

12/04/2024 07:23 AM EST

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Attended

Yes

Interest Rating

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Tracey

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Heather

Bogdan

Jennifer

Brouwer

Myra

Bublely

Walter

Bunting

Matthew

Byrd

Julia

Calay

Shannon

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Matthew

Cermak

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Clinton

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Joe

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Matt

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Ott	Emily
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Pehl	Nicole
Perkinson	Matt
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SAFMC Dec. 2024 Council Meeting

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

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12/09/2024 09:41 AM EST

Webinar ID

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Actual Start Date/Time

12/05/2024 07:14 AM EST

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Interest Rating

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Ben

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Skip

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Margaret

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Withers	Meg
Zapf	Daniel

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griner	tim
hallett	fletcher
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moss	david
murphy	allison
oden	jeff
sandorf	scott
thomas	suz
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Ostroff	Jenny
Package-Ward	Christina
Patten	Willow
Pelletier	Claire
Peterson	Cassidy
Poland	Stephen
Randall	Marianne
Reding	Brandon
Riley	Richard
Salmon	Brandi
Sartwell	Tim
Schlenker	Lela
Shane	Rob
Shervanick	Kara
Shipman	Thomas
Soltanoff	Carrie
Sramek	Mark
Stam	Geoff
Stancil	Mackenzie
Stemle	Adam
Vital	Victoria
Waldrep	Megan

Walsh
Warren
Weaver
Werner
Westcott
Yandle
collier
gloeckner
vara
zales

Mick
Camilla
ALWTRT -- Sierra
Cisco
Lauren
Tracy
chip
david
mary
bob

Duration	# Registered
9 hours 52 minutes	214

Last Name	First Name
Council	South Atlantic